



IV552 - January 2021

Workers of the World: Growth, Change, and Rebellion

31 January 2021, by **Kim Moody**

The working class, of course, is much broader than those who are employed at any one time. Relying only on workforce figures obscures important aspects of the broader working-class life, including its reproduction. Nevertheless, those in and out of employment form the core of the working class, once seen as a male domain but today nearly half composed of women. Furthermore, both space and research limitations dictate that this article will focus on the employed and near-employed sections of this global class. With these caveats in mind, we look first at the growth of the global working-class labor force in the twenty-first century.

The contemporary driving forces behind this dynamic have been the uneven globalization of capitalism generally with the simultaneous rise of multinational corporations following World War II; the falling rate of profit that began in the late 1960s, drove capital beyond its older boundaries, and produced recurring crises; the opening of the former bureaucratic “Communist” economies to capitalism; and more recently, the deepening of global value chains (GVC). The last mentioned have been developing for some time but in the last couple of decades have shaped economic growth and change in many developing economies by pulling the

formerly unpaid homework of reproduction, petty commodity production, and pre-existing domestic supply chains into the sphere of the value-producing chains of multinational capital. This has dislocated some industries and jobs in the developed economies but has mostly resulted in expansion into new areas. So, for example, although the share of world production in the developed countries has fallen, both the United States and the EU produce more added value today than twenty or thirty years ago.

Growth of the Workforce

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the world labor force grew by 25 percent from 2000 to 2019. Those “employed” for an income grew from 2.6 billion to 3.3 billion over those first two decades of the twenty-first century, also by 25 percent. Of those “employed” in ILO terms, 53 percent were wage or salary earners, up from 43 percent in 1996; 34 percent were considered “own-account” workers, up from 31 percent in 1996; 11 percent “contributing family” workers, down from 23 percent in 1996; and 2 percent employers, down from 3.4 percent in

that year. [1]

Obviously not even all of the non-employers in this ILO count are working class. Many are salaried professionals or managers of various sorts, others are small-business owners, street vendors, and so on. Here it is likely that about two-thirds, or a little over 2 billion, of those considered employed by the ILO are working class. These working-class employed workers are not just those in the wage and salary sectors, however. Many of those considered “own-account” or self-employed workers, as well as “contributing family” workers, are in fact locked into the capital-labor employment relationship via the expanded and deepened domestic and global value, or supply, chains that have characterized capitalist growth for some time. “Own-account” or self-employed workers are often simply misclassified by employers to dodge taxes, benefits, and responsibility for these workers. Women are far more likely than men to be informally employed.

This informality, however, is a legal definition of workers outside of most forms of state regulation of employment. By this definition, most workers in Marx’s time were “informal.” As Ursula Huws puts it concerning various forms of unpaid labor of reproduction or of

“unproductive” (of surplus value) individual service provision, “The history of capitalism can be regarded synoptically as the history of the dynamic transformation of each of these types of labor into another, with (as Marx predicted) the overall effect of driving a higher and higher proportion of human labor into the ‘productive’ category where it is disciplined by, and produces value for, capitalists.” [2]

Thus, the World Bank notes that “homebased” workers, who are disproportionately female, make up a considerable proportion of the lower end of global corporate value (supply) chains. Furthermore, studies of the impact of such supply chains show that a huge involvement of “informal”-sector workers classified as “own-account” or “contributing family” employees in South Asia, Africa, and across the developing world are commonly incorporated into GVCs. [3]

These corporate-dominated supply chains don’t just connect developing economies to multinational corporations. They reconfigure the local economy and workforce to corporate needs. Even if the majority of workers in a country are not directly connected to a corporate value chain, the levels of informality, wages, pace of work, and gender balance are set for most workers by the dynamics and speed of the multinationals’ “just-in-time” GVCs. As Bhattacharya and Kesar point out, the growth of capitalist manufacturing in India has increased the informal sector because it is cheaper to source from formerly petty commodity producers and to deal with household workers, where the women provide both (poorly) paid labor and the unpaid labor of reproduction that reduces the cost of each worker. Far from being “pre-capitalist,” such informal employment is a product of universalizing capitalism. [4]

GVCs grew from about 45 percent of world trade in the mid-1990s to almost 55 percent in 2008, before falling somewhat to about half. [5] As a result, the fastest growing sectors have been those associated with the infrastructure and operation of these GVCs. According to ILO estimates, employment in transportation and

communications grew by 83 percent, and that in construction by 118 percent, in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, faster than any other major sectors. In terms of direct employment, these sectors are composed largely of male workers. Nevertheless, an important result of the growth of GVCs has been the rise of women, from 40 percent of the employed workforce in 2000 to almost half (49 percent) in 2019, while in manufacturing that depends on these value chains, women increased from 41 percent to 44 percent by 2019. [6]

In addition, more and more workers have also been drawn “inside the knot” of capital’s social relations of production, as Huws puts it, via the growing commodification of both public services and the previously unpaid labor of social reproduction, that is, via the capitalist organization of services previously performed by the state for wages or in the home or community without pay. Disproportionate numbers of these workers are women, who compose two-thirds of workers in education, health care, and social services globally. [7] An indication of this trend is the rapid increase in “market services,” from 20 percent of employment in the ILO’s definition in 1991 to 31 percent in 2018. Another is the decline of “public capital” and assets as a share of national wealth in all of the leading industrial countries to less than 10 percent for most. [8]

When looking at the recomposition of the working class in the developed countries, it is common to point to the rise of services and the decline of goods production, assuming this amounts to a diminution of the working class. In fact, the line between the two is largely an obfuscation of how value is created by the global working class in contemporary capitalism. Service production is also increasingly dominated by giant corporations and involved in GVCs, with its share of value-added trade rising from 31 percent in 1980 to 43 percent by 2009. It is important to bear in mind that goods production is essential to the provision of services and vice versa. There are no services performed without “things” and there are no goods produced without the

input of “services.” The labor involved in both is meant to produce surplus value. The use value of the commodity it produces is secondary. While global service sector employment has grown by 61 percent in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, the international industrial workforce has increased by 40 percent. [9] This relative difference in growth is partly due to the continuing rise of productivity in global manufacturing at a faster rate than the world economy as a whole, rather than a diminution of industrial output.

Indeed, even in this period of slower growth, worldwide manufacturing value added, far from disappearing, grew by 123 percent in current dollars, or about half that in real terms, from 2000 to 2019. Overall, contrary to the notion of a “post-industrial” world, the manufacturing workforce grew from 393 million in 2000 to 460 million in 2019, while the industrial (manufacturing, construction, and mining) workforce grew from 536 million to 755 million over this period. This does not include workers in transportation, communications, and utilities, who are also essential to goods production and composed an additional 226 million workers by 2019, up from 116 million two decades earlier. Together this industrial “core” amounted to 41 percent of the world’s nonagricultural workforce as of 2019. [10] In other words, the industrial workers of the world, to borrow a phrase, remain a massive core of value production and the working population. Their global distribution, however, has changed.

Geographic Dispersion and Inequality

The growth of the world’s production and, therefore, its working-class workforce, however, was not evenly spread across the globe. While the developed countries still produce the largest share of manufacturing value added (MVA), the developing countries have increased their share from 18 percent in 1990 to about 40 percent in 2019, while that of the industrialized nations fell from 79

percent to 55 percent over that period. The EU share dropped from 33 percent of world MVA output in 1990 to 22 percent in 2018, while that of Asia rose from 24 percent to 37 percent over that period. China alone rose from about 5 percent of world MVA output in 2000 to 20 percent in 2018. Recently, much of Asia's increased share of MVA went just four countries: China, India, Indonesia, and the Republic of Korea. Employment followed suit, with the industrialized nations' share of manufacturing jobs dropping from 30 percent in 1991 to 18 percent in 2018. [11] In the twenty-first century, the growth of "informal" work, that of goods production, and the growing role of women in both have occurred primarily in the developing world.

At the same time, economic, political, and war-related dislocation and dispossession have produced a growing international migrant population. The number of people living outside their home country has grown from 173,588,441 in 2000 to 271,642,105 by 2019, an increase of 57 percent. Most of these migrants were of working age, and 48 percent, almost half, were women. About 111 million were classified by the International Organization for Migration as migrant workers in 2017, returning remittances to their homeland of \$689 billion in 2018. [12] At least a half billion people receive these remittances, contributing significantly to the social reproduction of the global working class and thus lowering labor costs to international capital. As Ferguson and McNally have pointed out, missing the role of migrant labor "loses sight of international processes of dispossession and primitive accumulation, which, among other things, generate global reserves of labor-power whose cross-border movements are at the heart of the worldwide production and reproduction of capital and labor." Thus, an additional 111 million workers move in and out of the ILO's static figures on employment, and the process of class formation, particularly in important centers of production like the United States, Europe, and the Middle East. [13]

Capital as a whole has done extremely

well by the geographic changes, technological advances, reorganization of production and the labor process, and even the crises of the system as a whole. Overall, in most developed and in developing economies, whether real wages fell or rose, the share of labor income in GDP fell from the mid-1970s, with some ups and downs, to 2019. Hence, that of capital rose. As an indication of this, the share of national income of the top 10 percent rose, while that of the bottom 50 percent fell, in all the major economies. [14] Poverty remains a central feature of labor in developing nations despite claims of its reduction achieved largely by manipulating the definition of poverty. Even in Europe, once the pinnacle of the welfare state, social-democratic theorist Wolfgang Streeck notes, "What follows will analyze the trajectory of European social policy over the *longue durée* as it has mutated from a projected federal social-democratic welfare state to a program for competitive adjustments to global markets." [15] In short, the working class has lost out everywhere.

Much of this increased inequality was due to the relative decline of unions and the subsequent wage stagnation in the developed economies, the continued increases in manufacturing productivity across the world, and the increasing incorporation of low-wage formal and informal workers in developing countries into the world's production systems. These trends have contributed to increased rates of exploitation everywhere. As political economist Anwar Shaikh argues, "The overall degree of income inequality ultimately rests on the ratio of profits to wages, that is on the division of value added." [16] Boosting this ratio for capital were advanced methods for the surveillance, measurement, quantification, and standardization of work that ultimately impact workers everywhere.

Technology and the Control of Labor

For hundreds of millions of workers across the globe, labor remains

primarily a draining physical effort seemingly removed from the high tech regime of automation and digital management that has come to intensify work. No matter where or how a worker is employed, however, their speed and effort are driven by this digital measurement and direction of work all along the vast "just-in-time" corridors of capital that now span the world.

What has changed most in the nature of work in the last two decades is the degree, penetration, and application of digital technologies that monitor, quantify, standardize, modularize, track, and direct the work of individuals and groups. [17] These build on, but transcend, the efforts of Taylorism and lean production to quantify, fragment, standardize, and thereby control individual and collective labor, regardless of what product or service it produces. The digitalization of much work-related technology means work can be measured and broken down into nanoseconds, as opposed to Taylor's minutes and seconds, and given a precision absent from lean production's simple elimination of "waste" via "management-by-stress." It also means that every aspect of work becomes quantified. Simplification via quantification enables speed, and speed demands quantification. Stress can be measured but not emotion, the effects of professional training, or the tacit skills of all workers.

All of this applies to services already transformed in the twentieth century from domestic service and jobs performed by local tradesmen or small firms to corporate providers, then reorganized along lean lines, and now digitally driven—from call centers to hotels to building maintenance. Today's digitally driven measurements also apply to professional work in fields such as health care and education. Data is harvested from workers and then used against them in these fields as in a factory or warehouse. So, teachers are measured by student grades (allegedly the teacher's product) on standardized tests based on "standardized knowledge," and they are forced to "teach to test." Meanwhile hospital nurses can be tracked by GPS and

directed by algorithmic Clinical Decision Support Systems that recommend standard treatments. Or, in both cases, they can be replaced by less qualified and less costly workers performing standardized tasks. Because these are mostly women workers performing “emotional labor,” the emotional content of the job is taken as an unacknowledged freebie for capital—the unpaid aspect of labor of social reproduction performed on the job rather than in the home. [18]

Amazon is the most-cited exemplar of digitally driven workers for good reason. A recent study of an Amazon fulfillment center in California described the context in which employees work: “In order to choreograph the brutal ballet that ensues once a consumer clicks ‘place your order’ for next-day delivery on Amazon Prime, the company leverages its algorithmic and technical prowess within its massive network of communication and digital technology, warehouse facilities, and machinery, as it numerically ‘flexes’ its workforce up and down in sync with fluctuating consumer demand.” In identical facilities across the globe, the work itself is guided by scanners and hand-held or wrist-mounted computers that track, time, and guide workers to the correct product. Workers are allowed thirty minutes a shift of “off task” time, that is, time when they are not in motion. In addition, they are pushed by Kiva robots who also pick products. [19] It is the prototype of work everywhere unless worker resistance curbs it.

Another dimension to today’s workplace technology is seldom mentioned: Like the global workforce itself, that in the Amazon warehouse is multiracial and multinational. As the international Black Lives Matter upsurge of 2020 underlined, race and racism, while particularly deeply entrenched in the United States, are worldwide and embedded since the days of slavery and colonialism. Racism under capitalism is not only a means of dividing working-class people but of imposing working-class status on those racial or ethnic groups whose “life chances” are limited by racial or ethnic barriers. It is a force in class formation. Hence African Americans are disproportionately

working class and poor. While capitalism may have inherited racism from the era of slavery and colonial conquest, it has nevertheless allocated work and workers on unequal racial, ethnic, gender, and national bases for generations. [20] Like management practices in general, the technology that sorts out workers by occupation, rank, skill, attitude, and so on bears the marks of that heritage.

Artificial intelligence and algorithms are programmed by human beings raised in this historic context, who more often than not possess many of its age-old, often unconscious assumptions while at the same time using data necessarily based in the past. As one analyst put it, “The past is a very racist place. And we only have data from the past to train Artificial Intelligence.” [21] A mathematician’s argument about the racial outcomes of AI programs used by police to “predict” high-crime areas applies in every aspect of life: Racially biased data “creates a pernicious feedback loop” reinforcing racial stereotypes and, hence, worker allocation and racial “life chances.” [22]

One of the more outrageous examples is that of facial-recognition technology, which is used by employers and police departments and which routinely fails to distinguish dark complected individuals from one another. [23] It is scarcely an accident that most of the poorly paid, overworked workers in that California Amazon warehouse are Latinx or black. Racism, after all, is one of capital’s weapons of class struggle now embedded in its technology. The same applies to gender and sexism. For example, the Clinical Support Decision Systems imposed on nurses are based on clinical studies that “systematically excluded women and minorities.” [24]

Labor and the Control of the Corridors of

Capital

The technology, employment patterns, and flows of goods, services, and capital that characterize domestic production and shape the world of labor, rest, in turn, on a deepening international material infrastructure for moving products and value throughout of the world. These material corridors of capital consist mainly of familiar roads, rails, shipping lanes, ports, pipelines, airports, and traditional warehouses. But they now include massive urban-based logistics clusters of facilities and labor, miles of fiber-optic cables employed widely only since the late 1990s, data centers that are even newer in application, and warehouses reconfigured for movement rather than storage and transformed by technology. This mostly embedded infrastructure is created by and dependent on the labor of millions of workers who build and maintain it. If technology imposes controls, the dependence of infrastructure on continuous labor inputs provides workers with their own potential control—the ability to slow down or stop capital’s relentless movement of value and, hence, the process of accumulation.

Marx saw transportation and communications as part of value production. [25] So, the tens of millions of workers across the world in these embedded repositories of fixed constant capital, and in the trucks, trains, ships, planes, cable stations, and data centers that move commodities, data, and finances across this infrastructure, are production workers as much as those in factories or sites of service delivery. They make the circuits of capital function and provide much of the speed at which those circuits turn over. It is over and through these paths of transportation and communication that these circuits of capital move with Marx’s familiar formula, M-C-M’, being sequentially and simultaneously repeated millions of times a day. The speed at which this happens determines the potential profit. [26] And, of course, driven by global competition, speed and “just-in-time” delivery have become major features of contemporary production

and logistics.

This is as true of those working in the movement of data, information, and money as those driving on a road, steaming a container ship, maintaining a pipeline, or working in a factory, that is, all those workers who are merging living labor power with accumulated dead labor to produce value. None of this infrastructure, nor the capital equipment that runs over and through it, comes to life without the hand and mind of labor. Even the most automated system requires constant maintenance and repair. For example, as of early 2020, Amazon's 39 supposedly fully automated data centers in the United States and Ireland employed ten thousand workers to keep them humming. [27]

What is called "the cloud" or cyberspace is nothing more than an extended material complex of fiber-optic cables, data centers, transmitters, and computers. As a New York Times article argued, "People think that data is in the cloud, but it's not. It's in the ocean." Actually, it's also on and under the land as well as under the sea, following paths originally laid in the mid-nineteenth century for telegraph cables. Today's fiber-optic cables carry 95 percent of internet traffic. The whole connected material system and its parts are highly vulnerable, and breaks or disruptions are frequent. [28]

The system is laid and repaired by workers on cable ships, those in cable stations around the world, workers employed by national telecom companies, and those in the proliferating number of huge data centers that, as James Bridle put it, "generate vast amounts of waste heat, and require corresponding quantities of cooling, from acres of air conditioning systems." [29] All of which, in turn, require human labor to run. At every point in this seemingly immaterial movement of data and money there are workers of various kinds and differing skills without which there would be no motion. There is no digitalization without human manipulation.

In a period of relatively low levels of capital investment, countless billions

have been poured into the extension and deepening of this infrastructure. Looking at a somewhat broader measure of infrastructure, Price Waterhouse Coopers estimates that \$1.7 trillion was invested by private sources in infrastructure from 2010 to 2017, in a sector in which government investment often plays the major role. [30] New cables are laid regularly, harbors and canals dug or dredged, new cross-continental rails embedded, more airports constructed, and old ones expanded. [31] As large as these new investments are, they represent only the initial cost and labor input. As Akhil Gupta argues about the many new infrastructure projects around the world, "As soon as the project is completed, and officially declared to be open, it starts being repaired." [32] That is, the "dead" labor involved in infrastructure requires the constant input of living labor over its entire functioning "life."

A major force of this infrastructure expansion has been Chinese President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative, launched in 2013. This has funded, largely through loans, a network of super highways, rail lines (three from China to Europe), ports, and airports that "spreads into the Pacific, the Indian Ocean, and deep into Africa" as well as the Middle East and Europe. By 2015 China had set aside \$890 billion to spend on 900 projects. [33] By 2019, it was "focused on energy, infrastructure, and transportation with an overall potential investment estimated at about \$1.4 trillion—a scale never before seen," according to analyst Daniel Yergin. [34] Such ventures mean the employment of huge numbers of workers across the vast spaces of Central and South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, who bring these projects to life and, through collective action, can shut them down as well.

An Era of Rebellion: Class or Multitude?

All of this has occurred in a period of economic turbulence and recurring crises, a climate crisis that can no longer be ignored, and most recently

the COVID-19 pandemic. Each of these has contributed, to one degree or another, to a dramatic upsurge in social activism, strike action, and mass mobilization in opposition to the status quo. Almost everywhere these strikes, mass demonstrations, and mobilizations have resulted from economic change, dislocation, and distress sometimes exacerbated by war. But they have been political in that they were mostly directed at governments and the neoliberal policies and accompanying corruption that have inflicted pain on the majority of people across the globe. The international upsurge that began with the Arab Spring 2011, and continued and even accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, has been far too massive to be described in detail here. Rather, I will try to analyze some of its major characteristics and the role of the working class in this general upsurge.

According to an analysis of "civil unrest" in 2019 by the risk-assessment firm Versisk Maplecroft, 47 countries, or almost a quarter of all nations, saw major civil disruptions in 2019 alone. This count shows these protests sweeping every region of the world other than North America. [35] However, it missed some important actions in North America, including several large strikes, the huge Black Lives Matter upsurge, and the July mass street mobilizations and strikes in Puerto Rico. [36] Adding to this "civil unrest" were new, highly visible mass mobilizations and on-going demonstrations in 2020 in Belarus, Thailand, and Russia's far east; mass strikes in Indonesia; as well as the Black Lives Matter upsurge across the United States and much of the world. [37]

Many of these mobilizations were started by students or activists of various class backgrounds, so the question of just what role working-class people and organizations played in all of this "civil unrest" needs to be addressed.

David McNally has analyzed "the return of the mass strike" in considerable detail. Looking at mass strikes since the 2008 recession, he writes in 2020,

Across the decade since the Great Recession, we have witnessed a series of enormous general strikes (Guadeloupe and Martinique, India, Brazil, South Africa, Colombia, Chile, Algeria, Sudan, South Korea, France, and many more) as well as strike waves that have helped to topple heads of state (Tunisia, Egypt, Puerto Rico, Sudan, Lebanon, Algeria, Iraq). [38]

In addition, there have been mass strikes of various sizes around the world, often linked to issues of social reproduction, including the 2018-2019 teachers strikes in the United States. As McNally emphasizes, the mass strike has also been adopted by the women's movement, notably in the International Women's Strikes that swept 50 nations in 2017 and 2018 in the name of the "feminism of the 99 percent." Some mass strikes, he reports, have occurred in the midst of broader mobilizations in streets and squares across the world, such as those in Hong Kong, Chile, Thailand, Ukraine, Lebanon, and Iraq. [39]

That working-class action has been at the center of the upsurge can be seen in a few general figures. The European Trade Union Institute calculates that between 2010 and 2018 there were 64 general strikes in the European Union, almost half of them in Greece. [40] More broadly, the ILO, looking at just 56 countries, estimates there were 44,000 work stoppages between 2010 and 2019, mostly in manufacturing. The ILO author notes, however, that given data limitations, the number of strikes "could be far greater than 44,000." [41] In China alone, the China Labour Bulletin counted some 6,694 strikes between 2015 and 2017 in a wide variety of industries. Lu Chunsen estimates 3,220 strikes by manufacturing workers in China from 2011 to May 2019, despite the precarious nature of work, the mass internal migration to the cities, and the government's ban on strikes. [42] Here we see a clear example of the merging of informal migrant workers with the formal workforce—and their subsequent actions.

We know that unions played important roles in many of the recent struggles, even where middle-class leaders put

themselves in front of the masses. In Belarus, for example, an interview on the BBC with a union leader revealed he was one of the top leaders of the rebellion. Furthermore, participants report that the demonstrations were "expanding into a wider working-class movement involving widespread workplace mobilizations." [43] In a detailed analysis of the Arab Spring, Anand Gopal notes that while unionized workers played a key role of most Arab rebellions, in the initial stages of the Syrian upsurge the fragmented working-class masses came first from the shanty towns and that "the movement's rank and file consisted of precarious, semi-employed workers who simply did not possess the structural power to threaten the Syrian elite." [44]

In other words, much of the mass base of 2011 came from both the organized working class and the informal workers in most Arab countries, many of whom, as we saw above, would have been at one time or another drawn into the GVC of multinational capital working in the oil fields, on the pipelines, on the Suez Canal, and in the many ports of the Middle East and North Africa. Gopal argues that their very precariousness and informal employment means they had little power. Yet, in many developing countries, such workers have organized themselves in their neighborhoods and through national trade unions, informal workers' associations, migrant worker organizations, and cooperatives, as well as in workplaces, to storm the streets and squares as workers have done for generations. [45]

The seemingly mixed-class appearance of many of the mass strikers and demonstrators was also a result of the "proletarianization" of educated people, such as teachers and nurses, whose jobs had been standardized and subjected to tighter management by the processes described above, as well as the descent of many educated "millennials" into working-class jobs. Here, the lines of class appear blurred, but the social destiny of the majority of this generation and the next is clearly working class. Some of these show up in strikes of "platform" workers, or delivery and other workers, newly discovered as

"essential" to social reproduction in the context of the pandemic, which is likely to accelerate this social transformation.

What seems clear is that whether or not students played an initiating role, and middle-class professionals and politicians co-opted leadership roles, the mass base of most rebellions of the last decade was working class in composition, and that to a considerable extent they employed the traditional weapon of the mass strike. This was the case whether or not they were union members or held permanent employment, much like the masses Rosa Luxemburg analyzed in the 1905 Russian Revolution, whose strikes "display such a multiplicity of the most varied forms of action." [46] This whole period has been an example of working-class self-activity with both economic and political demands.

Yet, nowhere did the strikes or mass mobilizations seek political power for the workers themselves or a program approaching socialism. Nowhere were the working class or mixed classes in transition organized for such goals. In some cases, there did not appear to be recognizable leaders. Yet, the participants were organized in "a multiplicity of the most varied forms of action" and organizations, often through networks enabled by social media.

The difficulty in analyzing the potential of this era of rebellion is compounded by the uncertain impact of the three crises of capitalism, and in particular the effect of the pandemic, on a variety of industries and the GVCs. Such speculation is for another article. The most useful understanding of the potential of the current upsurge is best described by McNally, who writes, "The new strike movements are harbingers of a period of recomposition of militant working-class cultures of resistance, the very soil out of which socialist politics can grow." [47] Whether this recomposition will help produce a general working-class upsurge is impossible to predict. But as United Electrical Workers representative Mark Meinster writes in Labor Notes, "Working-class upsurges often happen in the context of deep social changes

in society as a whole, such as abrupt and widespread economic dislocation, a profound loss of legitimacy by ruling

elites, or abnormal political instability.” [48] That just about describes the situation labor faces across the world today.

Source Winter 2021 (*New Politics* Vol. XVIII No. 2, Whole Number 70).

Massive repression of the demonstration against class and racist justice

30 January 2021, by **Charles Hampton**

Under these conditions, and in consultation with them, the presence of the families of the victims of violence and police killings, as well as many others, was no longer possible. The risk was too great, so they would not speak as initially planned. In this respect, the authorities of the country, at all levels, have succeeded in their coup: once again closing the public space to the families. If proof of the fundamentally racist nature of the police institution and the entire political apparatus that supports it was still needed, this is it. An abject situation, where taking the life of a son or daughter is not enough. It is still necessary to deploy all the repressive measures that the State knows how to mobilize in order, in practice, to try to force them into silence and put them under house arrest.

As soon as the rally began, the tension was palpable. While an agreement had been made with the police officers of the city of Brussels who were supervising the demonstration to tolerate it for 45 minutes, the federal reinforcements told us to leave the place immediately, under the pretext that the rally was simply forbidden. We were astonished that the different police forces present were not on the same wavelength.

During the whole time the speakers were speaking, the police encircled the square. Their presence was massive and ostentatious. Its members were in uniform, ready to intervene. The first incidents were already taking place: several young people were being harshly controlled around the

square, whose only “crime” was clearly to be the undesirable racialized people in the public space. In fact, the information was confirmed that the police are preventing people from joining the gathering.

The gathering lasted the 45 minutes allotted by the police, not one more. As the time elapses, the forces of law and order come closer, the circle narrows. We had to leave the square immediately. Most of the people present moved away, others lingered for a few moments, some of them to respond to questions from reporters. Suddenly, the turning point. Police officers, this time with shields and truncheons, arrived at full speed and closed the road. The number of policemen present exploded. They were already shouting, charging, pushing and stopping people in the adjacent streets. Their aggressiveness was simply amazing, almost paralysing.

Very soon, down the square and towards the Central Station, a face-to-face confrontation took place between the police and participants in the rally, mainly young people, some of whom had spoken bravely and brilliantly a few minutes earlier. They were surrounded, outnumbered by police officers using dogs and tear gas on a massive scale. In the ensuing chaos, the police once again put one of them in mortal danger: a law enforcement vehicle accelerated sharply towards the small crowd and hit a teenager, who fell violently to the ground before getting up and moving away.

A few minutes later, all these people

were kettled on the outskirts of the Central Station. There were about fifty of them. Some of them were on the ground, immobilised, surrounded by dozens and dozens of policemen, under the constant threat of fire engines. They were gradually being evacuated in the police buses towards the barracks. Very young, mostly non-white, people.

In the end, in response to a gathering of just over 150 people, gigantic means were deployed, applied with implacable force and unprecedented violence: federal and police zone reinforcements from almost all over the country, motorbikes, horses, vehicles by the dozen, six fire engines, a helicopter. All those present could confirm this: the police were solely responsible for the disturbances that took place in the afternoon. In its statement, the police demonstrated this when its spokesperson acknowledged that “the demonstration took place in a calm atmosphere”. Indeed, until the police decided otherwise and made more than a hundred arrests in total.

Finally, on the way home, we learn that a Rise for Climate action was held at Place du Luxembourg, in a peaceful atmosphere under the eye of a negligible police presence. It is of course good to see that these people were able to hold their rally in such conditions. But what a contrast with what is happening a few hundred metres away.

In this country, certain uses of democratic freedoms are not tolerated, certain messages are not

good to carry. Demanding truth and justice for victims of police killings is one of them. Demanding an end to racism, sexism and the class character of the police and justice also. To all those people and political organizations who condemn and support the repression of such gatherings, and say nothing about the systematic and permanent inhuman

violence against oppressed social categories: Stop speaking out on democracy, freedom, equality or human dignity forever, because these are just empty words for you. You are unworthy of them.

The police humiliate, mutilate, rape, kill. When people unite to denounce it,

the police humiliate again, mutilate, violate and threaten to kill. One day, however, there will be more of us on the street than they are. That day will be a beautiful day.

25 January 2020

Translated from [Gauche Anticapitaliste](#).

An Unfinished Epoch of Revolution

29 January 2021, by **Joseph Daher**

A Long-Term Revolutionary Process

A revolution is generally understood as a mass popular movement that aims for radical change even if it fails to achieve it. In the case of the MENA uprisings in 2011, they have not won radical material changes in the economic structures of the region, but have toppled family cliques from power in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Algeria, and Sudan, among others.

In other words, we witnessed forms of limited political revolution rather than social revolution, which would have brought about more fundamental changes in the neoliberal regime of accumulation within capitalism, if not the mode production itself. It is important to grasp the limits of political victories, because the problems in the region are not just political but are social products of its particular form of capitalism.

Nonetheless, we witnessed the mobilization of large numbers of people demanding the overthrow of despotic regimes in country after country. This is one of the main aspects of a revolution. As Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky wrote:

The most indubitable feature of a revolution is the direct interference of the masses in historical events. In ordinary times the states, be it monarchical or democratic, elevates itself above the nation, and history is made by specialists in that line of business – kings minister, bureaucrats, parliamentarians, journalists. But at those crucial moments when the old order becomes no longer endurable to the masses, they break over the barriers excluding them from the political arena, sweep aside their traditional representatives, and create by their own interference the initial groundwork for a new regime.

Some of the popular uprisings achieved a situation close to dual power. They organized an emergent alternative state to challenge the existing regime. One important example of this was in Syria during the early stages of the uprising when activists established coordination committees and local councils in liberated areas.

These formed a potential alternative to the Assad regime and Syrian capitalism. But they never fully developed. There were problems with them, especially the underrepresentation of women as well as ethnic and religious minorities. Nevertheless, these local organs of self-rule formed at least for a while a

political alternative that could appeal to large sections of the population.

Despite the defeat of the first wave of uprisings in 2011, most horrifically in Syria, the revolutionary process has not come to an end. As the subsequent decade of ongoing revolt has underscored, the region is in the midst of a long term revolutionary process.

The Roots of the Revolutionary Process

This process is rooted in the political economy of Middle East and North Africa. The region's economic development is blocked by its specific mode of production, which is an adventurous, speculative and commercial capitalism characterized by short term profit-seeking. As a result, the region's masses have a confluence of economic and political grievances that can only be overcome by revolutionary change.

In this analysis, the uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa not just of the result of the global economic crisis of 2008. Certainly, the Great Recession helped trigger them, but the region has deeper structural problems compared to the rest of the world system. This mode of capitalist production is focused on extracting oil and natural gas, underdeveloping productive sectors, overdeveloping

services, and fuelling various forms of speculative investment especially in real estate.

Each country of course has its own specificities. But all of them share some broad characteristics: patrimonial and neo-patrimonial states rule over this economic structure. In classic patrimonial states like Syria and the Gulf monarchies, a family and their clique preside over dictatorships, enrich a state bourgeoisie, and engage in crony privatization. In neo-patrimonial states like Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria and Sudan, dictators oversee states controlled by the military apparatus. In both cases, nepotism and corruption are rife.

Neoliberal policies and austerity measures implemented over the last few decades have exacerbated the region's authoritarian politics and blocked economic development. The regimes have cut public services, removed subsidies to basic necessities like food, and privatized state industry often selling them to capitalists linked to the centers of political power.

They have also opened their economies to foreign direct investment, developing the export and service sector – especially tourism. At the same time, the states have kept taxes on both foreign and domestic companies low and guaranteed them cheap labor. The regimes' repressive apparatuses have served as a "security agent" protecting the interests of these companies and cracking down on workers, peasants, and the poor.

As a result, all the region's countries are characterized by extreme class inequality, high rates of poverty, and high unemployment, especially among youth. Those with education and valued skills leave their countries for opportunities elsewhere.

And, in the case of the Gulf monarchies, their economies rely on temporary migrant workers who make up the majority of the laboring population and are deprived of political and civil rights. In Kuwait, Qatar, the UAE, and Oman, migrant workers represent more than 80 percent of the workforce.

These realities contradict claims made by the international financial institutions and Western states, especially the US, that neoliberal reform would create a "middle class" or capitalist class, which, with imperial support for political reform, would bring about democratization. In fact, it has produced the opposite: deepening neoliberal authoritarianism.

These conditions generated increasing struggle among workers and oppressed people in the run-up to the uprisings in 2011. It has been driven from below by youth, workers, and poor people desperate for political freedom and economic equality.

Struggle and Hope for Revolution

This is not to say that we should adopt an economistic perspective, which reduces everything to economic conditions. There are of course many other contributing factors. But the socio-economic blockage combined with the region's dictatorial regimes have made it impossible for the masses of people to overcome inequality and express their grievances through institutional processes.

These material conditions predisposed the people to struggle. But those conditions alone were not enough to detonate the uprisings. As Trotsky argued, popular classes turn to revolutionary action when they see the hope of transforming their society:

In reality, the mere existence of privations is not enough to cause an insurrection, if it were, the masses would always be in revolt. It is necessary that the bankruptcy of the social regime, being conclusively revealed, should make these privations intolerable, and that new conditions and new ideas should open the prospect of a revolutionary way out.

The hope and new ideas that sparked the revolts in 2011 came from

witnessing millions of people in the streets in Tunisia and Egypt demanding the overthrow of their rulers. But the inspiring struggles in those two countries did not come out of nowhere.

In the decade prior to the uprising, significant workers' struggle occurred in Tunisia and Egypt. In Tunisia, the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT) played a leading role in opposition to authoritarian regimes, despite the fact that it had been seriously weakened by a combination of repression, privatization of public jobs, and compromises by the union leadership with the regime.

In Egypt, the country witnessed its largest social movement since World War II, with strikes and occupations from different sectors of society. The strikes in the factories of Mahala el Kubra in 2008 testified to the strength of the workers' movement despite the repression of the security forces. These struggles progressively paved the way for the establishment of independent workers trade unions, who played a decisive role in the overthrow of Mubarak (although not officially recognized) and the first years of the uprising.

Thus, based on years of struggle, the revolts in Tunisia and Egypt showed how mass mobilization could topple dictators. Their victories, if incomplete in the case of Tunisia and temporary in the case of Egypt, inspired the region's masses to rise up against their own regimes.

MENA Revolts Spark the Global Resistance

The first decade of the new millennium started with the launch of the so-called "War on Terror" in 2001 and came to a close with the Great Recession in 2008 and subsequent global slump. The popular uprisings in the Middle East and North African region opened the next decade, triggering resistance throughout the world against the neoliberal order and governments that enforce it.

The uprisings in the MENA region overthrew the dictatorships of Ben Ali in Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, Muammar Khadafi in Libya, and Ali Abdallah Saleh in Yemen, all of whom had been ruling for decades. Without a doubt, the greatest achievement of the popular uprisings was to remind the left that revolution in which masses of people mobilize to remake society is possible. This ABC of revolutionary politics had been widely abandoned among wide sections of the left.

The MENA uprisings inspired revolts throughout the world. A short list includes the Indignados Movement in Spain, Occupy in the United States, uprisings against price hikes and repression in Sub-Saharan African states like Burkina Faso, and similar struggles in many other countries.

The end of this decade of revolt culminated with a second wave of the revolutionary process in the MENA region with uprisings erupting in Sudan, Algeria, Lebanon, and Iraq. Two new dictators—Omar al-Bashir in Sudan and Abdelaziz Bouteflika in Algeria—were overthrown after 30 years of rule, while the sectarian neoliberal ruling classes in Lebanon and Iraq were challenged.

This second wave occurred in the midst of rising massive popular mobilizations throughout the globe for political and social rights and equality from Hong Kong and Thailand to Catalonia and Chile. Massive feminist strikes and protests were also organized to fight against reactionary attacks women's rights from Poland to Argentina. In 2019 climate strikes swept the world and the decade ended with the Black Lives Matter uprising that shook the political and racial order in the US.

The international popular mobilizations deepened the global radicalization against the capitalist system that exploits and oppresses humanity and destroys the environment all for profit. The pandemic has only deepened grievances around the globe and called into question the legitimacy of governments.

The Counter-Revolutionary Offensive

While the MENA revolts inspired similar uprisings around the world, they also triggered a counter-revolutionary offensive from the regimes, regional powers, and imperialist states. Just like the Russian Revolution in 1917, the uprisings constituted a threat to the capitalist order, especially because its energy reserves power the global economy.

As David Harvey argues, “whoever controls the Middle East controls the global oil spigot and whoever controls the oil spigot can control the global economy, at least for the near future.” The Gulf monarchies hold around 40-45 percent of the world's oil reserves and 20 percent of its gas.

The desire to ensure orderly flow of those reserves explains why, after a short period of confusion, state powers carried out systematic counter-revolutions. The region's regimes repressed protests, killed massive numbers of people, and arrested and jailed untold numbers more. For example, the Syrian regime, with the backing of Russia and Iran, massacred hundreds of thousands and laid waste to large parts of the country.

The revolts also confronted another counter-revolutionary force: Islamic fundamentalist organizations. They hoped to hijack the struggles in order to impose their own form of neoliberal authoritarian and theocratic regime, contrary to the democratic and egalitarian aspirations of the people. The fundamentalists found support from regional powers like the Gulf states and Iran.

Various regional and imperialist powers intervened in multiple and diverse ways to back the counter-revolutions. Powers besides the US have increased room to do this because of Washington's relative decline in power and influence in the Middle East as a result of its failed occupation of Iraq. Russia and China to a lesser extent but above all Iran,

Saudi Arabia, UAE, Turkey, Qatar, and Israel took advantage of this situation to play a growing role in backing counter-revolution.

Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar at first militarily intervened in Bahrain and launched a war against Yemen with the support in both cases from the United States. Iran and Russia intervened in Syria. Iran and its proxy forces in Iraq and Lebanon also opposed the revolts in these countries and did not hesitate to repress protestors.

Turkey and its ally Qatar have supported the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic fundamentalist movements in various countries. Ankara has also intervened in Syrian territory controlled by the PYD, the Syrian branch of the PKK, in its ongoing war against Kurdish self-determination.

While that imperialist and regional rivalries are evident, they don't preclude alliances across those divisions. As Karl Marx noted, capitalists and capitalist states are a “band of warring brothers.” Thus, at the same time that they find themselves in competition to assert geopolitical power and corner markets for their corporations, they share class interests, can reach agreements, and often collaborate in repressing popular uprisings.

The latest example of this is Qatar's reconciliation with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which could pave the way for a rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Turkey. The Trump administration also pushed them all to throw Palestinians under the bus and open official diplomatic relations with Israel. Washington's aim is to bolster Israel, isolate the Palestinian struggle for liberation, consolidate a regional alliance opposed to Iran.

In securing this reconciliation, the US struck two particularly reactionary deals. First, Washington got Morocco to normalize relations with Israel in exchange for the US recognizing the Rabat's occupation of the Western Sahara and its pledge of \$3 billion of investments for “financial and technical support of private investment projects.”

Second, the US forced Sudan's new government, in which the military jointly rules with representatives of the popular uprising, to pay for what the old regime did. In exchange for removal from Washington's list of state sponsors of terror, help in repaying it \$60 billion debt to the World Bank, and \$1 billion in aid, Sudan agreed to repay the \$335 million for bombings of African embassies and to recognize Israel.

Neoliberal Authoritarianism

Thus, the revolts continue to face various counter-revolutionary forces utterly opposed to any and all radical democratic and socio-economic change. They are not just committed to restoring the status quo ante; they aim to intensify authoritarianism, repressive policies, and neoliberal reforms.

In carrying this out, the regimes backed by regional and imperial powers have exacerbated all the conditions that led to the uprisings. They have used the cover of the pandemic to escalate repression of protest movements.

They imposed lockdowns on large portions of the population, not to protect the health of the working classes, but to prevent them from organizing and fighting for political and social change. They threatened people with fines for breaking the curfews, targeted the media for raising criticisms of their policies, and arrested activists who questioned the official reports about the virus.

They have also taken advantage of global recession and collapse in oil prices to implement previously even deeper neoliberal reforms, reducing the role of the state in the economy and expanding the reach of the market into previously untouched arena. Several countries have adopted public-private partnership (PPP) legislation in order to expand the privatization of public services and state infrastructure.

In Saudi Arabia, PPPs have become a fundamental element in the economic

and political strategy of the Vision 2030 promoted by Prince Mohammad Bin Salman. They place private capital at the center of the future Saudi economy. The Financial Times described the plans as "Saudi Thatcherism."

It has cut subsidies, eliminated the cost-of-living allowance, and increased in VAT from 5 to 15 percent. The government plans to organize PPPs for many government services, including sectors such as education, housing, and health. Meanwhile, the kingdom's sovereign wealth fund has invested more than \$8 billion since the start of the pandemic in behemoths of the global economy such as Boeing and Facebook.

