



## IV556 - May 2021

### Disunited Kingdom

31 May 2021, by **Terry Conway**

There were parts of England where Labour did better – notably in Greater Manchester where Mayor Andy Burnham had showed rather more spine in challenging the Tories than Labour leader Keir Starmer, but also in parts of the south east. Indeed, Labour did relatively well at the level of Mayors – winning 11 out of the 13 contests – including Sadiq Khan’s seat in London, but this is nothing like enough to compensate for the loss of a bye-election in Hartlepool and dire results at local council level.

But it is the extraordinary differences between Scotland, Wales and England that are the key story of this election and that the left in England ignores at its peril.

### Pro-independence majority at Holyrood

Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon and the SNP ([Scottish National Party](#)) are right to point out that it is a huge victory to be returned as the largest party after 14 years in office, to be forming the fourth government in succession. This is particularly the case if you realise that the particular form of proportional representation voting in use for Holyrood elections was precisely introduced to prevent any party

getting an absolute majority. They would have needed 65 seats to take an absolute majority and came one short with 64 – but that is one more than in 2016.

They did so with a much higher turnout than anywhere else in Britain, 64 per cent overall with some constituencies topping 70 per cent and queues reported in some places. One polling station was unable to close until 11.30pm because of the numbers already queuing before the 10pm deadline.

Another first for Scotland was that for the first time there – or anywhere else in Britain – all foreign nationals and anyone serving a prison sentence of less than 12 months to vote. [1] And 16-17 year olds – allowed to vote in Wales for the first time at this election – have been allowed to vote in Scottish elections since 2015. England looks increasingly isolated with its limited franchise.

Despite the split in the independence electoral camp as a result of the founding of [Alba](#) by former first Minister Alec Salmond, and the fact that the Unionist media used this as an opportunity to lay into both Nicola Sturgeon personally and her party, the SNP vote has held up and it remains the main electoral expression of the independence movement.

While Salmond attempted to present

Alba as to the left of the SNP, even on the question of independence; they do not have the key to unlock the standoff between Westminster and Holyrood. Only a mass movement on the schemes (housing estates) and the streets which dwarfs what the [Radical Independence campaign](#) impressively managed in the second referendum, based on a radical vision of what an independent Scotland would stand for, could force Johnson to change his mind.

This needs to be combined with a major growth in support in England and Wales for the democratic right of the Scottish people to decide. Salmond and Alba are no more likely to build such a pluralist movement than Sturgeon and the SNP. In the meantime, Alba has a reactionary stance on social issues with prominent members playing a role in an anti trans backlash and trivialising misogyny in terms of Salmond’s behaviour.

The Scottish Greens, who stood in more constituencies than previously and saw their share of the vote rise, have also elected eight MSPs, an improvement on their previous best showing in 2003 where they elected 7. Indeed, they could easily have elected 10 MSPs – coming only a few hundred votes short of doing so.

Support for independence was clearer in their manifesto than before and

with COP26 coming to Glasgow in November the environment has been climbing the Scottish political agenda. So it was not surprising that that section of the pro-independence electorate who did not buy the rather hollow appeal to give both their votes to the SNP were more likely to back the Greens. [2] Their strong showing should be welcomed and it is to be expected they will exact a radical price from the SNP – particularly, but not necessarily exclusively on environmental questions.

The Scottish Greens are an interesting formation – with political positions similar to or to the left of the GPEW (Green Party of England and Wales) – but with no real branch structure or existence outside elections. [Patrick Harvie](#) has been the party's dominant figure for a long time – becoming an MSP in 2003 and taking over from Robin Harper in 2008 as co-convenor (the post became co-leader in 2019). Though he has nominally shared the leadership during these years the fact that 5 women have shared that role with him means that his profile has been much greater. Whether a bigger parliamentary group, including previous co-convenor and socialist [Maggie Chapman](#), who was also active in the Radical Independence Campaign, remains to be seen.

While there is not the scope in this piece to deal with the radical left in Scotland in detail, its certainly worth noting that this was the first Holyrood elections where there were no pro-independence candidates to the left of the Greens. The [Scottish Socialist Party](#) decided not to stand any candidates – and indeed looking at their website, they hardly acknowledge an election was taking place. Sheridan's Solidarity has effectively disappeared.

The current that played a major role in the Radical Independence Campaign during the previous referendum campaign, the International Socialist group Scotland, formally dissolved in 2015 with its members going into other projects such as Rise and Conter. Unfortunately some of them were also heavily involved in attempts to undemocratically wind up RIC precisely at the point when the left needed to really focus on what urgent

tasks would be posed for it following the inevitable fact of a new electoral mandate for a new referendum. [3] After all it was precisely in the last referendum campaign that the failure of the SNP to put forward a radical vision for Scotland became apparent to the greatest numbers. The [Republican Socialist Platform](#) has made some important steps forward in this regard but cannot hope to entirely fill the gap

## Unionist discipline

There was disciplined tactical voting in the Unionist camp. In seat after seat significant numbers of voters backed whichever Unionist party was seen as the strongest challenger to the SNP, whether that be Tory, Labour or Lib Dem, though this was less true of Labour voters. While this did not take seats from the governing party, it did prevent the SNP taking a number of key target seats – Dumbarton was held by Labour as was Edinburgh Southern while the Tories held Eastwood.

In Dumbarton, the seat with the smallest majority in the country, Labour's Jackie Baillie saw an increase of 6.1 per cent in her votes with the Tory vote falling by 6.3 per cent and the Lib Dems by 1.6. In Edinburgh Southern Labour's vote increased 10.4 per cent, the Tory vote fell 14.5 per cent and the SNP vote rose only 4.4 per cent. In Eastwood the Tory vote went up by 6.2 per cent to hold the seat while the SNP challenging increased only by 5.6, while Labour's vote plummeted by 14.8 in a seat where they had no hope of even being second. It is probably worth marking the fact that a higher proportion of Tory supporters switched to Labour where this was tactically advisable – the strength of their unionism was hugely apparent.

The new leader of Scottish Labour, Anas Sarwar, presided over a 1.6 fall in his party's vote, the worst since devolution, but claims it is on 'a journey back'. Tell that to the whole of the Glasgow Kelvin Executive committee who resigned their positions after candidate Hollie Cameron was removed for disagreeing with the leadership over the right to a referendum. [4] The support even for

the right to a referendum has always been weak in Scottish Labour, which has a long tradition of tribalism and of dismissing the SNP as Tartan Tories – somewhat ironically when the majority of their leadership is happy to block with the Conservative and Unionist Party to try to defeat a push for independence.

While promises of further devolution may have purchase in Wales and in the English cities, it is unclear that they would fly in Scotland. Sarwar is much closer to Starmer than to Drakeford and has inherited a Scottish Labour Party which has lost a huge proportion of its working-class base in particular to the SNP. No road back without some very sharp turns – turns which Sarwar is certainly not contemplating.

## The Welsh dragon roars

Welsh Labour's Mark Drakeford will be very pleased with the surprisingly good results in the Sennedd elections where Labour took 30 seats, Tories 16, Plaid 13 and Lib Dems 1.

Making a comparison with the previous national elections in Wales is complex because then UKIP took 7 seats and this time they (nor the new formation Abolish the Welsh Assembly with similar reactionary roots) had any significant impact. This, together with the two tier electoral system means that calculating swings is a nightmare.

Labour's showing was much better than opinion polls predicted early on. Drakeford has definitely benefited from managing the pandemic relatively well – he has not made nearly as many U-turns as Johnson, though that does not explain the shift during the campaign. [5] Labour will work with other parties on a case by case basis; the widely predicted Labour-Plaid coalition is not a runner. And while the Tories in Wales are much less pleased than those in England, they should not be completely written off.

The big political story in Wales however is increasing support for independence. [6] Before 2018, the

proportion of Welsh voters in favour of independence ranged between 10% and 20%. However, this figure has increased in recent years. Recent polling indicates that between one quarter and one third of Welsh voters who express a view say they would vote Yes in a Welsh independence referendum. [Yes Cymru](#) has grown significantly - and those numbers are probably much higher amongst younger people.

But unlike in Scotland, where for the mass of people the SNP is clearly the electoral voice of the independence movement, the same is not true in the same way for Plaid in Wales. While the differences are indisputable the reasons need more exploration.

There are certainly different takes. This piece "This was a bad election for Plaid Cymru - but they seem to be winning without winning elections" seems a profoundly complacent piece after such a lacklustre campaign by Plaid, whereas this [Voice Wales](#) article which suggests former Plaid leader Leanne Wood, who lost her seat in the Rhonda, might have been a victim of current leader Adam Price failure to champion independence enough in a lacklustre campaign. [7]

Plaid's [website](#) remarkably has no reaction to the results - only a statement at the eve of poll as to why people should vote for Plaid. I can only find Price's comment on his own

individual election result - but clearly they will not be happy not only at the loss of Leanne Wood's seat but with their national showing. [8]

Indeed independence was the issue that everyone other than the far right were trying to downplay despite its increasing popularity. The Welsh Labour manifesto has nothing to say about it but Drakeford made a speech to Welsh Labour's spring conference in late February in which he said: "Now, for all that to be achieved we need a more powerful devolution settlement. One in which we secure both home rule for Wales but in a successful United Kingdom. Internationalist, not nationalist. Outward facing, not inward looking." [9]

The fact that since the election Mick Antoniw has been appointed to a new post of Minister for the Constitution shows that this was not just a stance to undermine Plaid at the election but a longer term route that Welsh Labour under Drakeford is committed to going down. Antoniw was one of the those involved in the publication of an extensive report on [Radical Federalism](#) published this January - so in appointing him Drakeford is certainly given some weight to his views. [10]

While sections of the Welsh Labour bureaucracy can be as tribalist as is the case for the overwhelming majority of Scottish Labour, there is

also more support - and more organised support for independence inside Welsh Labour than there ever was in their sister party in Scotland. [Labour for an independent Wales](#) is a visible and serious organisation which makes this key statement: Labour for an Independent Wales sees independence as a tool with which to organise a socialist state, on an equal footing with every other state around the world - an ambition that is unattainable in the United Kingdom as it is.

It is not clear how these views around home rule and independence are reflected within the Labour left in Wales. Welsh Labour Grassroots, the sister organisation of Momentum in Wales, these days has a very out of date website and no list of its current office holders, but it was good to see prominent Welsh Labour Grassroots member s making a public tribute to Leanne Wood. This sentiment was also expressed widely by supporters of Labour for an Independent Wales recognising that she was probably the most left wing members of the Sennedd

All of this means that for socialists in England the question of deepening our understanding of the national questions in both Scotland and Wales, and in particular fighting for labour movement support for the right to self determination, needs to be pushed much higher up our political agenda.

# A look back at the history of East Turkestan and the geopolitics of Central Asia

30 May 2021, by **Daniel Tanuro**

The knives are drawn, but it is striking that the two camps have a point in common : they are silent on the fact that, if Beijing represses the Muslim peoples of Xinjiang with the methods used by the United States in Iraq and by Israel in Palestine, it is for similar economic and geostrategic reasons. It

is in reality a question of monopolizing the wealth, energy in particular, of this territory. For the benefit of the Hans, of course, but also for the benefit of the multinationals which take advantage of the conditions of super-exploitation in the workshop of the capitalist world. We can even go

further and say that the oppression of the Uighurs contributes to reducing the cost of "Green Deals" and other formulas of the transition to green capitalism in the West. Let us try to see clearly what is happening.

Xinjiang has only been a Chinese



province in its own right since its annexation by the Qing empire in the late nineteenth century [11]. The name given to it is unambiguous: "Xinjiang" in Chinese means "new march", or "new frontier". Although the Qing Empire cannot be equated with the Western imperialist powers of the time (such as Britain, France and ... the Belgian monarchy), it cannot be denied that Xinjiang was born out of a colonial conquest of Imperial China on its immediate periphery (in the same way as the Caucasus and parts of Central Asia were also colonial conquests of the Russian Empire on its periphery). It cannot be denied either that the various indigenous populations, which are the overwhelming majority - and overwhelmingly Muslim - in this region have never considered themselves Chinese and still do not consider themselves Chinese. Beijing's current objective is precisely to drown them in a Han settler colonialism which discriminates against Turkic Muslims on all levels, considers that their religion and their ethnicity make them suspects of terrorism, and leaves them the "choice" between forced Sinization or the hell of an Orwellian repression without equivalent.

## East Turkestan: a little history

The reality of what that Beijing calls "Xinjiang" is better perceived by the older name of "East Turkestan", although that term does not express the diversity of the people who live there. This very vast territory (one sixth of China, three times the size of France) in fact belongs to the immense Central Asia, with its high mountain ranges, its steppes, its deserts, its rich oases and its brilliant trading towns. For several millennia, the region has been a crossroads of North-South exchanges (between the Siberian steppes and the Indian subcontinent) and, above all, of East-West exchanges (between China, the Caspian, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean basin) along the "Silk Road".

Long disputed over the centuries and composed of two entities (the Dzungarian steppes with its nomadic

peoples to the north, the Tarim basin with its merchants and its cultivators surrounding the Taklamakan desert to the south), the region annexed by the Qing was - and remains - a hub for these commercial and cultural exchanges. The two main branches of the "Silk Road" in fact crossed through Xinjiang, bypassing the deserts and weaving between the mountains. The intermingling of peoples (Uighurs, Kazakhs, Tajiks, Mongols, Russians, Tatars, Chinese...) and religions (Muslims, Animists, Buddhists, Taoists ...) is the product of this very long history.

Throughout it, the empires (Persian, Ottoman, Mongolian, Tibetan and Chinese) sought to dominate the region in an attempt to secure strategic positions and levy taxes on its flourishing trade. More recently, the Industrial Revolution brought in from the West stirred up additional greed, because Xinjiang is rich in agricultural production (cotton cultivation) and in mining resources (coal, oil, gas, iron, gold, copper, lead, zinc, uranium). With modernity, certain strata of the population, Sufi in particular, also developed democratic aspirations for development, education and liberation in the face of the double tutelage of tradition and of empires - principally Russian and Chinese.

