



IV555 - April 2021

What now for Die Linke?

30 April 2021, by **Thomas Goes**

Many of the new members of this leadership belong to the younger generation who are committed to renewing the party: making it a modern socialist party based on its membership. There are great opportunities for Die Linke, but the party also faces enormous challenges.

A new generation

The party is entering a new phase. New presidents bringing a new breath of fresh air after years of internal dissension, have been elected. This vote was important. But that's not the point. What is decisive is something else: the congress showed the face of a new, younger party. For this generation, the old traditions conveyed by activists who grew up politically in the 1970s and 1980s are less important.

This new generation has formed in the movements against the far right (from Pegida to the AfD), in the Die Linke campaigns on housing or health and in the movement for climate justice. Many of them have gained experience in trade union work and some are young full time officials in their unions. But most of them went through formal high school rather than vocational high school, and many went on to higher education.

The configuration of currents within the party has changed dramatically.

Sozialistische Linke, long powerful in western Germany, has lost its importance. In particular because several of its most visible representatives made it the heart of the resistance against the overhaul of Die Linke started in 2012: towards a left capable of campaigning and organizing people, a party whose members can experiment, and at the same time establish a battle plan on all central social questions. On the new party executive, made up of 44 people, there are no members of *Sozialistische Linke*, while 20 candidates were elected with the support of *Bewegungslinke* ("the left in movement"). It would be hasty to take this as a shift to the left because the range of reformers who, in particular, give importance to government participation, can also be satisfied with this congress. The reformers are well represented in the leadership and in this sense this orientation has also been consolidated in the party.

Bewegungslinke was formed during the battle over the overhaul of the party. Through the interventions of Katja Kipping and more particularly Bernd Riexinger, this young current supported and defended new ways of envisaging the activity of the party. It sees itself as a "left class" current in seeing the class struggle as a central engine of development in which Die Linke must actively participate. However, it intends to combine the

class struggle with fighting other forms of oppression and discrimination. This is why it also defines itself as fundamentally feminist, anti-racist and ecological.

What is striking about this congress is not the twenty members of the leadership supported by the "left of the movement" but the fact that it became clear to what extent the strategic renewal has borne fruit. And this renewal was not about a single current, but involved most members - beyond the demarcation of currents and other affiliations.

Either way, today's Die Linke is no longer 2012's Die Linke. The strategic framework has shifted. Janine Wissler reaffirmed during the congress that "solidarity is indivisible". This basically indicates an extension of the scope of intervention. Naturally, Die Linke is the party which defends a socialist renewal of the welfare state and fights against the militarization of foreign policy. But it also wants to be the party of anti-fascist and anti-racist resistance, and of climate justice. "Solidarity is indivisible" indicates in this respect the attempt to forge new alliances within the social movement capable of implementing a fundamental change in politics. It means uniting those who live in precariousness with the core of the working class, still not exposed to it, and middle class wage-earners. And also uniting those who are involved in

different social movements or sympathize with them.

Die Linke is therefore faced with a series of challenges which it must meet and with opportunities which it must seize.

A unifying political project and a unifying political culture

A major challenge in the coming months and years to come will be relaunching a project around a political culture reinforcing what is common to members from different social backgrounds and political sensitivities who organize themselves within Die Linke. Calls for unity, important as they are, will not be enough. Unifying means addressing other experiences, other priorities and other values so that differences should not be overlooked, but made fruitful through common political work.

This works all the better when all the energy is devoted to developing good proposals for political reforms, trying together to generate enthusiasm around Die Linke, linking initiatives and organizations with a view to building alliances and attacking political opponents. A unifying political culture must not wipe out differences of opinion, but develop customs and rules that put what is common first, thus making it possible to reinforce each other. Such bonds and agreements are best forged around practical tasks. Both, however, require curiosity, respect, and the ability to abide by democratic decisions. Overcoming a culture of suspicion and animosity - such as has pervaded Die Linke in recent years - is therefore a matter of party survival.

Demonstrating that a rebel government could

impose advanced reforms

The age-old question of how Die Linke can implement its demands will once again be on the agenda. Susanne Hennig-Wellsow, one of the two new presidents, has an aggressive ambition to lead a coalition government with the SPD and the Greens. The idea that Die Linke must seek a left government in Germany is correct. What will be questionable, however - and this is anything but a detail - is exactly what it will mean when possible and what will have to happen for Die Linke to become "fit to rule". Neither Susanne Hennig-Wellsow nor Katja Kipping who, in recent years, in a slightly less provocative way, has gone in the same direction, have made contributions providing a more concrete approach to the challenges and problems posed by such a strategy, as well as the intermediate stages it implies. "We want, we should, we can" certainly sounds voluntarist, but clarifies little. It would be desirable for this debate to be carried out more intensively.

A left government will not be possible this autumn. There is currently no basis for a "government of solidarity and democratic renewal". There is hardly any serious exchange between the parties and the social forces associated with them. A coalition for change exists at best in the minds of a few activists and leaders, and even then, it is a vague thing at most. But a government, which must impose reforms in a context of confrontation, cannot be suspended in the air. Even so, sceptical members of Die Linke would be well advised not to give a simple "No" to the government option and not to hide defensively behind red stop lines. In particular, the Die Linke left should develop the party's capacity to exercise power in a rebel government.

The prerequisite is to be able to organize (or co-organize) social conflicts and translate them into advanced reforms - through an arduous confrontation with part of the administration, the right, the bourgeoisie and a part of the middle class. So, what are the reforms that the party should undertake? Will Die

Linke be strong enough to weather the storms that a policy of ambitious reform would unleash? What should our political project, which should be more than the sum of a few reforms, but should show where we want the country to go in the short and medium term, look like? How can we prevent Die Linke from going into the arena like a tiger advocating real reforms and ending up as a rug for the Greens and Social Democrats ("we can't do more, the balance of power isn't there")? And then: how to build in the coming years genuine political alliances which can genuinely support and impose such a development model for a more united and democratic Germany? And, not the least of things: how does such a project bring us closer to socialism, how do we make socialism more plausible?

Learn to enter into conflict, build power

An absolute prerequisite for this kind of capacity to govern is the building of social power - but also of the organizing power of Die Linke itself. A left-wing party in a position to govern must also be able to fight. Anyone who honestly views the state of Die Linke will have to admit that it is going to take quite a bit of practice to reach that level.

Organizational power emerges when activists want to get moving, act enthusiastically on their own milieu, continue to educate themselves politically and also when it is possible to create more dedicated full time posts. Social power and organizational power are obviously not the same thing, but the two go hand in hand.

Die Linke does not have social power when it is content to denounce political and social problems of everyday life and to turn them into political questions, ideas and demands that are debated around a table. It has social power when people beyond its own ranks want to defend it. The more activists there are, the better the political education, the more the party is an attractive interlocutor on the ground, the easier it is to get there.

Making Die Linke a party anchored in society that connects people, evolves their ideas and can exist during social confrontations is in this sense a prerequisite to being able to govern the country in a context of conflict and transform it.

Wanting to be a party of government without being able to become a party of struggles will certainly lead to political defeat. Thus, it will be important to strengthen Die Linke as a party existing on the ground, which organizes around social themes and is visible in local parliaments, in order to support initiatives and movements and make alternatives at the local level tangible: Saving the hospitals? A green transition in transport? Housing construction? The results of the recent regional elections in Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate showed that much remains to be done in these areas. Substantial results in a few cities (this also applies to the most recent municipal election results in Hesse) indicate that there is also promising potential.

Providing answers to central political upheavals

However, Die Linke will soon have to build this social power while providing practical responses to three central political upheavals.

Firstly, to overcome the economic and health aspects of the Covid crisis, the federal government has spent a lot of money on economic aid and social support, for example through the short-time working allowance. The programmatic shifts of the SPD and

the Grünen are more interesting. Both will make social promises in the coming months, ahead of the Bundestag elections. From my point of view, the question of whether this will for example lead to a change in their current policy remains open, even if scepticism is in order. The test will come after the Bundestag elections, as the price of the Covid crisis policy will have to be paid. It is easy to get confused with forecasts, but a top-down redistribution policy will not be on the agenda of the next government coalition, particularly if it is a coalition between the CDU-CSU and the Greens. In the coming year we will have to wage defensive struggles and fight for a different distribution of wealth. Die Linke must prepare for this, raise awareness in the unions and think about initiatives in favour of alliances.

Secondly, the ecological and social transition is already underway today - and will accelerate. In the workplaces, it is accompanied by a new wave of rationalization. Work and life will be changed (digitalization). We are not entering a period of stability, but of upheaval. In the car industry, both in large groups and among subcontractors, all of this is already omnipresent. This ecological and social transition will be shaped from above if the social left - and in particular, Die Linke - does not intervene. What needs to be done so that the interests of workers, employees and the unemployed are at the centre of concerns and not those of companies and financial speculators? On the basis of the proposals formulated - such as that of a "left green transition" by Bernd Riexinger - practical answers could be found within the framework of an in-

depth discussion with works councils and employee representatives, trade unionists and activists from the environmental and climate justice movement. Those who do not want the transformation of the economy and society to take place under the leadership of a coalition of conservative parties and the Greens, must put into practice alternative socialist and ecological solutions. This implies clear reform proposals, which to a certain extent must be utopian: stating what is necessary and not just what is conceivable. As a party, it will be necessary to bring social concerns into the movement for climate and environmental justice and to be active in it; and it will also be necessary to listen and advance the debate on left-wing responses. Believing we have a stock of truths (ranging from more or less left-wing Keynesianism to the revolutionary tradition) that would suffice to deliver does not add much anyway.

Thirdly, the far right which is radicalizing in this country is not defeated, even if the AfD has not been on the rise lately. The danger lies in its continued development in eastern Germany, where it is at its most fascistic. The AfD crisis should not deceive us, in particular because the social poison that fed it (social insecurity, loss of confidence in traditional parties, existing racist and authoritarian attitudes) is still there and can be spread more in times of crisis. The challenge remains to express the legitimate anger of people who, disappointed, turn to the far right, without drawing the wrong conclusion that the bulk of frustrated people are tempted to become radical nationalists, because they are voters disappointed with the left.

For a new 25 April

29 April 2021, by Sinistra Anticapitalista

Every day we need to continue to defend jobs, wages and solidarity between the Italian and migrant

working classes.

Let's talk again about 25 April and the

Resistance struggle that defeated the dictatorship and returned freedoms and democratic rights to citizens. We

are living through dramatic times in which the pandemic crisis brings out more acutely the contradictions of a capitalist society based on the profit motive. Everywhere misery, unemployment, inequality, insecurity and social injustice are growing.

We have a government including a right-wing party, the Lega, which is a true friend of the bosses, looking after their interests, and which does not hesitate to use openly fascist forces. The government parties that call themselves anti-fascist have decided to embrace their enemy, because they too are committed to guaranteeing the profits of the capitalists, rather than relaunching a new policy in defence of social rights and in support of the working class that is suffering the most from the crisis.

All this should not be a surprise! Let's remember that in recent times, Interior Minister Minniti (of the PD - the Democratic Party) set the stage for the current authoritarian and racist backlash. Then Salvini (Lega leader) developed the work of his predecessor by criminalizing even the struggles of trade union and working class militants.

The sacred law of the sea, along with respect for basic human rights, have been trampled on. European countries, with Italy in the lead, refused to respond to the rescue calls

that for two days came desperately from the Mediterranean waters, leaving 100 migrants to die. Yet another unacceptable massacre for which the Italian and European governments are fully responsible.

Just as we cannot forget the fact that the governments that have succeeded one another in Italy over the last 20 years have torn public health care to shreds. Today we are paying harshly for the consequences.

In this context of difficulty and anger a party like Fratelli d'Italia (Brother of Italy) is growing. It is the heir of the Italian Social Movement, (MSI), while political forces, which are explicitly fascist like Casapound and Forza Nuova, take to the streets and lead movements that deny the very existence of the epidemic.

The goal of fascists old and new is clear: to divide the front of the exploited, taking advantage of the growing malaise to lead people down the wrong road.

The enemy becomes somebody who is lower down the social scale, such as our immigrant brothers and sisters, the workers from another sector or another region, and not the bosses who in recent years have seen their profits grow by reducing wages.

It is no coincidence that these forces show absolute indifference to all the

victims, those of Covid (there are now 120,000 in our country) as well as those drowned in the Mediterranean.

Fighting the fascists and the forces of the reactionary right means building the solidarity and unity of the working and popular classes so that they can assert their interests.

On 25 April we remember those who fought to free us from Nazi-fascism, but today we also want to oppose all forms of injustice and oppression and fight for a policy of solidarity and social justice.

- Build solidarity in the fight against the pandemic. Revive public health services and the right to health. We demand the suspension of the private ownership of patents on vaccines so that they can be produced and guaranteed for everyone.

- We need a new public economic policy that guarantees safe and decent jobs for all.

- Antifascism, as well as the fight against the pandemic, must start from the solidarity between workers, Italians and migrants together, against all forms of racism, for an Italy and a Europe that is open and supportive.

Translated by International Viewpoint from [Sinistra Anticapitalista](#).

Putschist generals and sorcerer's apprentices

28 April 2021, by Julien Salingue

This was the statement of twenty retired generals, claiming the support of "[a] hundred or so high-ranking officers and more than a thousand other military personnel" on 21 April on the website of the rightwing rag *Valeurs actuelles*. Sixty years to the day after the generals' putsch in Algiers, a quarteron of officers are threatening a military coup to confront, in their words, "a certain anti-racism", "Islamism" and "hordes from the banlieues". [1]

Macron and his government can be proud, as they have largely contributed to the dissemination of racist and Islamophobic campaigns, when they did not initiate them, notably around the "separatism" law and the pathetic polemic on "Islamogauchism". The embarrassed silences of the government in the face of the generals' tribune were noticed, and it took four days for the Minister of the Armed Forces Florence Parly to come out of her reserve. But on the side of

the Macronie, it's "Move along, nothing to see," like the former Secretary of State and now "national coordinator of intelligence and the fight against terrorism" Laurent Nuñez: "I don't have to give my opinion on this tribune".

The same people who see "fascism" in internal meetings between racialized people have therefore found little or nothing to say about a call for a putsch made by generals who may be

retired but who obviously still have links in the army. Not much to say either about the fact that Marine Le Pen greeted the generals' tribune and invited them to join her: "Like you, I believe that it is the duty of all French patriots, wherever they come from, to stand up for the recovery and even, let's say it, the salvation of the

country."

We are certainly not on the eve of a military putsch, but this tribune and the reactions - or lack of reactions - it has provoked unfortunately say a lot about the zeitgeist. Macron and his followers, both sorcerer's apprentices

and pyromaniac firemen, are playing a particularly dangerous game, against which the construction of a radical and massive political and social opposition is more than ever on the agenda.

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

Biden: "Empire Is Back" ...

27 April 2021, by *Against the Current* Editors

Biden's mantra is taken to mean a return from Trump's transactional chaos and corruption to what's called the "rule-based international order." As to what that order means in the lives of the global majority, Nicole Aschoff has it right ("The Biden Doctrine," Jacobin, Winter 2021):

"In promising to reconstruct a close approximation of the Obama-era global order, Biden is promising to restore a violent, rapacious system that had increasingly lost its legitimacy.

"Trump is such an obnoxious, dishonorable figure that it is easy to lose sight of the deep continuities between his administration, previous administrations, and the likely proclivities of the Biden team: continued interference in Latin American governments, indifference to crippling Third World debt, blithe disregard for the massive corporate theft of collective wealth through offshore tax havens, and a ready willingness to go to the ends of the earth to protect Wall Street while throwing ordinary people under the bus."

On domestic issues, the enormous U.S. economic and public health crisis, as well as Republican obstruction, has pushed the Democratic administration in certain "progressive" directions. The same is not true of Washington's foreign policy. What stands out here on first look is its sickening moral depravity.