In a similar fashion, the Syrian regime has accelerated its neoliberal policies. It passed a PPP law in January 2016 that authorizes the private sector to manage and develop state assets in all sectors of the economy, with the exception of oil. The regime has imposed more austerity measures and cut subsidies on essential products from 20.2 per cent of GDP in 2011 to 4.9 per cent in 2019.

This neoliberal authoritarianism further deepened social inequality. Now, in the MENA region, the richest 1 percent and richest 10 percent of the population take in, respectively, 30 percent and 64 percent of income, while the bottom 50 percent of the population only take in 9.4 percent.

In the region as a whole, the wealth of its 37 billionaires was equivalent to the poorest half of the adult population. Furthermore, between 2010 and 2019, the number of wealthy individuals with assets of \$5 million or more in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Morocco increased by 24 percent, and their combined wealth increased by 13.27 percent, from \$195.5 billion to \$221.5 billion.

In a report published in August 2020 by Oxfam, it was estimated that the economic contraction caused by pandemic and recession will throw an additional 45 million people into poverty throughout the region. Conditions for refugees and migrant workers, which was already very difficult, have grown dramatically

worse and they have become the target of racist scapegoating.

The imperialist powers have collaborated with the regimes in this neoliberal authoritarianism. Their international financial institutions have used debt, which has reached astronomical proportions in Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Lebanon, and Jordan, to demand further structural adjustment to their economies even as they sink deeper into recession.

As a result, movement activists are now raising the demand for debt cancellation. Tunisia is an example. The IMF's Extended Fund Facility imposed several austerity measures, causing the depreciation of the Tunisian dinar in 2017, and consequent inflation has impoverished the popular classes and sharply increased unemployment levels.

The government's foreign debt now represents around two thirds of total public debt in 2020 and is funds that would otherwise go to public welfare are now being diverted to service it. Activists are now opposing debt payment. So, while Tunisia has won greater democracy, the socio-economic conditions for the majority have worsened.

Increasing numbers of Tunisians are fleeing their country, not because of political repression, but poverty. Five times as many people left this year than in 2019. They risk their lives crossing the Mediterranean and if they survive that, they face the EU's brutal border regime and racist discrimination in European countries. The region is thus again becoming a powder keg of economic and political grievances.

Challenges of the Left: Building a Political Instrument for Resistance

One of the key problems in the waves of resistance to these conditions has been the extreme weakness of the radical left and organized working

class. These have been unable to intervene as a central political force among the popular classes and participate in their self-organization to achieve economic and political demands.

In Egypt, there were initially large economic struggles and growing independent trade unions, but they never cohered into a political vehicle of sufficient size to articulate class demands and organize on a mass level. The only exceptions to this situation were in Tunisia and Sudan.

In both countries the presence of mass trade union organizations such as the Tunisian UGTT and the Sudanese Professional Association were key elements in organizing successful mass struggles. Women had also built large feminist organizations that continue to raise progressive demands for their rights.

Of course, the struggles in both countries have also hit the limits of simple political change. The UGTT and Sudanese Professional Association played pivotal roles, but their leadership has been tempted to seek accommodation with the ruling elites rather than radical socio-economic change.

Nevertheless, Tunisia and Sudan's mass organizations remain the exception in the region. Elsewhere, workers and the oppressed did not have such organizations in place, making it difficult for the masses to replace the regimes with a progressive alternative. In the coming years, the left must play a central role in the construction and development of such large alternative political organizations.

The left also needs to develop a political strategy that does just seek a political revolution, but also a social revolution in which the structures of society and the mode of production are radically changed. Indeed, the only way to guarantee a political revolution is to achieve a social one.

The left should not advocate stagist strategy of first carrying out a cross-class revolution for democracy and delaying for an unspecified period of time a complete social revolution. We

have seen the problems with that strategy in countries like South Africa, where Apartheid was dismantled, but social and class inequalities have grown worse.

As Daniel Bensaïd argues,

Between the social and political struggles there are neither Chinese walls nor watertight compartments. Politics arises and is invented inside the social, in the resistance to oppression, the statement of new rights that transform victims into active subjects.

Socialists in these struggles must champion the liberation of all the oppressed, raising demands of rights for women, religious minorities, LGBT communities, and oppressed racial and ethnic groups. Failure to do so will prevent the left from uniting the working class for the radical transformation of society.

The recent outbreak of protests in Tunisia on the 10th anniversary of the overthrow of dictator Ben Ali demonstrates the anger of wide sectors of the popular classes against economic woes, social inequality, unemployment, political corruption, and a whole host of other problems.

Moreover, the new democratic government has violently repressed the protests and arrested more than 1000 people, including minors. It even arrested individuals who had not taken part in the demonstrations – simply because they wrote Facebook posts supporting the protest movement.

This scenario points to the limits of political revolution without social revolution. It also underscores the importance of the left developing an independent class project aimed advancing both democratization and social transformation.

The point about the independence of the left is key because one the mistakes that the left has made especially during the first wave of

revolt has been to align itself with one of the two forces of counter-revolution.

Some have collaborated with the authoritarian regimes against the Islamic fundamentalists with disastrous results. That has resulted only in the contraction of the democratic space for workers and oppressed people to organize for liberation. The regimes remain the first and foremost enemy of revolutionary forces in the region.

At the same time, other sectors of the left have allied with Islamic fundamentalist organizations against the state. The Islamic fundamentalists, whether in or out of power, are reactionaries; they target workers, trade unions, and democratic organizations, all while promoting neoliberal economics and reactionary social policies. They are also part of the counter-revolution.

Instead of turning to either of these two forces, the left must build an independent, democratic, and progressive front that seeks to promote the self-organization of workers and the oppressed. In this project, it must be understood that workers' struggles alone will not, however, be sufficient to unite the masses.

Socialists in these struggles must champion the liberation of all the oppressed, raising demands of rights for women, religious minorities, LGBT communities, and oppressed racial and ethnic groups. Failure to do so will prevent the left from uniting the working class for the radical transformation of society.

The left must also cultivate a regional and internationalist vision, something currently lacking in much of the world. The region's left must build networks of collaboration in building a progressive alternative to the local, regional, and imperial counter-revolutionary forces.

The ruling classes of the region share experiences and lessons with each other to defend their authoritarian neoliberal order. The left has to do the same because the struggle is a regional one. A defeat in one country

is a defeat for all, and victory in one country is a victory for all.

The region's left must develop collaborative relationships with progressive forces internationally. No socialist solution can be found in one country or in one region, particularly one like the Middle East and North Africa, which, because of its strategic energy reserves, has been a battleground for regional and imperialist powers.

New explosions of popular anger are to be expected because the root causes of the uprisings not only remain but have in fact multiplied and intensified. However, these conditions do not necessarily directly translate into political opportunities, particularly for countries that have suffered wars and a suffering deep economic crisis. But struggle lies ahead.

The left must participate in the construction of united fronts against autocracy, exploitation, and oppression, and at the same time build a political alternative among the popular classes. These are the tasks not just of the left in the MENA region, but throughout the world.

Conclusion

The MENA revolutionary process is an integral part of the global popular resistance against the crisis-ridden neoliberal capitalist order. But it has a particular radicalism born of its particular form of capitalism that has opened a long-term revolutionary epoch. Against Orientalist claims of Arab or Islamic exceptionalism, the region's masses are struggling for the same demands for which people throughout the world are struggling, including as democracy, social justice, equality, and secularism. But to win requires not just a change in government, but both political and social revolutions.

There is no simple path in this revolutionary process. To win will require building a left that can navigate complex and dynamic combinations of political and economic struggles. As Lenin declared decades ago:

To imagine that social revolution is conceivable ... without revolutionary outbursts by a section of the petty bourgeoisie with all its prejudices, without a movement of the politically non-conscious proletarian and semi-proletarian masses against

oppression by the landowners, the church, and the monarchy, against national oppression, etc.-to imagine all this is to repudiate social revolution. So, one army lines up in one place and says, "We are for socialism", and another, somewhere else and says, "We are for imperialism", and that will be a social revolution!... Whoever expects a "pure" social revolution will never live to see it. Such a person pays lip-service to revolution without understanding what revolution is.

The role of left and progressives is crystal clear: build an inclusive social and democratic alternative in the struggle. The MENA region remains in the midst of a long-term revolutionary process that has - and will - include both revolution and counter-revolution.

There have already been terrible defeats, but also partial victories. But neither has brought the process to an end. This is only beginning...

26 January 2021

Source *Spectre Journal*.

Western Sahara: A forgotten war

28 January 2021, by Patrick Scott

Morocco, ruled by an autocratic monarchy, clearly wanted to further ingratiate itself in imperialist eyes through its recognition of Israel and consolidate support for its occupation of Western Sahara. This could ultimately backfire on the Moroccan regime. The national oppression of the Sahrawi people was much less known internationally than that of the Kurds or Palestinians for example. But now the agreement with Israel has put Morocco and Western Sahara firmly under the spotlight.

The declaration of position by the

Trump administration was not really a change at all. In practice US imperialism has always supported Morocco in Western Sahara. The new position is unlikely to be reversed by the incoming Biden administration, though we may get some mealy-mouthed platitudes about the need for a 'peaceful' resolution to the conflict.

And it is not just the United States, in practice all western imperialist powers have supported Moroccan control over Western Sahara, if not openly then tacitly. A clear example is shown by the relations the EU has with

Morocco. In 2016, in recognising it as an illegally occupied territory the European Court of Justice ruled that Western Sahara could not be covered by existing trade agreements between the EU and Morocco without the freely given consent of its people.

Nevertheless, shortly after in 2017 the EU foreign minister Federica Mogherini stated that the EU's trade agreements with Morocco would not be affected by the 2016 ruling. This was further emphasised by a later trade agreement between the EU and Morocco covering fisheries allowing

the importation into the EU of fish caught in Western Saharan waters.

So today the EU allows the importation of fish and possibly other products from Western Sahara in violation of a legal ruling by its own court! [49] Brexit Britain is no better, Britain signed a post Brexit trade deal with Morocco on broadly the same terms as the EU's trade deals in 2019 which came into force once Britain left the single market. This agreement did not exclude imported goods from Western Sahara so by default they were included. But other than a statement signed by a small though influential number of NGO directors and trade union leaders it attracted little publicity at the time. [50]

Origins

Originally a Spanish colony, the origins of the conflict go back to the 1970s. In 1973, Polisario was formed to fight for the liberation of Western Sahara and in 1975 it started a guerrilla war against the Spanish occupation. In 1974, the previous year, the Portuguese dictatorship had fallen; a major reason being because it was fighting wars against national liberation movements in Angola and Mozambique that it could not win.

No doubt mindful of what had happened in neighbouring Portugal, Franco's fascist dictatorship in Spain found itself in a political conundrum. Spain could not risk getting sucked into a colonial war in Western Sahara but equally it could not withdraw and allow Polisario to claim victory. The only solution for Spain was to withdraw from Western Sahara but let other powers occupy the territory to replace its role as national oppressor.

Accordingly, in 1975 only a few days before Franco died, Spain signed the so-called Madrid accords with Morocco and Mauritania, giving the northern two thirds of Western Sahara to Morocco and the southern third to Mauritania. In any event the war continued and in 1979 Mauritania signed a ceasefire with Polisario and withdrew from the southern part of Western Sahara, whereby Morocco immediately occupied the area and claimed sovereignty over all Western Sahara! In 1976 Polisario declared the formation of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). Today the SADR controls about 20% of Western Sahara in the eastern part of the territory and internationally is recognised as the only legitimate government of Western Sahara by 40 states, mainly in Africa; it is also a member of the African Union.

Western Sahara today is Africa's last colony, though not ruled directly by an imperialist power Morocco acts as the regional proxy in Western Sahara for the imperialist system as whole. At the time of the invasion in 1975 many Sahrawi people fled or were driven from their homes to become refugees in either neighbouring countries such as Algeria or the liberated territories in the east controlled by Polisario. They were replaced by migrants from Morocco so today the Sahrawi people are probably a minority in Morocco controlled Western Sahara, in other words the Sahrawi have become the Palestinians of North Africa.

Critical

The current situation in Western Sahara is critical. In 1991 the UN brokered a truce between Morocco

and Polisario pending the holding of a referendum which never happened and is never likely to happen, nevertheless this uneasy truce held for 29 years. But this came to an end in November 2020 with military clashes between Morocco and Polisario. [51] It is very probably no accident that these clashes happened at more or less the same time as Morocco reached its agreement with Israel. Morocco very probably provoked the clashes as a pretext to prepare a future offensive to take control of the territory in Western Sahara that remain under the control of Polisario and the SADR.

International support for the Sahrawi people is imperative given the serious possibility of a new war in Western Sahara. In Britain though there have been some positive developments in this regard. In the wake of recent events a joint statement on Palestine and Western Sahara has been endorsed by the Western Sahara Campaign UK, Palestine Solidarity Campaign, and four national trade unions, GMB, NEU, Unison, and Unite. [52] This statement needs to be publicised and endorsed by more labour movement organisations.

But we need to go further. In Britain, Europe, and internationally we should build support for the Sahrawi people around the following demands. First, no to trade deals with Morocco and yes to trade embargos until Morocco has completely and unconditionally withdrawn from Western Sahara. Second; for recognition of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic as the only legitimate government of Western Sahara.

26 January 2021

Source [Socialist Resistance](#).

Mass protests calling for Navalny's release on 23 January, set to continue

27 January 2021, by [Ilya Budraitskis](#)

On the eve of the rally, after his arrest, Navalny's campaign team presented a video about Vladimir Putin's secret palace, which cost about 100 billion roubles (about \$13 million) and was astonishingly opulent and senseless. Against a backdrop of economic stagnation, rising inflation, and unemployment, the story of this palace resonated enormously (over 90 million views on Youtube at the moment) not only as an example of corruption, but also as a demonstration of colossal social inequality in modern Russia. Unlike the previous Navalny investigations in which high-ranking bureaucrats and oligarchs close to power have been the heroes, this time it is the authoritarian leader himself whose sustained popularity has until recently provided the legitimacy of the regime. Not surprisingly, the publication of the film and the call to go out into the streets provoked a panicked reaction from the authorities: "preventive" talks were held at every school and university, informing students that their participation in the protests would lead to "problems", and all TV channels explained that the palace did not really belong to Putin, who preferred an ascetic way of life.

In addition, on the eve of the rally, all of Navalny's key activists were arrested on various pretexts. The effect of these actions by the authorities was just the opposite: the January 23rd protest surpassed in number of participants all the opposition rallies of the last decade. The main qualitative change, however, was the geographical expansion of the protest: thousands of people took to the streets in major regional centres such as Vladivostok, Irkutsk, Samara, Kazan, and many others. Despite the fact that the Kremlin media constantly tried to portray the protest mainly as the entertainment of irresponsible teenagers influenced by social media, in reality the majority of the participants were young working people, aged 20-40. The turnout of thousands of people in the Russian regions (the protests were held in approximately 120 cities across the country) showed that this time the opposition protests were able to attract a new audience that had never participated in rallies before. The protest in St. Petersburg, previously seen as more politically passive than Moscow, was unexpectedly massive: here about

thirty thousand people marched down the city's main street, Nevsky Prospect, and then occupied the famous Senate Square. In Moscow, about 40 thousand protesters came out and faced aggressive actions from the authorities - during the day, there were several open clashes with the police in the city centre, resulting in the detention of about 1300 people.

This new quality of the protest, the inclusion of an increasingly broad strata outside the traditional liberal opposition, also provides more opportunities for leftist forces to participate. Thus, the Russian Socialist Movement with its slogans and materials took part in the rallies in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Yekaterinburg, and in Izhevsk it practically led the column of protesters.

After last Saturday's rallies, Navalny's headquarters announced that they would now hold rallies every week. While it is hard to say how much such a call will contribute to the growth of the protest movement, it is already clear - after 23 January it has already moved to a qualitatively new level.

26 January 2021

The People's Fight Continues

26 January 2021, by Hanna Perekhoda

There are thousands of audio and video recordings of electoral fraud, showing the rewriting of results, the substitution of one ballot box for another, and multiple instances of pressure on voters, observers, and election officials. According to journalists and social scientists, based on admittedly partial data, Svetlana Tsikhanovskaya, the opposition candidate, actually won the presidential election. Regardless of the figures put forward, which can vary considerably from one study to another, all observations agree that the totals for the two candidates were much closer than announced by the Belarusian Central Election

Commission.

Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets on election night to contest the results, which they considered a massive fraud. The rallies continued for days, regularly bringing out 100,000 to 300,000 people in Minsk alone, becoming the largest demonstrations in the history of the nation of eight million people. The protests quickly spread across the country. For four months now, Belarus has been shaken by an enormous popular protest movement.

What Explains the Unprecedented Mass Movement?

Despite the peaceful character of the movement, from the first day this summer it has been violently repressed by the riot police. The proof of the unjustified violence can be seen in the deliberate arrests of passersby, minors, and the elderly. A great many of those arrested have become sick in the crowded cells, without access to food or potable water. Prisoners who have been released have told how they

were subjected to humiliation and to torture in the detention centers. There are allegations that penal authorities raped both women and men. The completely disproportionate police violence against the peaceful demonstrators and the mass arrests and torture to which the detainees were subjected fueled the mobilization, drawing in people who until recently considered themselves apolitical or even loyal to the regime.

Another issue adding to popular anger is the ineffective handling of the COVID-19 pandemic by Belarusian authorities. Like Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro, Alexander Lukashenko was long in denial about the dangers of this disease, calling it a simple flu. In the midst of a pandemic, the president advised Belarusians to wash their hands with vodka, go to the sauna, and drink alcohol to “poison the virus.” Lukashenko went so far as to openly deny the virus’s very existence, stating that he didn’t see it “flying around here.” The government decided to go on with celebrations, football and hockey matches, and other public events including the usual May 9 military parade, which annually celebrates the victory of the Soviet Union over Nazism.

On the one hand, such an irresponsible attitude on the part of the president has greatly contributed to his loss of credibility among the population. On the other hand, the authorities’ denial of the pandemic and their refusal to introduce public health measures have led the inhabitants of Belarus to build horizontal ties of solidarity that later proved very useful to the protest movement. Besides these immediate causes leading Belarusians to challenge the regime, other, less explicit reasons deserve to be analyzed. The creeping deterioration in the standard of living could indeed be considered one of the main factors inspiring such widespread popular discontent.

Despite the stereotypes that can be found in popular consciousness and sometimes even among leftist activists, Belarus is by no means a socialist country. Elected in 1994 after the fall of the Soviet Union, Lukashenko effectively put a stop to

mass privatization. This partial return to state management of the economy proved popular among the Belarusians, who had witnessed the sad examples of the neighboring post-Soviet countries’ economies being ruined by the return of capitalism.

To this day, Belarus continues to preserve certain attributes of the Soviet socialist system, in large part thanks to sizeable subsidies from Russia. These Russian “donations” represent roughly a quarter of the Belarusian gross domestic product. Russia is seen as the main investor and also virtually the only market of the Belarusian economy. Ninety percent of Belarus’s production, especially in the agricultural sector, is exported to Russia. In addition, the country benefits from a big discount on the price of Russian hydrocarbons: Moscow allows Minsk to refine crude bought at low cost and to re-export it to Europe at market price. Russian gas is also sold to its neighbor at friendly prices. Thanks to this support from the Russian “big brother,” Lukashenko could indeed “buy” social peace in his country. In return, Putin demanded full economic and geopolitical loyalty from Belarus.

We should remember, however, that Moscow itself is in a very delicate economic and political situation, especially since its military intervention in Ukraine in 2014 and the sanctions by Western countries that followed. Russia no longer has the same means to help its most loyal brother-country. To continue to benefit from Russian aid, Lukashenko resorted to blackmail, threatening Moscow with rapprochement with the West. This tension hardly helped to improve relations between Russia and the Belarusian regime.

The Belarusian economy, whose stability depends very much on its eastern neighbor, has been threatened. The Belarusian authorities thought to remedy this situation by introducing numerous austerity measures and by reducing social rights. Thus, we were witnessing the undermining of the very foundations of the Lukashenko regime. Until 2020, some sort of unspoken contract regulated relations between the government and the

people—Belarusians were prepared to tolerate the absence of democratic freedoms in exchange for modest social security. Alexander Lukashenko, now incapable of fulfilling these obligations as the guarantor of economic stability, began gradually to lose his political legitimacy. A feeling of deep discontent slowly spread to large sectors of the population, both in the towns and in the countryside.

In short, large-scale electoral fraud and the refusal of Alexander Lukashenko to leave the presidency have led hundreds of thousands of people to take to the streets. Police brutality further fuels the mobilization, drawing into it masses of previously apolitical people. The mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic is also reinforcing popular anger. The impoverishment of the population coupled with the reinforcement of state violence also seems to contribute to the justification of the current revolt in the eyes of Belarusians.

Actors, Demands, and the Variety of Struggles

Egotistical and well known for his macho attitudes, Lukashenko obviously didn’t take seriously the presidential candidacy of Svetlana Tsikhanovskaya, a homemaker who ran for office in place of her husband, a blogger who had been imprisoned for his criticism of the government. Without any previous political or public experience, she nevertheless became the symbol of this movement.

It’s no secret that Lukashenko had systematically jailed rivals or driven them into exile. Since all potential presidential candidates were excluded from the Belarusian political sphere, they were never able to participate in the elections and make themselves known. As for Tsikhanovskaya, she publicly declared that her main promise was, once elected, to leave her post and to quickly organize free and transparent elections where all candidates can run. Her candidacy was therefore seen, by herself and by her supporters, as a means of carrying

out the necessary measures for a democratic transition of power in this country, after a quarter century of sclerotic authoritarianism. Having thus publicly denied her own political ambitions, the candidate was able to gain wide support from a population wary of institutional politics. The crisis of confidence and mistrust of institutional elites is a general political trend, but it can take different forms. In Belarus it has found its expression in massive support for a female candidate whose lack of political experience is perceived as her main advantage and the main guarantee of her political "honesty."

The protests have not so far been accompanied by a precise political and economic program. Tsikhanovskaya sympathizers unite around a few simple demands: the release of political prisoners, the departure of Lukashenko, and the organization of new elections. The Belarusian political opposition, which has established itself as speaking for the whole movement, is made up of a small number of relatively well-known, but politically inexperienced, personalities. In their demands and their positions, they appear even less radical than the "ordinary" protesters. Few in number, they have become targets of repression, and thus they are unable to fully assume their role as leaders of the popular movement. Threatened by the Belarusian KGB the day after the election, Tsikhanovskaya took refuge in Lithuania. All the other members of the Opposition Coordinating Council presidium are in prison or forced exile. Therefore, the organized political opposition cannot play a significant role on the ground.

It should also be remembered that the opposition presidential campaign was led by three women. Two of them, Svetlana Tsikhanovskaya and Veronika Tsepkalo are married to previously excluded presidential candidates. The third, Maria Kolesnikova is the ex-campaign manager of another candidate, himself in exile.

As already mentioned, the president seemed not to take seriously the candidacy of a woman. According to Lukashenko, Tsikhanovskaya, Tsepkalo, and Kolesnikova were just "three poor girls who understood

nothing." During the campaign, he made several statements about a woman's inability to rule the country. According to Lukashenko, the Belarusian constitution "is not made for a woman," while society "is not ready to vote for a woman." But in 2020 that paternalistic and macho image cultivated by the president since 1994 finally backfired. Women, especially young people, saw it as an attack on their dignity.

Women are quite visible in the movement, including in the street protests. All-female protests often take place. Their main demand is to put an end to police violence. Photos of women of all ages, dressed in white, waving flowers, and holding hands, were published on the front pages of international media. The "Belarusian Woman" thus became the symbol of the movement as a whole.

Yet it would be a mistake to think of this unprecedented female activism as the equivalent of the feminist movement as we often imagine it in the West. The marches that bring together thousands of women do not put forward especially feminist demands. This mobilization remains largely within the framework of the post-Soviet imagination, which attributes to the sexes particular "essential" characteristics. In this sense, women as "mothers" are seen as naturally protective and as endowed with the role of calming and supporting their men: friends, sons, husbands, fathers, and so on. Moreover, the demonstrators use the women's symbolic status by putting them in front of the protests during clashes with the police. It seems that the Belarusian police don't allow themselves to beat up women as violently as men. Such a strategy plays on sexist stereotypes that women reclaim in their favor. In any case, such participation of women in the social movement is a valuable experience of self-organization and collective action. It could certainly contribute to some awareness among women of their interests and strength.

The protest movement seemed to take a decisive turn with the announcement of a general strike on 11 August. Large numbers of workers in industry, transport, commerce, and information

technology joined the protesters. Doctors, retirees, teachers, and college and high school students are also at the forefront of this movement. The announced general strike, however, is still struggling to become a reality, despite an attempt to relaunch it on October 26. Production came to a complete halt only in a few factories.

After Putin's public support, Lukashenko regained his self-confidence and launched a counterattack. Police were placed at the entrances of disloyal factories to intimidate the workers. The arrests of the leaders of strike committees and of trade unionists discouraged the undecided. And these are not just simple arrests. Many detainees have reported being beaten and tortured. Since August, at least ten people have been murdered by the police, including in custody.

The fear of layoffs is real. Dozens of workers have already become victims of "preventive" dismissals. In addition, workers are entitled to fixed-term employment contracts, which allow management to dismiss employees without any compensation but which do not allow employees to resign voluntarily since unemployment in Belarus is punishable by law.

We must also take into account the arsenal of sanctions at the disposal of factory management. Belarus has developed a whole system of control that makes a worker directly dependent on his or her workplace. Workers depend on social security that they can only get through their employers (this concerns housing, loans, vacation, and other items). Thus, material advantages can be obtained only by full subordination and loyalty. In a word, this organization of labor combines the worst of the Soviet and capitalist systems.

There is also the fear, among workers in state-owned enterprises in particular, of massive privatizations that would mean job losses if the pro-European and neoliberal opposition came to power. Such a prospect could also lead to the loss of the Russian market and the privatization of state enterprises, which represent a large

majority of workplaces in the country.

Despite everything, this strike attempt constitutes an unprecedented event for Belarus, where during the last 25 years the Lukashenko regime has meticulously destroyed any mechanism of self-organization from below. The Belarusian left is working to introduce slogans with socio-economic content and to help workers defend their interests, while opposition leaders seem to be quite removed from working-class life. Made up above all of the intelligentsia, the hard core of the Belarusian opposition lacks experience, determination, and above all a critical perspective vis-a-vis the liberal discourse dominating the political and ideological field of post-Soviet countries. Its inability to forge links with the structures of workers' self-organization, to take into account the interests of the employees, and to articulate demands for social justice are major obstacles to the success of the Belarusian protest movement.

However, the fact that the workers have not yet formulated their own economic demands and confine themselves to supporting democratic slogans cannot be explained only by the influence of the liberal discourse of the opposition. As Volodymyr Artiukh and Denys Gorbach have pointed out, in the Belarus system of state capitalism, the economic exploiter is at the same time a state bureaucrat, which means that social demands cannot be separated from democratic slogans. [53] Primarily, the workers see and feel the political violence of this bureaucratic class. The violence of economic exploitation remains in the shadow of the extreme physical violence of the regime that kills people with police batons right out on the streets of their cities.

At this stage, the very experience of uniting and confronting the authorities is essential for Belarusian workers. They must overcome the atomization and gain organizational experience. Those left activists who look upon the Belarusian protests with contempt must remember that class consciousness appears as a result of collective action, not the other way

around.

International Context and the Role of Russia

Despite the strike and such massive and protracted demonstrations, Lukashenko still manages to stay in power. One of the main reasons for his regime's longevity is certainly the explicit support from Russia. Vladimir Putin has even declared that he would be ready to send forces to Belarus to maintain order if the protests escalate there. But why would Russia be interested in supporting an autocrat who has already lost all political legitimacy both in Belarusian eyes and internationally?

The reflex, in Moscow, is to come to the aid of its neighbor mainly for fear of the domino effect. More than anything, the Russian president fears that popular protest will spread to his country, where his popularity is currently declining. Putin may decide to support Lukashenko, this time in exchange for his complete subordination. However, even if Lukashenko managed to stay in power thanks to Russian intervention, his *raison d'être*—his model of political blackmail and economic bargaining—could no longer survive.

It would also be strange if the Kremlin's support for Lukashenko didn't provoke anti-Russian sentiments among Belarusians. Indeed, the question "for or against Russia" has been until now almost absent from the discourse of the protesters. People perceived the need for a change of power in Belarus simply as an internal affair of the country. Opposition spokespersons explicitly limit themselves to one demand: the removal of the president and the organization of free and fair elections. In each of her interventions, Svetlana Tsikhanovskaya does everything possible to ensure that the movement does not appear to be anti-Russian. Yet in the event of Russian interference, the ongoing conflict between the government and Belarusian society would surely turn into a serious geopolitical crisis.

Moscow could also seek a "soft" solution, putting pressure on Lukashenko to convince him to leave his post by guaranteeing him personal security and a quiet retreat to a dacha somewhere in Russia. The post of Belarusian president would then be handed off to a person of confidence, loyal to Moscow. However, such a strategy involves a potential risk. Should Putin choose that option, he would unwittingly admit that mass mobilizations can, sooner or later, remove an autocratic president. In the current situation, when the Russian population has been demonstrating for months in Khabarovsk, openly defying Putin's power, this becomes an extremely dangerous message.

International Solidarity with a People in Struggle

The working class is the only force capable of resolving the question of power in the critical situation through which Belarus is currently passing. The self-organization of the workers has proven time and again to be the best way to challenge an authoritarian regime and ensure the success of the mass popular movement. This revolt of the Belarusian people is legitimate and deserves our full support. In Europe and throughout the world it is our duty to support the democratic slogans of the demonstrators and strikers and to show solidarity with the Belarusian left that is struggling to put forward demands with a social content.

More than ever, the organized popular classes in Belarus must take the initiative in favor of political and social change in order to prevent the frustration of this genuinely popular movement by forces opposed to their interests, whether pro-Russian or pro-Western. It is absolutely necessary to oppose any foreign interference in Belarusian affairs, whether from Moscow or other countries. Belarusians have the right to decide their future for themselves!

Source [*New Politics*](#).

'We're witnessing a fundamental political realignment'

25 January 2021, by **Ben Hillier, Mike Davis**

The House has voted to impeach Donald Trump for "incitement of insurrection". What do you make of the choice to impeach on this ground?

We need to be very careful in analysing this. "Insurrection" and "coup" are hyperbole: there was no plan to seize power on 6 January. On the other hand, there may have been a plot to capture or even kill members of the Senate and the House, particularly Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Nancy Pelosi. So "riot with deadly intent" is the most accurate term, and we now know that certain Republicans in the House helped organise the invasion.

In one survey a few years ago, researchers were stunned by the large number of Trump voters who believed that political violence, even the overthrow of what they considered unlawful government, to be totally justified. And we now have polls showing that 70 percent of Republicans still strongly back Trump.

A majority of Republicans in the House, moreover, voted against certifying the election. These Trump diehards now constitute a de facto third party. Since Trump thinks only of revenge, there is little chance of reconciling this group with the majority of Republicans in the Senate who voted in favour of accepting Biden's election. The Republican Party is splitting in two even if both wings retain the same brand name. The Trump movement indeed has become a genuinely neo-fascist force organised around the myth of the "stolen election" and tacitly condoning political violence. Their rage has become even more incandescent after Facebook and Twitter closed down Trump's accounts.

On the other hand, what happened in

Washington was also a liberation of sorts for many Republicans on the other side of the certification debate. The Trump cult has stifled the ambitions of younger conservative senators such as Ben Sasse (Nebraska) and Tom Cotton (Arkansas). Now a space has been cleared for them to run in the presidential primaries in 2024. Intra-party polarisation has also emboldened Republican hawks like congresswoman Liz Cheney, daughter of George W. Bush's former vice president, who hate Trump's coddling of Russian President Putin and blame him for undermining American hegemony.

This "post-Trump" wing has been given courage by an extraordinary revolt of the party's traditional business donors against the president. I must confess to astonishment when, on 6 January, the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), representing the entire spectrum of older industries large and small, called on Mike Pence to invoke the 25th Amendment to depose Trump. For 125 years, NAM has been virtually identical with the Republican Party, so this was a real earthquake, as was the declaration by the Koch network, the superpower coalition of donors on the right, that it would re-evaluate contributions in light of the Capitol riots.

But we shouldn't leap to the conclusion that post-Trumpism is a rebirth of "moderate Republicanism". It is not. The break is with Trump authoritarianism, not with most of his far-right domestic policies. It remains to be seen whether the hard Christian right, which has anointed Trump as the hand of Jesus, will also divide. In any event, we're witnessing a fundamental political realignment occurring in real time.

The new administration will be inaugurated on 20 January. Can you say something about what Joe Biden and the ruling class hope to get out of the next four years of Democratic rule?

His cabinet and advisory appointments are almost entirely Obama regime veterans, and especially members of his vice-presidential staff. Progressives have been scorned, with one notable exception: the nomination of Deb Haaland (a Democrat from New Mexico) as the first Native American cabinet member (Department of the Interior).

His promise to be "the most pro-labour president in history" coexists uncomfortably with his heavy support from Wall Street, Silicon Valley and Hollywood. One of his chief goals, moreover, is the restoration of the North Atlantic alliance, not only as barrier to Russian ambitions, but as a vehicle for synchronising stimulus packages and maintaining the stability of big finance. Domestically, most of his vaunted "green energy" revolution, if adopted, will subsidise private industry, not expand the public sector.

We should recall how he won the nomination after having lost so many primaries to Bernie Sanders. During the South Carolina primary, there was an incredible rallying to his side of the entire Democratic establishment, the other defeated candidates and the traditional Black leadership in the south. The implicit slogan was "stop Sanders at all cost".

After Bernie conceded defeat, his campaign and Biden's agreed to form a series of working committees to negotiate the content of the Democratic platform. To the horror of millions, in the healthcare group, the Sandernistas conceded universal

health care — they decided not to make it a make-or-break issue in the election and accepted instead Biden's far weaker modification of Obamacare, which would still keep private insurance companies at the centre of medical provision. This was a huge defeat at a time of the greatest medical crisis since the Spanish flu.

Given the way the impeachment is being carried out — the daily valorisation of and rallying around the sacred institutions of US democracy — is it a distraction for progressives whose tasks soon will be to challenge many of the policies of the incoming administration?

We need to challenge the cant about the Constitution. I personally consider nothing more obnoxious than the unctuous reverence for the Constitution on the part of the Democrats. If you look at it historically, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Woodrow Wilson was a fierce critic of the Constitution. Both Republican progressives and the Socialist Party at the time regarded the Constitution as an obstacle and nothing holy.

But it shows how completely the Democratic leadership has bought in to this almost biblical reverence of a document created by slave owners and wealthy merchants to control demands for democracy and to stabilise slavery in the south. And anointing with holy water the Constitution also precludes the fundamental structural reforms that must take place, starting with the abolition of the Electoral College.

So the establishment is just gloating over itself and instrumentalising the events of 6 January to its advantage. This also creates more leverage for the new administration, which is a restoration of the status quo ante — the Obama personnel and regime. It gives them more leverage to try to punish and control the progressive wing of the party.

However, the two Democrats who publicly have been the least enthusiastic about impeachment are the president-elect himself and Bernie Sanders. Biden still drinks the Kool-Aid and subscribes to the myth of

bipartisanship in Congress, of a moderate centre in American politics. It's just like Obama's quest to bring us all together and make us nicer and more decent people. It's a real delusion, but clearly one he believes in. Bernie Sanders will probably vote to convict Trump, but he's been very clear that working-class America has to be, always, the major issue in the foreground, has to be the highest priority.

Having said that, the greatest crime of the Trump administration is not what happened on 6 January. It's the fact that from the late spring onward, the administration has been sabotaging and undermining the public health response to the pandemic. Its hands are bloodstained and responsible for the deaths of at least half of the almost 400,000 people who have died. We should be demanding an independent commission to investigate all this, but also to indict those responsible. I doubt this has any purchase in Congress. But, if necessary, it should be conducted independently by medical experts and above all give voice to rank-and-file workers. It would be hideous to allow Trump and his administration to escape any kind of real punishment for the fact that their policies have become the active vector of the coronavirus infections.

Obama gave amnesty, informally, to the Bush administration for its war crimes and use of torture and then turned around and extended the same kind of informal amnesty to the bankers who brought the American economy down. Biden's instinct is to not punish the Trump administration — although he may modify this to some degree because of the pressure that he's under.

The trick for progressives is to demand punishment and criminal indictment, but at the same time not allow the Biden administration or the Democratic leadership in the House and Senate to turn impeachment and so on into a distraction.

I think it's entirely possible for progressives to demand the sternest punishment for the Trump administration, but at the same time point out the need for fundamental

structural reform. The American constitutional political system is completely undemocratic in certain aspects. The Senate, for example, was designed primarily as a check on the tendencies and movements towards democracy in the early republic. Even if reform is difficult or ultimately impossible to accomplish, it's necessary to change the discourse and to put these hallowed institutions in a realistic light.

Thinking more broadly about the situation in the US in 2021, what do you think are the most consequential "known knowns" and "known unknowns"? What do you think are the most important issues facing the US left?

The conditions in this country are extreme for low-wage workers in general and the working class as a whole. They're living under depression conditions. And it's doubtful that the Biden administration will be able to do anything dramatic about that, at least in the short term.

The great priority must be struggles to organise workplaces and defend workers, to organise in the communities around life and death issues like rent control and medical coverage and to build effective national protest movements after the bitter experience of last year — of seeing the pandemic response annexed by the Trumpites, allowing the far right to mount the only effective protest movement that occurred, rather than a broad progressive coalition fighting for workplace safety and supporting the healthcare and essential workers. Never has the progressive camp, or more explicitly the American left, had greater tasks and responsibilities placed on it than it has for the forthcoming year.

Among the known unknowns is the cold war with China, of which Australia is the front line. Biden ran on Trump positions about China. Remember this was one of the centrepieces of the second Obama administration — the pivot from the Middle East to South-East Asia and the South China Sea, and the attempt to create a more activist and militant alliance against China. This is

extraordinarily dangerous. I think progressives should do everything they can to support the rights of Uyghurs and democracy in China. But a cold war is an extraordinarily dangerous situation.

Another known unknown is the ability to restore, within the OECD bloc, a stabilising level of economic growth. I tend to be extremely sceptical about that possibility. Clearly, in the United States, the private sector cannot any longer create a stable supply of well-paid, meaningful jobs to compensate for the job losses that have occurred so far in the pandemic, but especially for what all the mainstream economists are telling us will be job losses due to the application of artificial intelligence to every sector of the economy. What that means is that the public sector has to be the engine that drives employment and keeps up the level of domestic demand — but public sector employment, particularly in the English-speaking countries, has been savagely cut over the last generation.

Another known unknown will be whether the labour uprising and resurgence, which is the central hope of the left, will occur. Right now, the most progressive unions are ones like the National Nurses United and some of the public sector unions. But other sections of the union movement that historically have been decisive power centres have been enormously weakened by job automation and job export, but also by corruption. The United Auto Workers, once the most powerful single union in the country, which set the pace for national labour negotiations, was eviscerated a few years ago by immense corruption and crisis inside the leadership. The American union movement has very activist and committed sectors, but it also suffers from a great amount of internal decay.

Then there's climate change and the environmental crisis. In places like

Australia and California, what we're seeing in the phenomena of annual or biannual mega-fires is an immense biological transition. Forests are dying and not being replaced. Fire is creating irreversible changes in the landscape. Drought is ravaging some of the most important irrigated agricultural systems in Europe. Food security is as precarious as it has been in a generation and will grow even more so. This is the background crisis to everything else. And certainly here in California, like you in Australia, we have a heightened sense of this. I live in San Diego, but I grew up in the rural East County. And almost half of the East County has been burnt in the last sixteen or seventeen years. California's iconic landscapes in some cases are disappearing. It's no longer a matter of an episodic disaster; it's a continuing catastrophe that grows bigger and bigger every year.

You shouldn't ask me these questions because, you know, I'm always characterised as a prophet of disaster (laughs). I probably have too many bad scenarios. I ultimately believe that global capitalism can't create meaningful social roles for humanity, that it cannot decarbonise the planet, that it cannot prevent nuclear wars, that it cannot provide food security. I don't think another golden age of capital is possible, certainly not globally.

And China's ability to step in and take the place of America, as it did after the 2008 financial crisis, engage in vast public spending campaigns that increase demands for products and help a large part of the world escape the economic crisis — well it's an open bet on China's capacity to do this, but I'm extremely doubtful that a new market-based world order will emerge to bring us back to anything that represents prosperity.

Rather, the opposite seems to be happening, with, even in the rich countries, enormous numbers of

people, particularly young people, reduced to the most marginal economic roles, without any forward motion or ability to escape the purgatory of casualised and contingent labour or, for that matter, the housing crisis that threatens to put hundreds of thousands of people out on the streets.

On the other hand, the United States differs from Western Europe in one important aspect. Okay, we've seen the growth of far-right authoritarian movements which had success in areas of Western and Central Europe among formerly left-wing blue-collar workers. But in this country, the most astonishing thing, I think, is not so much the rise of Trump and far-right populism. It's that among people under 30, every poll shows that a majority looks more favourably on socialism, whatever that means to them, than on capitalism. And it's that so many of them, hundreds of thousands of them, have been active in campaigns from the Occupy movement to Black Lives Matter and so on.

One of the principal concerns of progressives right now is how to sustain that activism, how to prevent it from being demobilised. Much of the future rests on the ability of the left to do that. There's been no other country — certainly no European country, or Australia, New Zealand or Canada — that has seen such a powerful resurgence of the left, or one that is so solidly, generationally specific and anchored. And of course, youth of colour, the coming plurality of the American population, played a central role in this — particularly the Black women who built Black Lives Matter. After Sanders' concession, you faced the possibility that tens of thousands of young people who had been active in his campaign would just become pessimistic and disorganised, when instead their activism was recycled by BLM. We must conserve and nurture activism above all.