In this context, the birth of the USSR appeared for some all too brief years as a hope of breaking what Lenin, speaking of the Russian Empire, called "the prison of the peoples". This parenthesis was suddenly closed with Stalin and the return of Great Russian chauvinism. Later, in 1933, in a very troubled context, a Republic of East Turkestan was proclaimed and then quickly crushed by the Hui (Chinese Muslim) warlords allied to the Kuomintang. A second attempt at independence took place in 1949, with ambiguous support from the USSR (which had dominated the region since 1941 and obtained there after the war the uranium necessary for its first bomb). Moscow, however, let China (now People's Republic) regain control in 1949, after a bizarre accident: the mysterious death of the eleven nationalist leaders of East Turkestan, who disappeared in a plane crash ... while on their way to Beijing to

negotiate with Mao Zedong.

## Colony of settlement of Hans

Be that as it may, under the Qing, at the time of the Kuomintang and as part of the People's Republic (PRC), China sought to strengthen in Xinjiang the physical presence of the Han, who had for long time been settled along the Silk Road, but were an ultra-minority in this sparsely populated region (currently 21 million inhabitants, 60 per cent of whom are rural). This desire became more evident after 1949, when the situation in China and its borders calmed down somewhat. The Maoist regime accentuated a policy of colonization and settlement piloted by the central state. The proportion of Han people in the population rose from around 8 per cent in 1953 to over 40 per cent in 2000, with higher rates in the northern half of the province and a strong separation from the indigenous peoples. At the same time, the share of Uighurs (by far the most important indigenous people) has decreased from over 75 per cent to 45 per cent [12]. And it is not over: the current five-year plan (2016-2020) relies on the installation of an additional million Hans.

The Hans and Huis (a minority of Muslim Chinese) are concentrated along the communication routes and in the cities, in particular in the capital Urumqi and in the historic centers of medieval Uighur civilization such as Kashgar, Aksu, Tarim..., where they have become the majority. They are drawn by the national development plans for the Northwest implemented by the Xinjiang Construction and Production Corps (XCPC), a central government body responsible for development, security and ethnic harmony in the region. This XCPC employs 2.4 million people, 90 per cent Han, controls a third of arable land, a quarter of industrial production and directly administers several medium-sized towns. It is the dominant power in Xinjiang and the main lever of social, economic and administrative Sinization. The army is another lever of Han colonization: 1.3 million Chinese soldiers are present in

Xinjiang: this number should triple in the coming years and 25 towns will be built to accommodate the troops. Finally, economic liberalization has the effect that a growing number of Hans settle in Xinjiang to pursue a career in the private sector (oil industry, textiles, tourism, etc. ), in which the Han employers preferentially hire... Hans.

However, Xinjiang is an autonomous Uighur region, one might say? On paper, yes. In 1955, Beijing gave autonomy status to various regions of China populated by non-Hans, including Xinjiang. At the time, Mao Zedong drew attention to the fact that the PRC is 94 per cent populated by Hans but depends on the 60 per cent of mineral and energy resources located in regions where minorities dominate, including Xinjiang. As in the USSR, the Maoist one-party bureaucratic regime was very vigilant against the risk of dissent from any oppressed group. There have been periods when there were more paternalistic policies, others were more repressive, but in general, the "autonomy" of specific regions has been tightly controlled by the Party apparatus (where the Han dominate), therefore by the central power, and coupled with a hypocritical ideological discourse on "mutual aid", "harmony" and "unity" within the homeland.

In Xinjiang, this policy was accompanied from the outset by institutional mistrust and encouragement of the prejudices of the Hans vis-à-vis the Turkic and Muslim populations, suspected of being capable of betraying the nation for the benefit of the Islamic world in general, Turkish in particular. Thus, in 1966, the Uighurs were forbidden to leave China, so as not to be exposed to bad influences. After the death of Mao (1976), the 1980s saw a relative relaxation of control over the Turkic Muslims, but after the defeat of the USSR by the Taliban in Afghanistan (February 1989) and the crushing of the democratic movement in Tiananmen (June 1989), the regime resumed a policy of tightening the screws on the Muslims of Xinjiang, the local party apparatus was purged, and the tension rose by several notches. Several riots broke out in the 1990s and were violently suppressed. Hans

and Uighur "collaborators" were attacked, sometimes killed. In Urumqi in 2009, inter-ethnic clashes claimed up to 197 victims. The data should be treated with caution, but it seems that it all started with a rally of students demanding an explanation of the circumstances of the death in a brawl of two Uighurs who were working in the south. Had they been victims of Han racism? In any case, as of that day, the authorities' "Yanga" doctrine ("strike hard" against the autonomist threat) has become the systematic complement of development plans favourable to the Han [13].

## **Dispossession, humiliation, discrimination: from bad to worse**

Between Chinese and non-Chinese, tensions have built up over the centuries. Far from appeasing them, the policy of the PRC has sharpened them, especially over the last thirty years. This phenomenon is linked to the regime's desire to make China the capitalist "workshop of the world" in order to raise it to the rank of a great power. The world workshop, in fact, requires a lot of energy, which has greatly increased the importance of Xinjiang. It comes first among Chinese provinces for known reserves of fossil fuels (38 per cent of coal, 21.5 per cent of oil, 23.3 per cent of natural gas), to which must be added uranium. The province also has enormous potential for renewable energies (wind, solar, hydroelectric) which is only very partially exploited. [14]

The Chinese administration is banking on this energy Eldorado both to support the industrialization of the entire country - through the export of electricity and gas to other regions of China - and to industrialize the province. A gas pipeline is to link it to Shanghai. On site, low-cost coal makes it possible to produce cheap electricity, which is decisive for the competitiveness of industry, in particular for the manufacture of polycrystalline silicone. This production is in fact extremely energy intensive. Suddenly, the law of profit

requires that nearly half of the polycrystalline silicone used in the world to manufacture photovoltaic panels is produced in Xinjiang. Without this resource acquired at bargain prices, the cost of the capitalist "green transition" and "green deal" would increase very substantially. [15] We understand better, in these conditions, how the European Union has put human rights in the closet in order to sign its recent trade agreement with China... [16]

Settlement colonization with the grabbing of resources has cascading social and ecological consequences. For example, coal mining requires large amounts of water. Xinjiang is not lacking in water, but it is also a country of deserts and oases. In order for industry to have sufficient access to the resource, Beijing decided that agriculture should consume less. The Chinese regime therefore organized the massive rural exodus of indigenous populations. Between 2004 and 2020, it is estimated that more than ten million people had to leave the countryside to work in an economy dominated by the Han. Those who showed signs of a possible "Islamic radicalization" were railroaded into forced labour as part of their "re-education". ([17])

The capitalist multinationals are among the great beneficiaries of this system: between 2017 and 2019, 83 multinationals are estimated to have benefited from the forced labour of some 80,000 recalcitrants from the Muslim communities of Xinjiang. As for the lands thus recovered, they are offered to Chinese investors. This is how the industrial cotton monoculture exploded, making Xinjiang one of China's main regions for textile production and processing. Overall, the province has certainly emerged from the poverty that characterized it previously, but social inequality has also exploded, especially if we take into account the ethnic-religious divide: the average income of Han households is up to four times higher than that of households made up of Uighurs, Kazakhs and other oppressed Muslim groups. [18]

## New Silk Roads, increased oppression

A colonial dynamic with racist and Islamophobic overtones has taken hold. It has been further strengthened over the last period in the framework of the Chinese "New Silk Roads" project. Xinjiang is indeed at the heart of one of the components of this vast economic and geostrategic plan, which aims both to strengthen China's global trade with the West and to reduce its dependence on fossil fuels imported from the Middle East (by importing Russian gas and oil from Kazakhstan, on the one hand, by developing its own fossil reserves, as well as nuclear power and renewables, on the other hand) and by establishing terrestrial means of communication through Eurasia (roads and railways) which could prove useful in the event of tensions on sea routes. In other words, the "new silk roads" mean that the territory is no longer just a reservoir of resources: it becomes the point of passage for huge international flows of goods. Nothing must be allowed to interfere with the smooth circulation of goods. Suddenly, the strict control of the oppressed Muslim peoples of Central Asia has become for Beijing a decisive geostrategic question: order must reign in Xinjiang and its surroundings, more than ever [19]

This plan did not come out of nowhere. Already in 2001, following the terrorist attacks in New York, China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan had founded the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (extended in 2017 to India and Pakistan). The initiative came mainly from Putin. The Russian leader had, according to his own words, "hit the terrorists everywhere, right down to the toilets" in Chechnya: in other words, he had crushed the Chechens who had risen up against the stranglehold of Moscow. China is at least as motivated as Russia by the objective of this cooperation, which is "to ensure the collective security of its members in the face of threats from terrorism, extremism and separatism. [20] The

participation of the "four Stans" helps us to understand the aim of Putin and Xi: to use the carrot and the stick to ensure the collaboration of the police apparatuses of the former Soviet republics of Central Asia in the fight against opponents who are characterized as "terrorists", "separatists", or vaguely "extremists". From that moment, the Muslim populations and other oppressed communities of Central Asia were clearly in their sights. They are even more so today. This is how China obtained from Kazakhstan a ban on Uighur organizations.

The national question is generally only the envelope of the social question. When oppressed ethnic-religious communities are dispossessed and discriminated against economically and socially, it should come as no surprise that their legitimate protest takes a nationalist and/or religious form. Lenin understood this. Belatedly realizing the Great Russian brutality of Stalin against the Georgian Communists accused of "social-nationalism", he had gathered his last strength, in 1922, to warn: "An abstract presentation of the question of nationalism in general is of no use at all. A distinction must necessarily be made between the nationalism of an oppressor nation and that of an oppressed nation. (...) In respect of the second kind of nationalism, we, nationals of a big nation, have nearly always been guilty, in historic practice, of an infinite number of cases of violence; furthermore we commit violence and insult an infinite number of times without realizing it. (...) That is why internationalism (...) must consist not only in the observance of the formal equality of nations but even in an inequality of the great nation, that must make up for the inequality which obtains in actual practice. Anyone who does not understand this has not grasped the real proletarian attitude towards the national question (...) and is sure to descend to the bourgeois point of view" [21]. Lenin must be turning in his grave: it is in the name of "communism" that the Chinese regime is committing an infinite number of acts of violence, injustices and atrocities, organized quite deliberately in Xinjiang on a mass scale.

## Under the pretext of anti-terrorism, forced assimilation

How to characterize this violence? The US government and many capitalist media are talking about "genocide". A genocide is an enterprise of physical extermination of a people. There is today a disastrous tendency to use this notion indiscriminately. It is not genocide that we are talking about in Xinjiang. ECOLO's repeating of this accusation is quite inappropriate. By formulating it, the Greens help to trivialize the real genocides - Jewish, Tutsi, Armenian... - and the horrors committed by imperialism in the four corners of the world throughout its history (Hiroshima and Dresden, for example). In addition, they help Beijing to get off the hook in the face of an accusation that is clearly propaganda.

In reality, China does not want to physically liquidate all Uighurs any more than Israel wants to physically liquidate all Palestinians. Beijing's intention is different: culturally destroy the indigenous Muslim peoples of Xinjiang, Sinicize them by purely and simply eliminating their identity and employ them as cheap labour. It is this project that materializes in the book burning, the measures against mother tongues, the restrictions on religious freedom, the re-education camps, the system of spying on and denouncing people, the checkpoints, the systematic biometric registration, the abduction of children from their "suspicious" parents, the employment of Uighur workers to fill the holes created by COVID in other provinces, not to mention the particularly perverse practice of the so-called "Han cousins", these Chinese officials instructed to live for one week a month in the privacy of Uighur families ...

Although China is making great efforts not to let any of its policies in Xinjiang filter through, enough is known from the diaspora organized in the Uighur World Congress - which has nothing to do with jihadism! - to affirm that the Chinese Northwest is the scene of a



crime against humanity. A heinous crime, perpetrated with the aggravating circumstance that it is perpetrated behind closed doors by a powerful state against victims who are very much in a minority and have no escape route. An Orwellian crime in which multinational capitalists and Western states are in fact complicit - despite the accusations of "genocide" that the leaders hypocritically launch to maintain the myth of "Western democracy".

Furthermore, as the article we have published shows, China is implementing in Xinjiang methods taken from the strategies of repression deployed by US imperialism in Iraq and by the Zionist state in Palestine. With four differences, which make Beijing's policy worse than the original: 1) the strategy is implemented preventively; 2) it is structurally based, Maoist style, on the collaboration of the party's neighbourhood committees and on that of individuals from the colonizing nation; 3) it uses tracing and facial recognition technologies on a very large scale; 4) locked up in their own country as in open-air prisons, the populations are not only subjected to humiliating control, like the Palestinians, but also to an attempt at forced assimilation on a mass scale.

As in the West (and in Russia), the "fight against terrorism" is used in China as a pretext for a policy of colonial plunder which carries with it racism and Islamophobia. As in the West (and in Russia) this "fight against terrorism" is the breeding ground for terrorism ... in such a way that the terrorism which does develop can effectively serve to justify the fight against terrorism and to make it more repressive. The Chechen case which inspired the Shanghai Cooperation is instructive: the "anti-terrorist" military operations continued officially until 2009, to such an extent that Moscow had to declare a second time the end of the war that had supposedly been won in 2001. What happened during this period was also the "Chechenization" of the conflict, that is to say, the establishment of a

brutal local government towards which Moscow outsourced the exercise of repression, which persists until today. All the experiences of the war against jihad converge towards the same conclusion: these policies do not only produce explosions and brutal conflicts, they create hidden situations where the political question (the demand for autonomy of the population in question) is never settled and where cycles of violence appear that feed endlessly on one another.

