



IV553 - February 2021

In Kosovo, unprecedented victory of Vetëvendosje

28 February 2021, by Catherine Samary

These elections come after years of constitutional and political crises, and in the midst of a pandemic. In December, the Constitutional Court provoked these early legislative elections by invalidating the government in power, whose parliamentary ratification had been narrowly achieved by counting the vote of a deputy condemned by the courts. In November, President Hashim Thaçi, the historic leader of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) - one of the commanders of the UCK, the Kosovo Liberation Army - indicted by the Hague Court, was deposed. He is awaiting trial for war crimes.

The Vetëvendosje party

Vetëvendosje (VV), for its part, has experienced major changes and crises. When it was founded in 2004, it had an "ethno-nationalist profile" and advocated union with Albania. [1] Its discourse, which became more social and denounced corruption, earned it growing popularity, all the more so as it also addressed the Kosovo Serbs: the search for an understanding with them was given priority over the "negotiations" with Belgrade,

conducted in an opaque manner by President Thaçi under pressure from the Trump administration. The latter advocated population transfers to new ethnic borders as a condition for Belgrade's recognition of Kosovo's independence. While rejecting this logic, VV was moving towards a policy of democratic popular sovereignty that responded to the concrete needs of the people of Kosovo. However, against a backdrop of contradictions between social orientations and the search for international recognition, the internal functioning of the VV in 2018 provoked a "self-destruction of the party" due to the lack of democratic modalities for expressing disagreements - particularly with regard to the main leader, Arbin Kurti. [2]

Major contradictions

The current electoral victory nevertheless comes after several years of local anchoring of the party thanks to its success in the municipal elections - particularly in Pristina, but also after a narrow majority in the legislative elections of 2019. This led

to a precarious governmental alliance of VV with the centre-right Democratic League of Kosovo (the LDK of historical leader Ibrahim Rugova). Arbin Kurti assumed the head of government for some 50 days and not without popular disillusionment at the weakness of the social policies implemented. It was a motion of censure initiated by the LDK that brought him down in March 2020. In the background: spectacular actions carried out by Kurti (for which he was condemned) on border issues.

Against popular disillusionment, the VV has multiplied its promises: dissolve the Privatisation Agency, create a sovereign fund for the management of public enterprises, ensure free tuition for students, parental leave and social welfare services especially for single mothers and the elderly. It rallied a massive vote from the diaspora (one third of the population, which brings in 60% of the country's budget) and women (61% against 47% of men). [3] Albin Kurti declares that he wants to "put an end to the old regime" by responding to social priorities. He hopes for the integration of Kosovo with the whole of the Western Balkans into the EU. [4] These are challenges that are a source of major contradictions.

The Wonder That Brings Hope: The Union Candidate in Albania's Parliamentary Elections

27 February 2021, by **Enriko Peçulaj** and **Frenklin Elini**

On Wednesday, 20th January 2021, we learned from the news that the United Miners of Bulqiza Trade Union (SMBB) will support the independent candidacy of one of their miners in the district of Dibra on the April 25th election. Elton Debreshi, miner, son of a miner, father of four and head of the new union of the chromium miners in Bulqiza, was fired more than a year ago because of his trade union activity, together with three of his co-workers, while working in the pit under the administration of AlbChrome.

Elton Debreshi was one of the youngest workers when his fellow miners elected him unanimously as the head of the union. Through a life that demanded sacrifice he was denied the lightness of youth. And yet all what is associated with it is still there: honesty, kindness, the spirit of solidarity and protest. Elton is young, not because of his age but because he has refused to conform and let the con artists, the cynics and the wealthy to dictate his life. The meaning of Elton's candidacy transcends the framework of electoral logic and lies deep in every dimension of grassroots politics, politics as a creation and will of the majority that is left in oblivion.

Elton Debreshi. Source: Roza Che | Wikimedia Commons.

The massive student demonstrations of December 2018 exposed not only the urgent need for change but also the need for a social movement that could and should include all social formations with organizational and subversive potential. Something was needed that exceeded the 30-year symbiosis of oligarchs with the three major parties at the expense of the people. A fundamental question was raised: what is to be done?

It didn't take long for the workers to answer this question. In April of 2019, three months after the protest was called off, the miners of Bulqiza – tired of the old unions supported by the powers that be – started to articulate the need for a new, independent trade union. On 17th of November that same year, at the centre of Bulqiza the miners announced the founding of the United Miners of Bulqiza Trade Union. Immediately after this event, Elton Debreshi with three other trade unionists were fired and AlbChrome workers went on strike demanding pay rise, reduction of the labor rate, recognition of seniority and difficulty at work, compensation in cases of accidents, negotiating the collective agreement with the new union which had reached over 600 members, and above all the return to work of the dismissed trade unionists. After the strike ended, trade union miners, pushed forward by the force that gives conviction to the cause, and with the support of many friends, undertook the signing of a petition for the legal recognition of the Miner's Status, collecting more than 11.000 signatures and the solidarity of the citizens all over the country.

Never before during the long years of transition had a workers' struggle been waged with such fervor in Albania. Samir Mane, the wealthiest and most powerful man in Albania, supported by both government and opposition, made sure that no media reported the news about the strike. Samir made sure that even small parties or "independent" individuals would remain silent about it. Rotten unions in the hands of wealthy and powerful owners fought against the collective effort of workers that risk their lives underground. And again, the stronger the pressure, the greater

was the resistance.

There is no coincidence that makes these events happen. The universe did not conspire to bring closer in time and space the protests of the students, miners, oil-refinery workers and artists protesting against the demolition of the National Theatre. Conditions and contradictions are what created the event. The government of Edi Rama cannot justify itself, at least since the students' protest. Not even the most zealous admirers of liberalism would have fathomed such political events unfolding.

The implementation of neoliberal policies – the privatization of public corporations, neoliberal reforms in higher education, concessions of public services to oligarchs close to power, systematic violence against small businesses camouflaged as a fight against informality – faced an unorganized society who had turned its gaze towards the West, where hundreds of thousands of Albanians flee, legally or otherwise. In the image of the same power structure converge not only the cultural hatred for the common man but also the whip that replaces the justifying facade. Brute violence, from here on, becomes the only tool for maintaining power vis-à-vis the lack of a real opposition and a popular alternative that speaks the language of the people.

It is these conditions that prompt the need for a reliable and hopeful alternative. Elton Debreshi is such an alternative. A figure with the potential to challenge the hegemony of the corrupt power and bring hope to all the marginalized social groups. It is not his political ambition that pushes him to the podium of the parliament,

but the historical demand of miners and citizens for a real and honest representation. A representation intact from the influence of criminal groups, violence and dubious businesses. Elton Debreshi has, for many years, sustained through his work the system that produces goods, on behalf of the oligarchs. Now it is time to seek on behalf of the city of Bulqiza the fair share of those people who work and live on a rich land, blessed with chromium, but spend

their lives in poverty.

Hope doesn't have boundaries and borders. Hope is a living matter, with roots in the consciousness of the oppressed. This hope turns into the conviction that the miners' and students' organizations will not fall apart the next day. That is why the struggle of Elton Debreshi constitutes a political articulation of a historical inevitability. Inevitable in relation to history, not in the form of the supreme

leader, infallible and absolute – not even as a positivist turnout of events; but historical inevitability as the moment when the oppressed appear on the public stage. The history speaks the language of battles despite triumph or defeat. In this sense, Elton is the voice that echoes the common social aspirations for radical change.

26 February 2021

Source [LeftEast](#).

Solidarity with Mamadou #Mamadoumuststay

26 February 2021, by **Sérgio Vitorino** , **Terry Conway**

The campaign is a creative way of overcoming the present difficulties imposed by the pandemic (the country is in lockdown since the end of 2020) and is gathering each day contributions from people ranging from anonymous citizens to well known artists, journalists, politicians and activists, see [here](#).

Mamadou Ba is a comrade of the Fourth International in Portugal. He is a Black activist of many decades standing. He was born in Senegal and particularly organizes in that community but has Portuguese nationality. For his role as a spokesperson for the antiracist organization SOS Racismo, Mamadou has frequently been the target of vicious campaigns and threats by the far right, supported by companies fabricating bots and false profiles, video manipulation and false news to target antiracist militants and the first black deputies elected for parliament.

What distinguishes this specific petition is the echo it gained in the headlines of the mass media, once more acritically amplifying the far right narratives, in a moment when the candidate of the far-right party Chega demonstrated its growth potential by obtaining more than 11% of the popular vote in the 24 January

presidential elections, (against the 1,29% in the previous legislative elections with which it elected its single deputy in parliament).

This particular attack on Mamadou Ba took place in the context of the death of Marcelino da Mata, the most decorated military officer in the Portuguese Army, who served in more than 2,000 operations in the Colonial War in Guinea, some of which have been classified as war crimes and Portugal has been condemned by the UN for such operations. He was a guinean fighting for the colonial power. Da Mata, who bragged about his acts of torture and was a far-right militant, died on 18 February as a result of a covid related illness at the age of 80. Another right wing opposition party CDS-PP, which is fighting for its survival faced with the rise of Chega, called for a vote of condolence in the Portuguese parliament over his death and called to expell Mamadou Ba from the governmental working group on racism.

Ba is one of a number of public figures who condemned this tribute to a war criminal who collaborated with the fascist regime of Salazar. But as a Black activist he is the target of the sharpest vitriolic campaign.

While the petition to deport him cannot succeed, that does not diminish the need to stand in solidarity with him in particular and to condemn those who are whipping up racist hatred. For the moment, the campaign is only accepting contributions in Portuguese.

Like Mamadou Ba and many others we agree that "Marcelino da Mata is a war criminal who deserves no respect at all".

**Solidarity with Mamadou
#Mamadoumuststay**

Statement by SOS Racismo (Portugal)

The positions of the anti-racist activist Mamadou Ba, based on the full exercise of his democratic rights, have been a frequent target of attacks that go beyond legitimate opposition, to become insults, defamatory attacks and even threats to his person.

This escalation of hatred and intolerance has recently reached a new level following statements by Mamadou Ba regarding the visibility

and state honours granted to Marcelino da Mata.

Given that his opinion is far from unique (several people and institutions have condemned the praise for Marcelino da Mata), Mamadou Ba was at the centre of several petitions calling for his expulsion from the country, one of them with about 15,000 signatures.

Even though these petitions have no legal validity, their repercussions in the public domain are not always visible. The positions of the anti-racist activist Mamadou Ba, based on the full exercise of a plural democracy, have been a frequent target of attacks that go beyond the legitimate contradiction, to become an insult, a defamatory attack and even a personal threat.

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Following an opinion which is not even isolated (several people and institutions have condemned the praise for Marcelino da Mata), Mamadou Ba was at the centre of several petitions calling for his expulsion from the country, one of them with about 15,000 signatures.

Even if the legal validity of these petitions is null and void, their repercussions in the public space and their promotion in social networks and the media merit our greatest concern. They reveal:

- The permeability of the public space

not only to slander and impropriety but, above all, to the message that sees deportation as an appropriate punishment for a supposed thought crime;

- The magnetism exercised in certain institutions and parties, from the most recent ones to some that claim to be co-founders of the Portuguese Democracy, by racist impetus, by hate speech, by nationalist fury;

- The way in which this type of petition is rapidly and expressively accepted by the very people who are angry at being accused of racism.

For all these reasons, SOS Racismo condemns the contents of these petitions, appealing to other people and institutions to show solidarity, in the necessary zeal for a democratic, plural and critical society.

How Can We Revive Herd Immunity to Fascism?

25 February 2021, by **Gilbert Achcar**

The onset of this far-right pandemic goes back to the 1980s and was powerfully boosted in the following decade, as the editors of a collective book, *Fascism and Neofascism*, acknowledged in 2004: "While a revival of extremist activity in Western Europe began during the 1980s, the collapse of Communism resulted in a surge of the extreme right all across the continent. During the 1990s, fascism, or something like it, was suddenly and unexpectedly resurgent." Like the classical fascism of the three decades that followed the First World War, this "neofascism"—arguably the best designation, as it refers to both historical affinities and the renewal of forms in tune with our times—takes different shapes according to the countries in which it develops.

Karl Polanyi dedicated several pages of his 1944 classic, *The Great*

Transformation, to underlining the great variety of fascisms and fascist ideologies. "In fact," he commented, "there was no type of background—of religious, cultural, or national tradition—that made a country immune to fascism, once the conditions for its emergence were given." He even affirmed that "the existence of a fascist movement proper" was not necessarily part of the symptoms of what he called a "fascist situation." At least as important were signs such as the spread of irrational ideas, racist views, and hatred of the democratic setup.

Read in the light of the ongoing events in the United States, Polanyi's following comment sounds chilling: "Though usually aiming at a mass following, fascism's potential strength was reckoned not by the numbers of its adherents but by the influence of the persons in high position whose

good will the fascist leaders possessed, and whose influence in the community could be counted upon to shelter them from the consequences of an abortive revolt." For the Hungarian-American thinker, fascism was above all a "solution of the impasse reached by liberal capitalism" aiming at "a reform of market economy achieved at the price of the extirpation of all democratic institutions." In this light, the herd immunity to fascism achieved in most Western countries after 1945 was not only the result of the defeat of the Axis powers, but also and above all a result of an alternative solution to the impasse of liberal capitalism: the Keynesian democratic solution that discarded the idea of "the self-regulating market," which Polanyi called "a stark utopia."

In another and much older classic of the social sciences, the founder of

sociology, Émile Durkheim, was already lamenting, in his 1897 book [Suicide](#), the fact that “for a whole century, economic progress has mainly consisted in freeing industrial relations from all regulation.... Government, instead of regulating economic life, has become its tool and servant.” For the French sociologist, this economic deregulation was the main source of what he called “anomie,” i.e., “a state of exasperation and irritated weariness” resulting from the loss of economic security and the disruption of social patterns. Anomie leads individuals to seek refuge in some type of identity group and—unless it is inward-oriented (suicide)—deploy their exasperation against other identities held responsible for the increasing precarity of their social condition, primarily by way of racist and/or xenophobic logic. Thus, the rise of fascist-like ideologies and movements starting from the 1980s went along with the rise of other types of exclusive identity groups, of which religious fundamentalism is the most obvious.

This fully coincides with the observation made by Eric Weitz and Angelica Fenner, the editors of the abovementioned book about the resurgence of fascism: “The right-wing revivals were very much a response to the political and social dislocations of

the 1990s, including substantial unemployment, the erosion of the security net that the welfare states of both Eastern and Western Europe had provided, and the deterioration of urban neighborhoods. They were also a response to the wide-scale population migrations that have taken place across the North/South and East/West axes of Europe since 1945.”

There is indeed a clear and undeniable correlation between the neoliberal onslaught that started in the 1980s, led by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan—an onslaught that made “deregulation” one of its main goals, along with privatization, reduction of social spending, and tax cuts for the rich—and the rise of phenomena such as neofascism and religious fundamentalism after decades of marginalization. Likewise, the Great Recession, triggered in 2007, gave a major boost to neofascist forces, as did the major wave of mostly Syrian refugees pouring into Europe in 2015. The facts resulting from both crises are still very much affecting our world, and the huge economic crisis that is presently gestating as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic can only severely aggravate the anomic conditions globally (the far-right exploitation of anti-lockdown movements is an indication), unless it is countered by economic policies

similar to those adopted after 1945.

Add to this the fact that, however significant Donald Trump’s defeat in the latest US presidential election was, it was certainly not of a scope comparable to the defeat of fascist powers in the Second World War. His loss occurred not because of the disaffection of his supporters but despite a huge increase in their numbers (11 million more voters) at a time when, unlike 2016, there was no possible illusion about what Trump represents and, therefore, hardly any ambiguity in the sense of voting for him. At the global level likewise, there are presently no signs of neofascism waning: The continuing popularity of figures such as Jair Bolsonaro (until very recently, at least), Narendra Modi, or Viktor Orbán does not portend any withering away of the far-right pandemic in the foreseeable future.

Achieving a new state of herd immunity to fascism, like that of the postwar years, requires not only a political defeat of the most prominent neofascist movements and an uncompromising fight against their ideologies. It also requires, most crucially, a global shift away from the neoliberal paradigm that has been dominant over the past four decades.

Source [The Nation](#).

Climate Change Comes to Republican Texas Producing a Disaster

24 February 2021, by [Dan La Botz](#)

Twenty years ago, Republicans took over Texas’ governorship, house, and senate and then deregulated and neglected the state’s energy systems, leading to this catastrophe. Governor Greg Abbott and other Republicans, whose party is fueled by the state’s oil and gas industry, have blamed the crisis on the failure of wind turbines and now warn that New York Congresswomen Alexandra Ocasio

Cortez, her Green New Deal, and wind turbines will destroy the state’s economy.

Texas, which is almost 25 percent larger than France, has a diverse population of 29 million, 40 percent white, 40 percent Latino, 13 percent Black, and 5 percent Asian. The state’s economy is dominated by the production of oil and gas and Texas is

the country’s biggest producer. The state’s petroleum and financial billionaires, led by Midland Energy, have bankrolled the Republican Party both in the state and nationally. The combination of an economy based on oil and Republican Party politics has meant climate change denial together with deregulation and irresponsibility.

Temperatures in Texas in February

usually vary between 60 and 70 degrees, but last week after the Polar Vortex sloped down over the United States, Houston had temperatures of 17° and Dallas reached a low of 4° on February 15, the lowest temperatures in about 30 years. Electrical, heating, and water systems failed in houses, health clinics, and hospitals. Medical clinics couldn't give patients their dialysis treatments, while the storms interrupted COVID vaccinations. The state's vast ranches and farms lost animals and crops worth billions. As water pipes burst in homes, ice cycles formed on lamps and fans on the ceilings. How could it happen?

Texas is the only continental state that has its own power grid; all of the others belong to the Eastern or Western Interconnects, which gives them greater capacity to respond to energy demands. The state's energy comes from several sources: 46 percent natural gas, 23 percent wind; 18 percent coal, and 11 percent

nuclear. Faced with the freeze, the state's electrical grid, managed by the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT), failed. Politicians created and maintained the Texas Interconnect and its manager ERCOT, to avoid federal regulation. The state had been warned back in 2011 that the system needed to be upgraded to deal with colder weather, but ERCOT failed to do so. The wind turbines failed because of the state government's failure to winterize them.



As the crisis unfolded, one of Texas' leading Republican politicians, Senator Ted Cruz, left the state to fly with his wife and children to a warm luxury resort in Cancún, Mexico. Other travelers took photos of Cruz in the airport and on the plane, posted them on social media, and they went viral, leading to a public outcry. Cruz

bought a return ticket and came back the next day.

The failure of the Texas energy system comes in the wake of the state's poor handling of the coronavirus. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Texas has had 41,981 deaths; second after California, among the half-million deaths nationally. After initial shutdowns, Governor Abbott reopened the state and, yielding to Evangelical Christian, permitted church services to continue, and soon Texas became the first state to reach one million cases.

The abject failure of the Texas Republican Party to deal with both the COVID pandemic and the energy crisis could lay the basis for a political shift that would allow the Democrats to retake state government. Texas Democrats support a Green New Deal and strict regulation of gas and oil companies, but it will take a fight by progressive and socialists to advance such an agenda and make it happen.

General strike against Mynamar junta!

23 February 2021, by Pierre Rousset

The military junta had tried to prevent this success by increasing the repression. There were more than 400 arrests. Sometimes, live ammunition was used. In Naypyidaw, the administrative capital, a 19-year-old grocer Mya Thwet Thwet Khine was killed. Her burial was followed by a long motorcade. A protest in her memory was held in Rangoon (Yangon), the business capital and largest city. This assassination radicalized the protest.

Another large protest took place in the port of Mandalay, where security forces shot dead two people, while trying to force strikers refusing to load a ship to work.

On Monday 22 February the military took preventative measures deploying tanks, erecting barricades and positioning military convoys to close

access to urban centres. This did not deter the demonstrators who dismantled the barricades or gathered in front of the soldiers.

Right from the start, the resistance to this coup has brought together a wide range of people, with healthcare workers and the educated youth of Generation Z at the forefront. The movement also gathers powerful formal or informal associations of public sector workers, private employees, entrepreneurs and traders. The opposition has spread to new groups and new regions over the last three weeks. A union led by women in an industrial area in Rangoon is helping to amplify protests in the city centre. LGBT groups are very active. A peasant mobilization is taking shape. (Some) police officers side with the demonstrators. Buddhist monks are showing their support (but the

religious establishment is not). The demonstrators have chosen non-violence, combining "fluid" actions and massive static gatherings. Overall, despite isolated incidents, there appears to have been no brutal repression to date.

The resistance quickly acquired a framework for coordination: the Civil Disobedience Movement. This aims to ensure the continuation of the struggle over time and in solidarity. Striking in Burma is not without consequences. Even civil servants (public sector employees) find themselves without income; there are no unions and strike funds able to support them. If the struggle fails, it is their job that is at stake. Many local initiatives have been taken, often by well-known personalities, to help strikers' families by providing accommodation, food, etc. The

existence of the MDC has facilitated this mutual aid, even if it is only a partial and temporary answer.

The creation of the MDC is one of the striking differences from the previous massive movement against the military order, initiated on August 8, 1988 by students, lawyers, doctors and - also then - civil servants. That movement was opposed to the "socialist" and dictatorial regime of General Ne Win. In 1980s Burma, the word "socialist" certainly did not have the meaning generally accorded to it. Back then, the junta defined its' vision as "socialist and anti-communist".

Nobody in Myanmar can forget the massacre of 3,000 or more in 1988. But history is not doomed to repeat itself. Protesters insist that this new "Four Twos" movement (for 22.02.21) will be much bigger than the old "Four Eights" movement (for 08.08.1988). The country is no longer isolated. Nowadays the military commands two powerful economic conglomerates whose profits depend on regional trade (Singapore is the largest source of foreign investment). The training of today's senior officers, including General Min Aung Hlaing, is quite different from the training of the

officer corps under Ne Win.

The 1 February coup shows that the military does not want to give up any of its power. But, faced with the power of popular mobilization, the military might try to play for time rather than unleash a bloodbath. Either way, there is no turning back. The determination of the movement reflects the feeling that there is no acceptable outcome other than victory - and that victory is possible this time!

23 February 2021

Source [ESSF Bulletin](#).

Millions Expected to Join General Strike in Myanmar on Monday to Oppose Regime

22 February 2021, by [The Irrawaddy](#)

It's likely that millions of people from all walks of life will pour out onto the streets across the country, as the regime's recent deadly crackdowns against ongoing protests have outraged many people.