The Dutch Government's Benefits Scandal Is Rooted in Stigma Against Welfare Recipients

24 January 2021, by **Kevyn Levie**

At least 26,000 families on the verge of bankruptcy, in more debt than they could repay in their entire lives. Countless people losing their homes, jobs, or partners. And one parent committing suicide after they were ordered to repay tens of thousands of euros. These were the effects of an extremely strict anti-fraud policy carried out by the Dutch tax administration for years — sparking a scandal over which the government led by Mark Rutte resigned last Friday.

The scandal was gradually uncovered by investigative journalists from early 2019 onward, and it revolves around fraud investigations into recipients of childcare allowances. In the Netherlands, parents who both work, as well as single parents, are eligible for a state contribution toward the costs of day care. For those with low incomes, this can add up to 90 percent of the actual costs. These contributions are often directly transferred to childcare providers, but parents are responsible for them — and have to pay back thousands of euros per year if the tax administration decides the allowance was wrongfully paid out.

That is what thousands of low-income families were forced to deal with: the tax administration wrongfully reclaimed their benefits retroactively, often from multiple years, thus pushing them deep into debt and triggering endless personal problems. Sometimes this was due to minor errors: a missing signature or one missing 200-euro payment would be considered fraud, and would lead to parents having to pay back the entire amount of benefits received for the entire year.

In other cases, unjustified fraud investigations into childcare providers

led to all parents who happened to use these daycare centers being considered fraudsters. Other families were singled out by automated “risk selection” systems to then be wrongfully hunted down, forced to pay back large amounts and denied any future applications. Appeals were systematically delayed or ignored altogether. Internal documents show that those responsible were aware that innocent people would be targeted but considered this collateral damage.

Institutional racism was a systemic part of these practices. The large majority of people affected were of bicultural origin. Investigations were initiated based on criteria such as double nationality or even a foreign-sounding last name; practices repeatedly condemned by the Data Protection Authority. In one instance, all benefit recipients of Ghanaian origin were systematically vetted. In email correspondence, civil servants referred to minority groups as “zwartjes” (“darkies”). This aspect of the affair remains grossly underinvestigated.

Political Consequences

Following media revelations on the fallout of this fraud policy, a parliamentary investigation committee was formed. It presented its report, titled “Unprecedented injustice,” in December. It concluded that the tax administration “grossly violated rule-of-law principles” and that affected parents “didn’t stand a chance for years.” It further concluded that the responsible cabinet members had been long aware of the issues; and that pleas from whistleblowers to quickly help parents with their ever-

growing debt problems were repeatedly ignored.

Renske Leijten, a Socialist (SP) member of the committee who played a key role in putting the affair on the agenda, recognized the role class difference played in the lack of attention for the predicament these families were in. She explained in an interview with newspaper Trouw that:

After weeks of deliberation on the committee’s conclusions, the entire Dutch cabinet — formed by four center-right parties, the largest of which is Prime Minister Rutte’s free-market VVD — formally resigned last Friday. They will continue to govern in a caretaker capacity until a new government is formed after March’s national elections, and the prime minister will remain his party’s figurehead in the upcoming election campaign. One responsible cabinet member, Eric Wiebes, resigned immediately; Lodewijk Asscher, the responsible minister at the time and current party leader of the social democrats (PvdA), has withdrawn from the elections.

The scandal has sent shock waves through the Dutch political landscape and initiated a range of measures to prevent something like this happening again: a reform of the childcare benefits system, anti-discrimination training for tax administration employees, more transparency on how the government arrives at decisions, and at least 30,000 euros compensation per affected family. Debate on further measures continues in parliament this week.

The Social-Liberal Consensus

However, this affair is just a magnified example of what has gradually become part of the social-liberal consensus in Dutch politics: access to government support should be limited as much as

possible, and people that receive any kind of benefits are not to be trusted. Only last month, a woman on welfare was ordered to pay back 7,000 euros because her mother occasionally shopped for groceries for her; the law left no option for the court to decide on a lower fine. In many municipalities, it is standing practice to stake out homes and count someone's toothbrushes to establish if they're really living alone and entitled to the benefits they receive.

Discovered benefit fraud in the Netherlands amounts to approximately 120 to 150 million euros per year. In contrast, the lost tax revenue from VAT fraud is estimated at 4 billion euros, and total estimated tax evasion is around 22 billion euros. Of these, benefit fraud gets completely excessive attention in media and politics, which contributes to disproportionate outrage among the public: over half of the population believes the most important task of the ministry of social affairs should be to curb benefits abuse. This dynamic makes politicians across the spectrum feel the need to appear tough: the day care allowance fraud policy spiraled out of control under a social-democratic minister, and a 2013 law mandating automatic high fines for any mistake benefit recipients make — regardless of whether there was malicious intent — was even supported by the Greens (GroenLinks).

Ideologically motivated budget cuts in the past two decades have further reinforced the idea that government support — whether it's unemployment benefits or rent support — is a favor, not a right. Discourse on people receiving benefits is riddled with phrases like "having to give back to society" and "stimulating them to work," as if people enjoy being unemployed. Access to amenities like social housing is limited to an ever-smaller group, to erode public support for them and make future cuts easier. And mainstream politicians readily amplify racist sentiments about citizens with a migrant background depending on or defrauding

government support programs.

These were the circumstances that made the childcare allowance scandal possible. If benefit recipients are considered profiteers, treating them all as potential fraudsters becomes legitimate. If politicians incessantly call for a tougher approach to fraud, innocent citizens losing their homes because of a wrongful fraud investigation becomes collateral damage. And if a government doesn't consider racism within its institutions — examples of which abound — a real problem, citizens will continue to be wrongfully singled out based on their last name.

March's Vote

The collapse of the Dutch government occurs against the backdrop of an unprecedented pandemic that resulted in unparalleled government injections into the economy. One of the effects of the crisis was that the number of people on government benefits increased sharply: about 150,000 people became unemployed, and as many as one-third of all the employed were indirectly supported by government subsidies to prevent layoffs.

However, so far, this doesn't seem to have had a significant effect on attitudes toward those who depend on government support. The support for left-wing versus right-wing parties in polls has been stable. A report by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research suggests that a long-term effect could be seen among young adults: growing up in a crisis like the present one tends to lead to people being more in favor of redistribution and government intervention later in life. But the report concludes that if the pandemic has any effect on economic solidarity among the population at large, it is likely to be temporary.

For now, opinion polls indicate that the current largest party, the right-wing VVD, will remain the largest after the March 17 elections. The VVD has been in government for ten years

— in different constellations, governing with the social-democratic PvdA one time and the extreme-right PVV the other — but all the scandals these respective governments have faced have never stuck to this party, or to its leader and prime minister, Rutte. Indeed, only 6 percent of VVD voters think that Rutte should withdraw as the party's political leader because of the childcare scandal. General support for him has only increased since the start of the pandemic.

Among both center-left and center-right voters, there is anger and dissatisfaction about the scandal. But the Left parties may be in too weak a position to keep the issue on the agenda in the run-up to the elections; let alone posit a credible, solidary alternative to the doctrine that resulted in the near-bankruptcy of at least 26,000 families. The social-democratic PvdA eternally oscillates between crafting neoliberal policy when in government and rediscovering their ideals when in opposition, and the party bears a large share of the responsibility for this affair. The Socialist Party (SP), on the other hand, persists in a course of cultural conservatism that alienates both activists and potential voters.

If the elections aren't postponed because of the pandemic, debate on many issues is likely to be drowned out by discussion on how to combat coronavirus. Parties may also use this strategically: the government sparking a public debate on the need for a curfew last week, just days before resigning, may well have been a move to deflect attention from the childcare allowance scandal. It therefore remains to be seen if the affair will play a significant role in the election campaign. And regardless of what government is formed after the elections, mistrust of benefit recipients and institutional racism are likely to remain deeply entrenched in government and in Dutch political culture for some time.

23 January 2021

Source Jacobin.

If Joe Biden Moves Left, You Can Thank the Left

23 January 2021, by **Liza Featherstone**

Joe Biden, to put it mildly, is an unlikely standard-bearer for a transformative policy agenda. He is deeply implicated in much of what is wrong with America and the world today: cheerfully working with segregationists in the 1970s, becoming an architect of crime legislation that led to mass incarceration, and a champion of the war in Iraq, which has killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians as well as thousands of American soldiers. You can read about this depressingly conservative public figure in my Jacobin colleague Branko Marcetic's fine book about Biden, *Yesterday's Man* (Verso, 2020).

It's worth asking, then, why, given this history, does Biden's incoming agenda so far seem surprisingly decent? Some of it is explained by the damage done to our critical faculties over the last four years; admittedly, his predecessor, an aspiring dictator beloved by fascists around the globe, set a low bar. But that's not the whole story.

Yesterday, his first day in office, Biden signed a raft of executive orders. Some of these were actions that any Democrat would have taken but are still worth noting as they're crucial to human survival: he signed a mask mandate covering all federal properties, rejoined the Paris Agreement and the World Health Organization, and restored the capacity of the federal government to address the pandemic in a coordinated fashion.

He also stopped Trump's anti-intellectual 1776 Commission and put the "Dreamers" back on a path to permanent citizenship. Other executive orders represent a welcome step away from the Trump administration's barbaric and bigoted

assault on the international working class, but might have taken longer or been overlooked in a different political moment: ending the "Muslim ban" (travel restrictions from certain Muslim majority countries), restarting visa applications from those countries, moving to reunite families separated at the border, adding protections against racial discrimination, stopping border wall construction, and counting noncitizens in the Census again.

Yet some of Biden's executive orders — even on this first day — went further, embodying a more decisive departure from bipartisan Reaganomics than we might have expected. He stopped the Keystone Pipeline, revoked oil and gas permits in all national wildlife monuments, extended eviction and foreclosure moratoriums, paused student loan payments, and froze Trump's environmentally destructive last-minute regulatory actions.

His announced legislative agenda, too, departs from the austerity that many of us would have expected from him a year ago. Any Democrat — we hope — would reject the anti-scientific macho buffoonery surrounding Trump's pandemic response and attempt at least a half-assed economic stimulus to address the recession.

But Biden is proposing to spend real money on those urgent crises. He is asking Congress for \$1.9 trillion, to get everyone vaccinated as quickly as possible, fund relief for struggling American households, help schools reopen safely, help state governments meet vital public needs, and increase the minimum wage to \$15. He has appointed Janet Yellen to the Treasury, not some venture capitalist deficit hawk. Biden has indicated a willingness to tax the rich. He says he wants to expand access to health care.

Biden has also put unprecedented emphasis on climate change, even in the midst of other crises most voters might find more urgent, appointing a team of climate experts to his White House staff, and setting a goal to decarbonize the electricity system in fifteen years, surprising both the fossil fuel industry and the climate activists.

Biden's plans are not the same as Bernie Sanders's social democratic agenda. He isn't pushing for Medicare for All, the full Green New Deal, or free college. Sanders would be calling for canceling rent and student debt — the latter for good. Yet in a twist unimaginable one year ago, Joe Biden is, for the moment, looking like a good liberal.

This long-endangered species tends to flourish when its habitat includes two historical conditions at once: dire crises and robust social movements. Without the Great Depression and World War II, Franklin D. Roosevelt probably might now be remembered mostly as a well-spoken WASP with an unusually socially conscious and unconventional wife.

Can you imagine Joe Biden without the devastating COVID-19 pandemic, the recession, this summer's massive street uprisings against racist police brutality, or Bernie Sanders's two presidential campaigns and their sequelae (the emergence of new democratic socialist politicians like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Cori Bush, and Jamaal Bowman, the new prominence of social democratic priorities like health care and housing, and the growth in organized left activism)?

Of course, you can! We're all too familiar with that Joe Biden.

The best strategy for the Left is not to ignore the emergence of this new

Biden, nor to insist that the old one has gone away for good. Instead, we should claim credit for the good liberal now visiting the White House and create the conditions to ensure that he does everything he says, and much more. This is especially true on climate, an issue where there is so little time to waste, and so much potential for action.

We on the Left always seem more intelligent and realistic to our comrades when we roll our eyes and dismiss the possibility of extracting anything from the national Democrats,

when we ignore the nuances and just call our opponents neoliberals as if nothing unusual is happening. But we need to acknowledge the Left's victories and dramatic global crises that have produced the present incarnation of Biden.

To give up on pressuring this administration would be a mistake; we need to demand that Biden keep his promises, while also explaining why our world needs more than good liberalism. We also need to guard against the greatest danger of good liberalism: if history is any guide, a

Biden foreign policy could be viciously anti-socialist and murderously interventionist.

Above all, we need to build socialist, left, and worker power from the ground up, focusing on local and state government and on our workplaces. That's the only way we can ensure that future generations will be able to expect better than Joe Biden, liberal edition. We cannot allow this complicated and chaotic moment to go to waste.

Source [Jacobin](#).

Navalny's Return and Left Strategy

22 January 2021, by **Ilya Budraitskis**, **Ilya Matveev**, **Kirill Medvedev**, [LeftEast](#)

Ilya Budraitskis, Moscow-based historian, political writer, and co-author of the [Political Diary podcast](#).

Alexei Navalny's arrest at Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport on January 17, minutes after his return to Russia, was not only the expected, but also the only possible reaction of the Russian authorities. At the beginning of this year, after the summer Constitutional amendments opened up the possibility of Putin's unlimited personal power, his regime had clearly entered a new phase: a virtually open dictatorship, based not on passive support from below but on repressive power. In this new configuration, there is no place either for the marginalized liberal opposition or for the systemic "managed democracy" parties, which have kept United Russia's absolute monopoly in check and have created limited opportunities for expressing electoral discontent. The attempted assassination of Navalny by the Russian security apparatus last August fits perfectly into this picture. From the perspective of the authorities, the main threat posed by Navalny is the tactic of "smart voting" – the accumulation of all the protest votes

by the candidate who stands the best chance of defeating United Russia's nominees. In a situation where support for the ruling party is rapidly declining (currently it is no more than 30%), the "smart voting" threatens the approved scenario for the parliamentary elections scheduled for September of this year and, in the long run, the triumphant re-election of Putin himself to a new term.

Navalny's bold and precise populist strategy is in fact aimed at creating a protest coalition, with an important place reserved for the representatives of the system parties (above all, the Communists), who will refuse to play by the Kremlin's rules and are able to conduct lively and offensive electoral campaigns. A key element of this strategy is Navalny's rhetoric, in which the issues of poverty and social inequality have taken the place of liberal-democratic values. The high-profile anti-corruption investigations that have earned him popularity have an emotional impact on a huge audience (for example, his latest film about Putin's palace, costing 100 billion roubles, was viewed over 50 million times by Friday), since they directly indicate the extreme

stratification of Russian society. In an environment of openly falsified elections and unprecedented police pressure, electoral protest can only have an effect if it is supported by a mass non-parliamentary street movement. And only such a movement can determine Navalny's personal fate today — if hundreds of thousands across the country do not stand up for his immediate release in the coming weeks, he will surely face a long prison term.

In my view, participating in such a movement — with our own program and demands — is today the only chance for the Russian left. Moreover, it is the left that can most coherently express the sentiments that are increasingly pushing people to active protest: social inequality, the degradation of the social sphere (especially health care, which became dramatically apparent during the pandemic), police violence, and the absence of basic democratic (especially labor) rights.

Ilya Matveev, a researcher and lecturer in political economy based in St. Petersburg and co-author of the [Political Diary podcast](#)

At first, Navalny's decision to return to Russia was bewildering. What did he expect to happen? The state had clearly decided to put him behind bars, disregarding international pressure (in any case, after the highly publicized assassination attempt, the reputation of the Russian authorities could hardly get any worse). In prison, Navalny could claim the moral high ground, but he could not be an effective communicator of anti-corruption investigations and political campaigns (his most important activity). Navalny's decision seemed almost irrational, a stubborn show of defiance. However, very soon it became clear that there was an element of political calculation to this. Once Navalny was arrested, his team released a new investigative video. It was one of a kind – Navalny's first big investigation targeting Putin directly. The video was destined to attract a huge audience. Navalny's calculation was to provoke an immediate and severe political crisis – both with his own arrest and with the new explosive investigation. This crisis would have a street dimension – on Saturday 23 January, Russian cities will witness unsanctioned rallies – and an electoral dimension.

2021 is in fact the year of parliamentary elections in Russia. Russia has a mixed electoral system – one half of the parliament is elected on proportional basis, another half in single-member districts. While elections are tightly controlled and falsifications have reached an unprecedented level during the vote on constitutional amendments in 2020, parliamentary elections could still pose a problem for the regime. Party list voting faces the problem of deep unpopularity of United Russia, a ruling party. And in single-member districts, the regime faces the so-called 'smart voting', Navalny's highly advanced tactical voting scheme. A political crisis triggered by Navalny's arrest and his new anti-Putin video hits both

targets – lowers the vote for United Russia even further and promotes 'smart voting' in SMDs. It could be a heavy blow for the regime, especially combined with street protests. In short, Navalny's return to Russia was a calculated gamble. The ball is now in the court of the ordinary members of the opposition.

A few words on the new video itself. It does not present a lot of new facts – Putin's personal palace first appeared in the news in 2010. Nor is it significant simply because it is a direct challenge to Putin. What is striking about the video is that it creates a consistent narrative. In this story, Putin's defining characteristic is his absurd, comical lust for material wealth. According to Navalny, Putin has always been guided by this lust alone. He wanted things when he was a KGB agent in Germany, he wanted things in Anatoly Sobchak's administration in St Petersburg in the 1990s, he wanted things while moving to Moscow and eventually becoming president and he still wants things, even after building a \$1,5 billion palace with the seal of the Romanov dynasty at the entrance. In my opinion, this is not an accurate description of Putin's mindset or motivation. Nor can the Russian regime be reduced to this caricature. Nevertheless, Putin's decisions in recent years (starting with his return to the presidency in 2012 all the way to canceling term limits for himself in 2020) made such a depiction of his life and work inevitable. For this one-dimensional account of his life, Putin has no one to blame but himself.

Kirill Medvedev, activist of the Russian Socialist Movement, musician from the Arkady Kots Band, editor of Zanovo-media

With his return, Navalny has taken an important step towards a new understanding of politics in Russia and a new round of politicization. Previously, there had been a fairly clear "division of labor" in protest:

activists take risks motivated by a certain idealistic civic impulse while politicians pursue their own, often purely selfish, interests. Navalny has drawn this line, showing that politics can and should be valiant and technological at the same time. Importantly, in the new videos, he continues to develop the image of Putin not as a politician, but as a corrupt functionary who, having gained enormous power through shady arrangements, continues to act in the same old manner of a rogue post-Soviet official with ties to the FSB.

But the more convincingly Navalny works with the theme of corruption and the ostentatious consumption of top officials, the more the limits of this rhetoric are exposed in a country like Russia, exhausted by inequality and permeated by class contradictions. Now the situation looks like this: Navalny is showing us the palaces of the rulers, playing with the fire of class resentment, while at the same time (together with his comrades-in-arms) promising businesses complete freedom in the Beautiful Russia of the Future. They say that the problem is not the palaces and gigantic fortunes per se, but where they come from. But of course, with the further development of this populist line, it will no longer be easy to separate the corrupt "friends of Putin" from those whom Navalny calls "honest businessmen," but whose fortunes are just as huge, and similarly generated by illegal schemes from the 1990s and 2000s and, of course, by over-exploitation of workers. All of this opens up great opportunities for leftist politics, which, with an equally skillful combination of valor and rationality, could produce a far more powerful wave of discontent and a far more coherent program of change than Navalny's eclectic populism.

22 January 2021

Source [LeftEast](#).

Towards a Year of Crisis and Uncertainty

21 January 2021, by **Dan La Botz**

The recent events have created uncertainty, and many now crave stability, so is there at this moment a place for the left in national politics?

President Biden will face a nation in deep crisis. In the background looms the climate crisis: 2020 was the hottest year on record. The pandemic continues to ravage the nation. We now have 400,000 dead and people are dying at a rate of nearly 4,000 per day, overwhelming hospitals in many states. Public health measures have closed businesses, putting 27 million people out of work while many others face reduced wages. Surveys show that about 13% of Americans, or 27.4 million people, sometimes or often do not have enough to eat. Some 18 million Americans have been unable to pay their mortgage or rent and about six million believe they face eviction. And week after week, police continue to kill black men and women in situations that do not justify violence.

We should add to these issues, the enormity of the political crisis of Trumpism and its spawn. Trump won 74 million votes and most of those people believe he won the election and should be the president. Some 147 Republican Representatives and 8 Senators voted not to recognize Biden's victory and most state

Republican officials support Trump. Among Trump supporters, are tens of thousands of racist, white supremacists, groups such as the Oath Keepers, the Three Percenters, the Proud Boys, and the Boogaloo Boys. All want to overthrow the government and the latter calls for a new civil war. We are entering a period with great potential for volatility and violence.

Biden and his Vice President Kamala Harris, the first female person of color to hold executive office, promise to address the pandemic, the climate crisis, the economic depression, and the country's racial justice issues. Biden has said that in his first 100 days, the government will vaccinate 100 million Americans, while also pressing for all to adopt masking and social distancing. With the Democrats having very narrow majorities in the House and Senate, Biden is putting forward a \$1.9 trillion "American Rescues Plan," with \$1 trillion in direct aid to people, \$440 billion for business, and billions more to rebuild the economy. Upon taking his new post, Biden will also issue executive orders to overturn policies of the Trump administration regarding the environment, immigration, health care, abortion, race relations and civil rights, gay rights, military spending and foreign aid. But there will also be

pressure on Biden, because of the insurrection, to pass a new domestic terrorism law, a possibility that justifiably worries the left.

Given the current political atmosphere, it's difficult to predict what will happen in the coming year. Biden, a neoliberal and political moderate, has chosen a cabinet made up largely of people who served in the Obama administration where he was vice-president. Biden's is a government of the Democratic Party establishment, long accustomed to serving the financial and corporate power elite. The left will be pushing him to create a single-payer health insurance system, to end carbon fuels, and to crack down police violence. The Democratic Socialist of America has launched a national tax-the-rich campaign. But will the left be seen as jeopardizing the desire for a period of stability after the insurrection? Will Black Lives Matter demonstrations seem too extreme? Or might the depth of the crisis combined with pressure from the left push Biden—as Franklin D. Roosevelt was pushed in the 1930s—to adopt more far-reaching progressive economic and social policies?

19 January 2021

Source [*New Politics*](#).

After the Pandemic Subsides, We May See a Third Wave of the Arab Spring

20 January 2021, by **Ashley Smith, Gilbert Achcar**

In this interview, Gilbert Achcar speaking to Ashley Smith for Truthout assesses the results of the uprisings so far and prospects for the new waves of

revolutionary struggle.

Ashley Smith: During this anniversary of the Arab Spring,

many mainstream commentators have expressed a very pessimistic view of the uprisings' results. What's your assessment?

Gilbert Achcar: I think that it's misleading to treat the revolts as if they were events that have passed and we were just marking their historical anniversary. It is more accurate to see the region as going through a long-term revolutionary process.

Looking at it this way is not wishful thinking. It is stating a fact. The first wave hit in Tunisia in December 2010 and spread throughout the region. Since then, we have been through a second wave — a second Arab Spring, as it has been called by the media — that started in December 2018.

The first wave engulfed six countries — after Tunisia: Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Bahrain and Syria; the second wave engulfed another four: Sudan, Algeria, Lebanon and Iraq. So, until now, 10 of the 20 countries in the region have experienced uprisings; countries that together are home to most of the region's population, making the significance of the revolts even greater.

True, the second wave has been frozen to a certain degree by COVID-19. But the pandemic will not bring an end to the revolts. On the contrary, it is making the conditions that produced the uprisings even worse.

The recession it triggered has led to a massive drop in oil prices, undermining the region's economy, deepening inequalities and destabilizing politics. Once we get through the pandemic, we will see yet another wave of uprisings sooner or later.

The region is experiencing an ongoing revolutionary process. One can be pessimistic about the results so far; the revolutions have not won, and two countries — Syria and Yemen — have been enduring devastating civil wars. But on the other hand, the people's determination to fight is grounds for optimism.

Most people do not look back on failed revolts with regret. A recent poll found that majorities in Algeria, Iraq, Egypt, Sudan and Tunisia do not regret the uprisings.

In sum, we should expect further waves of revolution and

counterrevolution. That is characteristic of long-term revolutionary processes.

We have seen a wave of revolts throughout the world since the 2008 global recession. But none so radical as those in the Middle East. Why?

At the global level, neoliberalism has entered a crisis since that recession. In general, most protests since then have demanded changes in government's neoliberal policies or even a change of government, but few have aimed at overthrowing the whole power system.

But that's exactly what most movements in Arabic-speaking countries have tried to do since 2011. "The people want to overthrow the regime" has been the central slogan of the region's uprisings. It demonstrates the difference between the general crisis of neoliberalism and the specific structural crisis in the Middle East and North Africa.

Neoliberalism is a set of policies, a certain mode of regulation — or deregulation as it were — within capitalism. It can be changed through elections or replacement of governments without overthrowing the system.

In the Arab region, by contrast, the people realize that they need to overthrow the power system in order to improve their social conditions. All the region's states are nepotistic. Some are patrimonial states, owned by families, like the monarchies of Bashar al-Assad's Syria. Others are neo-patrimonial states; among them, three — Sudan, Algeria and Egypt — are ruled by the military.

In most of the Middle East and North Africa, you cannot vote politicians out of office. Most of these states extract a sizable portion of their income from oil and gas and other rent sources. Washington and London have long been bolstering despotic oil monarchies to ensure continuous privileged access to their riches.

However, the regional state system thus created combined with the neoliberal turn to produce a structural developmental blockage. That

specificity explains the long-term revolutionary process that began in 2011. The people will continue to struggle to overthrow the political, social and economic system. Either they will win, or the region will keep facing calamitous times.

AS: What classes and social groups have joined the revolts?

GA: In the absence of reliable data, how you answer this depends on your diagnosis of the structural crisis and what will solve it. The international financial institutions (IFIs) — the IMF and World Bank — agree that there is a deep social and economic crisis. [54]

But they argue that it isn't because of their neoliberal recipes, but rather that these policies were not implemented as radically as they wanted them to be. For decades, they have pressured all the regimes to cut social expenditure, privatize state-owned companies, deregulate markets and open up to the world economy.

They thus try to portray the uprisings as revolts of the "middle class" for more neoliberalism. They pretend that the middle class will bring in a fully neoliberal economy along with "good governance," their codeword for democracy and the rule of law.

But this is fully at odds with reality. It is in Egypt under Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's brutal dictatorship that the IFIs have achieved the most radical implementation of their recipes in the region. That fact exposes the claim that neoliberalism goes hand in hand with liberal democracy as a pure myth.

Of course, some people of middle-class background did join the revolts. But the vast majority in the streets and squares belonged to middle- and low-income urban layers, working class and unemployed.

Take Tunisia, for example. It was not the country's "middle class" that toppled the dictatorship. It was a huge popular movement led by the Arab region's largest, independent workers' unions federation.

Egypt is another example. There, unlike Tunisia, official unions were entirely controlled by government.

But, outside those official structures, the country has a very combative working class.

Workers played a major role in February 2011. When the government called on people to resume “business as usual,” hundreds of thousands of them went out on strike, playing a decisive role in the ousting of the president.

We find the same pattern in other countries. Bahrain’s workers’ federation played a key role in the first stage of the uprising in 2011. In Yemen, too, the working class along with the youth were at the heart of that country’s initial uprising.

The second wave in 2019 has involved the same social classes. In Sudan, the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), which includes low-income categories, such as schoolteachers and journalists, played a pivotal role and ended up encompassing newly formed workers’ unions.

They were joined by a grassroots movement, the “resistance committees.” These are based in neighborhoods and mobilize tens of thousands of young people, mainly students, low-income workers and unemployed.

AS: Is there a key difference between the first and second waves?

GA: In the first wave, there was one revolutionary movement confronted with two counterrevolutionary forces. One, of course, was the existing regimes, which tried to suppress the uprisings.

The other was in the opposition: Islamic fundamentalists in the mainstream form of the Muslim Brotherhood, let alone the extremist far right type of al-Qaeda and ISIS [also known as Daesh]. Nowhere did Islamic fundamentalists initiate the struggle; they jumped on the bandwagon.

In Egypt, the Brotherhood’s aim was to hijack the protests, take advantage of the democratic opening, and take over the state. Their program, which combines neoliberalism with religious authoritarianism and sexism, offers no

solution to the country’s real problems. It can only make them worse.

Their rule in both Egypt and Tunisia quickly squandered the amount of support they had gathered in both countries in the initial post-uprising phase due to being the most powerful opposition force. As for the extremists, ISIS’s rule of parts of Iraq and Syria was so brutal, highly oppressive and reactionary, that it quickly undercut whatever popular support it may have had for sectarian reasons and became widely seen as repulsive.

The popular movements in the second wave have learned the lessons of the first. Islamic fundamentalists could not even join them this time.

In Sudan, the movement confronted a state that was based on the alliance between military and fundamentalists. In Algeria, mainstream Islamic fundamentalists had collaborated with the military-controlled regime. In Iraq and Lebanon, sectarian fundamentalist forces are the main pillars of government conveying foreign domination by Iran.

Thus, the movement in the second wave firmly opposed the Islamic fundamentalists as counterrevolutionary forces. And they haven’t nurtured any illusions in the military, especially after the experience of al-Sisi’s tyrannical reign in Egypt.

AS: What role did imperial powers like the U.S. and Russia play in the counterrevolution?

GA: We must bear in mind that the first wave started at the lowest point of U.S. hegemony in the region since the first U.S.-led Gulf War. This hegemony peaked in 1991, when Washington’s main adversary, the Soviet Union, collapsed. George H.W. Bush took advantage of that to assert control over the region through war on Iraq.

Washington rallied all the region’s states to its side or neutralized them. It even got Assad’s Syria, formerly Moscow’s ally, to join its war against Iraq. After the war, the U.S. boxed in Iran and Iraq with sanctions and co-

opted the Palestine Liberation Organization through the Oslo-Washington Accords with Israel.

The second Bush squandered this hegemonic position with the occupation of Iraq, which turned into a disaster: for the Iraqis first, but also for the U.S. That emboldened Washington’s international and regional challengers, especially Vladimir Putin’s Russia, and Iran.

While Obama was overseeing U.S. troops’ withdrawal from Iraq in 2011, U.S. hegemony in the region had reached its nadir. That, of course, was the very same year the first wave of uprisings hit, threatening the entire established order in the region.

Washington had little leverage to shape events on the ground. Its weakness was displayed best in Libya: it provided air power but excluded any prospect of boots on the ground. NATO’s intervention ended in another fiasco with the country fully escaping Western control after the fall of Muammar al-Qaddafi.

This made the Obama administration even more reluctant to intervene in Syria — until ISIS spilled over from there into Iraq. It deployed very limited forces on the ground, relying upon local forces in the war against ISIS, including left-wing Kurdish forces in Syria. Obama’s initial reluctance to act in Syria left an opening for Iran, followed by Russia, to intervene massively on behalf of the Assad regime.

Now, Russia has extended its intervention to Libya. It is working there with [Egypt’s] al-Sisi and the United Arab Emirates in providing support to a would-be dictator backed by remnants of the old regime.

Part of the left failed to grasp the relative decline of U.S. global hegemony and the rise of rival imperialisms. They are caught in a time warp, mistakenly believing that things are still the same as during the Cold War.

Of course, the U.S. is still the world’s dominant imperialist power. However, present-day Russia is plainly a rival imperialist power, even more

reactionary in several respects. And there are regional rival hegemonic powers, such as the Saudi Kingdom and Iran, both of which are deeply reactionary.

AS: What is the state of the second wave and where do you expect other uprisings to occur in the coming years?

GA: Second wave movements have been frozen by the pandemic, as I said earlier. The regimes took advantage of it to ban protests, and people themselves have been reluctant to join actions out of fear for their own safety.

And yet, at the same time, the pandemic and recession have worsened conditions throughout the region and increased anger and frustration. Some events can also enrage people to a point when they overcome their caution and hit the streets, as happened in the U.S. with Black Lives Matter.

There's still a very long way to go in this long-term revolutionary process. The good news is that people are learning what they're up against and drawing lessons from both defeats and victories.

For example, the explosion in Lebanon's port last August has set off a new round of protests in the country, albeit on a smaller scale. For now, though, the pandemic has put an effective hold on the uprisings in general, but larger ones will come when it subsides.

It is difficult to tell which country in the region will be next. Every single one is a tinderbox, and any spark could light the fire.

In Egypt, the rate of poverty even by official statistics has dramatically increased over the last few years under al-Sisi. In Algeria, the movement is merely on hold, and will resume in some form or another. The present president, elected with ridiculously low participation, is

widely perceived as illegitimate.

Morocco is another powder keg. Jordan had a popular revolt in 2018 that brought down a government. The struggle in Iraq is ongoing. Sudan's revolutionary process is far from over. It is in a transition period with tense coexistence between the popular movement and the military.

Even the Saudi Kingdom is not immune from these dynamics. The two countries that are the least likely to see uprisings are the most artificial — the Emirate of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, where only 10 percent of the people enjoy the privilege of citizenship. The rest have much less rights than migrant workers in Western countries.

AS: What are the movements fighting for? And what kind of organizations are needed to win?

GA: The people are fighting for their livelihood, democracy and social justice. To achieve these goals, a radical change in the social and political nature of the region's states and economic system is indispensable.

The popular movements need to bring down the corrupt and despotic regimes and replace them with truly democratic ones. Only then will they be able to implement egalitarian social and economic policies.

This requires a high degree of organization and political determination. The region's rulers and their states are very brutal and willing to go to extremes to remain in power.

Just look at Syria. The ruling family destroyed much of the country, massacred hundreds of thousands of its people, and drove millions into exile just to preserve its rule.

To defeat such regimes requires effective organization. The new generation of revolutionaries are wary of the old forms of top-down centralism and charismatic leadership.

As a result, most of the struggles since 2011 have been characterized by a key role of horizontal grassroots structures and the absence of charismatic leaders.

But everyone has realized that you need organization to be effective. In Sudan, the "resistance committees," while refusing to set up a central body, practice a high degree of political and organizational coordination, in part through social media.

Some of the neighborhood committees in the capital play a vanguard role. The committees act in tandem with the SPA, the equivalent of a trade-unions' federation. These forces lead the struggle together, but they are not a traditional party-like organization.

The movement cannot go forward, much less succeed, without at least such a level of organization. A revolution cannot win just through social media. The claim that the uprisings were a "Facebook Revolution" was always an exaggeration.

Sudan has shown the way forward. Of the 10 countries where you have had major uprisings until now, their movement is the best organized. And people in the region are learning from them.

There's still a very long way to go in this long-term revolutionary process. The good news is that people are learning what they're up against and drawing lessons from both defeats and victories.

Therefore, there is hope. Without such hope, with nothing but "pessimism of the intellect," there can be no "optimism of the will," as in the famous phrase from the Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci.

This interview has been lightly edited for clarity.

Source: [*Truthout*](#).

Why the Dutch Socialist Party Is in Crisis

19 January 2021, by **Alex de Jong**

The Dutch Socialist Party (SP) was long one of the success stories of the European left. Having started out as a Maoist group in the 1970s, it made its breakthrough into national politics in the 1990s, even as Communist parties collapsed and social democracy embraced neoliberalism across the continent. [55]

Around the turn of the millennium, the SP opened up to social movements and established itself as a reference point for left-wing activists. Its membership grew rapidly, and by the late 2000s, it had 50,000 members — twice as many as 10 years before. In 2006, it won over 16 per cent of the vote.

Yet despite the SP's past successes, today its prospects do not look good. With the Netherlands set for a general election in March, the SP is divided, and uncertain on how to reverse its recent decline.

Declining Appeal

The mood among many SP activists is pessimistic. Membership has declined by 18,000 in the last ten years, and the party's support in national elections has fallen below 10 percent. Only four months before March's elections, the SP leadership cut off support to the party's youth-wing, ROOD, accusing it of being infiltrated by communist radicals and breaking party rules. This was preceded by expulsions of a number of activists who were accused of being members of the Marxist Forum and/or Communist Platform, two groups active inside the SP that the leadership labelled "rival" political parties. [56]

Dissent against such measures is widespread — and at the congress where the SP adopted its program for the coming elections, over a third of the party voiced its opposition to these

steps. This conflict between the leadership and ROOD deepened existing disagreements over assessments of the SP's downward trajectory over recent years, how it can recover, and what its priorities should be.

In this sense, the SP faces questions similar to those faced by other parties to the Left of social democracy, such as what alliances and compromises can benefit socialist politics in the long term — and in what conditions a socialist party can assume a role in government. In this case, the conflict between ROOD and the party leadership escalated when the youth organization published a statement declaring its opposition to the SP entering a governing coalition with the Right.

Given the large number of parties represented in parliament, Dutch administrations traditionally consist of coalitions of multiple different parties that together form a majority. The current SP leadership has declared that it is willing to consider coalitions with right-wing parties in hypothetical future governments, including with prime minister Mark Rutte's secular, free-market VVD. The SP has already joined the VVD in local-level executives and recently broke with the other left-wing parties to [support a controversial environmental law proposed by the administration](#).

Understanding what is happening inside the SP can be difficult. The party has a notoriously top-down structure, partly inherited from its Maoist days, and factions and organized currents are banned. Moreover, as the party's involvement in executives and city councils grew alongside its own apparatus, full-timers that often double as elected representatives and staffers increasingly concentrated information and decision-making in their own hands. The lack of a party-wide debate

or involvement of the rank and file mean that party policies can be decided by small, informal groups.

The party's position on participating in a government coalition is an example of this. A recent motion holding that there should be a debate in the SP over this issue was rejected with the argument that it was "too early" for such a discussion. But shortly after this, the leadership changed its position without discussion, as it moved from opposing a coalition with the VVD to accepting it as a possibility.

Elections and Social Movements

The recent disappointments have produced what we can broadly outline as two different groups among SP leaders.

One insists on presenting the party as a reliable partner in government for forces to its right. As part of this approach, the SP already some years ago entered local-level executives such as in Amsterdam, where it joined with parties of the Right in a coalition excluding the Labour Party. Another group of SP leaders, though not opposed in principle to such coalitions, nonetheless insist on a more activist profile for the party and adopt a more traditional socialist rhetoric.

The disagreement between such "coalitionists" and "activists" is essentially a matter of how the SP should present itself to voters; as a "responsible" party fit for government and operating within the constraints of establishment politics, or as a party of dedicated, oppositional activists.

The most prominent "coalitionist" is Lilian Marijnissen, the chair of the party's parliamentary caucus. She is

the daughter of Jan Marijnissen, the long-time party leader under whose leadership the SP became a national force. An important representative of the “activist” approach was Ron Meyer, the party’s former chairperson. Meyer, who was previously a trade-union organizer, left his position in the party after the failure of its European election campaign in 2019.

But despite their differences, both groups are focused on elections as the way out of the SP’s predicament. Building independent social movements as goals in themselves or as part of a long-term strategy are not part of the vision of either group.

In fact, many SP activists feel that the party’s current orientation is isolating it from social movements. This has become especially pronounced in regard to mobilizations around racism and climate change. The SP was always weak on the issue of anti-racism, seeing it as a side issue, but its ignoring of anti-racism has become more and more obvious as the issue has grown in importance in Dutch politics.

The Dutch far-right has grown dramatically, feeding and encouraging Islamophobia and other forms of racism. [57] In response, the country saw significant anti-racist mobilizations and increased political debate around racism. But the SP plays little to no role in such developments. In educational materials the SP counterposes what it calls “race struggle” to “class struggle.” Significant protests that attracted many young people have also taken place around the issue of climate change, but here as well the party remained aloof. Participation is left largely to decisions of local chapters, and to ROOD.

For many, concerns over racism and climate change are the beginning of a broader politicization — but joining the current SP would not appear to them as a logical option.

When the SP stands apart from such mobilizations, this is not for lack of means. Rather this is a strategy, motivated by the prioritizing of electoral results and a calculation of

what the party leadership thinks will bring in most votes. Anti-racism and climate-change measures are assumed to be too “controversial” among (potential) SP voters.

Former SP councillor [Mahmut Erciyas](#) describes this strategy as trying to “combine progressive social-economic policies with cultural conservatism.” Party members complain that marketing agencies and public relations experts have had more of a say in determining this course than rank-and-file activists. When members succeeded in having anti-racism declared a priority at a recent party congress, this had little practical follow-up.

Erciyas was for years a councilor in the city of Oss, one of the SP’s bastions, and the city where Lilian and Jan Marijnissen started their political careers. Oss is a typical SP stronghold: a medium-sized city in the formerly Catholic south of the country, with a predominately white population and without a strong left-wing tradition.

Dissatisfaction over the current political orientation of the SP is especially strong in the larger, more racially diverse cities, such as in Rotterdam (the country’s second largest) and Amsterdam.

“The current political orientation of the SP is a dead-end, it does not connect with the diverse reality of the working class, especially as it exists in the larger cities,” says Erciyas.

Other SP activists criticize the orientation of the leadership in similar terms, saying it is trying to address a [caricatured](#), outdated version of what is only one segment of the working class. With proposals such as requiring working permits for people from other European Union countries, the SP is “repeating the mistakes we made towards Turkish and Moroccan labor migrants,” says Ercias. “We are attempting to keep Polish workers out, instead of strongly supporting them in their struggle for a better life.”

Among trade unionists, the SP is, along the Labour Party, one of the most popular parties, but here as well the party is not a strong, organized

force. The SP dissolved its shop-floor structures years ago.