## Lenin's warning

The PTB denounces these infernal dynamics when it comes to Iraq or Palestine. Suddenly, confronted by the Uighurs, it is rather embarrassed. It says that it "disapproves of the Chinese response to terrorism", which it finds "too broad" (Interview with Nabil Boukili on RTL). This elusive argument actually gives credence to the idea that the basic problem in Xinjiang is terrorism. However, if Uighurs have joined the jihad in Afghanistan and Syria, and if terrorist attacks have been committed in China by Uighurs (on Tiananmen Square in 2013, in Kunming and Urumqi railway stations in 2014, perhaps on other occasions) [22], there is no doubt that the root of the problem, as in Palestine, is settler colonialism, the grabbing of resources for the benefit of the contemptuous colonizer, the explosion of discrimination and humiliation. imposed on people dispossessed of their own country and, in the case of Xinjiang, of their own culture. That this intolerable situation of injustice (of which women are the specific victims, in Xinjiang as elsewhere) provokes outbursts of anger, no Marxist worthy of the name should be surprised. The iron repression applied to prolong injustice can only fuel the jihadist movement, represented by the Islamic Movement of East Turkestan. [23]

There is nothing to be expected from the Greens, who manage neoliberalism and support the very hypothetical "green capitalism". As for the PTB, it finds itself confronted with

demons from its own past. Will it take the opportunity to question its ideological affiliation with Stalin, which it hides from his own members but has never denied [24] To do that, it would have to face the reality of what historian Moshe Lewin called "Lenin's Last Struggle". [25] The question that is posed is: why was the leader of October so virulent in his denunciation of Great Russian nationalism within his party? Because he considered the attitude towards the small oppressed nations as a question of principle, that is to say a question which cannot be transgressed without consequences: "Anyone who does not understand this ( ...) is sure to descend to the bourgeois point of view".

Do not think that Lenin, in asserting this, underestimated the importance of the united front against the imperialism which besieged the USSR. On the contrary, here is what he said about it: "One thing is the need to stand up against the imperialists of the West, defenders of the capitalist world. It is another thing to engage ourselves in imperialist relations (this must be emphasized, DT) with regard to oppressed nationalities, thus arousing suspicion on the sincerity of our principles, on our principled justification of the struggle against imperialism".

Let us recall that Lenin, with these words, castigated the Great Russian nationalist backsliding of a limited circle of Soviet leaders ... at a time when the victorious revolution seemed ready to completely extirpate the capitalist cancer! One can easily imagine what the leader of October would say in the face of the Grand Han nationalism defended unanimously by the Chinese leaders, who are cheerfully conducting the reestablishment of the most brutal capitalism ... As the man said: "sure to descend to the bourgeois point of view". The left's task is to assert its support for the Uighur people against China's attempted cultural strangulation, not to shamefacedly cover up Beijing's crimes.

28 April, 2021.

# Palestine: a “ceasefire” that solves nothing, a mobilization that continues

29 May 2021, by **Julien Salingue**

The end of the bombing operation on the Gaza Strip resounds as a failure for the Israeli authorities. If the sequence was particularly violent, with raids of unprecedented intensity and considerable material and human damage, the fact remains that the State of Israel is not the winner of the confrontation of recent weeks. On the contrary, for many Palestinians, the cease-fire is more a reflection of Israeli fear that the situation will degenerate than of a mastery of the agenda.

## Community of Fate

If the media attention was particularly focused on Gaza, we should not forget that it is in the whole of Palestine that Israel had to face - and still faces - a Palestinian protest against its apartheid policies: the simultaneous mobilization in Gaza, in the West Bank, in Jerusalem and in Israel itself, if it is obviously not the affirmation of a suddenly recovered political unity, is the expression of the awareness of a community of destiny between the different Palestinian sectors. It is a scathing warning to the colonial

power that has not ceased, over the past decades, to fragment the Palestinian population, putting into practice the old adage ““divide and conquer””.

This is one of the singularities of the uprising of the last few weeks, which also has a particularly young face and which was hardly framed by the traditional political forces, be it Hamas, Fatah or the left. In the first days, we even saw the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah repressing the demonstrators in the West Bank, before changing gear and playing the rhetoric of “national unity”, for fear of losing more ground to a Hamas that appeared to defend all Palestinians, and not only those in Gaza. What happens now?

It is hard to predict what will happen in the days and weeks to come. One thing is certain, however: Israeli repression continues, with, among other things, the “Law and Order” operation carried out in Israel with the aim of arresting 500 Palestinians who have mobilised in recent weeks, while mobilization continues in Jerusalem,

notably around the neighbourhoods of Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan, and in the West Bank. Everywhere in Palestine, there are political discussions, structuring discussions, and discussions about what will happen next, and if we can hardly risk making predictions, there is no doubt that the sequence that has opened up in recent weeks is far from over and that we must continue to express our solidarity.

As researcher Tareq Baconi explains: “Palestinians need to figure out a way to maintain this popular uprising beyond the leadership structures that exist today. That’s not to say that there shouldn’t be a leadership for the movement. What we’ve learned from the 2011 Arab Uprisings is that if there is no leadership able to make political and strategic decisions, the deep state and the status quo win. That leadership cannot be channeled into the same corrupt institutions that have brought us to where we are today. There needs to be a more inclusive leadership that emerges from this grassroots mobilization. What form that takes is still unclear, but we’re still in the early days.” [26]

## The red thread of the Commune

28 May 2021, by **Jaime Pastor , Miguel Urbán Crespo**

“The body is on the ground, but the idea is still standing”.

That was the response that the Versailles troops got after the *Semaine sanglante* (“Bloody week”) and the subsequent massacre (Deleurmoz, 2020: 297). The Paris

Commune would from then on survive as a myth for the popular classes, superior to that of the 1789 Revolution, since in contrast to the interclass character of the latter, it was led mainly by the working class. It provides the international labour movement with “an autonomous

tradition, a legitimation” (Haupt, 1986: 42) that makes it destined to guarantee the emancipation of the “human race”, in the expression popularized by Eugene Pottier in *The Internationale*, written in June 1871. Élisée Reclus, the well-known anarchist and Communeard



geographer, vindicated the legacy of the Commune because it “set up for the future, not through its governors but through its defenders, a more superior ideal to all the revolutions that preceded it... a new society in which there are no masters by birth, title or wealth, and no slaves by origin, caste or salary.”(Ross, 2015:8).

A revolutionary legitimacy claimed by the IWA (International Workingmen’s Association or First International), which advocated the necessary independence of the working class from conservatism, liberalism and bourgeois republicanism. A new phase then began in which the different currents within the International, after the departure of English Chartism, entered into a dispute over the strategic lessons to be drawn from the 72 days of existence of the Commune.

Marx and Bakunin also praised what the implementation of a previously unprecedented form of communal and federal organization had meant and Engels even proposed in 1875 a new political form that he called “Community” (*Gemeinwesen*), a good old German word equivalent to the French word “Commune” (Engels, 1875) as an alternative to the bourgeois state. However, soon the divergences exploded around the necessity or otherwise of political action, together with mutual accusations of Pan-Germanism and Pan-Slavism and differences over internal organizational methods, ending, as is known, with the abandonment of the International by the Bakuninists in 1872.

Beyond that split, what would continue to unite both currents would be claiming the Commune as a “symbol and example” (Haupt) of another democracy to be built and of the alternative emancipatory horizon for the “human race” to which they aspired. An Event whose lessons would be shared, as shown in works such as that of Kristin Ross (2015), not only by the Communards who survived the brutal repression and found refuge in other places, but also by great leaders of the labour movement such as Piotr Kropotkin and William Morris, or poets like Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine. It is this common claim that would be transmitted to successive

generations through a long list of publications and a whole repertoire of poems and songs - such as “Le temps des cerises” - as well as places of memory such as the *Mur des Fédérés* in the cemetery of Père Lachaise in Paris.

The impact of the Commune thus survived the generation that led it and its debates, lessons and defeat have been a source of inspiration in the revolutionary imaginary and the international socialist movement. The anecdote is told of how Lenin danced in the snow in front of the Winter Palace on the seventy-third day of the Russian Revolution, since it had lasted one day longer than the Paris Commune. In “State and Revolution” (1917) Lenin radically changed his previous appreciations and based the project of revolutionary power to draw inspiration from the Commune. And the Commune should be understood less as an event in French national history than as part of a vast world picture that connects through the red thread of history the Russian Revolution with the workers’ insurrection in Asturias in 1934 [27], the insurgent Barcelona of July 1936, May 68, the Zapatista movement since 1994 and the Oaxaca Commune in 2006 in Mexico, the movement of the *indignados* in 2011 or the Kurdish libertarian confederalism under construction. Here, we will relate what the Commune has meant to some of the attempts at another possible world.

## **The right to the city and to decent housing, from yesterday to today**

The Commune was a revolution in a place, “a single, unique and dramatic event, perhaps the most extraordinary of its kind in capitalist urban history.” (Harvey, 2000). A primarily spatial and urban event, which in the 1960s many considered the first realization of urban space as a revolutionary space. Thus it raised fundamental problems that we will later see reflected in other revolts but that above all continue to be key elements

in the dispute over urban space today. To mention just some of the spatial problems posed by the Commune: the relationship of Paris with the provinces; the Commune as an immense rent strike; the social division of the city after Haussmann and the question of who, among those who inhabit it, has the right to the city and who does not; or military and tactical use during street fighting. These are some examples of the spatial issues that run through the Commune and that continue to question us today as issues to be radically overcome on all levels.

The Commune’s first measure was the suspension of rental debts, demonstrating the importance of urban space and the material conditions of the subaltern classes in its concerns. Housing has historically been configured as a means of expropriation of the wealth of the popular classes, while becoming a source of social unrest that has nurtured the evolution of anti-systemic movements throughout history. The suspension of rent debt has been configured from the Commune as a fundamental demand of urban movements to this day, with the paralysis of evictions and tenant strikes as a central element of the repertoire of collective action of the popular classes.

The transformation of the city during the Empire, configuring the bourgeois city that Haussmann projected, also brought as a counterpart the creation of the workers’ city of the other Paris. Haussmann’s work and the transformation of the land and the real estate market in Paris affected both the traditional notions of community and the socio-spatial structure of the city, displacing workers from the centre of a city that since then has been configured as a forbidden space for them: “The return of the workers to the centre of Paris during the Commune derived, in part, from the political importance of the urban centre within a tradition of popular insurgency and, in part, from their desire to reclaim the public space from which they had been expelled, the streets that had once been theirs”. (Ross, 1988). The fight against the gentrification of neighbourhoods and city centres as spaces of

representation of political power or showcases of city-consumption continues to be a central element in the struggle for the popular reappropriation of the city.

## May 68 and the vindication of the Commune

In France, the memory of the Commune has always been alive in the workers' movement. Proof of this has been the massive visits to the *Mur des Fédérés* in the Père Lachaise cemetery, every 18 March or 28 May, in tribute to the victims of the *Semaine sanglante*. That is why it is tempting, although historically imprecise, to compare the events of May 1968 with those of the spring of 1871. The truth is that from the 1960s some left-wing currents began to claim the legacy of the Commune, foremost among them the Situationist International and thinkers such as Henri Lefebvre, who also highlighted the importance of that experience in the will to change life, change the city, highlighting the role of the Commune as an urban event.

In May 68 that memory suddenly burst forth when in Paris, on 10 May in the midst of the protests, this cry was heard: "It's the revenge of the Commune!" During those days, the 22 March Movement published a pamphlet that, under the title "Renew with the Paris Commune", proposed to occupy the town hall while the cry "The Commune is not dead!" spread to many places, documentaries began to be screened, and the 65 issues of the Commune's newspaper *Le Cri du peuple* were reissued in facsimile. Of course, it is evocative to see the migration of the slogans and the iconography of the Commune over a century to re-emerge in the same streets full of barricades.

In Marseille, the students at the Thiers institute occupied it changing the name to "Lycée de la Commune" and self-organization was promoted following their example. The protesters considered themselves heirs to the Paris Commune, its radical democratic legacy and of its

internationalism, compared to what was represented by Thiers and the Versaillais: the newspaper "Action", an organ of the Coordination of Action Committees, denounced French capitalism as a "worthy heir to the Versaillais who murdered the Communards".

Throughout France, in many work or study centres the name of Commune was adopted. But perhaps the most advanced experience was that of the Nantes Commune: there, after the creation of Neighbourhood Committees, a Central Strike Committee of the entire city was constituted, supported by trade unions and peasant and student organisations, which was installed in the City Hall on 27 May as a new municipal authority, coordinating at the economic, commercial (bonds equivalent to a certain amount of food were issued), transport and teaching (nurseries were created for the children of strikers) levels until the end of the movement.

In many works about May 68 the word Commune would be in their headlines: *The Student Commune*, by Edgar Morin, *Journal of the Student Commune*, by Alain Schapp and Pierre Vidal-Naquet (in this they cite, for example, an edition of *La Cause du peuple* (the organ of an important Maoist current at the time) of 2 June 1968, in which de Gaulle was denounced as the representative of the new Versaillais. And after May many works of the Commune were reissued or new ones were published demonstrating a growing interest in the experience of the Commune in the context of the rise of social conflict in France.

## Toppling monuments: "the iconoclastic fury"

Revolutions often bring iconoclastic fury, and the Commune was no exception. Be it spontaneous, like the burning of the guillotine in Voltaire Square by a group of people, mostly women, in an attempt to erase any equivalence between the revolution and the scaffold; or planned, such as

the demolition of the Vendôme column as a monument to barbarism, a symbol of brute force and militarism. The strength of the Commune's iconoclastic gesture as an anti-hierarchical act can be calibrated by the hysteria recorded in the narration of the event by the Versaillais, who denounced the demolition of the column as an attempt to destroy French history itself. The Communards were branded "vandals" and Gustave Courbet, one of those accused of being politically responsible for the demolition of the column, was imprisoned and sentenced for life to pay compensation for its reconstruction. But beyond the reactionary propaganda, the truth is that the Commune did want to settle accounts with the history of the French Empire, but not as a matter of the past but rather as an affirmation in the present, as an anti-imperialist and anti-colonial statement that connected with his idea of a "universal republic".

The truth is that the "iconoclastic fury" has been reproduced in practically every revolution or protest movement throughout the 150 years of history from the demolition of the Vendôme column to the present day. A situation that has regained its relevance, placing itself at the centre of the political debate with the emergence of an anti-racist and decolonial movement that has put the statues of the military, colonizers and slaveholders in the crosshairs of its "iconoclastic fury". Although the movement began in the United States, it soon caught on around the world, also reaching Europe where attacks on different statues followed, generating an angry response from the elites and conservative parties, who, as in an authentic revival of the Commune, accused the protesters of being vandals trying to erase history.

For example, Emmanuel Macron complained bitterly about iconoclastic actions against statues, and in a message to the French nation that Thiers himself could have delivered, he railed against anti-racist protesters for trying to erase the history of France: "This evening, I say to you very clearly, my dear fellow citizens, that the Republic will not erase any traces or any figures from its history.