Inherited from Trump's gang, brutal sanctions on the people of Iran and Venezuela continue, while there's no sign yet of lifting the criminal U.S. economic blockade of Cuba. As Kevin Young writes on Venezuela: "U.S. support for the far-right forces of (Juan) Gaidó and (Leopoldo) Lopez is intended to prevent a deal between (president) Maduro and the more pragmatic elements of the opposition [which] might alleviate Venezuela's economic crisis, but it could leave Maduro in power and thus derail the U.S.'s regime change agenda." ("Smarter Empire," March 8, 2021)

Meanwhile no sanctions have been placed on the murderous Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammad bin Salman, on the pretext that Washington is "recalibrating the relationship" with Saudi Arabia, while preserving its essentials — and maintaining arms sales to the United Arab Emirates, as the country of Yemen dies. There are too many other dirty examples of "geopolitics" to list here.

Without reference to ethical considerations, we must also look at the real conflicts and contradictions facing the leading imperialist power. These are particularly important given the rising power of China as well as economic and cybersecurity challenges. Some of these carry longterm threats of war and mutual destruction.

This requires digging beneath daily rhetoric and news cycle noise.

Strategically, "deep continuities" between Trump and Biden outweigh the differences. For example, while the big twit liked playing tough on TV when he threatened "Little Rocket Man" or bombed an empty airfield in Syria, Biden in his first 30 days already launched an air strike in Iraq that killed reportedly 22 Iraqi Shia militia fighters.

Biden's intent was a warning signal to Iran, not starting a real war. Neither Biden nor Trump are serious warmakers by intention — even though such actions could trigger an apocalypse by accident or miscalculation. That is also certainly true of other smoldering conflicts, e.g. between U.S. and Chinese naval forces in the South China Sea, or the half-hidden Israeli and Iranian cyber conflict and sabotage of each other's shipping.

It does appear, if carried through, that Biden will end the U.S. war in Afghanistan by the 9/11 anniversary — a 20-year defeat for U.S. power, a war that could never have been "won" — and the longer it lasted, the more it inflicted devastation on Afghanistan and its population.

Conflicts and Contradictions

Notoriously, Trump was contemptuous of the U.S. strategic partners in Europe for their blatant failure to sufficiently impoverish their own

populations for the sake of ramped-up military spending. Trump's trashing of NATO and peremptory withdrawal from the Paris climate accord horrified the strategic partners of the United States, while appealing to his nativist and climate-change-denying domestic base.

Sabotaging the Iran nuclear deal (Joint Comprehensive Program of Action, JCPOA) made the world, and particularly the Middle East, a more dangerous place. This angered the European powers — while exposing their incapacity to do much about it — as well as drawing China and Iran closer together as Tehran turns to Chinese investment and assistance in return for Iranian oil at a discounted price.

Trump's strategic game of course was consummating the long-gestating anti-Iran axis of Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. A Hillary Clinton administration would have worked more discreetly to develop that same alliance, although without the bombastic open provocation of Trump's "deal of the century" that publicly throws Palestine under the tank treads.

In the Middle East arena of permanent crisis and shifting alliances, U.S. policy remains, as always, cynically indifferent to Israel's destruction of Palestine. We can expect Biden's team to return to more conventional postures of imperial diplomacy (from which the Palestinian people, for example, can expect exactly nothing). But on restoring the Iran deal, Biden is caught in the trick bag that Trump created.

Israel is doing everything, both secretly and openly in the sabotage of the Natanz facility, to destroy the negotiations. Iran for its part has now accelerated its nuclear enrichment. A new deal requires lifting Trump's crippling additional sanctions on Iran, a rupture which Biden is unwilling to make as it would look like "weakness" — and the suffering of Iran's population is of no concern. The permanent loss of the JCPOA is looming, with dangerous implications.

The serious conflicts confronting U.S. imperialism today would be

challenging even if they weren't converging together, and even if Trump hadn't left the United States in a weakened and declining position on a number of fronts.

The central axis of global rivalry today is between the established U.S. power and the rising one of China. This struggle differs in a crucial respect from the old U.S.-Soviet conflict, which was political and military but not essentially economic, as the bureaucratic Soviet bloc economies were insulated and overwhelmingly weaker. Today's China is a rising economic as well as political-military power, even though the United States remains clearly dominant.

China's rapidly growing technological capacity and commercial reach create a host of competitive and strategic issues — some generally positive as in supplying COVID vaccines, others less so as when China buys up agricultural assets in the Global South or bullies its neighbors in fishing waters, repeating some classic techniques of Western raw-material extraction and settler colonialism. Not only in Asia but in Africa and Latin America, Chinese investment and development projects are successfully competing with U.S. and European competition — while creating their own social and environmental contradictions, too.

At the same time, Western dependence on China for crucial supply chains (from rare-earth elements to N95 masks and PPE for frontline medical workers!) are forcing the United States and Europe to figure out rebuilding their domestic capacities.

The U.S. and international left faces the complex and tricky task of speaking uncompromisingly against the Chinese regime's brutal policies in Xinjiang and Tibet, and its broken promises and repression in Hong Kong, without playing into Washington's exploitation of these issues for its own hegemonic purposes. (For an excellent resource, see the Hong Kong solidarity activist website <https://lausan.hk>.)

A secondary but important arena is the U.S.-Russia conflict. In contrast with China's Xi Jinping, Russia's

president-for-life Putin rules over a society in deep social decline, utterly incapable of engaging in economic competition with U.S. capital. Its military capacities are significant regionally (in the Syrian holocaust and on the Ukrainian border for example), but globally weak in comparison with the United States. In asymmetrical rivalry, however, Russia has sophisticated capacity in terms of cyber espionage and malicious mischief, including the ability to disrupt other countries' political processes — as, of course, U.S. imperialism has been doing for at least 75 years.

Most pressing among the profound global challenges are the inextricably combined COVID-19 pandemic and climate crises, both of which will persist: COVID until, at the very least, the world is effectively vaccinated along with adequate preparation for new outbreaks, and the climate emergency for the remainder of this century, assuming we survive it.

Environmental degradation and runaway warming (with melting permafrost, destruction of forests, and northward migration of pathogens among other consequences) effectively guarantee new pandemics, as does corporate mono-crop agriculture. And if Biden's program projects a reasonable, although overdue, first step toward controlling COVID, it doesn't remotely grasp the environmental emergency. ("Carbon neutral by 2050" will not cut it.)

Here again, a rupture with policy and practice entrenched in the post-World War II "Permanent War Economy," and doctrines of unlimited economic expansion at any global environmental and social cost, are essential — yet beyond the capabilities of capitalist governance.

Imperialism Comes Home

The reality of imperialism for the lives of the world's people is literally brought home at the southern U.S. border where thousands of asylum seekers and refugees every day are seeking entry. As the worst

obscenities of the Trump administration are now gone — its sadistic pleasure in tearing families apart and imprisoning children in cages, its gleeful and undisguised racism — the essential realities come into clearer focus.

Alarmed by the flow of migrants and rightwing blowback, Biden and Vice-President Harris pledge to address “the underlying causes” that propel migration from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador in particular. But U.S. policies themselves are the critical factors that have entrenched death-squad and drug-cartel regimes in those countries, and blocked the possible revolutionary changes that might have liberated them. As a result, the only decent course is to LET THE REFUGEES IN.

Kevin Young puts it well: “Admitting a few more refugees and taking some climate action will have positive impact on people’s lives. Unruly popular movements may force bigger changes to policy. Yet given the

magnitude of the destruction that U.S. governments have visited on Latin America and the Caribbean, what stands out is the vast gulf between what Biden is likely to do and what is owed to the people of the region, who deserve far more than just a smarter empire.”

Unaccompanied children, and whole families, are fleeing from U.S. “bipartisanship” in action: The Honduran regime of Juan Orlando Hernandez (JOH) came to power following a 2009 coup that was warmly greeted by Hillary Clinton, then Secretary of State under Obama. In 2017, when Hondurans were voting for an opposition reform candidate, the Trump administration nodded approvingly as the count was halted and the president declared “reelected.”

Environmental and Indigenous activists in Honduras have been murdered by the hundreds. Both JOH and his brother Tony Hernandez are named as drug criminals in the United

States, where a federal court has just imposed a life sentence for Tony following his conviction.

We hear repeatedly that the United States is, or must return to being, that mythical “shining city on the hill” celebrated by Ronald Reagan during the glorious 1980s. That golden age was when the United States supported both Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden, while sponsoring the genocidal counterrevolutionary wars in Central America the results of which have brought those desperate migrants fleeing northward.

That’s imperialism: the metaphorical “shining city” dumping its garbage, raw sewage and toxic waste, both literally and figuratively, on the peoples down the hill, including much of its own population. This system needs to be fought — regardless of which capitalist party rules at the moment — for our own and humanity’s survival.

Source: May-June 2021, ATC 212.

Can Delivery Drivers Break Their Silence?

26 April 2021, by **Xiong Yan**

Earlier today I went out to Liuliqiao, in southwestern Beijing. A delivery driver had been riding down the road, not breaking any rules, when he was hit by someone going the wrong way. By the time I got there, the traffic police had already issued their report, which said the other driver bore full responsibility for the crash. All I could do was call out two members of the Drivers’ Alliance, the informal network of delivery drivers I founded and run. One of them took the injured driver to the hospital. The other returned the order he had been delivering to the restaurant.

I got into my first accident in the winter of 2018, when I’d only just started as a delivery driver. Luckily, the other driver was willing to take responsibility, and even agreed to pay me a few thousand yuan. That was

enough to cover my hospital bill, though when I went to file a claim with my company’s insurance company for the rest, I found the process nearly impossible to navigate. They don’t pay out for any claims under 10,000 yuan (\$1,550) anyway.

I was all alone in the hospital, and I didn’t want to contact my family. Most people I knew had abandoned me after my business had gone under earlier that year anyway. I was lonely and determined to make some friends, so I began adding drivers to a chat group on messaging app WeChat. After the platform I worked at slashed our per-order pay and cut our bonuses from 400 yuan to 200 yuan a week, a bunch of drivers started to vent their frustrations in our work chat groups. Then the bosses kicked them out.

A bunch of us got together and decided to make our own group in response, one in which drivers could help each other out. I made a sign, printed a QR code linked to a WeChat chat group on it, and pasted it to the back of my moped. I named it the “Drivers’ Alliance.” I started getting between 30 and 40 invite requests a day, and gradually one group became many. (WeChat groups put a cap at 500 members.) Currently, there are 11 chat groups in total. That’s a few thousand drivers. When a driver enters a group, they get an alert that lays out my original intentions and goals for the alliance. “Aims: solidarity, mutual assistance, friendship, determination, sharing, and winning together,” it goes. “No matter if you ride for Ele.me or for Meituan, for Fengniao, Shansong,

Dada, or Shunfeng, we're all in the same hustle."

Beginning in March 2020, I set up accounts on short-video platforms like Douyin and Kuaishou, as well as the microblogging platform Weibo. I wanted to make short videos because I wanted to give a voice to all the things drivers wish they could say, and all the stories they wish they could tell. I want people online to hear our real voices. I also want to keep people from being taken in: I've helped drivers cheated out of their money defend their rights, and have recorded stories from people I know who've been scammed to warn others.

Many kind people have taken an interest in us. Perhaps there's no way to change the current situation. All I can do is my best to make our voices heard. As for whether or not it'll really make a difference, I can't say I'm hopeful, but it's worth a shot.

Pushing Back

I recently helped a Meituan driver defend his rights. He joined the company on Aug. 1, 2020. In mid-September he asked for some time off, and his station agreed. Then, halfway through, his boss at the station called and told him to report back for work. He needed some time to take care of things back home, though. When he returned a few days later, his boss told him they'd automatically counted him as having quit, and they weren't going to give him any of his salary.

His efforts to solve the problem through mediation went nowhere. Then I filmed a short clip and published it to Kuaishou. In just a few dozen hours, it got over 180,000 views, and the station boss quickly sent him most of his salary for the month of August. It worked because if the stations don't solve these problems, it'll affect their reputation, making it harder to recruit drivers.

I dropped out of school after the fifth grade. Everything I learned about how to solve these kinds of problems, I learned from experience.

Once, my work with the Drivers' Alliance landed me in a detention

center. It was leading up to the 2019 "Double Eleven" shopping holiday, and both Ele.me and Meituan — China's two biggest food-delivery platforms — were slashing our per-order rates. Drivers were frustrated, and I sent a message to one of my chat groups suggesting we pick a district and jointly refuse to make any deliveries there: The first three days, we wouldn't take any Meituan orders; the next three, we wouldn't take any Ele.me orders. We would all put notes on the back of our mopeds saying what we were doing and why. I figured that way we could raise public awareness for our cause and get the platforms to pay attention.

The fliers weren't even passed out when the police found me. I spent 26 days in criminal detention, far more than I ever expected. Luckily our protest hadn't actually taken place yet, and it hadn't caused any real-world impact or damage. If it had, I probably wouldn't be talking with you today.

Other than that, looking after all the alliance members is quite time-consuming. But what can you do? They have hard jobs in a strange city. It's lonely. Drivers have few friends. Some have told me that they're embarrassed to even admit to others what they do. They think they'll lose face. I think it's a good job, though. We're not thieves. We work hard for our money. What's so bad about that?

Still, we're not white-collar workers. We don't spend all day in an office. They can go online and use Weibo. They have the knowledge and language to make their voices heard. Most drivers don't even have a Weibo account, and we aren't particularly good at expressing ourselves. We come from limited educational backgrounds and have limited knowledge. Take this latest controversy about the exploitation of drivers, for example. We're at the center of the whole debate, but you never hear from us directly, only others — experts, scholars and the like. It's like we're not even here.

It can feel as though we don't even have the right to speak. And even when we do speak up, no one hears us any way. Our words just get lost in all

the chatter. Then, once a given controversy is played out, everyone forgets about us until the next time.

And ultimately, while we may complain, we still need to take orders to make a living.

Getting By, For Now

In all honesty, what drivers want is simple: higher incomes. If you limit how many orders a driver can take at once, it might make our jobs safer, but drivers will object because it limits how much they can earn. A better solution is to raise our per-order rates. I remember back in the winter of 2018, you could make roughly 8 yuan an order. As of late 2020, it's about 5.80 yuan. If drivers want to maintain their previous income level, their only option is to go all-out and increase their hours.

I don't feel "trapped by the system," as one widely read article about our plight put it. What's trapping us are the platforms' tricks. They set all the rules, and we have no choice but to play along. We're cheap labor. As far as the platforms are concerned, if one of us quits, there's plenty more willing to take his place, so they're not worried.

Anyone who's really smart won't last long in this line of work. There's constant turnover. No one really cares about all the various little rules set by the platforms, or the insurance stuff. They're just here to make some quick cash. And people's concerns vary, too. There's a fair number of drivers who just want to make an honest day's living. They're not interested in anything else. So it's hard to bring everyone together.

Nevertheless, these rules are the source of all our problems. For example, most conflicts between drivers and restaurants are because of them not getting orders ready quickly enough. The platform only gives them a suggested time frame, but there's no real limit on how long they can take. If you're a Meituan driver, however, these delays are infuriating. You have to wait 15 minutes from the moment

you walk in the venue's door before you can cancel and take another order. For Ele.me, you need to file three reports before you can get out of delivering the order: one after five minutes, another after 10, and a third after 15 — and even then, they'll still fine you if you cancel.

Overturning the fine requires an appeal. The process is a hassle, and you need to fill out all these forms. What driver has the time? It's better to just take a few extra orders. No one can afford to wait out the full 15 minutes anyway. Each order has to be delivered within 30, maybe 40 minutes. Add in the time you take getting to the restaurant, and once the 15 minutes are up, you'd never be able to make the delivery on time. That kind of thing makes drivers furious, and sometimes they get so mad, they go after the restaurant owner. That's the origin of most fights between drivers and store owners.

I used to run a restaurant, so I understand the other side. Their only job is to make a good meal. How it affects the drivers' schedules isn't their problem. I used to argue with drivers. I didn't get why they were in such a rush. Now I do.