According to [Gus Ootjers](#), one of the expelled SP members, the party passes up an opportunity to organize working-class supporters. “There are plenty of SP members who are also active trade-unionists, but the party-leadership does not want to develop a trade-union strategy. The party is not involved in developments and discussions in the trade-union movement, and then complains its orientation is too right-wing.”

A Failing Strategy

The prioritizing of electoral results and avoiding controversial questions means the party seems not to have a clear stance on central political issues. The SP’s attempts build a political profile through its own campaigns, such as around health care, have not been as successful as hoped and were folded into electoral work. [58] Already in 2006, programmatic points of the SP that were considered to be “deal-breakers” for possible government participation, such as republicanism and NATO membership, were removed from the party’s election programs. The recent expulsions are a further step to integrate the SP into establishment politics.

One issue on which the SP does take a clearly different position concerns the European Union. The SP warns of a “European superstate” and demands the return of a Dutch national currency. Yet it has no alternative vision for international left-wing cooperation and attention to international developments is limited. The SP never joined the European Left Party, including forces like Germany’s Die Linke. Rather, the SP leadership emphasizes the Dutch nation-state as its political framework.

In this vein, ahead of 2019’s European elections the SP attempted to appeal to, in the words of its former European Parliament member Erik Meijer, “the angry outsiders;” people who would otherwise abstain or vote for Geert Wilders’s far-right, anti-EU PVV. But its attempts to mobilize anti-EU sentiments were not successful

and it lost the two seats in the European Parliament it had held since 2004.

Support for the bid to present the SP as a potential coalition partner by toning down its demands comes, in part, from members who have participated in local and regional executives in recent years. But such pressure also comes from ordinary voters and members. This only logical, since the SP does not present any long-term goals other than seeking good election results and joining executives with the capitalist parties.

It remains unlikely that the SP will actually join a government coalition after March's elections. Rather, the leadership's emphasis on its willingness to do so is based more on the assumption that such rhetoric is needed to come across as an acceptable choice.

Decisions such as declaring the SP is willing to cooperate with the traditional enemy of the Left, the VVD, or abstaining from social movements and treating activism as an electoral campaign tool, flow from the party's electoral orientation. This has led to dissatisfaction and frustration among its activists. In the last decade, membership declined by more than a third, and the recent conflicts led to more resignations of angry and disappointed members.

Changed Terrain

Even on its own narrowly electoral terms, the SP's strategy is not working. And the difficulties it faces go deeper than what can be solved by a successful election campaign or public relations experts. The political climate has grown more conservative [59] mishandling the COVID epidemic, current prime minister Rutte remains very popular.

There are also other changes to which the party should respond. The coming post-pandemic economic crisis will lead to new rounds of austerity while trade-union membership is declining strongly. The most important trade-union federation FNV lost seven per cent of its members in 2019. Of all EU countries, Netherlands has one of the highest percentages of workers in precarious conditions. But the unions are failing to attract young, precarious workers.

Yet even while the weight of the trade unions has declined, new social movements have arisen around racism and ecology, and people of color have become more politically organized in response to racism and the far-right. The SP's avoidance of important social mobilizations, its rigid structure and hostility to open debate leave it unappealing to newly politicizing activists. Inside the party, critical members fear the SP will lose connection to younger activists. The fight with ROOD is a dramatic illustration of that risk.

In the past, the SP's successes provided legitimacy to the leadership. But as its fortunes have waned, dissatisfaction and opposition have only risen. Some are considering voting in March for the new anti-racist party Bij1 ("together" in Dutch pronunciation) which also has a strongly leftist economic program. Radicals in the SP are arguing that despite everything, people should remain in the party and attempt to change its course.

ROOD is continuing its activities, while demanding that the party-leadership restores the links with the youth organization. Party members have started a campaign for financial aid to ROOD and also call for the links between the organizations to be restored.

Radicals in the SP plead for an orientation that prioritizes opposition in and outside of parliament, and an independent agenda. For this, active involvement in social movements, and the formulation of political positions that incorporate the issues of the movements and working-class demands are needed.

This can only be successful if the SP works along and with other forces. In recent years, the SP has become, in the words of one activist, "a problem-solving party," focused on responding to political issues but lacking in alternatives of its own and a long-term vision. But considering the limited visibility of socialist ideas in the Netherlands, ideological struggle over what society should look like is urgently necessary.

The Netherlands is no exception to the global pattern, whereby eruptions of anger lead to mobilizations which may then dissipate with little trace. This poses the need to build what Alan Sears has called new "infrastructures of dissent," "the amalgam of spaces, networks and institutions in which activists develop their capacities to push back against the capitalist austerity consensus and the narrow frame of official politics." Rather than trying to appeal to a supposedly existing constituency (which as election results are showing is limited), the party needs try to win people over to a different vision.

It is clear that if the SP persists in its current course, further isolation and decline are unavoidable. Forcing changes in orientation will be a difficult struggle. Considering the structural weakness of the Left, there is no guarantee of success.

18 January 2021

Source [Jacobin](#).

Bolsonaro is breaking the country: 200,000

dead, unemployment and poverty

18 January 2021, by **Esquerda Online**

What is being broken are the lives of Brazilians. Brazil surpassed the tragic figure of 200,000 deaths from Covid-19 on 7 January. The number of cases is increasing in most of the country and there are more than 1,200 deaths per day. Nevertheless, Bolsonaro continues to campaign against the vaccine and does not present an effective vaccination plan, even though more than fifty countries have already begun vaccinating their population.

Historical social debt has worsened during the pandemic. The number of people living in great poverty has increased, a tragedy that will increase with the end of emergency aid, received by 48 million people (on 27 January 2021, with a possible extension until March 2021). The government has been able to restrict access to the PCB [Benefício de Prestação Continuada - for people over 65 who do not have a pension and for people with disabilities; to be obtained, the person's income must be less than a quarter of the minimum wage, which is 230 euros!). Unemployment has increased to 14.6 per cent of the working population and 30 per cent of the workforce is under-employed, i.e. they work fewer hours than they would like. Excluding rent, 66.3 per cent of families were in debt as of December 2020. Life is more difficult, especially for Blacks and people of colour, women, LGBTQI, and workers in the North and North East.

Three measures to save lives and prevent extreme poverty for workers

Brazil is bankrupt for the vast majority of its population. And this is not due to

a lack of resources, but to the choices and decisions of this government. Jair Bolsonaro is breaking the country and people's lives, while saving the profits of the banks and big business by transferring our resources and those of the state (which is the policy of Economy Minister Paulo Guedes). There is another, alternative way to avoid this type of bankruptcy.

1 - Ensure vaccination now, free and for everyone, by the SUS (Universal Health Service)

Immunization is the only measure that will protect lives and boost the economy. Brazil is now among the last countries in the world to do this, and it seems that the government couldn't care less. At the same time, health entrepreneurs are taking the opportunity to try to offer a paid vaccine, thus ensuring that people's income decides who will live or die.

2 - Ensure emergency aid for the population until the end of vaccination

It is absurd to stop emergency aid. In December, 36 per cent of beneficiary families had aid as their only source of income. This measure will throw millions of people into poverty.

3 - Prohibition of redundancies during the pandemic period and hiring of the unemployed through a plan of public works

The measures of the government and the National Congress have abolished rights, but have not guaranteed employment and income. It is possible to make progress in the fight against unemployment and at the same time to undertake the work that the country needs to develop its economy, as well as the fight against Covid-19.

Life before profit

Large companies and banks have received all kinds of aid. The result is that, even during the pandemic, the small group of billionaires managed to get richer: they increased their profits by 34 per cent. They did not "break." To save the lives of tens of thousands of people and prevent millions from being thrown into poverty, it is necessary to attack the profits of those living on the top floor. To do this, we must implement:

1) Removing the spending cap (Teto de Gastos, adopted in 2016 under president Michel Temer) in order to free up resources for investments in health, employment and social assistance

The law that freezes public spending is criminal. If it had been in place longer, the SUS would have been even further dismantled and we would have lost more lives as a result of the pandemic. As a result of this cap, the government's discretionary spending in 2021 could decrease by R\$67.8 billion, which analysts say could lead to what they call a shutdown, a general paralysis of public services, due to lack of resources. Jair Bolsonaro and Rodrigo Maia (President of the Chamber of Deputies since July 2016, member of the Democrats) do not disagree on maintaining the spending cap and still want to promote administrative reform, designating civil servants as the enemy.

2) Taxing large fortunes and bankers

Several countries, such as Argentina, Spain and Bolivia, have created laws and taxes on wealth and profits to finance the fight against the pandemic. In Brazil, where the richest one per cent of the country accounts for 28.3 per cent of total income,

nothing is happening. According to Unafisco (the Association of National Tax Auditors), the government could raise up to 59.79 billion reais, with a change in the tax system, on profits and dividends. But Bolsonaro prefers to keep the income tax scale intact, by taxing those who earn only 2,000 reais per month (about 300 euros).

(3) Use some of the dollar reserves

According to the Citizen's Debt Audit (Auditoria Cidadã da Dívida), Brazil has 1,836 billion reais of foreign exchange reserves. This "mattress" is used to protect against attacks aimed at lowering the value of the currency, thus financing the action of speculators and market interest rates, while millions of Brazilians suffer from hunger.

4) Suspend the payment of interest on public debt to major creditors

Interest and amortization of public debt consumed 38.3 per cent of federal spending in 2019, compared with 4.6 per cent for health care. In 2020, in August, this haemorrhage reached 45.7 per cent. Every day, according to the Citizen's Audit, the country spends 4.4 billion reais,

without the debt coming to an end. We need to stop payments to bankers and big vulture funds so that the money can be used for emergency social needs.

Bolsonaro out now!

Bolsonaro will not adopt any of these measures. His government combines ongoing attacks on democracy with the implementation of an economic programme to dismantle the state. While he threatens not to acknowledge a possible defeat in the 2022 elections, he pursues a radical programme of counter-reforms and privatizations. His government does not care about the pandemic and even takes the opportunity to pass deregulation in the agricultural field and the forest code, in conjunction with Congress.

In order for the country not to "break" for good and for us not to reach 300,000 deaths (considering only the official figures, notoriously underestimated), it is necessary to remove Bolsonaro from power.

"Bolsonaro out!" is urgent. The government has already given every proof that it does not respect laws and attacks people's lives. His comment on the assault by Trumpists on Capitol Hill in the United States shows that he is willing to resort to violence if he does not win the next election. We cannot wait until 2022. We must demand that Rodrigo Maia immediately open impeachment proceedings, based on the popular demand, filed in August, signed by hundreds of entities and ignored by him, as well as by his accomplices.

Left-wing parties, trade unions, social and anti-oppression movements should unite to demand: free vaccination of all those already affiliated with the SUS, an emergency income and a guarantee of employment. It is a question of articulating these demands with "Bolsonaro out!" and with actions of solidarity. It is necessary to make 2021 a year of resistance and unitary action, on the streets - while respecting health standards - against this genocidal government.

9 January 2021

Original source: [Esquerda Online](#).

The 2019 Uprising Produces an Electoral Opening Toward the Left

17 January 2021, by José A. Laguarda Ramírez

The vote is historic because it represents a major shift in Puerto Rico's party system and a breakthrough for the independence movement, the political left, and social movements. These changes, in turn, are the direct product of the popular uprising that unseated then-Governor Ricardo Rosselló during the summer of 2019. Rosselló was forced out of office after two weeks of intense and massive street protests sparked by the publication of the text of an encrypted conversation between the governor and his all-male inner circle, in which

participants mocked those killed by hurricanes Irma and María (which devastated the territory in 2017) and made violent sexist and homophobic remarks about political rivals and other public figures.

The main way in which the shift is manifested is the unprecedentedly high level of support for the third- and fourth-placing Citizen's Victory Movement (MVC) and the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP), both of which publicly supported the 2019 street protests against Rosselló. In the

2020 election, MVC and PIP received 14.2 percent and 13.7 percent of the vote, respectively, according to the official first count, for a combined weight of 27.9 percent. [60] The election also reflects record-shattering low levels of turnout (52.8 percent of registered voters, which translates to approximately a third of all eligible voters), reflecting historical levels of disenchantment with the colony's political system. Fear of COVID-19, a complicated vote-by-mail system, and a disastrous primary process earlier this year also contributed, of course,

but as I argue below, the three-decade-long tendency of declining participation is clear.

Nonetheless, the combined MVC/PIP result represents a major shift in Puerto Rico's party system, which was reliably de facto "bipartisan" for all of the second half of the twentieth century. The significance of this is heightened by the fact that both parties' candidates for governor, MVC's Alexandra Lúgaro and PIP's Juan Dalmau, openly support independence for Puerto Rico, which has historically not been favored by the Puerto Rican electorate since at least 1952, when the current "Commonwealth" constitution came into effect. While neither candidate made independence a central focus of their campaign, neither attempted to hide or deny their personal preference.

Breaking the Status Barrier

Puerto Rico's party system was centered on the political "status issue" throughout the second half of the twentieth century (previously, some parties expressed "status" affiliations, but these often fluctuated). In 1968, the electoral hegemony of the pro-Commonwealth-status-quo Popular Democratic Party (PPD) came to an end, and it began to alternate power with the pro-statehood New Progressive Party (PNP). Both PPD and PNP have included members of the U.S. Democratic and Republican parties, which hold primaries in Puerto Rico for nominating purposes but have not typically been considered relevant by most of the population.

Marginalized during periods of economic expansion linked to the ideology of U.S. colonialism, the PIP played third wheel as the electoral outlet for the historically persecuted pro-independence movement. A handful of fourth parties or independent candidates (usually splinters from one of the three main parties) also occasionally participated. Full independence from the United States as an eventual goal remains a central aspect of PIP's identity. With its candidate receiving nearly 170,000

votes (the most in its history), in 2020 the PIP quintupled its 2016 performance. Founded in 1946, this is only the third time the party has surpassed 100,000 votes, and the first surpassing of 6 percent of the vote since 1956 (when it received 86,636 votes, 12.4 percent of the total voters in that election). [61] The feat is even more significant if we take into account that PIP was the only sector to grow significantly during this election.

In contrast, MVC does not make status part of its platform at all, hoping to attract support from all "options." Instead, it has proposed decolonization through a constitutional convention, in which supporters would be free to support convention candidates favoring different alternatives. Lúgaro edged out PIP's Dalmau as the third-placing candidate, but actually lost about 250 votes in comparison to her own independent run in 2016 (or about 5,700, if fellow MVC member Rafael Bernabe's votes are taken into account—he was then running for governor on the slate of another minor party).

The Plebiscite Farce

The reason PIP and MVC results are more significant than the "yes" vote for statehood is that this plebiscite is actually the third one in the last eight years, all manufactured to produce a statehood "win." In the 2012 plebiscite, for example, when two additional named options were given ("free association" and independence—but not the non-sovereign Commonwealth status quo, which many still support), statehood received 61.2 percent of "valid" votes. However, nearly half a million ballots were deposited blank in protest, which together with the results for the other two non-statehood options would have added up to 54.7 percent of the total vote. In 2017, statehood received 97.2 percent of the vote, with only 22.9 percent participation (even lower than expected in the middle of a nonelection year). This time around, "yes" received 52.3 percent of the vote, once again amidst abysmally low

turnout.

These repeated charades are desperate attempts by the corrupt governing New Progressive Party (PNP) to cling to relevance by using the mirage of statehood to mobilize supporters. The U.S. Congress, however, which has the last word on anything that happens in the colony, has never committed to supporting any such outcome, and the tenor of U.S. politics in recent years suggests that it won't do so in the foreseeable future. While Senate Democrats recently waved the specter of Puerto Rican statehood at Republicans, as retribution for the nomination of Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court, it now seems uncertain at best (pending the two run-off elections in Georgia) that Democrats will retake the Senate. In any case, after 122 years of false promises by Democrats and Republicans alike, most Puerto Ricans are generally unimpressed by the prospect of being blatantly used as a bargaining chip yet again.

Medium-term Precedents

In 2008, the gubernatorial electoral landscape began to change with the appearance of non-status-oriented parties and independent candidates, which nevertheless did not garner a significant portion of the vote until 2016. In that election, Lúgaro (then running as an independent) and independent candidate Manuel Cidre together generated 16.8 percent of the vote. In 2020, in addition to PPD, PNP, PIP, and MVC, a fifth party, the Dignity Project (PD) of Christian fundamentalists received nearly 7 percent of the vote. A sixth candidate, the independent Eliezer Molina, received less than 1 percent. Together, Molina and PD candidate César Vázquez received scarcely 3,200 votes more than Cidre did in 2016.

Mainstream pundits have attempted to subtract from the moment's significance by emphasizing Dalmau's supposed distancing from the party's traditional focus on independence. The numbers indisputably reflect that the PIP received the support of voters

who traditionally vote for the pro-statehood PNP and voters who usually back the pro-status-quo PPD. The reality, however, is that Dalmau never disavowed either his party nor its message, and this is not the first time a PIP candidate has attempted to appeal to voters beyond the party's base by emphasizing other aspects of the party platform (for example, in 1996, PIP candidate David Noriega ran a far less status-centric campaign, receiving 75,305 votes or 3.8 percent of the total votes in that election).

MVC's success is also significant, less because of Lúgaro's result in the governor's race (which, as noted, reflected a slight decline from her earlier performance as an independent candidate) than because of the results of its legislative and local candidates. MVC elected two at-large representatives and two at-large senators, as well as members to the municipal assemblies of numerous towns. It also nearly elected the mayor of the politically crucial capital city of San Juan (the MVC candidate, Manuel Natal, came in second by a scant 2,300 votes—another first for a non-PNP or PPD candidate) and a representative from San Juan's third district. [62] PIP, as usual, elected one at-large senator and one at-large representative and numerous municipal assembly members.

Together with reelected independent Senator José Vargas Vidot (a health care activist once considered left-leaning, but who has proven inconsistent on many issues) and the at-large senator and at-large representative elected by the "socially" (but not necessarily "fiscally") conservative PD, there will be nine non-PPD or PNP legislators, the first time there are more than two or three in a very long time. However, only the six MVC and PIP legislators are considered reliably leftist or left-leaning.

The Left Reborn?

Many thus consider the success of PIP and MVC as a triumph for the newly electorally-significant Puerto Rican left. It is the first time since the original Socialist Party of the late 1920s and early 1930s (many of whose

top leaders were actually pro-statehood and which self-destructed through a highly uneven "coalition" with the local Republican Party of the sugar planter elite) that some version of the political left is able to mobilize nearly a third of the electorate on its own.

Like the social-democratic PIP (initially a traditional Latin American "social Christian" party that declared itself in favor of "democratic socialism" and joined the Second International in the 1970s), MVC is a left-leaning party that emerged as an alliance between various groups and individuals seeking to "overcome" the traditional status deadlock. Among these, in addition to Lúgaro's campaign, it's worth highlighting former members of the short-lived Working People's Party (PPT), which ran candidates in 2012 and 2016 (with candidate Bernabe receiving 1 percent or less in the gubernatorial races). PPT was an electoral incursion spearheaded by a Puerto Rican Trotskyist organization now known as Socialist Democracy (Democracia Socialista, DS). The other major factions within MVC are the Sovereign Union Movement, the Pro-sovereignty Network (former members of yet another defunct minor party), and the labor union Sindicato Puertorriqueño de Trabajadores (SPT), a local affiliate of the stateside Service Employees International Union (SEIU).

Both Lúgaro and the SPT/SEIU have been criticized by other sectors of the left for either personal involvement in suspect privatization deals (in the case of Lúgaro, who now claims her position on privatization has evolved) or opposing the 2008 teachers strike and attempting to raid the teachers union's bargaining unit (in the case of SEIU). [63] However, DS members have long insisted a tactical alliance with sectors receptive to critiques of neoliberalism is the only way to make inroads into the electoral field in order to amplify the DS anti-capitalist message. [64]

Whether this theory holds is yet to be seen, and many are rightly skeptical. However, the MVC's results can be seen as at least a partial and delicate victory for another reason: It brings bona fide active participants of the

social-movement left to the legislature for the first time since at least the 1970s. In addition to Bernabe, who is an openly socialist supporter of many progressive causes, and longtime feminist advocate Ana Irma Rivera (both elected to the Senate), newly elected Representative Mariana Nogales is a prominent movement lawyer and radical feminist.

Underlying Tectonic Shifts

Most importantly, both PIP's and MVC's electoral successes can be traced directly to the uprising that unseated then-Governor Rosselló. That event was preceded by several years of combative anti-austerity protests, most markedly on each May 1, in the wake of the island's debt crisis and the appointment of an unelected "fiscal control board" (the Junta, as it is locally known) by the U.S. Congress in 2016 to ensure the colony's crippling, odious debt is paid off. Those protests, in turn, built on decades of mobilizations and strikes by teachers, university students, and communities threatened by displacement and environmental damage, stretching back—at least in its contemporary incarnation—to the successful 1999-2003 struggle to force the U.S. Navy out of the island municipality of Vieques.

Both PIP and MVC actively supported protests against Rosselló, and their rank-and-file members participated in them to a greater or lesser extent. Both parties also developed campaign platforms opposing not just PNP and PPD corruption but also against neoliberal privatization and austerity policies and the presence of the Junta. Like Representative-elect Nogales, the narrowly defeated candidates for San Juan's third district and mayoralty are also vocal critics of the Junta and products of Puerto Rico's combative student and feminist movements.

Whether or not these electoral incursions will lead to demobilization, as is often the case, is an open question. However, the large anti-Junta movement that was at the epicenter of the 2019 Uprising has so far remained stubbornly independent.

Even some vocal leftist critics of MVC leadership see the election results as a product of the uprising, reflecting new opportunities for the anti-capitalist and anti-colonial movement to expand in both qualitative and quantitative terms. [65]

In my assessment, striking the right balance between institutional participation and street mobilizations will be crucial in the next few years. However, and more importantly, at least for now the electoral result confirms and inscribes the popular victory onto the larger political landscape in a way that is strikingly different from the recent past and which will make it very hard for traditional politicians to deny, minimize, or reverse in the foreseeable future.

To understand the magnitude of this change, it is important to consider recent history. For instance, in the 1970s, the PIP and a now defunct, openly Marxist, pro-independence Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP) competed for scarce votes. Starting in 1980, some PSP leaders eventually opted for a highly uneven, unspoken “alliance” with “pro-Puerto Rican” sectors of the PPD in order to “stop” the advance of the pro-statehood movement. Whether it was this tactic that stopped statehood is debatable. What is certain is that it resulted in four decades of the dilution of the pro-independence vote through the phenomenon locally known as *melonismo* (adherents of this Puerto Rican variant of lesser-evilmism are popularly known as *melones*, or “watermelons”: green on the outside, red on the inside, in reference to the PIP and PPD’s party colors), whereby thousands of pro-independence or independence-leaning voters supported the PPD.

This did not happen in 2020. As even the mainstream pundits insist, the opposite may now be true, with thousands of pro-status-quo and even pro-statehood voters turning to pro-independence and left-leaning candidates to represent them. [66] To visualize this, one need only consider the collapse in the vote totals of both PNP (from 655,626 or 41.76 percent to 406,830 or 32.9 percent) and PPD (from 610,956 or 38.92 percent to

389,896 or 31.6 percent). It seems *melonismo* is dead, at least for now, as a dominant tendency.

These results suggest there is now a possibility, for the first time since the 1970s, of forging a left-leaning bloc that can aspire not just to represent electorally, but to lead politically (that is, not just institutionally, but seeking “intellectual and moral” leadership or hegemony in Gramsci’s sense), in which the pro-independence left can participate on its own terms. MVC and PIP leaders have suggested their newly elected officials will seek to collaborate with each other, and many are hoping for some sort of electoral front or alliance heading into the 2024 elections.

The True “Winner”

What neither MVC nor PIP (nor their fellow travelers and critics further to the left) must forget is that the true “winner” of this election is electoral abstention. Participation by registered voters shrank for the eighth consecutive time since the historical high point of 1992 (83.9 percent), to an all-time low of 52.8 percent, a number that shrinks even further if we consider the vote total as a percentage of all eligible voters. (Continuing reductions in population size since 2004, as a result of outward migration caused by economic contractions and the impact of two major hurricanes, must also be taken into account).

The deposed Roselló entered his four-year term with the support of 41.8 percent of voters, the weakest mandate of any Puerto Rican governor since the first gubernatorial election in 1948. The newly elected Pedro Pierluisi (who has served as the Junta’s attorney and is mockingly known as “Pedro the Brief” after being illegally appointed Roselló’s successor and removed by the Supreme Court) will come to govern with only 32.9 percent of voters’ support.

In addition, it is likely that neither PNP nor PPD will fully control either legislative chamber when the counting and recounting is done, with a staggering five independent or minor-party senators, and four independent

or minor-party representatives, all but ensuring the already weak Pierluisi (widely perceived as a Junta shill) will be a lame-duck governor for the entirety of his term—if he is not ousted by protests before his term ends. This also means the PPD will have to play to the left if it hopes to have any chance of co-opting MVC/PIP growth, which the left can easily outflank by taking the lead in proposing social-justice legislation supported by pressure from “street” mobilization. MVC’s left faction thus seems, for now, to have an upper hand in preventing its right flank from sliding back toward or into the PPD and PNP. Indeed, MVC’s pro-statehood candidate for resident commissioner, largely considered its most conservative public figure, has already announced she is leaving the party.

The left is therefore in a unique historical position to grow quantitatively by nurturing disaffection among the 1.2 million registered voters who did not participate (and even more eligible voters who didn’t even bother to register), and qualitatively by strengthening its ties to social movements. At the same time, it should not make the mistake of assuming that all 1.2 million abstaining registered voters will lean left or support disruptive protests. The challenge is to make use of the opportunity to build counter-hegemony by continuing to echo the demands of key, strategically positioned, disaffected sectors without seeking to control them (specifically workers, women, LGBTQ+ youth, and environmentally threatened communities), while providing political content to both conventional and disruptive mobilizations.

Beyond MVC and PIP lies a significant extra-parliamentary left, which includes organizations like the Feminist Collective Under Construction, the Socialist Workers’ Movement, the anti-control-board Promises Are Over Campaign, several rank and file labor unions, and dozens of mutual aid groups along with hundreds of unaffiliated young people. Its potential role in keeping the electoral left in check from the inherently demobilizing pull of the

colonial capitalist regime's institutions is enormous. All the same, the more combative sectors must not lose sight of the political character of these struggles, which will continue to oscillate rapidly between Gramsci's "war of position" and "war of maneuver."

Mutual patience on all parts, respect

for tactical diversity (and each other's spheres of action or "lanes"), a long view toward shared goals, and an understanding that not all goals will be shared were all decisive to the outcome of the 2019 Uprising. They will continue to be the key to the qualitative and quantitative growth of the Puerto Rican left. If a solid leftist

electoral front can be built while maintaining the pressure of street mobilization on a much weakened colonial capitalist regime, a true sea change is not just possible but within reach.

Source Winter 2021 (New Politics Vol. XVIII No. 2, Whole Number 70) [New Politics](#).

The Return of Democracy and an Uncertain Future

16 January 2021, by **Bret Gustafson**

Evo Morales, despite his critics, had managed 14 years of economic stability and prosperity. He did so through a pragmatic rapprochement with capital—especially the natural gas industry and domestic business interests, in particular the agro-industrial elites. Frugal management of foreign reserves earned from gas exports and a generous dose of public spending had allowed for a bank full of dollars, a stable exchange rate, economic growth, and poverty reduction. To be sure, corruption cases were common, as they have long been in Bolivia. Critics also pointed to Evo's contradictions. He spoke of Mother Earth while pushing for more mining and gas drilling. He touted Indigenous revitalization while running roughshod over Indigenous organizations opposed to certain state development projects. And he embodied a hyper-masculine mode of politics amidst a rising crisis of violence against women and refusals to move forward on issues of abortion rights and sexual equality. Evo and the MAS had managed to maintain hegemony by offering concessions to agro-industry as well, putting the brakes on land reform and limiting Indigenous autonomy projects to a handful of municipal restructurings. Yet all of this was countered by relative economic well-being and a deep layer of grassroots support, strong in all parts of the country.

There was, as well, widespread discontent. This was to be expected from sectors of the far right, strongest in the eastern Bolivian city of Santa Cruz. Even though banking, construction, and big ag had done well over 14 years, the end of the gas boom was near and agro-industry, in particular, was looking at serious challenges. They want more genetically modified seeds, more land, more tax breaks, more subsidies (in the form of cheap fuel and state loans), and more protection from peasant organizing. Already shaped by deep racism against Andean peoples, their opposition to Evo Morales—despite the overtures to their elites—was intense. Even before the October 2019 vote, this opposition had declared its intent, with echoes of Trump, to declare fraud if Evo was elected.

In the more moderate sectors of the urban middle classes, and even among many in the Bolivian left, there was also exhaustion with Evo Morales. Morales had deepened the country's dependence on natural resource extraction and used those revenues to expand a patronage-based political system that was increasingly seen as decadent and degraded. Despite much ideological enthusiasm in the early years of the MAS (an enthusiasm still voiced by many leftists who live outside of Bolivia), it was increasingly clear to many that there was very little

left of the revolutionary core of the MAS project. The concessions to big business and, of late, a series of legal measures that approved new GMO seeds and incentivized clearing of new agrarian lands in the east suggested that Evo was as much in support of big capital as of any revolutionary agenda. And finally, Evo's maneuvers to change the constitution and allow himself a third term rubbed many the wrong way, reminding Bolivians of their intense distrust of dictators and those who want to perpetuate themselves in office. Many of these moderates also opposed Evo's candidacy and were deeply suspicious of the electoral process itself.

The events that followed the 2019 vote are still being debated. Some say there was fraud and no coup. Others (including myself) say that evidence for widespread fraud is thin, while the appearance of a coup is practically undeniable. At any rate, with thousands of people in the streets and the military suggesting he step down, Morales left the country. What followed was a year-long interim government characterized by corruption, brutality, and incompetence in the face of COVID-19. Perhaps for these reasons, much of Bolivia apparently changed their minds when they went back to the polls a year later and sent the MAS back into office with a near historic turn out and an overwhelming

majority for Luís Arce.

What happens next is the main challenge. The new president and vice president reflect the power of the MAS to build coalitions but also hint at its internal schisms and contradictions. Arce, an economist who does not self-identify as Indigenous, is associated with the technocratic side of the MAS coalition. David Choquehuanca, the vice president, is Aymara and is highly respected as a leading intellectual of Indigenous thought, including its critiques of rampant extractivism and Western-style patriarchy and power. At their inauguration ceremony on November 8, Arce's speech was focused on economic recovery. Choquehuanca's included an admonition (not so veiled) against continued abuse of power, the politicization of justice, and colonialist patriarchy. This does not suggest any deep division, as Arce has also embraced indigeneity and its key symbols, and Choquehuanca, clearly on the left, said that "power, like the economy, has to be redistributed." Nonetheless, some parts of the MAS coalition who identify more closely with the Indigenous position thought Choquehuanca should have been the president. Nonetheless, Evo Morales himself is said to have pushed Arce forward, hoping to appeal to the urban middle classes by positioning a "white" Bolivian at the top of the ticket. Whether that explains the electoral victory or not, the combination is for the moment creating positive reactions. Acquaintances who were increasingly disillusioned with Morales have expressed some hope that Arce and Choquehuanca can avoid falling into the seductions of power. Whether Choquehuanca's thoughtful critiques of the old way of doing politics can carry weight remains to be seen. He himself was somewhat marginalized during the latter years of the Morales government, having been unwilling to fall in line with some of Evo's more egregious errors.

At any rate, the future will be challenging. President Luís Arce, who had been the minister of economy for most of Evo's 14 years in office, confronts lower natural gas prices and thus shrinking revenues to the state.

Arce, like Evo, will have to balance often-conflicting demands from different sectors of society in a context of intense polarization. Right up to the inauguration date, the right-wing extremists of Santa Cruz were mobilized again. Despite all evidence to the contrary, they were saying the election was fraudulent. While there may have been some reason to suspect fraud when the MAS was running the elections last time, this time it is laughable. Salvador Romero, one-time employee of the U.S. government National Endowment for Democracy, was in charge of the process. The coup government oversaw it. And the MAS still won by a landslide. The extremist minorities of the east, much like the gun-toting Trump supporters of the United States, clearly do not believe in democracy at all. With young muscle-bound men in baseball hats and ski masks, they have blocked streets, and many, including those of the evangelical Christian right, are literally praying for a military coup. On November 3, the unelected civic chamber of Santa Cruz, called the "civic committee," petitioned the constitutional court to suspend the inauguration of Luís Arce and demanded an audit of the electoral process (basically a recount). Not without some humor, the judges have granted the civic committee a hearing, but scheduled it for November 10, two days after the presidency changed hands.

Evo Morales himself may also be a complicating factor. On November 9, the day after the swearing-in of Arce and Choquehuanca, he triumphantly walked across the Argentina-Bolivia border into the far southern part of Bolivia. Greeted by euphoric crowds, he thanked Argentina's president and fellow left-leaning traveler for having saved his life. He planned a two-day caravan to return to the Chapare, his home region in central Bolivia. Publicly, he has pledged to stay out of Arce's way. Yet as the undeniable historic leader of the MAS—and now the president of the MAS party organization—he will surely play an influential role, perhaps more privately than publicly. Many doubtless support this possibility, though some fear that Evo's urge to return to power may somehow derail the Arce-Choquehuanca government.

Many former high officials associated with Evo, such as his cabinet members, are being held at arm's length by the new government. Critics and sympathizers alike increasingly fretted about the so-called "invited" ones or the "infiltrators"—figures who had no deep MAS loyalty or history but who had been given posts by Evo in order to curry political support. Some of these figures, such as former Minister of Government Juan Ramón Quintana, are seen as being among those who had pushed Evo and the MAS away from the more Indigenous orientation. Despite all of these internal politics—and despite his own less than ideologically-pure personal and political style—Morales is still a national and international icon of the left and the Pink Tide. As with Alvaro García Linera, the former vice president who has stayed largely out of public view since their return to Bolivia, Morales may also play a role articulating connections with movements elsewhere. For example, during his return to Bolivia he met with Indigenous and labor organizations from Ecuador and Argentina. With Argentina and Venezuela still standing leftward, Chile having just voted to dump a Pinochet-era constitution, Peru in upheaval, and elections coming soon in Ecuador and in two more years in Brazil, we may see a new Pink Tide or at least a "Pink Flow" returning after its ebb.

The main question remains as to whether Arce will try to challenge the power of capital given that Evo had largely made amends with it. For the moment, it is unlikely. This is partly because of the risks of political and economic instability. The reactionary forces, largely backed by the banking, insurance, and agricultural capitalists of eastern Bolivia, tried to use the spurious fraud claims to counter the overwhelming mandate of the MAS and Luís Arce with a show of regional power. The country has entered into an economic recession for the first time in 14 years. Arce says it may take two years to return to positive growth. Although the left and the environmentalists would like to see a turn away from extractive industries and the destructive power of big ag, Arce may find himself supporting both of these in a bid to get the economy

going again. At this writing, he has just visited the Amazonian department of Beni and promised to invest in expanding cattle ranching and agriculture—both deemed problematic by more environmentally-minded observers. Arce, who is more of a Keynesian than a socialist, is unlikely to shift the government radically leftward or to embark on an ecologically radical rethinking of extractivism. While Keynesianism is better than neoliberalism, whether the engagement with capital can maintain the redistributive orientation of the state remains an open question.

A lot will depend on whether and how the working class and rural social

movements regroup and reorganize. Before Evo, the movements were militant and at least relatively politically autonomous. During the 14 years of the MAS, many leaders became state officials and the movements were often absorbed into patron-client relations with the state. Those who showed loyalty were rewarded. Those who criticized the MAS were excluded. Recovering some autonomy is crucial to influencing political change. Now with state largesse in retreat, we may see a reconfiguration of Bolivia's historic movements that sets the stage for a return to a more progressive process of change. For the moment, the

serene, serious, and patient exercise of the democratic process on October 18, 2020, showed the country's commitment to the idea of a nation and state—and a form of politics—that is meant to meet the needs of its people. Against the minority sectors voicing racism and exclusionary talk, there is a collective moral consciousness that by-and-large bristles at state violence, military intervention, and injustice. Wherever one stands on Evo Morales, and despite the challenges ahead, it is clear that at least for the moment, Bolivians continue to challenge capitalism and its orthodoxies.

Source [New Politics](#).

First as tragedy, then as farce? AUR and the long shadow of fascism in Romania

15 January 2021, by [Raul Carstocea](#)

A new political formation, the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor), whose acronym, AUR, means 'gold' in Romanian, [won 9.07% of the votes for the Chamber of Deputies and 9.17% of the votes for the Senate](#), becoming the fourth largest party in the current Parliament. Their success is all the more remarkable since the party was established only one year ago, on 1 December 2019 – the symbolically chosen national day of Romania that harks back to 1918 and is known as the 'Great Union Day'. In this respect, the party recalls the electoral fortunes of the far right Alternative for Germany (AfD), which barely missed meeting the 5% threshold for entering the Bundestag some six months after its establishment in 2013, and had its first electoral successes in state (Saxony, Thuringia, Brandenburg) and European Parliament elections in 2014. [67] There is thus a case to be made for reading this electoral result within the overall framework of the evolution of right-wing 'populism' – a term that has been however rendered almost meaningless by overuse and

that glosses over significant differences within the political spectrum it covers – in Europe and elsewhere, and [that case has indeed been made](#). There are, however, also good reasons for looking more closely at the Romanian specificities of this instantiation of the contemporary European far right and its links with interwar Romanian fascism, and it is here that my contribution can hopefully be of some help.

Unlike the seemingly more benign 'populism' (something that is in itself problematic), the association made immediately by commenters on AUR's electoral success was with 'fascism', and specifically the native form it took in interwar Romania, with the 'Legion of the Archangel Michael' / 'Iron Guard'. [Experts on the topic were interviewed](#), offering valuable insights about [the role of the Romanian Orthodox Church \(Biserica Ortodoxă Română, BOR\)](#) in accounting for this result, pointing at [continuities with the national-communism of Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime](#) (mistakenly, in my opinion), while others offered [valuable](#)

[class-based analyses](#) that however ignored the specificities of interwar Romanian fascism or its legacies in post-socialist Romania. A characteristically clear analysis by one of the most prominent experts on the legionary movement, Roland Clark, was both the most direct and the most worrying, asking 'Is fascism returning to Romania?' and hinting toward a positive answer, inflected however by awareness of the different conditions of the 21st century and the importance of contemporary influences, from Donald Trump to Viktor Orbán, in accounting for AUR's strategies. [68] My own take on the matter follows along similar lines, with a much more straightforward 'yes' answer to Roland's question, and one that factors in one of the important structural similarities between interwar and present-day Romania, i.e. the absence of a credible, organised, electorally-powerful left as a driver of class-based, rather than national- / religious-based politics.

The first thing to note is the novelty of AUR in Romania's post-socialist

political landscape. The very useful distinction made by Michael Shafir between parties of 'radical continuity' and 'radical return' within the spectrum of right-wing politics in post-1989 Eastern Europe is an important one here. [69] The former continued the nationalism of the socialist era, with 'continuity' clearly visible at the level of the elites (Corneliu Vadim Tudor, Adrian Păunescu, etc.) in the Romanian case; whereas the latter denounced communism in toto and harked back to interwar-era models, often related to the fascist 'Legion of the Archangel Michael'. It was the former parties, of 'radical continuity', that were prominent in Romanian politics in the 1990s, at a time when Romania was being singled out not for the absence of the radical right, as it has been during the last decade, but for its virulence. In contrast, until three weeks ago, despite the number of such organisations (from the 1990s Movement for Romania - Mișcarea Pentru România - through the 'All for the Country' Party - Partidul Total Pentru Țară - that took over the exact name of the Legion's political party organisation to the extra-parliamentary New Right - Noua Dreaptă) and their radicalism, they remained confined to the political fringe, with no credible bid for electoral representation.

Despite their many similarities in terms of nationalism and xenophobia, important differences also stand out, evident for example in their respective attitudes to Romanian history. For the 'radical continuity' parties, the historical reference point, and someone whose rehabilitation they incessantly sought, was Ion Antonescu: authoritarian dictator of wartime Romania, anti-Semite, genocidaire and the person ultimately responsible for perpetrating the Holocaust in Romania; but, importantly, not a fascist. Their attitude to the communist regime was also much more ambivalent, as too straightforward a rejection would have raised questions about their own leadership's affiliations with the former regime. For the 'radical return' parties and movements, the role models were and are the members of the armed anti-communist resistance and the so-called 'martyrs' and 'prison

saints' who had been victims of repression under the former socialist regime, both groups overwhelmingly dominated by former members of the legionary movement. [70] Eventually, the legionary leadership, much of which was assassinated or executed under King Carol II's dictatorship, was also exalted as 'martyrs' for the national cause.

In turn, the socialist regime was condemned in unequivocal terms, as a foreign imposition and an unnatural hiatus in the history of the nation, as anti-communism became (and remains with AUR) one of the core principles in the ideology of such groups. The difference is telling: for parties like PRM the historical references pointed to the state and its representatives, be they Antonescu or (more quietly) Ceaușescu; for neo-legionary groups, they are to an anti-establishment movement engaged in (occasionally armed) resistance and violent action against the state, be it the partial and fragile interwar Romanian democracy or the post-war socialist regime.