It will not forget any of its accomplishments. It will not topple any statue.” (Traverso, 2020) In his speech to the nation, Macron never mentioned either the victims of racism or French colonialism, a curious oversight. In the same vein, when protesters in Bristol tore down the statue of the slave trader Edward Colston, the British Home Secretary, Priti Patel, described the act as “totally disgraceful” and “unacceptable vandalism”.

But, as Traverso states, “Far from erasing the past, anti-racist iconoclasm carries a new historical consciousness that inevitably affects the urban landscape. The contested statues celebrate the past and its actors, a simple fact that legitimates their removal. Cities are living bodies that change according to the needs, values, and wishes of their inhabitants, and these transformations are always the outcome of political and cultural conflicts.”

The truth is that statues, when they become an object of dispute, cease to be a matter of the past and become a direct part of our present. Demonstrating that racism or neo-colonialism are far from past but living elements of our present, leading to the iconoclastic fury against supposedly past statues, gives a historical dimension to the present struggles against racism and oppression. Here we again find a red thread that connects the Commune’s demolition of the Vendôme column with the anti-racist protests that are currently running through the streets of half the world.

## From the Women’s Union to the feminist strike

The Women’s Union was not only a very interesting initiative for the self-organization of women within the framework of the experience of the Commune, but in its short life it represented a break with the dominant feminist logic during the 19th century, closely linked to the demand for political rights, such as suffrage and traditional forms of

republican politics in general.

During the Commune, participation in public life was not determined by electoral participation, but there were both mixed and autonomous spaces where female Communards could develop their public and political activity. Instead, from the momentum of the Women’s Union, feminist discourse and proposals focused on a complete reorganization of female work and the end of economic inequality based on gender. Highlighting decrees such as that of equal pay for male and female teachers, the proposal to create nursery schools in the vicinity of factories, incorporating a reproductive and care dimension to the issue of access to work that should be assumed communally. As well as the proposal made to the Labour Commission of the Commune by the Union for the constitution of sewing workshops and free productive associations in each arrondissement with the idea of being able to expand beyond Paris, building an alliance with other similar cooperatives in France and other countries, in order to facilitate the export and exchange of products.

Almost 150 years later, the feminist movement organized the first international strike of the 21st century. A milestone not only for the international workers’ movement and social movements, but also a paradigm shift in the feminist movement itself. As in its time was the contribution of the Commune, closely linked to the reorganization of work in all its spheres, ending economic inequality based on gender and ensuring that the obligation to sustain life does not fall only on women. Apart from the obvious distances of time and context, the truth is that we find a purple thread that connects the Commune’s feminist movement, which incipiently placed social reproduction at the centre of its demands, with the new feminist movement that has placed the capital-life contradiction at the centre of the debate.

## Communal

## autonomy: from Zapatista councils to Kurdish confederalism

Since 1994, *Zapatismo* has represented the link between the community tradition of the indigenous peoples of Mexico with the decentralized, autonomous and direct democracy model of the Commune. Representatives do not make decisions on behalf of their community, but rather act as community delegates, revocable and subject to public scrutiny. In the *juntas* of good government, the regional government space of the Zapatista autonomous municipalities, rotating delegates represent their community. The *juntas* are constantly renewed and allow training in government and interest in public affairs for a large number of people. This rotation also shows a characteristic of Zapatista politics, which is the absence of professionalism in politics, everyone governs for a short time and in stages, and no one has a monopoly on political representation. This model of direct democracy and Zapatista autonomy has developed in the context of a low intensity war with constant harassment by the Mexican state and paramilitary groups.

In a climate of exceptionality, violence and open military conflict, Kurdish democratic confederalism has developed, inspired by the writings of the American anarchist Murray Bookchin, a supporter of a municipalist and environmental socialism. In the purest Commune style, the historical leader of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) has theorized the construction of a stateless democracy as an alternative to capitalist modernity. A constellation of interrelated and coordinated organizations, ranging from the smallest and most active units, the communes, which are managed from a shared leadership (a man and a woman); to the cantons where the different communes of a region are coordinated. Each commune holds elections to choose its representatives at the higher levels and the municipal



councils decide who goes to the Cantonal Public Council. The cantons have their own constitution and their government and parliament, in addition to their own courts, whose tasks and duties are stipulated in the Social Contract which effectively forms the constitution for the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria. [28] Finally, all these new entities are grouped into the Union of Kurdish Communities (KCK), which is the body that, as a confederation, brings together all of them. A model of social and political organization based on decentralization and direct democracy that is very reminiscent of that Universal Republic as a "confederation of free peoples" defended by Communards such as Élisée Reclus.

## The recovery of social space. From the Arab Spring to the camps of the indignant

In 2011 the world political scene was dominated by the figure and the phenomenology of camps or occupations, a global outrage that ranged from the Arab spring to the Puerta del Sol through Syntagma Square to the very heart of Wall Street. A movement that vindicated the public space as a form of protest and that in many ways was reminiscent of the political culture of the Commune.

The cry for real democracy was already contesting the limits of formal democracy calling for more democracy, trying to resolve the split between what really exists and what should be. This demand for democracy appealed to the same Commune principles that sought to go beyond the limits of formal republican

democracy to achieve a social republic.

Likewise, the occupation of public spaces in cities, through the symbolic taking of squares, represented the emergence of a fundamentally spatial and urban protest movement that claimed the city as a space in dispute. Also, like the Commune, by politicizing social practices and the use made of public space, it built a powerful social space. The squares became the equivalent of the clubs of the Commune, with frenzied social activity and public debate.

Because if we observe the *indignados* movement of 2011, beyond the spectacular and symbolic event of the camps, we can see how its extension and capillary nature turned the "neighbourhood" into a place of collective aggregation, of social anchoring in the territorial and in the daily realities of people. This allowed the incipient development of a "moral economy of the crowd" (EP Thompson, 1971) through the proliferation of worker cooperatives, time banks and bartering of services, urban gardens, social unionism with the Platform for People Affected by Mortgages (PAH) in the Spanish case, community health centres in the Greek neighbourhoods, food banks and so on. The construction of social space as a political sphere beyond the institutions in which any citizen can actively participate in public affairs, recalls the revolutionary reappropriation of urban public space by the Commune.

A collective imaginary that is topical again 150 years later in the movements and revolts that foreshadow a new world through new practices instituting a real democracy. An imaginary, in short, that today also links with the demand for the common, for cooperation and mutual support, against the new enclosures, privatizations and appropriations of common and public goods that global

capitalism has been imposing during almost fifty years of neoliberal hegemony that threaten to be prolonged in the midst of the current pandemic, ecosocial and multiple crisis. Rethinking the Paris Commune should not be understood as an academic or nostalgic exercise, but as a militant one. Because as Walter Benjamin said, we must recover the art of narrating history in a way that allows us to ignite from the past the spark of hope in the present. Thus, knowledge of past experiences of struggle can become an inspiring instrument for our present conflict.

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# “Unprecedented and unacceptable”

27 May 2021, by **Editors l'Anticapitaliste**

Nevertheless, there is one expression too many in the EU's formula: “unprecedented”. There is at least one precedent and it is French. On 22 October 1956, the French army captured an Air Atlas-Air Maroc plane flying from Rabat to Tunis outside French airspace, carrying five of the most important political leaders of the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN), including Ahmed Ben Bella. To intercept it, military planes took off from a French military base in Algeria with orders to force the Air Maroc plane to land, including shooting at it if it refused to do so. Ben Bella and his comrades remained prisoners until 1962.

This reminder does not aim to relativize the interception of

Protassevitch and the dangers that he could run. The NPA obviously associates itself with the calls of the Belarusian opposition for his release. But so-called “rogue” regimes or groups labelled as terrorists do not have exclusive rights to hijacking. Apart from the French example, there is evidence that the CIA was informed of a planned attack on a Cuban airliner by a group of anti-Castro fighters and did nothing to prevent it; the attack actually took place in October 1976 just after the plane took off from Barbados and resulted in the death of 73 people.

Some have called the Belarusian act state terrorism; we agree. But many other states have resorted or still

resort to terrorist practices. In 2016, François Hollande openly referred to France's use of targeted assassinations in a book published by two *Le Monde* journalists. The Turkish state hunts down its opponents, especially Kurds (including the 2013 assassination of three activists in the premises of the Kurdistan Information Centre in Paris). Putin's regime has a predilection for poison. As for the Israeli services, a recent book (*Lève-toi et tue le premier*, Grasset, 2020) traces their practices in this area. In fact, behind their grand proclamations, more or less humanistic, all bourgeois states do not hesitate to resort, more or less discreetly, to dirty methods.

25 May 2021

## The economic response to the crisis benefits large companies

26 May 2021, by **Éric Toussaint**

**The seeds of a debt trap whose effects will be seen in the years to come**

The first economic response to deal with the crisis evolving from the Covid-19 pandemic, a response that prevailed almost everywhere, was to inject **liquidity** into the financial markets and to contract more public debt. This eventually benefits Big Capital, the large shareholders of big corporations and the **investment funds** that develop speculative activities. And, at the same time, it sows the seeds of a debt trap whose effects will be seen in the years to come, says Eric Toussaint, spokesperson for the international network of the

Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debts (CADTM).

“The working classes, already affected by the pandemic, are faced with changes that impact them even more deeply,” says Toussaint, who for several years has been one of the best-known voices in the anti-globalization movements which emerged from the Seattle mobilizations to oppose the practices of the **World Trade Organisation** or the World Economic Forum in Davos (1999).

“It is clear that the crisis of 2020 is different from that of 2007-2009, but there is a repetition of policies that basically favour big capital and big

business. In this case, it's not only investment funds and private banking. This time we have to add Big Pharma and GAFAM (Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft),” he told La Jornada.

### **Postponing the debacle**

Toussaint is currently promoting, with hundreds of organizations in various parts of the world, a manifesto for dealing with the current multidimensional crisis, a fundamental component of which is to cancel patents on vaccines and vital medicines.

**You say that the pandemic has**

## **widened social gaps. What has happened?**

- The pandemic cannot be dissociated from a profound and destructive commodification of nature, which is linked to the way capitalism operates on a global scale. Moreover, even before the pandemic, [we were in the midst of an economic crisis, with a financial and stock market bubble, stagnation in the major industrial economies](#) and slowing growth in China. There is a link between the pandemic and the global and worldwide capitalist crisis. It is important to point this out since the rulers and the mainstream media tell us that problems are caused by the virus.

## **Has the crisis hit the most vulnerable sectors hardest?**

The working classes are forced to continue to look for ways of providing for their daily needs, to take public transport to go to work. In the context of the pandemic, this leads to a deterioration of their living conditions, coupled with the loss of income sources since in many cases, especially workers in the informal sector workers do not have access to government benefits, if there are any.

"The level of working class indebtedness, including the lower middle class, has also increased. In several countries, measures have been taken to postpone the payment of debts or suspend the eviction of families who are unable to pay their rent or [mortgage](#). However, this is temporary and in the future they will have to pay them unless their debts are cancelled."

## **Just over a year after the crisis began, what have been the governments' main economic responses and their consequences?**

One: a massive injection of liquidity into the financial system, which means that the stock market crisis that exploded between 13 February and 15 March 2020 has apparently been overcome. The stock market index of most economies is higher today than at the beginning of 2020.

"The first response has been a policy

favouring the big capitalists. The latter in most cases use the financial means at their disposal for speculative purposes. They do not invest them in production and job creation, except in Big Pharma, which is very profitable. Governments are repeating the moves they made in 2008: massive intervention by big central banks in favour of big financial and other companies.

"Two: the imposition of lockdown with governments wishing to boost economic activity at the expense of the working classes as they are more exposed to the virus than others. It is clear that in countries such as the US, parts of Europe and China, there is the beginning of an economic recovery, even if it is not yet very strong, and it is not in a position, except in China, to make up quickly for the loss of GDP in 2020 and the first quarter of 2021. US GDP is growing strongly but job creation is currently weaker than the Biden administration had hoped. If another disaster is not on its way, the US GDP will probably be higher at the end of 2021 than at the beginning of 2020, but the number of small businesses going bankrupt, the rate of unemployment, the debt situation of working-class households, etc. all remain rather uncertain.

"Budget deficits and increasing public debts are allowed, but not as the US President Franklin D Roosevelt did in the 1930s, European countries after World War II or Latin American countries with the industrialization by import substitution model between the 1940s and 1960s (see box).

## **Industrialization by import substitution**

This strategy refers mainly to the historical experience of Latin America in the 1930s and 1940s, and to the work of ECLAC (the UN Economic Commission for Latin America) in the 1950s, including the writings of Raúl

Prebisch of Argentina (who became the first Secretary-General of the [United Nations Conference on Trade and Development](#) - UNCTAD - in 1964). The starting point was the observation that, faced with a drastic reduction in trade due to the Great Depression of the 1930s and the WWII, the main Latin American countries had been able to respond to domestic demand by replacing imported products with the development of local production. ECLAC's theorization aimed to extend this process to all sectors of industry by creating a 'disconnection' with the centre. Relying on a good dose of protectionism and coordinated state intervention, it aimed to allow nascent industries to flourish. This policy has had important results in terms of the industrialization of Argentina (1940s-1950s) and Mexico (1930s-1950s). [South Korea also applied this policy successfully but under special conditions.](#)

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The current policy is not similar to the New Deal that President Franklin D. Roosevelt applied from 1933. No increase in social rights; no imposition of strong financial discipline on the banks; no tax effort imposed on the richest; no significant increase in wages; no expansion in trade union rights, to point to just a few differences. Under the New Deal, significant social protection was put in place, investment banks were separated from deposit banks, wages were increased. The tax rate on top incomes reached 91% in 1941 and then remained at 80% for several decades.

Today, the economic rescue programme is financed by public debt and no crisis tax has yet been imposed on the rich. We will see in the coming months whether the Biden administration's plan to raise taxes on corporate profits materializes (bearing in mind that Biden's planned increase does not make up for Trump's 2017-2020 tax cut on profits, which is still effective at the time of this interview). We will also see if he (significantly) increases the levies on



GAFAM.

"There is no abandonment of the neoliberal orientation in terms of structural reforms that aim to further deregulate the labour market, the capital-labour relationship and social protection systems. A Keynesian policy is not only defined by fiscal management, but also by other measures targeted for the working classes, as Roosevelt did when he was president of the United States under the pressure of major workers' mobilizations, or President Lazaro Cardenas in Mexico in the 1930s."