If it happens, Monday's general strike will go down in the country's modern history as the second nationwide popular uprising, after the one on Aug. 8, 1988 (Four Eights), when millions of people took to the streets to defy the then Socialist regime.

The planned strike is now popularly known as the "Five Twos" revolution, as it will be staged on 22.2.2021. On that day, nearly every business in the country will halt operations as people join the strike. Activists and celebrities are calling on every citizen to join in.

Many shop owners and market vendors have been informing their customers since Saturday morning that they will close on Monday to join the strike.

Myanmar's largest retailer, City Mart Holding, as well as Thai wholesale center Makro in Yangon and several

other popular local private businesses also announced on Sunday that their businesses will be closed on Monday.

The Southeast Asian country has already seen hundreds of thousands of people take to the streets over the past two weeks to oppose the regime.

The military regime has stepped up its crackdowns on street demonstrations, beating and opening fire directly on peaceful protesters in several cities. On Saturday, at least two civilians, including a young man, were shot dead in Mandalay when riot police opened fire with live and rubber bullets on residents protecting striking government shipyard workers who had joined the CDM.

Arrests of protest leaders and civil servants who refuse to work under the military regime have also intensified this week

With the numbers of deaths and detentions at the hands of the military continuing to rise, several netizens posted on social media that "the more you oppress, the more we rise".

Despite the threat of being shot, or

getting arrested, thousands of Mandalay residents staged sit-in protests, and protesters across the country continued their marches and rallies on Sunday, showing their determination to take down the regime.

A General Strike Committee involving 25 organizations from different fields including political parties, labor unions, student unions, farmers unions, religious groups, women's groups, monks, doctors, lawyers and writers groups was also formed on Saturday to work for the end of military dictatorship, the abolition of the 2008 Constitution and the establishment of a federal democratic union.

The committee will form local strike committees and arrange the collective people's struggle against the military dictatorship across the country, said committee member U Aung Moe Zaw, who is also chairman of the Democratic Party for a New Society (DPNS).

"We can't collapse. If we drew back at this point, the military regime would intensify its crackdown. Therefore, I

Defend Pablo Hasel the rapper, defend democratic rights in the Spanish State

21 February 2021, by **Dave Kellaway**

Criticise the monarchy, go to jail

He rapped and tweeted public attacks on the monarchy and his support for armed groups like ETA (a group that fights for Basque independence).

Pablo sees his mission to raise the consciousness of the people and to overthrow the capitalist dictatorship. In his song [Juan Carlos el Bobon](#) (Juan Carlos the dumb/idiot) he calls the ex-King a mafia boss and a whore. Given that it is a proven fact that Juan Carlos was corrupt and used his position to get big kickbacks from foreign governments, as well as being a notorious philanderer, Hasel's defence is clearly right - he was talking about objective facts. Indeed Juan Carlos abdicated and is now in exile due to the scandals. This king played an important role in managing the transition from the fascist Franco regime (1938 to 76) to a more modern capitalist one with severe anti-democratic hangovers from Francoism. Both the current ruling PSOE (Socialist Workers Party - like the Labour Party) and the Communist Party of the time collaborated in this 'blocked' transition.

How Podemos and the PSOE government have responded

Today the PSOE is in government supported by the radical Podemos group to its left. Its spokespeople have

been quick to condemn the 'violence' of the young protester but to be silent on the relish in which the fascist infiltrated police used their weapons against them. A demonstrator in Barcelona has already lost an eye. There have been demonstrations of thousands in a number of cities but the hot spots are in Barcelona and Catalonia where Hasel comes from. Last night banks were attacked.

Podemos, despite its ministers, has, to its honour, refused to condemn the violence and raised its ongoing concerns about the big democratic deficit in the present judicial and constitutional arrangements in the Spanish state. Its position has been fiercely attacked by key PSOE leaders. Pedro Sanchez, the prime minister, has made a veiled attack on those who do not condemn violence and attacks on democracy. "In a full democracy like Spain's violence is unacceptable" (*El Pais* 19 Feb). He did not indicate the police as the source of violence or how a democracy can be complete with laws condemning attacks on the monarchy and the problem of self-determination for Catalonia unresolved. Legal changes are being proposed by the PSOE to make it more difficult for courts being used by rightist prosecutors to jail people for free speech offences. The Spanish State has quite a few laws that give police a lot of leeway in dealing with demonstrations.

Clearly the Podemos leadership is worried about losing its significant support amongst younger people. It has called for Hasel to be pardoned, not released. Hasel himself refuses a pardon because he correctly believes he has done nothing wrong. A Podemos spokesman on 20 February

did clarify that while it supported protests it was against 'violent methods' of the minority. It is trying, to a degree, to ride two horses.

A response from Anticapitalistas

Raul Camargo and Lorena Cabrerizo, who are spokespeople for Anticapitalistas, have published an article in the [El Publico](#) national news site. We have translated some extracts that can help us further understand what is going on.

The protests for the release of Pablo Hasel are no coincidence. They are spontaneous, but they reflect the consciousness of a sector of young people who know that things are not going well. Freedom in this country is a fact that is constantly under threat, and it does not always come free. (...) There is an entirely legitimate youthful dissatisfaction. High unemployment figures, a privileged totally corrupt political class at the service of the interests of the economic elites, and the feeling that the future will be worse: this is the backdrop for the mobilisations(...).

We want to show our support for these protests, hypocritically attacked by the regime's spokespersons. We call to participate in them, this is what the anti-capitalist activists have done. The sudden concern about street furniture by the talk shows and politicians (who never say anything about the fires in the villages of Almeria and Huelva where migrant farm workers live in poverty) is an attempt to criminalise totally legitimate protests and to hide the underlying problems.

The repression of the protests and the brutal policing show another problem. The behaviour of state security forces are increasingly corporatist, aggressive towards the population and linked to the repressive agenda of the extreme right. Police organisations are the core of the organised social base of the far right and this problem needs to be addressed. They will take advantage of the situation to counterattack, try to isolate social protest and to strengthen themselves with the complicity of the political and media establishment. Faced with this, we need an overall strategy that allows us to broaden the field of protest, avoiding the isolation of the struggles, linking problems to an agenda of our own.

Basically, what we are seeing are the first throes of a social crisis that is

going to be very deep and that will undoubtedly have important political repercussions. The progressive government's bid to avoid any kind of change is translating into increasing disaffection among the people on the left. Podemos is trying to maintain a critical stance on some issues (to their credit, they have not joined in the criminalisation of protest for now) but lacks the social strength to influence the government's future. This contributes to its disengagement with the street: being in government under the command of the PSOE, as some of us have already warned, is not translating into appreciable social improvements, and it is translating into a loss of credibility.

(...) From the social and political left we need a strategy for new situation. Alongside the spontaneous

mobilisations of the youth, many other demands need to be raised: the defence of housing, the gift of European funds to big business, the failure of social policies such as the Minimum Living Income, the privatisation of public health, the non-repeal of the labour reform, the fight for liberties...(...) We are aware that the left is not at its best and that internal rifts and mutual distrust are part of the equation. We are not going to fall into the bureaucratic cant of demanding the unity of the left, and even less so to do so around this failed 'progressive' government. What we do urgently need is to turn these protests onto the offensive. This means avoiding the isolation of the protests, broadening them and involving more and more social sectors.

20 February

In Greece, anger rises against the government of money, cops and free riding

20 February 2021, by **Andreas Sartzekis**

Fire on the public education service

The most massive protests in recent weeks have concerned education, with, of course, the very strong mobilisations of the whole university world, supported by the workers' movement, against the law breaking up the university and police control of students. Unsurprisingly, the law was passed last week by 166 votes to 132, with the right-wing deputies being reinforced by the small group *Elliniki Lysi* (Greek Solution), the Nazi successor to *Chryssi Avgi* (Golden Dawn). The real surprise was the strength of the demonstrations, including those on Wednesday and Thursday, the voting day. This was a challenge to the dictates of the Minister of the Interior. The flagship measure of the law is the creation of an expensive police force in the

universities, and if one has the slightest doubt about their announced peaceful nature, one only has to see the violence with which the MATs (Greek riot police) hit the demonstrators to have no doubt about the government's intentions. To Tsipras, which was protesting against the creation of this body, Mitsotakis dared to reply: "It's not the police that we are introducing into the university, it's democracy."

In the French press this measure is a bit emotional, except in *Ouest-France*, which has managed to find an obscure professor who says all the good things he thinks about cops in universities. While the vast majority of the academic world is standing against this (ruinous) creation worthy of dictatorships (admired by some members of this regime) and even one of the most famous rightwing academics famous for having made the cops intervene against the

students of the Athens law school is clearly against this measure!

On the other hand, the articles in the French press forget the substance of the reform: as has been explained, it is the whole relatively open system of the Greek university which is broken with the law voted, excluding thousands of law students from studying law and favouring private companies, whose bosses are friends of the government. It is against this break-up of the university that there have been mobilisations that will continue. For many of them, the ministers in charge, children of the bourgeoisie who have never set foot in a public school or a Greek university, have a clearly assumed objective: they want to break the national education system from kindergarten to university, to hand it over to their friends in power, and in the wake of the university law, Minister Kerameos is preparing a law on the autonomy

and decentralization of the school system, obviously cut off from any pedagogical concern. The objective would simply be for the schools to impose their self-financing, with an appeal to local sponsors, by making them dependent on local institutions from an administrative and programmatic point of view, basically offering them to the needs of local employers, with local recruitment of staff... Blanquer [French minister of education] beaten on his own ground by ideologues who are madly in favour of the commodification of schools and the enslavement of their staff. Rich mobilizations in perspective...

Incompetence in power

But education is not the only area where anger is expressed. Faced with the pandemic, this government is demonstrating a rare incompetence. While in the spring, Greece had been relatively spared, since the end of the summer (not thanks to good management as the media claim, but thanks to a lesser effect of the virus in all the Balkans), the epidemic is now hitting hard.

Instead of responding to the demands of recruiting healthcare staff - there is a shortage of thousands of doctors in hospitals and health centres - the right has decided to cut the health budget. This at a time when the army's budget is rising sharply and it is spending 2.5 billion on 18 Rafale... What's more, the measures taken exasperate more and more people: as soon as they reopen, the shops have to close down abruptly. The schools had remained open, then the middle schools reopened for a week - but not the high schools - and for a few days now, all the establishments have been closed, without the requirement of 15 maximum per class being met (in the cities, the number of pupils can reach thirty with often poorly designed classrooms). As a bonus, the misnamed "New Democracy" of Mitsotakis offers itself increasingly shocking privileges: while vaccination

is at a standstill, we have seen right-wing executives arrive in their big sedans to be vaccinated without any rights, and the Prime Minister himself is multiplying what he does not even realise are provocations: while a hiking guide who organized an excursion with participants several hundred metres apart receives a fine of 5,000 euros, Mitsotakis gets his photo taken in the mountains with other cyclists not wearing masks and eats with dozens of companions in the house of a deputy on the island of Icaria. Balance sheet in Icaria: popular booing, which the friendly TVs tried to hide, while Minister Vouridis (former secretary of youth of the junta of colonels ...) explained that the Icarians wanted to express their love for the Prime Minister and that's why they invited him to come and eat ... This gives an idea of the political level under this "new democracy".

Repression and the support of the extreme right as the only supports

Devoid of any political strategy as the crisis deepens in the country, this regime believes it can make its credibility depend above all on the propaganda asserted by the vast majority of the media owned by its rich pals, but even if the brainwashing operation is massive, cracks are appearing in the big bourgeois press: dismissal of an editor-in-chief for a critical opinion, resignation of another, both very well known. With a prime minister who has placed the public broadcaster ERT under his direct control, this regime seems to have only one fear: seeing popular opposition develop and challenge his power. So its main response is repression, which is why the government is now ranked among the "flawed democracies" in the ranking of *The Economist* magazine. And of course, this is accompanied by a racist policy towards refugees and winks

supported by the extreme right: on the one hand, the political prisoner Dimitris Koufodinas is being refused return to the prison from which he was removed and confined for no reason in another; on the other hand, the Nazi criminals Pappas and Lagos are at liberty and Papavassiliou, sentenced to six years in prison, has seen his request for release satisfied after four months in prison ...

Another proof of authoritarianism reminiscent of the fascist junta of the colonels (1967-1974): in the bill on the university was hidden an article attempting to criminalize song lyrics that could be assimilated to a praise of terrorism... Rage and laughter on the part of the artists, the slightest song could have lyrics of such suspicion! As a result, hundreds of singers, both known and unknown, were mobilized, and the government was forced to withdraw the article, which was a major victory and proves that it is possible to win against this government. Thus, the fact alone of having held banned demonstrations with thousands of demonstrators against the university law is in itself a great victory, which gives some punch for the future.

What next? On the right, cracks are beginning to appear, on the one hand with the most nationalist currents (the former Prime Minister Antonis Samaras), on the other with the old Caramanlist right, which is worried about the Orbanization of power and its consequences, even if only the radicalization of the mass movement in the face of this anti-democratic regime. Unfortunately, even if the newspaper of NAR, the main organisation of the anti-capitalist left, headlines that the days of this government are numbered, the perspectives on the left are for the moment blocked, which reinforces the role of the mass movement and should push the radical and revolutionary left to come out of its reflexes of self-affirmation, which are of little use in offering credible perspectives on the left. Let's go left!

Athens, 16 February 2021

Capitol: “He is guilty” said 57 Senators, but Trump walks

19 February 2021, by **Barry Sheppard, Malik Miah**

Forty-three Republican Senators voted to acquit based on the false claim that the Senate trial was unconstitutional, though no one defended Trump’s actions leading up to and during the January 6 insurrection.

Trump escaped conviction and disqualification from future office.

In a statement after the verdict, Trump said his “beautiful movement” would be stronger than ever.

The persuasive Impeachment presentation by House members chosen for the job proved that Trump was guilty of the organization over months of what culminated on January 6.

Five people died including a Capitol policeman, and many members of Congress narrowly escaped physical harm or death.

It was Trump’s second “acquittal” in one year. He is the only president to lose the popular vote twice, to be impeached by the House twice, and survive two Senate trials.

Trump’ defense lawyer’s main argument was that the Democrats had a deep “hatred” of Trump, who had a right of “free speech” when he led the march to and attack on the Capitol building.

But video evidence showed Trump cheering on the mob during the violent riot inside the building, not merely exercising his right of “free speech.”

The cynicism of the Republicans afterwards was on full display. Mitch McConnell, the minority leader of the Senate who voted to “acquit,” said Trump was “practically and morally” guilty for the January 6 insurrection but because he is a private citizen, he

should not be convicted.

McConnell himself as the then Majority leader of the Senate prevented the Senate from beginning the trial while Trump was still president.

At the end, both the Republican and the Democratic leaders agreed to get the trial over with quickly, for their own reasons.

The Establishment Democrats wanted January 6 put behind them, to “get on” with compromising with Republicans in Congress to “get things done.” Trump’s lawyers wanted to get the evidence over with.

The Democrats’ House managers at the trial took less than a week to present their case. They called not a single witness.

An alternative

Consumer advocate and former two-time Green Party presidential candidate, Ralph Nader, in an interview on Democracy Now during the trial observed:

“This is not a criminal proceeding; it’s a civil proceeding controlled completely by the U.S. Senate. The Supreme Court ruled in Nixon versus the U.S. years ago that the judiciary has no role whatsoever, There’s no appeal. There’s no protracted delays. It’s all up to the Senate and the Senate rules, number one.

Number two, the purpose of this impeachment effort is prophylactic. It is designed not just to hold Trump accountable under the Constitution, but to prevent future wannabe Trumps from behaving in the same way. Therefore, the only really result of a guilty verdict would be disqualifying

Trump from running for federal office anymore....

[Without witnesses], what the Republicans will do is simply say, “This is a video show trial. A lot of the material was taken out of context. And the protagonists were entirely Democratic partisans, members of the House Democratic Party.” If you have witnesses, you have the potential of breakthrough testimony. Mike Pence, for example. Jay Rosen, for example. Brad Raffensperger. They might be required to testify about far deeper crimes than simply a telephone call to the Justice Department by Trump or to the Georgia Secretary of State twisting their elbows to try to change the course or the count of the election....”

The presentation of Trump’s defense lawyers lasted a little more than three hours, less than a quarter of the time that Trump’s lawyers were allotted. They did not even take up the concrete allegations in the impeachment charges. Instead they tried to say that anti-racists and Democrats used the same language Trump used on January 6.

They played so many clips of Representative Maxine Waters, a prominent Black Democrat of California, delivering fiery speeches, that one might have thought that she was on trial.

No surprise there as the Republicans whip up anti-Black racism by stoking white fears of “uppity” Blacks.

Trump’s legal argument was also laced with racism and falsehoods. His lawyers blamed “radical” Democrats, Black activists and antifa (antifascists) for what happened.

Anti-Black policies and rhetoric has been the staple of the Trump

government and the right-wing media. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement was vilified while white supremacist groups were given a pass in such media and outright embraced by Trump.

The BLM mass actions protesting cop violence last year, which were led by Blacks but were joined by many young whites, were attacked by armed, militarized police and troops of federal departments, such as the Border Patrol, answering only to the president.

The BLM leaders have repeatedly pointed out the hypocrisy of U.S. “democracy” and dual legal systems—one for whites, one for Blacks and other oppressed people.

When the rioters on January 6 were finally escorted out of the Capitol, they were treated with kid gloves and no arrests were made and even their names were not recorded. Subsequent arrests of some of the insurrectionists are based on minor charges.

The Democrats response to the slander and lies about the BLM at the Senate trial was to call it a distraction and diversion from the real issue of Trump’s actions.

The Democrats did not put white supremacy on trial in the Senate even though violent white supremacists were those who attacked the Capitol, and were organized and led by the openly white supremacist President Trump.

They couldn’t do this because they themselves have stoked white supremacy, although not as blatantly as they did for eight decades of their support to the Jim Crow system in the South, and not as blatantly as Trump.

They use “dog whistles” and code words, and led the charge of criminalizing Blacks in the 1980s and ‘90s that led to them and Latinos being funneled into the system of mass incarceration underlying the “New Jim Crow”.

White supremacy is the ideology the whole ruling class and its politicians have used to justify the oppression of Blacks for the last four centuries. The Democrats couldn’t put that on

trial.

Why did the establishment Republicans remain loyal to Trump? They recognize that Trump has some 70-80 percent of voting Republicans in his base. Many in his base have even threatened violence against elected Republicans who voted against Trump in the House of Representatives and Senate, and state offices.

Since the trial, Republicans who voted to impeach Trump in the House or to convict him in the Senate, have been censured by Republican machines in the states they represent.

The mob leaders in ultra white nationalist fascist groups like the Proud Boys, Three Percenters, Boogaloo Bois and Oath Keepers who don’t agree on many topics are all followers of Trump. They admit they went to Washington D.C. with weapons to support Trump and attack the capital under his orders. These fascist groups represent tens of thousands, while Trump’s supporters number in the tens of millions. But they are tolerated by most among his supporters as part of their movement.

Trump has openly supported these groups, and as January 6 demonstrated, he can mobilize them to commit violence when and if he deems it necessary.

The dilemma facing elected Republicans and Democrats going forward is the cloud of Trump is above their heads. Both ruling class parties seek to protect the idea of the “presidency” while not admitting the reality of how much power the presidency has acquired over time.

Trump established in practice that the Executive branch has all the power, and he could do what he wanted in foreign and domestic affairs without personal consequences.

What next

Trump could face criminal charges in New York, Georgia and Washington, D.C. He faces a rape charge in a civil case in New York City.

Trump is not interested in democracy. He is an authoritarian in the

Bonapartist mold. He wants to be president for life. That’s why to this day he refuses to recognize the Biden win and presidency. He still refers to himself as the president.

Who says he will not be a candidate again? And take his acquittal as proof he should act before the election takes place to “stop the steal”?

Or, he may be thinking of a Trump dynasty. A key Republican leader, Senator Lindsey Graham, has endorsed Lara Trump’s announcement she is considering running for Senator from North Carolina in 2022.

The seat she would run for is that of Senator Burr, who will not run again. Burr was one the the senators who voted to convict Trump, which riled up Trump’s base in the state.

As of now, the Republican Party remains Trump’s party. There are new fissures in the party, as exemplified by Republican’s in the House voting to impeach, and Senators to convict.

McConnell’s comments that Trump was guilty of organizing and inciting the insurrection is another indication.

But Republicans know they cannot win elections without Trump’s base. How this conflict will play out remains to be seen.

Establishment Democrats are not ready to fight Trump or his far-right base. They look to win “moderate” Republicans, not more progressive supporters.

Biden seeks to accommodate the conservatives and move on to “normal” partisan debates.

As leaders of African Americans, immigrants and indigenous people know from history that arguments of false equivalency between white supremacists and fighters for equal rights will be used to attack uprisings by Black and Brown and Native American people.

The progressive movement and socialist left must mobilize against white racism, defend Black and Brown communities and actively oppose the imperialist foreign policy of Republicans and Democrats.

How to fight the pandemic? Notes on experiences in Asia and Europe

18 February 2021, by **Frank Prouhet, Pierre Rousset**

The history of any epidemic (and *a fortiori* any pandemic) combines many areas: biological and ecological, medical and scientific, political, social or cultural and so on. Hence it puts health systems (in the broad sense), solidarities (intergenerational, male-female, social and international), and states very much to the test.

When the conditions are right, an epidemic today internationalizes much faster than in the past as a result of capitalist globalization. The 1957 flu took 6 months to make Europe the heart of the pandemic, two months was enough for Covid-19. So, there was less time to prepare for its arrival, but there was still enough time to do so - it was lost, with the dramatic consequences that we all know. As we will see, this was not just a lack of responsiveness caused by bureaucratic dysfunctions. We don't have to deal with a simple lack of preparation in the temporal sense of the term. It has class (bourgeois) roots.

Not only was the Chinese warning ignored in January 2020, but the early experience of East Asia was not studied. However, it made it possible to anticipate events and to develop an appropriate health policy. On the scale of Johns Hopkins University - which only takes into account states or territories that have reported cases of Covid-19 - four of the five countries with the fewest deaths per 100,000 inhabitants are Asian: Taiwan, Vietnam, [Tanzania], Papua New Guinea (but here the social structure and density are extraordinarily different) and Thailand. A comparison: the death rate per 100,000 inhabitants in January 2021 was 113.46 in France

against 0.03 in Taiwan!