And then there are the crazy customers. One hot summer day, someone asked me to go to a store and buy them a skirt. Turns out, the store didn't have the color they wanted, so they tried to cancel the order. I'd ridden several kilometers to get to the store, and if they canceled the order, I wouldn't be paid for what amounted to more than an hour's work. I asked them if they'd mind just paying me 10 yuan for my troubles, and they ended up reporting me to the platform. I was

suspended for three days.

Another customer wrote down the wrong address — the place wasn't even on the map. I spent half a day circling the neighborhood, trying to find her building, and ended up having five orders go over the time limit, meaning I wouldn't make anything off them. I finally found her, and I pulled up my map app and showed her the address she used didn't exist. As I was riding away, she called me and told me she was filing a complaint. Her reason? I didn't have a good attitude. It's just overwhelming sometimes, you know? I'm 1 million yuan in debt, and I kept trying to tell myself: What does it matter if I lose another 50 yuan? Who cares? But I just couldn't let it go. I was so frustrated.

Customers can file complaints, restaurants can file complaints, and drivers are trapped in the middle. The platforms already tend to blame drivers for any problems: I would say that about 90% of complaints are substantiated. And if you want to appeal, the burden is on you to make a convincing argument. Given the typical driver's lack of education, this isn't always realistic.

An Uncertain Future

Our lack of organization makes it hard for drivers to protect their rights. To tell the truth, I used to think setting up this alliance and fighting back might help things. I don't think that anymore. I know the alliance can't change the bigger picture, and it'll never earn the right to negotiate with the platforms directly. Still, at the very

least it can change the lives of the people around me. If I can do that, it'll be worth it.

A law firm once reached out to me. They wanted to work together, saying they could offer free consults to drivers. They offered other things, too. For example, if a driver is hit by a car and hospitalized, and the other party refuses to pay, the insurance company requires them to first get treated, then bring an itemized receipt to them to be reimbursed — in these cases, the law firm could help pre-pay the initial costs.

This seemed like a good idea to me, so I agreed. But I asked for something else, too: an app where drivers could go to trade or sell secondhand gear. For example, they could sell their lithium batteries, or even their mopeds. That went online in the spring of 2020.

Of course, helping others also helps me. When I help members buy or rent a battery, the factory gives me a commission, but I've never hidden that from anyone.

I still owe more than 1 million yuan. I'm paying it off slowly. I'd like to go back into business one day. A few nights ago, I met with a wealthy businessman. He wanted to go into the auto-services business with me, but I'd have to take orders from him. I declined. I like my freedom. And isn't that the whole point of our lives? To live them how we want to live them?

As told to Yin Shenglin.

Translated for Sixth Tone by Kilian O'Donnell; edited by Yuan Ye and Kilian O'Donnell.

Today, We Celebrate the Carnation Revolution

25 April 2021, by **Raquel Varela**

DB: The anticolonial revolt was a key trigger for the revolution, as dissent within the Portuguese army — expressed in the creation of the MFA — forced a split within the regime. But even after the MFA unseated the dictatorship on April 25, 1974, it enjoyed ongoing popular identification, and left-wing parties also aligned themselves with army figures. But how come this soldiers' movement enjoyed such a wide base of support? And why was it unable to maintain control of the revolutionary process?

RV: The MFA's formation owed not to left-wing ideology but rather to Portugal's colonial war between 1961 and 1974. The country spent thirteen years fighting against the anticolonial revolutions in Guinea, Mozambique, and Angola, with more than one million troops mobilized, over eight thousand dead on the Portuguese side and one hundred thousand dead on the African side.

It is often said that there was a bloodless revolution, since on April 25, 1974 almost no one died in metropolitan Portugal. Yet the Carnation Revolution had really begun with the anticolonial revolutions thirteen years earlier, which are indeed part of the same process.

Revolution means conflict: and the MFA overthrew the dictatorship with troops and tanks in the streets. But its members were mostly from the petty bourgeoisie, and little politicized, their aims being limited to ending the war. That was their achievement on April 25, 1974, as middle-ranking officers mounted a coup d'état. This however also launched a wider revolutionary process, as the working and popular masses entered the stage. This also altered the balance of forces between the social classes.

Portugal had been pitched into a national crisis, and the breach that had opened up within the ruling class was not resolved by the coup. What began on April 25 — a classic coup d'état — led to a democratic revolution, as within a few days or weeks the replacement of the dictatorship with a democratic political system was practically

assured. This was also the seed of a social revolution, implying changes in the wider relations of production.

The bases of this revolution were launched by workers and the popular and student sectors. They had joined the process behind the army, and they could thus act without fear. Yet as they entered the stage en masse, these layers soon moved ahead of the MFA itself, which was instead trying to restore order in the very state which it had helped set into crisis.

The Communist Party (PCP), the largest clandestine opposition during the dictatorship, advocated a popular-frontist approach. It advocated an "MFA-people alliance" — which amounted to maintaining the leadership of part of the army over the people. This was very similar to its French sister party's line in France in 1945 to 1947, when it followed a policy of national unity for the sake of "national reconstruction" in the immediate aftermath of the Resistance.

Yet the conflict between different sources of power persisted. From the start of the Portuguese revolution, new forms of popular power emerged that went far beyond the PCP's institutional project, thanks to the self-organization of the working class in committees of workers, residents, and later soldiers. These were forms of dual power outside the central state, and even part of the MFA separated off in order to join them.

But while parallel forms of power emerged during the revolution, they did not develop and coordinate themselves nationally, as a viable alternative to the power of the central state. Indeed, if the state entered an enormous crisis, it did not collapse. This lack of alternative was one of the reasons why on November 25, 1975 the right wing was so easily able to restore "order" at the expense of these forms of dual power.

DB: Your work emphasizes history from below — the unexpected role the masses played, even after decades without formal political organization. But in what sense was the Portuguese revolution a deeper process of change than the

Spanish transition to democracy in this same period? There, it was ruling-class elements who led the process, even if their bid to shake off a backward regime also brought a wider democratization of public life.

RV: It is telling that while Francisco Franco's archive is in his family's hands, Portuguese dictator António Salazar's papers are available to the public. What began on April 25 as a coup d'état led immediately to the complete dismantling of the dictatorship's political regime, but more than that, it was also the seed of a social revolution.

What happened in Portugal in 1974-5 was the last revolution in Europe to call into question the private ownership of the means of production. According to official data, it resulted in a considerable shift in the balance of class forces — some 18 percent of national income was transferred from capital to labor. It achieved gains like the guarantee of the right to a job, living wages (above the level of subsistence or biological reproduction alone), and equal and universal access to education, health, and social security.

What differentiates Portugal's revolutionary period from a democratic transition process like Spain's was not the staging of elections or their results, but rather the overall dynamic visible in this period. The holding of elections was, obviously, a major achievement, after forty-eight years of dictatorship: the first contest saw 95 percent of the people turn out to vote! But what sets a revolution apart from other processes is the way the population get stuck in, and directly take their lives into their own hands.

Paul Valéry used to say that politics is the art of turning the citizens away from their own lives. A revolution is precisely the opposite, a unique moment in history. We enacted one of the twentieth century's most important revolutions. The right to vote was one of its elements, but its most crucial feature was that for nineteen months, three million people directly took part in workers', residents', and soldiers' councils,

which decided what to do on a daily basis. People voted and discussed what to do for hours and hours. All of this made it possible for our revolution to accomplish wonderful things. To take just one example, look at the women organized in the residents' councils, who together with Carris (Lisbon public transport) drivers rerouted the buses so that social housing districts distant from the city center would finally be served by public transit.

The banks were nationalized and expropriated with no compensation whatsoever. And the right to free time was absolutely pivotal. Take the case of the demonstration by bakers working long hours, whose slogan was "we want to sleep with our wives." As a slogan, it is very interesting, because nowadays we take it for granted that at eleven at night there are people selling socks in supermarkets or working on Volkswagen assembly lines. People won't just price freeze so that they could have decent meals, but the right to leisure and culture. They also won the right to housing, indeed by occupying vacant houses that were destined for speculation. Even judges sometimes backed them, as in the city of Setúbal. I'll remind you that today in Portugal there are seven hundred thousand vacant houses, owned by real-estate funds, which do not pay taxes.

As well as four thousand workers' councils there were 360 companies managed by their own workers. Dryland farming areas tripled, as peasants occupied the land. These occupations are obviously in contrast with what we have today: the stalling of production during the crisis. Amid mass unemployment, people are instead paid to stop producing.

1979 would also see the creation of a National Health Service. However, the unification of a universal health system was introduced on the aftermath of April 25. The first person in charge of that was an absolutely wonderful figure within the Armed Forces Movement, Cruz Oliveira. He took the hospitals out of the charities' hands and turned them into a single service, and banned the selling of blood — since then, the blood used in

hospitals has been donated. All of this happened with the people on the streets, demanding that health access should not be a commodified good, but rather a universal right.

DB: You describe the revolution as relevant to the twenty-first century as much as the twentieth, and also note a flowering of consciousness of class interests during this upheaval. But it could also be argued that the Portuguese experience was tied to an older history and model of class organization rooted in large Fordist workplaces, coming toward the end of the wave of struggles that had opened up in 1968. Indeed, ideas like self-managed factories were widespread in the international left of this period. In what sense was this a movement that points to the future rather than the last gasp of the workers' revolution in Europe, before an onslaught that dismantled its historic social base?

RV: One of my main arguments in my book is to distinguish workers' control from self-management. There is a long history of experiences of workers' control, from Petrograd in 1917 to Italy in 1919-20, where workers impose their standards on company management. This phenomenon — little-studied in the Portuguese case — was however one of the most interesting elements of the Portuguese revolution, developing in nationalized firms, the major engineering companies, and beyond from February 1975 onward. This was different from companies which workers took directly into their own hands (self-management), which was more common in firms in real financial difficulties and smaller businesses.

The Portuguese revolution was based on the working class, not peasants or a militarized party. It is the most modern revolution to have taken place in Europe. Out of Portugal's ten-million-strong population, three million belonged to the sectors involved in the revolution, including a massive proportion of women (representing some 40 percent of the labor force, due to the war as well as emigration) and a service sector which had seen great expansion in recent

years. In this revolution, factory workers controlled hospitals and doctors.

Portugal's revolution thus combined great backwardness — the crumbling of the most anachronistic (indeed, the last) colonial empire — with modernity, in a revolution in the heart of Europe in the midst of the Cold War.

Today this revolutionary past — when the poorest, the most precarious, indeed often illiterate people, dared to take life in their hands — is a kind of historical nightmare for today's Portuguese ruling classes. Most of the people were jubilant. One of the characteristics of the photos of the Portuguese revolution, as illustrated in the cover of the book, is that people are almost always smiling at the camera. Not by chance, Chico Buarque sang: "I know you're having a party, man." Yet on the fortieth anniversary, it was insisted that only the soldiers' actions on April 25 be celebrated, forgetting that this was but the first day of the most surprising nineteen months in Portugal's history.

DB: Social-democratic parties in other countries, but also the US government, feared contagion from Portugal to other countries. How far was this realistic, and what pressure was used to stifle the energy of the revolution from the outside?

RV: We can see what happened in the American archives which have now been opened. Portugal was, alongside Vietnam, the country most closely monitored by the State Department. In Gerald Ford's words, Washington feared a "red Mediterranean" spreading out from Portugal. What he feared was often something neglected in the history of revolutions — the force of example. The images of the people of the shantytowns smiling with open arms alongside the soldiers filled the people of Spain, Greece, Brazil with hope.

The global left, from social democracy to the Communist Parties, groups to the left of these, trade unions, human-rights groups, progressive sectors of the Church, and democrats and republicans saw in Portugal an

alternative to the bloodbaths carried out under the boots of the Latin American and Asian military dictatorships. Only seven months after the bloody events in Chile on September 11, 1973, one people in Europe was actually winning.

On the other hand, today we know that the greatest sum of money dished out by the German Social Democracy (SPD) in its history was dedicated to building a Socialist Party in Portugal in 1974-75. This, not to further the revolution, but to create a party that could serve as the civilian heads of its derailing. The American and German states realized that there was no way to stop the revolution by repeating Chilean-style repression — Portugal was in Europe. The strategy of the “democratic counterrevolution” was implemented under the leadership of a Socialist Party, pacifying the masses with welfare concessions while undermining the popular forms of power by insisting that only parliamentary politics were legitimate.

DB: You reproduce João Abel Manta’s famous cartoon showing Portugal being studied by history’s great revolutionaries and convey how far it was a focus for the international left. Yet as you also note, it has not entered history in the same way as the Chilean experience as an example of the problems of state power.

Why do you think that is? Was it that the far-left groups of the time simply proposed a 1917 style revolution in Portugal and therefore added nothing new? Or is it that other large parties (e.g. the Italian Communists) saw the Chilean experience as more in line with the dangers they themselves faced?

RV: The Portuguese Communist Party, even more than the Maoists, created the idea that there was a danger that fascism would return. They used this as a means of pressure to defend the popular-front strategy (i.e. a broad alliance against fascism stretching across class divides) and thus constrain the conflictual dimension of the social revolution. Some of the far left aligned with this approach, but others did not. Not just the Maoists and Trotskyists, but also the

Communist Party and the MFA were very divided between supporting popular power against the central state and supporting the official Communist-MFA line defending this state against the “fascist” threat.

The claim that fascism was a real threat was, frankly, ridiculous: within a few days of April 25 the population had entirely destroyed the old regime, from the censor’s office to the political police, the fascist newspapers, the old trade unions, and so on. The mass meetings — the “plenarios” — had rapidly moved to purge regime officials. Meanwhile the army not only refused to repress the people, but elements of it split, in favor of the popular power. So, there was no Chilean-style threat to the Portuguese revolution.

But it seems that a large part of the revolutionary left finds it easier to trust in the success of popular-front politics — the defensive front against fascism — than in the self-emancipation of the workers. It is not easy to explain this, but doubtless it involves a kind of subjective fragility.

When we compare our own era, or indeed the 1974-75 period, with what international solidarity represented among the workers’ parties at the twentieth century, we see how in more recent times revolutionary leaderships have in fact become less bold and even more precarious and isolated “in their own countries.” Of course, it is one thing to say there was no Bolshevik Party in Portugal (or elsewhere) in 1974-5, but that itself poses the key question of how come a revolutionary situation with so much potential did not give rise to any such strong party.

DB: You mention some gains of the revolutionary period that survived deep into the present, like a rent freeze that lasted until 2012. Even the constitution preserved formally socialist language. How far are the tasks of the Portuguese left today a matter of defending or reviving the demands of 1974-75? What lasting changes in class and gender relations did it impose?

RV: The call for the beginning of the revolution on April 25, 1974 was the

radio playing the song Grandola Vila Morena. When, after the 2008 financial crisis, popular demonstrations rose up against the European troika imposing austerity on Portugal, the crowds sang this same song. In a time of social crisis, the music of 1974-75 becomes like a national anthem. This reveals something of the deep legacy of the revolution in Portuguese society.

History has different temporalities. The revolution lasts in culture, in music, in the name of bridges and streets, in the defense of the welfare state won in the battles of that time. Yet from the economic point of view, we can see the great setbacks we have suffered since its demobilization. Today, the Gini index of social inequality is the same as it was in 1973 — as bad as before the revolution.

There was to be no “Red Mediterranean” as Gerald Ford had feared. Portugal’s revolution gave everything, but it was alone. Despite the enthusiasms of leftist militants across Europe’s wealthier countries, the same dynamic did not take hold elsewhere.

But the outcome of a process is not the same thing as the process itself. The defeat of the revolution does not detract from the grandeur of what the colonial and Portuguese peoples showed in those two years. They provide an example of what we can hope for in the future.

Never in Portuguese history have as many people spoken for themselves as they did in those months. Politics ceased to be separated between elites and people, and there was a close connection between manual and intellectual work, between Africa and Europe, between doctors and nurses, men and women, students and teachers.