**Do the measures taken by governments in Europe or the United States to increase public budgets, budget deficits and increased liquidity by central banks change the economic structure that existed when the crisis broke out?**

It doesn't change the fundamental direction. These are strong measures, but they cannot be interpreted as capitalism reverting to measures that were implemented in the 1930s to 1960s and 1970s. This is not the case. These are temporary measures and at some point the debt will be so much that a brutal return to austerity policies will occur in one or two years. Look at the United States. President Joe Biden's stimulus package, at least in its intention, gives a minor impression of something that might be in the direction of some moderate Keynesianism; but it is not yet fully adopted by Congress. What happens in the US will have an impact on Europe, Mexico and the rest of the world.

**Some of the measures taken by governments and central banks to deal with the 2008-2009 financial crisis ended up benefiting the same groups that caused that crisis. What is happening now, except that it is a different kind of crisis?**

"Pfizer's Covid vaccine patent will give it a 20-year income. The company says it will have \$25 billion in additional revenue in the short term"

- It is a repetition. Even though it is clear that the crisis of 2020 is different from that of 2007-2009, we are seeing a repetition of policies that fundamentally favour big capital and big business. In this case, it's not just investment funds and private banking. This time we have to add Big Pharma, an industry that has become increasingly powerful, as well as the digital industry. BlackRock, the world's largest investment fund, is a shareholder in all the big pharmaceutical companies, which are favoured by the policies of governments, which instead of suspending patents and launching a programme of public investment and vaccine production, are buying hundreds of millions of doses from private companies, which, moreover, will secure a 20-year income if the patents are not suspended.

"For example, Pfizer's Covid vaccine patent will provide an annuity for 20 years. This company says it will have \$25 billion in additional revenue in the short term. Also, the vaccine will have to be renewed every year. It is a permanent income. We are witnessing something that has to be opposed urgently, because it is an extraordinary change, namely public initiative has been gradually withdrawn from the production of drugs and treatments.

"Structural changes are being imposed on the way we work, the way we teach and the way we get services and commodities. This worsens the situation of the working classes"

"We must add the structural changes that are being imposed: distance working and education, and the increase in online purchasing (via Amazon and other companies). Structural changes are being imposed on the way we work, teach and

procure services and commodities. Commodification is accelerating and all of this is worsening the situation of the working classes."

**What will happen in the years to come when the debts incurred by governments to deal with the crisis have to be paid off?**

Exactly. This is a trap. As the debt has increased enormously, neo-liberal governments and markets will have more instruments or weapons of blackmail to continue implementing structural reforms. We are in a phase of super fast and huge public debt. Beware of what will follow if we don't resist strongly: more austerity and counter-reforms in favour of the private sector. We must be vigilant and ready to resist.

**In contrast to other episodes of crisis, the debt is now increasing in both the South and the North.**

Greece's debt represents 200% of its gross domestic product, Italy's 150%, Belgium's 120% and France's 115%. In the South, it is increasing, but at levels of 60 or 70% of the countries' GDPs.

"If the central banks in the US, Japan, Europe and Britain change their current policy of near-zero interest rates and start raising them, the cost of debt will skyrocket and all countries will have difficulty financing it." If unbridled speculation in the stock markets, with stock market valuations reaching new highs, leads to a stock market crash, another huge failure of large companies, panic may take hold of the markets. This can lead to a sharp increase in risk premiums on new loans for a number of companies and countries that are financed on the financial markets. Speculation is again strongly affecting the commodity market and this can also lead to new shocks.

*Translated by Sushovan Dhar and Christine Pagnoulle for CADTM.*

# The popular uprising is bringing down the neoliberal and militarist regime

25 May 2021, by **Movimiento Ecosocialista de Colombia**

The 28 April 2021 marked a new stage in the history of mobilization and the exercise of social protest in Colombia. The national strike called by the trade union federations ended up becoming a great popular uprising. On that same day, the capital cities saw mobilizations of workers, those in the informal sector, students, neighbourhood organizations, women, and indigenous and Afro communities; a diverse and plural social expression of a desperate people cornered by the implementation of decades of neoliberal policies, and which was left to its own devices during the pandemic. This popular uprising has a line of continuity with the urban mobilizations of 21 November 2019, but this time intermediate cities and rural areas joined in. **There were street protests in 600 municipalities and the number of protesters reached approximately five million people.**

This massive protest has already achieved results. The withdrawal of the tax reform, the departure of finance minister Alberto Carrasquilla and his economic team, the resignation of Chancellor Claudia Blum, the paralysis of health, pension and employment reforms in Congress which form part of the Duque government's "Paquetazo", demanded by the risk rating agencies and the IMF.

These results have been obtained despite the unprecedented police and military deployment in the country authorized by the government of Iván Duque against social mobilization. The 50 murdered, 400 disappeared, the hundreds injured and dozens of sexually abused women, leading in the case of 17-year-old Alisson Meléndez, raped in an Immediate Response Unit-

URI- in Popayán, to her tragic decision to commit suicide, have been the consequence of a civil war approach to citizen protest taken by ESMAD, the police, army and armed civilians. In Cali, the repression included the use of assault weapons, grenades and gas against the protesters and surrounding neighbourhoods or residential units, and even machine-gunning from military helicopters, as occurred in Siloé.

On the outskirts of Buga, on the Pan-American Highway, airborne military units were also used, and nearby neighbourhoods were surrounded by ESMAD and attacked with gas and explosive weapons. In Popayán, the militaristic response to the uprising of popular indignation caused by police abuses has already cost one student dead, missing and injured. Something similar has happened in Yumbo. These military "theatres of operations" were authorized personally and directly by President Iván Duque, the general commander of the Armed Forces Eduardo Zapateiro, the general director of the police Jorge Luis Vargas to which we must add the responsibility by omission of the local mayors who handed over control of the "public order" of the cities without so much as a discussion. All of them are responsible for genocide and terrorism against the peoples and must be tried as such before the International Criminal Court and the international organizations created for this purpose.

This militaristic barbarism confirms that we are witnessing the collapse of the so-called "Rule of Law" and confirms that there is an abysmal separation between the institutions of a precarious representative democracy and the social demands of

the majority of Colombians.

The systematic and programmed application of state terrorism also shows the crisis of peripheral capitalism in the country linked to the worst economic crisis in the history of capitalism and aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic. We have reached the dead end of a state and elites incapable of meeting the most basic needs of the population, now, and in the medium and long term.

**The social outbreak went beyond the classic forms of popular mobilization, making possible expressions of solidarity as with the presence of the indigenous "Minga" in Cali and blockades and self-defence (barricades) in the cities as key points of a genuine national strike.**

Those who led the blockades, the so-called "front line" are young people marginalized by neoliberalism, lacking health, education and work who came to protest out of outrage, united in hopelessness. They do not believe in conventional institutions, nor in political parties, whether from the left or the right.

They are organized "from below" in slow coordination processes based on the demands of the street resistance; they reject personal leadership, proclaim "horizontality" in decision-making, and have gained great social legitimacy in the neighbourhoods where they operate and facilitate popular assemblies. These urban blockades, according to public statements by the Archbishop of Cali, Darío Monsalve, "constitute almost the only way that strike activists have to make themselves heard ..." and also arose in response to the armed forces

besieging of the cities.

The fact that the days of protest days began more than two weeks ago and that the blockades have been presented by the government, businessmen and local merchants as being responsible for the shortage of basic necessities and fuel, despite the enabling of "humanitarian corridors" by the protesters, has opened discussion on whether to maintain them. In this regard, we consider that any decision should be preceded by guarantees of no prosecutions or criminalization for all those leading the blockades, supervised by human rights organizations and, as far as possible, international agreement and with explicit commitments from the national government. and local leaders on their demands. What has been happening in Cali after the failure of the negotiations attempted with the mayor's office is contrary to what we need to find solutions to the current situation. The neighbourhood leaders who attended the convocation were detected and are currently being detained by the police under house arrest to be prosecuted.

Regarding the political decision in relation to the blockades, we consider that this should correspond to those who have been organizing them as a form of legitimate resistance, that is, to the members of the front lines and close logistical support. Those who have led the street confrontations, and have made up the dead, wounded and missing are those who have the moral authority to make this decision. The same must be said about roadblocks by transporters and peasants.

The gigantic marches that we have witnessed in Ibagué, Neiva and Bogotá in recent days and the social organizations that have joined such as transporters throughout the country and coca growers in the southwest confirm that this popular uprising is on the rise, which is why we believe the decisive factor is the opening of political alternatives "from below" to the crisis of peripheral capitalism in the country.

It is showing that **self-organization and direct democracy expressed in multiple forms of resistance contribute to the consolidation of**

**a "parallel institutional framework" that goes beyond the narrow limits of representative democracy. This uprising went beyond the traditional representative character of the trade union organizations and the official national strike leadership, confirming that their narrow protest action does not correspond to the demands of the broad popular spectrum.** On 1 May, there was dramatic evidence of this. While in the street skirmishes police brutality had already caused deaths and disappearances, the trade union federations called for a celebration of the workers' day with a "virtual parade". The distrust felt by neighbourhood and popular leaders in relation to the negotiations that the strike committee is trying to develop stems from this reality.

The popular uprising also demonstrates the inability of a congress and political parties mired in corruption and commitments to the businesses of big capitalists, as well as regulatory agencies and high courts that have played the role of accomplices in the face of the militaristic barbarism that we currently witness. **For this reason, an institutional crisis has opened that could end in the resignation of President Duque. The development of events and the relationships of forces that are established in the immediate future will determine if it is possible to realize this possibility, which would be a real blow to the neoliberal and militarist political regime. We agree that it is necessary to raise it from now on as it has been proposed, with increasing force, by the political and social organizations. Ignoring this possibility on the grounds that it would produce an "institutional vacuum" leading to the arrival at the Palace of Nariño of the vice president or president of Congress, who supposedly are worse than Duque, or that the resignation would open the path to a military coup, reasons why it is necessary to "defend Duque from Uribeismo" which placed him in power, exempts him from political responsibility for collective murder**

**against defenceless people, as head of the armed forces, and also starts from the mistaken criterion that the deepening of the institutional crisis that would open the popular overthrow of a reactionary government such as that of Duque, something unprecedented in the history of the country, could only be resolved within the framework of the same institutional framework that is collapsing.**

**On the contrary, we consider that a popular triumph of these characteristics would open great possibilities for the autonomous political action of the people and open the way to the convening of a Constituent and Popular Assembly.** It would be the best way to isolate and defeat political reaction and the coup plotters, at a time when there is immense popular solidarity at the international level.

**The social and popular leaders have also emphasized the following economic and social demands that we support and that can form a minimal emergency platform in the face of the impoverishment to which millions of Colombians have been subjected due to the neoliberal policies that continue to be imposed by Duque's government:**

- **Prosecution and punishment of those responsible for the murders and disappearances** that occurred during the militarization of social protest. Punishment of those responsible for raping women. Dismantling of ESMAD and transformation of the police into a civilian body dependent on the Ministry of Government.

- **Stop the murder and massacres of social leaders.** Promote a humanitarian agreement with all the armed groups from now on in order to find a way out of the conflict that must conclude at negotiating tables differentiated according to the characteristics of each group.

- **A Basic Emergency Income for those in the informal sector and the unemployed.** To achieve this objective, it is necessary to suspend



the payment of the public debt that currently represents 63% of Gross Domestic Product and carry out a democratic and redistributive tax reform establishing a wealth tax on the rich and super rich, not deductible from income tax; taxation of corporate dividends and inheritances, as well as the elimination of tax exemptions for large companies and the financial

sector. Fulfilment of the peace agreements, particularly with regard to the voluntary substitution of crops and the implementation of collective projects that improve the standard of living of peasant and ethnic communities, based on food sovereignty.

• **An employment generation programme for young people,**

expansion of coverage and financing of enrolment of students in public universities.

• **Down with the genocidal government** of Iván Duque!

• **For an alternative solution to the current crisis: A Constituent and Popular Assembly!}**

## Egypt's Uprising and Its Fate

24 May 2021, by **Joel Beinin**

According to the Arab Network for Human Rights Information, in the last quarter of 2020 there were 73 labor (33) and social (40) protests, including 11 strikes. [29] This is considerably fewer than the pace of collective action from 2004 to 2016, and many protests suffered severe repression. But it's a much higher level of social struggle than during the Nasser, Sadat or the first two decades of the Mubarak eras.

The popular uprising of January 25, 2011 was partly, although not necessarily consciously, directed against neoliberal Washington Consensus economic policies. In that sense it is comparable to and continuous with the "Bread Intifada" of January 1977, one of the earliest of the roughly 150 anti-IMF food riots from the late 1970s to the early 1990s.

The clearest expression of this political economy-driven element in the uprising was the nearly 3500 collective actions, including 570 strikes involving some 2.5 million workers, from 1998 to 2010.

Nonetheless, as labor lawyer, former presidential candidate and former director of the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights, Khaled Ali perceptively observed, "The workers did not start the January 25 movement because they have no organizing structure.... [But] one of the important steps of this revolution was taken when they began to protest,

giving the revolution an economic and social slant besides the political demands." [30]

Most Western observers ignored or minimized this aspect of the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, where it was particularly pronounced.

The January 25 uprising was also linked to the more overtly political protest movements of the 2000s, animated primarily by the young urban intelligentsia: solidarity with the Second Palestinian Intifada; opposition to the 2003 Iraq War; Kefaya — the Egyptian Movement for Change, whose peak of activity was 2004-06; support for the Judges Club's criticism of the 2005 elections; Mohamed ElBaradei's National Association for Change; the 2010 "We are all Khaled Sa'id campaign," etc.

This genealogy of social protest encompasses demands for democracy and government respect for the dignity of citizens, especially curbing routine police brutality and torture, and an anti-imperialist foreign policy. Why No "Revolution"?

The mass demonstrations that erupted on January 25 could not have become a revolution, because the great majority of the movement's supporters had no common organizational framework or political program beyond the ouster of Mubarak.