Europe unprepared

Contrary to popular belief, "advanced", but more "purely" capitalist, Europe, is less prepared to face epidemics than Asian countries where either community or bureaucratic structures, the distant legacy of revolutions, persist (even if they are fading) giving rise to a public health policy. The pandemic health preparedness index ranks Thailand sixth in the world and France eleventh.

On the strength of health advances (improved living conditions, antibiotics, vaccines), the Western world had proclaimed the "end of epidemics", henceforth reserved for "underdeveloped" countries. Health systems have focused on individual care, which yields the most profit, at the expense of prevention, of overall health. On the other hand, if Asia is also struck by the ills of the new capitalist world (explosion of diabetes, cancer and so on), contagious infectious diseases are still present there and are not understood only as individual pathologies.

The paradox is that, with overconfidence and neoliberal counter-reforms helping, the capitalist West has liquidated its anti-epidemic know-how (and the means that go with it) even as the epidemic risk worsened. Capitalist globalization, by dramatically accelerating the movement of goods and people, can change the nature of diseases: four

dengue viruses had their own separate geographic areas. Their dense contact created a new form of dengue, haemorrhagic, which began in the 1950s in Asia (Thailand, Philippines), global warming facilitating its spread. Ailments caused by viruses transmitted by mosquitoes, ticks and other bloodsuckers (arboviruses) have succeeded one another: Zika, chikungunya, yellow fever.

An adaptive mutation related to the 2003 coronavirus, Sars-Cov-2 (remember that this is the name of the virus causing the disease) appears in a period of upheaval in the pathocenosis, that is to say of rapid changes in the balance of human pathologies. Ecological upheavals, including deforestation, are changing the relationship between the animal world and human life, as well as factory farming: the H1N1 flu originated in Mexico (and not in Asia!) not far from the Smithfield pig factories. The development of gigantic megalopolises has constituted a privileged environment for the circulation of viruses. The food industry has imposed its dictates and so-called civilization pathologies are exploding (diabetes, hypertension). The population is getting older. These comorbidities are the bedrock of the new coronavirus. It is certainly less lethal than its predecessor, but it goes around the globe and therefore, ultimately, causes many more deaths. Covid-19 is a disease of capitalist globalization.

There is no universal recipe for tackling an infectious disease. An appropriate health policy depends in particular on the social structures and the environment specific to each

country or region. The effectiveness of the choices made by the authorities is measured between close and comparable countries. However, there are a few simple considerations to start with.

The price of delay

Faced with a serious emerging epidemic, any delay in reaction from the authorities has a high price. This was dramatically confirmed in China in late 2019- early 2020. Once the Covid-19 disease had established itself, its rapid spread internationally was inevitable (especially since China is at the heart of trade). The question then was: would the same mistake be made in other countries? Several Asian countries reacted swiftly, but this was generally not the case in Europe, which as a result became a springboard from which the epidemic became a global pandemic.

Taiwan's counterexample shows positively what a quick reaction allows. This country was particularly exposed, with hundreds of thousands of Taiwanese working in China and multitudes of Chinese tourists visiting the island. A first imported case of Covid-19 was detected on 21 January 2020. The government immediately activated the disease control plan drawn up on the basis of the experience of the 2003 SARS epidemic, implementing around 100 measures. It never had to lock down the population. A year later, the country has only 8 dead (Taiwan has just recorded its first death since May 2020) and the number of positive cases is around 912.

Another counterexample, Vietnam, was also on the front line. As in Taiwan, the authorities reacted without delay. During the first wave of the epidemic, it had no deaths. After the second wave, the country recorded 35 deaths from the pandemic as a result of local community transmissions.

The price of

Eurocentrism and foolish cultural nationalism

We did not know everything about the SARS-Cov-2 coronavirus in January 2020 - it is still a novelty and the more we learn about it, the more new questions arise. We knew, however, more than enough to act. Many articles were published in leading scientific journals and, in France, the health watch had done its job. The Asian experience, both early and varied, was instructive. Alas, European political circles are rarely used to learning from Asia. The metropolises of the late empires are struggling to shake off their arrogance - and blind Eurocentrism. Why be concerned with what is happening "over there" in the distance?

The refusal to learn from Asia involved its share of racist clichés and connotations, as if Asians (in this case from the Far East) were behaving like obedient robots, regardless of freedoms. Popular protest against the authorities is nevertheless evident in China (witness the number of administrative buildings set on fire). South Korean youth are also claiming their right to enjoy themselves. The Japanese certainly greet each other without touching each other, but they are also people who like to live well, who regularly frequent tiny bars and traditional restaurants (high places of contamination, as we know) where the crowds are higher than here.

In France, we are smarter - how many times did Jérôme Salomon, the irremovable director of health, spell this out during the press conferences he held in February-March 2020. We do things our way, necessarily better. In France again, "we" foolishly laughed at the levity of the Italians, hit hard by the pandemic, shortly before us. Flattering the nationalist ego is a recipe so often used to divert attention from real issues and real responsibilities. This posture reveals a bewildering myopia even as Covid 19 accelerates the shift of the geopolitical centre of the world towards Asia and the Indo-Pacific region.

The price of lying

The Vietnamese government lied during the 2003 epidemic and it cost them dearly; it learned the lessons: in 2020, it spoke the truth, which is one of the factors that explain the success of its health policy during the first wave of Covid-19. The Chinese government lied, but the Taiwanese government told the truth. The French authorities dug into lies to hide their responsibilities in the then prevailing state of lack of equipment. In Vietnam, surgical masks were available over the counter at any drugstore. France was unable to produce them. Amazement in Vietnam to see the former colonial power so deindustrialized, become what can be called a dependent imperialism.

Since there were no masks, gel or gowns, French political and health authorities claimed that Covid-19 was not that dangerous and that masks were useless (or worse). Lying has become a policy. We are still paying the price today. Not only have the authorities' words been discredited, but the door has been opened to the most dangerous health denials. It would have been healthier and easier to tell the truth: masks, hydro-alcoholic solutions, are important, but we don't have any, so we'll have to do without for a while.

Do not expect political and health authorities to admit having lied. Lawsuits are possible for endangering the lives of others. So, they claim that it was not known whether masks were effective against this coronavirus: was it spread by contact or by air? Note that the mask is useful in both cases, because it prevents us from touching our nose or mouth (which we do spontaneously). It should also be noted that masks are a standard measure in the event of epidemic contamination by the respiratory tract. Above all, countries have effectively reacted, in various ways, from January. Besides Taiwan and Vietnam, this was also the case for South Korea (after a brief delay), Thailand or the people of Hong Kong who masked themselves overnight without waiting for the authorities to recommend it.

The culprits are now relying on

belated directives from the World Health Organization (WHO). Our leaders are, however, well placed to know that this body is subject to pressure from the main member states and that it is not (or no longer) free to talk. They brought under control an Organization which, in the 1970s, had shown itself to be too independent (which was a guarantee of its effectiveness). It is now subject to double pressure from governments (notably exerted by China in January 2020) and private donors. Plus, faced with a global shortage of masks, it (rightly) believed they should be reserved for healthcare workers. In times of scarcity, we must of course make choices, but in France we have experienced a genuine anti-mask campaign which has left deep traces.

Feedback of experiences

By opposing "liberal democracy" and "authoritarian regimes" (China, Vietnam) or "[East] Asian traditions" to "Western" concerns about individual freedoms, many French commentators are playing a dangerous game, suggesting that in the fight against an epidemic as formidable as Covid-19, a dictatorial order would be more effective than a "democratic" one.

China. The dictatorial order has meant in China that "whistle-blowers" have been brutally suppressed and that the first outbreaks detected were not nipped in the bud. Confronted by an epidemic that had grown out of control, Beijing imposed extremely violent lockdowns in the most affected cities - these lockdowns are by no means models (to put it mildly)! The Chinese experience, however, deserves to be studied. Xi Jinping has greatly strengthened the CCP's single leadership and personal dictatorship, but Chinese society is complex and not just one political order. Power must also develop mechanisms ensuring popular support (great power nationalism being one). The experience of the pandemic is not uniform across this continent. In unaffected areas, local structures linked to the CCP (and usually monitoring the population) have

established controls to prevent the arrival of potentially infectious people. The memory of the criminal mistakes, the suffering inflicted, and the lies will not disappear, but it is mingled with relief following the victories won and the hope that the state remains able to contain the danger of further contamination caused by the return to the country of Chinese residents or foreigners. Many questions therefore remain unanswered.

Hong Kong. During the first wave of January-February 2020, the response of the people of Hong Kong was remarkable. They saw the imminent danger. The territory was in direct contact with one of the most virulent Chinese epidemic centres. Population density is one of the highest in the world, and the structure of urban housing makes it difficult to maintain physical distances within homes or buildings. However, on the strength of the SARS experience of 2003, the population spontaneously masked itself, while the authorities, under Beijing's influence, still advocated procrastination - a form of spontaneous self-organization.

Healthcare workers went on strike for five days in a row to demand that the border be closed and that sufficient resources be obtained, otherwise hospitals would be unable to cope; this mobilization was made possible by the creation in December, in this sector, of an activist trade union originating from the 2019 movement.

All this occurred during a genuine citizens' uprising to defend the legal and civic rights enjoyed by the population under the agreements reached at the time of the handover to China of the former British colony. Beijing had in fact decided to impose its direct hold on this "Special Administrative Region". The fight against the epidemic has been integrated into a comprehensive struggle, with remarkable health results.

The general climate has since changed. Not only has Covid-19 been long-lasting, with the permanent danger of new surges fuelled by the return of residents to their homes (hence a policy of quarantine), but the battle to defend the autonomy of the

territory has been lost. Fatigue is felt, following this defeat and the considerable toughening of the repression. At the end of January 2021, since the start of the epidemic, there had been 10,453 cases of contamination and 181 deaths linked to the coronavirus (the territory has 7.5 million inhabitants).

South Korea. South Korea was one of the countries most vulnerable to the pandemic in February 2020, after members of the Shincheonji Church of Jesus returned clandestinely from Wuhan. The government mobilized and reoriented the industrial apparatus to produce what was necessary to fight the epidemic (nothing in common with Macron's "patriotic masks" supposed to bring relief to the French textile industry). It has deployed enormous resources to "test and trace" the chains of contamination and "isolate" those who are contagious. Initially, this last measure led to tragedies, the names of the patients having sometimes been revealed, subjecting them to the vindictiveness of those around them. This has been partially rectified (anonymity being better guaranteed by the medical teams and the data being stored independently of the state), but the government is today calling for denunciations of people who do not respect the measures of protection (with rewards) - a very dangerous slide towards the "surveillance society".

However, the South Korean experience shows how "test, trace, isolate" is one of the key elements of a health policy in the face of Covid-19. Without establishing lockdown, the contamination curve stabilized at around 8-9,000 cases. The country (more than 50 million inhabitants) had on 30 January recorded 1,425 deaths.

In Ile-de-France, it was only recently that the COVISAM teams began to operate effectively. Until now, hotels have remained desperately empty and the arrangement of the conditions of isolation at home very uncertain, because they were not part of a prevention policy, despite Macron's unkept promise of a home visit for each carrier of the virus. If the French authorities had wanted to learn from South Korea, they could have

anticipated the implementation of a screening policy well in advance (also called for by many researchers).

Vietnam. Vietnam's success is linked to how it was able to mobilize the population by telling the truth about the situation and using social media to alert it - including showing a music video viewed 65 million times. Screening was set up, borders were closed, a strict quarantine policy was established regarding the return of nationals and the arrival of experts, while hotels, barracks and hospitals were mobilised (up to 40,000 people were affected). All the mass organizations linked to the party (Women's Union and so on) were called upon to implement the health policy. Vietnam has only experienced two weeks of national lockdown and has 35 dead for a population of 97 million.

Political regimes and "social fabric"

Is there a simple relationship between political regime and health efficiency in the face of an epidemic? The answer is far from obvious.

Neoliberal hegemony is an almost universal rule. It dominates the regime's politics in Sri Lanka - but the free public hospital care system has yet to be dismantled; it was effectively put to work in relation to Covid-19. Is a federal plan a plus or a minus? It seems that the answer can only be "it depends". Angela Merkel had measures adopted more quickly and more effectively than in France during the first epidemic wave, with the agreement of the Länder; this was no longer the case in the autumn, which contributed to an epidemic outbreak (some Länder ministers admit this). Under Trump, Democratic-controlled states opposed his devastating madness; under Biden, Republican states have refused to implement the new health policy deployed at the federal level.

On the other hand, it is tempting to answer that the French system of hyper-centralization in the person of the president is a minus. The system is opaque, while transparency over time

is a key factor for popular support. The vocabulary underlines it: the choices are made by the Defence Council whose meetings are subject to defence secrecy! The French Constitution, marked by the context of the time (an army in rebellion imposing the accession of De Gaulle to the presidency) is probably the least democratic in Western Europe (with, perhaps, the Spanish Constitution, in different ways). Macronism accentuates its original faults by making it even more presidentialist in practice. Emmanuel Macron decides at the end of the day, according to his whim, and does not like strong personalities to act as a counterweight to his authority. However, the presidency is not organized to govern and anticipate the implementation of policies (in logistics, for example). As for Macron, his personal history has not prepared him to think of a health policy. The Merkels are scientists. Taiwanese Vice President Chen Chien-jen is a Johns Hopkins-trained epidemiologist and virus expert - it helps! Macron is formatted by the world of capital governance - it is disastrous.

There is a wealth of experience in France of mutual aid "on the ground" in the face of an epidemic. This was the case with helping AIDS patients, to break their isolation, to inform and popularize protection (condoms). It was again the case with Covid-19 during lockdown, often in collaboration with town halls, in particular in lower-income neighbourhoods: food distribution, location of isolated elderly people or populations not covered by official funding (including foreign and trans prostitutes who had lost all forms of resources), mobilization so that the homeless were urgently accommodated, action against domestic violence (against women and children) and so on. However, Macronism has always refused to associate the "ground" with the implementation of health policy (he even has difficulty "dialoguing" with elected officials). He is deeply authoritarian and verticalist. [5] Corollary: he has a narrow vision and, after having violently repressed the mobilizations of caregivers, he remains foreign to any notion of health democracy or community

health. [6]

The more we dig, the more it becomes apparent that we must take into account actually existing society, as a whole and not stick to definitions that often only refer to state structures of domination. A comparison between Thailand and France (two countries comparable in terms of the number of inhabitants) is very instructive. In principle, the cost of the epidemic should have been much higher in the Thai kingdom than in French "western democracy": it is under military rule and the monarch is of dubious character. The reality is the opposite.

In Thailand, health authorities bypassed political (military) and royal authorities to mobilize pre-existing volunteer networks in villages and urban centres - which precisely has not been done in France. In January 2021, there were 77 dead in Thailand against 76,000 in France.

Solidarity, a factor of health efficiency and social justice

Immigrants have often been singled out and discriminated against during the pandemic; they are nevertheless its victims and have few resources to face the danger. Governments generally began to protect only their nationals, as in Thailand and Singapore, only to realize, at times, that by excluding migrants they were allowing the pandemic to continue. Of course, to include migrants in the health care system, undocumented migrants must be guaranteed that they will not be sanctioned or expelled, so that they do not avoid health checks.

Popular insecurity has reached new heights in the Philippines, subject to Duterte's dictatorship, police impunity and death squad violence, widespread corruption, harsh lockdowns without effective social compensation and multiple military conflicts (in Mindanao in particular, in the south of the archipelago). Solidarity networks work in particularly difficult conditions to support the most marginalized populations.

For a long time, a particularly large part of the Filipino population has migrated to the West or the Middle East; the survival of families in this country depends on it. These emigrants can have secure jobs, but they are most often precarious (domestic service). Their insecurity has increased with Covid.

Many nurses in British hospitals are Filipino. They can be subjected to an insidious hierarchy of roles, de facto racial discrimination, albeit invisible, being more often than others placed in risky situations, receiving less or later protective clothing. It should be noted, however, that all hospital staff in Britain paid an extremely high price for being unprepared for the epidemic and for the choices made by Boris Johnson's government (four times more infections than in the general population). It should be noted in passing that in some hospitals (regardless of the country?) the members of the administrative hierarchy have granted themselves the best protection even though they do not treat patients.

In Hong Kong, Chinese families have outright thrown Filipino and Indonesian servants onto the streets for fear they will infect them. Or, conversely, they have forbidden them to go out (which allows them to demand availability 24 hours a day, 7 days a week). However, the employer's family is not a place of socialization for a domestic worker,

who is moreover confronted with racism. They are traditionally found in walking areas during their weekly leave where they must now keep their distance.

In general, the pandemic is testing social solidarity, within families, intergenerational or international. There is a search for scapegoats (foreigners, the elderly). This is favoured in the West by neoliberal individualism, a component of the dominant ideology, destructive of solidarities (but countered by currents of solidarity resistance). How less dominant is it in East Asia? The fight for solidarity is being waged on all fronts, including cultural ones.

Generally, we have to fight on two fronts at the same time. Against the "scientific" claims of the drug industry whose choices are dictated by financial considerations (including a very high rate of payment to shareholders) and against the rise of increasingly disturbing irrationalism. A scene that one might have thought specific to the United States is also happening in France: an ordinary patient insulting nurses by claiming that "Covid does not exist" when he must be placed on respiratory assistance. That the 5G theory is spreading leaves us speechless. [7] Through their lies, the political authorities have opened a breach in which conspiracy theories are rampant, as well as being fanned by

"populist" figures eager to build up a clientele.

The Asian experience confirms the obvious: people learn from experience (sometimes more than rulers). However, if irrationalism spreads, this progressive process can be fractured in a country like France. The issue is not marginal.

The policy of a state of health emergency gives a boost to an almost universal authoritarian drift of political regimes. Health democracy and community health thus become key components of the democratic struggle.

The same is true of the question of treatments and vaccines. Private firms have neither the will nor the means to produce them in sufficient quantity to meet the needs of a pandemic such as Covid-19. These drugs must fall within the public domain and the means should be provided to poor countries to develop production chains on their own territory.

The logic of the common good must decisively prevail against privatization via patents. Along with food security, the right to health is an obvious requirement. The arrival of vaccines (and hopefully also of treatments) and their shortage organized by the capitalist logic of profit underlines the burning actuality of the solidarity-based alternative, in a radical break with the dominant order.

Biden Moves Ahead as Republicans Line Up Behind Trump

17 February 2021, by Dan La Botz

All of this as the health and economic crises continue with 465,000 pandemic deaths, over twenty million unemployed, and millions facing eviction and hunger. Biden's initial domestic and foreign policy positions are more liberal than some on the left would have predicted, and the

expected split in the Republican Party had not happened. Where does all of this put the left?

Biden, who often seeks compromise, has decided instead to push ahead with his \$1.9 trillion stimulus plan to deal with the health and economic

crises. The Republicans want a program less than half that size. The Democrats, however, have only a one-vote majority in the Senate and only a ten-vote majority in the House, and at least one Democratic Senator has questioned the Biden plan.

In foreign policy, in a reversal of Trump positions, Biden has ended military aid to Saudi Arabia in its war against the Houthi rebels. The Saudi Arabian war has taken at least 100,000 lives and killed some 10,000 civilians, while 85,000 have died in the famine and 2,500 from cholera. While U.S. aid will end, the Gulf States have the arms to continue the war; still, Biden's change in policy could be a first step toward ending the horror. Biden is also exploring the possibility of rejoining the Iran nuclear deal, seeking to align the U.S. with its Western European allies.

Many, like leftist writer Mike Davis, predicted that after the January 6 attack on the capitol, the Republican Party would split. It has not happened yet. Trump's continued dominance seems clear. In the congressional vote to recognize Biden's victory in the election, 7 senators and 120 members of the house voted against certifying Biden's victory. On the impeachment vote in the House 272 Democrats and a few Republicans voted for

impeachment but 197 Republicans voted against. These votes reflect the Republicans' fear of offending Trump and his base.

The most recent test for the Republicans is the case of newly elected Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene who since her election has been backed by former president Trump. Greene claimed that former president Barack Obama was a Muslim. She supported the conspiracy theories of QAnon, who believes that a cabal of pedophiles runs the U.S. government. She also argued that the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center in New York did not involve airliners but was an inside job. And she said that school shootings in which dozens of children died were staged events to justify new gun laws. As if that were not enough, she claimed that laser beams controlled by the Rothschild family started California wildfires to benefit Jewish businessmen.

Pushed to discipline her, the Republican Party rallied around her, and when in a caucus meeting she

repudiated these theories, it gave her a standing ovation. So, in an unprecedented move, the Democrats stripped her of all committee assignments, nullifying her influence in the House. Now Trump's impeachment trial has begun, but with Republicans fearing him, there is little chance of his being convicted.

The Democratic Socialist of America, the largest left group, has been largely defined by its electoral strategy. In 2016 and 2020, it supported Bernie Sanders whose campaigns buoyed up DSA for five years. DSA pursued an electoral strategy of supporting Democratic Party socialist and progressive candidates and elected a few. With Biden now leading the Democrats and two-thirds of Americans supporting his policies, DSA is emphasizing local politics and calling for taxing the rich. Will DSA be able to continue to grow in this new terrain? Will workers take action? Will social movements revive?

Source [New Politics](#).

Battle of the polls - tension between the lefts.

16 February 2021, by **Decio Machado**

Although initially it appeared that the indigenous candidacy of Yaku Pérez, from the Pachakutik movement, had gained the second biggest vote in the presidential elections on Sunday 7 February and Pérez would emerge as the opponent of *Correísmo* in a second round, the evolution of the vote count reversed this by the afternoon of Tuesday 9 February. Guillermo Lasso, financial magnate and candidate of the elites, became, with just a handful of votes more than Pérez, the opponent of former *Correísta* minister Andrés Arauz in the ballot which will take place on 11 April.

The suspicions of the indigenous movement are based on the fact that the territory that was last in the processing of the votes was the province of Guayas, the historical

fiefdom of the Social Christians. It is a coastal right-wing sector allied to Lasso's candidacy and traditionally known for its electoral malpractices. In Guayas, the records that presented inconsistencies went from being 5% in the previous electoral process to being 20% this time. Thus, a significant number of votes remained at the mercy of the decision of the National Electoral Council. [8] According to what indigenous electoral observers said, during the slow processing of votes in recent days, several bags of votes and a significant part of the electoral records with inconsistencies could have been replaced - with the complicity of the members of that body, taken over by delegates from the right - although this has not yet been proven.