I have written more than ten books on the revolution in a decade of research, and I always hear people saying the same thing, they say: “These were the happiest days of my life.” In these two years, human beings were reunited with their humanity. This legacy still lasts today. And it is the only one that can save us from the abyss of the

Left Bloc defends the waiving of patents on vaccines against Covid-19

25 April 2021, by **Left Bloc**

The party thus joins the “forceful appeal” made by the World Health Organisation, which, given the shortage of vaccines, recommended this measure to intensify its production.

The draft resolution recalls that “several states have invested a lot of public money to finance research and to subsidise the production of the vaccine against Covid-19” and that the EU has increased funds for research and created funds to support the development and production of these vaccines. However, “something essential” was not taken into account: “the vaccine must be a public good, with universal access”.

Moreover, vaccines were only made “possible through massive public investment in research and production”, but were left “in the hands of private industries that are strangling production in favour of a monopolistic position that guarantees more and more profits”. Even so, the contracts signed with the pharmaceutical companies “are being consecutively breached”. Thus,

“patents are strangling production and the situation is more dramatic in the poorest countries of the world”.

For this reason, Left Bloc recommends that the Portuguese government “defend, in the European Union and in the various international organisations, the waiving of patents on vaccines against Covid-19 and the sharing of all data resulting from the investigation” so that “vaccines against Covid-19 become a public good of universal access whose production must be diversified and with equitable distribution to all countries of the world”.

“The pharmaceutical industry wants to keep the secret and control the expansion of production.”

José Gusmão, MEP for Left Bloc, responded to the recent statements by the Portuguese Minister of Health, Marta Temido, about the waiving of vaccine patents, who affirmed that patent waivers did not solve the problem of their lack of production capacity, repeating the opinion expressed by the Portuguese Prime

Minister in a recent parliamentary debate.

José Gusmão also criticised Marta Temido for ignoring calls from countries like India, which “have a much higher vaccine production capacity than Europe”, from other companies that also “call for the sharing of know-how” and the World Health Organisation. For the MEP, the minister is “naïve” when she says “that if the waiving of patents accelerated production, it would have already happened”, and that she is unaware of “the dimension of the business that the pharmaceutical companies that hold this oligopoly are preparing to do”.

“The pharmaceutical industry wants to keep the secret and control the expansion of production, in order to protect the oligopolistic regime that allows it to make the prices it wants to those who are prepared to pay more”, José Gusmão defended.

7 April 2021

Source *Esquerda English*.

Boris Johnson and the Orbanisation of Britain

24 April 2021, by **Joseph Healy**

Such fulsome praise from a deeply authoritarian and anti-democratic leader is unusual but it wasn't the first

time that Johnson's and Orban's paths had crossed. Both of them emerged from the Steve Bannon stable and

both of them were committed to populism, the ending of the European Union and the overthrow of liberal

democracy. Bannon, Trump's previous ideological guru and campaign director in the US election of 2016 had long had the aim of cultivating a stable of European populists who would further his far right ideas throughout the continent and Brexit was one of his favourite projects. In his comments last year, Orban also praised Brexit and marked it out as:

Orban's links with the Tory party go back to the Brexit referendum, in which Johnson played such a major role. Tory MEPs had been criticised for standing almost alone among mainstream western European conservatives and refusing to censure Hungary over breaches of the rule of law. Orban had been one of the first guests of Theresa May in Downing Street after she became Prime Minister in 2016.

Orban's regime in Hungary has been a textbook case of dismantling democracy while maintaining a pseudo-democratic façade. He has placed himself as the defender of a Europe of "Christian values" opposed to liberalism, human rights, minorities and the European Union. This is the culture war writ large and is straight out of Steve Bannon's playbook. For Fidesz (Orban's party) to gain traction, Orban had to appeal to the populist images from Hungarian history, the leading one of which is hatred and fear of the Turks and Islam, who ruled Hungary for centuries in the guise of the Ottoman Empire. In 2015 as refugees from Syria came streaming up the Balkans through Greece, Hungary sealed its borders and erected barbed wire

fences, issuing a statement that it would accept no refugees and that any found in Hungary would be detained. Many refugees found themselves sleeping in or near the main railway station in Budapest en route to Germany or Austria. A BBC reporter asked a waiter in a nearby restaurant why Hungary was not prepared to accept any and his response was that Hungary was "the Christian shield of Europe as it had been for centuries". Orban succeeded in mining this rich field of Islamophobic feeling and virtually no refugees settled in Hungary.

He also ignored the exhortations of the EU to accept some and his stance strengthened his stance of gallant little Hungary thumbing its nose at the large European states and refusing to water down its culture in any way. There are parallels here with Brexit.

Another traditional feature of Hungarian culture has been antisemitism and this also was mined with George Soros, the Jewish financier, who also supported the European University in Budapest being characterised as an evil force who was trying to weaken Hungary's Christian roots and impose liberalism and refugees on the country. Orban used images of Soros on his election billboards which were so deeply antisemitic as to hark back to the anti-Jewish cartoons of the Nazi era.

Step by step and in the face of EU opposition, Orban has marginalised the press, academia and the judiciary, last year passing a law that anyone publishing any information about the

Covid pandemic there unofficially would be subject to a prison sentence. Effectively total censorship. There are still some sources of resistance such as the recently elected Mayor of Budapest from an opposition party. But similarly to populist leaders elsewhere it is not in the capital that he draws his support but in the small towns and the countryside. Gradually the rights of LGBTQ people and women have been removed in the name of "Christian values"

In 2018, as Foreign Secretary, Johnson caused outrage by openly congratulating Orban on his re-election as Prime Minister. In his strategy of gradually dismantling political opposition in the UK, Johnson has seen the blueprint in Hungary. Suspending parliament, muzzling the media, with the BBC now a government mouthpiece, banning demonstrations and having his ministers appear with flags always in the background, Johnson is pursuing the same route as Orban has already taken and with no EU to guarantee rights post Brexit, is prepared to use nationalism and "British values" as a cover in the same way that Orban has used Christian values in Hungary.

Hungary is now classed as a semi democracy and is effectively a one party state. Johnson's aim is to do the same in the UK and to emulate his good friend on the banks of the Danube. It is already late but not too late to prevent this becoming reality.

15 April 2021

Source [Anti*Capitalist Resistance](#).

Economy & geopolitics - Biden and Europe, Concerning China and Russia

23 April 2021, by Barry Sheppard

There have been two approaches the U.S. ruling class has taken to try to defend the empire.

One was exemplified by the path of the Trump administration. Unilateral actions were taken such as Trump's unilateral withdrawal from the Iran

nuclear deal which upset the Europeans who wanted to do business with Iran, but were prevented by Trump's threat of sanctions against

them unless they knuckled under.

He also scorned other previous international agreements, including with Europe, and embarked on a path of seeking bilateral agreements with other countries, not multinational ones.

His "America First" rhetoric often included derogatory comments about Europe.

Biden has sought the other course, attempting to shore up the U.S. role as leader on the international scene through multilateral agreements, with the expectation that the Europeans would accept without exception Washington's positions.

But this too is not what it once was.

Foreign Affairs is the magazine of the Council on Foreign Relations, a think tank for the ruling class which includes a wide spectrum of views. A number of contributors to this magazine have pointed out that there is no going back to the pre-Trump days.

Other countries now are wary of Washington, fearful that U.S. elections every four years could reverse its course and agreements, as happened with the election of Trump.

Biden made a speech to European leaders in late January where he attempted to get them fully aboard the U.S. plans to confront China and Russia. Biden also said that "America is back" and ready to once again assume leadership of the trans-Atlantic alliance between Europe and the U.S.

This was reinforced by Secretary of State Anthony Blinken in a trip to Europe, where he demanded the Europeans join the U.S. in a bloc against China. The German Chancellor Andrea Merkel publicly made clear there would be no economic bloc against China.

Blinken beat a hasty retreat.

Almost simultaneously with Biden's January speech the European Union announced the tentative renewal of its trade and investment agreement with China. Already China bypassed the

U.S. as the EU's leading trading partner in 2020.

The new agreement would give European businesses greater access to make investments inside China by equalizing each party's allowed investment in the other. It would also streamline trade. European businesses welcomed the agreement.

The new agreement has to be ratified by the European Parliament. Behind the scenes Washington is trying to scuttle the agreement by pressuring EU countries to not ratify.

The U.S. was aided in this effort when the EU parliament sanctioned in late March Chinese officials over Beijing's oppression of the Uyghurs, and China retaliated with its own sanctions against individuals in the EU Parliament, raising opposition in the Parliament to the agreement.

However the struggle in the EU Parliament turns out, it is unlikely to affect commercial relations between Germany and France with China for example.

According to Germany's Foreign Office in June of last year, "China was once again Germany's most important trading partner in 2019, with a volume of trade of almost 200 billion euro.

"In the face of international crises and mounting global challenges (including COVID-19, climate change), great importance attaches to German-Chinese cooperation and coordination under the comprehensive strategic partnership. China views Germany both economically and politically as a key partner in Europe.

"The regular high-level coordination of policy in some 80 dialogue mechanisms, as well as dynamic trade relations, investment, environmental cooperation and cooperation in the cultural and scientific sector, are key elements in bilateral relations.

"Germany also advocates closer relations between the EU and China and increased EU unity towards China."

Germany does officially disagree with China's human rights, etc., policies, but these disagreements are separate

from its policies listed above.

France's Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs says, "Investment in both [France and China] is booming. France has a long-standing presence in China (foreign direct investment stock of 27 billion [euros] in 2017) in all sectors, including agrifood, industry, transport, urban development, major retail and financial services.

"More than 1,100 French companies are present in China where they employ around 570,000 people. Chinese investment in France has grown significantly in recent years A total of 700 subsidiaries of Chinese and Hong Kong companies are set up in France and employ 45,000 people.

"France supports Chinese investment which creates jobs and forges long-term, balanced partnerships. The economic partnership is reflected by the consolidation of structuring industrial cooperation in civil nuclear energy and aviation And its expansion into new sectors (sustainable development, health, the economics of aging, innovation and financial services)."

It goes on to list other areas of cooperation, including scientific and technical, combatting emerging infectious diseases and space satellites. "Over 3,000 researchers from the two countries and from 600 research unites cooperation with some 60 public research structures. In the area of artistic and cultural exchanges, the 'Croisements' festival has become the most prominent foreign festival in China".

Germany and France are not likely to join in any attempt by the U.S. to form an economic bloc against China.

A major source of tension between the United States and Germany is the construction of new pipelines to deliver natural gas directly from Russia to Germany, called Nord Stream 2.

There are already two such pipelines delivering gas from Russia to Germany under the Baltic Sea, called Nord Stream 1. Nord Stream 2 would greatly increase the volume of gas

delivered.

The construction of Nord Stream 2 is almost completed, and gas is scheduled to start flowing by the end of summer.

The United States has been opposed to the project from its beginning, and the Biden administration is frantically stepping up pressure on Germany to cancel it before it is completed.

Washington claims it would give Russia control over gas going to Europe. But it doesn't object to the gas pipeline going from Russia across Ukraine to Europe. Russia is planning to bypass Ukraine by building other pipelines, including Nord Stream 2.

One of the reasons the U.S. is opposed to the new pipelines is that they would cut off the rent Ukraine charges Russia to allow the gas to flow across Ukraine, a source of financing for the

U.S. client state. This rent increases the cost of the gas.

Getting gas cheaper directly from Russia is the main reason Germany has supported Nord Stream 2.

What Washington really opposes is not that Russia could potentially cut off supplies (a far-fetched danger that would be against Russia's interests) but Germany's increased control over more gas flowing from Germany to the rest of Europe.

Germany is much more of an economic competitor to the U.S. than Russia is.

The U.S. is opposed to Nord Stream 2 for another reason. It wants Germany to buy U.S. liquified natural gas (from fracking). Since liquifying natural gas comes at a cost, as does shipping it in pressurized containers across the Atlantic, this would mean Germany would pay more than getting the gas directly from Russia.

Secretary of State Blinken has even threatened Germany with sanctions unless it cancels the project. Is this a bluff? Any sanctions against Germany would cause hostility to Biden to increase among the German people.

A possible wild card in all this for Germany has been the rise of the German Greens. Green Parties around the world are different. The German Greens have moved to the right, and now stand for supporting the U.S. drive against China and Russia (and subordination to the U.S generally), and want Nord Stream 2 cancelled. (By contrast, the U.S. Greens ran two socialists for president and vice president in the 2020 elections on an anti-imperialist program.)

How this struggle plays out in the next weeks and months remains to be seen.

Source [ESSF](#).

Kosovo: a historic turning point

22 April 2021, by **Catherine Samary**

With 58 seats in the new parliament (out of 120) Vetëvendosje (VV) received massive backing from émigré and women voters. It now controls all the institutions of power: the presidency of the parliament has gone to it by right and its charismatic leader Albin Kurti (aged 42) formed his government on 22 March. But they still had to win the presidency of the country which requires the backing of a qualified majority in parliament, while the opposition boycotted this vote. In the event of failure after three votes, the country would have been forced to hold new legislative elections. [2] VV presented as candidate a figure who had helped it achieve victory by her campaign against corruption and had quit her party - the (centre-right) LDK: the popular lawyer and feminist Vjosa Osmani (aged 38). And in the last ballot, on 4 April, Osmani was elected, supported by VV, ethnic minorities

and 3 deputies from her former party, the LDK.

From now on, VV will have to apply the main thrusts of its electoral campaign against corruption and for social rights while the pandemic has killed nearly 1,800 people, worsening the economic, social and health crises in one of the poorest countries on the European continent: the average wage is around 500 euros and the unemployment rate for young people is around 50%, which drives them overwhelmingly to emigrate to Switzerland or Germany. All this in a context of uncertainty on the international status of Kosovo, whose parliament voted for independence in 2008.

What status?

Serbia denounced the vote on the grounds that Kosovo was not a republic but a province of Serbia in the former Yugoslavia. For their part, the separatists stressed (among other arguments) the status of "quasi-republic" acquired under Tito's reign in the 1973 Constitution - which gave Kosovo the same rights as republics within the collegiate presidency, and autonomy of management, independent of Belgrade. But they also underline the nullity of UN resolution 1244 (which explicitly wanted to avoid them having a tête-à-tête with Belgrade) after the end of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. Belgrade however persists in upholding it (with the support of Russia on the UN Security Council): it advocates radical autonomy for Kosovo within Serbia. Behind the

games of liar's poker, in truth, from the time of the Rambouillet negotiations (1999) whose failure was followed by the NATO war, the leaders in Belgrade were already ready to recognize to the Albanians a broad autonomy to organize and finance themselves the "autonomous" institutions and public services (health and education) in Kosovo! This was accompanied by a discourse of "historical sovereignty" whose real issue was the north of Kosovo: it was about ownership of the mines of the Trepça complex (which the Nazis also wanted to keep in their hands during the carve up of Yugoslavia in World War II), associated with predominantly Serbian communities and with great vestiges of the Orthodox patriarchate. All monetary, commercial, political and repressive measures (including assassinations of rebellious Serbian leaders) taken by Belgrade since the 2000s and within the framework of negotiations with Pristina are aimed at control over this northern part of Kosovo.

Meanwhile, the independence rejected by Belgrade is not recognized by the United Nations (but it is by 93 of its 193 members). It is also not officially recognized by the European Union (although only five members are opposed: Cyprus, the Spanish state, Greece, Romania and Slovakia). In contrast, the EU has opted for a "pragmatic" approach (avoiding discussing "status"), playing on the carrot of membership as pressure on the leaders in Belgrade and Pristina to find common ground. With this in mind, the EU has explicitly included Kosovo in the "stabilization and association process" that it has established with the so-called "Western Balkan" countries since the end of the NATO war - and confirmed at the Thessaloniki Council of 2003. Peaceful relations between neighbours are part of the "road map", in particular in the perspective of a free trade area.