Under the best of circumstances,

Mubarak's ouster alone could not have resulted in a regime change. Most participants in the uprising — both workers and the urban intelligentsia — did not understand the character of "the regime" whose demise they sought. This was exemplified by the deeply misguided slogan: "The army and the people are one hand." That slogan blocked people from understanding that Mubarak's removal was as much a coup as due to popular pressure.

Another reason why the popular uprising of January 25 could not become a revolution is that the social movements of the urban intelligentsia and the workers were largely detached from each other.

In the 2000s there were brave, even heroic, efforts to support and spread the ongoing strike movement by poorly resourced NGOs like the Center for Trade Union and Workers Services, the Coordinating Committee for Trade Union and Workers Rights and Liberties, and the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights, a small number of individuals like Kamal Abbas, Kamal Abu Eita, Khaled Ali and Fatma Ramadan, and journalists aligned with the left like Hossam el-Hamalawy, Mostafa Bassiouny, Jano Charbel, Faiza Rady, and Adel Zakariyya, among others.

There was an increasing degree of coordination and collaboration between the workers' movement and

the left and democratic forces after the formation of the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU) on January 30 and the ouster of Mubarak on February 11. In addition to the organizations and individuals mentioned above, the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights actively supported the workers movement.

Collaboration strengthened as the number of strikes and collective actions soared from February, 2011 until the July 2013 military coup that overthrew the elected president Mohamed Morsi. But this was insufficient to link the two streams of social protest in a way that resembled the coalition of workers and intellectuals in Poland's Solidarity movement that was forged over the course of a decade or more.

## Failure of Leadership

Moreover, as had been the case since the legal left party Tagammu's decision to back Mubarak against the Islamists in the early 1990s, most liberal, left and feminist forces at first supported the July 2013 coup and aligned with autocracy against Islamism.

The inability of these forces to break out of the devil's choice between Islamism and nominally secular autocracy has weakened opposition to autocracy for over 30 years and continues to do so. The "officers' republic," as Yezid Sayigh dubbed it, is now more firmly entrenched and more tyrannical than in the Mubarak era.

The government installed by the July 2013 coup appointed Kamal Abu Eita, then president of EFITU, as Minister of Manpower and Migration. Most of the left mistakenly considered Abu Eita's appointment a victory. Only a minority — most vocally, Fatma Ramadan — were critical of Abu Eita because after becoming a minister, he spoke out against striking.

Abu Eita's dismissal in March 2014 made it clear that the coup leader and

now president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi was not interested in substantially accommodating the needs of working people. In fact, given the economic situation and the demands of the Saudis and Emiratis who had showered some \$12 billion on Egypt, that would have been very difficult even for a government inclined to do so.

The strikes of the 2000s — and the escalating workers' movement after Mubarak's ouster — could not play a leading role in the popular uprising or turn it in a more radical direction, as many on the left imagined they could.

This was in part because until the formation of EFITU on January 30, 2011 there was no organization that could credibly claim to represent a large number of anti-regime trade unionists. EFITU was too new, inexperienced, and largely unfamiliar to workers beyond greater metropolitan Cairo, and a few other working class centers like Sadat City and Mahalla al-Kubra, to fulfill this task.

Even more importantly, the demands of public sector workers (the main force in the strike movement, though it was much broader than that) were backward looking. They wanted a restoration of the Nasserist social contract.

Rather than raise demands for democracy or other critiques of the Mubarak regime (with some exceptions), protesting workers often called for the government, and even specific ministers like Minister of Investment Mahmoud Mohieldin, to intervene.

Sometimes they achieved their demands in this way. So they did not learn anything about the character of "the regime."

Nonetheless, there were sharp upsurges in workers' collective action in the first quarter of 2014. Even though far fewer than in 2011 and 2012, strikes and other collective actions remained well above historic levels throughout 2015 and 2016. These actions were locally led with no national leadership or strategy.

## Persistent Neoliberalism and Autocracy

Ten years on from the start of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) uprisings, both neoliberalism and autocracy remain in place throughout the region. Even in Tunisia, conventional wisdom notwithstanding, a weak procedural democracy provides a screen behind which many figures from the Ben Ali regime have restored their power.

Therefore, the issues that prompted the 2011 uprisings are still on the table. Since then, struggles have continued to erupt over the prevailing failed mode of capital accumulation and governance.

The 2017 hirak rif mass protest movement of Imazighen (Berbers) in Morocco, the 2019-20 uprisings in Algeria, Sudan, Iraq and Lebanon — and in January 2021 the third (or perhaps fourth) wave of popular mobilization against neoliberal policies in Tunisia since 2011 — illustrate the unfinished character of the Arab uprisings.

It will take many years before their final outcome is determined.

France began its trajectory towards a republic in 1789, but that republic was not securely established until after 1870, and resistance to it persisted until the mid-20th century. There is no reason to expect the Arab region to transform itself more quickly, whatever the end result may be.

One thing that appears to have changed is that whereas in 2011 Egypt was a leading factor in the spread of the popular movement to other Arab countries, it is no longer playing that role. In part this is because the Sisi regime has repressed all forms of political debate, and in part because the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have consolidated their grip as the leading forces of reaction in the region, with the full backing of the United States.

Source: *May-June 2021, ATC 212.*

# Party-state and mafia state

23 May 2021, by **Uraz Aydin**

Leaving aside the wishful thinking, it is true that the Erdogan regime, in the eyes of a growing proportion of the population, is dragging the economy, society and the country towards an unprecedented bankruptcy that will spare no one. Starting with the management of the health crisis, which is a real disaster. The “strict” curfew, declared for 17 days until the end of Ramadan, has only been the arbitrary prohibition of any sale of alcohol and the closure of shops, bars and restaurants (the latter having opened only a month and a half before). The so-called “total” curfew does not concern a very large part of the workers since all factories, building sites, public transport, hotels, businesses... in short, almost everything works. So in order to reduce the number of cases - fourth worldwide in April after India, Brazil and the United States - and to prepare for the tourist season (essential for the economy), the lockdown is accompanied by a drop in... PCR tests! The number of tests dropped from 318,000 to 204,000 in one month without any plausible explanation; the number of cases from 60,000 to 15,000 and the number of deaths, after having stagnated for a long time at around 350 per day, finally fell to 250. But the regime, which sees its hegemonic capacity weakening day after day and has no other perspective than to prolong its power, is no longer close to being inconsistent.

## Revelations of the mafia

As corruption within Erdogan’s party-state becomes more and more blatant,

notably with the disappearance of \$128 billion from the Central Bank, the confession of a mafia boss on the run reveals the regime’s level of interpenetration with organised crime. Sedat Peker, one of the main sponsors of the ultranationalist Turkish mafia, had been a vocal supporter of Erdogan for several years. Among his most conspicuous acts were the meetings he organised in support of Reis and the sending of military equipment (drones, bullet-proof waistcoats, etc.) and dozens of 4x4 vehicles to jihadists linked to the Free Syrian Army, which could not be carried out without the authorization of the state. But following the release of another Turkish mobster, Alaattin Cakici, Peker had to leave the country in February 2020. After several months on the run in the Balkans and a stay in Morocco, Peker, from his new home - apparently - in Dubai, has been broadcasting videos on YouTube for the past ten days or so in which he has begun to settle scores with the Turkish state-mafia circles that have abandoned him.

Among his main targets - from which Erdogan is excluded for the moment, probably with a view to a bargain - is Mehmet Agar, Interior Minister in the 1990s and the main figure of the “deep state” with whom the regime had to renew an alliance after the ousting of the Gülenists from the state apparatus following the failed putsch of 2016. Citing various facts, Peker argues that Agar has an important role in international cocaine trafficking and highlights its undisputed hold in the police and among the military.

## The “post-Erdogan” era?

Another important target of Peker’s is the current Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu. Having adopted a hyper-aggressive posture and not disdaining to go on the counter-attack against any criticism of the regime, he undoubtedly has plans to gain Erdogan’s trust and replace him as head of the party (and the state?) in the future. Peker explains, among other things, that it was Soylu who had informed him of the investigation prepared on him, suggested that he leave the country and promised to bring him back in April 2021. The mafioso, however, points out that he has a lot more information to reveal and that he will destroy all those who brought him down even if it costs him his life...

The “post-Erdogan” will not happen mechanically. It is important to mobilise and demand justice and democracy against this corrupt state. But for a post-Erdogan period where the oppressed will have their say, for the working class to be able to weigh in the balance of power, it is also important to support and win the various workers’ struggles that are going on in the country, such as that of the peasants of Rize-İkizdere who are fighting against the opening of a mine under their village, of the metalworkers of Baldur who have been on strike for the last five months against the Spanish boss, and to raise our voices against the ordinary massacres of Turkish capitalism, which has killed 735 workers in the last four months.

# India's Covid Crisis: Can the Modi Regime Get India Out of It?

22 May 2021, by **Sohaila Timrith**

Let's spell this out, for the sake of clarity. Twice the official death count of over 250,000 would bring it to 500,000 deaths, five times would bring it to 1.25 million, while 10 times would bring it up to 2.5 million. And since the cases are similarly undercounted due to the lack of testing, they too are probably the highest in the world.

These images from major cities have been flashed around the world, but what is happening in villages is even more terrifying. In the villages of Uttar Pradesh (UP), for example, cases and deaths have surged as a consequence of panchayat (village council) elections and 'people are dropping dead like flies'. People with severe Covid symptoms are sent to district hospitals, where all too often they die because there is no oxygen; but they are not tested so these are not recorded as Covid deaths. Others die at home, untested, as hospitals ask patients to arrange for oxygen cylinders themselves. Hospitals and families desperately appealing for oxygen as well as social activists doing their best to respond to these appeals have been threatened by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) chief minister with confiscation of their property for spreading rumours because, he says, there is no oxygen shortage in UP. [31]

## How did this happen?

There were, of course, long-term problems with India's healthcare system, due to the failure of successive governments to invest more than around 1.25 percent of GDP in it. And the deadliness of the second wave, probably driven by new and more transmissible variants, has taken everyone by surprise. But there was a

whole year since the lockdown of March 24, 2020, to prepare for this onslaught. Why wasn't it used to minimise the scale of the second surge?

One reason, clearly, was Prime Minister Narendra Modi's boast at the World Economic Forum in January 2021 that India 'has saved humanity from a big disaster by containing corona effectively,' which he apparently believed. [32] As recently as March 2021, Health Minister Harsh Vardhan made the delusional claim that "We are in the end game of the Covid-19 pandemic in India." [33]

In a hard-hitting statement, Dr Navjot Dahiya, vice-president of the Indian Medical Association, called Modi a 'super-spreader' for holding political rallies 'tossing all Covid-19 norms in the air,' and for encouraging millions of pilgrims to attend the Kumbh Mela at Haridwar in Uttarakhand. [34] The criminal recklessness of Modi's behaviour is magnified when we factor in the unprecedented prolongation of the Bengal elections to eight phases by the Election Commission, acting under Modi's instructions, as most supposedly independent institutions now do. In fact, the Kumbh Mela was not even due until 2022, but was advanced to 2021 because of some astrological configuration; the BJP chief minister allowed devotees to crowd together without masks or physical distancing in the belief that the 'flow and blessings of Ma Ganga [Mother Ganges] will ensure coronavirus doesn't spread.' [35] The previous chief minister had been removed when he suggested subjecting the Kumbh Mela to restrictions in view of the Covid surge, illustrating the tendency whereby all power in the BJP is now concentrated in the PM; only those who fit in with his agenda can survive. The

government at the centre and in BJP-ruled states is now synonymous with Modi.

If we go back a little further, we can detect two massive mistakes that have led to the current holocaust. One, which has become very obvious now, is the failure to ramp up oxygen supplies. The need for doing this was flagged as long ago as April 1, 2020, in a meeting of government officials. [36] Yet nothing was done until October 21, when the Central Medical Services Society (CMSS), an institution under the central Health Ministry, floated tenders for 150 (later raised to 162) Pressure Swing Adsorption (PSA) oxygen plants for district hospitals across the country; six months later, only 33 of them had been installed, and only 5 were functioning. All 162 plants cost only Rs 2,015,800. [37] Meanwhile, inexplicably, India exported twice as much oxygen in the first ten months of fiscal 2020-2021 as it did in the entire previous financial year. [38] If ten times the number of PSA plants had been ordered in April 2020 and the CMSS had ensured they were installed and functioning by April 2021, if oxygen had been stockpiled instead of being exported, and if oxygen distribution had been streamlined, we would not be seeing the thousands of deaths per day that doctors tell us are entirely preventable.

Vaccines too save lives and cut transmission of the disease. It is not true that India produces 60 percent of the world's vaccines (it only supplies 60 percent of UNICEF's vaccines), but it is home to the world's largest vaccine manufacturer, the Serum Institute of India (SII), which is one of the few which already had influenza vaccine-producing capacity which could easily be switched to producing Covid-19 vaccines. [39] It was



therefore welcome news when SII CEO Adar Poonawalla announced in late December 2020 that he had already produced and stockpiled 40-50 million doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, called Covishield in India, which had completed its Phase 3 trials in other countries. He expected to expand production to 100 million doses per month in March 2021 and 300 million doses per month by July. While SII had an agreement to supply 200 million doses to COVAX, to be distributed to other developing countries, most of the rest would be made available in India, especially the initial batch. [40]

One would have expected the government to start Phase 1 of the vaccination drive (for healthcare and hospital workers) at the beginning of January, but it started only on the 16th and even then very slowly. The reason for the delay seems to have been that the government wanted a simultaneous roll-out of Covaxin, indigenously developed by Bharat Biotech with funding from the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), without waiting for it to complete its Phase 3 trials; health professionals who objected were told that if they were allotted Covaxin, they had to take it or not be vaccinated at all. [41] Even more reprehensible is the fact that unlike other countries, which provided advance funding to vaccine producers and tied up huge orders, the Indian government contributed nothing to the development or production of Covishield, and ordered only 11 million doses initially, along with 5.5 million doses of Covaxin, which is also a 2-dose vaccine. [42] By February, it ordered 10 million more doses of Covishield, still at the price of Rs 150 per dose which, according to Poonawalla, provided a small profit but not enough to reinvest in expanding production. When the government banned exports, he lost the income he had been counting on to increase production. In April he borrowed Rs 30 billion from banks, after which the Centre said it had authorised a loan of the same amount to SII and Rs 15 billion to Bharat Biotech to enable them to ramp up supplies; but due to the delay, 100 million doses per month would only be available after July, he said. [43]

This is surely a monumental botch-up. Despite being home to the manufacturer of one of the cheapest Covid-19 vaccines in the world, the government of India did not invest in expanding production or securing vaccine supplies in advance of the second wave. Modi, who has been acclaimed by his supporters for being business-friendly, doesn't seem to understand that businesses need investments and markets. The Centre placed an order for 110 million additional doses of Covishield in March, when cases were rising exponentially, but by April, vaccination centres were closing and people above 45 years were being turned away because vaccines had run out. In the midst of the vaccine crunch and knowing very well that it had pre-ordered the existing supply, the Centre announced that from May 1, 18-44-year-olds could get vaccinated, and while 50 percent of domestic vaccine production would go to the Centre, 50 percent would be sold to state governments at Rs 400 per dose for Covishield (later reduced to Rs 300), and Rs 600 per dose to private hospitals, with higher prices for Covaxin.