Changing priorities

Beyond this situation and given the very narrow difference in votes between Pérez and Lasso, the truth is that on Sunday 7 February the people of Ecuador broke with the socio-political cleavage that has marked the last 14 years in this country: the polarity between two clearly opposed political factions. On the one hand, that of the former president, now exiled in Belgium, Rafael Correa, and the political-partisan structure that he leads and, on the other, that of the pro-business right represented by Lassos, at the head of the CREO party.

Despite the electoral slogan "In a

single round” with which the favourite candidate, Arauz, hoped to avoid a ballot, his party barely obtained 3 million votes (32.6% of valid votes cast). Lasso and the indigenous candidate Pérez obtained around 1,800,000 votes each (between 19.7 and 19.5% of the vote). In fourth place was Xavier Hervas, a young businessman unknown until this campaign, who ran for the social liberal party Izquierda Democrática (ID) and obtained about 1 and a half million votes (15.7 percent). The result of the other 12 candidacies that disputed the presidency was marginal.

Andrés Arauz, candidate of Correísmo

The opposition of anti-extractivism versus developmentalism and new versus traditional politics was thus expressed in a scenario that initially appeared dominated by the confrontation between Correa’s supporters and detractors. This breach materialized in what was achieved by Pachakutik and ID, an old party on the political scene that has decayed in recent years. To understand this phenomenon, it must be recognised that the candidates of both forces connected in their campaign with segments of the population that no longer felt represented by traditional politics. Beyond his success in the highland and Amazonian territories, Pérez achieved a particular impact among urban youth through an environmental message “in defence of Pachamama”, while Hervas presented himself as the leader of renovation. Both defended, in addition, the right to abortion due to rape against the other candidates, who chose to oppose legalizing it or did not directly address the issue.

Pachakutik made up for its rivals’ criticism of the shortcomings of the economic plan it presented during the campaign – even less transformative than that presented by *Correísmo* – by emerging as the depository of the political capital accumulated in the 2019 indigenous uprising against the IMF and the government of Lenin Moreno. In many popular urban

sectors, Pérez was seen as part of the “people”, “one of us” and not as a member of the establishment.

The surprising thing about the result obtained by Pachakutik in these elections – the previous polls gave it around 11% of the vote – is in part the effect of the politicization of the pain of many Ecuadorian families after more than 15,000 deaths from Covid-19 in 2020 recorded by official figures; the current accelerated increase in unemployment and job insecurity, suffered by at least 83% of the economically active population, according to the Institute of Statistics and Censuses; the constant loss of purchasing power of the middle and lower middle classes, which is generating strong family indebtedness, and the growth of poverty, which affects almost 38% of Ecuadorians, and of inequality, which increased by 6% last year, according to UNICEF figures. In this context, the indigenous party, founded in 1995 as an electoral front of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (Conaie), has thus obtained the best performance in its history at the polls, becoming the second biggest party in the National Assembly.

Tensions and the danger of division

The criminalization of social protest during the decade of Rafael Correa’s government (2007-2017) and the opening of legal proceedings against a good part of the indigenous leadership who exercised their right to resistance in defence of their territories have opened a breach that currently makes understanding between the two political factions impossible. In this context, conflict within the indigenous movement seems inevitable. While Pérez and his entourage, more open to negotiating with the right a common anti-government front, maintain the position of reopening the polls and recounting the votes in the seven provinces in which they consider that there are incidents – especially in Guayas – the most combative sectors of Conaie, those who led the popular uprising of October 2019, would hardly support Lasso’s candidacy in a second round.

At the same time, part of *Correísmo* seems to prioritize the conflict with the indigenous movement, which it accuses of complicity in the dismantling – carried out over the last four years – of the institutional framework installed during the progressive decade. This bitter dispute between the two main options on the left may pave the way to power for a neoliberal right that on Sunday barely won 20% of popular support.

However, just as there are differences within the indigenous movement, not all *Correísmo* shares the confrontational stance against Pachakutik, led by Rafael Correa himself. His former minister and presidential candidate Arauz has been making permanent calls for the formation of a broad front that incorporates not only the indigenous movement, but also the liberal social democratic expression represented by the ID. In fact, in the *Correista* ranks there is a tension similar to that seen recently in Bolivia between old and new cadres of *progresismo*.

Predestined for crisis

At this juncture it is difficult to see how Ecuador’s political stalemate will be resolved. A feasible scenario would be for Pérez’s claim to open the polls and recount the votes. If the alleged fraud denounced by Pachakutik is proven, the rival to *Correísmo* in the second round would be Pérez himself, who would have to negotiate with the elites and

At this juncture it is difficult to see how Ecuador’s political blockade will be resolved. A feasible scenario would be for Pérez’s claim to open the polls and recount the votes. If the alleged fraud denounced by Pachakutik is proven, the rival of *Correísmo* in the second round would be Pérez himself, who would have to negotiate with the economic elites in exchange for his vote. This would lead to serious tensions in the indigenous movement.

In the event that Lasso’s passage to the ballot is confirmed, Pérez may declare his support for him in the second round in exchange for some

second-order ministerial portfolios. It would not be the first time that Pachakutik has made this political mistake. However, once again it seems difficult for such a position - an alliance of the historically forgotten with the country's elites - to be supported by Conaie, the true organizational structure of indigenous power.

Finally, if the vote count demanded by Pérez does not take place, a powerful indigenous mobilization is assured in which episodes such as those of October 2019 could be repeated. A scenario like this, on the other hand, would also mean consequent repression by the state security

apparatuses and even the possibility of a Bolivian scenario, with the imposition of a temporary de facto government until a new electoral consultation. Undoubtedly, that would be a propitious occasion for those who wish to impose the package of economic measures demanded by the IMF, which lacks the support of the vast majority of Ecuadorians.

In addition to this political crisis, there is also the announcement by the State Attorney General's Office of an investigation of the finances of the Arauz campaign based on a complaint from Colombia. According to the magazine *Semana*, aligned with conservative interests in that country, the insurgents of the National

Liberation Army would have donated about 80,000 dollars to the electoral campaign of *Correísmo*. Despite the fact that the credibility of this publication on issues related to the guerrillas and their alleged links with legal *progresismo* has been severely diminished and the accusation is so far unfounded, it is clear that there is a strong interest for the Ecuadorian government and its allies in the region in achieving the election of a government of conservative tint for the next legislature.

12 February 2021

Translated by International Viewpoint from [Correspondencia de Prensa](#).

Catalan elections closely watched in Scotland

15 February 2021, by **Lorena Serantes** , **Socialist Resistance**

Catalan Fourth Internationalists in Anticapitalistes (part of the confederal Anticapitalistas organisation across the Spanish state) have also published a statement on the elections, available in Catalan and in English. [9]

Anticapitalistes support the Catalan independence movement but warn of the need for a social response to neoliberal policies in Catalonia and the Spanish state, one that defends working class living standards and state services from cuts. In recent years sections of the radical left within both Catalonia and the Spanish state, including Podemos, the municipal movement around Barcelona Mayor Ada Colau, and the Republican Left (ERC) party that is aligned with the SNP in Scotland, have attached themselves to neo-liberal coalitions with social democrats and right wing nationalists. Anticapitalistes call for a break (or "rupture") from this.

They are not standing in the elections themselves, but give support to the candidates of the CUP ("Popular Unity Candidacies"), the pro-independence,

anticapitalist, ecosocialist and feminist grouping contesting the elections and described below. CUP currently have four seats in the Catalan Parliament and are looking to increase their influence.

Anticapitalistes also draw attention to the rise of the far right, openly fascist, Vox party winning seats in the new parliament for the first time.

Below we republish an article by Lorena Serantes, first published on the site of the Scottish Republican Socialist Platform (RSP), analysing the political parties contesting the Catalan elections and exploring their ideological shifts. [10]

Political party

shifts ahead of the Catalan elections

Since the 1 October (1-O) independence referendum took place nearly four years ago, the political situation in Catalonia has gone through many relevant changes that can be vital for the next election and its wider context.

First, we need to understand the fundamentally imperialistic nature of the Spanish State, shown by the tactic of judicialisation of the whole Catalan independence process (especially their most recent move against Generalitat president Quim Torra). Secondly, the Catalan independence movement needs to be understood as a popular uprising for democracy and the right of self-determination within a strongly centralised state. We shouldn't refer to it as an electoral movement, nor as a civil disobedience tactic to change the nature of Spain into a federal republic. The Catalans have been able to respond to the inaction of pro-

independence parties and groups (both on the right and left-wing spectrum) by strengthening the street-focused level of activity and putting pressure on the parties to advance on building the new Catalan state.

There's a lot of work which analyses the Catalan process, the incarceration of the ANC and Òmnium leaders and the strategies of the Catalan politicians and the national government (I must clarify when I'm talking about "national" I mean the Catalan executive, as I deny the character of 'nation' to Spain, a state composed of nations and regions). My intention in this article, however, is to define and explain the political party shifts that will have an impact on the behaviour of the Catalan electorate. I will propose at first the main factors that accelerated these transformations within the parties and the party system. Following that, I will focus on developing the main topic of the article.

The main political formations from the pro-independence and the unionist blocs have increased the existing uncertainty around the issue of independence

Background

Before I begin, there are some points I need to make clear. My use of the term 'political party shifting' doesn't strictly align with the concept as utilised by political scientists. In political science we refer to it as: (1) membership changes within political parties and (2) redefined voting patterns (i.e. when the electorate switches its traditional behaviour towards parties, giving way to realignments in the political system). In contrast, I will combine both conceptual definitions and add the ideological changes the Catalan parties have gone through during these last few years. Keeping this in mind, my intention is not to write a scientific article but one that helps to understand the situation of party politics in the northeastern nation.

Both Spanish general and regional elections (i.e. elections taking place in the autonomous communities) use the proportional representation method

known as the D'Hondt formula, also used for the Scottish Parliament's regional lists. Each constituency is presented with a closed list of candidates from every party or coalition and elects a number of representatives in accordance with its population. Catalonia elects to its parliament 135 members from its four provinces (85 from Barcelona, 18 from Tarragona, 17 from Girona and 15 from Lleida). The threshold which parties need to reach to win representation is 3% of the vote.

Catalonia has changed since 2017 and the events following the 1st of October referendum. Attention has been drawn to the courts of justice, the incarceration of politicians and activists and the exile of the Catalan president Carles Puigdemont, but nobody has focused on explaining how the main political formations from the pro-independence and the unionist blocs have increased the existing uncertainty around the issue of independence.

I will not use the term "constitutionalist" or "constitutional" to define the parties that oppose independence because I don't think it's accurate and correct. A constitutionalist party is by definition a political formation that respects the constitution and legality of some territory. Spanish parties refer to themselves this way to take the powerful concept of "the law", which is incredible given how many times they have conveniently forgotten to follow it. Instead, they are profoundly unionist parties that agree on rejecting Catalan independence (or even more autonomy).

Changes

It's clear to me that there have been many factors producing changes in Catalan politics. I will therefore develop some of them.

In the pro-independence bloc - made up of the catch-all Junts per Catalunya (Together for Catalonia), the centre-left to left-wing Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (Republican Left of Catalonia/ERC), and the far-left Candidatura d'Unitat Popular (Popular Unity Candidacy/CUP) - the exile of

Puigdemont (Junts) and other leaders from ERC and the CUP (Marta Rovira and Anna Gabriel) have pushed a renewal of leadership and new strategic plans for the future.

Leadership changes often produce positive effects (parties with a bad image can rise and recover) but also can create negative ones (voters attached to the candidate will no longer identify with the party if the new proposed faces don't represent a form of continuity). Fights to elect party leaders with a certain ideological background take place within the liberal and social democratic-oriented parties, which may result in party fragmentation or splits. Left-wing projects with a democratic structure have to decide their future too, but instead of promoting internal competition amongst different traditions, they might debate, discuss and respect all the options, establishing other ways and methods to elect a new leadership from their membership. I'm not an expert on structural changes within parties, however I understand how these can make a big impact on electoral performance. Unionists

The unionist bloc is formed of the classic right-wing Partido Popular (People's Party/PP), the liberal right-wing Ciudadanos (Citizens/C's), the social democrat centre-right Partit Socialista de Catalunya (Socialists' Party of Catalonia/PSC) and the new extreme ultranationalist right-wing Vox. The Spanish nationalist nature of these formations has taken them to focus on the politics of the state rather than on Catalan issues, content to blame the independentist forces for the rise of extreme right groupings on the streets of Barcelona (and also other territories of Spain like Valencia) rather than address the societal problems that gave rise to them. It's important to clarify the PSC is not the same as PSOE in the other Spanish regions and nations, although they set up an agreement a long time ago to stand together in Catalan elections. The Catalan PSOE branch disappeared in the 1970s, since then the PSC has become the electoralist brand of the social democrats in the northeast.

PP and PSOE, the major parties in Spain, agreed on attacking the Catalan independence movement the same way, which has distanced them from Catalan civil society. Looking at Spanish politics as a whole, they have preferred to appeal to the anti-Catalan middle and high class of Madrid and the South (Andalusia, Murcia, Extremadura). PSOE's tactic has been to feed the extreme right (specially on the PP/PSOE-controlled media) to divide the Spanish right-wing parties and make Vox the political scarecrow which can provide a reason to vote for the "left alternative" they propose. This obviously has opened a channel for Vox to promote hate speech and extremist ideologies which were previously hidden within the PP. C's (Citizens), a free-market liberal-oriented formation, has been trying to occupy each space left out by the two major parties, from the right to the moderate left, always with a nationalistic narrative that tries to exclude everyone that doesn't want to feel Spanish. Polarisation has settled in Catalonia because of the trajectory of Spanish nationalism.

Political parties in Catalonia have changed since 2017 from an ideological point of view and also in the electorate they want to appeal to. Therefore, we have two polarised blocs, one that leans to the centre-left civic nationalist tradition and another spanning the right-wing ultranationalist spectrum. But having said that, we cannot end our analysis with this simplistic explanation because political parties in Catalonia have changed from an ideological point of view and also in the electorate they want to appeal to. I will not analyse Podemos and the Comuns (Commons) coalition here, since they should be regarded as a distinct phenomenon and will require a separate article to comprehend their position, fragmentations and internal instability. First, I will analyse the pro-independence bloc shifts, which are significant due to a fragmentation pattern in the traditional conservative nationalist groups.

Why an election

This election has been called not only because of the suspension of Quim

Torra (again using the Spanish supposedly democratic law), but also due to the conflict between government partners Junts and Esquerra. Both of the parties had interest in holding the presidency, which caused a rupture of the coalition during the Catalan budget negotiations. As of today, Esquerra has 32 seats in Parliament, whilst Junts (Torra's party) has 20 representatives. With the break-up of the government coalition, it's obvious that talks of forming an electoral coalition like Junts pel Sí (2015-2017) won't occur, and both parties will run separately.

Junts is an alliance of little Catalan nationalist and Catalanist right-wing and centre-right liberal parties that emerged from the rupture of *Convergència i Unió* (CiU) in 2014-15. CiU was formed in 1978 as a coalition of *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* (CDC), with Catalan nationalist ideas, and *Unió Democràtica de Catalunya* (UDC), a Catalanist non-independence party. This alliance governed Catalonia for long periods of time (Jordi Pujol's executives) with a liberal program of deregulating basic public services and joining with Spanish nationalist parties at a state level, specially with the PP.

After the alliance was disbanded, UDC followed a long way of talks with the PSC, finally joining the social democratic party, arguing that independence is not the solution for Catalonia's problems. However, CDC changed its name to *Catalan European Democratic Party* (PDeCAT) to (1) avoid comparisons with the old CiU coalition, which had been criticised for a tremendous history of corruption and fraud and (2) give the party a more centrist and pro-independence image. The party campaigned for the 2017 referendum, and the events that occurred after the vote made a big impact on the leadership of the party.

Many PDeCAT leaders were tied to the right-wing tradition of CDC, something that bothered Puigdemont's pretensions of giving the party a 'left-wing' renewal. He founded Junts per Catalunya in July 2018, accompanied by civil society well-known leaders such as the Jordis (Jordi Sánchez and

Jordi Cuixart), and managed to unite dissident members from Esquerra, the PSC and even the CUP. PDeCAT's leadership, although reluctant at first, merged into Puigdemont's centrist movement, as well as other minor political parties (Action for the Republic, The Greens, Independence Rally, Democrats, etc.). Junts has been defined as a populist, centrist and Catalan nationalist party. I will challenge the concepts of populism and centrism by using a term from political science instead: the catch-all party (in Spanish, *partido atrápalotodo*).

These types of parties appeal to transversalism across the political spectrum, escaping a left-right conceptualisation. Junts is a pro-independence ruling party in a typically constituted Western liberal democratic state, which will never push for a working class republic based on a socialist economic model. However, the CDC right-wingers are now trying to claw back the political space from CiU by standing alone in this next election, something that breaks Puigdemont's plans as the confluence between right-wing and left-wing groups is now impossible. Hence, with the most reactionary sector gone (PDeCAT, *Convergents* and other liberal-conservative soft-nationalist minor groups), Junts has become a radical centre-left party who are very critical of the Spanish state and the conservative ideology the Spanish parties share, but less so with the disastrous handling of the public services at a Catalan level. Junts is becoming the new PSC in the pro-independence bloc, which implies the whole independence movement is going to move to the left, electorally speaking. Nevertheless, the party shift doesn't mean a change in voting patterns and behaviour, so it's very likely the Catalan bourgeoisie will still trust Junts to form a government in the nation.

**ERC can become
the new PSC in
next week's**

election

The two left-wing parties in the pro-independence bloc certainly have more disagreements than points of unity. Esquerra, or ERC by its initials in Catalan, is a social democratic party with a progressivist tendency, and a relevant republican discourse, refusing to accept the terms of the Spanish monarchy and the two-party oligarchic system around PP and PSOE (which has now been broken by the birth of Podemos, C's and Vox). However, its language on self-determination evokes an individualistic conception of the rights of the people to decide their future, a liberal nationalist view they share with Junts. In actuality, ERC's nationalism is just a means to an end – their ultimate aim is to create a Catalan Republic based on the principles of Spanish republicanism.

It's now clearer than ever that a Spanish Republic is impracticable due to the resistance of the major powers to simply hold a referendum on that matter and the absence of a single Spanish nationalist party campaigning for the abolition of the aristocracy. The traditional republicans were Izquierda Unida (United Left), which is now almost dead and subjugated to Podemos' leadership. ERC always comprised people from different ideological backgrounds within the Catalanist left, until the 1980s when they started to recognise the necessity of winning an independent state in Catalonia, rather than pursuing federalism. This shift to an openly nationalist position moved away from the party those who didn't want independence to happen, joining either PSC or Esquerra Unida (the Catalan branch of United Left). Since the referendum, with the exile of ERC's leader, Marta Rovira, the vice president of the Catalan government Pere Aragonés has gained the control of the party, and, in contrast with Torra's radical independence continuity policy, he has tried to calm down the nationalists with a new turn to the federalist response. The Spanish central administration has offered the Catalan executive a seat at the negotiating table, which ERC has accepted.

The problem is the agreement between PSOE's government and ERC ties the republican party to Pedro Sánchez and his policies, as the Catalan party supported him as prime minister after the November 2019 general election. Junts and the CUP have abstained from this dialogue instead. The current strategic decision coming from the elite of the party is focused on "expanding the party's base" to a larger membership that not only includes nationalists and independentists, but the Catalanist wing of the PSC, communists, ecologists and Podemos ex-affiliates. We could see this as an attempt to build a broader Catalanist front composed of social democrats, liberal socialists, ecologists and eurocommunists to get votes from the traditionally PSC-oriented electorate. ERC can become the new PSC in next week's election.

The CUP is the left-wing alternative formation that seeks to challenge the old social democracy. The "cupaires", as they are known in Catalan, are anticapitalists, feminists, ecosocialists, and independentists. There are different caucuses within the membership (anarchists, Trotskyists, Marxist-Leninists, etc.), and their structural organisation is quite democratic. The CUP is now under a process of leadership changes since the exile of Anna Gabriel, CUP's leader during the time of the referendum, who was charged for "sedition" by the Spanish Supreme Court, the same as Puigdemont and other Catalan politicians. They have been experiencing tough times trying to rebuild trust with left-wing voters after the leadership of sociologist Carles Riera, under whom their electoral performance suffered big losses in 2017 and left them forced to share a parliamentary group with the PP as a result of not being large enough to create one of their own (requiring six representatives).

The unionist bloc

In the unionist bloc, the PSC is the major political formation with a strong Spanish nationalist campaign, especially after PSOE, its partners at a state level, won the 2019 general election under Pedro Sánchez, who

belongs to the rebel caucus of the traditional social democratic party. The Catalan socialists moved from a Catalanist and federalist ideology at first towards a more right-wing approach following the 2017 referendum, which explains the removal of the federalist sector, which joined ERC. The PSC has two different types of electorate: Barcelona and Tarragona's anti-independence middle class, and Girona and Lleida's working class. In short, they appeal to the oligarchies in two provinces whilst keeping a progressive rhetoric. This switch from left to right is applicable only to the national question, i.e., it's still a social democratic party in economic terms, but no longer Catalanist, as it has incorporated a strong anti-independence policy and a Spanish nationalist ideology. Shifting this way, the PSC will attempt to gain back its electorate lost to C's (Citizens) in 2017. The liberal current is now more relevant and has more capacity than ever within the formation.

Ciudadanos-C's is a liberal centre-right party that came into Catalan politics to campaign against Catalan-only-speaking schools and Catalan nationalist ideals (paradoxically, with a Spanish ultranationalist approach). Its desire to celebrate Spanish identity above Catalan identity has convinced the anti-nationalist PSC supporters and the ultra right-wing groups to give their votes to Albert Rivera's (now Inés Arrimadas') party instead of the declining Catalan PP. Consequently, C's was the winner in 2017 elections, managing to achieve a combination of the anti-nationalist vote with that of the working class (mostly in Barcelona). C's got 36 representatives (25.4% of total vote), but from 2018 onwards its constant opportunistic turns to the right or left according to whatever would suit best at the time rendered the party incapable of maintaining a good position in Spanish politics. In last year's general election, C's suffered a huge loss of seats (from 57 to 10), and, after their leader's resignation, the liberals are experiencing a precipitous decline that will definitely bring joy to the PP and PSC.