Vetëvendosje's political course

VV was founded during the protectorate, in 2004, succeeding an associative movement (Kosovo Action

Network) favourable to direct democracy. It then had an "ethno-nationalist" profile and advocated union with Albania (not without nostalgia for the period of Enver Hoxha). It stood for the first time in the 2010 parliamentary elections where it won 12.7% of the vote: with 14 deputies out of 120 it rose to third position on the Kosovar political scene, ahead of the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) led by former Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj. In 2014, the vice-president of VV won the mayoral elections in Pristina, the capital of Kosovo. This marked the start of a decisive anchoring of the party in action on the ground, with concrete left-wing dimensions in terms of demands.

Its discourse became more social, and it systematically denounced corruption - without sparing those who had long been untouchable because they were associated with the country's liberation struggle. Its spectacular and continuous actions in this area have earned it growing popularity. It also objected to orientations that advocated the transfer of populations to new ethnic borders as a condition for Belgrade's recognition of Kosovo's independence.

While rejecting this logic, VV moved towards a policy of democratic popular sovereignty responding to the concrete needs of the population of Kosovo - by addressing itself in particular to the various minorities, in particular Kosovo Serbs: the search for an understanding with them was privileged over "agreements" with Belgrade. And its intransigence towards the former leaders of the armed struggle, now prosecuted, no doubt gave credibility to the discourse.

The current electoral victory therefore comes after several years of local anchoring of the party thanks to its successes in municipal elections - notably in Pristina; but also, after a weak majority in the legislative elections of 2019 which allowed Albin Kurti to accede to government responsibilities. However, this occurred within the framework of a precarious alliance of VV with the centre-right LDK. Kurti became head of government for around 50 days

amid some popular disillusionment with the weakness of the social policies implemented. It was a motion of censure initiated by the LDK which brought him down in March 2020. In the background were some spectacular actions carried out by Kurti (earning him a conviction) on border issues linked to the secret negotiations of former President Thaçi with Belgrade.

A new phase: promises and uncertainties

Will the relationship of forces created by the new elections allow VV to apply its program more independently? VV has made many promises: to dissolve the Privatization Agency, create a sovereign fund for the management of public enterprises, ensure free tuition fees for students, parental leave and social protection services, especially for single mothers and the elderly. It won a massive vote from the diaspora (a third of the population, which brings in 60% of the country's budget) and women (61% against 47% of men.) - in particular thanks to the involvement of the new president. Kurti says, with her, that he wants to "put an end to the old regime", that is to say what he calls the "establishment" of institutional parties. He promises to meet priority social demands - including having vaccinated most of the population within a year. Will the generous distribution of vaccines by Serbia to its Balkan neighbours in the recent phase be an instrument of "dialogue" with Pristina?

Kurti speaks in favour of integrating Kosovo, with the entire Western Balkans, as a whole, into the EU. But this is a logic at odds with the practical guidelines of the EU. His alliance with the new president Vjosa Osmani marks at least three major changes in the political scene: the rise of women (in addition to the presidency, and the high participation in the poll, a third of parliamentarians are women), a change of generation, with two leaders aged around forty, and the end of the reign of "the commanders". But three questions

also represent major trials to come.

On the one hand, how will VV work internally? Recently in particular, there have been conflicts of orientation made opaque by conflicts between persons. This issue sparked "a self-destruction of the party" in 2018 for lack of democratic means of expressing disagreements - especially with regard to the main leader, Arbin Kurti. And the internal functioning of a party in power generally has rapidly visible consequences also on its relations with its allies and with the "civil society" which elected it.

On the other hand, will the social promises be implemented and with what means - given Kosovo's relationship of international dependence with the EU and the United States - and therefore also its uncertain "status"?

Finally, and associated with this issue, how will VV defend the "sovereignty" of Kosovo - particularly in terms of social rights? This raises political and socio-economic questions at different articulated territorial scales.

The former workers of the mines of Trepça, Albanians or Serbs, are without unions able to defend their rights. Miners in neighbouring Albania, "adrift" after thirty years of privatization, have faced the same situation - and are trying to respond by self-organizing a new union. [3] But beyond trades unionism, who were and are the "legitimate owners" of these "common goods"? The not only illegitimate but illegal character - in view of the old constitutions - of the post-1989 privatizations in the countries formerly claiming to be socialist remains a blind spot in the balance sheets of this phase, resurfacing in many conflicts. The competitive "free trade" advocated by the EU could be opposed to many alternative logics of "pooling" resources and rights. VV has promised a questioning of privatizations, but how?

9 April 2021

Historical landmarks and main institutional parties in Kosovo

In 1989, Serbian President Milosevic abolished the status of quasi-republic which was recognized to Kosovo in the 1974 constitution. The Albanians of this autonomous province of Serbia decided to boycott all official institutions now controlled by Belgrade. From 1991, the dismantling of the Yugoslavia of Tito (who died in 1980) was materialized by the declarations of independence of the former republics (except Montenegro and Serbia which remained associated in a rump Yugoslav federation).

1. The Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) headed the pacifist resistance. The centre-right LDK was founded in 1989 by Ibrahim Rugova, novelist, a former member of the League of Communists, nicknamed "the Gandhi of the Balkans". In September 1991 the Kosovar Albanians (after a clandestine referendum) proclaimed the "Republic of Kosovo". This was organized by shadowing all official institutions - with parallel schools and health institutions, presidential and parliamentary elections. Ibrahim Rugova was elected president and there were hopes for international recognition of the "republic of Kosovo" in a context of "neither peace nor war".

2. From the armed struggle of the UÇK (Kosovo Liberation Army) to the PDK (Democratic Party of Kosovo).

Faced with the international recognition received by Milosevic during the Dayton accords of 1996 (ending three years of ethnic cleansing of Bosnia and Herzegovina and establishing its new constitution) Rugova's pacifist strategy was criticized. by the "Popular Movement for Kosovo" which decided to launch

an armed struggle and created the Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK). This aimed to win the solidarity of the villages against the repression of Belgrade, then the support of the USA: the latter treated the guerrillas as "terrorists" initially, then recognised them as representatives of the independence struggle. They became the armed wing of NATO in the field in 1999, after the failure of the Rambouillet negotiations.

The Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) was founded on 14 May 1999, becoming the political counterpart of the UÇK.

3. From Kosovo under a protectorate in the rump Yugoslavia to independence.

After three months of an undeclared NATO war, *UN Security Council resolution 1244, supported by Moscow and signed by Belgrade*, put an end to the conflict and established (with the UN) a supposedly provisional international protectorate (including institutions whose control would evolve in an evolutionary manner bringing together NATO, the UN and the EU). **Kosovo was endowed with autonomous status as a "province of Yugoslavia" (to avoid it being under direct Serbian rule).** In 2006 this status lapsed when Montenegro proclaimed its independence.

In February 2007 Martti Ahtisaari, UN special envoy appointed by Kofi Annan, drew up a project for Kosovo's independence under international supervision. It was vetoed by Belgrade (which demanded the application of resolution 1244 in the new context, with autonomy for Kosovo in Serbia).

In February 2008, the Kosovo parliament took up the terms of the Ahtisaari project and proclaimed the country's independence, supported by much of the EU and the United States.

- The PDK was second behind the LDK until 2007.

- It then became the first party in the country to express the nullity of the status of autonomy within a Yugoslav framework - in the face of the final dismantling of the federation.

From 2016 several dozen of its members were prosecuted for corruption and war crimes. The PDK is also suspected of having ordered political assassinations against members of the LDK and is accused by the Council of Europe of having participated in the trafficking of organs taken from prisoners during the war against Serbia (1999). Its leader **Hashim Thaçi**, one of the UÇK commanders, was elected President of the Republic from 7 April, 2016 (after three ballots without an adequate majority) until his resignation on 5 November, 2020 following his indictment by the Special Court in The Hague (KSC) - a Kosovar body of law made up of international judges (the

KSC sits in The Hague to protect witnesses; but it is responsible for investigating crimes committed by pro-independence Kosovars, mainly against Serbs, Roma and Kosovar opponents of the pro-independence guerrillas).

- **The Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK)**, on the right, was formed on 29 April 2001 following an alliance between several formations, under the leadership of **Ramush Haradinaj**, one of the historical leaders and former senior officer of the UCK. The latter, elected Prime Minister in 2004 after having entered into an alliance with the LDK, was forced to resign after three months, due to his indictment by the

International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). He was acquitted (on appeal) in 2012. Ramush Haradinaj again became Prime Minister in September 2017 at the head of a coalition of five parties including the **Serbian List (SL), based in the majority communities in the north of the country, reputed to be remote-controlled, by Belgrade**. But he had to resign in July 2019, after being summoned before the special court for Kosovo, which suspected him of war crimes. [4]

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Translated by **International Viewpoint** from the original French.*

The Power of the Polish Women's Strike

21 April 2021, by **Katarzyna Boni**

There were about 200 of us there, all peaceful protesters collecting signatures for a citizens' initiative to liberalize abortion laws. The police greatly outnumbered us; some people said there were as many as 2,000. They kept informing us through a bullhorn that our gathering was illegal. We drowned them out with the Macarena. A few women waved copies of the constitution in the officer's faces, showing them the page that enumerated the right to peaceful protest. Sometimes the police, for no apparent reason, yanked a woman out of the crowd, dragging her along the ground. I looked in the eyes of the officers surrounding me and shouted "Shame!"

Only six months ago, I would never have placed myself in a police cordon of my own volition. But a lot has changed since then.

THE RULING was issued on Thursday, October 22nd, 2020, in the early afternoon hours. A panel of 15 justices of the Constitutional Tribunal had declared that terminating a pregnancy due to severe and irreversible fetal impairment was contrary to the Polish

Constitution.

On that day, my whole body hurt—I thought, perhaps, from exercise.

As I was heading east out of Warsaw with my girlfriends to a house near the forest, women were gathering in front of the Constitutional Tribunal building. From there they marched several kilometers to the home of Jarosław Kaczyński—chairman of the ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS) and the most powerful politician in Poland—carrying a banner that said "Fuck Off."

My friends and I were supposed to celebrate a weekend together. But we didn't manage any toasts. We checked the news non-stop. The morning after we arrived at the vacation house, we read the police had used teargas on the protestors in Warsaw.

My body broke out in a rash.

All over Poland, women walked in protest of the Tribunal's ruling. They walked on Friday, walked on Saturday, and walked on Sunday. They "took walks" because under current COVID

restrictions, walks are permitted. There were hundreds of spontaneous direct actions, mainly under the umbrella of the All-Polish Women's Strike—"a grassroots, independent social movement of pissed-off women." Marches sprung up in small cities and towns which had never seen women march before.

On Sunday at the Church of the Holy Cross in Warsaw, a woman ascended to the altar during Mass and unfurled a sign reading "My Body, My Business." Men tore it out of her hands and carried her from the church; someone put a hand over her mouth, someone shouted "shut up, slut." In the golden sunlight at the edge of the forest, we watched recordings of self-proclaimed church security guards shoving another protester down the steps. "We won't let churches be profaned," shouted these soldiers of Christ, men and women proud of their momentary importance. The police stood around and watched.

My body was burning. Like a war zone.

On Monday, we returned to Warsaw. I joined women “taking walks” through the streets and around the traffic circles. I was nervous. For one thing, Poland was in the middle of the virus’s second wave, with over 12,000 new cases a day; for another, there was the police. During the summer’s election campaign, Polish politicians, led by President Andrzej Duda, had asserted that “LGBT” does not describe actual people, but an ideology. When that “ideology” hit the streets to attest to its human form, the police brutally arrested activists and shuffled them from police station to police station, leaving their lawyers in the dark. Now it wasn’t an “ideology” walking the roadways, but mothers, grandmothers, daughters, sisters, and wives. Maybe that’s why the police were more cautious. They stood off to the side and issued statements about the danger of contagion through their bullhorns. We danced in the street to the protests’ new anthem: Someone had noticed that the rhythm of “Call on Me” by Eric Prydz fit perfectly with the phrase “Fuck off PiS”—it even rhymed. The streetcars stopped and honked their horns to the beat.

Taxi drivers with lightning bolts on their windshields and hoods joined us, blocking the streets. It wasn’t just about abortion anymore. It was about dignity for all of us.

A few days later, I was back in the street. The sun was hot; I pushed my bike with one hand and held up a white sign with a red lightning bolt with the other. A lightning bolt is a warning—the symbol of Polish women’s protests since 2016. People came out on their balconies and applauded; they drew lightning bolts on bedsheets and hung them from their windows; the symbol adorned the storefronts we passed. We marched to the parliament building in euphoria. We were furious, joyful, and strong. Taxi drivers with lightning bolts on their windshields and hoods joined us, blocking the streets. It wasn’t just about abortion anymore. It was about dignity for all of us.

When I got home that night, I realized I’d lost my sense of smell.

On Friday, a week after the Constitutional Tribunal announced its

ruling, the All-Polish Women’s Strike announced a huge protest in Warsaw. A hundred thousand people marched in the streets of the capital. But I, positive COVID test in hand, could only hang a lightning bolt in my window and watch social media from my phone.

I spent day after day in fitful sleep. Images blended together in my fever dreams: Jarosław Kaczyński delivering an address to the nation, everything about him stunted—his torso and his arms and his words and his thoughts (the choice is between the church or nihilism, he says); 430,000 people in hundreds of cities and towns “taking walks” on the streets and in front of churches; plainclothes police officers beating protestors with extendable batons; the smeared phone number for Abortion Without Borders spray-painted on church gates and bus stops; right-wing militias dragging people out of crowds to brawl; teargas sprayed in the faces of journalists and female members of parliament holding up their IDs; slogans on pieces of cardboard held aloft: Stick With the Body of Christ. My Body Isn’t a Coffin. Try Carrying Your Kidney Stones to Term. If Altar Boys Got Pregnant, Abortion Would Be a Sacrament. A Government’s Not a Pregnancy, It Can Be Terminated.

FIFTY YEARS AGO, young women would come to Poland from Sweden to have abortions; under communism, the procedure was available without significant limitations. Today, Poland has one of the most restrictive abortion laws in the world. As recently as 2020, abortion was permissible only in three instances: when the woman’s life was in danger, when serious and incurable fetal deformities were discovered, and when the pregnancy was the result of rape. For the last three decades, in a country of 40 million people, the number of legal abortions hovered around 1000 a year (with a brief spike to around 3,000 in 1997, thanks to a short-lived relaxation of the law). Of course, that’s only according to government statistics. It’s estimated that every year, around 150,000 Polish women terminate a pregnancy outside the system. How did it come to this?

Everything changed in the early

1990s, as our young democracy tried to manage a warp-speed transition from communism to capitalism. At the time, politicians and the Church struck an unwritten compromise: The political elites agreed that issues of family, sexuality, and morality would be dictated by the Catholic Church; meanwhile the Church would soothe those unhappy with the transition to democracy and rein in the worst of the nationalists’ impulses. To show its commitment to this arrangement, in 1993 the centrist government changed the abortion law. Almost two million petition signatures in favor of an abortion referendum proved less important to them than gaining the support of the episcopate. No administration could upset the church’s hold on the balance of power, not even the left-wing government elected in 1997. But the bargain the politicians made with women’s bodies amounted to nothing. The conservatives won power anyway when PiS was elected in 2015. The nationalists’ lust to control our bodies proved even stronger. The Tribunal’s ruling on October 22nd means that in Poland, there will be practically no abortions at all—officially, anyway.

Women answered with an exclamation that became the protests’ main rallying cry: “Fuck Off!” But many people had a problem with this. Commentators and other very wise gentlemen in the media explained to women that they were undermining the protests with this vulgarism. They were dividing instead of uniting. Others said, go ahead and have your revolution, but you better have a political strategy. Who remembers the crowds on the street in Paris in 1789? People remember Robespierre! People remember Danton! Politicians are remembered, men are remembered, so we women were better off trying to break into politics, not just “Fuck Off” this and “Fuck Off” that. Besides, it’s so impolite.

I admit, at first, “Fuck Off” sounded harsh to my ears and tasted sour on my tongue. Though I’d been marching intermittently since 2015, when PiS staged a coup against the separation of powers in Poland by trying to pack the courts, I generally kept to the sidelines. I don’t like the feeling of being in a crowd, of being pushed to

conform to a certain kind of political expression. But when “fuck off” got caught in my throat, I started to ask myself why. I was raised in a liberal family with a professor mother and a politician father who scoffed at traditional gender roles and believed that making decisions about one’s own life was a basic human right. Even so, when I examined my own thoughts, I found the patriarchy dwelled very deep within me. Stop being so difficult. Be polite. Don’t ask for too much. The men know better, so don’t cause trouble.