This brings me to an important clarification regarding fascism. I subscribe to the current consensus in academic studies of historical and neo-fascism that is inspired by Roger Griffin's definition of fascism as "a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism". [71] Understood along these lines, the palingenetic element that promises a rebirth or regeneration of the nation from an alleged present state of decadence and the populist appeal to 'the masses' are key to understanding fascism as a revolutionary ideology and form of politics. This allows us to distinguish fascist movements and regimes from conservative authoritarian ones - Antonescu never sought popularity and aimed to preserve the Romanian state, not to radically transform it - and to see them as the right-wing revolutionary counterpart to the socialist challenge of the liberal-capitalist hegemony. A revolution from the right, denouncing the materialism of the left and elevating 'culture' above economic concerns; these are the terms according to which fascism should be understood. It is also why it may

appear relatively meaningless and incoherent when approached from a strict materialist perspective: fascists' ideas about the economy, their notions of a 'third way' between capitalism and socialism, always fuzzy and poorly articulated, combining a condemnation of plutocracy with guarantees for private property, were always and still are less important than culture to the fascists themselves. It is also why they can easily gain the upper hand in matters of 'identity politics', always their preferred terrain, dismissing the economic inequalities that underpin it. Yet the intended outcome of the fascist project, in the interwar period as today, is not the preservation of the status quo, but its complete overhaul - the evidence from the cases where fascists did come to power providing ample evidence of this.

With these considerations in mind, we should be genuinely worried about the claims of one of AUR's co-presidents, George Simion, [to represent an anti-establishment movement against "a rotten system" and to be "a form of revolution"](#). Lest anyone has any doubts as to the specific form AUR's revolution might take, the webpage of Rost magazine, managed by AUR's other co-president, Claudiu Târziu, clarifies this in explicit palingenetic terms, self-identifying as ["a magazine for national and Christian resurrection"](#). The most recent article penned by Târziu on the Rost webpage, at the end of the electoral campaign on 4 December 2020, is significantly entitled ["the signal of the conservative revolution"](#). With statements such as these, we witness the return of a palingenetic, revolutionary type of ultra-nationalism to the Romanian parliament for the first time since the interwar period. And if George Simion might be a relative novelty in Romanian politics, [with his background in nationalist football ultras groups rather than political parties](#), Claudiu Târziu is extremely well-known in neo-legionary forums and among researchers of the legionary movement [as someone with a long career promoting the legionary movement in Romanian public space](#). Târziu was also prominent in the 2018 campaign of the 'Coalition for the Family', an association of NGOs with direct links to AUR, for a failed

referendum that sought to make gay marriage unconstitutional (despite it being already illegal under current Romanian legislation). The third member of the triumvirate making up AUR's leadership is the philosopher Sorin Lavric, notorious for his legionary sympathies, as well as for his extreme misogyny and racism. In an interview accounting for his reference to the Roma minority as "a social scourge", the writer clarified that ["the inclination of the Roma ethnicity toward this type of crimes" \(stealing, begging, and prostitution\) is "well known and proven statistically"](#), thus reproducing one of the most common racist stereotypes about the Roma in Romania.

Considering the backgrounds of the three leaders of AUR, the party programme and doctrine comes as no surprise. Founded on the four pillars of ["family, fatherland, faith, and freedom"](#), its doctrine identifies the party as conservative (although conservatives are historically not known for their revolutionary propensities), in favour of a "Europe of Nations" (a staple of historical fascism and the contemporary European far right), and ["adamantly opposed to the colonisation of Europe with foreign populations"](#) – a notion that would not be out of place in the manifestos of extreme right terrorists like Anders Breivik or Brenton Tarrant. Importantly, this is also aligned with the rhetoric of far-right parties in power in the region of Central and Eastern Europe, like Fidesz in Hungary or PiS in Poland, with regard to migration. While the latter is [explicitly identified by the AUR leadership as a similar party and a model to emulate to a certain extent](#), the anti-Hungarian nationalism of AUR precludes any positive references to Viktor Orbán or Fidesz. Interestingly when it comes to the language of AUR's programme, the opposition to 'colonisation' and the references to Article 3 of the current (and also of the first, 1866) Romanian Constitution that prohibits the colonisation of Romanian territory is another element that was missing from Romanian party-political programmes since the legionary interwar rhetoric of "Jewish colonisation". While the party is pro-European, its notion of 'Europe' is

grounded in its "classical values" and three main "cultural paradigms (Greek philosophy, Roman law, and Christianity)", once again pointing at the exclusion of non-Christian groups – although there are no explicit references to Muslims, Jews, or other religious groups in the party programme. However, an updated, 21st century version of anti-Semitism – [via references to government representatives on George Soros' payroll](#) – is promoted by AUR party members on social media. A wholesale denunciation of the entire political class reminiscent of the legionary movement is doubled by strong opposition to ["any form of contemporary Marxism"](#), with ["camouflaged forms of the neo-Marxist scourge" including "political correctness, gender ideology, egalitarianism, or multiculturalism"](#).

The ideological similarities to interwar Romanian fascism – adapted to a 21st century context, as neo-fascist organisations are wont to do since uniforms have gotten out of fashion – are, however, only part of the story. The success the legionary movement in the interwar period had in growing from a group of five nationalist students to the third largest party in Romania in the 1937 general elections owed at least as much to its mobilisation strategies. Here as well there are important parallels with AUR. First off, the extra-parliamentary origins of its leadership and the fact they were not previously associated with other political parties lend credibility to their wholesale dismissal of the political establishment, just like the Legion consistently claimed to not be engaged in politics (all evidence, such as their parliamentary representation, to the contrary). The ["ideological war whose conclusion will be the removal of the current political class"](#) that Sorin Lavric promises is not just an electoral tactic, however, because its distinct style staking a claim to a form of anti-political politics (animated by ["the recovery of the mystic sense of being Christian"](#) for both Lavric and the legionaries) is a constitutive feature of fascism. Second, AUR prides itself on its different style of electoral propaganda, its grassroots engagement with the electorate, online and offline, on foot, through

personal communication, ["at one marketplace after another"](#), despite the restrictions in place during the pandemic. In 1931, a police report accounted for the first legionary electoral successes with the "intense and permanent propaganda carried out in the villages by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu [the Legion's leader] and his devoted cohorts". It emphasised that legionaries knew how to engage the peasants, "how to reach their souls, enquiring about all their needs, taking the time to sit around a boiling pot of soup or polenta", and saw in this strategy the "superiority" of legionary propaganda. Third, both AUR and the legionary movement emphasise(d) action, "deeds" as the legionaries called them, over words, whether this involves in AUR's case protest meetings, national unionist marches (from Alba Iulia, the symbolic site of the 1918 Union, to Chişinău, the capital of the Republic of Moldova), violent clashes with members of the Hungarian minority over the memory politics of a First World War cemetery, or fundraising projects for building houses or a hospital. All of these recall (as they surely do for AUR leaders like Târziu or Lavric, who know their legionary history) the winter marches on foot of the legionaries, their resilience in overcoming restrictions to their activity and even police brutality (which George Simion also mentions), the endless instances of legionary violence against members of the Jewish minority, or their famous voluntary work camps building and repairing roads, churches, student dormitories and, yes, even a hospital. [72]

Whether intentional (which seems more plausible given the familiarity of AUR's leadership with legionary electoral propaganda) or coincidental, in both cases such actions were and are used to further delegitimise the entire political class, dismissed as corrupt and either committed to personal gain or prone to foreign influence. This contrast is then employed to further emphasise the 'uniqueness' of the respective organisations as representative of the 'national interest' and their constituting the sole alternative to the 'politics as usual' of the other parties. In [his first speech in Parliament](#), Simion instigated Romanians to a 'tax

strike', encouraging them to refuse to pay their taxes, since these will be misused by the government anyway. This direct contact with the electorate, unmediated by political institutions, is skilfully 'performed' in the videos posted on social media by George Simion - in one such example, tagged "[my Christmas present to the Romanians](#)" and posted on 24 December, he announced that he will be donating 90% of his parliamentary salary to different civic causes. The performance is carefully staged, set against the background of dramatic music and featuring Simion slowly approaching the camera down an aisle in the Chamber of Deputies, while addressing his electorate directly and staring intensely into the camera in a sense of establishing 'eye contact' with the audience. Viewers familiar with legionary propaganda may be excused for having an odd feeling of déjà vu. Moreover, many AUR members are wearing the traditional peasant 'national' costume in Parliament and at public meetings, as the interwar legionaries also did.

In one of the EU's fastest growing economies that is also consistently flagged as among the worst countries in the EU with regard to income inequality and where the Romanian officials' denial of the extent of poverty and discrimination against the extremely poor, especially the Roma was noted by the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, a party that is adamantly opposed to any form of egalitarianism as 'neo-Marxist' is bad news indeed. [73] It also begs the question why such a party would be appealing to such a significant segment of the electorate. And here the absence of a credible left-wing alternative comes prominently to the fore, whether we are thinking about the popularity of the legionary movement in the interwar period or the recent electoral results. While the most stable political party in post-socialist Romania is the Social-Democratic Party (Partidul Social-Democrat, PSD), winner of the recent elections as well, its left-wing credentials leave a lot to be desired. For one, its involvement in the aforementioned 2018 referendum on gay marriage saw it enter an alliance

with the 'Coalition for the Family', its instigators. [74] Incidentally, while some commenters have related AUR's success to the ongoing pandemic and its firm opposition to the measures implemented to contain the spread of the virus, as well as to the very low electoral turnout (33.3%), I remain sceptical of such explanations. [75] The reason for this is my anticipation in 2018, on the occasion of the referendum, that [an organisation that can muster 3 million signatures to support a referendum on changing the constitutional definition of marriage](#) will soon have parliamentary representation.

Returning to the PSD, its economic policies might have been more redistributive than those of the other parties, but that hardly put a dent in the neoliberal consensus in a country where social welfare measures consistently fail to prevent extreme poverty, including its racialised version affecting Roma communities. Absent any notion of international class solidarity and drawing instead on the same nationalism and association with the church that is the bread and butter of AUR, its continuing fortunes at the polls probably have more to do with having established (and to some extent continued) an early presence in the 1990s in the rural areas completely ignored by the other mainstream parties, which tend exclusively to the urban, educated middle class. This electoral advantage may soon vanish if AUR continues targeting that electorate. The attempt to propose a new type of left-wing party more attuned to issues of class than PSD ever was, Demos, failed to attract virtually any electorate beyond its initial core of highly-educated, overwhelmingly urban, and often diasporic members, with its supporters clearly unable to cross the online/offline barrier.

The situation appears similar to the one in the interwar period, when the popularity of the 'revolution from the right' can be explained by its filling in the void of a mass left-wing party that would have represented the overwhelmingly poor majority of the population. With the communist party banned as 'anti-national' and the tiny social-democrats subject to extensive

censorship and state control, a political system heavily tilted to the right produced its fascist challengers on the same side of the political spectrum, provided they were able to speak the language of the peasantry (over 80% of the population back then) in ways that the mainstream parties were not. So why does widespread poverty fail to lead to more mobilisation along class lines? In my view this is primarily because of a failure to understand inequality and poverty along the lines of class in Romania, with social antagonism coded instead along nationalist, anti-Semitic lines (in the interwar period), or according to a narrative pitching the 'deserving poor' against the more unfortunate recipients of social benefits, the reviled "socially-assisted" (asistați social) today. Regarding the latter, the production of this lumpenproletariat and the resulting undermining of class solidarity has become a virtual political consensus in post-socialist Romania and has successfully convinced the poor that the cause of their misery is to be found with the extremely poor rather than with the exploitative nature of capitalism and Romania's dependent position in the global economy. Add to this the racism that associates all Roma with the "socially-assisted" and much of this underclass with the Roma (recall Lavric's 'defence' mentioned earlier), and there is ample room for a nationalist and racist coding of class antagonism. Interestingly, shifting the scale of analysis from a national to a European one, as I have done in a recent blog post, allows interpreting the entire Romanian diaspora as a disaffected and abused proletariat, particularly given its demonstrated expendability in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. [76] I argued there that, in the context of the pandemic, "the red line that connects the stories of precarious Romanian asparagus-pickers in Germany and vulnerable Roma communities in Romania is one of marginality and exclusion, of expendable lives and convenient scapegoats, where race and class are mutually imbricated and played out on different scales, from the local, through the regional, to the global". Absent a politics of solidarity that takes stock of these intersections, we should not be too surprised if

parties like AUR are able to capitalise on the precarious Romanian diaspora, all the while driving a nationalist wedge between it and other vulnerable groups. Indeed, AUR's share of the diaspora vote was more than double its overall result, **with over 23% of the votes**.

Anti-communism was in the interwar period and still is in present-day Romania a hegemonic discourse that further delegitimises mobilisation along class lines. With the collapse of socialist regimes and the proclaimed end of 'grand narratives', an anti-communist rhetoric heavily laced with anti-Semitism and Russophobia became prominent not just in Romania but across the region of Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe. [77] Its Romanian instantiation saw the return of the once-persecuted legionaries into public memory, not as members of a fascist movement, but as anti-communist heroes and victims of persecution. With national institutions dedicated to "the investigation of communist crimes and the memory of the Romanian exile" (with much of the latter of legionary inspiration) and the uncritical republication of the works of interwar luminaries of Romanian culture who had been members or sympathisers of the legionary movement (e.g. Nae Ionescu, Mircea Eliade, Constantin Noica, Emil Cioran), very good conditions were created for the 'return' of the legionary version of Romanian ultra-nationalism after 1989. After all, the legionaries' was the most explicitly virulent version of anti-communism to draw on in Romanian history, and their victimhood at the hands of the socialist regime was all too real – and amply mediated through TV documentary series such as "The Memorial of Suffering" (Memorialul Durerii), which ran on prime time television between 1991 and 1996, and intermittently until 2004 (with numerous re-runs). Roland Clark is right that the general public in Romania has but vague notions of the legionary movement – but when they do, I found, it is much more often fond

images of 'the boys' carrying out voluntary work and building things than of political assassinations or the gruesome January 1941 pogrom, – but I would argue that its memory was refreshed through the commemoration of victimhood under socialism. I would disagree with him on the risks involved in resurrecting the legacy of Romanian interwar fascism though. AUR does indeed dissociate itself from the historical legionary movement – because it has to, as doing otherwise would be illegal under Law 217/2015. But the reactions to that law and to the inclusion of the Legion in the category of fascist movements whose positive commemoration is banned, about which I have written elsewhere, show that those risks are minimal indeed, short of an explicit commitment to 'finish what they started'.

Allegations of collusion between legionaries and communists in socialist Romania should be put to rest, as there is very little historical evidence to support them, far less than was the case for example in neighbouring Hungary with members of the Arrow Cross. The nationalism of Ceaușescu's regime took over elements of Romanian nationalism that were indeed indebted to the fascist, anti-Semitic version espoused by the legionaries. This indeed speaks volumes of the long shadow cast by interwar Romanian fascism, even on a regime which rightfully saw them as its sworn enemies. It does not however **indicate any hybridisation between the two, let alone suggest that "legionaries were the strongest allies of the former communist regime"**, as Mădălin Hodor seems to believe. The national-communism of Ceaușescu's regime steered clear of direct legionary influences, preferring to rehabilitate radical right figures such as Octavian Goga or military dictators such as Ion Antonescu, just as neo-legionaries in post-socialist Romania (and AUR) are steering way clear of Ceaușescu's nationalism. What we are witnessing with AUR is unprecedented in post-socialist Romanian politics and represents a

'return' of sorts precisely because of this distinction, which consequently cannot be emphasised enough. As a historian I am not into predictions, and it remains to be seen if this return will turn out to be the contemporary farce to the interwar legionary tragedy. **Signs of AUR members of parliament being ridiculed are already here** and this does not bode well for a party that, in typical legionary style, takes itself far too seriously and is prone to a rhetoric of "traitors" and "ideological wars". Nor does sleeping in Parliament during its first session and claiming to have been in the "vishuddha chakra position that activates special mental connections" sit well with the unwavering commitment to the "national and Christian resurrection" of Romania. Signs of the farce might be there, but the dangers posed by AUR making further inroads into the electorate and benefitting from the attention associated with its presence in parliament are all too real.

As I was contemplating the differences between the interwar period and the present day with regard to a class-based politics in Romania for this blog post, I wondered if the legacy of the socialist regime did not itself, paradoxically, contribute to a disavowal of 'class' as a meaningful form of identity and mobilisation. After all, in a regime that referred to all of its citizens as (triumphant) proletarians, was class struggle not over and decisively won? And if this was the real existing socialist equivalent of John Prescott and Tony Blair's "we are all middle class now" slogan behind New Labour in a capitalist society that (only) values the middle class, should we be surprised that it is difficult to resurrect (pun intended) class struggle as a call for political action in a post-socialist one? [78] Yet if the story of the defeat of fascism and of the central role played by socialism in its demise teaches us any lesson, it is that we surely have to keep trying.

11 January 2021

Source **LeftEast**.

Post-Election 2020: A Crisis of Representation

14 January 2021, by **Barry Eidlin**

The short answer is “not much.” While lacking Trump’s predilection for outright nepotism and sycophancy, Biden clearly values personal loyalty, and has made his staffing choices accordingly. His transition team and cabinet picks are chock-full of people who have followed him for years. [79] Many are ascending a few rungs on the career ladder they began climbing during the Obama administration. Others, like proposed Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, are literally taking back the same job they had under Obama.

Personal leadership style aside, the clear message is that the Democratic Party establishment is back in charge. Despite Biden winning election just months after George Floyd’s murder at the hands of the Minneapolis police sparked the largest protest movement in U.S. history, despite the fact that Bernie Sanders’ insurgent candidacy showed that there was a vibrant constituency on the party’s left flank, and despite the fact that unions and other progressive groups gave him the margin of victory in key swing states like Arizona and Pennsylvania, Biden and his team have shown nothing but contempt towards the Left. Instead, they have doubled down on bland centrism. With the possible exception of Green New Deal-supporting Deb Haaland at Interior, every cabinet pick has been a safe establishment choice.

Granted, having competent administrators in charge may be a step up from the assemblage of yes-men and wreckers we saw under Trump. But that should not obscure the fact that Biden’s “back to normal” means a return to corporate-connected technocratic austerity at home paired with efforts to reassert U.S. global domination (AKA “leadership”) abroad. Many problems that pre-dated Trump, like growing

inequality, a broken healthcare system, a broken immigration system, racist policing, weakened unions, etc. will persist under Biden. There may be more headway on COVID and climate change, but well short of what’s required. Polling may show strong support for broad progressive policies like [paid family leave](#), [student debt forgiveness](#), [Medicare for All](#), and more, but even with Democrats in control of the presidency and both houses of Congress after the January 5 runoff elections in Georgia, such policies are unlikely to see the light of day.

The one concession to recent movements for social justice is Biden’s greater commitment to racial and gender diversity in his cabinet. It is likely that he will honor his commitment to assemble “the most diverse Cabinet anyone in American history has ever announced.” [80] But this is a commitment grounded in a narrow politics of representation, aimed primarily at putting more female, Black, and Brown faces in charge of advancing the same tired, centrist Democratic policies that will do little to improve the lives of actual women, Black, and Brown people. Biden’s diverse cabinet is packed with Wall Street bankers, corporate board members, lobbyists, consultants, even torture apologists. [81]

Over on the Republican side, Trump’s refusal to concede defeat has created even more chaos within the party. While nobody in party leadership actually believes that Trump won, least of all Trump himself, he is using the “stolen election” fiction as a loyalty test for elected officials, who must show their support for the outgoing president by denying reality. [82]

While some in the party justified their

delegitimization of the November 3 election results as a harmless way of humoring the president, the January 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol shows how mistaken this was. [83] Defending Trump’s unhinged claims of election fraud and malfeasance gave oxygen to an alternate, fact-free universe where QAnon conspiracy theorists, 4Chan trolls, neo-Confederates, paramilitary groups like the Proud Boys, and outright neo-Nazis could come together to form the ghastly white supremacist mob that stormed the Capitol. [84]

Meanwhile, Trump’s election fraud narrative is serving as a massive grift to siphon more money from his base—\$207.5 million since Election Day. [85] Although some within the party may want to leave Trump behind, there is nobody obviously positioned to seize the reins.

The result is a party frozen in place, unable to move beyond Trump but unsure of what it would do even if it could. Trump did enact some cruel and grotesque policies by executive order, and Senate leader Mitch McConnell has been effective in helping Trump pack the courts with right-wing ideologues. But their sole legislative achievement has been the 2017 tax cuts. This is symptomatic of a party that has lost the vision and élan it showed from the 1980s through the 2000s. The once hegemonic conservative narrative of small government, personal responsibility, and prosperity rings hollow in the aftermath of two financial crises, massive job losses, wage stagnation, and the accompanying trauma of instability, illness, and addiction that have literally led to declining life expectancy for large swaths of the U.S. population. [86] In its place, Republicans can only offer naked cash grabs for their wealthy donors,

combined with nationalism, racism, and xenophobia for their base, and voter suppression for their opponents.

Taken together, the situation amounts to a crisis of political representation. On the left, Democratic Party elites can ignore or toss aside movement demands in a way that their forebears in the 1960s and 70s could not. On the right, corporate elites may enjoy tax cut windfalls, but at the expense of trade, immigration, and foreign policy that work against many of their interests. [87] And while Trump's rhetoric about "bringing jobs back" mixed with healthy doses of white nationalism, xenophobia, and conspiracy theories may provide a salve for his base, neither he nor his party are capable of delivering policies that might actually address their material grievances. [88]

More broadly, neither party is capable of articulating a positive political vision that could form the basis of a new hegemonic coalition, along the lines of postwar Keynesianism or the conservative neoliberalism of more

recent decades. Partially this is because traditional organizational vehicles for articulating such a vision are absent. Even as corporate economic consolidation proceeds apace, capital remains [politically fragmented](#), incapable of positioning itself as acting in anything approximating a "general interest."

On the left, the election showed that unions are still capable of shaping politics, particularly with UNITE HERE's efforts in driving up Democratic votes in Arizona and Pennsylvania. [89] But with current union density barely above 10 percent, they are considerably weakened from their postwar heyday, and their broader social influence diminished. Meanwhile, much of the left ecosystem consists either of staff-driven NGOs with no genuine membership to speak of, or periodic outbursts of "leaderless" protest that either dissipate or themselves become absorbed into staff-driven NGOs.

When writing about such periods of political paralysis, it is common among

Left writers to reference [Gramsci's quote](#) about how "[t]he crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear." While the quote is certainly relevant to today, the temptation is to view the interregnum as a passing phase, an unstable situation that must somehow resolve itself. But what often gets lost is that unstable interregnums can last a long time. The status quo can keep muddling through. Nothing guarantees a particular resolution to the crisis.

To the extent a resolution is possible, it will not be due to vague concepts like the current "balance of class forces" or "requirements of capital." Rather, it will be the outcome of concrete political struggles that shape the balance of class forces and articulate the needs of the parties involved.

7 January 2021

Source [Solidarity](#).

Parliamentary elections - Results and prospects

13 January 2021, by [Elio Colmenarez](#)

The defeat of Chavismo in the previous election (2015) made the AN the centre of the attack, with US support, against the Chavista government. The decision of the Tribunal Supremo de Justicia (Supreme Court of Justice - TSJ) ordering a rerun of the election of the deputies in Amazonas state (three, two oppositionists and one Chavista, out of 165), due to previous complaints of vote buying irregularities, was rejected by this opposition-dominated AN, for which the Supreme Court declared it in contempt, allowing the government to ignore its decisions.

Still in contempt, the AN acted directly against the government. After

the failure of an "impeachment" (2016), the activation of a "recall referendum" (2016) and a *guarimba* coup (2017), the AN became the axis for the strategy of the US and the Lima Group of setting up a parallel government, making the president of the AN, Juan Guaido, interim president, a role stipulated in the constitution for cases of the definitive absence of the president, for a period of no more than 30 days and with the sole power to call elections, not for a parallel government that has already been in place for two years.

This AN, over five years, repealed key laws of the revolution (land, hydrocarbons, banking, housing,

media and so on) and approved privatization laws aimed at economic recovery under the direction of the IMF. They were not applied because of their condition of contempt, but that they awaited the arrival of the "new government". It tried to legitimize imperialist aggression, military intervention and the appropriation of the republic's assets abroad and their use "in favour of the restitution of democracy in Venezuela". They authorized parallel diplomatic representations, and created a Supreme Court and a Prosecutor's Office "in exile" to attack Venezuela.

Taking control of the AN from the right was vital for the Bolivarian

revolution, with elections in the midst of a serious economic crisis, mainly the consequence of the blockade imposed by imperialism. The right is divided despite the pressure and threat from the US to apply personal sanctions to those who participated in the election and, based on the talks held in Norway, the National Electoral Council leadership was appointed and the number of deputies increased from 165 to 277, reducing the proportion of nominal deputies (from 79% to 49%) and 48 national deputies were created. But also within Chavismo internal differences regarding economic policy and the selection of candidates led to the emergence of the Alternativa Popular Revolucionaria (Popular Revolutionary Alternative - APR) and the presentation of separate lists to those of the PSUV.

The permanent imperialist threat, the extremely serious economic situation and internal political frictions, both on the right, including imperialism, and within Chavismo, are an indispensable framework for the interpretation of the results of the parliamentary elections. With a participation of just over 30% (6.25 million votes), the vote was 69.43% for the Polo Patriótico, the PSUV alliance and other Chavista organizations; 17.72% for the Democratic Alliance, made up of various opposition organizations (AD, COPEI, EL CAMBIO, CAMBIEMOS and AVANZADA PROGRESISTA); 4.15% for a second opposition alliance (PDV-VP), made up of splits from Primero Justicia and Voluntad Popular (Guaidó's party); and 2.7% for the alliance of the PCV and the APR, with Chavista candidates who had left the Polo Patriótico. Other organizations, mostly regional, that participated outside these alliances accounted for the remaining 6%.

This result corresponds to the national vote, which is applied to 48 deputies. Another 96 deputies were elected on regional lists that depend on the results in each state, 130 from the circuits that are elected nominally and three deputies correspond to the indigenous peoples, whose election process is separate and in accordance with their traditions. For this reason, the national result released by the press does not reflect the final distribution of the AN where there

were 253 deputies for the Polo Patriótico, 18 for the Alianza Democrática, two for PDV-PV and one for PCV-APR.

Electoral abstention

The press, reflecting the position of the United States, emphasizes the low participation to argue for the lack of legitimacy of the electoral process, something unfortunately repeated by sectors of the left whose anti-Chavismo leads them to chorus, without their own criteria, the discourse of the right, attributing the abstention to a rejection of the electoral process and a defeat for Chavismo. But while the EU were criticizing the Venezuelan electoral process, in parallel parliamentary elections were held in Romania, with an equivalent turnout (31%), which they attributed to the pandemic without speaking of the illegitimacy of the elections.

The reasons for abstention cover a wide spectrum. Indeed, there is a militant sector of abstention, favourable to imperialist intervention, but also, at the other extreme there are sectors that traditionally vote for Chavismo, that did not feel attracted towards a process devoid of polarization and with predictable results. These were not the ANC elections, three years ago, where people had to dodge barricades and confront the *guarimberos* that destroyed several voting centres. This time there was not a single demonstration promoting abstention beyond the networks and interviews in the media. In fact, they have been the most peaceful elections in the last thirty years, and many people were in the plazas enjoying the start of the Christmas season and a period of easing of the quarantine. It is therefore not possible to assign abstention to a single political opinion, and still less present it as a questioning of the legality of the elections.

On the other hand, there is data, numerical and historical, that is conveniently ignored. Some 2.4 million emigrants form part of the

electoral roll (the opposition always speaks of 6 million, but now they do not even mention this) which represents at least 12% of the population that did not vote. Nor are these the first parliamentary elections sabotaged by imperialism. In 2005, Condoleezza Rice, Bush's Secretary of State, took over the reorganization of the opposition, hit by defeat in the recall referendum (2004). "Señorita arroz", as Chávez called her, anticipating a defeat, ordered the parties subsidized by the US to withdraw from the electoral process to detract from its legitimacy. At that time there was an intense popular mobilization favourable to the revolution and a growing economy that overshadowed the sabotage actions of the bourgeoisie and imperialism, but abstention reached 75%.

As they are doing now, expert analysts awarded victory to the campaign for abstention and announced the debacle of Chavismo, but a year later Chávez defeated the unitary opposition candidate, Manuel Rosales, with a record 63% vote. With several years of blockade, with the economy destroyed and frictions within Chavismo, participation has been higher than in 2005, so it is very difficult to present this as a triumph of anti-Chavista abstentionism. Furthermore, if the percentages of the PP and the PCV-APR are added (1.87%), the vote for Chavismo is higher than in 2005, a floor of 20% over the total electorate, which no ruling current in the countries of the Lima group can claim. Therefore, abstention cannot be presented a priori as a defeat for a Chavismo that has achieved the objective of regaining control of parliament.

But neither does the low participation give reasons for celebrating Chavismo. Covid, in one of the countries with greater control of the pandemic, did not influence the low participation. The participation in the barrios was almost 40%, but in middle-class urban development it did not reach 20%. The Chavista mobilization teams had difficulties in getting people to vote. Certainly the absence of polarization influenced this, even though Maduro challenged the right by announcing that if they won parliament again he

would resign, trying to increase the confrontation and encourage Chavista sentiment, but it did not work. The problem is that without there being support for the right, there is discontent, lack of hope and among a significant sector of the population, especially the younger ones, apathy and depoliticization have won, an impact of the setback imposed by the economic situation.

The debacle of the right

The dominance of the US over opposition activity since 1999 has produced a metamorphosis of the opposition. The parties of the Punto Fijo Pact that dominated the country for forty years, AD (social democratic) and COPEI (social Christian), with those that originated from the old left, MAS (with a brief passage through Chavismo) and CAUSA R, imploded when the coup activity in the first Chávez government focused on civil society avoiding the old parties. Hundreds of NGOs and “social groups” emerged to the sound of the dance of dollars that the NED distributed to finance opposition activity. After the failure of the coup and the oil strike, “civil society” succumbed with the victory of Chávez in the recall referendum (2004).

As a party, AD survives as the only one with a significant presence, a vestige of the popular roots of that organization in the pre-Chavismo stage. The others have been reduced to small groups. From the remnants of “civil society” came Primero Justicia (PJ), organized by the IRI, the international arm of the Republican Party and the UNT, a split from AD, mainly in the state of Zulia, which had been a fundamental bastion of civil society. Many NGOs also created small right-wing parties. Later, the CIA would use middle-class youth sectors to create ultra-right shock groups, the actors in the *guarimbas* from 2006. Although initially they were linked to PJ, they ended up creating the far-right organization Voluntad Popular (VP) and other small groups.

The opposition activity involved

guarimbas and terrorist actions, which included the assassination of several Chavista leaders (Danilo Anderson, Eliezer Otaiza, Robert Serra among others), but the greatest triumph of the right was winning the parliamentary elections of 2015 with almost 56% (36% of the electoral roll) and the allocation of 65% of the deputies. There was an imperialist offensive against Latin America, displacing the progressive governments of the previous decade, the death of Chávez had been a negative impact and at the internal level, the combination of the effects of the blockade, the fall in oil prices, the attack on the currency and sabotage of production had destroyed an economy with a strong state dominance which was highly dependent on imports, which had been built in the previous stage as a transition to socialism. Long queues of people searching for essential goods were common. The US managed to gather the opposition archipelago around the “big four” (the 4G: AD, PJ, UNT, VP), and the slogan was to call on the population “to make the last queue”. Indeed, broad sectors of the middle class, who normally do not participate, then believed that a victory by the right would end the blockade and sabotage that affected the economy.

The conjunctural electoral triumph launched them into a coup strategy that led to new failures. The image of an “imminent fall of Maduro”, prompted by international media strategy, turned the opposition into a federation of presidential hopefuls eager to take over from the government that was supposed to fall in a few weeks. The triumph of 2015 and the subsequent coup strategy was the beginning of the opposition debacle, a debacle into which groups that detached themselves from Chavismo were also dragged in search of the formation of a political centre (neither Chavismo nor the right). The coup strategy led to the *guarimbas* of 2017, which marked the highest moment of the opposition struggle with a predominance of the extreme right, defeated by the mobilization and resistance of the population.

The parallel government strategy, implemented in January 2019, to

ignore Maduro’s triumph in the 2018 elections, did not occur amidst a rise in the opposition but in the midst of its debacle. Guaido was a total unknown, a CIA operative, a second-line VP cadre, who assumed the presidency of the AN as part of the 4G rotation pact. The improvised strategy dictated by the US had initial resistance from the opposition itself, which did not recognize any leadership, forcing Guaido to swear himself in an assembly in a plaza, despite the existence of a parliament dominated by the opposition. The US had to build unity behind Guaido with dollars and a promise to intervene “for a prompt departure by Maduro”.

After 30 days of the parallel government, an attempt was made to introduce humanitarian aid from Colombia by force, as part of a plan to establish a “liberated territory” next to the border, which with international support would serve as a beachhead against the government. But the attempt was defeated again by the mobilization and resistance of the population, in addition to a total absence of any internal mobilization favourable to the aggression. Two months after the failure of humanitarian aid, in April, they launched into a caricature of a military uprising, a new failure fuelled by the false idea of a fracture in the Bolivarian armed force that made the US intelligence services look ridiculous.

The sad history of the parallel government after these failures has been reduced to more than sixty calls for protests with little uptake, including 29 unsuccessful calls for a national strike and at the beginning of lockdown, an incursion from Colombia of almost a hundred mercenaries that was crushed by the action of the popular militias. But apart from the internal political failure of Guaido’s parallel government, more than three hundred coercive measures have been implemented by the US, supported by the EU and the Lima group, which have exacerbated the difficult internal economic situation, and “opposition activity” became a prosperous business at the expense of the Venezuelan people.

Billions of dollars from contributions

from the US, the EU and other governments for “the establishment of democracy in Venezuela” and the embargo of accounts, assets and companies of the Venezuelan state abroad, are administered by the parallel government, which the opposition themselves call the “Guaido Corporation”. In these two years, with resources that triple the national budget, while access to medicines, food and supplies for industry is closed to the population, the “Guaido Corporation” finances a high standard of living for most of the opposition leaders that have moved abroad, network and media operators, law firms and economic advisers, foreign government officials, the operation of the Lima group, NGOs and groups linked to activity against Venezuela abroad.

Disagreements over the management of resources controlled by the “Guaido Corporation” have fuelled internal disputes, in addition in recent years to the activity of evangelical groups as actors in opposition politics, as in Brazil, who question Guaido’s ineffectiveness. Opponents denounce wasteful financing of what they call “guaidolovers”, to the detriment of internal political activity, now practically extinct. Most of the “leaders” have sought any excuse to go into “exile”, even for a traffic fine, to more easily access the torrent of dollars that finances activity against Venezuela abroad. The opposition was able to organize a demonstration in favour of Trump in the United States but could not set up a meeting in a plaza in Venezuela in favour of its abstentionist policy. Finance has been the main source of internal clashes in the last two years.

It has been from the opposition itself, rather than Chavismo, that the corruption and business scandals of the “Guaido Corporation” have emerged. A few months ago, Guaido’s ambassador in Chile resigned, denouncing “democratic” resources going to groups that squandered them at parties. The same thing happened previously with the ambassador in Colombia. After Trump’s defeat, the ambassador to the United Kingdom resigned, saying that there were huge debts to her and several “operators” in that country, because the US was

blocking resources. Elliot Abrams himself had to respond, stating at a press conference, “that the salaries of the Venezuelan opposition had experienced an administrative delay but that they were going to be paid”. Such a scandalous confession of a “salaried opposition” did not shock the EU, much less the Lima group.

In January of this year, when the rotation of the president of the AN should have taken place, and the US decided to extend Guaido’s “mandate” to avoid friction, dissidents from various groups took umbrage. Chavismo took the opportunity to return to the AN and support the faction opposing Guaido, who preferred to be absent to avoid the election. Since then, two ANs have operated, one in the official headquarters chaired by Luis Parra, who split from PJ to form Primero Venezuela and another by Guaido that works in the function rooms of residences in eastern Caracas, both inoperative. At the end of the AN period, the elections produced the foreseeable crisis. The decision, without legal basis, to extend the mandate of the old AN “until the dictatorship falls” caused hilarity and new splits in the opposition.

Certainly the government took the opportunity to influence the crisis, by judicially favouring dissident groups, granting them control of the organizations and electoral representation, but the campaign that indicates that the opposition that participated in the elections was confected by Maduro to deceive the international community, a stupidity that some groups on the left repeat, is mistaken. All the leaders and candidates who participated on the right have been associated with the coup, the oil strike and the parallel government strategy, some even were part of Guaido’s AN and his phantom government.

The most serious analysts recognize that the groups participating in the elections bring together most of the opposition activists who are still really active, especially in the recently emerged evangelical groups, which allowed them to have expectations much higher than the 8.5% obtained. But they did not participate in a united

front either and they were spread over several alliances, mainly, that of PDV-PV, splits from Primero Justicia and Popular Will, and the Democratic Alliance where they did not present single lists either, which dispersed their vote and facilitated the greater allocation of deputies to the Polo Patriótico, than if they had presented a single list.

For this reason, beyond the international campaign against Chavismo, the opposition themselves doubt that even if they all participated together, without calling for abstention, they would have defeated Chavismo, and would hardly have reached the 36% obtained in 2015. The idea that the growing discontent against the economic situation was going to favour the opposition was a fantasy because the people hold them responsible for the aggression against the country. Even the groups that broke from Chavismo in previous years with a “nini” policy (neither Maduro nor Guaido) were diluted between abstentionism or local candidacies without any weight or profile.

Discontent and criticism of Bolibureaucracy

Aside from the influence of the right, the low participation points to Chavismo. Even if the vote in favour of the Polo Patriótico reflects a vote for the homeland, anti-imperialist and against the blockade, it also involves a lot of criticism and discontent against the government.

There are more and more critical voices within Chavismo against the economic policy, against growing social inequality and against the corruption that is evidenced in the high standard of living of a bureaucracy in the government, in the party and in the Bolivarian army. The growing predominance of the bureaucracy, the decline of popular power, the growth of depoliticization is an indirect triumph of the imperialist aggression and the blockade, which has not managed to defeat the Bolivarian revolution, but

gains space in the demoralization of the population. A depoliticization and apathy that enters the corridors of government where there is reluctance and discontent, and many leading officials obey the guidelines of groups and cliques, rather than the action of the government. Corruption is gaining ground and an apolitical neoliberal technocracy also dominates the spaces of economic decision and development. This is the achievement of imperialist aggression, a Bolibureaucracy with bourgeois appetites.

This Bolibureaucracy has caused demoralization in the population, achieving what imperialist aggression has not been able to achieve, and a broad Chavista sector that militates selflessly in defence of the revolution, that understands that the enemy continues to be imperialist aggression, suffers from the domination of the bureaucracy and the gross privileges of some groups in the government, linked to corruption and business, while the majority of the population often depends completely on social programs.

The people understand the difficulties imposed by the blockade, but they do not understand the ineptitude in combatting corruption, speculation and the internal actors of the imperialist aggression. They do not understand the enormous wage restrictions, responsible for the fall in income, when the bureaucracy goes to expensive nightclubs, has luxurious transport and acquires mansions and farms. This discontent exist not only in those who abstained but also among many of those who faithfully went to vote.

There have been several plans, full of neoliberal measures justified in the need to break the blockade, which have only served to increase social inequality, stratifying the population to pre-Chávez levels. Certainly supplies have improved and commerce has proliferated, but the people continue to suffer from low incomes and hyperinflation while others line their pockets. There are people who depend exclusively on CLAP and bonds, and others who wallow in luxury, and we are not talking about the bourgeoisie. People want to

defend the revolution, the conquests achieved in these two decades, and confront the blockade, but they hate the gross privileges of the bureaucracy and corruption. That is why there was abstention among Chavismo and it was difficult to get people to vote, when it became clear that the right had no chance of victory.

This is the reason for the growing dissent within Chavismo, the voices of protest, the claim that the construction of socialism has been abandoned, that a sovereign economy is not being built to confront the blockade. Certainly many mistakes made in the past, even with Chávez as president, allowed the imperialist blockade to destroy our economy, but much of the current situation is not attributable only to the blockade.

With the new plan, the Anti-Blockade Law, the voices of protest within Chavismo have increased. Many do not understand that constitutional norms and legal controls imposed by the revolution with the intention of facilitating foreign and national investments are “de-applied”, or that state companies should pass into private hands, much less when these were expropriated from the bourgeoisie in the past decade. It may be tactical to apply certain measures to achieve an economic revival, but what people fear the most is that, despite the name of the Law, it will not end up defeating the blockade, and as has already happened, will end up strengthening business and the corruption of the Bolibureaucracy. The disappearance of the revolutionary democracy that filled communities and workplaces with assemblies, the setback in political debate, increases the distrust of the Chavista base.

The dissent was made public with greater force during the preparation of the lists of candidates for parliament. This did not involve the previous anti-Chavista dissidents, or those who called themselves anti-Maduro Chavistas but ended up chorusing with the right. It is a decidedly Chavista and anti-imperialist vanguard, which questions bureaucracy, corruption and neoliberal deviation in economic recovery policies. They question the

imposition by hand of candidates, some without roots or trajectory in the Chavista base, over the natural leaders, representatives of the daily fight against the blockade. This gave birth to the Alternativa Popular Revolucionaria, which, more than an organization, is a critical, oppositional movement within Chavismo.

Unfortunately, spaces were closed for political discussion, democratic debate, and many were crushed with bureaucratic methods. Unlike the Constituent Assembly elections of 2017, where the expression of all currents that wanted to present candidates was allowed, in these elections the closed electoral legislation only allowed expression through parties, even for the nominal candidates.

The tactically understandable facilities given to the right wing to participate were not extended to dissident APR candidates, to whom every possibility was closed. Only the PCV, which separated from the Polo Patriótico, kept its electoral card that allowed the alliance with the dissident currents of the PPT, Tupamaros and some of the APR. Unfortunately the Communist Party is not the best exemplar of anti-bureaucratic struggle and it ended up behaving like the criticized bureaucracy. Instead of putting its campaign at the service of the grassroots candidates, it ended up making the APR the tail of its particular policy of confrontation with the PSUV and Maduro, facilitating the attacks of the PSUV, who portrayed them as a new form of anti-Chavismo.