Neo-fascist and neo-Nazi groupings that previously tended to operate on

the margins of politics now have an electoral vehicle to bring their hate speech to parliament

The classic right-wing People's Party (PP) isn't quite as popular in Catalonia, as they are associated with the past and Francoist ideologies. Despite the overwhelming majority of Catalans rejecting the party, the PP has been capable of retaining some votes thanks to its anti-Catalan nationalism message and good relations with CiU. The rise of C's during the Catalan independence process and the recent appearance of Vox have prevented the PP from becoming the first option for Spanish nationalist voters. Also, the bad choices of the leadership, with the ex-candidate Xavier García Albiol being openly racist against Roma people and the lack of new charismatic leaders in Catalonia to replace him, have left the party with no chance of ruling the Generalitat. They would prefer to run Catalonia from the central administration in Madrid, despite not having more than four representatives in the Northeastern nation.

As for the extreme right-wing, represented by the Spanish ultras of Vox, it is too soon to analyse the situation of Santiago Abascal's group in the northeast. We know that, since the referendum, the Spanish right-wing has become far more extreme and exclusionary and, even though Vox has no representation or electoral base in Catalonia, neo-fascist and neo-Nazi groupings that previously tended to operate on the margins of politics now have an electoral vehicle to bring

their hate speech to parliament. It's concerning how Vox's participation in the Catalan institutions could turn into another excuse for the Spanish state to pass legislation that impedes self-determination rights, and it is, of course, a threat to the human, collective and individual rights of the Catalan people.

Conclusions

The polls show a strong decline of C's, which would obtain 13-15 seats, down from the 36 they have held since 2017. Polls also show a disputed and narrow victory for either PSC or ERC, with 30-35 seats for each party. Junts would fall consequently to ERC's rise. Podemos-EU-Equo and PP would remain in between seven and 12 seats. We will probably see a recovery from the CUP; the left-wing party would obtain eight to 14 seats (they have had four since 2017). Vox would obtain anywhere from six to 10 representatives, making a big breakthrough in Catalonia.

There will be a huge difficulty in forming alliances and there is the possibility that the pro-independence and unionist blocs will break themselves apart because of the complexity of the situation and the narrow outcome expected. If the PSC wins the election, the obligation to develop agreements with the extreme right to get a majority might challenge the unionist bloc's possibilities (primarily due to PSOE's strategy at the state level opposing Vox, which makes this coalition incoherent in Catalonia, rather than democratic

obligation). In the same way, ERC and Junts will require an agreement (including the CUP) to regain the parliamentary majority. Both parties are currently in a dispute and taking opposite directions ideologically and strategically. This means the idea of a PSC-ERC coalition is quite possible. We still don't know the political implications that could have, but what we can anticipate is the end of the independence process started in 2014-15.

Glossary

Catalanism: Ideology pointing to the defence of Catalan's autonomy within the Spanish state, it was developed around the first period of the 20th century by early nationalists who didn't support self-determination but thought Spain should be a decentralised country.

Catalan nationalism: Ideology that identifies Catalonia as a nation with inalienable rights such as self-determination within the Spanish state.

Catalan independence: Ideology that defends Catalonia should be an independent state outside Spain.

Transversalism: Political strategy that, in opposition to identity politics, intends to represent every group of society regardless of class, ideology, nationality, race or gender.

Regionalism: Ideology that defends regional autonomy and decentralisation policies within a state.

Source: [Socialist Resistance](#).

Putin's Majority?

14 February 2021, by [Ilya Budraitskis](#), [Ilya Matveev](#)

The authorities adopted the same stance of open confrontation towards the protests that followed Navalny's arrest. Russian cities were instantly flooded with riot police, the National Guard, plainclothes 'anti-extremist'

officers and countless other forces. Central Moscow and St Petersburg were completely shut down: armored vehicles blockaded the streets; metro stations were closed for 'technical reasons'. The 23 January protests set a

record, as at least 4,000 people were detained across the country. On 31 January that figure climbed to 5,700. With normal holding facilities chock-full of protesters, new detainees were brought to a migrant detention centre

on the outskirts of Moscow. The lack of holding cells is so severe that hundreds of people spent days in police vehicles, prevented from eating or sleeping.

The latest wave of resistance is in many ways unprecedented. Navalny's direct, populist style, his focus on elite corruption and his embrace of social demands (such as raising the minimum wage) have increasingly brought inhabitants of the Russian 'heartland' into the opposition orbit. In that respect, the protests of late January were something of a breakthrough. According to the sociologist Alexandra Arkhipova, who organized a quick survey of the protesters, 39% of 252 people surveyed in Moscow and 47% of 454 people surveyed in St Petersburg on 23 January responded that it was their first protest. In the regions, the number of new participants was likely even higher. Vladimir Zvonovskiy, another researcher who conducted 20 interviews with protesters in Samara, claimed that only a few of his respondents had ever attended such a gathering. Turnout at demonstrations reached its highest ever levels in many smaller cities.

While it was Navalny's investigation and arrest that provoked the protests, only a minority of the protesters could be considered fully fledged 'Navalnists'. According to Arkhipova, 33% in Moscow and 22% in St Petersburg 'fully trusted' Navalny, while the majority (57% in Moscow, 64% in St Petersburg) 'somewhat trusted' him. Zvonovskiy reported that some respondents did not want to replace Putin with Navalny, though they nonetheless craved social change. These findings confirm an obvious fact: despite Navalny's charismatic media persona, the protests have never been solely about him. This cannot be considered 'his' movement. In its current form, the Russian opposition is comprised of disaffected youth, students, workers and white-collar professionals increasingly from outside Moscow.

The political credo that assembled these diverse layers can broadly be defined as 'populist'. From the beginning of his career, when he joined the liberal Yabloko party in

2000, Navalny's attitude toward policies and programmes has been instrumental. Whatever unites and expands the movement is good; whatever sows disagreement and alienates potential allies is bad. This was a stark contrast with Grigory Yavlinsky, the founder and eternal leader of Yabloko, who has always been dogmatic and intolerant, refusing any coalitions with the left (viewed as the heirs of Stalinism) and with other liberals (seen as responsible for the disastrous market reforms of the 1990s, which Yabloko opposed, favouring a more cautious, gradual approach). Navalny's disenchantment with Yabloko - from which he was expelled in 2007 - did not evince a rejection of liberal ideas, but an antipathy toward old-style Russian liberals, who are famously disinclined to form a broad coalition.

It was in pursuit of such a coalition that Navalny began to align himself with the extreme right in the late 2000s, presenting a 'civilized' image of Russian nationalism open to alliances with the liberal opposition. But at the end of 2011, when a wave of mass demonstrations against parliamentary election fraud swept the country, Navalny came to recognize that nationalism - rejected by most of the protest movement - could not be a unifying platform. From that moment on he began to create his own 'political machine', a strongly personalized platform based on the rhetorical confrontation between 'the people' - lacking proper political representation - and the corrupt elite that had consolidated their power within Russia. Throughout the 2010s, this populist attitude informed Navalny's anti-corruption investigations, whose targets were not only state officials, but oligarchs such as Oleg Deripaska. Navalny railed against their acquisition of enormous wealth through the criminal privatization of former Soviet enterprises. Gradually, as Russia's economic crisis deepened and poverty levels rose, Navalny's focus on social inequality and the degradation of the public sector increased. One of his recent flagship projects was the Alliance of Doctors, an independent trade union that called for higher salaries in state health care and denounced the underfunding of

hospitals during the pandemic.

None of this means that Navalny has turned left: his social-populist rhetoric, like his former nationalist line, reflects his pragmatic approach. Navalny's personal views seem to be unchanged: he advocates 'normal' capitalism with functioning democracy, a large middle class, and a welfare state capable of smoothing out income inequality. He does not seem to dwell on the difficulty of attaining these goals in a poor, semi-peripheral country without implementing wider structural change. Yet his economic advisors are attuned to this contradiction - and propose to solve it through neoliberal, free-market policies that leave less room for the social protection and inequality reduction than Navalny envisions.

Navalny's populism has always been linked to activist politics: in every one of his videos he urges his audience not to remain passive spectators in anti-corruption investigations, but to take to the streets and struggle for change. Navalny himself has always been at the forefront of this struggle, which bears great personal risks in Russia's authoritarian conditions. Navalny has been arrested and imprisoned for short periods after virtually every street protest (in total he has already spent around one year behind bars), and his younger brother Oleg has been sentenced to three years on trumped-up charges. Navalny's decision to return to Russia and accept an indeterminate jail sentence is the latest example of his willingness to pay a personal price for his politics.

It is difficult to predict how the current street protests will develop. On the one hand, the January demonstrations saw the emergence of a new generation of activists ready to embark on a lengthy war of attrition. On the other hand, the furor surrounding Navalny's arrest is bound to peter out, and many protesters will be mindful of losing their jobs or going to jail. Yet the authorities' attempt to suppress the movement - through Navalny's harsh sentence, the house arrest of his key associates and the systematic intimidation of his supporters - takes aim at a symptom, not a cause. These measures are based on the Kremlin's theory that

protest is merely a 'technology' imported from the West, which can itself be defeated by technical rather than political solutions. In reality, state repression will only defer a looming political crisis, which is likely to hit during the 2021-2024 election cycle.

This September's Duma elections will be decisive for Putin's re-election in 2024. The Kremlin strategy for both ballots is rooted in the concept of 'Putin's majority': a silent mass of supporters who will ensure the absolute parliamentary dominance of United Russia, along with another triumphant victory for Putin himself. However, the January protests have cast doubt on this supposedly unbeatable voting bloc, which is threatened not only by those who took to the streets, but by all those who watched the Navalny investigation and expressed cautious sympathy for the protesters. The lack of social prospects, the pandemic-fuelled decline in living standards, and the frustration with an irremovable and unaccountable political regime will continue to dilute Putin's support over the coming years. This will create a new political configuration in which the current system of 'managed democracy' may become untenable.

Besides street protests, Navalny and his team have developed their own electoral weapon - a highly advanced tactical voting scheme called 'smart voting'. Though elections in Russia are tightly controlled through electoral fraud and the removal of independent

candidates, the scale of malpractice varies across the regions. In many cases, it is possible to drive United Russia out of local parliaments by voting for the second most popular candidate in single-member districts. This is precisely the idea behind 'smart voting': votes mobilized by Navalny would be added to the second most popular candidate's organic support, producing a narrow victory over the United Russia candidate. Of course, the problem is that the other Russian political parties are usually no less subservient to the Kremlin, so the benefits of electing them are slight. Nevertheless, Navalny's support sows the seed of ambition among the existing parties' mid-level operatives. Ironically, this most applies to the Communist Party of Russia (KPRF), as it is still the second most popular party nationwide and the chief beneficiary of 'smart voting'. Gennady Zyuganov, the KPRF leader, demonstrated his cowardly subservience to the regime by denouncing Navalny and the protest movement in January; yet Valery Rashkin, the head of the Moscow KPRF, broke ranks and defended Navalny against the crackdown. Communist deputies of the Moscow city parliament even travelled to the airport to meet Navalny upon his return to Russia. The reason is simple: 'smart voting' has increased KPRF representation in the Duma from five to ten seats out of 45. Navalny and his team have already promised to unleash this scheme in the upcoming federal parliamentary elections, in a

move which could exacerbate the current instability.

The Russian left - primarily its radical extra-parliamentary wing - is approaching the crisis in a state of organizational weakness and internal division. The protests that began in January once again revealed two opposing views on left strategy. According to the first, Navalny and Putin are simply the representatives of different ruling class factions, and the tens of thousands who came out to protest are therefore pawns in someone else's game. They should either be radicalized (by urging them to abandon the protests for smaller Marxist grouplets), or simply ignored as irrelevant to a genuine (but currently absent) class struggle. The second position, which most left-wing activists have taken, stresses the need to participate in the democratic protest movement, bearing in mind that it transcends the figure of Navalny. The composition of the recent protests - which have drawn in a large number of new participants whose main demand is social justice - opens up a space for socialist ideas. This youth-driven movement, centred on a rejection of social inequality and elite privilege, is far more amenable to the left than, for example, the 'fair elections' rallies a decade ago. No one can guarantee its success; yet among the broad spectrum of protesters there is more demand than ever for democracy and socialism.

13 February 2021

Source **NLR** [Sidecar](#).

Modi: itinerary of a man from the extreme right in India

13 February 2021, by **Pierre Hélelou**

Modi owes his political ascent entirely to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, National Volunteer Association), which he joined in the mid-1970s. The RSS is a very old Hindu nationalist movement, founded in 1925. A

member of this movement assassinated Gandhi in 1948. It defends a racial conception of the Indian people, the Hindutva: only Hindus can be really Indians, and the party organises both schools and a

"medical" branch which claims to help Hindu couples to obtain children who are "perfect, tall and fair-skinned" and have "the desired IQ". [11] The RSS is also distinguished by its militias, which violently attack Christians,

communists and above all Muslims, against whom they have carried out real pogroms. The most famous coup of this movement was the destruction in 1992 of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya, in order to build a temple in Rama, under the pretext that it had been built on the site of an ancient Hindu temple... in 1527!

Massacre in Gujarat

Modi earned his first stripes in the SSR during the state of emergency (1975-1977), when the head of government Indira Gandhi exercised dictatorial powers and banned many political organisations, including the SSR. It was within the underground apparatus of the SSR that Modi was able to prove himself as an organizer to his superiors.

In 1980, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was founded by groups representing the different components of Indian nationalism. The purpose of this new party was to legally challenge the power of the Congress Party. It was immediately overwhelmed by the SSR, which sent many cadres, including Narendra Modi, to the party. Modi then continued his career as a bureaucrat in the BJP, patiently moving up the ranks during the 1990s. In 2001, as a result of internal intrigues and political scandals in the BJP leadership in Gujarat, Narendra Modi was chosen to replace the Prime Minister of Gujarat.

On 27 February 2002, only a few months after he came to power in Gujarat, incidents broke out between Hindu pilgrims returning from Ayodhya and the population of a Muslim neighbourhood. The train carrying the pilgrims was set on fire (although it is not known to this day whether this was deliberate or an accident), resulting in the deaths of around 50 people. This drama was immediately exploited by the Indian extreme right, which unleashed its militias against the Muslim population of Gujarat. Nearly 2,000 people were killed during the anti-Muslim pogroms that multiplied over the following months. More than 100,000 people had to flee their homes to escape the

massacres. The Gujarat police, under Modi's orders, not only did nothing to prevent them but blocked any serious investigation. And with good reason: many of the people in power were directly involved in the organization of the massacres, including Amit Shah, the current federal interior minister and Modi's right-hand man. The massacre, which put Modi out of international relations for years to come, has made him immensely popular among the Hindu population, which has been rendered white-hot by years of communal hatred. [12]

Prime Minister in 2014

Re-elected twice, Modi joined forces with the great capitalist families of the region - often among the greatest Indian fortunes such as the Ambanis, Birla, Godrej - to make Gujarat a showcase for Indian ultra-liberalism. Pollution scandals multiplied, inequalities increased and the state continued to be low ranked for poverty, lack of education and malnutrition, far behind other states with a more modest GDP. [13]

From the mid-2000s onwards, Narendra Modi was increasingly seen as the man for the job by many Indian capitalists and politicians who were working to rehabilitate him.

On becoming Prime Minister in 2014, he applied the recipes developed in the Gujarati laboratory. His policy was based on two main lines: on the one hand, strengthening political centralization by weakening as much as possible the weight of the federated states and autonomous powers; on the other hand, deregulating the economy at all costs by massively privatizing public services and by widely opening up economic sectors that were until then relatively protected - such as the agricultural market - to investments by large national or foreign groups. This ultra-liberal policy, applied by forced march, as met with a lot of resistance, especially from peasants who opposed the requisition of land necessary for its policy of major works (expropriation of tribal populations by the army in order to build dams...) even if the mobilizations were not then

on the scale of those which are currently taking place. More than 1,800 peasant demonstrations took place in 2016. In 2018, a march brought together 50,000 tribal peasants over 200 km to demand land titles on the land they have lived on for generations. [14]

Re-election in 2019

Despite the resistance he encountered, Modi managed to gain the support of a relatively large section of the population sensitive to his chauvinistic and anti-Muslim rhetoric and his promises of economic development, enabling him to be re-elected in 2019. He owes this victory both to the heterogeneous coalition of regional, nationalist and caste parties, whose opportunism no longer needs explicating, but also to the fact that on the ideological level Narendra Modi embodies a certain evolution in the Hindutva current. In fact, unlike the traditional Hinduist extreme right, which is stubbornly defending the privileges of the high castes, Modi emphasises belonging to Hinduism as the only determining identity, including a number of other religious currents (Jain, Sikhs, Parsi, Buddhists...), while violently rejecting the Christian and Muslim minorities. The latter (14.2% of the population) is the target of repeated attacks by the Modi government. For example, in Kashmir, the only predominantly Muslim state, it enforces a military curfew of rare violence and had all telephone and internet lines to the outside world cut for several weeks during army operations in March 2019. A year later, its militias orchestrated anti-Muslim pogroms in the heart of the capital. For the rest of the population, he holds out the prospect of access to education or work through caste quotas, opposing any social policy.

Mass repression

Modi now has both the state police and military apparatus and militant groups and extreme right-wing militias ready to use terror against his opponents.

Political activists, intellectuals and well-known figures are subjected to trials, arrests and even political murders. For example, journalist Rana Ayyub has been the victim of a campaign of harassment, calls for rape and murder by pro-Hindutva activists. In 2017, journalist Gauri Lankesh, a critic of Hindu nationalism, was shot dead outside her home. In 2020, 67 journalists were arrested or imprisoned. [15]

As for the working classes, especially the most discriminated fringes, such as Muslims, tribal populations and dalits ("untouchables", individuals considered to be out of caste), they are subjected to indiscriminate violence, covered up by the authorities when they do not encourage it. Dalits

are murdered every day, and women are subjected to sexual violence (21 Dalit women are raped and 13 Dalits are murdered every week) without the police looking for the slightest culprit. [16] Until now, its nationalist policy, in a state of cold war with Pakistan and in constant search for domestic scapegoats, had thus allowed

Modified to divide the working classes.

The support of the Indian bourgeoisie has been acquired on the basis of an antisocial policy and the promise of new future opportunities for business, in agriculture as well as in

industry. [17]

Internationally, he recently announced his agreement with Trump. Even today he buys enough fighter planes from Macron to be able to invite him to the Taj Mahal, far away from noises of boots on the ground of the real war going on in Kashmir. Whatever the diatribes and nationalist violence, no leader seems to find his company unprofitable. Some humanitarian associations, NGOs funded by rich donors like Bill Gates, work hand in hand with the extreme right-wing government and its leader. To get rid of Modi and his clique, the Indian people will have to rely on their own forces.

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

The Dragons of national unity against the working class

12 February 2021, by **Franco Turigliatto**

Mattarella's choice, justified by the pandemic and social crisis, has big implications on the political and institutional level. It is deeply questionable and opens up future scenarios that are not yet completely clear, but which are very worrying for the democratic stability of the country.

The consecration of Draghi has been openly called for, desired and envisaged for a long time by the most diverse political, social and media circles of the Italian ruling class. They called him in to deal with the difficulties of its political representation. Its political hegemony in parliament is mediocre, fragmented and completely unprepared to manage this very delicate phase coherently and in line with its interests. The health, social and economic crises continue to interact dangerously and are not under control.

On the day of the opening of the government crisis, we had underlined

the dissatisfaction of the bosses with the divisions and uncertainties of the executive led by Conte. In particular, we had recalled the concern of the Confindustria (Confederation of Italian Industry) about the use of the 200 billion euros of the Recovery Fund which, for Bonomi (leader of Confindustria) and partners, must guarantee the revival of profits.

What a vain and posturing spectacle it has all been - no worse than that of the parties' previous negotiations for the reconstruction of a third Conte government. In the television studios after Mattarella's speech we saw the pundits competing to see who could best denounce the failure of "politics" and toast the saviour, the arrival of the man of destiny.

In fact the negative characteristics of the various currents representing the bosses (in parliament there is no longer the presence of any force that refers to the working class) are an

almost direct expression of the institutional political choices and electoral models imposed in recent decades by that same ruling class.

Bourgeois democracy appears increasingly worn out, authoritarian tendencies are accentuated and in the face of the current crisis they think there is nothing better than to resort to a person who is able to assume a bonapartist role (perhaps).

We will see if Draghi will be able to meet expectations. In order to form a government he must obtain a parliamentary majority and then be able to maintain and manage it in the face of the various competing political and economic interests. We will also see what the spread of the parties willing to support him will be. There are many difficulties and the pressure will be enormous.

There is no doubt that an eventual Draghi government disrupts the plans

and prospects of the various political parties, starting with the PD (Democratic Party dubbed centre-left but social liberal), which hoped to be able to build a new stable coalition with at least part of the M5S (Five Star Movement centrist populists started by comic, Beppe Grillo). It could further undermine the M5S. It also complicates the plans of the right-wing forces that were almost certain of victory in the next election. They initially expressed their wish for the calling of a general election but then softened their tone and began to express a willingness to support Draghi.

One thing is certain, however, all the governments of 'national unity' that have taken place in our country have been of great harm to the working classes, to their living conditions and created political confusion and disorientation. We saw it with Andreotti in the 1970s, Ciampi in 1993 and Monti, much more recently, all operating under the banner of austerity.

Behind the governmental crisis there are not only the divisions and the power struggle between the parties, but there is the unresolved problem of economic policies. For this reason, there is no doubt that various protagonists have worked to steer the political crisis towards the Draghi solution. Not only an unpalatable character like Renzi, (ex PD leader who split to form Italia Viva) who has been calling for it for some time. He has always offered himself as the best representative of the interests of the Italian bosses and now also as a paid jester of the Saudi monarch (he recently paid a flying visit there).

In one of the many dire televised debates, Landini, the CGIL (main trade union confederation) secretary, was completely on the defensive amongst the pundits. He said Draghi was a useful and authoritative choice, when in fact he represents a very serious danger for the working class. Landini then shamefully confirmed this judgement the following day in the hope perhaps of being able to maintain a semblance of

government/trade union consultation. It is evidently not in his plans to activate the social struggle of workers, precisely what it is essential in the face of the new Confindustria sponsored government. .

The mobilisation of workers is in fact indispensable in the face of the very difficult scenario that is opening up. We have the deepening social crisis, the increase in unemployment with the coming restructuring of industry and the persistence of the pandemic. There is no other way to stop governmental policy from being made to serve the interests of employers, profits, private health and increased exploitation (they call it increased productivity).