This announcement was received with widespread criticism because it would result in states and private buyers competing with each other to buy 50 percent of the vaccines. The price differential between the Centre and the states is certainly unjustifiable, but a deeper problem with the whole vaccination drive has received less attention. The requirement for registration and the mode of registration - you need to have a computer or smart phone with access to the internet, and it's a complicated process - makes it inaccessible to the poor. The vast majority of people queuing up to get vaccinated (except for hospital workers like cleaners) appear to be from the upper and middle classes, and this impression is confirmed by an India Today report by Preeti Choudhary, in which she found that not a single person in a Delhi slum had been vaccinated. The same is undoubtedly true for other slum-dwellers as well as villagers; the approximately 10 percent of the population which has received one dose of vaccine and 2 percent who have received two doses excludes the

poor. Given the grossly unfair roll-out of the vaccination drive so far, it could actually be an improvement if state governments begin schemes to take (free) vaccines to slums and villages while employers pay for their employees (and in some cases their families too) to get vaccinated. [44]

None of this was necessary. If the Centre had placed a massive order with SII at the beginning of January and paid enough in advance to enable the company to expand production, there would have been millions of doses more available for the over-45s by March; but you can't scale up production overnight - you need to construct or convert specialised bio-safety level 3 (BSL3) facilities, buy Covid vaccine-manufacturing equipment and raw materials, recruit and train additional workers and pay them decent salaries. Since the government had complete confidence in the safety and efficacy of Covaxin, it could have done the same with Bharat Biotech, and in addition licensed public sector pharmaceutical units like the Haffkine Institute to produce it, as it has now started doing, since the ICMR is a government institution. It would then not have been left scrambling to buy more expensive vaccines at a time when vaccines are in short supply globally, and would eventually have had enough vaccines to supply to other developing countries.

## Was he sleeping?

Instead of saving humanity from a disaster by containing Covid, India now threatens humanity with disaster by becoming a breeding-ground of lethal new strains of the virus, and more and more countries are understandably closing their borders to us. Modi's slogan of *aatmanirbhar* (self-reliance) has quietly been buried as India becomes a recipient of aid from all over the world, including much poorer developing countries. How did this happen? Was he sleeping?

On the contrary, he has been extremely busy implementing his core agenda of converting India into a Hindu Rashtra with himself as absolute ruler. Modi belongs to the

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), to which the BJP and thousands of other organisations are affiliated, forming what is known as the Sangh Parivar (Sangh family). Its ideology is Hindutva (not to be confused with the religion Hinduism), and goal is to convert India into a Hindu Rashtra, whose characteristics we will explore below. Modi has worked tirelessly to crown himself as the head of it. Early in the pandemic, he hosted Trump at a super-spreader event designed to promote Modi's image in India. Before Trump left India, members of the Sangh Parivar organised an anti-Muslim pogrom in Delhi facilitated by the Delhi police, which is controlled by the Centre. [45] No one was punished for those killings. Hindu Rashtra is a country in which Muslims can be murdered with impunity.

In April and May 2020, peaceful protesters against the Citizenship Amendment Act, which discriminates against Muslims and ignited fears that Muslims would be deprived of their citizenship and voting rights, were arrested and jailed under a draconian anti-terror law. The accused included Safoora Zargar, a student of Jamia Millia Islamia University who was pregnant at the time, and Kalita Devangana and Natasha Narwal of Jawaharlal Nehru University, both activists of Pinjra Tod (Break the Cage), a women's rights group. [46] These young women were among many more framed and jailed for defending the Indian Constitution, which prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion.

Among others arrested by the anti-terrorist National Investigation Agency (NIA) in this period and incarcerated in Covid-infested prisons were Dalit scholar and public intellectual Anand Teltumbde and civil rights activist Gautam Navlakha (arrested April 14); Delhi University associate professor and anti-caste crusader Hany Babu M.T. (arrested July 28); and 83-year-old Stan Swamy, a Jesuit priest and tribal rights activist who suffers from multiple ailments including Parkinson's disease (arrested October 8). They joined labour lawyer Sudha Bharadwaj, English professor Shoma Sen, writer and Dalit rights activist Sudhir Dhawale, advocates Surendra Gadling

and Vernon Gonsalves, social activist and researcher Mahesh Raut, journalist Arun Ferreira, political prisoners' rights activist Rona Wilson, and writer Varavara Rao, all accused in the same case. [47] In February 2021, the Washington Post reported that American digital forensics company Arsenal Consulting, which had examined cloned copies of Rona Wilson's hard disk and thumb drive, concluded that the letters used as key evidence to implicate him and the rest of the accused were in files planted using malware, and had not even been opened by him. Yet the NIA opposed bail and continued to pursue the cases against them. [48] Evidently human and democratic rights must be stamped out in Hindu Rashtra, and the rule of law will not be allowed to get in the way of that process.

During this period, most BJP-ruled states passed love jihad laws which criminalise not just love and marriage but even friendship between Muslim men or boys and Hindu women or girls; the men and boys, if convicted, would be put behind bars, while the women or girls would be delivered into the custody of their parents or state-run homes. [49] While the intention to persecute Muslims is obvious, these laws also show that love and friendship as well as women's agency have to be stamped out in Hindu Rashtra. So do science and rationality. The BJP's assault on these values continued over 2020-2021, and had a direct impact on the response to Covid-19, with BJP leaders proclaiming that cow urine, cow dung and yoga could ward off the virus. [50] We saw above that the waters of the Ganges too were supposed to have that property. How can we fight Covid-19 if that is what India's leaders believe?

On September 22, 2020, three new labour codes were passed in parliament by voice vote after just three hours of discussion. All of them took away existing rights from workers. A code on wages had already been passed in 2019. The central trade unions burned copies of the four codes on April 1, 2021 - the day when they were scheduled to come into effect - and demanded their withdrawal. [51] They were perhaps taking a leaf out of the book of

millions of farmers protesting against three farm laws, also passed in September 2020 in similar circumstances, and demanding their repeal. The farmers argued that the laws would ruin 85 percent of farmers, deprive many of them of their land, and benefit only billionaires Mukesh Ambani and Gautam Adani, both close to Modi, who were planning to go into agribusiness. [52] After months of intimidation and demonisation failed to disperse the farmers, the government barricaded the roads leading into Delhi with barbed wire, boulders, walls, and iron nails embedded in concrete to keep them - the people who grow the food we eat every day - out of the capital city of their own country! [53]

A major obstacle to realising Hindu Rashtra is the existence of states ruled by opposition parties; removing this obstacle has been an obsession of Modi and his right-hand man, Home Minister Amit Shah. One way of doing this was visible to all during the recent elections: numerous election rallies with high-pitched speeches full of bigotry and misogyny. Voters are bribed with promises: in recent elections, voters in Bihar and Bengal were told they would get Covid vaccines free if the BJP comes to power, implying that if the BJP loses they would be left to die. The BJP did come to power in Bihar amidst allegations of vote-rigging but Biharis are still dying in their thousands, showing how empty these promises are.

Less visible are the machinations before, after and between elections. One is bribing or blackmailing opposition legislators to resign. The Congress government of Madhya Pradesh was brought down in March 2020 when 22 Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) resigned, and the Congress-Dravida Munetra Kazhagam (DMK) government in Puducherry was brought down in February 2021 when 6 MLAs resigned. Often opposition representatives are bribed before elections, or, if they refuse to be bought, the Centre uses tools like the Income-Tax and Anti-Corruption authorities to harass them and their relatives. In the run-up to the Bengal elections, the BJP bought up dozens of

MLAs from the Trinamool Congress (TMC) and other parties, but still lost the election. In Maharashtra, the BJP tried to topple the Maha Vikas Aghadi government after a policeman, who had been implicated in a supposed terror plot against Mukesh Ambani and the subsequent murder of his accomplice, made allegations of corruption against the state Home Minister; they forced him to resign just as the second Covid wave hit Maharashtra. The efforts to pull down the government are still ongoing, despite the fact that the Supreme Court has commended the way that Maharashtra has handled the Covid crisis. The BJP's priorities are clear.

Among countless photo-ops and homilies that keep Modi's face and voice constantly before the public, two events stand out. On August 5, 2020, he laid the foundation stone for a grand Ram temple in Ayodhya. It is to be built on the site of the Babri Mosque, which was demolished on December 6, 1992, as part of a bloody anti-Muslim campaign in which Modi took part, and can be considered to be the heart of Hindu Rashtra. Then on December 10, 2020, Modi laid the foundation stone of the Central Vista Project in central Delhi, a vanity project which costs Rs 200,000,000,000 and includes a new palace for Modi. Work on the project has been classified as an 'essential service,' and continues even under lockdown. Ordinary citizens have made back-of-the-envelope calculations of how many hospitals, oxygen concentrators, oxygen cylinders, vaccines, Covid-19 tests, etc. could be produced or bought with this money, [54] but Modi's priority is to concentrate power in his hands, not save lives. Concentration of power also entails censoring criticism that dents his image [55] and lying relentlessly about how everything is fine and there are no shortages of oxygen or vaccines, even as courageous reporters bring us stories of Covid deaths in every family in rural UP, and dead bodies being dumped in rivers in UP and Bihar as they run out of wood for pyres.

These activities of the Modi regime over the past 15 months make it clear that in order to fight against Covid, we have to fight the regime at every level.

We need to know exactly what is happening and where, but the regime covers up this information. We need science and rationality, but the regime actively undermines these values. We need money to be spent on life-saving oxygen, vaccines, etc., but instead the regime is spending stupendous sums of money on expanding and consolidating power. Above all we need humanity, but the regime has none.

## What can we do?

An effective fight against Covid-19 depends on our recognising that India is in an undeclared civil war between a Hindutva dictatorship and a secular democratic republic, and that the Hindutva dictatorship, currently in power at the Centre and in several states, has neither the will nor the competence to defeat the virus.

Dr Anthony Fauci has recommended a national lockdown and the Congress Party has echoed him. With all due respect, I beg to disagree. Even the local lockdowns in Mumbai and Delhi sent migrant workers fleeing these cities; if they were not infected with Covid already, there was a good chance they would pick it up in crowded trains and buses and carry it to their villages. In any case, what does physical distancing mean in slums where a three-generation family or eight migrant workers live in one small room, and 300 people share a toilet and water-tap? For these people as well as the rural population, the only hope lies in getting vaccinated, but this is precisely what they are being deprived of.

It is certainly necessary to demand transparency from the Centre regarding how many vaccine doses they have acquired and how they are being distributed, since the Centre is still supposed to be supplying free vaccines to the over-45s. The letter by 12 opposition parties to the PM proposing that the Centre divert money from the Central Vista Project and Modi's opaque PMCare fund to procure enough vaccines for a free, universal vaccine campaign, oxygen and other medical supplies, as well as funding welfare measures and repealing the farm laws, makes

excellent demands. [56] Unfortunately, Modi is not likely to take this advice, so the states need to take action too. One possibility is for opposition-ruled states to form a consortium and negotiate directly with Poonawalla, requesting that the price of vaccines for state governments, which are much poorer than the Centre, should not be higher. They could also ask him what is required for SII to expand production to 300 million doses per month by July, as he was originally intending? After all, at that level, SII could produce 1.8 billion doses in six months, enough to provide an additional 90 million Indians with two doses. If he says that a certain amount of investment is required, they could look for financing. They could do the same with Bharat Biotech's Krishna Ella. This would be cheaper than individual states floating global tenders. As and when other vaccines become available, they could add them to speed up the vaccination drive.

Ensuring that the vaccines reach slums and villages is also a priority. For vaccines supplied by the Centre, this would require a tech-savvy task force to go out and help these people to get registered, tell them where to go, and ensure that vaccines are available when they turn up at the designated centres. This would have to be done across the country, including BJP-ruled states. For vaccines supplied by the states, more flexible arrangements could be made, setting up vaccination centres close to where people live.

Foreign medical aid is welcome, but countries sending it through the government should be aware that there is absolutely no transparency about how it is being distributed, and it is not reaching those who need it most, who continue to die in their thousands every day. [57] The only information given to us by the Health Ministry is that the aid has been sent to 38 elite institutions and hospitals run by the central government, in which no shortages of oxygen or other medical supplies has been reported. A targeted approach would be much more effective, but efforts by foreign donors to send aid directly to non-profits working on the ground have been sabotaged by the Modi regime's amendment to the Foreign

Contribution Regulation Act in September 2020, at the height of the first surge, which ensures that “The organizations best placed to respond to community needs at the grass roots in a timely, agile manner are unable to access these donors.” [58] In other words, Modi is blocking life-saving foreign aid in order to consolidate his vice-like grip on power. Providing funds to vaccine producers in India to scale up production rapidly, in return for a commitment that they will provide vaccines at cost price to the central and state governments in India as well as COVAX for at least a year, would be of major importance. It would create a win-win situation,

helping to end the Covid surge in India and other developing countries while allowing the companies to sell at a profit later.

The international press and human rights organisations are on the whole clear about the nature of the Modi regime, but Western governments seem to be treating it as a democratic counterweight to Xi Jinping’s China! This makes no sense. Xi is erasing all traces of Muslims in China, and Modi is doing the same in India; Xi supports the genocidal Myanmar military, and so does Modi; Xi unleashed Covid-19 on the world by victimising doctors who warned of it, and Modi is

spreading the virus. Modi is as brutal as Xi, and treating him as an ally will simply help him to crush the remaining vestiges of democracy in India and continue his disastrous Covid policy.