Unlike the candidates on the right, the PCV-APR candidates were not given free access to the state media, even in a presentation by Maduro explaining the location on the electoral screen of the Polo Patriótico parties he concealed with the other hand the PCV card. Accusations of victimization and persecution wrongly became the axis of the PCV's campaign, and there were even pronouncements by the Mexican and Chilean CPs “repudiating the attack on the PCV”. This anti-Madurist and sectarian campaign repelled many who identified with the APR, and the initial sympathies aroused by an alternative Chavista list waned. It is not true that everyone in

the government are agents of the bureaucracy and corruption, nor is this true of many of the candidates on the Polo Patriótico lists. In the end, the PCV-APR alliance elected only one deputy, the president of the PCV.

But the failure of the PCV campaign does not mean that the critical voices questioning bureaucracy and corruption in the PSUV and the government have ended, whether in the APR or inside or outside the PSUV or the government, the revolutionary movement stands in defence of the revolution, against the Bolibureaucracy, the “endogenous right” which are the internal expression of imperialist aggression.

The real discussion

Some leaders of Chavismo, justifying openings to right-wing groups, say that the country needs a decent and patriotic opposition, others speak of the need for a “revolutionary bourgeoisie”. The Bolivarian revolution does not need a decent or indecent right-wing opposition, and there has never been an opposition more divorced from the concept of homeland, totally in hock to imperialism, like that of Venezuela, as José Vicente Rangel has pointed out. If an opposition has to emerge, it is from the left, against bureaucracy and corruption. There will never be a revolutionary bourgeoisie. Chávez, in the first years of government, gave enough space for a sector of the bourgeoisie to redeem itself, to join in the construction of the homeland, even after the April coup, and did not achieve anything, concluding that socialism was the only possibility to transcend capitalism.

It is not about pointing out who is more treacherous than who, behind-the-scenes pacts, or epithets and unsubstantiated accusations designed to morally destroy colleagues. After the elections, it is about opening spaces for political debate throughout the revolutionary movement, to

confront the imperialist blockade, bureaucracy and corruption that are sides of the same coin, and win the people, detach them from apathy, for economic reconstruction of the country, and a plan to achieve economic and productive sovereignty.

In this new parliament, the elected deputies must guarantee the active participation of the municipalities, the union and peasant organizations, the student movement, and all the grassroots organizations, to build the plan for a free, productive, independent and socialist homeland. With 92% of the deputies, a closed order in the discussion does not make sense, on the contrary, it must be an open debate. The parliament, the new deputies must promote debate, giving space to the grassroots movement by placing it ahead, not the other way around. Recovering democratic spaces, permanent assemblies, street parliamentarism must be the main objective.

The danger to the right will not be in parliament, it will be in the streets, in the internal actors of the imperialist aggression. Biden will modify the Trump plan, but seeking the defeat of the Bolivarian revolution, that will not change. That is why we have to advance a plan to defeat the internal enemy. The actors of the imperialist aggression must be separated, those who have lived off the assets and money seized from the Venezuelan people must be criminalized and their property and accounts confiscated, as well as their relatives and front men. Companies from countries that do not recognize the right of the Venezuelan people to choose their own government must leave the country. No more impunity, no more contempt for the actors of imperialism. Social movements, the Latin American revolutionary movement, must be summoned to a campaign for the immediate dissolution of the Lima group and the recognition of the Venezuelan parliament.

The fight against bureaucracy and corruption must be an axis of the next

stage. The AN's comptroller commissions must fall to the deputies linked to the organizations of popular power. Investigate the assets and accounts of all senior government officials. Return to the course set by comandante Chávez.

The monitoring and control, based on popular power, of the economic plan should be an orientation for all of Chavismo. It is not questionable that special measures are taken to recover the economy, but precisely because they are special they must be specific, with precise objectives and with total transparency. They cannot be general or secret plans, as if it were a military action. There are many appetites for plundering state companies and bureaucrats who want to be bosses, so everything must be very clear and public.

The conquests, the rights achieved, are not temporarily or definitively unenforceable. For example, the elimination of home foreclosures and job tenure are historic conquests of the revolution, tomorrow they cannot be “de-applied” to favour investment by real estate banks or the Polar group, because what is rebuilt then are the pockets of capitalism, not the economy. If it is necessary to associate with national or foreign private investors for specific situations, the objectives must be clear, why it is done, facing the country, the popular movement, with monitoring and control of compliance with the plan. The origin of the capital must be clear, whoever wants to invest in secret for fear of imperialism is of no use to us because they will flee at the slightest pressure.

It is about conquering economic and productive sovereignty, to build an independent and socialist homeland, that is the objective of the Bolivarian revolution, for which it is necessary to generate a broad Chavista movement promoting the political revolution against corruption and bureaucracy.

13 December 2020

Source [*insisto-resisto*](#).

2021 begins with a new National Assembly. Will it lead to advances?

13 January 2021, by **José Domenico**

The first and most important aspect is that it represents a major blow - we hope a decisive one - to the parallel government, which US imperialism and the local bourgeoisie have been trying to impose on us for two years, using the puppet Juan Guaidó, to subject us directly to the dictates of capital.

This ongoing defeat of the "Guaidó Project" is based on three elements.

The first is the popular resistance that isolated, confronted and defeated all the aggressions, in particular the invasion - under the pretext of "humanitarian aid" - in February 2019, the attempted coup d'état in April 2019 and the mercenary invasion of our coasts in May 2020.

The second is the electoral defeat suffered by the fascist right - disguised as democratic - that participated in the 6D elections, combined with the political defeat of the ridiculous "binding popular consultation" conducted by the undisguised fascist right.

The third and last element is the political defeat of Donald Trump in the elections, there in his own backyard, by the rebellious masses, who have expressed themselves by the millions on the streets since the assassination of George Floyd in May 2020, opening a political crisis in the most powerful imperialism on earth.

Defeating the parallel government is a victory for democracy and sovereignty by the Venezuelan masses against imperialism and the fascist bourgeoisie. This defeat must be consolidated by dismantling each and every one of the give-aways and cheats that they tried and in several cases succeeded in imposing.

It is also necessary to punish Guaidó

and all those who acted against the Venezuelan people by requesting and endorsing sanctions and robberies against the nation; as well as by promoting and supporting military aggression.

We know that imperialism and the national bourgeoisie will not "back away from the fight" no matter how badly defeated they are in their latest plan. But, thanks to this victory, it is now possible and necessary for the revolution to advance. The National Assembly has to be an instrument of this advance.

The new National Assembly has a very big majority for those who claim to be revolutionaries and socialists, with more than 90% of representatives from the PSUV and one from the APR PCV.

The number of seats taken by the PSUV was so large that, beyond the "usual" and widely questioned leaders, a good number of militant cadres who express much more directly and genuinely the anxieties and wishes of the working people, have joined it. There is a tremendous opportunity to take advantage of this new National Assembly to recover and carry forward the Revolution.

The National Assembly that started work yesterday must confront the imperialist blockade and its effects on the lives of millions of Venezuelan working class families by reviving the real economy. Not the one that just makes the bourgeoisie even richer, but the one that takes socialist measures to solve the urgent needs which we, working families, face, with hunger wages and public services that are ever more expensive and useless, due to the imperialist blockade and bourgeois commercial speculation, aided by the negligence and corruption of the state bureaucracy.

This new Assembly can and must decisively support the organisation of the people, so that they can take into their own hands the planning, production and distribution of essential goods from the Social Property Enterprises, directly and indirectly, along with the Peasant Councils, the CLAPs (food distribution committees) the Workers' Productive Councils and the Communal Councils.

In order to recover and expand participatory and protagonist democracy, the new National Assembly must defend the democratic right to struggle and protest of all the workers and the people; it must begin its work by demanding the immediate release of all workers, peasants and people's leaders imprisoned for fighting for their rights or denouncing corruption, and at the same time it must demand the imprisonment of the fascist sponsors of guarimbas (violent opposition protests), attacks, sanctions and military invasions. May the National Assembly serve to combat the negligence and corruption that is rampant in most of the state institutions, making them complicit in the effects of the blockade.

The legislators who are beginning work today must give effective support to the democratic and anti-neoliberal struggles that are shaking our continent, cornering the reactionary governments of the "Lima group" and renewing hopes for a Latin America that is free and independent of imperialism, united and in solidarity. That is the way to break the imperialist siege: the dream of Bolívar and Chavez.

We in LUCHAS call on all members of the Assembly elected from the ranks of the PSUV and the APR PCV, to put themselves at the disposal of a programme of struggle for these

revolutionary objectives. To become genuine spokespeople of the organised working class, of the real people's power.

A National Assembly linked to and integrated with the workers', peasants' and communal grassroots can be a great engine of mobilisation that will take advantage of the current setback of the bourgeoisie; not to reconcile with it, increasing the misery of the people and rolling back the achievements made, but to advance, to regain political space and living conditions for the great majorities, i.e. for more Revolution.

We know that many of the representatives elected are aware of these imperative needs of the Bolivarian Revolution, with which we stake its very existence against the imperialist attacks.

They will have to decide whether to remain prisoners of a false "loyalty" of

silence and submission, repeating "whatever Nicolas says", under the watch of Jorge Rodriguez, or whether to use their capacities and experiences to be the living and active voice of the Chavist grassroots, the revolutionary working people from where they come.

At the same time we as LUCHAS call on all unions, communal organizations, peasants, environmentalists, gender activists, etc, to bring their demands and mobilisations to this new Assembly, to demand their support and concrete actions to improve the living conditions of the majority, to achieve independence from imperialism, the democratic rights of the people and to fight against fascism, bureaucracy and corruption.

We believe that the new National Assembly can be an instrument of the Revolution, but we will not encourage

false hopes among the ranks of the peasants, workers and communities. We are emphatic: it will not be with a National Assembly as "protector of the people", nor with a government as "protector of the people", that we will get out of this economic and social quagmire that the imperialist aggression has plunged us into.

Only the daily and ever more profound application of participatory and protagonist democracy, in the planning, execution and control of economic, political, social measures, etc. from and through the workers', peasants' and communal organizations, will enable us to definitively overcome this condition of submission to capitalism, which is the source of our hardships.

There are possibilities to move forward: Let's move forward!

6 January 2021

Source [*insisto y resisto*](#).

Five Things we have Learnt from the National Education Union's Mobilisation to Keep Schools Safe.

12 January 2021, by **Dave Kellaway**

1. Working people can collectively intervene and make a difference in the Covid-19 pandemic

Right up to the day before schools were due to reopen Johnson said that schools were safe. A day later, after the biggest online trade union meeting in history, with anything between 70 and 100 thousand participating, we saw Starmer [Labour Party leader] shift his line to call for a national lockdown. Then Johnson executed yet another U-turn and shut the country down for six weeks. Indeed, this is the second or third time that teachers' action has forced the government to back down during the pandemic.

2. Starmer not so forensic, not so

strong

Starmer's leadership has been exposed as a lot less strong and forensic than his cheerleaders in the press and Labour Party have claimed. It was only after the massive success of the NEU online meeting he called on Johnson to bring in a national lockdown. Even then he studiously, even forensically, avoided direct references to the teachers' mobilisation. He had consistently been more bullish than the Tories over the need to keep the schools open. His formulation, schools will 'necessarily have to close' was an attempt to write the concrete action of teachers and their unions out of the story. Indeed, it became laughable when he seemed to

put the closure of zoos on some sort of equal footing with schools. Just look at the TV interview. Despite pointed questioning about what he would do about schools, he just kept going back to how national restrictions opened up that possibility. He refused to say clearly what Labour's position on opening primaries on Monday morning would be.

Starmer is reluctant to support working people taking action, in this case refusing to follow government rules or headteachers' directions, because he thinks that will weaken his effort to win the 'middle ground'. Actions that are not parliamentary or challenge the legal order in even the mildest way are not to be supported.

His preferred framework is placing Labour's policies within 'the national interest' and securing a reputation for managerial competence. Most of the time the Tories will always own the 'national interest' and Starmer's hope that this will bring electoral victory is far from certain, outside of a Tory implosion.

3. Corbynism's legacy is alive and kicking

These events show the gains of the Corbyn project are far from exhausted. NEU leadership includes a strong contingent of pro-Corbyn supporters. A letter, organised by the Corbyn left, calling on Labour to support the teachers gathered support from across the party and the trade unions. Teachers and students were among the most numerous and enthusiastic supporters of Jeremy Corbyn. He was prominent in calling for support for the teachers and spoke on the campaign platforms. Pushing Starmer to take a stronger position will encourage, rather than demoralise, activists inside Labour who are organising against Starmer's witch hunt and the abandonment of his famous ten 'continuity' pledges.

4. Which working class?

Looking at what is happening rips up any narrow definition of the working class, limiting it to the so-called 'red

wall' Brexit-voting industrial (often ex-industrial) working class. Do you make concessions to these groups over 'nationalism' and so-called traditional family values as Blue Labour supporters or Lexiteers like Paul Embury argue? Or do you build outwards from the progressive mobilisation of sectors like the teachers to win back the Labour Brexit switchers to progressive politics? Action by teachers in the red wall constituencies will have a positive influence on Labour voters who switched to the Tories, exposing how the government does not care about working people's health. Already some polls are suggesting that the Tories are losing support in such areas. Abandoning progressive policies in order to win a minority of Labour voters in these places is not only unprincipled but is not necessarily a winning formula. Such a Blue Labour line will lose support among the teachers or students mobilising today against the government.

5. Strong leadership and action build unions.

In the last few weeks, the NEU has gained 16,000 new members. It had already grown as a result of the strong line it took against the government last year. Just like the RMT, the rail and tube workers union, taking industrial action and campaigning

builds support in a way that providing legal and other 'individual' services do not. The former left NUT (National Union of Teachers) leadership correctly pushed for unity with a smaller union to form the NEU and it has creatively used online methods to organise its activities. These national mass meetings on Zoom may have been a result of the pandemic, but the NEU have used them more effectively than anyone else.

Moreover, their leaders have welcomed and spoken on broader campaign forums which have supported teachers. Such campaigns have been initiated by left activists from inside and outside the Labour Party. Online meetings show the bosses, or the government, in this case, a sign of your support on the ground in real-time. This explains partly why both Starmer and Johnson had to shift their positions so quickly. It was inspiring to drop in on the online meeting and see how interactive it was. Teachers raised literally hundreds of pertinent questions about the action that were answered either by the platform speakers or other people on chat. Certainly, even when the pandemic is over this form of online organisation will continue.

5 January 2021

*Source [Anti*Capitalist Resistance](#).*

Nationalism and patriotism: the opium of the masses

11 January 2021, by [Zwide Ndwandwe](#)

The country is incapacitated by a longstanding failure to deal with structural and societal issues that have marred the democratic experience. The mismanagement of these issues is evident in increasing wealth inequality, racial hostilities across the country, and ongoing violence in various social contexts. This mismanagement should no longer

come across as ineffectual but genuine attempts by our leaders to alleviate these problems. It is now certainly a deliberate effort to keep these conditions in place, so that they may continue to extract from them.

Does patriotism exist?

The imagining of South Africa as a beacon of hope and progressiveness for the world to marvel at has dwindled under the weight of horrors stemming from neoliberal capitalism,

heterosexism, anti-Black racism, queerphobia, ableism, xenophobia and other systemic forms of oppression. It goes without saying that there's very little for us to feel patriotic about in this current moment. Yet if this description largely sums up what the country has looked like after the tyrannical apartheid regime, one must wonder if patriotism ever truly existed outside of the celebratory moments over achievements on international stages. Furthermore, it becomes more crucial to ask oneself what it means, for colonised people especially, to be patriotic in a settler colonial state.

For the most part this question, which isn't new, has felt less complicated when coming from African descendants of slaves who live in settler colonies that aren't their ancestral homes. They have been impacted by the psychological phenomenon, theorised by W.E.B. Du Bois, known as "**double consciousness**" - "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity".

It's not as simple to grapple with, however, when the colonised have an ostensible hegemony over the political and cultural landscape.

If structural power has not changed hands and the colonial institutions have not been entirely removed, then what exactly are we expected to be patriotic towards?

Nationalism is deliberate confusion

In a previous article I wrote about the need to question the framework of South African exceptionalism. We see it sustained in the obnoxious examples of chauvinism that we've become used to seeing. And we also see it in the seemingly innocent state-sponsored messages implying that we should remain "proudly South African". This prevailing nationalist discourse has had disastrous consequences not only for non-nationals but also for South Africans who don't look South African

(whatever that may mean). The aim of the article was to get more of us to recognise that this nationalist discourse is one of the outcomes of the nation building project itself.

The construction of a post democratic South Africa, in the image of upholding the nation state, has not only been dangerous for those who don't fall within the arbitrary definitions of nationality. It has also been harmful for anyone who isn't a part of the ruling class in this country. People of all backgrounds are misled into believing that as citizens we have equal claim to a social order that only uplifts a minority. The negative responses directed towards Enoch Mpienzi's family over their call to close down the notorious Parktown Boys High School, led Naledi Mbaba to accurately point out that being South African means "having a false sense of class solidarity with white people" in the aims of protecting "the institutions they've built (for themselves)."

Much as how race became useful in the obfuscation of class consciousness, a national identity within a liberal democracy is utilised to accomplish the same goal.

The rainbow nation mythology wasn't just helpful in reducing racial differences in South Africa to superficial terms; the idea presented a view within which the class interests of the previously disenfranchised and the class interests of the bourgeois elite were no longer in conflict, but coalesced into one, to legitimise the capitalist state. When Black middle class South Africans form a xenophobic movement around the desire to be prioritised over immigrants, it represents a failure to recognise that certain South Africans are already being placed first. And they will continue to be placed first so long as the policies which govern our lives exist only to serve monopoly capital.

A time of neocolonial

fascism

In the book *How Britain Rules Africa*, George Padmore makes this assessment of South Africa: "unity of race as against class accounts for the widespread racial chauvinism which permeates all strata of the European population, and makes the Union the world's classic Fascist State." The Trinidadian writer wrote extensively on the mechanisms of "colonial fascism" and how it plays out specifically in settler colonial states.

Expanding on his views, it is important that we come to terms with the fact that we are now living in a time of neocolonial fascism, which not only terrorises African and South Asian communities, but targets the majority Black and poor population of this country. The countless scenes of state-sanctioned violence - on working class protestors, or against civilians as unthreatening as children, or conducted during unlawful evictions (what are lawful evictions when all property is theft?) - undercut every notion of South Africa being a democracy.

Fascism is not just limited to instances of repression, which somehow have not stopped becoming the norm after apartheid was constitutionally dismantled. As radical activist George Jackson wrote in *Blood In My Eye*, fascism can also be defined by "each economic reform that perpetuates ruling class hegemony" and that is intentionally "disguised as a positive gain for the upthrusting masses." The neoliberal policies enacted by every ANC administration since 1994 have offered no material difference to the majority of those who lived under the rule of the National Party.

Unifying people across racial lines on a national basis has not just resulted in the harmful othering of non-nationals, it has placated us so that we don't think about how our lives are completely in the service of capital. If we don't begin to see the generally accepted modes of living - race, nation, capital - for what they truly are, we can never change the conditions they produce that keep us further away from knowing what it means to belong to a democracy.

Hong Kong's mass arrests are an assault on grassroots advocacy

10 January 2021, by **Shui-yin Sharon Yam**

The primary, held in July 2020, mobilized a record turnout of over 600,000 voters to express their preferences for pro-democratic politicians among the traditional pan-democratic and localist camps. It was meant for the public to choose two slates of pro-democratic candidates most likely to win in the LegCo election scheduled for November 2020, though it was ultimately postponed by the Hong Kong government under the pretense of coronavirus fears.

Almost every candidate in the primary, including both established and younger opposition figures, were arrested. Their intent to secure a legislative majority to vote down the Hong Kong annual budget plan was deemed “subversive” under the National Security Law. The police also presented search warrants at independent news outlets and the Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute, which conducted polling for the election.

Following Beijing's disqualification of four incumbent lawmakers in November 2020 that led to the mass resignation of pro-democratic legislative councillors, this suggests an end to an effective political opposition in the city's legislature. [90]

This outrageous wave of arrest cements the government's intent to stifle and criminalize all dissent. It implies that the government's removal of its parliamentary opposition has expanded to a full assault on Hong Kong's civil society, including targeted arrests on academics, researchers, labor organizers, and advocates of social justice for marginalized

communities.

While the Hong Kong pro-democracy movement has often emphasized dual universal suffrage—the right to directly elect the Chief Executive and the entire legislature—as one of its core demands, the movement encompasses interconnected social justice issues. Among the 53 people arrested, several were seasoned activists and organizers fighting for labor, migrant, racial, and disability justice.

[Jeffrey Andrews](#), a democratic primary candidate who was arrested, was both the first social worker of Indian descent in the city, and the [first person of a non-white ethnic minority](#) to run for LegCo. As a senior social worker at the Center for Refugees, a drop-in community center for asylum seekers, Andrews wanted to represent the rights of ethnic minorities from within the institution. [Chi-yung Lee](#), another arrested primary candidate, joined the race because he wanted to advocate for [disability justice](#). As a caretaker of a severely disabled daughter, Lee advocated for more accessible public transportation and city planning.

Similarly, prominent pro-democracy figure Eddie Chu Hoi-dick, who was also arrested, has long been advocating for the rights of immigrant detainees and [migrant domestic workers](#) along with demands for electoral democracy. [91] For Andrews, Lee, and Chu, securing seats in the LegCo was not merely about challenging Beijing's rule, but also about advocating for marginalized groups in Hong Kong whose experiences and needs were often ignored in favor of corporations and

those in power.

The mass arrest of these lawmakers shatters the illusion that democratic candidates who were not previously disqualified could present a legislative challenge to the government's plan to distribute billions in HKD to the Hong Kong Police Force, alongside “white elephant projects” like the Lantau Tomorrow Vision that cede ground to property developers' interests and exacerbate environmental devastation. [92]

Among the arrested democratic primary candidates were also union leaders like [Carol Ng](#) and Winnie Yu, respectively the chairperson of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU), and the founder and chairperson of the Hospital Authority Employees Alliance (HKEA). [93]

The new union movement in Hong Kong, emerging from attempts to coordinate general strikes and seek parliamentary representation in the LegCo's functional constituencies, sought to extend movement energy through sharing information, building worker solidarity, and conducting industrial actions such as the medical workers' strike in February 2020. [94] Yu was herself featured in “[Medical Workers' Unions—Movement Building from US to HK](#),” a webinar organized by *Lausan* in late June to facilitate exchange and learning between labor activists in the United States and Hong Kong.

The new union movement connects the demand for democracy with economic struggles, making clear that the pro-democracy movement cannot be separated from the capitalist material conditions that perpetuate

class inequity in Hong Kong. As Leo Tang, a labor organizer from HKCTU, noted in a letter from prison, the new union movement connects labor rights with political demands and “unearths the potential to sustain the movement through the transformation of relations.” [95] Ng and Yu’s arrests signal an affront from the Hong Kong

government towards the new union movement, which has been effectively building power from the ground up.

While undoubtedly another crushing setback, the redrawn fronts of struggle may yet unearth novel forms of resistance. [96] Can the movement energy in legislative activism be redirected towards direct action? Can

the intensifying persecution of activist leaders compel ordinary folk to organize and advocate for their own communities? How do we connect with other movements and communities, in the interlinked arena of transnational struggle? [97]

Source [Lausan](#).

The Freedom Struggle Is a Labor Struggle, Then & Now

9 January 2021, by **Robin D. G. Kelley**

The new parliamentary bills essentially eliminate state-run regulated agricultural markets, and allow direct transactions between farmers and private corporate interests — namely international commodity traders and conglomerates such as Walmart and Cargill.

The new arrangements will destroy small farmers and force those who survive to enter into contracts with corporate global seed and agrochemical suppliers, traders, distributors and retail concerns. The legislation encourages the unregulated storage of produce and commodity speculation, overturning laws that made hoarding food items for profit a criminal offense.

Imagine a quarter of a billion people trying to stop unfettered capitalism, save the planet, and resist massive dispossession and a catastrophic migration to already overburdened cities — an example of militant solidarity in the face of a global pandemic and a global recession. The largest general strike in human history, and hardly anyone is talking about it in this country.

And yet events in India might afford us the most important lessons for the hour: the strike invites us to confront the question, who makes up the working class and where is it located?

When we talk about labor history on a global scale, I’m always surprised by how quickly we slip into a Euro/U.S.-centric framework, and how we unwittingly privilege urban over rural.

I’m always reminding my own students that the largest workers’ revolts of the 19th and 20th centuries occurred neither in Europe nor the United States, but in the colonies and nations of the Global South.

Black Workers and “Racial Capitalism”

When I’m asked about the role of organized labor in the Black freedom movement, I’m always quick to point out that Black workers have been at the forefront of the labor movement, especially in the 19th century, when labor organizing took the form of parties and mass organizations rather than guilds and skilled trades unions — Knights of Labor and the Greenback Labor Party, for example.

Black workers provided leadership to white workers — or at least they tried. The more familiar story, of course, emphasizes how capitalists deploy racism as a weapon to divide workers and crush opposition; use the coercive arm of the state to put down strikes or

contract out convict labor; bribe conservative Black leaders to oppose unions and break strikes; foment mob violence in the name of protecting white womanhood and fighting communism.

But wily capitalists alone are not solely to blame for undermining labor’s collective power. Trade unions were also exclusionary, not inclusive. They were based on skilled trades and protecting those jobs. There were exceptions, like the IWW and the CIO, but the key takeaway here is that when white workers attempt to go it alone by building exclusionary racist unions, they lose. We can look at the 1866 campaign for an eight-hour day: in St. Louis, unionists built a biracial campaign and won; in New Orleans a lily-white campaign went down in defeat.

This brings me to the crux of the matter — the real question is not “labor’s” support of “Black liberation” but rather: why has so much of the U.S. labor movement refused to embrace the entire class? Just consider the long history of excluding Black workers, Asian workers, agricultural and domestic workers. Why have so many unions historically consistently supported or tolerated a racially segmented labor force and wage differentials based on race?

What explains white working-class

support for housing policies that not only maintain segregation but devalue homes in Black and mixed neighborhoods and boost home values in segregated white neighborhoods? Or policies that have excluded Black people from publicly funded institutions — better schools, better hospitals and healthcare?

Are these “labor” issues? Of course they are! Spatial segregation explains so much that a workplace focus cannot — hidden costs of living, food deserts, limits on mobility to access decent jobs, home/property values and impact on intergenerational wealth, school funding, and services like access to sanitation, fire fighters, and libraries. (Imagine what it means for Black and Brown kids to attend school on-line by using the internet at their neighborhood McDonalds.)

This is what we mean by “racial capitalism,” which not only produces deep race, class and gender inequalities but continues to keep a segment of white-working class in a state of precarity while convincing them that Black and Brown people are to blame.

The hidden secret of racial capitalism’s longevity is the capacity of capital and the state to capture the “white” workers and tie its identity to race (whiteness) and masculinity. We all need liberating from racial capitalism.

An Ideological Struggle

I am not suggesting that labor unions are hopelessly racist, nor is Michael Goldfield in his extraordinary book *The Southern Key*. On the contrary, we have many examples of unions dedicated to social justice and antiracism. I’m reluctant to call these “exceptions” since it implies that the “labor movement” is singular and unitary rather than combined and uneven.

Put simply, a union’s political orientation cannot be reduced solely to the inherent contradictions between labor and capital but must be understood within a broader

ideological struggle. The extraction of surplus value alone does not explain why some sectors of the labor movement embrace a vision of racial and gender justice and equality, others hold fast to racism, patriarchy and social order, and perhaps most reflect a messy, ever-shifting combination of these tendencies.

And as I’ve suggested, some of the most critical battles have occurred not at the workplace but at the level of the state — struggles over social policy, state violence, budgetary and fiscal decisions, housing and welfare, education, etc.

Indeed, as we revisit the 1930s, the era we hold up as the heyday of interracial working-class radicalism, there are three things we ought to consider. The Left, and here I mean specifically the Communist Party, was different from other socialist parties up to that point in that it centered anti-racism.

Whatever the CP’s many faults and missteps, it generally resisted color-blindness, underscoring distinctive features of Black, Brown and Indigenous workers’ struggles, while refusing to forgive or explain away the racism of white workers. Second, the CP’s biggest mobilizations did not center on relief or jobs or trade union struggles but the defense of the “Scottsboro Boys,” nine young Black men falsely accused of raping two white women on a train in Alabama.

Third, the 1930s, the period we often describe as the U.S. left turn, was also characterized by rising fascism that drew a segment of the white working class into groups such as the Black Shirts, the Klan, the White Legion, and the American Nazi Party.

In other words, what often animates social justice or civil rights unionism are movements with a vision of justice, movements that are anti-fascist, anti-racist, and dare I say anti-capitalist (though embracing the latter doesn’t necessarily translate into embracing the former).

Where Organizing Succeeded

In the South, Black labor militants, many of whom were Communists, were the key to building the CIO in the region, even during the early stages of Cold War-era attacks on labor and the Left. Operation Dixie, the postwar campaign to organize the South, is usually seen as a total failure, but as Will Jones demonstrates, it succeeded where Black workers were in leadership positions — e.g. among Black lumber workers in North Carolina and Black tobacco and cotton-press workers in North Carolina, Arkansas, and western Tennessee.

Black workers built and sustained the International Woodworkers of America (IWA) campaign to organize sawmill employees in the South, in spite of unremitting violence from employers, allied businessmen and white workers, and the CIO’s best efforts to push race off to the side.

In Elizabethtown, North Carolina where in 1948 the IWA waged a militant strike against one of the largest lumber companies in the Southeast, it was precisely racial solidarity and Black community support that ensured their success. [98]

The largely Communist-led Food, Tobacco, Agricultural, and Allied Workers of America (FTA) rested on the union’s ability to tap into a deep well of black community organizing and grievances centered around workplace conditions, wages, and racial discrimination. By 1947, FTA won 111 union elections, bringing some 15,000 workers into the union.

Winston-Salem, North Carolina, had become the epicenter of FTA strength in the region. Led by an extraordinary group of Black women, notably Moranda Smith, Velma Hopkins, Theodosia Simpkins, and Viola Brown, Local 22 had successfully organized workers at R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company.

They fought for more than higher wages and better conditions; they

promoted a Black radical vision that civil and human rights were inseparable from labor rights.

They protested segregation, fought sexual harassment at work, revitalized the local chapter of the NAACP, launched voter registration campaigns, set up worker education classes, and established a library stocked with volumes on African American history and political economy, and were largely responsible in 1947 for electing Winston-Salem's first Black alderman, the Reverend Kenneth Williams. [99]

Collective Power Under Attack

The success of the left-led unions such as FTA, the International Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers, the Farm Equipment Workers, United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE) among others, were strengthened by the 1945-46 strike wave, only to be bludgeoned by the state and corporate response to the postwar labor insurgency.

The collective power of labor, especially in cases of exemplary interracial cooperation, threatened to severely curtail corporate power, or worse for capital, usher in a new political order that would further regulate business, expand the welfare state, protect workers' rights, and undermine corporate profits.

We all know what happened next: the war on labor ramped up in the name of fighting communism. Left-oriented labor militants were fired or deported or brought before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC).

The Taft-Hartley Act (1947) restricted workers' right to strike; outlawed closed shops, secondary boycotts and "sympathy" strikes; imposed hefty fines on union officials who failed to oppose unauthorized strikes; prevented unions from contributing to political campaigns; and required union officers to sign loyalty oaths and affidavits affirming they are not Communists.

Those that refused to sign were the left-led unions — the unions that proved to be the most antiracist — for which they were summarily expelled from the CIO between 1949 and 1950.

The story doesn't end here, however. There is a prevailing myth still in circulation that Cold War repression forced the Civil Rights Movement to abandon labor and economic justice in favor of desegregating public accommodations and other middle-class demands.

The 1963 March on Washington, in fact, was about two things: ending racist violence and securing "jobs and freedom." The lead organizers, Bayard Rustin and A. Philip Randolph, both had roots in socialist and labor movements.

Randolph's opening remarks laid out a clear agenda for labor. Echoing Karl Marx's oft-quoted line in *Capital*, that "Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded," he warned

"[T]his civil rights revolution is not confined to the Negro, nor is it confined to civil rights for our white allies know that they cannot be free while we are not. . . .

"[W]e have no future in a society in which 6 million black and white people are unemployed and millions more live in poverty. Nor is the goal of our civil rights revolution merely the passage of civil rights legislation. Yes, we want all public accommodations open to all citizens, but those accommodations will mean little to those who cannot afford to use them.

"Yes, we want a Fair Employment Practice Act, but what good will it do if profit-gearred automation destroys the jobs of millions of workers black and white?" [100]

The Negro American Labor Council (NALC) was a lead sponsor of the March. It had organized local marches under the slogan, "Freedom from Poverty through Full Employment," and threatened to hold a national one-day work stoppage to pressure Congress to pass the Civil Rights bill.

NALC also fought to raise the federal minimum wage and extend its

coverage to all workers, and backed efforts to organize domestic workers, abolish the House Un-American Activities Committee, and build up the American Labor Party as a third-party alternative.

So what happened to this vision of economic justice? First, the big groups — the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Congress on Racial Equality, the NAACP and the Urban League — threw their energies almost entirely behind passing the watered-down Civil Rights bill, supporting a Voting Rights bill, and trying to influence the Democratic Party.

Second, the labor movement betrayed the coalition's racial justice agenda. AFL-CIO leader George Meany and the United Auto Workers' Walter Reuther made lofty statements and financial contributions in support of Civil Rights, while acceding to its rank-and-file white members who worried that the elimination of racial barriers to equal wages, access to skilled jobs, and unfettered access to housing, would threaten their privileged status.

Third, Randolph and other leaders excluded Black women's organizations from playing any significant role in the movement. This weakened the coalition, in part because activists such as Pauli Murray, Anna Hedgeman, Dorothy L. Robinson, Rosa Parks, Gloria Richardson, and Dorothy Height had already committed to linking labor and economic justice to questions of racial and gender equity [101]

A Radical Revival for Justice

The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party never abandoned economic justice. They not only embraced a program of economic justice but went further, calling for the redistribution of wealth, reparations, and workers' power.

When SNCC organized its Freedom Vote campaign in Mississippi in the summer and fall of 1963, they ran a slate of candidates in a "mock"

election to challenge the state's white Democratic party behind a fairly radical platform that included the right of labor to organize and engage in collective bargaining; a \$1.25 minimum wage; support for farm cooperatives in place of sharecropping and dispossession; provision of low-interest loans for small farmers; a progressive land tax on tracts of land over 500 acres and tax exemption for those with plots smaller than 500 acres.

SNCC had also founded the Mississippi Freedom Labor Union (MFLU) to organize agricultural workers in the Delta. In the spring of 1965, about 350 members of the union went on strike to demand \$1.25 an hour for chopping cotton (clearing weeds). The planters would not budge and instead evicted the workers, leaving them to starve.

In January 1966 when the Greenville Air Force base was about to be sold, strikers occupied it to draw federal attention to their plight. After Air Force police expelled them, they regrouped in an encampment dubbed "Strike City" and appealed to liberal organizations and the government for food, clothing, and other basic commodities. [102]

Unfortunately, without economic leverage to force planters to meet their demands, and lacking federal support, the MFLU was defeated. But that defeat profoundly shaped the politics of the MFDP, which pursued a radical economic vision even when middle-class Black Mississippians were finally admitted into the mainstream Democratic party.

By 1968, the MFDP backed a Guaranteed Annual Income, extended day care for poor and working mothers, comprehensive medical care for all, increased federal provisions for food stamp programs, free higher education, an end to the draft, and full military withdrawal from Vietnam. [103]

This revolutionary vision of social justice unionism found expression among Black auto workers in Detroit. In May of 1968, veteran organizer General Baker led a wildcat strike of 4000 workers at the Dodge Main plant

to protest a speedup of the assembly line. They did not win since most white workers did not support the strike, but out of that action the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) was born.

The strikes spread to the Eldon Avenue Gear and Axle Plant, giving rise to ELRUM, and other actions in other plants like the Ford Revolutionary Union Movement (FRUM). DRUM's specific demands included workplace safety, lower production demands, and an end to racist hiring practices.

Of course the RUM leaders wanted to win better working conditions and wages for Black workers, but their ultimate goal was freedom for all workers — and that meant in their view the end of capitalism. So in 1969, leaders of all the RUMs came together and formed the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, with the long-term goal of becoming a political party or revolutionary movement.

The League fought the leadership of the UAW, who not only tried to crush the revolutionary union movement but called police to break up their meeting and relied on violence to undermine the League's campaign to elect Ron March, a member of DRUM, on the board of trustees of the UAW.

Even though March would have fought for all workers and resisted speedups, too many white workers were threatened by Black leadership.

League members knew that racism limited the ability of workers to unite, undermining the strength of the entire class. But they also argued that white workers benefited from racism in the form of higher wages, cleaner and safer jobs and greater union representation. [104]

There are many other examples. Greensboro, North Carolina, has been a center of interracial and anti-racist labor organizing. Last year we observed the 50th anniversary of the Greensboro Massacre, when armed Klansmen and Nazis assassinated five organizers in broad daylight — four of whom were members of the Workers Viewpoint Organization (later the Communist Workers Party). The event

on November 3, 1979, is usually described as an anti-Klan rally but they were also there to organize textile workers.

Fast forward to 1996, Local 2603 of the Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees (UNITE) prevailed in a three-year campaign against K-Mart in Greensboro, thanks largely to the union's strong base in the African American community.

The union attacked racial discrimination head on, filing a complaint with the EEOC and enlisting key local Black community leaders to organize a boycott. The boycott forced K-Mart to raise wages and implement a grievance process that would shield workers from unjust discipline and terminations. The Greensboro City Council passed a resolution requiring that all future employers moving into the city pay a living wage of \$12.50 per hour before receiving any city tax incentives.

The boycott was organized by a coalition of Greensboro Black ministers called "The Pulpit Forum." Forum leaders engaged in mass civil disobedience campaigns resulting in the arrest of several ministers, including the Reverend Nelson Johnson. Johnson, along with his wife Joyce, had organized the November 3rd rally where he suffered a serious knife wound in the conflagration.

The main point is that UNITE adopted a civil rights/community based union strategy by appealing to the whole Black community and its tradition of resistance to racism and injustice. Mobilizing the entire Black community was the key to their victory.

The Working Class As It Really Is

In closing, what the Indian general strike tells us is that we need to rethink the composition of the working-class. When we shift our attention from the big industrial unions where we imagine the working class resides to low wage, marginalized workers in fast food, retail, healthcare, homecare, domestic work, agriculture, etc. — workers who

have to survive on involuntary part-time work, short-term contracts, zero-hours contracts, telemarketing (homeworkers and prison labor for example), and the concierge economy: Uber, Lyft, Grub Hub and so on — the horizon looks radically different.

Once powerful engines of racial and gender exclusion, often working with capital to impose glass ceilings and racially segmented wages, the 21st century labor movement has largely embraced principles of social justice,

anti-racism, immigrant rights and cross-border strategies.

It seems that the new labor leaders are teachers, nurses and other healthcare workers, clerical workers, fast food workers and flight attendants, among others.

They have adopted new strategies, from passing minimum wage laws at the municipal and state levels to using Community Benefits Agreements to secure living-wage jobs, equitable

working conditions, green building practices, affordable housing, as well as childcare provisions. And in alliance with movements such as the Movement for Black Lives, and immigrant rights activists, campaigns such as OUR Walmart, Fight for Fifteen, Change to Win, are leading the way, building the most dynamic labor movement we have seen in generations. [105]

Source January-February 2021, ATC 210.

Grand Theft Election?

8 January 2021, by **David Finkel**, **Solidarity National Committee**

It Could Happen Here

The reality is much more complicated, and a lot less rosy. Those sacred “institutions” are actually quite vulnerable to anti-democratic manipulation, in part because they were never designed to be democratic in the first place. The Trump game of “Grand Theft Election” fell apart for a number of reasons, but under different but entirely conceivable circumstances could have been much more threatening.

Let’s look at some centrally important facts:

1. American democracy, such as it is, was saved by massive election turnouts of Black — and in crucial swing states, Latinx and Indigenous — voters that defeated Trump by margins too large to credibly deny. In places like Georgia in particular, this is a tribute to many years of on-the-ground grassroots organizing that overcame systematic voter suppression measures by rightwing gerrymandered state legislatures. Although we would argue that these heroic efforts are worthy of a better cause than the wretched neoliberal-

led Democratic Party, they’ve undoubtedly made an historic difference in U.S. politics.

2. This longterm struggle is by no means over. As Republican figures desert Trump’s sunken ship — many of them having been his most notorious enablers — their party will be divided over Trump’s “legacy” and whether to coexist and cooperate with the centrist-neoliberal Biden administration, or carry on the wreck-to-rule obstructionism they’ve pursued ever since Barack Obama’s election. What will unite Republicans, especially at state levels, is voter suppression — the only way this party can hold onto power as the white proportion of the U.S. electorate ages and declines.

That’s no idle threat. After the smoke cleared in the evening, if you paid attention to some of the Republicans’ speeches purporting to uphold the election result, they said it wasn’t up to Congress to “intervene in states’ right to run their elections.” One of those speakers was Senator Rand Paul, who before the Georgia runoffs had opined that encouraging more people to vote “could alter the result of the election.” No kidding!

What’s needed in fact is strong federal

voting rights legislation, precisely to intervene where state legislatures or administrations — not only in the Deep South — conduct voter roll purges, obstruct registration, restrict early and mail-in voting that helped make the November turnout historically large in the midst of the coronavirus crisis, blatantly reduce polling sites for Black communities, and racist partisan gerrymandering. Whether the Biden/Harris administration will fight for voting rights, not just talk about it, will be a very big question. (Beyond this is the bigger constitutional question of eliminating the “sacred institution” of the Electoral College, which disempowers the national popular vote and enables malicious mischief in closely contested states.