We should remember that it was Draghi who invented the distinction between good and bad debt, the first being debt that favours investment, or rather that favours financial stability, i.e. the interests of banks and employers,. The second, bad debt is unproductive expenditure, perhaps social expenditure aimed at the underprivileged classes, or income support and cassa integrazione (a type of furlough payment to workers where jobs are lost or being restructured).

The Italian bourgeoisie is calling Draghi to address a fundamental problem that all members of the European bourgeoisie have begun to discuss.

The catastrophe of the health crisis forced the bourgeois class to make certain choices in total contradiction with their ideological principles and economic choices. But it was primarily a question of saving the capitalist boat. It had to be accepted that the number of hours worked would fall, but not to the same extent as employment, which was partially contained with the CIG (cassa integrazione/furlough) and the freeze on redundancies. They have accepted that the public debt would soar, breaking all neo-liberal dogmas. But now they are discussing how, step by step, with more or less caution, they can restore the old order. In other

words, what are the mechanisms to start repaying debts and, at the same time, to allow companies to restructure and lay off workers, i.e. to guarantee the revival of profits.

The whole of this, however, continues to be conditioned by the persistence of the pandemic and its effects on production, hence the constant search for an impossible 'balance' between health and the economy.

The management of Draghi's Recovery Plan will be measured against this strategic dimension of what the bosses want to happen.

The workers' movement needs to respond to this aggressive project of the employers' class to further roll back the living standards and conditions of working people.

The battle for the reduction of the working week without loss of pay and the redistribution of existing work is not only a trade union objective, it is a fundamental social objective that determines the future of the working class.

The good debt, the one that is sustainable over time, is not the one that is sustainable by profits, but the one that is part of a project of economic growth:

- that is sustainable on an environmental and social level,
- through public investments for the reconversion of the economy,
- for the guarantee of an income for all,
- for a revival of education,
- for massive investment in public health that allows first of all a vast plan of vaccination for all and the activation of all measures that effectively fight the pandemic.

It is with this approach that we fight the very project of a Draghi government and we will fight its policies even more so if they succeed in setting it up.

3 February 2021

Leading From the Front: The Role of Women in Farmers' Movement

11 February 2021, by **Himanshi Dahiya**

Sixty-five-year-old Jasbir Kaur Natt has been a farmers' and labourers' rights activist for more than 30 years. She is a state committee member of the Punjab Kisaan Union and is identified as a communist. We met her near the main stage at the Tikri Border, where, as the head of the steering committee, she is responsible for handling the speakers and the crowd. "In addition to being a farmer leader, I am also a communist. I have been associated with several organisations since 1986," Natt stated.

We spent a day following her through the protest and what we saw was relentless and tireless determination, ensuring everything runs smoothly.

From 7 am to 9 pm: Here's How Jasbir Kaur Day at Tikri Looks Like

Kaur, along with her husband, daughter and son, stays in a makeshift tent under the Metro bridge at Tikri. She wakes up at 7 am and leaves for the main stage by 9:30 am. What begins next is a series of meetings with leaders of several farmer unions on the road ahead for the movement. At around 11 am, she takes her job of managing the stage, ensuring that speakers from all the unions get a fair chance to speak.

The steering committee which decides the order of speakers. I make notes in my register for these duties. My job is to ensure that all unions get enough and equal time to speak. Then, being the incharge of the fund

committee, I have to keep a daily account of funds received and utilised. I have kept an account of funds from day one till today.

After handling proceedings near the main stage till around 4 pm, Natt returns to her tent for lunch and then helps with dinner. "When I am done with my duties around the stage, I then supervise the food preparations here. Sometimes, I also do the dishes," she said.

'Didn't Become an Activist Overnight'

Speaking about the role of women in the movement, Natt stressed on the fact that women, especially from Punjab and Haryana, have been at the forefront of the fight against the controversial farm laws. She also told us that those who think that women are being forcibly brought to the protest site must know that women play a very crucial role in agriculture and are very well equipped to understand the laws.

People believe that a woman is an object which has been brought to the protest forcibly. As if they don't have the ability to think on their own. I have been fighting for farmers since 1986. As a result, I have also been jailed and slapped with court cases multiple times. We know what we are protesting against.

Harinder Kaur Bindu, 43, is a leader of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) Ekta Ugrahan faction and is fondly called

Bindu by her fellow protesters. Her everyday jobs at the protest site in Tikri involve speaking to the press, relaying messages sent by union leaders to other protesters and meeting people who come to donate funds for the cause. "I wake up at 5 am and am able to sleep only after 11 pm," Kaur told us.

'Lost My Father to Khalistan Insurgency in the '90s'

Speaking about her childhood, Bindu recalls how her father lost his life fighting against the Khalistanis on 9 April 1991.

My father was a member of the Nau Jawan Bharat Sabha. In the '90s, we saw the rise of Khalistan insurgency in Punjab. At that time, he worked to educate people against it. On 9 April 1991, he lost his life fighting against the Khalistanis. He sacrificed his life for the people.

She further adds that the spark of revolutionary ideas has always been part of her family and her father's sacrifice pushed her into activism as a full-time career. Since then, she has worked for the rights of farmers, Dalits and women.

How Gender Roles

Are Being Reversed at the Farmers' Protest

As we went around the Tikri protest site with Harinder Bindu, she told us that the agitation is being purposely managed in a way so that women aren't restricted to jobs like cooking or cleaning the area. "A lot of thinking has gone into this design. Women usually handle the kitchen at home. If they do the same thing here, how will the movement enlighten them?" she explained.

Further, stressing on the role of women in the movement, Bindu told us that she has a message for the Narendra Modi government.

We want to send a message for the BJP government which is following the teachings of the 'Manusmriti', which equates women with animals. We want them to warn them, to stop their efforts in suppressing women and denying us our right to unionise. We want to tell them that we won't sit at home.

A much younger Navkiran Natt is a student youth activist with the All India Students' Association (AISA) and Revolutionary Youth Association (RYA). She has been a part of the farmers' protest since November 2020. Natt believes that hailing from Punjab and, to top it all, belonging to an agricultural family has made it impossible for her to stay away from the protests.

At Tikri, Natt and her friends started the *Trolley Times*, a protest's

newspaper which is now being published in three languages and circulated at protest sites across Delhi.

We felt that there were serious connectivity issues at the protest sites. People could not keep a track of what was going on, on the main stage. People at one border could not connect with those at the other because of connectivity issues. We thought that a newspaper can help resolve these problems, and that was when we started the *Trolley Times*.

'Some Aspects of the Protest Go Beyond Political Gains'

Speaking about the concept of domestic labour at the protest site, Natt shared with us an interesting anecdote.

Once, I was writing slogans on a wall at Tikri and I was hungry. I looked around and saw a few young and middle-aged men cooking. I went to them and told them that I was hungry. They offered me food and we started talking. A 20-21-year-old young man came up to me and said that he could not even knead the dough when he came to the protests, but now can make well-rounded rotis.

Talking about the patriarchal nature of agrarian societies, she further

emphasised that the ongoing agitation is unique in the sense that there are no pre-defined gender roles there.

'It Hurts When the Media or the State Tries to Snatch Our Agency'

Sitting beside her father at pillar number 783 at the Tikri Border, Navkiran told us that she has grown watching women leaders, including her mother Jasbir Kaur Natt, struggle for the rights of the disadvantaged sections of the society. "My mother has been an activist for 35 years. She has been actively speaking for these issues since early '90s," she said.

When I was born, my father was in jail. He has been jailed during protests almost six times, while my mother has been jailed thrice for participating in farmers' agitations over the years. I think the CJI's statement is a cruel joke, because I have seen these women fight the same issues for over years. Then how do I believe that they've been kept at the protests?

Women make for a very significant and crucial part of the farmers' movement. They are not only actively participating in the protests but are also holding the fort back home and looking after the farms in the absence of other family members. They have strong opinions on the farm laws and are firm on their decision of not returning home, till the legislations are repealed by the government.

Source [the quint](#).

Navalny and the protests: some clarification

10 February 2021, by **Karine Clément**

Navalny has just been sentenced to 2 years and 8 months in prison for a spurious reason, having broken the rules of his judicial review since... he was in Germany on authorization from the Kremlin to seek treatment after the attempted assassination of which he had been the victim in Russia... An absurd story, but absurdity is now the favourite style of the Kremlin, making politics an absurdity.

I personally have never been a fan of Navalny. But I remember him fighting alongside the inhabitants of Moscow against real estate constructions threatening their environment, alongside the inhabitants of Khimki to save their forest from a highway construction project led by Vinci (the French are everywhere). I also remember him in the nationalist "Russian Marches" (under the slogan "Russia for the Russians") of the second half of the 2000s and in debates (with me also) on immigration, which he at that time made an objective of struggle (especially against illegal immigration, but also for increased control).

His popularity took off with the 2011-2012 mobilizations against fraud in the presidential elections, and especially thanks to his videos denouncing the corruption and illegal enrichment of the highest leaders of the state, which gave rise to demonstrations in 2016-17. But at that time, still, he remained little known to most people. He was mostly seen as one of the many "politicos" who try to build a career by fooling people (according to the classic perception of "dirty politics").

The situation has changed radically

He is known to the majority, partly thanks to the Kremlin which instead of ignoring as usual the actions of the non-institutional opposition, incessantly makes his name known in the state media, obviously to smear it ("Foreign agent", "destabilizer",

"provocateur sending children to unauthorized demonstrations"), but also to respond to his accusations.

For the first time, Putin has explained himself publicly (no, it is not his palace, no, he lives humbly like a true patriot), which, given the lack of confidence that Russians in general have in television, only reinforces the certainty that he too is helping himself (generously) from the coffers of the State. Moreover, it exposes him to ridicule, as someone who is precisely very touchy about his reputation as a ruler of integrity concerned for the wellbeing of his people. Suddenly, he has fallen from his pedestal, including with those who always voted for him or believed him at least to guarantee the stability, the state, and the independence of Russia.

Navalny has succeeded in tearing off the veil and:

1/ breaking Putin, the symbol of the resurrection of Russia, to make him a politician like any other, corrupt, greedy for profit and despising his people,

2/showing by his own example (by committing his body and his life) that we must stop being afraid.

It is strength of character and this is what commands respect. Beyond the reservations that we may have, and which may be numerous. His economic programme, for example, which he never really presents directly, seems clearly neoliberal (competition, competence, privatization, deregulation, fuller integration into the world market). His nationalist sympathies can arouse mistrust, they also testify to the political flair of this man who seeks to express himself as closely as possible to what his fellow citizens feel.

At the time of his frequent trips to the regions, at the end of the 2010s, he regularly raised the question of social inequalities, dismally low wages, the state of decay of infrastructure and public services (alone in the "liberal"

opposition in this respect). He also supported trade union initiatives (support from an independent union of doctors) and citizens' initiatives (support for complaints from residents about the management of their buildings). He therefore mastered populist discourse. And at the same time, he is supported by Western governments and, arguably, also by Russian capital linked to the West.

An impressive mobilization

All these reservations do not prevent us from celebrating the impressive mobilization that he has succeeded in inspiring, once again, at the cost of his freedom and at the risk of his life. The current protests mark a turning point. First, they are characterized by a massive participation of the regions, with demonstrations having taken place in very remote places. A riposte to the contemptuous arrogance of the "enlightened" and pro-Western intellectual elite who had nothing but contempt for Russians in demonized regions for being supposedly the docile vassals of Tsar Putin.

This Russia of the regions, as sociological surveys have shown for a long time, is constantly agitated by struggles and citizens' initiatives - especially for survival, little things that preserve a minimum of well-being and which nevertheless require great courage. and a strong capacity for self-organization. Of course, these struggles in the regions, of the workers too, of the impoverished inhabitants, were not struggles for abstract human rights, nor support for a mythical and monolithic "opposition", nor for "democracy", something with which Russia is not very familiar.

The current mobilizations therefore indicate an obvious politicization of social struggles, while many say they are in the streets not to support Navalny and fight against Putin, but so that people can live better, be

respected, and that the capture of the country's wealth by a handful of oligarchs should cease. These aspirations correspond to what I encountered during my surveys in the regions in 2016-2018. I found there, at least in the popular classes, dissatisfaction with and sharp criticism of the existing regime (especially condemnation of the staggering inequalities and a state controlled by the oligarchy of the richest).

Let us not forget that in a country as immense (and rich in natural resources) as Russia, inequality also opposes the regions to the centre which takes the wealth and does not redistribute anything, at least from the point of view of the inhabitants of certain provinces which see themselves as "colonized" by Moscow. Patriotic propaganda from the Kremlin further compounds the discontent by highlighting the so-called "wealth" of Russia, which most can easily compare with their real-life experience.

This discontent and criticism, widely shared and punctuating everyday conversations, remained however underground or sometimes expressed through micro-social struggles. Too strong an awareness of the unequal relationship of forces, too strong a sense of powerlessness against what was (rightly) considered the wall of money and repression. It seems that Navalny has managed to turn the tide and make it appear that, yes, it is possible to resist.

In a nutshell, if we know that we are attacking a wall and that we attack it all the same, it is because the rage is there, and it has accumulated! We can retort that the mobilizations are not massive. But, firstly, protesters are often prevented from regrouping and roam the streets in disorder, making it difficult to count. Secondly, the active support goes well beyond the present: there are the car horns, the nudges of the inhabitants, the millions of views of the video of Putin's "palace" and the everyday conversations.

A youth revolt?

It is certain that young people have been increasingly numerous in the demonstrations in recent years, whereas they were one of the most apolitical groups not so long ago. An effect of the new political style of Navalny and a few others (videos, social networks), of the taste for freedom, but also of the closure of their perspectives: a broken social elevator, better places taken by the offspring of the oligarchs. There are also the students from Moscow and St. Petersburg who come from the regions and can compare the standard of living and the infrastructures here and there and take offence in interviews with such inequality of treatment within the same country.

While there are many young people, this is not a youth movement or a generational conflict. As polls conducted among protesters in Moscow and St. Petersburg by teams coordinated by Alexandra Arkhipova show, all age groups are represented. Elderly people whom the liberal opposition accuse of being lobotomized by Kremlin propaganda have also taken to the streets. They openly start to condemn Putin and his policies, without being held back by fear of once again suffering the chaos of the brutal neoliberal reforms of the Yeltsinian 1990s, and here again, express their anger at the miserable pensions amid such disgusting luxury at the summit of the state.

Patriotic propaganda has had for many the opposite effects of what was expected by the regime: far from strengthening the legitimacy of the system, it has above all contributed to the politicization of people, to the broadening of their viewpoints, to the denunciation of massive poverty ("how can we live so poorly in such a rich country?"), to the consideration of the interests of the country as a whole, to the aspiration to be part of a "people" that had been believed to dead and buried by an ethos of looking after number one and the humiliation of a ruined and dislocated country.

The reasons for protesting are therefore very diverse and go far beyond Navalny or corruption.

Everyone comes out with their own feelings and their own aspirations. They all want change, respect, an end to the theft of wealth. Hopes and refusals that come together without contradictions and tensions for the moment, since the struggle is above all for change. What change? When the question is asked, divisions will emerge, but for now it is a kind of national unity to regain dignity and, in a sense, popular sovereignty. From the words I heard in the demonstrations, I remember the idea of rebelling "for all Russians", "for the people", "for Russia", "because I want to help my country".

One last detail deserves attention. While Russians are used (in recent years in any case) to being very "wise" on demonstrations, very respectful of rules and conveniences, we observe an unexpected aggressiveness, to oppose arbitrary arrests and stand up to the police. Dignity is also defended against the police. And the crackdown (thousands of arbitrary arrests across the country) is only adding to the rage and resolve.

In short, this is a mobilization of very diverse discontent and aspirations that are expressed for the moment in a surge of solidarity from a people recovering their dignity. Navalny is not the leader but the detonator - not even Navalny the politician (who as a politician can only arouse mistrust), but the real, physical example of Navalny who risked his life to show that we could resist.

Under these conditions, it is not possible to define the political face of the mobilization, denounce or rejoice in the ultra-neoliberalism or pro-Western sentiments of the demonstrators, or denounce or rejoice in the aspiration for a fair distribution of wealth and a struggle against the oligarchy. The rejection of politics is so deep, the disorientation so radical, that none of the political coordinates known in the West make sense in Russia to most people. Neither right nor left, neither conservatism nor progressivism, neither monarchism or anarchism and so on

The mobilization is courageous

This is a fact. It is united and extends to the whole country and all age groups. It is in the encounters between the demonstrators, the discussions in the street and the police stations, that a new relationship with politics, another politics, can be built.

As for the Kremlin and the current political system, it is suffering the deepest crisis it has known since Putin's rise to power (which itself had already saved the Yeltsinian system from collapse). The system has in fact exhausted its sources of legitimacy: neither patriotism, nor populism, nor the figure of Putin-the-Saviour allow it to maintain itself any long. The oligarchs and all those who profit from the system therefore have only one

option: naked repression.

The situation is therefore very tense, the risks are major, but the system can indeed collapse. So, what would replace it? This is an open question. Being on the left and convinced of the relevance of the social agenda, I hope that all left activists in Russia (they are not very numerous) will be able to get involved in the struggle and reinvent politics, with all the rest of the protesters.

Note by Karine Clément

I am a sociologist affiliated to the CNRS. I write from France since the FSB last year banned me from visiting Russia for ten years. According to the security services I represent a "threat

to the State". In recent years, however, I have only been doing my work as a sociologist at several universities in Saint Petersburg. But before that, especially in the 2000s, I was very much involved in the trade union and citizen struggles that were emerging all over Russia at that time, on very concrete questions of unpaid wages, the defence of green spaces, housing, etc. I was also involved in citizens' struggles. With friends and colleagues we had set up the "Institute of Collective Action" which aimed to publicize these struggles through an Internet site and help them to exchange and develop.

It was at that time that I met Alexei Navalny. Without being "comrades", we met several times in the field, in Moscow, Astrakhan or elsewhere.

*Translated by **International Viewpoint** from the **Mediapart blog**.*

International appeal for the immediate release of all political prisoners in Russia

9 February 2021

At the end of January 2021, a wave of mass protests swept through all of Russia's major cities. The occasion for these protests was the arrest of opposition leader Alexei Navalny, but the genuine cause was the enormous social inequality and political disenfranchisement prevailing in the country. Not all of those who took to the streets were supporters of Navalny, but they were all united by a desire for social and political change and a fatigue with the corrupt, authoritarian regime ruling Russia today.

Peaceful protesters faced unprecedented (even for Putin's Russia) police brutality: in a few days, over 10,000 people were arrested, many of them beaten on arrest. A climate of fear was created in the country: students who participated in the rallies have been expelled from

universities, teachers who sympathized with them have lost their jobs, and school students have been intimidated for voicing their political stance.

While we disagree with Navalny's pro-capitalist orientation, which on this point is not different from that of Putin's regime and represents no real social and democratic alternative, we demand the immediate release of Alexei Navalny and all political prisoners, and stand in solidarity with all those in Russia who are fighting for social and environmental justice and fundamental democratic rights.

Russia Appeal - Updated list of signatures 17 February 2021 12H30 (GMT +1)

Argentina

Nicolás del Caño, Deputy PTS/FIT

Myriam Bregman, Deputy PTS/FIT
Martín Mosquera, Professor at the University of Buenos Aires & editor, Jacobin Latin America
<https://jacobinlat.com/>

Nora Ciapponi, militante, candidate in 1973 as vice president of the Nation for el Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores.