When I protested in defense of an independent judiciary, I was a body defending an abstraction. But since October I’ve been defending not an idea, but my own body.

Three months after the ruling was announced, on January 22nd, 2021, the Constitutional Tribunal published its opinion in full. That same day, the government published it in the Journal of Laws, thereby bringing it into force. Many legal experts argue that the October 2020 ruling is not legally binding, asserting that the Tribunal itself is illegitimate because PiS packed the court with party loyalists in violation of Polish Constitution. But what does that change? As it stands, the government is now forcing Polish women to give birth to sick babies. Men in suits say that this way, at least we’ll be able to baptize the babies before they die. And women will get special rooms to cry in. Such a good government we have.

On that January day, protests sprung up all over the country. I was outside the city, in the mountains, drawing lightning bolts in the snow. The protests lasted a few days, and then it got quiet again. But another demonstration was called for March 8th, International Women’s Day. I knew I had to be there. That evening, as the police cordon was closing in around me—four rows of men in bulletproof vests—I felt fear. It was primal, corporal. I wanted to flee, but I stayed put. When I protested in defense of an independent judiciary, I was a body defending an abstraction; I marched out of a sense of duty, but not conviction. Protesting the abortion law feels different. Since October I’ve been defending not an idea, but

myself. We dance and we shout and we rage about the right to decide about our own bodies. In the police cordon, I yelled “Shame!” I yelled “Fuck off!” I looked the policemen in the eyes. The fear dissipated. I have no problem with “Fuck Off” anymore.

OF THE HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF WOMEN on the streets in the fall, today only a few hundred remain. Many people ask us what the point was. Yet another romantic uprising with nothing to show for it, a kind of a Polish tradition, say the mustachioed uncles, nodding sagely. They would offer us their advice, but they’re afraid of being told to “fuck off,” it offends their sensitivities. They can’t see that a great change has already taken place. Now Polish women demand full access to legal abortion until the 12th week of pregnancy. This position has the support of 66% of Polish citizens. PiS has inadvertently forced the other parties to take a position on the matter. Even the highly centrist opposition—locked in its own dance with the clergy—now favors abortion up to 12 weeks in the case of “difficult life conditions” (whatever that means). The very wise gentlemen have been met with a definitive: OK, boomer.

The All-Polish Women’s Strike—an informal and nonpartisan initiative—has organized a Constitutional Council. Its leaders—or rather, coordinators—have gathered cries from the streets and transformed them into 13 demands, spanning women’s rights to education to environmentalism. Not only do we want access to legal abortion, we also want an independent judiciary, a secular government, and full human rights. The ruling from the so-called Constitutional Tribunal can fuck off, the so-called Constitutional Tribunal can fuck off, and the government can fuck off.

Eight hundred people volunteered to work together in discussing how to implement these demands. Ideas are posted on a website where anyone can weigh in. What will result from the consultations? Maybe a report, maybe a dialogue with parliament, maybe a new social contract. The Women’s Strike, despite the good advice of mustachioed uncles, does not want to

turn itself into a party. That doesn’t mean it can’t influence politics. Its momentum highlights something that many Poles don’t grasp: Politicians aren’t authorities who can dictate how our lives are supposed to look, politicians are people employed by us to run the country. We can seize the opportunity to actively decide what our country looks like, not just at the ballot box once every four years, but every single day.

I’m watching this happen in real time. Many of the people trapped in police cordons in Polish cities were 17, 18, 19 years old. They were brutally hauled from the crowds and arrested. Teenagers protesting in front of churches across Poland were taunted by priests: “Apologize to your mothers, they didn’t scrape you out.” They are discovering that a lightning icon on a Facebook profile pic can result in a reduced grade for conduct, and that their teachers who support the protest can be punished by the Minister of Education for vulgar behavior.

And still, they turn up on the streets, prepared to weather the cordons and the attacks. They carry thermal blankets and warm tea to protect them from the cold; goggles to protect them from the teargas. They scrawl lightning bolts and “Fuck PiS” on the sidewalks in chalk.

The latest poll indicates that 30% of people between the ages of 18 and 24 hold left-wing views. That’s twice as high as a year ago. As author and human rights activist Agnieszka Graff wrote last November: “They act as if they have never heard of the . . . compromise . . . For them John Paul II is a historical figure, not a saint.”

There are women of all ages who ventured into the streets for the first time in their lives, afraid they’d be standing alone in the central market of a small city, holding a lightning bolt sign. But they were never alone. I am not the only one who has been changed these past months. The so-called compromise is over. And to those who still support it, I can only say: kindly fuck off.

Source [LeftEast](#). Note from [LeftEast](#) editors. The article is a reprint: it

The Lynching of George Floyd: Truth vs. Copaganda

21 April 2021, by **Malik Miah**

“I CALLED THE police on the police,” one eyewitness told the jury.

The prosecution opened the trial of Derek Chauvin with a 9-minute and 29-second (“929”) video of the cop’s knee murdering George Floyd on May 25, 2020 in Minneapolis. The Medical Examiner and other medical doctors said he was not moving minutes after the knee was placed on his neck.

The evidence by eyewitnesses and testimony by police officers, including the chief, declared that Chauvin was not following police policy and should be convicted. The Blue Wall of silence was cracked.

The top police officials’ argument is that Chauvin is an exception to “good policing.” African Americans and many others, on the other hand, see Chauvin as the norm of modern policing especially as it applies to Black and Brown people.

\$27 Million Civil Settlement

A few days before the trial began the Minneapolis City Council agreed, March 12, to a historic civil settlement paying the Floyd family \$27 million — the largest pre-trial settlement ever. Chauvin’s lawyers unsuccessfully tried to use the settlement as a reason to move the criminal trial out of Minneapolis.

The three charges against Chauvin are second-degree unintentional felony murder, third-degree “depraved mind” murder, and second-degree manslaughter.

The defense repeated its false claim

that Floyd died of his heart condition and drug use. A former medical examiner from Maryland — who’s being sued there because of his outrageously false reports in previous police killings — even said death could have been caused by carbon monoxide poisoning from car fumes, although Floyd’s blood oxygen level was normal.

The aim of the defense is to get a single juror to believe Chauvin followed police procedures. They seek a hung jury, and no conviction. The defense does not have to prove innocence. Then the state’s attorney general would have to decide to drop the case or have a retrial.

Not Safe to be Black

The context of the trial and the “929” video is numerous shootings by cops of unarmed Black men around the country.

During the 20-day Chauvin trial, 64 people in the United States have been killed by police — half of them Black or Brown. (New York Times, April 18)

In Chicago, just hours before the trial began on March 29, a 13-year-old Latino youth, Adam Toledo, was shot in the chest and killed by a cop. The bodycam (released after more than two weeks) shows that he was running away, was told to stop and turn around and raise his hands.

Toledo did so and was shot anyway. The cop, who has four use-of-force complaints since 2017, was put on administrative desk duty with full pay.

As the Chauvin trial was wrapping up, a killing occurred in the inner suburb Brooklyn Center of Minneapolis, 10 minutes from the courthouse.

Hundreds of demonstrators poured into the streets on multiple nights after the fatal police shooting of Daunte Wright, a 20-year-old Black man, during a traffic stop.

The officer, 26-year veteran Kimberly Potter, shot and killed Wright after a minor car violation. Her police chief claimed it was an “accident,” that she intended to pull her high-powered Taser gun but instead grabbed her heavier gun.

The Taser is yellow, while the standard police gun is Black. The Taser is positioned opposite the normal shooting hand.

The next day Potter resigned — with a full pension. She was charged with second-degree manslaughter, arrested, booked and released on \$100,000 bail.

As George Floyd’s family says, there is no justice for Floyd since he can’t be brought back to life. Accountability is the goal. A murder conviction of Chauvin can send a strong message to the police and those who back criminal actions by cops.

A bigger victory of much greater significance would be an end to modern policing and its replacement.

Abolish Qualified Immunity

A starting point is to end “qualified immunity” for police.

Policing has never been fair or equal for Black and Brown people. It is why young Blacks are given “the talk” by their parents on how to act around police.

Youth as young as 7 years old are told to fear the cops. But as the Chicago shooting of Adam Toledo shows, complying with cop orders does not mean you are safe.

The U.S. Supreme Court first introduced the qualified immunity doctrine in *Pierson v. Ray* (1967), a case litigated during the height of the civil rights movement. It gives cops immunity from civil suits — unless the victim or the family is able to demonstrate that the cop “violated clearly established statutory or constitutional rights of which a reasonable person would have known.”

Who defines “reasonable”? The police and the government do.

That means a killer cop in most cases is never charged. Even when a Derek Chauvin is charged, it is not for first-degree murder.

Even when the Floyd family won its civil lawsuit for \$27 million, the cop pays nothing out of his pocket. Nor does the police budget. It is the city’s taxpayers who pay.

Worst yet, the police budgets continue to grow, with more military armaments, tear gas and weapons of war. The police then deploy this force upon peaceful Black Lives and anti-police violence protesters.

Another needed immediate change is for all cops to live in the community they police. The community must have an independent board to hire and fire police.

The police “union” (a cartel) must also be dismantled so criminal cops can’t be protected. The “unions” don’t just bargain for wages and conditions, they “bargain” for cities giving almost all oversight of police conduct to the police themselves, usually meaning they have a green light to kill.

The police system as it is must be ended and replaced. These changes go beyond reimagining current police forces, or other democratic reforms. They represent the end of policing as it has been practiced since the time of slavery and the Jim Crow segregation era.

Police Defense: Copaganda

The Black Lives Movement that sparked the mass protests in 2020 in the United States and around the

world is ready to act whenever a Black man or woman simply walking, driving or breathing is gunned down by cops.

The police counter-narrative, labeled by some as “copaganda,” says that police make split-second decisions and all their actions are justifiable. Black and Brown people are seen as less than human and criminalized for existing.

“There is no political or social cause in this courtroom,” the Chauvin defense lawyer told the jury. It is true that the jurors’ assigned task is neither to vindicate nor to denigrate the Black Lives Matter movement.

But will the jury do their job?

As Jeannie Suk Gersen, professor of Law at Harvard University wrote:

“‘You can believe your eyes,’ the prosecution told the jury. ‘It’s murder.’ That appeal to jurors’ common sense comes up against the defense’s suggestion that ‘common sense tells you that there are always two sides to a story.’ But this is a case in which the political momentousness far exceeds its legal or factual difficulty.” (The New Yorker, April 10)

The whole world watched. Until Black lives matter, no lives matter.

Source: [May-June 2021, ATC 212](#).

Some thoughts on “Care”

19 April 2021, by **Susan Pashkoff**

If we are to transform the manner in which care is provided, we must first understand the importance of it in our societies, the manner in which it is being done, and understand that those getting support and assistance and those providing support and assistance in the historical and the current care system have lived with a system that covers neither of their needs. Workers are treated as unskilled, receive low pay and have awful working conditions. Those

getting support and assistance are objectified and treated as “vulnerable”, unable to express their wishes and their needs. The infantilisation of those getting support and assistance has led to their expressions of self-determination ignored; they are treated as though they are unable to express their wants and desires or to explain their needs. Even worse, they are treated as “burdens” in our societies, unable to work and provide for themselves like

working class people are supposed to be doing. What needs to be recognised is that disability is a socially based oppression caused by how the capitalist system views the role of the majority as workers; it is not the impairments that cause the oppression but how society deals with those that have impairments and the role of working class people in the society.

What we need to be fighting for is for those that need care and assistance to

be able to live as independently as they are able to do. This means that they are not treated as the passive recipients of a service but as valued members of our societies that they are. That means that their voices and their expression of their needs must play a central role in the manner in which support and assistance they receive is given.

In the next pieces for the ACM, I will begin to raise the issues of how we together can change and transform the provision of care to actually cover the needs of those that need support and assistance as well as addressing the abysmal working conditions and pay that those that work in the care sector. Standing as allies alongside of those working in the care sector as well as allies for disabled people that get support and assistance is solidarity work which we must do. What is needed is a major transformation in how we think of care, how it is provided and the needs of those that actually get support and assistance to ensure that they have some control over the support and assistance they receive. Many of these ideas have come out of the 'Disabled People's Movement' and address issues such as the rights of self-determination, independent living and ensuring that the voices of disabled people are heard and listened to.

What have we learned from the pandemic?

The current situation in the provision of care that has been made so clear by the pandemic has led to calls for increased funding for social care; this is the case in many advanced capitalist countries. President Biden has included a massive increase in funding for care in his proposed budget, this problem has also been recognised in Britain and other advanced capitalist countries as a serious problem that must be addressed. However, the organisation of care and the role it plays in our societies given the over-reliance on the private sector to sort economic problems means that the actual input of how this should be envisaged is not

developed and we are left with the feeling that even if we could get government funding for this important sector, the manner in which provision is carried out is simply not being developed.

The failure of the capitalist system itself to ensure that this important series of services exists provided by the private sector became clearly evident during the pandemic. The importance of profitability in the capitalist system and how it relates to production decisions cannot address the social needs of our population adequately. In a private system, either the family itself has to cover the costs of care or do it themselves. Given stagnant incomes and an economic crisis, this means that unless you have the finances, you cannot obtain care. What care has become in this situation is perhaps decent provision for those can afford it, but insufficient or non-existent provision for everyone else; there is often a two-tier system available for those people that can pay for it from the private sector. Moreover, we need to raise the provision of care through the public sector which is grossly underfunded and has often been a "one size fits all" type of provision rather than ensuring that the specific needs of those receiving care are addressed. Additionally, most of public sector care has been privatised in the age of neoliberalism through either local councils or local towns or cities paying private sector agencies for care provision or money given to those needing care and assistance so that they can arrange the support and assistance needed.

The [Women's Budget Group](#) has compiled the following information for Britain about women and the pandemic:

- Women are the majority of employees in industries with some of the highest Covid-19 job losses, including retail, accommodation and food services.

- Overall, more women than men have been furloughed across the UK, and young women have been particularly impacted. Estimates for the end of January 2021 see a significant rise in furloughing as a result of the third

national lockdown, reaching 32 million for women, and 2.18 million for men.

- Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women began the pandemic with one of the lowest rates of employment. In 2020 this was still the case, with BAME women's employment at 62.5% and the highest rate of unemployment at 8.8% (compared with 4.5% for White people and 8.5% for BAME people overall). Between Q3 2019 and Q3 2020, the number of BAME women workers had fallen by 17%, compared to 1% for White women.

- 46% of mothers that have been made redundant during the pandemic cite lack of adequate childcare provision as the cause. 70% of women with caring responsibilities who requested furlough following school closures in 2021 had their request denied. This has led to almost half (48%) worried about negative treatment from an employer because of childcare responsibilities.

- Employment for disabled people has fallen more rapidly during the crisis than for non-disabled people (1.9% compared with 1.1%) and disabled people are currently 2.5 times more likely to be out of work than non-disabled people.

- During the first national lockdown, those in low-paid work were twice as likely to be on furlough, or have their hours reduced than those in higher income jobs, hitting women in particular as there are twice as many women as men in the bottom 10% of earners.

What additionally became evident during the pandemic is the role of women in doing the work that is formally treated as care in the economy and what happens when the underfunded inadequate care sector has to pick up the pieces in a global pandemic without the necessary resources. For something so deeply essential in our societies to be left to either a private system based on profitability or to be covered by families individually has not only been demonstrated to be problematic at best, it has enshrined in the system itself, the oppression of women doing unpaid labour in the home. Moreover,

those doing care in the home for their family members get limited financial and material support; there is a small benefit stipend for those caring at home for family members in Britain, certainly not enough to live on. This work continues throughout your working life and into your retirement, we often see retired disabled women continuing to care for their family members. Finally, if we are really trying to ensure that social needs are covered in our societies, we need to discuss this issue of provision of care in our societies as social issues, not individual problems which need to be addressed individually.