3. Politicians and media are describing what happened yesterday as an “insurrection.” This is a piece of nonsense that sullies the good name of insurrection.

As a premeditated and potentially murderous mob action, the attack on the Capitol is indeed very serious, and an ominous threat of rightwing terrorism that may be coming. No one can miss the contrast between the brutal response to many Black Lives Matter protests against police

brutality as opposed to the fact that apparently few if any invaders yesterday were arrested inside the building. (Later arrests were for curfew violations, after the events of the day.)

At his Wednesday morning rally repeating lies about his stolen “landslide” victory, Trump called on the crowd to “march to the Capitol,” indicating he’d be with them. Of course, he then retired to his TV-bedecked White House bunker. When calling on people to turn out in Washington on January 6, he’d said the day would be “wild.” Beside the fact that all these were virus super-spreader events, it was mob incitement for sure.

But an “insurrection,” meaning an attempt to seize power? That kind of thing requires more than semi-spontaneous attacks on government offices. From the left, insurrections against repressive regimes require mass popular movements capable of waging general strikes and forcing splits in the military apparatus. From the right, coups may employ mob violence as an auxiliary but the real action is tanks in the streets, targeted roundups and arrests, and organized terror against dissident populations. None of that was even remotely present in Washington DC yesterday, to say nothing of the country as a whole. This is not to underestimate the real threat that is posed from the white-supremacist far right and the legion of Trump voters living in a reality-free ideological universe who think their election was “stolen.”

4. The Trump/Republican Grand Theft Election threat, understood and widely discussed ahead of time by the Transition Integrity Project and many authors, was not a joke. The shambolic way in which it’s collapsed shouldn’t deceive us.

If the November election had been closer, if the Trump gang’s post-election moves had been more competently organized and coordinated, if the legal maneuvers hadn’t been in the hands of the barely-warm corpse of Rudy Giuliani, if a few state and federal judges had been as corrupt as Trump himself — and perhaps if governorships in Michigan,

Pennsylvania and Wisconsin had remained in Republican hands after 2018 — the United States might have truly faced an existential threat to the Constitutional institutions that have served its elites so well for more than two centuries.

The rickety state of U.S. democracy is as vulnerable to destruction from within as, it turns out, its government and corporate computer systems are to Russian hacking. If carried to its outer extremes, another Grand Theft Election scenario could conceivably break the country apart, not now but sometime down the road. Yes, it could happen here.

5. Yesterday’s violent debacle has shattered what remained of the Trump presidency, and probably (although one can never be certain) destroyed his own and his crime family’s future political perspectives. Rush Limbaugh actually puts it accurately: “If you want to have a life in Washington DC today, you have to denounce Trump now” (radio broadcast, January 7). You don’t have to be a Limbaugh fan to appreciate the hypocrisy of these sudden Republican conversions.

At long last, leading circles of the corporate ruling class weighed in as Twitter and Facebook suspended Trump’s access to his cult followers, the National Association of Manufacturers called for his removal by the 25th Amendment, financial industry leaders like CEO David Solomon of Goldman Sachs, Jamie Dimon and others obscenely enriched by Trump’s policies turned against him. He’s no longer useful to them.

Trump running in 2024 could destroy the Republican Party for good. That does not mean the end of what’s called Trumpism, even if it now has to go forward without Trump.

In this regard, the analysis by Samuel Farber published January 3 in *Jacobin*, “[Trumpism Will Endure](#)”, is highly recommended. Although writing before Trump’s self-implosion yesterday, Farber nails the critical point: “Perhaps the most useful way to understand Trumpism is as a right-wing response to the objective conditions of economic decay and a perceived moral decay.”

In this context, “perceived moral decay” centers around rightwing resentment that the standing and privileges that too many white males have assumed as given are now under challenge. This requires a deeper discussion than is possible here, but it gets to the heart of one reality of U.S. society and, in particular, the central problem confronting those of us on the socialist left: A large sector of the working class, among white workers in particular, has been recruited to authoritarian, rightwing racist politics.

It remains to be seen whether their loyalty can be transferred from the Trump cult to a new standard bearer. But that’s secondary to the fact that working class “Trumpism” will remain as a major obstacle to struggles to gain serious reforms that can be won and maintained.

To understand why and how that’s happened requires coming to grips with the second reality of our condition: the objective immensity of the crises that await Biden and the narrowly Democratic-controlled houses of Congress. The COVID catastrophe, medical system collapse and the mess of the vaccine rollouts; the tens of millions of working and middle-class families facing eviction, permanent unemployment, bankruptcy, ruin from debt and medical expenses; state and local governments hopelessly underwater; and overhanging it all, continuing climate change and environmental disasters made worse by four years of Trump.

The situation absolutely demands big measures: large-scale economic stimulus and relief, a mobilization of public health and possibly military resources to make vaccinations happen, a “warp speed” transition from the fossil fuel industry, a true Green New Deal and Medicare for All, and immediate closure of the obscene for-profit immigrant detention centers, among other things. What then is to be expected from those acclaimed “moderate” forces in both parties, as Democrats ponder how to use the power they’ve been given and those on the Republican side figure out whether to be “bipartisan” or obstructionist?

For the left and the social movements, all the more important to remain active and mobilized to fight for what we need, not for a few crumbs.

Celebrating Trump's self-destruction is certainly in order; a leftwing honeymoon for Biden most certainly is not.

8 January 2021

Source *Solidarity*.

World Faces Covid-19 “Vaccine Apartheid”

8 January 2021, by **Sharon Lerner**

But Argentina, South Africa, Brazil, and Turkey will have to be satisfied with Pfizer's gratitude, because (like [most countries in the world](#)) they won't be receiving enough of the vaccine to inoculate their populations, at least not anytime soon.

Meanwhile, the U.S. and Germany — along with Canada and the rest of the European Union — have contracted for enough doses of various Covid-19 vaccines to inoculate their populations several times over. [106] While the U.S. is struggling with the logistics of its vaccine rollout — fewer than [3 million people](#) have received the first dose so far — adequate supplies should eventually be available. [107] The U.S. pre-purchased 100 million doses of the Pfizer vaccine for \$1.95 billion in the summer (and reportedly passed on the opportunity to secure another 100 million doses). [108] Last week, the Department of Health and Human Services announced a deal to buy another 100 million doses of the vaccine by July 2021, and the government has the option to purchase an additional 400 million doses. [109] The U.S. has also purchased 200 million doses of the Moderna vaccine, which is also extremely effective against Covid-19. Those doses are due by the second quarter of 2021, and the government may buy up to 300 million more doses. And the U.S. has contracts for additional vaccine doses from Ology, Sanofi, Novavax, and Johnson & Johnson, whose candidates are in earlier stages of development.

Pharmaceutical companies and individual executives are already profiting handsomely from their medical breakthroughs. On the same

day that he sent his open letter, Bourla, whose net worth is estimated at more than \$26 million, sold more than \$5 million worth of his shares of Pfizer stock. [110] Pfizer has already made an estimated \$975 million from the vaccine this year and is expected to earn another \$19 billion in revenue from the vaccine in 2021, according to Morgan Stanley. Pfizer's profit margin on the vaccine is estimated at between 60 and 80 percent. [111] Moderna is projected to make more than \$10 billion from its vaccine next year. [112]

The European Union is facing heavy pressure to approve vaccines after Britain and the United States have already administered tens of thousands of shots while China and Russia have begun efforts with their own vaccines. The bloc intends to start its inoculations with the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine before the end of the year.

The estimated \$100 billion in sales to be made from a Covid-19 vaccine was clearly part of what attracted pharmaceutical companies to vaccine research. [113] For the participants in that research, the calculus is different. In developing countries, “you find people who don't have medical care and are desperate for medical attention and will grasp at the straws of medical research,” said Harriet Washington, a medical ethicist and author.

That desperation is only part of the reason that pharmaceutical companies do the majority of their research in less affluent countries, according to Washington, who pointed to a relative lack of oversight and lower operating costs as additional reasons that the

industry is drawn to those places. The Covid-19 vaccine research participants in South Africa, Argentina, Brazil, and Turkey “will work more cheaply than the people in the U.S. and Germany,” she said.

The ethical problem this creates — that people in developing countries have less access to medical breakthroughs despite shouldering a disproportionate share of the risk that enables their development — far predates the coronavirus pandemic. “There are inherent inequities that are repeated in every epidemic,” said Washington. “It's a consistent pattern; you'll see it as far back as you want to go.”

Whether they participate in drug research or not, people in low- and middle-income countries often lack access to lifesaving medical breakthroughs, which are sometimes priced out of their reach. Gilead, which holds the patent on the hepatitis C drug sofosbuvir, has provided a clear and tragic illustration of how deadly this dynamic can be. Only about 1 in 7 people who needed the company's lifesaving drug in Brazil had received it as of June 2019. In that country alone, thousands died of the treatable disease, [according](#) to the nonprofit group Make Medicines Affordable. Though many drugs eventually become available, access is often delayed for people in developing countries, as was the case for lifesaving HIV medications, which are still unavailable to some 15 million infected people around the world and arrived in some poorer countries more than a decade after they were used in wealthier ones.

“We see lags occur in almost every

intervention in the world whether it's a new drug or medical device," said Dr. Krishna Udayakumar, founding director of the Duke Global Health Innovation Center. "There's not as much money in products reaching markets in low- and middle-income countries." As a result, in much of the world, access to lifesaving developments often depends on funding from donors, "which is always less than you'd like," he said.

The deadly consequences of delayed access to the Covid-19 vaccine will be on display in the coming year. The number of people vaccinated worldwide in 2021 will depend partly on whether other potential vaccines candidates are successful and whether they're delivered as one dose or two. [114] But it's already clear that the majority of countries will not have enough, while rich countries are hoarding vaccine supplies. [115]

An international initiative to ensure equitable access to the vaccine, [called](#) the COVAX Advance Market Commitment and governed by the public-private health alliance Gavi, aims to provide participating countries with enough vaccines to inoculate up to 20 percent of their populations by the end of 2021. But even under the best-case scenario, this goal would leave the vast majority of the population unvaccinated — and is "subject to funding availability," as the group's [website](#) makes clear.

Some international health activists have become frustrated with Gavi. "On day one, when the first person was vaccinated in the U.K., we should have been seeing the equivalent in a developing country," said Kate Elder, senior vaccines policy adviser for Médecins Sans Frontières. "But we didn't. And we don't have any precision about when we can expect those doses in developing countries."

Elder pointed out that, despite its stated goal of providing equal access, the international vaccine distribution effort is hindered by the global power and wealth imbalance. "Gavi will never call out vaccine nationalism because its biggest donors — like the

U.K. government — are the most powerful members of their board," she said.

The World Bank is providing additional aid for the delivery of vaccines, but it is in the form of loans, which poor countries will need to repay. As a result of the delays, many people in low-income countries will likely not get the vaccine until 2023 or 2024, which will result in an unknown number of deaths.

"We're facing a global vaccine apartheid," said Zain Rizvi, law and policy researcher at Public Citizen, who predicted that the delay in vaccine access will prove "calamitous."

Public Citizen has [proposed](#) several ways that the U.S. could expand access to the vaccine, including building new production facilities and taking advantage of an [obscure statute](#) that allows the government to override companies' patents on inventions they fund. Meanwhile, Kenya, India, and South Africa put forward a measure at the World Trade Organization that would waive some intellectual property rights for coronavirus-related products, including vaccines. The proposal, which was supported by 99 countries, has yet to pass after being opposed by wealthy countries, including the U.S., EU members, Japan, the U.K., and Australia.

But the waiving of patents is only the first step in ensuring global access to vaccines. "Know-how is the bigger problem than patent rights in the shorter run," said James Love, who directs the nonprofit advocacy group Knowledge Ecology International. Love pointed to Moderna, the federally funded vaccine maker that has already [pledged](#) not to enforce the patent on its vaccine. "But you still can't go out and make their vaccine unless you know how they did it," said Love. "You need to force the people who have the know-how to share the know-how because it's a fucking pandemic."

While the U.S. government and the

companies it funded to make vaccines are already getting credit for ending the pandemic, Love points to a big hole in that success story: that taxpayers wound up paying for deals that limited global access.

"Some people are going to say this is a massive success because the innovation story is pretty good," said Love. "But the reality is the government took our money, gave it to the companies, and wrote terrible contracts so we ended up with very few rights over the inventions that we financed."

The problem was entirely avoidable, according to Love. "The government could have put mandatory sharing of know-how built into each of its contracts so the technology transfer would have started as soon as these vaccines were in clinical trials," he said. "That did not happen. And one of the consequences of these giveaways is that we've condemned developing countries to delayed access to vaccines."

The Trump administration has been particularly generous with the pharmaceutical industry, removing standard protections from some of their contracts, and has shunned international efforts to pool resources to fight the pandemic. [116] But it's not too late for the country to reverse course.

"President-elect Biden has the power to change that," said Public Citizen's Rizvi. "He can think bigger and share the vaccine recipe and help ramp up production and manufacturing capacity to further expand vaccine supply quickly."

The ethical dilemmas raised by conducting Covid-19 vaccine research in countries that may not have their own supply for years are fixable too, according to Washington. "The inequities are easy to address," she said. "You simply treat people in the developing world the same way you treat everyone else."

31 December 2020

Source [The Intercept](#).

New Challenges for African Americans

7 January 2021, by **Malik Miah**

Meaning of Trumpism

The election results exposed the depth of white identity “grievance/victimhood” politics. While Trump lost the popular vote by some seven million, he won over 73 million voters — the most ever except for Biden’s 80 million — including a large majority of both white men and women.

Republicans who follow Trump’s lead made gains in the Congress and state legislatures. Trumpism is more than Trump. It reflects strong white-nationalist sentiments in the white population and successful voter suppression focused against African Americans.

“I think it’s a dose of reality of the times that we are living in,” said Nicole Small, vice chair of the Detroit Charter Commission, who believes the Trump vote was a “blatant attempt at voter suppression.”

“I do not believe that Trump has created racism amongst people, but I do think he was the safety net and the vehicle for people to be more active in practicing their racism and their prejudiced beliefs publicly,” Small said.

Trump never saw his presidency as representing all Americans. Trumpism exacerbates what’s been true for centuries. The cult-like enthusiasm for whatever Trump says and does means that white racism is now more intense. What Biden Represents

Joe Biden acknowledges that his nomination and electoral victory required large numbers of Black votes in urban areas along with Latinos, Asian Americans and Indigenous people.

Since the November 3 presidential

election, almost each week a Black man is brutalized or murdered by police. It is not by accident. The ideology of policing is racist and in defense of the status quo (de facto white domination).

According to the Associated Press, “A prominent law enforcement training group is promoting a lengthy research document riddled with falsehoods and conspiracies that urges local police to treat Black Lives Matter activists as terrorists plotting a violent revolution.

“The document [is] distributed by the International Law Enforcement Educators and Trainers Association.... It alleges Black Lives Matter and antifa, an umbrella term for leftist militants, are ‘revolutionary movements whose aims are to overthrow the U.S. government’ and claims they are planning ‘extreme violence.’”

Biden, however, has not embraced the Black Lives Matter movement or any of its demands. To fundamentally change how Black and Brown communities are protected they have raised the demand “Defund the Police.”

Instead, Biden has proposed sitting down with so-called police union heads, police chiefs, elected officials and leaders of establishment civil rights groups to modestly improve policing. Black activists leading the multiracial racial justice demonstrations are not invited.

Kamala Harris, the first Black and South Asian woman vice president and a former California attorney general, endorses Biden’s vision of policing. It is in line with her own practices in the most populous state.

The first Black president, Barack Obama, has openly attacked the demand of Defund the Police, calling it a misguided slogan. For BLM activists,

it is not a slogan. It is a thought-out demand based on decades of experience dealing with occupying police forces in Black and brown communities.

Obama, whose record toward African Americans communities was right-of-center policies that did little, is Biden’s approach.

His appointment of “moderate” Black, Latino and women figures to his cabinet reflects the rise of a layer of well-off middle class and professional people into mainstream capitalist society. But these individuals do not represent the best interests of the working class, particularly its poorest.

Movements Respond to Crises

Various BLM groups said before the election that they would continue to respond to police terror with street protests and demands on city, state and federal officials, including Democrats, to enact radical changes. The key, they all say, is to force governmental and corporate powers to advance the interest of the African American community, and not rely on capitalist politicians who “look like us.”

The same applies to the health pandemic crisis facing the African American, Latinos, Asian American and Indigenous communities who are the worst hit by the coronavirus. Will Biden and Democrats make sure that these communities get the vaccine first, and will it be free to those without health insurance?

Biden is opposed to universal health care (Medicare for all). He does not explain how essential low-wage workers, including Latinos (many undocumented) working in agriculture (many are undocumented), will be

safely vaccinated and not targeted by immigration cops.

Biden says he will return the United States to the WHO (World Health Organization). But he has no a plan to make sure the entire world, especially “Global South” countries, are able to get low-cost vaccines. The big pharmaceutical companies are there for profits not health care.

The pandemic has exposed the inequalities of the health care system. Black and brown people have always received inferior health care compared to whites in general. Based on past and ongoing racial policies many African Americans don't trust the medical establishment.

Activists Push People's Action

African American activists and

commentators see the reason for the polarization: White-identity “grievance” politics convinces the poorest working-class whites to unite with billionaires against Blacks and nonwhites.

Blacks understand this. It as part of the blood and bone of American history. The race card is always played by white politicians and those in power to win the white racial group to oppose socio-economic progress.

Biden's concept of government is to make deals with conservatives even at the sacrifice of more liberal positions. His team will reflect pro-corporate Democrats who care more about working with mainstream Republicans than promoting progressive policy.

The New York Congresswoman from the Bronx, Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, has been the most outspoken against Biden's move to the center right. Her demands and those of other progressives are intended to pressure

Biden's team.

That's a flawed strategy — working inside the Democratic Party to bring social and economic change. It does not work.

What inspired a multiracial and working-class coalition against Trump, and by default for Biden, was the broad-based Black-led racial justice uprising. The movement against the police built an effective Rainbow Coalition to fight racism.

The answer to Trumpism, modern-day white supremacist politics, is to continue to mobilize for real change. The leaders of the Black Lives movement have all pledged to fight police violence and political corruption. Others including leaders of the women's, gay rights and unions must do the same.

Source: January-February 2021, [ATC 210](#).

Repeal the Farm Acts

6 January 2021, by **Radical Socialist**

Contrary to the numbers at the national level, where 86 percent of farmers are small and marginal, in Punjab, the number of small and marginal farmers, who own less than 2 hectares, is about 33 percent. However, the numbers are relatively closer to the national average in Haryana—67 percent. These two states were at the heart of the Green Revolution and experienced a flourishing agricultural economy from the 1970s onwards. In the early 90s, the Centre started taking back its support to farmers in the form of subsidies while agricultural productivity started declining and input costs started increasing. This growing crisis was further exacerbated by the entry of multinational and corporate agri-businesses. These factors had a detrimental impact on the emerging capitalist farmers who owned less

than 4 hectares. Increased costs for inputs and technology mired them in loan cycles, which culminated in a suicide wave that took the lives of nearly 20,000 farmers in the last two decades in Punjab alone. It is important to note that the number of farmer suicides in the country since 1995 is well over 300,000. If we add the number of landless working in the fields the figures will be much higher. This is a sign of a much deeper malaise and an all-engulfing crisis that has gripped the country since the implementation of neoliberal measures.

In the wake of the Green Revolution, a procurement regime was established, whose function was to procure the crops of wheat, rice and other food grains at the Minimum Support Price (MSP) set by the Centre. These food grains were made available to the

poor at a negligible price through Fair Price Shops but under pressure from free-market forces, the universal Public Distribution System (PDS) was seriously weakened. The Essential Commodity Act (amendment), which is one of the three Farm Laws, is one more step towards dismantling the procurement regime and PDS. Under this Act, the hoarding of essential commodities that can be stored such as food grains, has become legal, enabling the manipulation of food prices for the benefit of big agri-corporations while the other two Laws aim to eradicate MSP, and to promote contract farming by big agri-businesses--- all of which will enable them to make huge profits while also leading to the massive polarisation of landholdings.

The basic line of confrontation and struggle can be put very simply---it is

farmers control over their own lives and livelihood — versus corporate control over the agricultural sector ushered in by this government!

These three Laws by aiming to greatly undermine the regime of procurement and distribution in the name of promoting market freedom are an attack not only on the peasantry but also on all working people of India. Moreover, the Centre has put forward proposals for allowing corporates to set up their own banks, for privatising certain public sector utilities, and is pushing through Four Labour Codes whose purpose is precisely to casualise and contractualise and dismiss labour in the mining, manufacturing and services sectors by shifting more control and power to private business especially to big corporates. If the government succeeds in this current assault on farmers they will be much more strengthened in their subsequent attempt to go after urban and semi-urban workers. This is why the need, today and tomorrow, is to forge a strong and enduring worker-peasant unity!

To understand the present protests, we have to look beyond the agrarian crises into the current rural distress in the states of Punjab and Haryana. Unemployment in the state of Punjab is 33.6 percent and 35.7 percent in Haryana—higher than national levels. Furthermore, the de-peasantisation of small and marginal farmers in the last two decades has worsened the crisis. From the 1990s onwards, the rising costs of inputs and technology has made farming unviable for the small and marginal farmers and pushed a large section of them out of agriculture. Farmers who own from 2 hectares to 4 hectares barely make enough to pay for their costs, owing to the assured price in the form of MSP. In fact, it is precisely this combination

of serious unemployment, de-peasantisation and unviability of cultivation for the majority of farmers that lies at the heart of this unrest.

What makes these protest different from other protests against the Modi regime is the dominant involvement of Left forces. A great many of these forces belong to the Marxist-Leninist tradition of the Indian Left. While this fact opens possibilities unseen in preceding protests, the ideological sectarianism of these forces also puts constraints on the potential of the present unrest.

The issue of securing a proper MSP for agricultural produce has garnered support of peasants from Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. The Left should make all efforts to transform these protests into wider peoples struggles against the present authoritarian regime and to give it an anti-capitalist disposition. To broaden and deepen these protests, efforts should be made to include the demands of various sections of working people. Incorporation of demands for employment generation and food security can reinforce the appeal and strength of this movement among the masses across different regions. Pursuing these demands would not only help the movement to gain support among the working people, but it will also push the representatives of the sections of the rich peasantry to the margins. There is an urgent need to build solidarities with the working-class struggles going elsewhere.

Left populism may not be the end objective of Left politics, but it can be an ushering of anti-capitalist politics. Around the world, the Left has seen the resurrection in one or other form of Left populism—US, Britain, Spain and Greece are some of the examples.

Many of these experiments have faced defeats, but one thing is certain—that they have succeeded in gaining the support of working-class people and could be used as a springboard for furthering working-class politics. The present movement, with the involvement of Left forces, has the potential to be used as the departure point for such class politics. The left needs to recognize this possibility and work together towards this goal.

The biggest limitation the dominant Left forces have is their sectarian attitude towards electoral politics. For them, electoral politics is the point which differentiates the 'revolutionary' M-L forces from the 'revisionist' mainstream Left parties. However, there is an urgent need to give this rising ferment an electoral form to not only counter the forces of Hindutva but also to mobilize the masses behind the anti-neoliberal agendas. On the other hand, the role played by the mainstream Left parties to support and strengthen present unrest is insufficient. Even in the states and districts where they have a significant presence, much more mobilization around the issue of repealing the Farm Laws is required.

This is not a peasant uprising to capture state power, as professed by Maoist organisations, nor is this a movement of only rich peasants as claimed by the adherents of a stage-ist Socialist Revolution. This is a movement where the majority of people are fighting for their immediate and longer term survival. The Left should not squander this opportunity to form a redoubtable opposition to Hindutva and to come out of their time-worn ideological cocoons.

20 December 2020

Source *Radical Socialist*.

Rising Up Against Corruption

5 January 2021, by **Andrea Palacios**

Corruption has tainted the political elite for years. Elected president in 2016, Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, was forced to resign two years later over his failure to disclose ties to the corrupt Brazilian construction company, Odebrecht. Martín Vizcarra replaced him and attempted to carry out reforms. He tried to get rid of the prosecutorial immunity granted to lawmakers, alter how judges are chosen and even dissolved Congress in 2019. Popular for his reform plans, he had no party backing him in Congress, which for its part blocked his moves and finally, on November 9 impeached him based on an accusation of corruption when he was a provincial governor years ago.

The following day Congress installed their congressional leader, Manuel Merino. As a member of the center-right Popular Action Party, he immediately eliminated student benefits. This one-two governmental punch led students to pour spontaneously into the streets. The police reacted to these massive demonstrations with force. But police brutality backfired and brought Merino to resign in less than a week. He was replaced by interim president Francisco Sagasti, an economist who has worked for the World Bank.

Sagasti is regarded as a consensus figure who can take the country to April 2021 elections. As founder of the centrist Partido Morado (Purple Party), a party that did not vote for Vizcarra's impeachment, he does have a party in Congress to back him. As president he must face the aftermath of the police actions, deal with the highest per capita COVID-19 mortality rate in Latin America along with a contracting economy. That economy is based on exports including copper, gold, zinc, textiles, chemicals, and fish meal. It has signed many trade pacts, most recently with China.

Joe Stapleton interviewed Andrea Palacios in North Carolina to discuss the background of Peruvian politics and implications of this struggle for the country's future.

Against the Current: Could you provide a basic rundown of what touched off what's going on in Peru?

Andrea Palacios: On November 9, 2020 President Martín Vizcarra was forced out by the Peruvian Congress, a body that's disliked throughout the country for their corruption. They impeached him under a charge of "immoral incapacity." Vizcarra is facing corruption investigations that have not yet been proven, but it is still an open investigation.

Congress replaced him with Manuel Merino the following day. This was the last straw pushing people to the streets in massive numbers.

Many are saying "We haven't seen these protest numbers since the fall of the dictatorship in 2000."

It's a big deal, but the protests are not necessarily about the impeachment of Vizcarra, who has been accused of corruption. It is more about generalized corruption and lack of democracy.

ATC: He's not perfect?

AP: Right. Regardless, I think what guided people to the streets was a corrupted Congress that has been a reality for many, many years. It's a Congress that's protected by the Constitution for any crime they can commit. People are saying that Congress made this decision, which destabilized the country at this moment just because they wanted to protect themselves.

The Constitution that was written in 1993, during the dictatorship of Alberto Fujimori, gives complete immunity to congresspeople. Sixty-three of whom (out of 120) still have open investigations, whether for corruption or violence against women, and for which they cannot be tried or judged.

Vizcarra was generally popular because he tried to provide the judiciary with a little bit more power to bring the cases to court. Congress roared, "Hell no, obviously that's what protects us," so they took him down and replaced him with Merino.

This is happening five months before April 2021 elections. Merino is the third president in the last four years, so the country has gone through a lot of changes. That's partly why I say this was the last straw. People are tired of Congress members being under investigation but who cannot be legally tried because the Constitution protects them.

Peru is one of the countries that has been the hardest hit with the pandemic in all Latin America. The fact that Congress would put the country through this kind of instability in the middle of a pandemic meant people saw their self-motivated action as a coup. From the beginning of the demonstrations, it became emblematic to see spray-painted posters on the street, "People against the coup."

ATC: The police murder of two young people, Jack Brian Pintado Sánchez and Jordan Inti Sotelo Camargo, inflamed the protests after they started. Can you tell me a little about them and why that was so galvanizing?

AP: From the first day the protests were predominantly led by young people, very loosely organized mostly through social media. And from the beginning it was clear that the police were ready to attack, and lobbying tear gas canisters.

When young people saw that the police were attacking in this way, they organized themselves, talking through WhatsApp and other channels and set up brigadas del desactivación ("brigades of deactivation of gas bombs" or "brigades to deactivate bombs.")

They organized themselves, saying, "What do we need? Traffic cones,

carbonated water, etc.” and with those things that they would find in their households they started organizing.

There were different brigades. If demonstrators got teargassed, “brigades to clean your face” would run and help. There were nurses, doctors, or student doctors -- a lot of them students actually -- forming first-aid brigades to help the wounded.

Now these brigades are very highly regarded. The newspapers reported their work because they were such a huge part of the protests.

On Saturday, the sixth day of protests, the police violence escalated. They started shooting directly at people, dropping bombs from helicopters, barricading protesters in specific areas, dropping tear gas on them and making sure they couldn't get out.

These things were not reported on Peru's mainstream media right way, but from the beginning I was able to watch, through different friends, Instagram live. I was saying, “Oh my god yes, the helicopters are right there, oh my god, they're being gassed.” This was happening at 1AM.

Murder and Memory

Through Instagram live we could see the helicopters dropping along with videos of protesters talking while they were being shot at. It was terrible, it was very violent. This increased police attack took the lives of two young men. One was 24 years old, Inti Sotelo Carmago, and Jack Brian Pintado was 22. The autopsies revealed that both young men had been shot multiple times. Right to this day the police maintain it was not their shots but must have come from protesters. They say “We did not use any violence,” even though there are videos showing their violence.

The day these two young people were assassinated over 100 people were wounded and 42 people disappeared. The disappeared were found days later and recounted how the police kidnapped and mistreated them.

The two young men who died have

become the face of the movement. People have built altars throughout the city in their names and with their pictures. Written alongside are the words “We will not forget” and “This is the work of memory.”

The phrase that's used a lot is memory. I think this alludes to the years of the dictatorship when people were unjustly killed, including a lot of students. It seemed that the country had forgotten. There was so much talk about reconciliation: “Let's forget about ...” and not remember.

These two have become the faces of the protests still happening now. We are reclaiming our history, our memory.

ATC: From what you're hearing from people you are in contact with in Peru, how would you describe the atmosphere of these protests?

AP: Both by what I've been able to watch on social media and hearing from family members there, it's very much youth-led, and much like a festival or a party. Especially at the beginning of the protests, line of drummers would lead off. They would start and then everybody began to dance in the streets. It was a big party.

My cousin told me that the Saturday when that police attack happened down by the Palace of Justice, “It was just music and people were dancing,” and there were the sounds of the bomberellas (firecrackers), they're everywhere, which is also very Peruvian because Peru's very into soccer and fireworks are always going off when soccer is happening.

It's those sounds that you encounter with big festivities, where a bunch of people go out into the streets and dance. My cousin was saying “It was just a party and we were dancing and then the police started shooting.” That's the description that I get of the atmosphere, a lot of young people just having fun while protesting, having fun dancing, and then being attacked by the police.

ATC: Describe the work your group is doing.

AP: What's been really cool to watch here in the diaspora is that the energy of the protests has affected Peruvians everywhere — to gather and do something collectively.

I think many of us started these conversations feeling we were too far away from home to actually do something. We've always felt like, “What do we do? I'm over here.”

Our collective started very organically. I was invited to it by a Peruvian friend whom I barely knew, but this has strengthened our connection. We started as Peruvians knowing each other and inviting others. It started as a WhatsApp group, then we said, “Hey let's meet over Zoom, let's form a collective.”

We call ourselves the PUMAS collective. We just selected the name two weeks ago. We are now focused on getting funds to the protesters we are directly connected with. We have been thinking about money for things that were needed, like gas masks and materials for all the brigades, especially the first-aid brigades.

The protests continue, but they've dwindled. Since one of the people in our collective is a therapist, tonight's meeting is discussing the idea of group therapy sessions for the activist protesters and those who have been watching these horrific things. There might be a desire to sit down together and talk through it.

Also, we're forming an Instagram platform in English to educate people about what's happening in Peru. We've noticed it's hard to talk to friends about these events because we don't have resources in English.

It's partly because Peru is a small country of 32 million and the diaspora here is small. We want to have a platform in English that would explain the political situation and the demands of the protests as they continue — especially as the election happens next year — as well as sharing things about our country. We've been discussing a series on Peruvian cumbias, dances, and joys, and things about our culture.

Inspiration from Chile, Bolivia

ATC: Do you feel that some of the other movements in Latin America over the past few months have had any effect on what's going on in Peru?

AP: I saw it from here — the brigades that were organizing themselves were taking cues from those that were organized in Chile when they had big protests last year. They were sharing and watching videos from Chile on how to deactivate bombs.

Even the demands have been shaped by theirs. Chile just voted to change their constitution, which also comes from a dictatorship — the Pinochet dictatorship. Bolivia held their Constitutional Assembly and adopted a new Constitution as well. So, the calls for a new constitution, or the call for a constitutional assembly, definitely follow the steps of Bolivia and Chile. Peru can imagine and call for this because Bolivia has done it and Chile is on the way to doing it.

ATC: What do the protesters want?

AP: It varies. Parents of the people who were wounded or disappeared formed a collective, too. They held a press conference, saying “We want the government or the police to be held accountable for what they’ve done.”

That’s a big one. People are asking, “Who’s guilty for this?” The police are claiming “We didn’t shoot anyone,” and time is passing. Family members of the murdered have publicly asked, “If anyone has a video of my son being killed by police, we need it because they will not believe us.”

The police are threatening to close the case while people are demanding justice.

There’s a big call for a new constitutional assembly, as well. Some people say, “Let’s reform the constitution.” Others say, “This constitution cannot be reformed because it was written under the dictatorship of Fujimori and only benefits the economic interests of the foreign and domestic corporations. We

need to change it altogether.”

In the Bolivia they got rid of the old Congress altogether and elected new people. They made a point to include people of Indigenous descent and people from Indigenous nations who could represent themselves. That’s one of the big issues Indigenous people participating in these protests are raising.

Since the onset of what we call the Peruvian Republic, constitutions have never been written for us, especially as we think about Afro-Peruvians or people of Indigenous descent. It was a constitution for Peruvian elites. They wrote it for themselves and left others to face violence.

So, we need a new constitution that would achieve the autonomy of the many Indigenous nations, as Bolivia did.

ATC: How have the class and ethnic and national differences played out in the protests?

AP: It seems to me that the majority of young people in the streets are unified. We want a new constitution, we’re tired of this Congress — it’s corrupt, we can’t reform it, let’s get rid of it.

I think the wrestling is much more with the liberal groups that aren’t necessarily out in the streets, and with established political parties. Even the latest president, Francisco Sagasti, says we don’t need to get rid of the constitution — let’s just reform it, or change one thing or another.

Obviously, Sagasti is super pro-corporations. It wouldn’t make sense for him to ask for anything else.

Roots of Uprising

ATC: What was it that laid the groundwork for these mass uprisings? They didn’t come out of nowhere, and they weren’t totally spontaneous.

AP: In the collective here, we often say, we are gathering because we understand the conditions that took these young people out to the streets are the same ones that took us out of

our country.

Many of us emigrated from our country because of the kind of corruption that is happening still, and because of the dictatorship of the 1990s or before.

Living in the United States, I’ve read in the newspapers that Peru is skyrocketing economically. It is a model for other countries. Supposedly all these neoliberal reforms have made it an example: “Everybody be like Peru!”

I’ve always been skeptical. Who is benefiting? My family is still struggling; a lot of people are struggling. Especially since the protests have been youth-led and student-led, I think a lot of the foundational issues here are about the impossibility of students getting a job and the impossibility of getting an education.

One of the young protesters who was murdered had to quit his studies because he could not afford to continue. Poverty is a common reality. Neoliberal reforms have opened the country to foreign corporations. The economic and environmental devastation has created huge problems.

In the Andes and the Amazon, communities are being exposed to the pollution of our water, our land, our air. The mass uprising is a combination of a lot of things.

ATC: What role, if any, do the political parties have in the protests?

AP: Here in the USA the Republicans and Democrats are established political parties. In Peru, a lot of times elections are more about personalities and candidates rather than parties.

But the party of former president Manuel Merino was not well regarded. You have more conservative parties that are very pro-police. You have the Partido Morado, which is more liberal, like the Democrats. They don’t want to take things too far. Then you have the Communist Party of Peru, which has never received a lot of votes, but had a voice in the protests.

ATC: What should the U.S. Left know about what's going on in Peru?

AP: It's important to be aware that there is a revolution happening in Peru, a country that doesn't often get the media attention because of how small it is, but that has been ravaged by colonialism and even afterward by the elites in Peru for years and years.

And today we have foreign corporations, particularly American and Canadian.

At the same time, Peruvians have fought beautifully against all this, and in many different ways. I think in the United States we forget about the global context. In our conversations about the possibilities of building a

better life there is little about the global struggle.

As a Peruvian living here — and initially not connected to what is happening in Peru — I understand how necessary it is to pay attention to the global struggle for human dignity.

Source: January-February 2021, ATC 210.

Less flag waving, more rights

4 January 2021, by **Angela Aguilera, Miguel Urbán Crespo**

An agreement of more than a thousand pages that tries to lock down to the last detail of the future relations between the island and the continent, but which explicitly excludes Gibraltar at the expense of an agreement between the Spanish and British governments. [117] An agreement that must be closed before 1 January, 2021 or we will witness a hard Brexit on the rock that fundamentally affects the Campo de Gibraltar. [118] Despite the fact that this situation is going practically unnoticed by the public, it could have very negative effects for thousands of Andalusians, as 25% of the region's GDP depends in one way or another on Gibraltar.

In the end, if there is no agreement, Andalusia may be one of the territories most affected by Brexit. A situation very symptomatic of the institutional neglect to which Campo de Gibraltar, one of the most depressed regions of Spain and the EU, has historically been subjected and which has traditionally seen its problems covered with a flag. There are data that speak for themselves, La Línea and Algeciras are among the five cities in the Spanish state with more than 20,000 inhabitants with the lowest life expectancy according to the urban indicators of the European Urban Audit project. In addition, La Línea is the city with the second highest unemployment rate in the

country and is among the municipalities with the lowest average annual net income per inhabitant. The metropolitan area of Algeciras is also among those with the lowest income. Likewise, Campo de Gibraltar has an unemployment rate of more than 29 percent which translates into some 40,000 unemployed people. For all these reasons we have demanded in all institutions from the autonomous community to the state and even European level, that both the EU and the Spanish government must address a specific aid plan that ensures not only that Brexit does not suppose a new weight on the inhabitants of Campo de Gibraltar, but rather that it sets in motion a change in the production model so that Campo de Gibraltar has a future.

We fear greatly that we will have to face a hard Brexit without being prepared. The central government with interior minister Marlaska at the head does not see beyond its anti-drug policy and has not fulfilled a single commitment of the 900 million euros allocated for a special plan in the region. While the government of the Junta de Andalucía has not lagged behind in its unfulfilled promises, beyond the cheap propaganda of the 112 measures, the reality is that Campo de Gibraltar has not received more than a pitiful 4 million euros to face the consequences of Brexit. This

gives us an idea of the inability of the Andalusian right to take seriously the structural problems that the region suffers.

Another major issue to be resolved is the situation of cross-border workers. At the end of 2019 there were 14,500 cross-border workers in Gibraltar, of whom 11,000 reside in La Línea de la Concepción. Although certainly the cross-border workers affected by the Withdrawal Agreement will be able, beyond 31 December, 2020, to continue temporarily working in Gibraltar with the same community rights that they currently enjoy. It is essential to reiterate that rights cannot be transitory or have an expiration date. However, both the Gibraltarians who find work in Gibraltar and the Gibraltarians who work in Spain will presumably see these rights diminished. Of those who do not have any contract, the majority of women working in domestic service or care will undoubtedly be the most affected, since they will not appear in any agreement or exist in official discourse.

If an agreement between Spain and the United Kingdom on Gibraltar is not reached and the border is classified as an External Border, any disagreement between Spain and the United Kingdom may mean tightening the conditions for crossing the border, returning to the unfortunate spectacle

of endless queues, with the victims and hostages of this situation being the thousands of cross-border workers. Those same workers who continue without the Spanish government recognizing them or resolving the issue of their future pensions. Workers who have paid contributions for more than thirty-five years in Gibraltar will only be entitled to a pension of just over 300 euros that is granted by Gibraltarian law. Once retired, they have to request non-contributory pensions in Spain and still do not attain a decent pension. For all these reasons, it is

essential that the Spanish government promote and include in any agreement a Cross-Border Worker Statute that ensures their employment and social rights.

Furthermore, any agreement must listen to and take into account the municipalities and inhabitants who suffer the consequences of the decisions made in Madrid and London. Gibraltar, La Línea de la Concepción and Campo de Gibraltar must be listened to and considered because they are the true protagonists and

those who suffer these decisions most harshly. The coexistence of these peoples should be a priority for the negotiators and not an “extra” in the negotiation. The Gibraltar negotiation cannot once again be the war of flags to which we are accustomed; the rights of cross-border workers should be at the centre of the debate, as well as aid for particularly affected populations such as those in Campo de Gibraltar, aside from all the patriotic fireworks, flags and current accounts in tax havens.

31 December 2020

State Racism, Islamophobia & Religious Fundamentalism

3 January 2021, by Joseph Daher

In recent weeks, France has seen an unprecedented deepening of the Islamophobic and authoritarian policies of the ruling classes, through the government of President Macron. This orientation comes at the height of the socio-economic crisis, following the murder of teacher Samuel Paty and the Nice attack, perpetrated by people claiming to hail from a jihadist ideology, which carries a fundamentally reactionary social project. [119]

Islamophobia and State Racism

Assaults and violence against Muslim populations and their places of prayer have increased. At the same time, Macron's government is threatening to ban and dissolve more than 50 Muslim associations, such as the Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF) [120], whose role is to provide assistance to victims of Islamophobia. Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin has already announced the dissolution of the humanitarian association BarakaCity, while the Pantin Mosque has been closed. [121]

Not to mention the expansion of the criminalization of minors for “apologizing for terrorism, complicity and death threats.”

To a lesser extent, left-wing organizations and activists have been targeted: tags “collabos” on the headquarters of the French Communist Party, violent media campaigns against deputies of the party “France Insoumise” as well as against committed journalists, death threats against political and trade union activists Etc.