Eduardo Lucita, Economistas de Izquierda (EDI)

Australia

Federico Fuentes, journalist
Mick Armstrong, Socialist Alternative
Susan Engel, Associate Professor, Politics & International Studies

Austria

Helmut Dahmer, sociologist and Professor Emeritus at the University in Darmstadt

Belgium

Yannis Thanassekos, ex-director of Fondation Auschwitz (1983-2010)
 Eric Toussaint, PhD University Liège and Paris VIII, spokesperson CADTM international
 Mateo Alaluf, Sociologue, professeur émérite de l'Université Libre de Bruxelles ULB
 Corinne Gobin, Professeure à l'Université libre de Bruxelles
 Lucien Perpette, ex shop steward FGTB metal, militant IV International
 Christine Pagnouille, Université de Liège, ATTAC Liège
 Jean-Marie Chauvier, journalist, ex permanent correspondant Drapeau Rouge (Red Flag) in Moscow
 Jean Delval, Editions du Cerisier
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 Mauro Gasparini, Gauche anticapitaliste - SAP
 Bernard Duterme, director CETRI - Centre tricontinental
 Willy Estersohn, ex-journalist
 Marianne Rathmès, member of Attac Liège

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 Roberto Robaina, Member of Municipal Council/Vereador of Porto Alegre/Brazil, National Direction of PSOL
 Gustavo Seferian, Professor at the Federal University of Minas Gerais. Director of ANDES-SN
 Israel Dutra, responsible for international relations of the PSOL
 Sâmia Bomfim - federal deputada PSOL São Paulo
 Vivi Reis - federal diputated PSOL Pará
 David Miranda - federal diputate PSOL Rio de Janeiro
 Luciana Genro - PSOL state deputada Rio Grande do Sul
 Mônica Seixas - PSOL São Paulo state owned company
 Sandro Pimentel - PSOL Rio Grande do Norte state deputado
 Fábio Félix - PSOL district deputado Distrito Federal
 Luana Alves - concejal PSOL São Paulo/SP
 Mariana Conti - concejal PSOL Campinas SP
 Josemar Carvalho - concejal PSOL Saint Gonçalo/RJ
 Jurandir Silva - concejal PSOL Pelotas/RS
 Max Costa - Secretary of Human Rights of Belém/PA

Mariana Riscali - National Secretariat of Finance of PSOL
 Zeneide Lima - National PSOL Executive
 Leandro Recife - National PSOL Executive
 Pedro Fuentes - International PSOL Observatory
 Bruno Magalhães - International PSOL Observatory
 Danilo Serafim - Union of Educators and Professionals of Education of Rio de Janeiro (SEPE/RJ)
 Paulo Neves - State Union of Teachers of São Paulo (APEOESP)
 Ana Borguin - Union of Metroviarios of São Paulo
 Luan Badia - Federation of University Workers (FASUBRA)
 Camila Souza - Youth Movement Together!
 Maurício Costa - Red Emancipa de Educación Popular
 Nathalie Drumond - Movimiento de Mujeres Juntas!
 Paula Kaufmann -Movimiento de Mujeres Juntas!
 Tiago Aguiar - Editor of the Movement Magazine

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 Costas Lapavitsas, University of London
 Tariq Ali, writer
 Gilbert Achcar, Professor, SOAS, University of London
 Michael Roberts, marxist economist, <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/>
 Alex Callinicos, Emeritus Professor of European Studies, King's College London
 Dr Neil Faulkner FSA, Archaeologist and Historian
 Simon Pearson, Anti-capitalist Resistance
 Mike Phipps, member of the editorial board of labourbriefing.org
 Andrew Kilmister, Editor, Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe
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 Richard Abernethy, International Marxist-Humanist Organization

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 David Mandel, professor, Université du Québec à Montréal
 M V Ramana, Professor, University of British Columbia.
 Haideh Moghissi, Emerita Professor of Sociology, York University, Toronto
 Saeed Rahnama, Professor (retired) Political Science and Public Policy, York University
 Ronald Cameron, Plateforme altermondialiste
 Ken Hiebert, retired trade unionist, Palestine solidarity activist
 Todd Gordon, Associate Professor, Wilfrid Laurier University
 David Camfield, Associate Professor, Labour Studies & Sociology, University of Manitoba
 Earl Turcotte, former diplomat
 Barry Weisleder, Federal Secretary, Socialist Action / Ligue pour l'Action socialiste

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Wang Zhikun

Croatia

Srecko Horvat, Diem25
 Dimitrije Birac, Subversive Festival, Zagreb

Denmark

Søren Søndergaard, Member of Parliament, Spokesperson on International Affairs, Red-Green Alliance

Ecuador

Fernando López Romero, Movimiento Revolucionario de los Trabajadores - Ecuador -MRT
 Carlos Rojas, MRT
 Alberto Acosta, ex-president of the Constituant Assemblée in 2008, ex-minister of Energy in 2007

France

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 Patrick Silberstein, Éditeur, Editions Syllepse
 Pierre Cours-Salies, Sociologue. Professeur émérite, membre d'Ensemble !
 Pierre Rousset, Europe solidaire sans frontières (ESSF)
 Franck Gaudichaud, Professeur des universités, Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès

Christine Poupin, porte-parole du Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste
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 Serle Le Quéau, syndicaliste
 Olivier Besancenot, NPA
 Jan Malewski, Responsable de la rédaction d'Inprecor, <http://www.inprecor.fr>
 Josette Trat, Sociologue féministe
 Claude Calame, Directeur d'études Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris
 Penelope Duggan, International Viewpoint, IV Internationale, <https://internationalviewpoint.org/>
 Michèle Leclerc-Olive, chercheure CNRS (retraîtée) et Présidente de CIBELE
 Bruno Della Sudda, autogestionnaire et altermondialiste, ex-conseiller municipal de Nice - Ensemble!
 Didier Epszajn, animateur du blog « entre les lignes entre les mots »
 Stefan Bekier, interprète de conférence, membre de la Commission internationale d'Ensemble!
 Christian Mahieux, syndicaliste SUD-Rail [Union syndicale Solidaires], éditeur (Syllepse)
 Henri Mermé, coordinateur de la commission internationale d'Ensemble !
 Nicole Abravanel, historienne
 Gustave Massiah, fondateur du CEDETIM
 Christophe Aguiton, militant altermondialiste, ex secrétaire général d'ATTAC
 Gilles Manceron, historien
 Martine Boudet didacticienne, membre du Conseil scientifique d'Attac France
 Daniel Guerrier, éditeur des Editions Spartacus
 Pedro Vianna, poète, homme de théâtre, enseignant universitaire
 Marie-Claude Herboux, Militante d'Ensemble!
 Ugo Palheta, membre de la rédaction de la revue Contretemps, membre IV internationale
 Léon Crémieux, IV Internationale
 Patrick Farbiaz, PEPS - Pour une Ecologie Populaire et Sociale
 Bénédicte Monville, PEPS - Conseillère régionale
 Sergio Coronado, PEPS, ancien député
 Jean Malifaud, Syndicaliste SNESUP-FSU
 Hubert Krivine, physicien

Monique Dental, Présidente Réseau Féministe « Ruptures »
 Alexis Cukier, Philosophe, Attac, CGT Ferc Sup
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 Pierre Khalfa, Fondation Copernic
 Evelyne Perrin, syndicaliste
 Gérard Filoche, porte-parole de la Gauche démocratique et sociale
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 Frank Mintz, anarchosyndicaliste, CNT-Solidarité ouvrière
 André Rosevègue, Militant girondin multicarte
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 Vincent Buard, Président de la C.I.S.E.
 Myriam Martin, conseillère régionale Ensemble France Insoumise Occitanie
 Lucky Thiphaine, journaliste, ancienne Secrétaire nationale du MRAP, Ensemble, Attac
 Françoise Kiefe, militante féministe altermondialiste
 Nouzarede Pierre, Retraité et syndicaliste CGT
 Jean Lafont, PEPS - Pour une écologie populaire et sociale
 Paquito Schmidt, retraité, syndicaliste et associatif
 Théo Roumier, syndicaliste et libertaire
 Jacques Simon, Ensemble! Perpignan
 Pascal Boissel, vice-président de l'Union syndicale de la psychiatrie
 Benoit Derijard, ColsolCat Collectif des Alpes Maritimes de solidarité avec le peuple catalan
 Roselyne Rollier, Maison des Femmes
 Therese Clerc Montreuil
 Christian Delarue, Amitié entre les peuples
 Hélène Gallis, Citoyenne insoumise
 Angélique Sapolin, militante de la société civile
 Samy Johsua, professeur émérite Aix Marseille Université
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Loren Balhorn, Editor, Jacobin.DE
 Jakob Schäfer, ISO, Fourth

International
 Wolfgang Alles, Trade unionist
 Angela Klein, ISO and editor of Sozialistische Zeitung, <https://www.sozone.de/>
 Christian Boissevain, ISO
 Wolfgang Alles, ISO

Greece

Antonis Ntavanelos, DEA
 Yorgos Mitralias, Journalist
 Tassos Anastassiadis, journalist, Magazine "4" & Synantissi (for an Anticapitalist Internationalist Left) <https://tpt4.org/>

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Roberto Savio, Othernews
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India

Achin Vanaik, Retired Professor, University of Delhi
 Kunal Chattopadhyay, Professor of Comparative Literature and Russian/Soviet History specialist, Jadavpur University
 Shalmali Guttal, Focus on the Global South
 Sushovan Dhar, CADTM-India
 Soumya Sahin, Associate Professor of Economics, The WB National University of Juridical Sciences, Kolkata
 Pratip Nag, Radical Socialist, IV International
 Manoj Bhattacharya, General Secretary, Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), former member of parliament

Ireland

Paul Murphy, TD, Member of the Irish parliament, RISE, www.letusrise.ie

Japan

Tsutomu Teramoto, ATTAC Japan

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Martinique

Philippe Pierre Charles, Groupe Révolution Socialiste, IV internationale
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Morocco

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Organizations

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Secretaria de Relações Internacionais do PSOL,

Comuna - PSOL

Insurgência - PSOL

Movimento Esquerda Socialista - MES/PSOL

Subverta - PSOL

Britain

Anti*Capitalist Resistance
<https://www.anticapitalistresistance.org/>

France

Le Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA)

Europe solidaire sans frontières (ESSF)

Union syndicale Solidaires

ENSEMBLE! (Mouvement pour une Alternative de Gauche, Ecologiste et Solidaire)

Germany

Internationale Sozialistische Organisation (ISO), section of the FI

Morocco

Courant Al Mounadil-a

Mexico

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Spanish state

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SolidaritéS

USA

Socialist Action socialistaction.org

Solidarity <https://solidarity-us.org/>

Venezuela

Liga Unitaria Chavista Socialista (LUCHAS)

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Understanding Alexei Navalny

8 February 2021, by David Mandel

This is a 'Bonapartist'-type regime, in which the state administration, and proximity to it, are the principal sources of accumulation. Consequently, for this administration, holding onto power is the overriding interest of the state (the constitution was recently amended to allow Vladimir Putin to remain president

until 2035), and corruption is at its core. This regime was initially established with the enthusiastic support of the major capitalist states, which were ultimately disappointed to see their creation rebel against its semi-colonial status.

In terms of political liberties, the

regime can be termed a "soft dictatorship"—it tolerates these liberties (much more than the former Soviet regime, apart from its first and last years), but only insofar as they do not pose what it considers a serious threat. And the margin of toleration has been narrowing progressively over the past decade, so that even one-

person picketing was recently subjected to restrictions. Legal strikes have long since been practically impossible. Socially, this is an extreme neoliberal regime.

In the last few years, the most visible political opposition to this regime has been organized by Aleksei Naval'nyi, a 44-year old lawyer of mixed Russian and Ukrainian descent born in the Russian city of Obninsk.

Since the main thrust of Naval'nyi's political activity has been to expose official corruption, both economic and political (fraudulent elections), and since his calls for (illegal) demonstrations have mobilized tens of thousands, the regime naturally views him as a serious threat. He has been subjected to various criminal prosecutions—preventing him, among other things, from running in presidential elections—culminating in last August's nearly-successful assassination attempt, into which the regime has not yet even opened a criminal inquiry.

Although Naval'nyi's main message to the Russian public has been about the endemic corruption of the Putin regime, he has made some effort in the past several years to promote socio-economic demands too, including better wages, higher pensions, and progressive taxation. He has also created a kind of virtual trade-union movement of public sector workers in response to the government's unfulfilled promise to raise their salaries. Some members of Russia's rather weak socialist left have found this social turn encouraging. But the main message of Naval'nyi's public activity remains the state's rampant corruption, a message that clearly finds resonance in a so profoundly unequal and overall quite poor society.

The focus on corruption, rather than on socio-economic demands, is no doubt explained by the fact that Naval'nyi is himself a liberal, albeit with an ethnic-Russian nationalist

(that is, racist) bent, which has been suppressed and to some extent whitewashed over the past decade. Having obtained his university education in law and finance during Russia's wild 1990s—the period of “shock therapy”—while also working in various private firms, Naval'nyi joined the liberal Yabloko party in 2000, attaining a high-ranking position in the Moscow organization. But he was expelled in 2007 for his racist activity, notably his role that year in founding the short-lived “Narod” (people) movement, dedicated to the defence of “democratic nationalism,” its main programmatic goals being democracy and the rights of ethnic Russians.

In 2010, he started a much-celebrated internet anti-corruption site “Ros-Pil,” dedicated to exposing government corruption. It was in a 2011 interview that Naval'nyi famously called Putin's ruling Duma (parliamentary) party “the party of crooks and thieves,” an epithet that quickly gained widespread currency across Russia. He became even more prominent through his role in the 2011-12 protest movement against fraudulent parliamentary elections and Putin's return to the presidency after a four-year hiatus during which he served as prime minister. In 2011, Naval'nyi created the Foundation for the Struggle Against Corruption, devoted to exposing corruption in higher government circles, and in the 2019 regional elections, he promoted, with some success, the tactic of “smart voting,” in which anti-government voters are invited to concentrate their votes on a candidate who is not a member of the ruling party and who has the best chances of winning—a tactic that was somewhat effective.

Naval'nyi and his movement are yet another instance of the growing worldwide populist phenomenon of recent years. His supporters are a largely atomized mass, his movement relying heavily on social media (more than six million YouTube subscribers). This protest movement lacks a coherent program, in particular one

that would speak to workers, and any meaningful strategy. Naval'nyi's latest video exposé, released to coincide with his arrest upon returning from Germany where he has been treated for poisoning, has been viewed by millions. But it does not offer an analysis aimed at fostering a movement of politically conscious citizens. The subject is a palatial complex on the Black Sea coast that cost over \$1 billion and, so claims the video, belongs to Putin, who is portrayed simplistically as a man driven by his overwhelming thirst for personal wealth and luxury.

Naval'nyi's courage and tenacity, as well as his tactical skill, cannot be doubted. But a large majority of Russians do not see him as a credible alternative. Although Russians are far from enamoured with the present regime, in the traditional Russian fashion, based on historical memory, they fear what might come to replace it. And they do not have to look far—indeed, only to Ukraine—to see the altogether dubious results of populist movements in the former Soviet Union (the “colour revolutions”) that ousted sitting governments.

The participation of members of the younger generation has been notable in recent demonstrations called by Naval'nyi (high-school and university students were warned that they would be reported to their respective institutions if they participated in the latest demonstration). But older Russians can remember the “wild 1990s” that followed the demise of the Soviet Union, itself a sort of “colour revolution.” Putin's accession to power coincided with an economic recovery from a very deep and prolonged depression, the reassertion of Russia's independence on the international stage and an end to the state's drift toward balkanization. These factors still play in his favour, while his regime does everything it can to ensure that no credible alternative to Putin can emerge.

Source *Canadian Dimension*.

Open Islamophobia in Switzerland

7 February 2021, by **Joseph Daher, Paola Salwan Daher**

This initiative, supported by the UDC and a majority of the centre group (PDC, PBD and PEV) was tabled in 2017 by the Egerkingen committee (which had already initiated the vote "Against the construction of minarets" in 2008). [18] It has its roots in the Ticino initiative "Prohibition of the concealment of the face in public places", initiated by the "Trouble-fête" movement with the support of the Lega and the UDC, and accepted by more than 65% of the votes in September 2013.

Racism in permanent campaign

The proposed text deliberately avoided any reference to the Muslim full veil. But make no mistake, the burqa is the main object of accusation of the Egerkingen Committee and its supporters, as the initiative goes alongside discrimination against Muslims more generally. The campaign visuals of the initiators are clear, with a picture of a woman in a burqa, stamped "stop extremism".

This is part of an ongoing and increasingly stigmatizing campaign against non-white people, but also against Muslim people. The UDC wants to continue to promote and strengthen xenophobic and Islamophobic discourse while maintaining a neo-liberal economic and ecologically destructive orientation.

Equality as an instrument

The UDC and its supporters also continue to instrumentalize the issue of women's emancipation in their campaigns against foreigners and Muslim populations in particular. On the historic day of the Feminist Strike on 14 June 2019, the Swiss People's Party (UDC) in French-speaking Switzerland, which of course did not support it, organized a support meal for an anti-abortion foundation (Swiss Aid for Mother and Child). Not surprisingly, a party that had supported the popular initiative "Financing abortion is a private matter", which proposed to exclude the terminations from the benefits reimbursed by the health insurance (LAMal), which was rejected in a vote in February 2014. On the contrary, the UDC is a historical enemy of the progress of women's rights.

Other voices claiming to be "left-wing and feminist" also support the initiative in the name of equality, stating that "the full veil is nothing more than a mobile prison for women". Their paternalistic argument - "we have never considered the fact that some people accept or even adhere to the discrimination they face as a reason to stop fighting it" - denies the agency of women wearing the burqa and ignores the fact that this initiative will only reinforce the discrimination to which they are already subjected.

Self-determination vs. the patriarchal state

Such political orientations are at odds

with any idea of women's self-determination by anathematizing women wearing the burqa, speaking on their behalf and automatically declaring them oppressed without giving them a voice or even listening to them. Moreover, the use of the repressive apparatus of the state is never a vehicle for emancipation. Muslim women, who are already sufficiently discriminated against and subject to stereotypes that have a considerable impact on the realization of their rights, do not need to have decisions made for them.

It should be noted that the organization Terre des Femmes (TdF), which is committed to gender equality and combats gender-based violence, has spoken out unequivocally against a ban on the burqa, as has the Swiss section of Amnesty International. TdF describes it as "hypocritical": demanding a burqa ban in the name of equality is nothing but "racist instrumentalization".

The UN Human Rights Committee also considered in 2018 that the French law on the burqa ban disproportionately infringed on religious freedom and at the same time constituted a "form of criss-crossing discrimination based on gender and religion".

Voting in favour of an initiative that will only reinforce one form of discrimination in the name of fighting discrimination against women is political nonsense. The veil and burqa, imposed or removed by force (by a state and/or an individual), are reactionary acts that run counter to any support for women's self-determination.

Translated from **solidarités**.

Myanmar's Labor Movement Is Central to the Fight Against Authoritarianism

6 February 2021, by **Kevin Lin, Ma Moe Sandar Myint, Michael Haack**

The question of how Myanmar's people will respond now looms large. Suu Kyi and her party remain popular in the country despite her brutal record — which includes enabling the **ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims** — because they're seen as representing an end to military rule and an increased openness to the world.

Meanwhile, the **medical staff** in major cities have called for a strike, the country's largest labor federation is urging people **not to cooperate** with the military government on labor issues, and a Facebook group titled "**civil disobedience movement**" has drawn a hundred eighty thousand likes.

Myanmar's labor movement was building even before partial democratization. A major strike wave swept the country's mostly foreign-owned garment factories in **2009-10**, which the government met with coercion: quartering off factories and forcing workers and employers to come to a deal, undercutting the momentum of the movement.

But in 2011 the ban on labor unions was dropped, and the following year collective bargaining was legalized. Labor organizing began to come above ground. Labor rights organizations that had served Burmese migrants in Thailand moved to Myanmar and joined their formerly underground comrades. Many labor activists appealed to the liberal rights-based regime in order to rile up workers and gain protection for their unions.

Above all, strikes have been essential to building the movement. In 2019, a wave of walkouts took off in the country's now-massive garment sector

— which employs around **six-hundred thousand** workers and manufactures Myanmar's chief export — only to collide with the COVID-19 pandemic and its assorted restrictions.

Shortly before the coup, we spoke with Ma Moe Sandar Myint of Action Labor Right, a key organizer of the recent strike wave, to get a better sense of workers' struggles in Myanmar. We tried to reach her after the putsch, but communication is currently being disrupted inside Myanmar. What is certain, though, is that the fight against authoritarianism in Myanmar will be intimately tied to the success of its labor movement.

KL / MH | In 2019, just before COVID-19 hit, there was a strike wave in Myanmar. What caused it?

MSM | Workers were seeing the benefits of the strike. The strike gets them their rights. The strikes get them their wage increase. When one strike happens, other workers see that the strike works. They come to know the taste of the strike, and it is a good taste. The strike also gives them the union.

When there is a strike, workers come out of the factory and they open a strike camp. They get to talk to each other, and they select their union leaders and stewards at that time, and they educate each other. And the organizers educate workers on unionism.

When they find out that their wages are very low compared to what they produce, they get really agitated. There is no way you can get your rights by sitting idly. You have to collectively fight the employer.

The role of organizer is very

important. Let's say the worker comes to the organizer and then the organizer explains that there are many rights violations in the factory, but you cannot solve this problem alone. You have to get together with other workers and you have to talk to them and bring them to us. We will explain more to them.

In that way, they get together and then explain that if we go through the government mechanisms, it would take time.

KL / MH | I'd like to focus on one thing you said: that the union is formed through the strike. Why do you think that's so important?

MSM | Most of the stable unions come from strikes, and most of the unions in our federations went through at least two or three strikes. Even after one strike, there will be a subsequent strike, depending on how the employers treat the workers and the union. So striking is a custom here.

During the strike, organizers ask the workers what they demand from the employer. They write down the demands during the strike from different departments or different production lines.

Participation is high during strikes. Workers are not staying at home. Workers come to the factory like a normal working day with their lunch, then they stay the whole day.

In some cases, the workers sleep in the strike camp and other workers come the next day.

KL / MH | You emphasized workers' participation. Can you talk more about union democracy in the movement?

MSM | For the negotiation to be settled, workers have to vote on whether they like this settlement or that settlement. The union leaders are also elected. Workers elect the executive committee members of the union. According to Myanmar's labor law, there are seven executive committee members. Those seven executive committee members are mostly elected in the strike camp.

The factories are huge, so a few executive committees cannot cover the whole workforce. Each department or each production line elects stewards depending on how many workers are there.

The organizers and the union federation understand that the power is in the hand of the workers, and the unions have their own autonomy. What the federation leaders do is give suggestions and support strikes.

KL / MH | Is labor law in Myanmar favorable to workers?

MSM | The labor laws do not represent the workers. The reason that the labor movement is advancing is because the workers are willing to go on strike. That is what makes the labor movement grow.

To make the laws better and represent the workers' voice, workers have to become strong. They need strikes, because from strike they form unions, and they form the labor movement. That is how it is.

KL / MH | How did you get involved in labor organizing?

MSM | I have been working in the garment sector since I was young. We have summer holidays in high school, so in those summer holidays I went to work as a laborer in a garment factory. In 2000, I finished high school, and went directly to the garment factory and worked there as an office clerk.

In 2015, there were minimum-wage changes in Myanmar. At that time, the minimum wage was 3,600 Kyawt per day [about 2.70 USD]. In my factory, the employer did not pay the minimum wage according to the time frame set by the government.

Workers went on strike for several days. The employer said he would give the money back, so workers ended the strike. However, the employer did not fulfill his promise, and so workers engaged in slowdown actions. The employer retaliated by withholding wages. The case was going through the dispute settlement mechanism in Myanmar, and the Confederation of Trade Union of Myanmar (CTUM) assisted the workers there to form a union. I was only a member at that time.

During that time, the employer sued the sixteen worker leaders under the 341 Penal Code for blockage of a gate. The employer was scaring workers, warning that "the Penal Code can get you into jail." One of the worker leaders asked me about Penal Code 341. I also did not know about that Penal Code 341, so I talked to my husband who told me that it's not that serious. I also talked to a woman leader and learned that that Penal Code is not serious.

So I started talking to those worker leaders and other workers who began to trust me. The workers were not satisfied with their current leaders. The workers wanted to go outside and strike. A woman worker leader decided to lead the strike. There were 306 workers there, and 220 workers follow her to strike. That is how I got involved in the labor movement.

KL / MH | As a female worker yourself, how does the fact that 90 percent of garment workers in Myanmar are women affect your organizing?

MSM | Eight or nine years ago, strikes were led by men. Employers decided to not hire male workers at high rates. Women workers were hired because the employers thought women workers wouldn't fight the employer. What happened was the opposite. Women workers are also willing to go on strike.

Regarding organizing, it is easy when you are the same gender in terms of talking to and convincing other workers. One obstacle is from parents; another obstacle is the partner or, if the worker is married, the spouse.

But against all odds, women leaders get outside of their customs, and traditions, and fight. In the federations especially, most of the leaders are young women who give their time and energy to fight for workers, and they sacrifice a lot. They are even willing to divorce their spouses.

And when they go on strike, those woman leaders are not afraid of being dismissed. They overcome their fear, and they commit their mind. I am very proud of the woman workers leading the strikes and the movement.

KL / MH | You have been working in factories for a long time. You have seen the transition to partial democratization. How big of a difference did it make?