What is care work?

When we think of care, what is it that we are talking about and how is currently conducted? Care in our societies is a very broad thing. If we simply just think about the issue of raising children, it ranges from childcare at home, in crèches and nursery schools, and some care is in done in schools by guidance counsellors and other support staff and even teachers. There is, of course, support and assistance for those with impairments and under the notion of care, we must include support and assistance for the elderly and retired at different stages of their lives. Care is provided in the medical profession by physiotherapists, by nurses, etc. Moreover, aspects of care are also conducted in social work, in support for marginalised communities, in shelters for those fleeing domestic violence, and in mental health support just to name a few.

Care in our society exists in a broad range of things; from support at home by family, social services visitations at home, in nurseries (where it is combined with education and includes socialisation), in nursing and care homes and it falls under public and private service provision. A large part of caring falls under the title of social reproduction which is primarily done by women at home; this includes of course, caring for children, socialising them for their future roles in society, it includes caring for family and extended family members that are sick, that have impairments and that are elderly. One way to think of this is

that care at home provides emotional support, physical assistance for tasks that need to be done for people either who cannot work (due to age and some impairments) and to ensure food, clothing, a clean home, and even nursing for those that need it.

The economics of care

When women do this work at home for free, we are providing a service for the society (which is often seen as being a good mother, daughter, sister, grandmother or aunt) as these are essential things that if the capitalist system needed to pay for directly (even if they dump it on the state to cover through taxation, it means a change in the nature of goods and services produced in our countries) it would impact on profits and surplus value produced in the system as a whole it would increase the costs of that which is necessary to not only physically reproduce the working class, but to ensure that the skills that the economy requires in order to cover its costs (and wages are a cost to the capitalist system) which must be done in order for the economic system to be continuous. Rather than treating the provision of care covered by the society it falls under the rubric of personal responsibility.

If you think about it, the system itself needs to ensure not only the sufficient raw materials needed for current (and future) production, and it needs to eventually replace fixed capital which depreciates over time. Moreover, the fact that labour power is an essential part of the production of goods and services means that since replacement of the labour force takes place over time (there are child labour laws and also infants cannot work) this future generation of workers needs to be fed, clothed, loved, access health care, get education and socialisation as they cannot survive without this. But since it is the sale of labour power that the working class does, it is not only the physical reproduction that the capitalist economy needs to be reproduced, but the skills and ability needed for workers to do their jobs in the future. Although we often treat the ability to labour as indistinguishable,

the reality is that there are specific skills, knowledge, education that comprise the sale of labour power. Some of these things are taught at home, but others are taught in education, training, and on the job learning.

The provision of care

One of the main problems that have occurred due to austerity is the destruction of government funding for the care sector and increasing privatisation of work done in this sector in the advanced capitalist world. Privatisation impacts on the quantity of care that is available that you can access (it needs to remain profitable if privatised). It impacts also the quality of care available and whether someone can actually access the support and assistance they need (again, it needs to remain profitable). Rather than ensure that people's needs are being met, care and nursing homes have become institutionalised as warehouses for those needing support and assistance as well as basic medical help.

Women and care work

What became obvious during the pandemic is that the manner in which care is being provided has serious consequences for women and these consequences not only continue the oppression of women at home doing unpaid labour, but it also impacts upon our work in the labour market. It does this in several ways.

On the one hand, given our caring responsibilities to our immediate and extended families, women are often forced into part-time employment in order to be available to cover childcare and care for family members that are sick, have impairments and are elderly. This means that women with care responsibilities at home are trapped in part-time often low paid jobs to cover their caring responsibilities at home; often they need to do several part-time jobs to ensure that they have an income as

well as to caring responsibilities.

On the other hand, the reality is that women are also overwhelmingly those working in care sector provision across professions and employments. We work in nurseries and crèches, we are primary school teachers whose work has a strong component of care as well. We are those that work for private agencies send care workers into homes to assist and support those with impairments, we work in care and nursing homes providing support and assistance and we are predominantly those working in social work offering support and assistance. Moreover, it has become increasingly evident that our care work is viewed and treated as unskilled labour which means that we get **low pay and bad working conditions**.

Also given the way that the private care sector is organised, we are often working alienated from each other as we go from private homes to different workplaces to provide assistance and support; that means that building relationships with co-workers is difficult and addressing working conditions and pay requires a collective effort in trade unions and trade union organisation and recognition for “unskilled” workers working individually is very hard.

An additional consideration is that because those working in the care sector do this work because they enjoy caring for those needing support and assistance, demanding better wages and conditions may be seen by them to be overstepping.

[Ali Treacher](#), a care worker and trade union organiser, explains the difficulties in organising care workers in her article:

Often, carers believe that they do the work they do for moral reasons as opposed to economic ones, and that the two are counterposed. To ask for more money, or to ask for value and recognition or to engage in class struggle, is to be a bad carer. The idea is that we don't do this because we have to pay our bills, we do it because we care. Even when workers are making

arguments for higher pay, they often revert back to saying: “We need this because the quality of care needs to be better for the service user.” If we do anything for ourselves, it can be painted as selfish. That narrative and false class consciousness is a massive barrier, because it is so culturally ingrained and tied up with the role of women as unpaid caregivers throughout the history of capitalism.

The **Women's Budget Group** analysed the state of the care sector in Britain and found the following horrible state of affairs in Britain:

- The need to reform the social care sector is long overdue. Decades of cuts, deregulation and privatisation have left the sector in crisis and ill-equipped to respond adequately to the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, the social care sector has been treated as the “poor relation” to the NHS, with less access to PPE, testing and resourcing.

- As a result, those in need of care and those providing care - the majority of whom are women - have been disproportionately impacted by Covid-19. At the peak of deaths in the first wave (last week of April 2020), there were 2,769 deaths involving Covid-19 in care homes in the UK compared with 938 in hospital.

- Care workers are twice as likely to die from Covid-19 as non-key workers, with Black, Asian and ethnic minority (BAME) workers at a particularly increased risk. Care workers are also more likely to die from Covid-19 than their NHS counterparts.

- The origins of the crisis in care predate the Covid-19 pandemic:

- Deregulation and privatisation have led to a to a care sector that is dominated by private providers focused on increased financial yields and cost minimisation.

- Funding has been inadequate to address rising needs for decades, and there are increasing geographical inequalities in the social care system.

Although government grants to local authorities halved since 2010, responsibility for resourcing care remains with local authorities. Income from local taxes, including the increases announced in the 2020 Spending Review, have been insufficient to compensate for these cuts.

- Staff shortages are high and likely to worsen. Nearly a fifth of the current workforce were not born in the UK. The post-Brexit immigration system excludes thousands of potential care workers because they do not meet the pay and qualification thresholds. Prior to the pandemic, in a workforce of 1.2 million there were 122,000 social care staff vacancies.

- The numbers of unpaid carers have grown steadily over the last two decades and particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic. Since the onset of Covid-19 the numbers of unpaid carers have increased by an estimated 4.5 million to over 13.6 million in total and support needs have intensified.

While those that work in education and the public sector have been able to protect working conditions and their wages through unionisation, those working in zero hours contracts, in agencies providing support and assistance are far less able to do so as their jobs depend on the private sector agency hiring them and their power is limited as an understatement.

Because is it believed that somehow care work is “women's work” as though somehow we are genetically predisposed to do it rather than being socially conditioned to being seen as our responsibility, it hides the reality that anyone can do it and that it is rewarding and socially important work. To be more precise, our societies cannot function without this type of work.

Another thing that became very clear during the pandemic is the interdependence between women workers. With schools closed, women were forced to leave paid employment to help children learning at home. Instead of this becoming a shared responsibility of families with two parents, overwhelmingly it was women that took on this task and were

forced to leave work. Key workers that are women needed to keep their children in school in order to continue working as key workers. In Britain, children of key workers and children that were vulnerable (e.g., have impairments or are living in unsafe circumstances) remained in on-site education which required that classrooms and education itself had to be transformed in order for continuous education. So if you work in the care sector, as hospital and medical staff, in supermarkets, and in education at all levels, you needed other women to be in work in order for you to continue working and this was what kept our societies running during the pandemic. Women held our societies together during these crises and we need to ensure that not only is this work acknowledged but the importance of this work itself to keep our societies running.

Some final thoughts

In many respects, the contradictions inherent in the roles that working class women play in the capitalist system has been laid bare by the pandemic. On the one hand, they want us in the work force because they

need us there. On the other hand, the system relies upon women to cover social reproduction in the home at the cheapest cost to the ruling class. It is this contradiction that has left working class women still trapped in “traditional women’s labour” with low wages, part-timism and poor working conditions. The problem for the overwhelming majority of women is not breaking the glass ceiling; rather it is the recognition of the importance of their labour in the capitalist economic system and decent wages income (so including benefits), access to services (e.g., childcare, social care) and working conditions that reflect the importance of the work that they do in our societies.

What must be remembered when we are looking at something like care, is that we are discussing care in the societies in which we live and what has often happened is that care has literally been delegated/relegated to individual members of families and extended families to ensure that the needs of family members are met rather than ensuring that this is treated as the societal responsibility which is what it actually is; something that impacts all the members of our society and it must be addressed in that manner.

With almost all economists talking

about government directly intervening in the economy and investing to get us out of the economic crisis we need to be stressing that investing in care is investing in our societies and that it provides work for a far wider group of people than traditional government investment in construction and infrastructure which create jobs mostly for men. The socialisation of caring (bringing it into the public sector control) will not only provide employment, it provides something people living in our societies desperately need and it will address the needs of those that get support and assistance and at the same time address not only women’s oppression but the super-exploitation of women working in the care sector itself. Add to that that this work is carbon neutral and we have a win-win. But we must remember that the needs of those getting care and assistance must be at the forefront of all this discussion. The care sector needs to be transformed so that it serves the needs of people working there as well those that get support and assistance or all we will do is reproduce the problems that have existed in the system both historically and currently.

19 April 2021

Source [Daily Kos](#).

French oil giant still bankrolling Myanmar junta

18 April 2021, by [Myanmar Now](#)

At the time of reporting, Total E&P Myanmar was under pressure to suspend its operations in the country, where at least 710 civilians have been killed in less than three months by the junta’s armed forces, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

Members of Total’s staff spoke to Myanmar Now on the condition of anonymity, and said that income from

gas exports continues to be channeled to the state-owned Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE), which is controlled by the military.

“There is no suspension [of operations] at all. Natural gas is still being produced and exported for sale, and the generated income has not been seized. It is being transferred to MOGE. It is surely reaching the junta,” an engineer who has been with

Total for nearly 15 years said.

The company’s local employees have demanded that oil and gas revenue not be paid into the military’s coffers, in accordance with a March 5 appeal put forward by the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), a body made up of elected lawmakers ousted in the coup.

However, employees told Myanmar

Now that Total has refused to honour this request.

“We demanded that the company’s management stop gas delivery to Thailand- then there would be no income from gas exports for the junta,” a local employee said, referring to natural gas from the Yadana gas field in the Andaman Sea, the country’s largest.

“Another option is to freeze income from gas sales by at least holding it until the democratic government returns. But the company’s management failed to follow our request,” the employee added.

In late February, Australian oil company Woodside Energy announced it would suspend its drilling operations in Myanmar, including in the A6 offshore block in the Rakhine Basin.

Woodside and Total each hold a 40 percent stake in the project, but Total holds a non-operator role.

Total’s Chief Executive Officer Patrick Pouyanné released a statement on April 4 in response to calls for the company to stop funding the junta, announcing that Total would discontinue drilling in the A6 block.

However, a Total employee in Myanmar dismissed the CEO’s declaration, describing it as a “trick.”

“A6 is operated by Woodside- Woodside suspended operations, not Total,” the staff member said.

Apart from the A6 site, Total’s drilling campaign in the Yadana gas field has continued throughout the current crisis. The staff member explained that company management within Myanmar had said that they would

stop drilling for additional wells at the site by May, but the employee noted that the decision was not made in response to the lethal crackdowns carried out by the coup regime.

“The truth is, the drilling was already going to be done by this time,” he added.

The employee pointed out that Total is slated to continue extracting and selling gas from the Yadana field, even as the drilling of new wells halts.

In 2019 alone, the company brought in nearly \$230 million in revenue to Myanmar, more than three-quarters of which went to the MOGE and the rest paid in taxes, Reuters reported.

“One thing to note about Total is that they came to Myanmar in 1992, just after the 1988 uprising,” a staff member told Myanmar Now, referring to the widespread pro-democracy movement that was brutally crushed by the military regime. “It is operating in war-torn regions and countries where dictators rule, because it is more beneficial for them,” he added.

Staff have also raised questions about their rights as workers being violated. The company employs some 300 people, an estimated 90 percent of whom are locals. One of these employees who spoke to Myanmar Now reported that management had forced at least one staff member to resign after he asked to take unpaid leave amid the ongoing regime crackdown.

“At the moment, we are on four weeks of work and four weeks of rest at home by rotation. One employee couldn’t resume his work due to the current situation in Yangon,” the staff member said, referring to shootings

and arrests perpetrated by soldiers and police across the commercial capital. “He requested unpaid leave. But the management didn’t allow it, and instead made him resign. He had to submit his resignation letter voluntarily.”

Leaders of the CRPH have urged workers across all sectors nationwide to join the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) and refuse to work under the military dictatorship. However, participation in the CDM has yet to catch on among Total’s 300 employees, nearly all of whom are locals, a staff member added.

“In early March, we tried to organise to mainly demand that [Total] suspend paying taxes to the junta, but it didn’t happen. Senior staff who have been in the company for so long went to work instead of joining the CDM,” he said.

The employee remained hopeful that if the staff joined the CDM as a united front, they might be able to stop Total’s operations.

“If we all go into the CDM, the company’s operations could surely be stopped. [We] cannot be replaced easily,” he said, adding that Total would likely try to bring in overseas contractors to take over their jobs. “Each offshore platform has a different nature to it, and requires familiarity with the site. They can’t [learn] that all at once,” he explained.

In addition to operating the Yadana gas field and holding shares in the offshore drilling block A6, Total also works on at least three other deepwater blocks in the Andaman Sea, and the Yetagun West Block.

15 April 2021

Source [Myanmar Now](#).

France in Rwanda: responsible but not guilty?

17 April 2021, by **Samuel Terraz**

Alain Juppé, French Foreign Minister at the time of the genocide, endorses the last sentences of the Duclert report submitted to Emmanuel Macron on 26 March: "The reality was that of a genocide, precipitating the Tutsis into destruction and terror. We will never forget them." But at the same time he was pleased that "France [was] finally exonerated of the accusation of complicity in the preparation, or even the execution of the genocide". [5] Commenting on the same report on France Culture, one of the commanders of Operation Turquoise that enabled the exfiltration of the genocidaires to Zaire took the same line: "The intentionality of genocide [of which France is accused] makes me shudder. We had absolutely one intention: to save, protect and help the victims. ...] The idea that French soldiers might have had other intentions is not only foreign to me but also deeply distresses me for my soldiers." [6] The real political significance of the report was therefore not lost on either of them.

Recognition of the genocide: an achievement of the work of historians and activists

The time when Mitterrand could calmly declare that "in those countries, genocide is not too important" seems long gone. Likewise, the theories on the "double genocide", presenting Hutus and Tutsis as equally responsible and victims, seem outdated. After twenty-five years of meticulous research by historians and associations such as *Survie* and *Ibuka*, it is no longer time for the crude denial of the genocide. The exclusion of the historian Julie d'Andurain who had published a notice in a military dictionary advocating these theses from the Duclert Commission testifies to the loss of legitimacy of the worst negationist theses. The scandal

triggered by the publication of this notice forced the commission to abandon her along the way. [7] This is to be welcomed.