The French government's responsibility for this explosion of racist violence and hatred is indisputable. Gérald Darmanin, for example, did not hesitate to establish a continuity between “halal rays” and “separatism,” while the Minister of National Education, Jean-Michel Blanquer, declared that “Islamofundamentalism” has gangrened the university, like the ranks of France Insoumise, and was wreaking “havoc.” Blanquer ended up asserting that “these people promote an ideology that then, from afar, it leads to the worst.” The message is clear: these organizations and personalities are accused of

complicity in the attacks committed in recent weeks.

The policies of the French government legitimize and trivialize the discourses and theses of far-right organizations. It thus encourages violence through targeting Muslim populations and symbols.

Islamophobia is not a new phenomenon in France, far from it, since it has its source in its colonial and historical imperialist policies. However, Islamophobia has intensified in Western countries since the September 11 attacks by Al Qaeda.

This latest Islamophobic offensive is taking place at a time when the Macron government is facing a number of political challenges and difficulties: against a background of the health crisis and social discontent since the yellow vest movement. It is interesting to note that Macron had not initially made Islamophobia a strong orientation of his presidency. During his campaign, he presented himself as a young cosmopolitan opponent of Marine Le Pen's far right, criticized former Prime Minister Manuel Valls' obsession with Islam

and called colonialism a “crime against humanity.”

Islamophobia has a dual purpose for the French ruling classes, which allows it both to divide workers — making their struggles for social rights more difficult — and promotes the gathering of the white majority around a so-called “French Republic” without class. This mythical “Republic” is described as the best protector and defender of the right to freedom of expression, women’s rights, public order, “secularism,” etc.

In this context, it is essential for the French government to break all popular and anti-racist initiatives as it deepens its neoliberal and austerity policies. One example is the work of undermining the large demonstration of 10 November 2019 against Islamophobia and racism.

Religious Fundamentalism and Jihadism

While denouncing the authoritarian and racist offensive of the French government, we must also oppose the jihadist and Islamic fundamentalist movements. From this perspective, it should be remembered that religious fundamentalism is an international phenomenon, which is not unique to the Middle East or to predominantly Muslim societies. Similarly, a clear distinction must be made between the Islamic religion and fundamentalist groups.

Islamic fundamentalism is the product of the specific political and economic conditions and developments in the Middle East, where imperialist powers have had an essential and continuous impact on states and the political economy.

The United States used its strategic partnerships with Iran (until the overthrow of the Shah in 1979), Israel and Saudi Arabia to dominate the region. They supported them to deal with Arab nationalist regimes like Nasser’s Egypt, communist and leftist movements, and various popular struggles that generally claimed

greater sovereignty, more social justice and independence from imperial domination. In this context, Saudi Arabia has promoted and financed various Sunni Islamic fundamentalist movements, in particular the Muslim Brotherhood, to counter nationalists and the left.

The crisis of Arab nationalist regimes has opened up the political space for the development of fundamentalist movements. These regimes abandoned their previous radical and anti-imperialist social policies for two reasons. First, they suffered a crushing defeat by Israel in 1967. Then their methods of developing state capitalism began to stagnate. As a result, they opted for a rapprochement with Western countries and their Gulf allies. They adopted neoliberalism, putting an end to many social reforms that had earned them popularity among the working and peasant sectors. The regimes also backfired on the Palestinian national movement in seeking compromises with Israel. At the same time, all Arab nationalist regimes and others, such as Tunisia, voluntarily supported Islamic fundamentalist movements at one time or allowed their development against leftist and nationalist groups.

The overthrow of the Shah’s regime during the Iranian revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979 stimulated Shiite Islamic fundamentalist movements in the region.

Also in 1979, to combat the invasion of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, the United States, with the help of its allies in the region, injected billions of dollars into the training and arming of fundamentalist groups. U.S. imperialism thus contributed greatly to the creation of the Al Qaeda movement, the most extremist wing of Islamic fundamentalism at the time, which would later turn against Washington.

Inter-fundamentalist

Competition

The last significant development that fueled the rise of fundamentalism was the growing political rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Each state has used its own denominational fundamentalism to achieve its counter-revolutionary goals.

Organizations such as the so-called Islamic State (IS), Al Qaeda, the various branches of the Muslim Brotherhood and Hezbollah differ in their formation, development, composition and strategy. Gradualists such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Hezbollah in Lebanon participate in elections and existing state institutions. On the other hand, jihadists such as Al Qaeda and IS view these institutions as un-Islamic and instead turn to guerrilla or terrorist tactics in the hope of a possible seizure of the state. Among the jihadists, there are also debates and divisions over tactics and strategies to achieve their goal of an Islamic state. In various historical contexts and periods, the various fundamentalist currents have sometimes collaborated and at other times have been in competition and even clashed.

Nevertheless, they defend a common political project, despite significant differences. All variants of Islamic fundamentalism share the goal of establishing “a Sharia-based Islamic state” that preserves the existing capitalist order. Islamic fundamentalist movements, such as Hezbollah and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, have promoted neoliberal policies by supporting measures such as privatization, market liberalization and openness to foreign capital, while denouncing and attacking social movements below, particularly trade union movements.

Therefore, the task of the left is to fight unambiguously the capitalist system and the oppressions that constitute it. In this way it will be possible to fight politically and cut the grass under the feet of ultra-reactionary forces and reveal them as insignificant. We must work to unify the working classes in all their diversity.

An illusion of election

2 January 2021, by **Patrick Guillaudat**

Within this right, the most radical and violent wing, led by Juan Guaido and Leopoldo Lopez, gained the upper hand to the point that Juan Guaido appointed himself as president of the Republic on 23 January, 2019 during a meeting in Caracas. The imperialist countries, USA, France and so on, hastened to recognize him as "legitimate president".

This conjunction between the hardening of the regime and the extreme right-wing opposition was marked by periods of violent anti-Maduro protests, as in 2014 and 2017.

But the effects of the economic crisis, the combined result of a catastrophic economic policy and the sanctions imposed by the US since 2015, have become the main concern of the population. With nearly 80% of people living in poverty, a minimum wage which fell to a 20th of its previous value between 2013 and 2019 and a dizzying drop in GDP since 2015, the Venezuelan population is experiencing hunger and misery. All this with inflation out of control, going from 274% in 2016 to 130,060% in 2018 then falling to 7,374% in 2019. Added to this is COVID, which is hitting the population as US sanctions ban the country from importing medical equipment.

No wonder the opposition mobilisations against the regime have stopped. This has had have two consequences. The first is the attempt by part of the opposition to come to terms with the regime. This roughly corresponds to the two historical parties of the Venezuelan bourgeoisie, *Acción Democrática* (Democratic Action - AD) and the *Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente* (Independent Electoral Political Organization Committee - COPEI), but also partially *Primero*

Justicia, led by the 2013 presidential candidate, Henrique Capriles.

The preparation of the elections

One event allowed Maduro to divide the opposition, the attempted landing of mercenaries on 3 May, 2020 in Macuto. On that day, several boats landed with the goal of overthrowing Maduro and were immediately arrested by the Venezuelan army. The US press discovered that this operation was carried out by Silvercorp, a US security company, and that the contract was signed by Juan Guaido's immediate entourage.

This was the perfect opportunity for a part of the right to negotiate with the authorities in order to return to the electoral game, deeming the attempt to overthrow the government to be a failure. Maduro played a double game: trying to negotiate with part of the opposition and at the same time subduing it by bringing in the Supreme Court of Justice. Within weeks, the elected leaderships of AD, COPEI, *Primero Justicia*, *Volundad Popular*, and several left-wing parties such as the PPT (*Patria Para Todos*) and *Tupamaro* were dissolved and replaced by "accommodating" leaderships.

In response, all right-wing parties called for a boycott of the elections. The Episcopal Conference condemned this call and after secret negotiations between Capriles and the government, Capriles announced his participation in the electoral process. It took a European Union "intervention mission" to get Capriles to change position again and join the "hawk" camp led by Guaido.

But the crisis on the right is deep and many leaders of its parties decided to join in the electoral process. To curb this, the US Treasury Department decided to sanction several opposition figures in Maduro who said they wanted to participate in the elections, a message relayed by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on 22 September, 2020.

Despite this, some 30 national parties and more than 50 regional organizations registered for the 6 December elections. These organizations were stripped of their elected leadership. The voters had choice mainly between four major coalitions, the GPP, the Democratic Alliance (grouping a part of the "historic" right), *Venezuela Unido* (right) and a left coalition, *Alternativa Popular Revolucionaria* (Popular Revolutionary Alternative, mainly the PCV [Communist Party of Venezuela], the PPT and *Tupamaro*).

In order to prove that the ballot was not tainted with fraud, the Venezuelan government asked the European Union to send observers to ensure that the polls ran smoothly, which was refused. Despite this, some personalities responded positively to this call, such as José Luis Zapatero, former Spanish Prime Minister, alongside two hundred other personalities.

In order to counter the electoral process, the faction of the right calling for a boycott decides to launch a national consultation from 7-12 December, either by internet or physically. It was therefore in a context marked by violent social crisis affecting the vast majority of the population and a political crisis with confusion on the right that these elections to the National Assembly took place.

The independent left

Contrary to what might be thought, the Venezuelan left is not reduced to Maduro's *Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela* (United Socialist Party of Venezuela - PSUV), nor the GPP which brings together the majority party and a few subordinate groups. There is a left, made up often of former PSUV members. This is the case of former ministers like Jorge Giordani, former Minister of Planning, Hector Navarro, former Minister of Education, Gustavo Marquez, former Minister of Industry and Trade, Ana Elisa Osorio, former Minister of 'Environment and so on. There is also a network of activists and intellectuals grouped together in different associations, such as the *Plataforma Ciudadana de Defensa de la Constitución* set up to denounce the creation of the ANC or the *Plataforma contra el Arco Minero del Orinoco* (a special economic zone with an area equivalent to that of Portugal, where tax, social, environmental and indigenous peoples' rights are abolished to facilitate the exploitation of resources by national and foreign companies). In this informal group we also find animators from the *aporrea* news site as well as the *Marea Socialista* organization, which called for a spoiled vote in the 6 December elections.

Then we have the APR. Founded on 11 August, 2020, it has published a programmatic press release which explains its areas of demand. First, the fight against imperialist aggression and corruption, then the fight for decent living and working conditions, and finally, a commitment to radicalize popular and revolutionary democracy, with the aim of creating a socialist society. This coalition insists on the social mobilization of workers, peasants and popular bases. The significant difference between the APR and *Marea Socialista* is mainly due to the fact that in the statements of the APR there is a criticism of the regime limited to the sole call to fight corruption.

The third actor of this independent left is the trade unionists and workers who lead struggles in public or private

companies. Despite the violence of the economic crisis, many social conflicts are taking place throughout the country, such as the struggles of oil workers in Zulia state, those in health, electricity, the shipping company PDV-Marine, CANTV, Ferrominera and so on. All denounce the deterioration of their living conditions but also the repression of trade unions, too often the only government response, punctuated by arbitrary detentions, invasion of union premises and severe sentences.

This left, beyond its differences, is invisible to the apostles of *Chavismo* in Europe whose reading of Venezuela is limited to a struggle between two actors: Maduro and the USA. Exit the real people who fight every day for their survival and dream of a society free from both the bourgeoisie represented by the right and the Bolibourgeoisie in power. This misguided prism is found in particular in the curious appeal for the European Union to recognize the results of the 6 December elections. It is signed by international figures, such as former Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa (who criminalized and assimilated to terrorism the actions carried out by trade unions and peasant and indigenous organizations, even calling for the dissolution of the teachers' union) or France's Jean-Luc Mélenchon. The latter recalls the "plethora of political proposals", forgetting that the Venezuelan regime has forcibly replaced the leadership of the parties on the right and several on the left. What would Mélenchon have said if the French government decided to dissolve the leadership of his party, *France Insoumise*, and forbade him to be a candidate so that his party was allowed to participate in elections?

The results of the elections

In the absence of the main opposition leaders and given the groupuscule nature of the right-wing parties authorized to participate in the poll, the main interest of the result was to verify popular support for the electoral process, knowing that it took place in the particular conditions of the renewed COVID-19 epidemic, and

in the midst of a social and food crisis. Maduro's bet was that these restructured right-wing parties would attract enough voters to make the election credible.

In this context, the right-wing intelligently decided to hold its "popular consultation" after 6 December, the organization of which is open to fraud. There are two solutions for the right. Either it will record a result greater than the number of voters for the election of deputies and can claim the illegitimacy of parliamentary elections. Or their score will be below the turnout and they will cry fraud. In both cases, they win on the international scene.

In support, members of Congress for the US Democratic and Republican parties did not wait for the results to denounce the "electoral fraud" of Maduro's electoral, following identical denunciations by the European Union and the OAS (Organization of American States).

On the morning of 7 December, the results were a cold shower for Maduro. Indira Alfonso, president of the National Electoral Council, said in a first statement that the turnout was only about 31%, against 74% in the previous legislative elections in 2015.

Despite the mobilizations of supporters of the PSUV in the last days of the campaign, with meetings in all the cities, the government's hope of exceeding 50% participation had not been achieved.

By way of comparison, in 2015, the GPP totalled 5.625 million votes for 40.9% of the votes. In 2020, it barely scored 4.3 million voters, or 68.4% of the vote, 21% of the electorate. The right wing allowed to run for office represented around 18% of voters with 1.1 million votes, up from 56.2% in 2015. This shows that the call for a boycott has been widely heard among the ranks of right-wing voters. As for the APR, it totalled less than 200,000 votes, or 2.7% of voters.

Of the 277 parliamentarians making up the National Assembly, the GPP is expected to secure a comfortable majority with more than 250 seats,

due to a particularly complex ballot that favours the leading party. Beyond the health and social obstacles that explain the low participation, there is also a political explanation. In recent years, the government has experienced difficulties in mobilizing and even though numerous meetings have been held across the country to support the GPP candidates, we are far from the magnitude of those which punctuated Chávez's last campaign in 2012. .

This weakness in the mobilization of the government camp was glaring during the riots of the right, especially in 2017. For months, the right was on the streets and the Madurist party was unable to mount large-scale counter-demonstrations. This is not the simple result of the social and humanitarian crisis. There is also, among the popular classes, a feeling of mistrust vis-à-vis a government which does not meet social needs. Maduro's permanent reminders of the effects of US sanctions do not completely convince the people. Because while there is great poverty, that does not prevent the Bolibourgeoisie from benefiting greatly from the system.

But these results also opened up a crisis on the right. Capriles, in an interview with the BBC-World channel on 9 December, 2020 said that now "the opposition has no leader", questioning the legitimacy of Guaido. He openly criticized the boycott strategy, claiming that the opposition has "thrown its capital in the dustbin" and that it must change its strategy or disappear as an alternative.

These elections have certainly allowed

Maduro to accumulate all powers and opened the crisis on the right, but the problems remain and in this context, it will be difficult for Maduro to make the right responsible for the social and humanitarian crisis. If a significant fraction of the population still trusts Maduro, this part of the electorate shrinks election after election and it is not certain that the new economic policy decreed by the government will go in the direction of reuniting the Venezuelan people with *Chavismo*.

Liquidation of the gains of the Bolivarian revolution

Even if *Chavismo* never had the objective of calling capitalism into question, in its early years it took decisions that were in the interests of the poorest social strata, be it popular missions, the takeover of PDVSA (the national oil company) or the granting of rights for indigenous peoples. This explains the good electoral results for *Chavismo* until 2007.

But from 2008/2009 and especially with Maduro's rise to power, everything changed. Social programs have seen funding cuts and two essential laws have been passed to liberalize the economy and above all to accelerate the exploitation of the subsoil.

The first is the investment protection law passed in 2016, which any right-wing government could sign (the right-wing opposition did not oppose it

by the way). The second, more recent since it dates from 8 October, 2020, is the anti-blockade law for national development and the guarantee of human rights. It allows the executive to violate legal norms "to overcome obstacles and compensate for damage caused by unilateral coercive measures" in all areas. The executive can also decide on any form of financing, private or not, for all public health, social security, basic services and essential goods.

More broadly, article 23 of this law provides for the possibility of reorganizing all public property according to the "mechanisms specific to the mercantile practice of Private International Law", and then specifies that all the rules of property, management and the functioning of public or mixed enterprises will be modifiable by the Executive alone. There follow articles strengthening the protection of international private investments and those of private individuals in companies, including public ones. In order to maintain control, this law implements transitional provisions which specify that this law is superior to the constitutional provisions and to those of all the organic laws in force.

This is a real blank check given to Maduro to rule without accountability. No wonder Venezuelans are not motivated to elect a National Assembly whose role will be to applaud decisions made elsewhere.

14 December 2020

Translated by *International Viewpoint* from *Contretemps*.

"Too late to be pessimist! Ecosocialism or collapse"

1 January 2021, by **Daniel Tanuro, Mats Lucia Bayer**

In 2010 you published

L'impossible capitalisme vert (Editions la Découverte). What prompted you to write *Trop tard*

pour être pessimiste (Editions Textuel) ten years later? [122]

There were several factors involved. First, I wanted to emphasize the correctness of the diagnosis made in *L'impossible capitalisme vert*: there is an irreconcilable antagonism between the dynamics of accumulation inherent in the capitalist mode of production, on the one hand, and the ecological limits of the planet, on the other. This antagonism is blindingly obvious when it comes to the question of the climate: on the one hand, renewable energies are expanding and the IPCC estimates that their technical potential can meet nearly twenty times human needs; on the other hand, the atmospheric concentration of CO₂ (currently 415 ppm) is unprecedented over three million years and governments are constantly postponing the measures to be taken to avoid a cataclysm. It is not possible to save the climate without a radical reduction in final energy consumption, therefore its consumption in production and transport. This is incompatible with capitalist productivism.

Secondly, I wanted to update the scientific data on the basis, in particular, of the IPCC's special report on the target of 1.5 degrees of global warming. This update is important to me because my concern is to help disseminate the necessary knowledge to non-convinced people, especially in the working class. This is why *Trop tard pour être pessimiste* begins, like *L'impossible capitalisme vert*, with a brief overview of the present disaster and its ecological and social consequences.

Third, I have sometimes been criticized for focusing *L'impossible capitalisme vert*, primarily on the climate challenge. *Trop tard pour être pessimiste* broadens the field of enquiry to cover the entire ecological crisis, with particular attention to the destruction of living organisms and species. This enables us to show common lines of force for capitalist policies, for example the very strong kinship between the well-known "carbon compensation" scam and the "biodiversity compensation" scam, which is much less so.

Fourth, *L'impossible capitalisme vert*, compared social democratic and green party illusions, on the one hand, and

pointed to the limits or dangerous tendencies of degrowth, on the other. *Trop tard pour être pessimiste* goes further. The book reviews several currents of ideas of political ecology (green liberalism, collapsologists, followers of Jacques Ellul, supporters of stationary capitalism, mystical ecology, etc.) and highlights what connects them: a misunderstanding of the mechanism of capital accumulation demonstrated by Karl Marx.

Fifth and most importantly, *Trop tard pour être pessimiste* also goes further on the strategic level. One-fifth of the book is devoted to the ecosocialist project, the plan of transition and strategies for the convergence of struggles. In this context, special attention is paid to the key question: how can the working class and its organizations be brought to break the productivist compromise with capital?

Having appeared in April of this year, the foreword to *Trop tard pour être pessimiste* takes up a "hot" analysis of what the pandemic was producing. In particular, you say that the SARS-CoV2 virus confirms the profound distortions that capitalism has caused on biodiversity, facilitating zoonoses. We also see how the pandemic has plunged most societies into health and social crises. Is this pandemic only a "defeat" for the people, or does it also offer opportunities for social movements?

Trop tard pour être pessimiste was written at the end of 2019, but the French publisher offered me the opportunity to write a foreword about the pandemic. It is included in the Italian edition, but not in the Castilian edition, which was released in early March. This is a pity, because the Covid-19 pandemic is part of a clear trend towards an increase in zoonoses (according to the WHO, three quarters of new pathogens present in humans now come from animal species) and because this trend is indeed inseparable from the damage to ecosystems caused in particular by the nexus deforestation-agribusiness-industrial breeding. Since then, the Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

(IPBES) has published a special report confirming this link and concluding that there will be more zoonotic diseases. According to this report, we have even entered the "era of pandemics". The epidemic risk is therefore in addition to the four major ecological risks of climate change, falling biodiversity, disruption of the nitrogen cycle and destruction of soils.

Before answering the question about opportunities (and dangers), we must stress the fact that this crisis is a historical event. It is true that the world economy was showing signs of slowing down for several months, but SARS-CoV2 is much more than a trigger for endogenous contradictions in capitalism: it is an autonomous, exogenous, and very powerful agent. Like it or not, government recovery plans must go under the Caudine forks of the virus. In other words, the ecological destruction of capitalism has created a boomerang effect that is coming back to hit capitalism. This is not completely new: we have already experienced local boomerang effects. For example, the extensive wind erosion of the southern plains of the United States during the Dust Bowl in the 1920s and 1930s was due to the decision to cultivate fragile soils that were unsuitable for cereal production. But this is the first time that the phenomenon has manifested itself at the global level with so much violence. It is likely that a vaccine will be developed, but it is not certain that we will find vaccines against all future viruses (we still do not have an AIDS vaccine)... and there is no vaccine against climate change.

It is this exogenous dimension of the crisis that creates new opportunities for social movements. To fully grasp them, I think we need to go beyond the classic question, "who will pay?" The action of the virus highlights the fact that there are not crises - ecological, health, economic, social, food, etc. - that are juxtaposed, but a global crisis, a systemic crisis due to the congenital rapacity of the capitalist mode of production and existence. Through the pandemic, capital reveals quite clearly that it is not a thing but a social relationship of exploitation and that this relationship, as Marx said, "exhausts the only two sources of all wealth - the land and the

worker" (including the woman worker). The response must therefore articulate several demands; we cannot limit ourselves to the sphere of the distribution of wealth, we need an overall plan that offers a coherent alternative.

In the face of the pandemic, all governments, even the most reticent (with the exception so far of the Brazilian government), have been forced to adopt a health policy that claims to "take care" of the population. Of course, this claim is hypocritical: the discourse serves to wrap up a class-based health policy - neoliberal, hygienist, authoritarian, racist and macho - that maintains activity in the sphere of value production as a priority. But the contrast between the shock of the pandemic and the reality of health policy creates a "window of opportunity" for social movements. They have the opportunity to return the "taking care" against austerity, inequality, privatization, repression of the racialized, precariousness of work, violence against women, the driving back of migrants, extractivism and deforestation, the meat industry, etc. This is possible, because "taking care" is an attitude that cannot just be cut into slices and must be translated into something concrete. An anti-productive plan is needed to take care of humans and the nature to which they belong.

In my opinion, the systemic origin of the zoonosis and the systemic causes of its spread (globalization of trade, its speed, concentrations of poor people, racialized population, etc.) argue for "taking care" as a new paradigm of social life and society's relationships with nature. In Marxist terms, it is really a question of arguing for the centrality of the sphere of social reproduction, but in a way that is understood by the greatest number of people. It goes without saying that this centrality requires financial resources, but not only that: it also requires qualitative measures and ethics. In this sense, "taking care" can help in the convergence of struggles. It is a lever of what Gramsci called the battle for hegemony, on a mass scale. Given the deep and persistent ideological disarray, I think it is useful to think further in this direction. For the

exogenous and unprecedented nature of the crisis does not open up opportunities only on the left. It dramatically accelerates the rise of neo-fascism, which combines anti-capitalist demagoguery, social Darwinism and an ultraliberal conception of "freedom" as unlimited freedom for the possessors of wealth - or those who project themselves as such - to accumulate infinitely by exploiting, destroying, dominating and eliminating. Demanding that the rich pay for the crisis is not enough to stop this threat.

More generally, in terms of responses to the crisis, it is clear that liberal ecology is now part of the ideological arsenal of many governments and institutions. Nevertheless, few policymakers link the pandemic to the ecological crisis. On the other hand, the announcements of a possible vaccine for the first half of 2021 may have the effect that the pandemic is only a parenthesis in history. What do you think the reasons for this are?

There is indeed a gigantic paradox: while the link between the increase in zoonoses and the ecological crisis is the subject of a very broad scientific consensus, government health policies ignore the consequences to be drawn from this observation. Certainly, the health emergency is there. But it is striking that capitalist think tanks that claim to draw the long-term consequences of the pandemic also remain silent on this point. It does not enter their heads to question the nexus meat industry - deforestation - transgenic soybean cultivation. Yet this nexus, responsible for the increased risk of pandemics, is probably where we reach the point where the situation becomes ecologically unsustainable. Some one hundred million hectares are now devoted to the production of soybeans (of which 70 per cent involve GMOs) to feed livestock (which emits methane). At the current rate of development, 120 billion animals will be slaughtered annually in 2050 (50 times more than in 1960!) and this quantity of livestock would require two planets. The failure to take these realities into account does not fall from the sky. It obviously reflects the

"short-termism" of capital. But there is more. The French newspaper *Les Echos* recently mentioned a quote from Xenophon that is disturbingly topical: "Agriculture is the mother of all the arts: when it is well conducted, all other arts prosper; but when it is neglected, all other arts decline" (*Les Echos*, November 25, 2020). "Badly conducted" capitalist agriculture was historically built on English enclosures, in other words on the expulsion of peasant populations, driven from the land by violence. Marx called this event "the great wrench" of relations between humanity and nature. To tackle the agriculture that was the product of this "great wrench" is to undermine the historical foundations of the entire edifice. So yes, the development of the vaccine will allow the aficionados of the system to reassure themselves, to pretend that the pandemic was just a parenthesis. But their relief may be short-lived. More pandemics will come. And other, more serious disasters continue to grow quietly.

The U.S. election finally led to recognition of Joe Biden as the winner. Biden has shown that he plans to have a policy that would address climate change, which has allowed him to polarize with Trump's climate denial. Many progressive movements and organizations have shown relief over Trump's departure. However, it also appears that many of them are preparing a strong opposition to the Biden government. In your previous book, *Le moment Trump. Une nouvelle phase dans le capitalisme mondial*, you analyze the phenomenon as a fundamental break in the historical consensus within the American political class. Does his defeat mean the end of a political paradigm that denied global warming?

I think that we are witnessing, on climate, a rapid rapprochement between the USA, the European Union and China. Biden's agenda, the European Commission's Green Deal and Beijing's statements converge on the same goal: zero net CO2 emissions by 2050. China is even considering a "zero carbon", including methane, for 2060. At the same time, and for the first time, the International Energy

Agency's *Energy Outlook* report incorporates a carbon neutrality scenario in 2050. These developments have been aided by the health crisis. First, because without it, Trump could have been re-elected. But also, because the crisis resulted in a severe blow to the coal (and oil) industry while renewables continued to grow. This is why, in parallel with the debate on the relocation of vital productions, the ruling class is tempted by the advantages of a more flexible electrical system because it is less centralized around very large production units. This debate is accelerating because the point at which renewables become competitive has been reached: according to the IEA, solar energy is now "the cheapest energy in history" (*Energy Outlook* 2020). Even if countries do not increase their climate targets, the IEA estimates that 80 per cent of new energy investment by 2030 will be in solar energy. I therefore believe that COP26 will indeed lead to an 'enhancement of ambitions'.

We can only rejoice that the chief climate denier Donald Trump is leaving the White House. However, climate denial has not said its last word, especially in the US. For example, Exxon, unlike Shell or BP, maintains its focus exclusively on oil development... Above all, we should not be under any illusions about the US-EU-China climate convergence. Firstly, the targets of the three powers in terms of reducing emissions in 2030 will not allow us to stay below 1.5 degrees of global warming: the EU has set the tone by adopting a target well below the 65 per cent reduction dictated by urgency and respect for "differentiated responsibilities"; in China, CO2 emissions are increasing by 2 per cent per year, 70 per cent of electricity is generated by coal-fired power plants and the government seems to want to postpone the radical reduction in emissions after 2030 (they are talking about 8 per cent per year); Biden is moving towards a reduction in net U.S. emissions of between 38 and 54 per cent compared to 2005. As a reminder, according to the IPCC, the reduction must be 58 per cent globally by 2030 to have a one in two chance of not exceeding 1.5 degrees; for developed countries, this implies at least 65 per cent reduction.

Second, the concept of "zero net emissions" is very elastic. In addition to the lack of accountability for international transport emissions, the solutions chosen to make "carbon neutrality" compatible with capitalist productivity are "carbon compensation" through massive tree planting, "negative emission technologies" and nuclear power (including mini-power plants). There is much to be said about these "solutions" of green capitalism. I leave out nuclear power, the dangers of which we know. Trees can be planted, but the possibilities are not endless and increasing for a few decades the organic carbon stored by green plants cannot compensate for the huge decrease in mineral carbon stored in geological layers for millions of years. Moreover, politically, the mechanism of carbon compensation is typically neocolonial, as it mainly implies that land areas of poor countries are suitable to serve as CO2 waste bins for developed countries. As for "negative emission technologies," it involves mainly the geological capture and sequestration of CO2, which does not have a guarantee of being watertight. It could eventually be implemented to facilitate the phasing out of coal without social damage for miners. But to make it a structural solution to continued burning of fossils for several decades is outright madness. The more we dig into this question, the more we find the antagonism between capitalist productivism and natural limits. An example is capture-sequestration with CO2 mineralization. This technology would ensure a very stable capture, since carbon is transformed into rocks (carbonates). But the extractive groups, De Beers in particular, are throwing themselves at it to mineralize CO2 in their mining waste, thus greening their image and continuing their destruction, while selling emission rights. However, it would take 100 Gt of mining waste - 5 to 50 km³, or a layer of 30 to 300 m by 180 km² - to mineralize 1Gt of CO2 (one fortieth of annual emissions). Capitalism turns everything into madness, even reasonable solutions.

Thirdly, the US-EU-China climate convergence will obviously not put an end to inter-imperialist rivalries and will constitute a kind of agreement

between bandits against the countries of the global South. They will be forced to pay a carbon tax in order to gain access to the markets of the big three. This mechanism will in fact involve a new step in the abolition of the principle of differentiated responsibilities, which the Global South had enshrined in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Biden is very clear about these imperialist aspects. He wants to make trade policy a lever to support large US capital in the battle for the "clean technology" market, create a fund to support exports of these technologies, condition the debt relief of the countries of the global South and development assistance to the adoption of climate policies dictated by Washington, etc.

Isn't this US-EU-China convergence around a more ambitious climate policy, however, a lesser evil compared to Trump and what we have experienced so far?

Catastrophe is obviously a lesser evil compared to cataclysm, but we are already in a catastrophic situation and the policies of the three major economic blocs lead straight to a cataclysm. Governments seek to reassure people that they have finally understood the importance of the climate danger, but their implicit scenario is that of the "temporary overshoot" of 1.5 degrees of warming. However, even assuming that tree plantations and negative emission technologies can cool the globe in the second half of the century, there is a real risk that "temporary overshooting" will be sufficient to lead to a definitive shift towards what scientists have called the "sweating-room" planet. The IPCC places the tipping point for the Greenland ice sheet at between 1.5 and 2 degrees of global warming and two huge Antarctic glacier massifs are on the brink of disintegrating. Crossing the Greenlandic tipping point could lead to a chain of positive retroactions that would bring the planet back to the Pliocene climate of thirty million years ago. At that time, the ocean level was about 30 metres higher than today. The criminal productivism of capitalism has brought us so close to the abyss that it would take little to

make us tumble into it. However, if a tipping point like Greenland is crossed, it is totally illusory to believe that the movement can be reversed with negative emission technologies. I mean this: the great danger is that the climate movement will be put to sleep by the impression that Joe Biden, Xi Jinping and Ursula von der Leyen are partners, even allies, with whom it would be possible, together, to meet the climate challenge, or at least to go a long way. That is not the case. These people are at the service of the productivism that is rushing on renewable energies as it rushed on fossil fuels, without giving up these fuels, in order to accumulate capital on the backs of peoples and nature.

You criticize some of the ideological biases of science, including the IPCC and IBPES reports. Can you say more about that?

This point should be addressed with caution. We must avoid bringing water to the mill of climate-deniers and, more broadly, promoting the rise of the irrational that is now facilitating conspiracy theories. With regard to the IPCC, the reports of Working Group 1 on the science of climate change must be distinguished from those of Working Groups 2 and 3 on adaptation and mitigation. As a reminder, the IPCC does not do research, it only compiles existing research. The WG1 compiles research based on the laws of physics. As long as these laws are not disrupted by a scientific revolution, these reports synthesize the best climate science available. Things are different for the other two WGs, especially for the WG3 on mitigation. In fact, the climate stabilization scenarios that it synthesizes are achieved by introducing hypotheses about the evolution of society into the models of the climate system. The hypotheses are made mainly by economists. In this brotherhood of modellers, neoliberalism reigns undivided. For example, the IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report states that "climate models assume fully functioning markets and competitive market behaviour". In other words: outside the market, there is no salvation, the models do not make the assumption of public plans that are outside the laws of profit. It is

important to challenge the IPCC on this point. In fact, submission to profit implies submission to the accumulation of capital. As a result, simple solutions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by eliminating unnecessary or harmful production are not being considered. This blind spot of research increases anxiety and encourages tail-ending of the sorcerer's apprentice solutions of green capitalism. As an example, I quote in *Trop tard pour être pessimiste* the case of researchers who question the maximum possible reductions in emissions by sector of production and who do not even imagine that we can ban the production of weapons, or transport fewer goods and transport them by trains rather than by trucks.

Nor does the IPBES envisage breaking the rules of the market. On the contrary, it promotes the mechanism known as "biodiversity compensation." What this consists of is that an extractivist enterprise can operate in an area of great biological wealth if it undertakes to restore destroyed ecosystems elsewhere, which is obviously impossible. Mining and oil groups use this bogus mechanism because resource scarcity leads them to look to national parks and nature reserves rich in minerals or hydrocarbons. It is very positive that the IPBES highlights the key role of indigenous peoples and rural communities in the defence of biodiversity. But, at the same time, it explains the disappearance of species mainly through the growth of "population" and "agriculture" in general, as if all populations and all agriculture had the same destructive impacts. This is clearly at odds with the praise of indigenous peoples and communities. But the IPBES strategy is based mainly on the idea that natural reserves should be strengthened and multiplied as oases of biodiversity. These oases are important, but the main problem today is not there, because biodiversity will not be saved if the oases are separated by the huge deserts of agribusiness. The alternative is agroecology. But, as a result, the question of the population is posed in a different light. Pointing to "the population" in general, the IPBES report suggests that "more population

= less biodiversity". However, agroecology requires much more human labour than does agribusiness. In general, one must ask not only the maximum number of humans that a mode of production can support, but also the minimum number needed for a mode of production. In *Trop tard pour être pessimiste*, I mention a very illuminating comparison between large- and small-scale fishing. The second is better for the climate (less fuel), better for biodiversity, better for human health, costs the community less and employs twenty times more manpower for the same tonnage of catches for human food. The agribusiness/agroecology comparison gives the same kind of conclusion. The fight for biodiversity is inseparable from the fight against agribusiness, against the meat industry, against industrial fishing and other mechanisms of capitalist predation that the IPBES is careful not to question.

You review other currents which claim to be ecological, ranging from currents supporting the "Green New Deal" to currents belonging to "collapsology".

Regarding the former, which are mostly situated on the left, they clearly associate their plan with monetary creation. How do you think this is contradictory to an ecosocialist solution?

Regarding the "collapsologist" currents, can they become a platform for far-right currents?

I would not say that the Green New Deal as it is defended by the US left is contradictory to an ecosocialist solution. On the contrary, this Green New Deal (GND) contains two important ideas that ecosocialists fully share: to stop the disaster, we need a plan, and this plan must get us out of both the social and ecological crises. It was in this context that I shared a criticism formulated by the Marxist economist Michael Roberts, about the financing of the Green New Deal through monetary creation: according to Roberts, the state can create money, yes, but the value of the currency is determined by the economy, and therefore by the capitalists who own the economy. If

they don't like the Green New Deal, they won't invest, the currency will depreciate and the government won't be able to finance its plan.

Having said that, that is not where we are today. The situation has changed since the publication of *Trop tard pour être pessimiste*. Bernie Sanders has rallied behind Joe Biden, who surfed on the idea of GND to secure the support of the left: but, although the label has remained the same, the contents of the bottle have changed. Thus, Sanders's GND provided for the cessation of fracking; Biden has only promised to stop distributing new fracking permits, and to evaluate existing permits on a case-by-case basis. If it is passed by Congress, his programme plans to invest \$40 billion a year over 10 years in clean energy and technology, but not to break with the fossil fuel industry. His team includes several people who are financed by oil companies. For example, there is Cedric Richmond, a member of Congress with extensive links to the oil, gas and petrochemical industry in his Louisiana district, which is one of the ten most polluted districts in the United States. The Green New Deal in its Biden version is green capitalism, like that of the European Commission.

As for collapsology, I find it excessive to say globally that it can become a platform for the far right. I am extremely critical of collapsologists because they send a fatalistic message about the inevitability of a "collapse". Collective struggle and the convergence of struggles are absent from their perspectives. They have no programme to propose, except the creation of small resilient communities that will, they say, be the only forms of society capable of withstanding the great catastrophe that will make half of humanity disappear. Not understanding much about capitalism, collapsologists believe that the poor of the global South will be least affected by "collapse" because they are closer to nature. This is, of course, an absurdity that ignores the capitalist, imperialist and racist relations of domination. Collapsology can drift towards reactionary conceptions that see no other future for humanity than its regression towards an archaic past. Collapsologists are on a slippery slope

when they praise ideologues like Jung and Eliade, whose Nazi commitment they seem to ignore, or when they plead for men and women to reconnect with their "archetypes." Having said that, the collapsologist movement is very diverse. There is a quasi-survivalist component (Yves Cochet), and a mystical component. There is also a libertarian component that believes that "collapse" will sweep away capitalism and leave the field open to self-managed communities. All this is very confused and intertwined. Many young people invested in important struggles against fossil projects say they are close to the collapsologist-libertarian trend. We need to work with them in these struggles, while conducting the strategic debate.

You emphasize in the last part of the book the importance of looking at emerging social movements. In particular, you emphasize the construction of a common subaltern identity from the different subjects, and one where the feminist movement occupies a central place. What are the key elements of this "composition" for you?

I start from a triple observation. One: we will not change the mode of production without workers, let alone against them; we must therefore win them to the ecosocialist struggle. Two: the working class, on the whole, is - at best - at the rearguard of this struggle; its main organizations are for growth and recovery through "green capitalism." Three: the vanguard of ecosocialist struggles is made up of indigenous peoples, peasants (with a key role of Via Campesina), youth, and women, who are on the front lines on all these terrains. These vanguard and rearguard positions do not fall from the sky. Workers are integrated into capital through their labour power, which is purchased, formatted and applied to create or realize surplus value. Their condition is schizophrenic: their historical interest is to end the system, but their daily individual existence depends on the crumbs distributed by this system that mutilates them and mutilates nature. Farmers and indigenous peoples are in another situation: the defence of

their daily existence largely coincides with ecological management of their natural environment. Young people escape schizophrenia to some extent (either because they are in school or because they are rejected on to the margins of the system); their situation leads them to protest against the destruction of the planet on which they will live and eventually have children. As for women, the explanation of their primary role is the subject of a debate among feminists. From what I have read, the idea that convinces me the most is that their vanguard position results from the fact that patriarchy assigns them the work of caring for the human body, which makes them more sensitive and lucid about ecological destruction - another example of a boomerang effect, in a way.

From there, I try to outline a strategy for the convergence of struggles. The idea is not at all to seek the greatest common denominator between the movements of the exploited and the oppressed. On the contrary, the idea is to promote, from the vanguard, an upward convergence, by an articulation of struggles, guaranteeing the autonomy of each component in the pursuit of its legitimate demands. The aim is to create a relationship of forces that is conducive to the politicization of issues, thus to the breaking of the capital/labour productivist compromise. Notre-Dame-des-Landes is an instructive example for me because the alliance of zadists, residents and peasants and their fierce struggle made it possible to turn a territorial conflict into a central political issue. All the political and social forces were put in a position where they had to say "yes" or "no" to the construction of the airport. As a result, the terms of the debate have also changed within the trade union movement. The CGT of Vinci, in particular, was encouraged to adopt positions not only from "trade-union" concerns but above all from a broader societal point of view, a political point of view. At the end of an internal debate, and thanks to the action of a trade union left, it took a stand against the project and supported the zadists. I conclude by paraphrasing Che: "creating two, three, many Notre-Dame-des-Landes is the watchword".

This strategy is obviously at odds with the "neither left nor right, terrestrial" proposed by Bruno Latour. But it also differs from the simplistic vision expressed by the slogan "capitalism destroys the planet, let us destroy capitalism". Capitalism must be destroyed, of course, and to do that requires a revolution. But we are deluded if we believe that it is only necessary to designate the capitalist enemy so that the struggle of the class "in itself" stops the ecological catastrophe. The key problem today is the recomposition of the class "for itself". This recomposition can only come from struggles and

convergences between struggles, and this process will sometimes be painful, even confrontational. If we look at it from the point of view of ecology, it goes without saying that it necessarily implies the greening of the worldview and the demands of each layer of the exploited or oppressed. It is this process that will make convergence from above possible. Joan Martinez Alier proposed the concept of ecology of the poor. We must continue in this direction, to bring each exploited or oppressed group to make emerge, so to speak, its concrete "ecology" from its concrete conditions. This began with the Yellow Jackets, for example,

which converged several times with climate protests (and with demonstrations against violence against women). Potentially, all the exploited have their ecology, because the capitalist-patriarchal-racist way of treating humans as things is not essentially different from the way non-humans are treated as things. It is from this strategic vision, in my opinion, that we must address the tasks of ecosocialist activists.

4 December 2020

*Translated by **International
Viewpoint** from **Gauche
Anticapitaliste**.*