MSM | Around 2000, there were only a few factories, and workers worked from morning to night. Some even worked the whole year without taking any leave because they were not aware of their rights. And, people couldn't gather because of military rule.

After 2010, the phone and internet gave workers information. Workers got to know their rights and became aware of what was happening in their environment. There were also many more factories, so workers became more connected with each other.

In 2000, workers accepted that the employer was like a God, because the employer gave them food and wages. But after 2010, the views on employers changed, and workers got to know their rights.

KL / MH | How has COVID-19 affected the labor movement in Myanmar?

MSM | When COVID-19 hit, the government imposed restrictions on people gathering. Workers cannot open a strike camp outside factories right now, and this restricts them from going on strikes. As the strikes are not happening, unions are not being formed.

COVID-19 also gives employers the upper hand in oppressing workers, dismissing workers, and cracking down on unions. Because orders are getting low, employers are planning to

reduce the workforce.

Although we cannot strike, we have to keep strong and resilient, and when

the COVID-19 restrictions are lifted we will fight back. Then the strike wave will happen again.

3 February 2021

Source: [Jacobin Magazine](#).

Austria's far right tries to surf on popular anger

5 February 2021, by **Dima Rüger**

The country has long been a good pupil: a rapid and relatively brief lockdown allowing cases to be traced and infection rates to be reduced to almost zero at the beginning of the summer. Since then, the situation has deteriorated sharply. In autumn, an epidemic outbreak took the government "by surprise". Even more than elsewhere, the relative success of the spring had been used as a justification for not changing anything, leaving the health system helpless in the face of the second wave. In November, for several weeks, Austria even had the highest per capita case rate in the world (reaching almost 10,000 cases/day in a country with 8.9 million inhabitants).

A first "hard" lockdown was decreed in mid-November, but was relaxed on 6 December under pressure from the tourist industry, which weighs heavily in this country which receives many tourists during the ski season (the largest "cluster" of the first wave had already been located in the ski resort of Ischgl). A decision quickly put to the test by reality, since a new strict confinement, which ended on 18

January, had begun on 16 December.

The "Liberation Day"?

With the deterioration of the health situation and the economic effects (already last spring, unemployment exploded by 25% in one week), the government's popularity was also eroded. There is a weariness in the face of repeated lockdowns and a frank hostility, though quickly denied in certain hospital environments, to compulsory vaccination in health care. For several weeks now, relatively small anti-lockdown demonstrations, with a strong conspiracy-theory content, have been taking place in provincial towns with a contingent of "tourists" making the rounds of all the demonstrations.

The 16 January was planned as "Liberation Day", with a central demonstration in Vienna. Around 10,000 people marched (less than the 30,000 originally planned by the organizers) under a stream of Austrian flags. It was a demonstration with a

very nationalistic tone, with elements of similar demonstrations in Germany, with slogans such as "The blood of Christ protects, not the vaccine!" as well as QAnon logos. There was also a noticeable presence of the institutional far right, which wants to surf on a "populist" movement to rebuild itself since it was ousted from government in 2019.

Last weekend, rather small anti-lockdown demonstrations took place on Saturday, and on Sunday 5,000 demonstrators - probably more QAnon than the Austrian far right - were in the streets of Vienna despite the ban on the demonstration.

The end of the health restrictions is not in sight (AstraZeneca recently announced a long delay in the delivery of vaccine doses for Austria) and, in the absence of alternatives, some of the anger could well fuel a movement whose political significance seems quite similar to the anti-mask demonstrations that have marked Germany.

4 February 2021

The lessons of the Indian farmers' struggle

4 February 2021, by **Sushovan Dhar**

Earlier, in an interesting twist to the tale, the Union government on January

20, proposed to suspend the three contentious farm laws for one and a

half years and set up a joint committee to discuss the legislation at the tenth

round of talks with farmer unions. However, Samjukta Kisan Morcha rejected the offer the very next day. It resolutely clarified the continuation of the movement till the three anti-farmer laws were completely repealed. The AIKSCC was also determined to carry out its scheduled Tractor Parade on the Republic day.

A few days ago, the Supreme Court had expressed intentions to stay the implementation of the controversial agricultural laws while proposing to form an independent committee chaired by a former Chief Justice to “amicably resolve” the stand-off between the farmers and the government. Of course, there were serious questions about the “independence” of the committee nevertheless, the first signs of backing down were obvious.

Government forced to step backwards

Given its belligerent and antagonistic attitude of the present current government - more so after it was elected for the second time in 2019 - the Union Agriculture Minister, Narendra Singh Tomar's announcement might have appeared a little unusual but not entirely surprising. The government hoped that this announcement would force the unions, determined to take out a tractor rally on Republic Day to rethink their months-long agitation and vacate their blockade of the national capital, tamely. Various measures, including threat and intimidation, to dissuade the farmers were tried and tested earlier but it was all in vain. In an attempt to discredit the agitation, a section of the ruling dispensation hurled accusations of infiltration by Sikh separatist elements. This foul play resulted in a backlash and the government ministers in charge of negotiations with farmers' unions had no options but to dismiss the allegations, washing their hands off.

The continued agitation by the unions, the imminent nature of Republic Day protests and the highest court's refusal to ban it were just the immediate reasons for the

compromise formula. A desperate and a last ditch effort to contain this growing agitation which can potentially spread to other parts of the country, more vigorously. The fascist brigade's parent organisation, i.e. the RSS was also nervous about the indefinite continuation of this well organised protest. Suresh “Bhaiyaji” Joshi, the number two of the Sangh Pariwar, expressed his apprehensions about the stability of the government in the face of such resolute defiance, in an interview to the Indian Express.

Can this be termed as a partial advance? Sure. Are there reasons to celebrate? Of course, yes. While it is important to abstain from being overwhelmed or getting carried over, there are enough reasons to feel confident about this collective action that has put the government on a back-foot. Certainly, the credit goes to millions of peasants of this country who relentlessly fought with their backs on the wall. The peasantry is clearly fighting for a control over its own destiny (lives and livelihood) against corporate control of agriculture ushered in by this government. Neither the deep agricultural crisis engulfing the country since the last three decades which has led to over 3 hundred thousand farmers committing suicides due to severe indebtedness nor the chronic rural distress which forces thousands to leave their villages to migrate towards urban centres in search of an uncertain future can be undone so easily. We surely need a larger political battle to overcome that but the current struggle is an earnest way towards that direction. It has instilled hopes in the minds of millions who want to fight this fascist regime and regain the democratic soul of the nation.

The recent farm bills plus the new Labour Codes are attempts to carry on an unprecedented degree of reforms that gives the big bourgeoisie a free hand to run the economy. No doubt they are backing it very strongly. While the labour codes are an attempt to flexibilise employment by giving owners the right to ‘hire and fire’ employees and do away with minimum legal guarantees for the workers, the former can be seen as a response to the agrarian crisis from the Right.

They are ably supported by the media and a pet group of economists - so impressed about the new farm acts - attempting to craft popular public opinion about the laws. Many have gone to the extent of heralding these laws as something that will revolutionise the Indian agricultural sector. Fortunately, the farmers are oblivious towards such enlightened counsel.

The strength and the prestige of this agitation stems from the courage and tactical ingenuity of a movement that has a real economic base. It is an endorsement of the fact that the neo-liberal agenda, internalised by all political parties in India including sections of the mainstream Left, continues to be resisted from below. The resilience shown by the peasants, mostly from Punjab and Haryana, and their organisations are exemplary and frankly, much more radical than the politics of the existing Left parties.

The crisis of the Left

The crisis of the Left partially explains the relative lack of inertia on the part of the trade unions and the overall workers movement to come out in full support of the current protests. There have been minuscule attempts by workers to join in unison with the agitating farmers and one fears that they are squandering a golden chance to launch similar offensives, in their own interests, just when the iron is hot.

Unfortunately, the major trade unions of the country are controlled by one political party or the other. In the absence of genuinely independent organising, these unions instead of acting as authentic expressions of the working class, function as the transmission belts of their “parent organisations”. Perhaps, this party-unionism explains the weak working-class response to the current farmers' movement. Can the situation be reversed? Difficult but not impossible! Is it worth giving a try? Yes, we have no other choice! Without the self-organisation of the class it has already conceded a lot, as evident in the current scenario and historically too.

This movement is very important for the left. While any attempt to see this as a peasant uprising to capture state power would be fool-hardy it is also not “a movement of only rich peasants” as per certain sections of the left or more precisely, some adherents of a stage-ist Socialist Revolution. The farmers are fighting for their immediate and longer term survival. It would be criminal for the left either to be steeped in deep sectarianism or squander this opportunity to form a redoubtable opposition to Hindutva coming out of their time-worn ideological cocoons. We must seize the moment and make all efforts to transform these protests into wider peoples’ struggles against the fascist regime and to give it an anti-capitalist character. The current momentum can be deepened by including the demands of various sections of working people. Demands for employment generation, food security and food sovereignty among others would serve to 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 solidarity with the working-class struggles going elsewhere.

Post-script

The current struggle also helps us to throw light on another important question. Can the fascist forces be defeated by forming electoral coalitions or are they best dealt with by powerful mass mobilisations from below? While not entirely ruling out the possible electoral scopes, we need to pay attention towards the evolution of Indian elections and the trajectory of the Right wing. The Sangh Parivar and the other Hindutva forces have maintained a consistent ultra-right direction since the 1950s unhindered either by electoral defeats or any alliance with “secular” forces. One vividly recalls the optimism of a section of the liberals when the extreme-right entered the Janata party to form the government in 1977. With

Vajpayee as the foreign minister in Morarji Desai’s cabinet many saw the Hindutva project contained, tamed and civilised. History has treated such optimism with contempt. No electoral misfortune is enough to uproot this agenda and any genuine battle against Hindutva project must acknowledge this. A long-term political project to deal with it must be based on class struggle and our search for a lesser evil, i.e. relatively ‘harmless’ bourgeois allies, will act as serious roadblocks to vibrant opportunities for class agitation and mass movements.

The Farmers’ struggle and its partial advance has shown us the way. Strong movements from below can have the potential to take on the Hindutva juggernaut much more than stitching electoral alliances. What will be the fate of this movement six months down the line? We don’t know but it is worth recalling the ancient Chinese proverb “a journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.”

28 January 2021

Source [Groundxero](#).

Presidential elections marked by the pandemic crisis and the aggressiveness of the ultraright

3 February 2021, by **Bloco de Esquerda**

In the midst of the pandemic crisis, which reduced the visibility of the campaign, it was more difficult to expose the obstacles promoted by Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa’s presidency, whether in terms of the troika’s continuing influence on labour legislation, the protection afforded to private health corporations or the European programme of bank concentration paid for by countries on the periphery of the euro. [19] On the contrary, the years of the “geringonça” government have given Rebelo de Souza some credit as a

guarantee of stability. [20] The confrontation with Andre Ventura made the serving president look like a buffer blocking the growth of the ultra-right. [21]

His easy victory in the first round was made possible by the more moderate voters of the right, but above all those of the Socialist Party and even of the left. The votes for Ana Gomes (who came second but with far fewer votes than those won by Antonio Sampaio da N6voa (5) five years ago) and for Jo6o Ferreira (on a par with those for

Edgar Silva in 2016) (6) also confirm this reading. [22] The results, along with various studies and polls, indicate that many of those who identified themselves as Bloco voters on Sunday, chose to vote for Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa. In this highly polarized situation, Jo6o Ferreira, who had expressed his hope of receiving votes from some socialist sectors, did not even win all the votes of the PCP electorate. Not surprisingly, most of the PS voters who had mobilized especially for the candidacy of Sampaio da N6voa in 2016, this time

concentrated on re-electing the president. Ana Gomes, who sought to exploit internal tensions within the PS, captured a very small part of her party's electorate. The expectations of those, particularly in the PS, who hoped these presidential elections would deliver a people's verdict, by way of prize or punishment, on the different positions of the left in relation to the state budget for 2021, were not confirmed. [23]

The elections did confirm the reconfiguration of the right. With the CDS collapsing and the PSD losing ground, the most reactionary sectors of these parties came together around André Ventura, himself from the PSD. Ventura would try to imitate Donald Trump's strategy, and use this increased visibility to attract impoverished popular sectors frustrated with the government, as well as sectors of the bourgeoisie that hope to crush social rights. But the supposedly "anti-system" party had already made clear where it was going, promising the PSD positions of power. On election night, Rui Rio reciprocated and admitted that the PSD's plans for government also included Chega. But the right is far from having a majority that would allow it to take any decisive stance. On the contrary, in trying to normalise the Chega, the PSD has limited itself to the hardcore section of the electorate that would accept the perspective of a government with the extreme right, leaving António Costa to represent the political centre uncontested. [24] Instead of showing a political system in crisis, the results of the presidential elections show a reshaping of the traditional right, which includes the governmental plans of the two big parties.

In this context, the Left Bloc stresses that the crisis that needs to be tackled as a priority is the pandemic and social crisis. The fight against the extreme right cannot allow it to occupy the centre of the political stage. Only by affirming alternatives to the left and demanding responses against the crisis can we relegate extremism to the marginal place it deserves.

The Bloc's priority is to respond to the crisis in health, jobs, the economy and society

Portugal registered the first cases of Covid almost a year ago and is now reaching the most critical period of the pandemic. Pressure on the National Health Service and the social and economic crisis are worsening. The pandemic crisis is not a temporary shock; the health disaster is prolonged and its effects will be structural.

The Bloc puts forward a left-wing response to the crisis and confronts the government with the central issues of the day: the strengthening of the National Health Service, the response to the social crisis and investment to restore employment and the economy. It is these measures, left out of the 2021 budget by the government, which remain the priority for Portugal.

The requisitioning of the social and private sector, placing all existing healthcare capacity under the supervision and organization of the NHS, is essential to increase the capacity to respond in priority care, Covid and non-Covid, thereby ensuring equal access to urgent care. This integration of the available staff and facilities must be accompanied by an increase in investment and in the worth given to careers in the NHS. If this is not done, the impact of the pandemic on the NHS will not be overcome and will lead to irreversible deterioration of the NHS. This is the plan of private health groups, which are trying to protect themselves, hoping to absorb a good part of the current efforts of the NHS and its funding.

The lack of investment and the absence of solutions to structural problems in the state schools is also a weakness in the response to the pandemic. The return to remote teaching for an indefinite period of time was not prepared by the

government, especially with regard to the promise to distribute computers, and threatens to exacerbate inequalities.

The combination of the closure of social facilities, the lack of support for informal carers and the fragility of public services disproportionately hits women. Women enter any crisis at a disadvantage; they earn less and are more precarious, but are mostly in the front line of the battle against Covid-19 and in the sectors most affected by the crisis. The fact that aggressors and victims are now living together constantly has provided the ideal conditions to exert more control and less opportunity to report abuse and ask for help. The data from the most recent study reveals an even more devastating reality: 34% of the victims suffered domestic violence for the first time during the pandemic.

People in marginalized communities and migrants and racialized people are also disproportionately exposed to the crisis and suffer its effects with aggravated violence. Measures to combat the crisis must take account of structural inequalities.

Social support, protecting jobs and strengthening essential public services are central to promoting social and territorial cohesion and combating poverty. The effects of insecure employment have been exacerbated in recent months: without job security, large sections of the population are facing the economic and social storm without access to extended unemployment benefits, and are excluded from extraordinary support because of the conditions attached to it, or have support payments well below the poverty line. The correctness of the Bloc's criticism of the backsliding of the state budget in the area of social protection is now evident. The immediate strengthening of social support, and the need for new goals in social security, with more comprehensive support and thresholds above the poverty line, is a fundamental demand for the country and the left.

The country's difficulties are aggravated by the limited response to the crisis. Today we are among the European countries worst hit by the

pandemic but also among those that invest least in responding to it. The 2020 deficit was lower than expected because the government, in the face of the crisis, chose not to spend 3.5 billion euros budgeted for 2020. This choice is outrageous given the effects of the crisis and the scarcity of support set in 2020 and for 2021. Budgetary restraint is now extremely imprudent: low investment accentuates the dynamics of the crisis and hampers and slows down economic recovery.

Mobilization, debate and organization in times of pandemic

The Bloc has adapted its activity to the conditions required to protect public health, but this adaptation does not mean less activity or less participation of supporters.

The National Committee will promote with all the district branches, plenaries of supporters to take stock of the presidential elections and discuss the priorities for the Bloc's intervention in the current political situation.

The National Committee will call for a debate on the strategy and priorities for the local elections, delegating to the Political Committee the organization of a Local Conference to be held next month.

The National Committee also resolves to launch a recruitment campaign. In the aftermath of the presidential

elections, many decided to join the bloc. This process of reinforcement can and must be extended.

All initiatives, including the preparation and holding of the National Convention, must be adapted to ensure public health protection.

The Left Bloc welcomes the parliament's approval of the decriminalization of assisted suicide. Against the campaigns of fear and fundamentalism, a broad movement of unity for tolerance and respect for the rights of each person has triumphed in parliament and, more than that, has won the vast majority of Portuguese society for this cause. In all this, the role of João Semedo was fundamental. [25] His exemplary struggle is a challenge for all the struggles in which the Bloc is involved.

Opposition to the “War on Women”

2 February 2021, by Dianne Feeley

The Constitutional Court ruled last 22 October that any termination because of fetal abnormality is “incompatible” with the Polish constitution. However massive demonstrations forced the government to hold off publishing the controversial ruling in the Journal of Laws. [26] Three months later and given that gatherings of more than five are banned during the pandemic, the government moved to implement the decision.

As soon as the government announced that the publication of the Constitutional Court's ruling late Wednesday afternoon, Women's Strike called for everyone to go into the streets that evening, and they did. The Warsaw demonstration started in front of the Constitutional Tribunal Building

and soon brought traffic to a halt. In recognition of the Argentinian women's successful campaign to overturn their abortion ban, many of the women demonstrators wore green scarves. [27]

Strike leaders announced there would be protests in Krakow, Lodz, Wroclaw, Poznan and Katowice to start with, with more locations to be organized subsequently.

Even before this latest restriction, Poland had one of the most draconian abortion laws in Europe. The right-wing Law and Justice Party controls the government and appointed its members to the Court. Under the revised law, there are only two reasons for abortion: in cases of rape

or incest or if the woman's life is in danger. It also allows doctors to opt out of performing the procedure, making it even more difficult to obtain.

Poland's human rights commissioner, Adam Bodnar, pointed out that the government's policy is opposed by the majority and said, “The state wants to further limit their rights, risk their lives, and condemn them to torture.”

It is estimated that 200,000 Polish women seek abortion each year, but only 2,000 are obtained under the provisions of the law. The other 198,000 are either clandestine and “illegal” or occur in nearby countries.

The demonstrations continue [28]...

Brexit - contradictions of a right wing project

1 February 2021, by **Dave Kellaway**

Many British people abroad found out last week (including myself) that the TV streaming services they enjoyed were no longer available post-Brexit. Mastercard, the credit card company, is imposing extra fees on people making purchases from the EU. Many small companies - which were often pro-Brexit - are finding the extra non-tariff costs increasing their costs and creating delays. VAT and some import duties have to be paid now. Extra forms have to be filled in for health and safety regulations and alignment of standards. The full impact is still not clear since many businesses stockpiled parts and materials before the deal. It was reported that when such companies asked the relevant ministry what to do they were advised to set up warehouses or branches of their business inside the EU. So much for taking control and reclaiming an illusory British sovereignty!

A sector of the economy that is more important than manufacturing - finance and services - is not even included in the free trade deal. Hard negotiating will have to continue, Brexit is not done as Johnson claims. Most mainstream economists think this 'thin' deal will reduce GDP by 4 to 5%.

Such a decline in the economy will hit workers hardest. Hardly had the ink dried on the deal when a 'consultation' was set up in the business ministry to look into ways labour law and regulations could be relaxed. The maximum 48 hour week, holiday rights and statutory work breaks and company obligations to log working hours were all put on the table for review. Such was the outcry that the minister has since dropped the consultation. It will certainly return in another form. Brexit for Johnson's conservative party was about building a 'Singapore' island off the coast of Europe. A low tax, low wage economy

that, with global investment from the US and China, would give Britain a competitive advantage over the EU.

Ending free movement of workers in the EU was the biggest defeat for workers and at the same time amplified racist, anti-migrant attitudes in society. The government has continued to exploit this dog whistle politics with a £2000 a head scheme to 'incentivise' the repatriation of EU workers who fail to secure 'settled status' by June 2021. For all sorts of reasons there will be tens of thousands of EU migrants who have worked here for many years who fail to make this deadline. Already Brexit and the Covid crisis has meant nearly a million people have left London.

Reactions on the left

The Labour opposition, now led by 'Mr. anti-Corbyn', Keir Starmer, has called it a thin deal but the leadership has decided the battle is all over and decided to vote for the deal in Parliament. The deal meets none of the criteria laid down by Starmer when he led on Brexit under Corbyn (the famous 6 tests). But he is fixated on winning back the so-called 'red wall' voters - ex Labour supporters who switched to the Tories in the last election mainly in the Midlands and the North. Instead of winning them back with socialist policies and internationalism he thinks that Labour should just cave in and accept Brexit and its against the deal.

A minority of the radical left argued for a people's Brexit (Lexit) and saw the vote to leave as an opportunity for the left since they said it showed working people had kicked back against an establishment that was for remain. This left underestimated or ignored the racist element to the leave

vote. They were ultraleft about any gains that EU law or regulations have established for working people. None of these forces have been able to organise any campaign or demonstrations mobilising a Lexit current. Today they steer clear of the discussion or content themselves with what if explanations, imagining there was actually an alternative to a right wing Brexit.

A coalition of some Corbynista MPs, Labour activists, trade unionists and left groups have continued to campaign for an internationalist response to Brexit through Another Europe is Possible. They held a recent online conference which you can view [here](#).

Finally Brexit has been a major factor, along with the appalling way the Johnson government has handled the Covid pandemic, in the developing constitutional crisis in the British state. The Scottish nationalists are likely to win a landslide in the Scottish Parliament elections in May and already polls show majorities for both calling a referendum and for independence. In Wales there is also an increased support for more independence. The North of Ireland is essentially now within the customs union with the 26 counties of the South which will also objectively help create support for a vote on a United Ireland.

Brexit was already a nightmare for the British imperialist state since the dominant sectors of capital were never keen on it. The added contradictions of the Covid pandemic and the crisis of the union could lead them to look for alternatives to the Johnson team within the Tory party or even switching to a moderate, pro-business Starmer-led Labour party.

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