But recognising the existence of the Tutsi genocide is one thing, understanding the role played by the French state in this story, which cost 800,000 people their lives, is another. And it has to be said that from this point of view, the Duclert report does not go far enough. If we follow the report, France acted badly in Rwanda not because it had been unfailingly supporting a Rwandan regime and its racist and genocidal logic for several decades, but because of "blindness", or even "lack of understanding". [8] By continuing to adopt the colonialist software distinguishing between two distinct races, "Hutu" and "Tutsi", in Rwanda, and supporting the former against the latter, France sinned because of its backwardness and intellectual ignorance.

The Duclert Commission's loaded dice

One should probably not have expected anything else from a report commissioned by the Élysée Palace. Its authors worked for two years in the premises of the Ministry of the Armed Forces. None of them was a specialist in the subject. The reason for this was that historians who had already published on the subject had been carefully excluded at the request of the Élysée. The dismissal of Stéphane Audouin Rouzeau and Héléne Dumas, judged too critical of the French state, was already indicative of the direction Macron wanted the commission to take.

What are the conclusions of the report? "Responsible but not complicit. France, which according to Vincent Duclert "defines itself by its attachment to the truth" (!?) failed because it was unable to understand that a genocide was taking place

despite numerous warnings. It is in the moral sense that France would have "overwhelming responsibilities" in the genocide of the Tutsis. The experts of the Duclert Commission, taking up the white man's burden, would fortunately be there to re-establish the truth in the eyes of France, Africa and the world... This fable is not very serious. The categorisations of 'Hutu' and 'Tutsi' as racial categories were imposed by the German and then Belgian colonisers and taken over at independence by the regime in power supported by the French state. If these racial categories were taken over and used by French imperialism, it was not out of ignorance but because they allowed to divide and rule and to keep control over a territory and its population.

The crimes of French imperialism exonerated at little cost

Acknowledging the "complicity" of the French state would have strengthened the weight of the complaints lodged with the International Criminal Court against political and military officials. It would also have strengthened the case in the Paris public prosecutor's office against BNP Paribas, which was responsible for the transfer of funds for the purchase of arms on behalf of the genocidal government until June 1994. In order to cover up for the French officials of the time, many of whom are still in office 25 years later, the conclusion of the report categorically refuses to use the term "complicity".

In the end, only Mitterrand did not find favour with the commission. Accused of "drift to solitary power", he alone bore responsibility for French policy in Rwanda. If Mitterrand had not died, one wonders how the commission would have managed to

find a French official to incriminate? That Mitterrand was a central actor in this genocidal complicity is not in doubt, but to summarize the complicity of the French state in his person is completely ridiculous.

The French army and Operation

Turquoise are exonerated by the report, even though it was the French army that fought the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), which was the only force to effectively combat the genocide in progress and slowed down its victory for several weeks. With this report, recognizing the genocide but

denying the complicity of the French state, it seems that Macron wants to appease the military in France and at the same time warm diplomatic and economic relations with the Rwandan government. Truth and justice were clearly not the problems of the orderly historians.

A look back at the genocide and the essential role of France

16 April 2021, by **Paul Martial**

It is so simple that this message was taken up by most of the major news agencies. Then, the small and big manoeuvres continued to try to hide the truth.

A consequence of colonialism

The genocide is, above all, a consequence of colonialism. The Belgians, who were the masters of the country at the time, used Tutsis as auxiliaries to the colonial power for decades, which obviously caused resentment among the Hutus. Faced with Tutsi demands for independence in the 1950s, Belgium changed its tune and supported the Hutus and the "1959 revolution", which saw large-scale massacres of Tutsis. The colonialists, with the help of Christian missionaries, helped to crystallize the two ethnic groups.

In the 1990s, the French government supported Juvénal Habyarimana, who saw his power faltering, caught between a Hutu opposition and an increasingly powerful RPF, oscillating between a national union with the latter and the extremist Hutu line of undivided power. The Élysée then saw the RPF as a threat. This aversion can be explained in several ways. The RPF, composed of descendants of the Tutsis who fled the "1959 revolution", is said to be an agent of English-speaking countries disputing French

hegemony in the region. Above all, this organization has never pledged allegiance to Paris. In military circles, its members are called the "Khmer Noirs".

Decisive role of the French army

After the RPF offensive in 1993, which was halted thanks to the decisive role of the French army, the genocide was clearly prepared. Militias were formed and trained, weapons were distributed, and the media, such as Radio des Mille Collines, continued to stir up hatred. But France's support did not wane. Before the genocide, at the beginning of the 1990s, serious abuses were committed under the eyes of the French military, as several testimonies attest: "I saw the French instructors in the military camp of Bigogwe. It was there that civilians were brought in by the truckload. They were tortured and killed, then buried in a mass grave." [9] In 1992, the military chiefs of the Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR) defined the enemy as follows: "The principal enemy was: the Tutsi inside or outside the country, extremist and nostalgic for power, who have NEVER recognized and will NEVER recognize the realities of the 1959 social revolution and who wish to reconquer power by all means necessary, including arms." [10]

Belgian journalist Colette Braeckman reports on a visit to Paris on 9 May 1994 by Lieutenant-Colonel Ephrem Rwabalinda, deputy chief of staff of the FAR, to General Huchon, head of the military cooperation mission; in the midst of the genocide, it is above all a question of improving the image of Rwanda so that France can continue its aid!

Recycling

The international community was slow to realize the reality. More than 800,000 Tutsis, but also moderate Hutus, had been massacred. France then launched Operation Turquoise, claiming a humanitarian objective. The truth was quite different. This operation served above all to prevent the defeat of the Rwandan army and the genocidal militias in the face of the RPF advance from turning into a debacle. Thus, France took charge of the withdrawal of thousands of armed men to Zaire, where it could count on the unfailing support of the dictator Mobutu. Thus, these men, all of whom were involved in the genocide, were stationed at the Rwandan border, with their weapons. This situation explains the subsequent conflict between Zaire and Rwanda, which will result in hundreds of thousands of victims, including civilians caught in the crossfire.

As humanitarian organisations pointed out, France would go on to protect the

leading staff of the *genocidaires*, first and foremost Colonel Théoneste Bagosora, considered to be the organiser of the genocide: "According to UN officials, the French military flew important officers, including Théoneste Bagosora and the leader of the Interahamwe militia, Jean-Baptiste Gatete, as well as elite FAR and militia troops out of Goma, to unidentified destinations between July and September 1994. [11]"

The French military recycled other

genocidaires, notably in Congo-Brazzaville, where General Bizimungu, another dignitary of the Rwandan regime, was found alongside Sassou-Nguesso. Complaints were deemed admissible by the Paris Court of Appeal. They refer to the direct participation of French soldiers in the massacres of Tutsis, alongside militiamen. In the remarkable work of the citizens' commission of enquiry, testimonies were collected, particularly in the Bisesero region, where survivors recount in detail the

exactions of French soldiers. France's neo-colonialist networks, the autonomy of the army in the field, the dispossession of the French Parliament regarding external military interventions, the consensus between the socialist and right-wing leaders - both parties being in business at the time - favoured France's complicity in the genocide in Rwanda and its attempts to cover up the truth.

Rouge 2007, republished in L'Anticapitaliste.

Union Organizing Drive at Amazon Fails—Why? What Next?

15 April 2021, by **Dan La Botz**

Officials of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) argued that Amazon had intimidated the workers, though long-time union activists also pointed to other problems with the campaign, particularly the failure to build a strong workplace organization before calling for an election.

In the United States workers can win recognition for a labor union from the employer in two ways: an election conducted by the National Labor Relations Board or a strike of the workers, though recognition strikes have become quite rare since the 1970s. If 30 percent of workers in a workplace sign cards or a petition saying they want a union, the NLRB will conduct an election. If a majority of workers vote for the union, it will be recognized by the U.S. government and the company must then bargain with the union on wages and conditions.

The biggest problem in the Bessemer case, of course, was the enormous power of Amazon and the sophistication of its anti-union campaign. Driven largely by the COVID pandemic, Amazon's 2020 net sales were up 38 percent, to \$386.1 billion and Jeff Bezos, the company's

founder and chairman, has a fortune valued at \$190 billion. With unlimited resources, Amazon held regular meetings with workers in the plant and sent text messages daily. The company pointed out that it was already paying workers an average of \$16 an hour, twice the U.S. minimum wage and higher than other employers in the region. In a campaign called "Do It Without Dues," the company pointed out that workers would actually lose money with a union, paying about \$500 per year in dues. Amazon succeeded in creating a pro-company team spirit among some workers, convincing them to wear "Vote No" buttons on the job.

The RWDSU began its campaign during the height of the COVID pandemic and made a particular appeal to Black workers who make up an estimated 85 percent of the workforce. There was hope that the Black Lives Matter movement had created a new enthusiasm for workers' power. The Democratic Party supported the campaign, with President Joseph Biden demanding that the company not intimidate the workers and Bernie Sanders going to the plant to speak at a rally. Yet neither BLM nor the Democrats seem to have little impact on the outcome.

The Bessemer facility only opened a year ago, part of a vast expansion of the Amazon company which hired 400,000 workers nationwide and now employees over a million. This meant that the workers in the warehouse did not know each other very well, especially given the high turnover rate, and did not have long-established relationship of mutual support and trust. When the union filed for the election in November 2020, it had not built up a strong shopfloor organization among the workers capable of taking action on its own. Nor did it do so later. As late as February the union had not contacted some workers. The RWDSU did much of its organizing at the plant gates, but made no house calls, claiming that it could not do so because of the COVID pandemic. Few workers attended union rallies.

What will happen now? In all likelihood, the RWDSU will file unfair labor practice complaints with the National Labor Relations Board, rightly claiming intimidation, and could win another election. Other unions and NGOs continue to support Amazon workers in other plants throughout the country. Some socialists have gotten jobs at Amazon to help organize on the shop floor.

Despite the defeat, organizing efforts will continue. Union organizers have learned again that workers have to

organize the union themselves, by building a strong movement that can take action on shop floor.

12 April 2021

Source [New Politics](#).

From Rafael Correa to Guillermo Lasso via Lenin Moreno

14 April 2021, by **Éric Toussaint**

The election of Lasso as president opens a new stage in the implementation of policies that will be even more favourable to Ecuadorian Big Capital, to foreign multinational corporations, to an alliance among right-wing presidents in Latin America and to the pursuit or indeed reinforcement of US domination on the continent.

Lasso's victory was anything but predictable for, in the general elections, the two leading political forces were on one hand the political movement supported by Rafael Correa with 42 representatives and on the other Pachakutik, the political extension of the CONAIE with 27 elected members, which was the best parliamentary result ever for the indigenous movement. In the presidential election, the outcome of the first round was clearly in favour of the popular side; indeed, if you added votes for Andres Arauz (a little more than 32%) and those for Yaku Perez (just under 19%) you had a majority, to which could be added part of the votes for a candidate that came fourth under the social-democrat label and had gathered close to 14%. Former banker Lasso came second with 19% but only a very short edge on Yaku Perez, the Pachakutik candidate in February 2021, and 13% less than Andres Arauz. Yaku Perez and the CONAIE first complained about what they called a massive electoral fraud. Then a couple of days after the first round Yaku Perez passed an agreement for mutual support with Guillermo Lasso, an agreement that

was soon cancelled by Lasso. Next the CONAIE and other left-wing forces called for a null vote in the second round and refused to vote for Andres Arauz to beat Guillermo Lasso. The CONAIE and Pachakutik were divided on this issue for a right-wing section of Pachakutik called for a vote for Lasso while the president of the CONAIE, Jaime Vargas, had called to vote for Andres Arauz with the support of a majority of indigenous organizations in the Amazonian part of Ecuador. In spite of discordant voices announcing that they would vote for Lasso or for Arauz, the CONAIE confirmed its call for a null vote, which eventually amounted to 16.3% on election day.

The election of Lasso as president opens a new stage in the implementation of policies that will be even more favourable to Ecuadorian Big Capital, to foreign multinational corporations, to an alliance among right-wing presidents in Latin America and to the pursuit or indeed reinforcement of US domination on the continent. The election outcome on 11 April 2021 is a dark signal for the popular side. In order to understand why a significant part of the popular side refused to vote for Arauz to defeat Lasso, we have to examine the policies implemented by Rafael Correa after he was reelected president in 2010.

Reminder of policies

implemented by Correa from 2007 to 2010

As detailed in [several former articles](#), from 2007 to 2010, Ecuador's government led the way in making the sovereign decision of auditing its public debt to identify illegitimate debts and suspend repayment. The suspension of payment of a large part of its commercial debt, followed by its undervalue repurchase, shows that the government was not content with merely expressing outrage. In 2009 it unilaterally restructured part of its external debt and won a victory against private creditors, mainly US banks and investment funds. In 2007, at the outset of Correa's presidency, Ecuador's government came into conflict with the World Bank and expelled its permanent representative. Moreover, from 2007 to 2010, under Correa's presidency, a number of important positive policies were initiated: a new constitution was democratically adopted, announcing significant changes which, however, never really materialized; Ecuador put an end to the US military base of Manta on the Pacific coast; [Ecuador attempted to set up a Bank of the South](#) with Argentina, Venezuela, Brazil, Bolivia, Uruguay and Paraguay; Ecuador left the WB tribunal.

Rafael Correa's U-

turn from 2011

2011 marks a U-turn in the policies of the Ecuadorian government on several fronts, whether social, environmental, commercial or concerning debt. The conflicts between the government and a number of significant social movements such as the CONAIE on the one hand, teachers' unions and the student movement on the other, deteriorated. Rafael Correa and his government went ahead with trade negotiations with the EU, making more and more concessions. As for debt, from 2014, Ecuador gradually began to have recourse to international finance markets, not to mention the debts contracted with China. On the environmental front, in 2013 Correa's government abandoned the commitment not to extract oil in a very sensitive part of the Amazon. Correa also condoned patriarchal and reactionary positions on the issue of depenalizing abortion and on the LGBTIQ+.

The Yasuní-ITT Initiative abandoned in 2013

The Yasuní-ITT Initiative was presented in June 2007 by Rafael Correa. It consisted of leaving underground 20 % of the country's oil

reserves (about 850 million barrels of oil), situated in a region of outstanding biodiversity, Yasuní National Park, in the North-West of the Ecuadorian Amazon. [12] As Matthieu Le Quang explains, "To compensate for the financial losses of non-exploitation, the State of Ecuador asked the countries of the North to make an international financial contribution equivalent to half of what the country would have earned from exploitation (3.6 billion dollars, based on the price of oil in 2007). This was an extremely ambitious policy, particularly the goal of changing the energy matrix of a country which, although exploiting and exporting crude oil, nevertheless remained an importer of its derivatives and dependant on them to generate its electricity." [14] To these should be added the export of farmed prawns and tuna fished on an industrial scale. This model has numerous harmful effects: environmental destruction (open-air mines, deforestation, contamination of running water, salinization/ depletion/ poisoning/ erosion of soils, reduction of biodiversity, greenhouse gas emissions, etc.); destruction of the natural habitat and way of life of entire populations (first peoples and others); depletion of unsustainable natural resources; dependency on global markets (stock-markets for raw materials and agricultural commodities) where the prices of export products are determined;

salaries kept low to remain competitive; dependency on technologies owned by the highly industrialized countries; dependency for inputs (pesticides, herbicides, seeds whether transgenic or not, chemical fertilizers...) produced by major transnational companies (mostly from highly industrialized countries); dependency on international financial and economic conditions.

François Houtart (1925-2017), who had studied the process unfolding in Ecuador closely and supported Rafael Correa's policies, did not hesitate to express criticism and make it known to the government. Shortly before he died, he wrote the following about the agricultural policies: "These are also short-term policies. They do not take account of natural changes and their long-term effects, of food sovereignty, workers' rights, or the origins of rural poverty. They emphasize an agro-export model presented as an objective without mentioning the consequences." He further stated: "As authors, we asked ourselves in our report whether it was possible to build 21st century socialism from 19th century capitalism. (...) Once again as throughout history, it is the rural world and its labourers that pay the price of modernization. It was the case for European capitalism in the 19th century, for the Soviet Union in the 1920s, and for China after the Communist revolution." [