Despite the ghastly situation in India, there are still brave journalists risking their lives to bring us the truth about what is happening across the country, and humane people putting their own lives on hold in order to save the lives of others. Truth, courage, humanity: that is what we need to get us out of this crisis.

Source *New Politics*.

# The Palestinian Catastrophe

21 May 2021, by **Roland Rance**

On 15 May 1948, the State of Israel was established on the ruins of Palestine. For Israeli Jews, the date is a celebration, marked annually as Independence Day. For Palestinians, the date symbolises the Nakba, or Catastrophe.

The Nakba was not a single-day event, but a process lasting most of 1947-9, the culmination of almost 70 years of Zionist settler colonialism in Palestine. A region which had been one of the economic, intellectual, cultural, and political centres of the Arab world was wrested away from its people, who became either refugees from their homeland or third-class citizens living under conditions of military rule.

From the beginning of the Zionist project, in the early 1880s, Jewish settlers, mainly from Eastern Europe, had moved to Palestine. These Zionist settlers represented a small fraction – about 1% – of the hundreds of thousands of Jews who fled the harsh repression and antisemitism of the dying Tsarist regime; most refugees preferred to seek safety in the United States, Britain, and other Western capitalist states.

Of those who reached Palestine, more

than half left within a few years. Although some who remained tried to live harmoniously with the indigenous Palestinian population of the region, most sought to displace and replace Palestinians and to establish their own society in the area. There were clashes over land and dispossession as far back as the 1880s, long before the 1917 Balfour Declaration and even before the formal establishment of the World Zionist Organisation in 1897.

As a result of the wars of 1947-9 and the establishment of the Israeli state on the ruins of Palestine, some 750,000 Palestinians were forced into exile from their homes and land. This was accompanied by scores of massacres. In the best-known of these, more than 100 Palestinians were slaughtered in the village of Deir Yassin on the outskirts of Jerusalem. [59] This act was carried out by armed militias of the Zionist right, though most of the lesser-known massacres were the work of militias of the ruling ‘Labour Zionist’ groups.

In Lydda, forces under the command of Yitzhak Rabin (later to become prime minister of Israel) killed at least 500 Palestinians; scores of these were

murdered while seeking shelter in the mosque. In the border village of Hula (now in Lebanon), about 60 men were murdered, and the women and children expelled. The company commander, Shmuel Lahis, was later convicted by an Israeli court of a war crime for this, and sentenced to seven years imprisonment. On appeal, his sentence was reduced to one year, and he then received a presidential amnesty. In 1979, Lahis was appointed director-general of the Jewish Agency, the executive body of the World Zionist Organisation.

In Dawayma, near Hebron, an unknown number – certainly several score – were shot as they took refuge in a cave. Although Israeli diplomat Abba Eban (and subsequently foreign minister) claimed in the UN that there was no such village, researchers later unearthed mass graves in the cave. Similar stories were reported the length and breadth of Palestine.

About 150,000 remained in the Israeli state, where they lived as second-class citizens under military rule until 1966. Many of them were designated by Israel as ‘present absentees’, and had their homes and lands expropriated by



the state. At least 400 villages (some estimates go as high as nearly 700) were destroyed, and their land given to settlers. [60] This was acknowledged by the Israeli state.

In 1969, speaking to students in Haifa, then-Defence Minister Moshe Dayan said, 'Jewish villages arose in place of Arab villages. You don't even know the names of these villages and I'm not reproaching you for that, as those geography books no longer exist. Not only do the books no longer exist but the villages don't exist anymore either... Not one place in this country was built where there hadn't formerly been an Arab population.' [61]

## An unfinished process

Palestinian citizens of Israel face both official and unofficial discrimination. Palestinian human rights organisation Adalah has compiled a database of scores of Israeli laws which discriminate, either directly or indirectly, against Palestinian citizens. These include the Law of Return, the Citizenship Law, the Jewish National Fund Law, the Absentees' Property Law, and the Land Law, whose combined effect means that 93% of the land area in the state of Israel is officially designated as for Jews only.

Massacres continued after the establishment of the Israeli state. The notorious Unit 101 of the Israeli army, led by Ariel Sharon (later to become prime minister of Israel), killed over 2,000 Palestinians and Egyptians in cross-border raids between 1949 and 1956. During Israel's military occupation of the Gaza Strip following the 1956 Suez War, several hundred were killed in massacres in Khan Yunis and Rafah. And in a particularly notorious crime, 48 Palestinian citizens of Israel were murdered in 1956 for breaking a curfew in their village of Kafr Qasim - a curfew imposed while they were away farming their fields.

In the last case, the perpetrators were convicted and received prison sentences; but on their release, one was appointed head of security at

Israel's nuclear reactor in Dimona, and another was appointed 'head of Arab affairs' by the ethnically-cleansed city of Ramle.

The occupation in 1967 of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, and (until 1982) Sinai saw Israel apply the same settlement and land-grab processes, under the cover of military rule. Today, there are at least 750,000 Israelis living in about 250 illegal settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. They have expropriated nearly half the land area, and are governed by Israeli civil law, while the three million Palestinians live under military law. In Gaza, over two million Palestinians live in an area smaller than Rutland.

When the British Army occupied Jerusalem in 1917, the population was just 50,000. By the time of the partition of the city, and of Palestine, in 1948 this had risen to 150,000, and when Israel occupied East Jerusalem in 1967 and claimed to have 'reunified' the city, the population was about 250,000. Today, the population is close to one million.

The whole period has been marked by the steady growth of the Jewish population, and the theft of Palestinian property. Many areas in West Jerusalem are still known to locals by their former Arabic names, and the efforts of the municipality to impose nationalist Hebrew names has been largely unsuccessful. Some of the most desirable homes in West Jerusalem are stolen Palestinian property; indeed, the term 'Arab house' has become a selling-point for luxury estate-agents.

Palestinians in East Jerusalem have seen the process by which the west of the city - from which many of them are refugees - has been transformed over the past 70 years into a mono-ethnic area, and fear the same is gradually happening in the east too.

## Sheikh Jarrah

Following the 1967 occupation, Israel built several new quarters and satellite towns, designed to increase the Jewish population and to cut off East Jerusalem from the rest of the

Palestinian community. Until recently, this has usually involved the theft of land and denial of building rights to Palestinians, rather than direct expulsions. But what is happening today in Sheikh Jarrah represents an intensification of Zionist colonisation.

Palestinians are being evicted from homes that their families have lived in for decades, sometimes with the excuse that before 1948 these belonged to Jewish families. Many of these Palestinians still have the deeds to properties stolen in 1948, but the law does not permit them to reclaim these and evict the Israelis now living there.

Palestinians are well aware that the Israeli state is built on the ruins of their land and homes. They know that the 'Independence Parks' in both Jerusalem and Tel Aviv are laid out over destroyed Muslim cemeteries; that Tel Aviv University is built on the ruins of the village of Sheikh Muwanis and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on the ruins of Sheikh Badr; that even Israel's Knesset is built on stolen land, for which a Palestinian still holds the deeds.

The Nakba took place during 1947-9, but its roots go back more than 50 years before, and the process continues today, nearly 75 years later. Any attempt to resolve the Palestine conflict without recognising and redressing nearly a century and a half of Palestinian dispossession will be justly doomed to failure. The right of the Palestinian people to return, to compensation, and to restitution is not negotiable.

That is why one of the triple demands of the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement is 'respecting, protecting, and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN Resolution 194'.

While demonstrating against the latest Israeli atrocities, and demanding an end to the bombing of Gaza and the beating of worshippers at Al-Aqsa, we must place these latest outrages in the context of an ongoing Nakba.

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

# Chilean elections - Debacle for the regime's parties

20 May 2021, by **Dave Kellaway, Franck Gaudichaud**

Elections this Sunday in Chile brought big upsets:

- the debacle of the traditional parties,
- the "night of the long knives" within the right-wing,
- the beginning of the end for the heirs of Pinochet,
- a huge defeat for President Sebastián Piñera - which he acknowledged himself-
- the victory of the popular movement...

Since yesterday afternoon, the Chilean press began to multiply the superlatives to describe the political earthquake that has just shaken the Andes, from the Atacama Desert to the cold lands of the Magallanes region. Chileans were called to the polls on Saturday 15 and Sunday 16 May for four simultaneous elections: to re-elect mayors, councillors, and regional governors and to elect a Constitutional Convention to draft a new Constitution for the Republic.

No one, least of all the pollsters, had foreseen such an upheaval, even though the isolation of the government was evident and the rejection of the political "caste" had been strong for years. Despite the power of the popular revolt of October 2019 and its impact on the entire institutional landscape, people were rather cautious about possible transformations resulting from these elections.

Attention was particularly focused on the elections to the Constitutional Convention; a hotly contested election that sought to put an end to the neoliberal Magna Carta promulgated 41 years ago during the Pinochet dictatorship. There were many

obstacles put in the way of the popular movement of opposition to the regime:

- The nature of the electoral system for these elections,
- the unity of the right and the extreme right under a single banner (that of "Chile Vamos"),
- the pact signed within Parliament to ensure that the future Constitution would be validated by a qualified two-thirds majority,
- the financial and media dominance of the main parties that have governed the country for the last thirty years,
- the difficulties encountered by militants of the social movement to achieve legal candidacies,
- the great fragmentation of the camp of independents and the hesitations of the left,
- the pandemic and the economic crisis.

## The results have profoundly changed the situation

First, with regard to the Constitutional Convention, the right-wing coalition had to swallow its arrogance. Its leaders seemed confident that they would win at least a third of the seats (52 out of 155), thus securing a blocking minority and a right of veto over all articles of the future Constitution. They failed. With just over 23% of the vote, "Chile Vamos" will have to settle for 37 seats. It is also punishment and a humiliation for the President, Piñera, who has been responsible for the crisis his country

has been experiencing for months.

Another surprise is that the balance of power within the left-wing opposition has been largely reversed. The list that brought together the Communist Party and the Frente Amplio (Broad Front), which emerged strengthened from the movements of the 2010s, triumphed with 28 seats (18% of the votes cast). On the other hand, the social-liberal parties of the former Concertación, which governed from 1990 to 2010 without questioning the economic legacy of the dictatorship, won only 25 seats. 15 are for the Socialist Party and only 2 for the Christian Democracy.

However, the left and centre-left will only represent a third of the assembly. The real surprise was the magnitude of the vote in favour of the "independents", who won a total of 48 seats, definitively marking the massive rejection of political parties. This is a very heterogeneous group of candidates, which also includes notorious conservatives. But a majority is critical of the authoritarian and neoliberal legacy of the last decades. This is generally the case with the candidates of the "People's List", which brought together representatives of social movements and organised civil society. With 24 seats, it brought figures from the October revolt, such as "Aunt Pikachu" and several leaders of the feminist movement to the Constituent Assembly. Alondra Carillo, leader of the Coordinadora Feminista 8 de Marzo, was also elected on a list made up of independents and social movements. Moreover, in these elections, women obtained much better results than men, and indeed some of them even had to give up their seats in the name of respecting parity within the Constitutional Convention...

Thus, if the right-wing loses the right of veto it had hoped for, alliances between representatives of the social and political left could make it possible to win two-thirds of the assembly and begin - at last - to deconstruct Chilean neoliberalism.

The anger was also expressed at the ballot box in the municipal and regional governors' elections, the results of which will have to be analysed in more detail. [62] Jorge Sharp (anti-neoliberal left) was comfortably re-elected in Valparaíso, as was Daniel Jadue, the communist mayor of the municipality of Recoleta in the metropolitan region (with more than 64% of the votes cast). Very popular, Jadue is a declared candidate for the presidential elections to be held in six months' time. This is enough to make the right-wing and the social liberals tremble a little more. In Santiago, Ms. Irací Hassler, a thirty-year-old feminist and communist activist won against right-winger. Felipe Alessandri, who became notorious for his misogynist and anti-communist statements during the campaign. At the governor level, the victory of Rodrigo Mundaca in Valparaíso, an environmental activist and defender of water as a common good, was celebrated with euphoria and joy by many activists from social and environmental organisations.

## What kind of Chile should be built to finally bury the dictatorship?

The crisis of representation and legitimacy of the parties and the institutional system is not only reflected in the vote. Abstention was also historically high with 61.4% of the electorate! This was even more so in the popular municipalities, in places exceeding more than 65%, sometimes even 70%. Thus, a majority of citizens did not feel engaged by this political event. Some of those who mobilised in October 2019 called on people to boycott the "electoral circus" in order to continue fighting in the streets. For the most part, Chileans continue to show their indifference or mistrust

towards those "at the top", be they from the right or the left, from the parties or even independents.

While the Constitutional Convention is due to sit for 9 to 12 months, the November presidential elections will once again raise the question: what kind of Chile should be built to completely break with the dictatorship?

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Here are some additional points made by Francisco Salinas, the co-editor of the Social Theory Notebooks of the Laboratory of Social Transformations at the Diego Portales University. His whole article is here on [Labour Hub](#).

These results represent an overwhelming victory for the ideas of change that have been underway in social mobilisations for over 15 years. These had their high point during the mass struggles starting from 18 October 2019. Some people gave us up for dead, that we were not representative, that we were polarising. But the truth is that we were constructing and articulating a social force that knows that changes have to be made, but that was still not a majority.

Today we are all contributing to finding each other and constructing a majority that expresses the diversity of political and social organisation in a convention that will enable us to open a new cycle in Chile. It will enable us to twist and shift the neoliberal paradigm in Chile. And the first challenge that we will have is to assure conditions for the active participation of citizens.

(...) This election made official the representation of indigenous groups in the writing of the new constitution. There were 17 protected seats for these people, many of whom are campaigning for the return of their lands and the recognition of the country as multinational. The person with the most votes in this group was Machi Francisca Linconao, a Mapuche spiritual leader who was unjustly charged and linked to acts of murder and terrorism. Probably, as a symbolic reparation and a symbol of a new Chile, some even think of her as a

good candidate to chair the assembly.

(...) Overall, plurality and a desire for social justice are a mark of this newly elected body. Constanza Schönhaut, elected representative for the constituent assembly from left-wing party Convergencia Social (Social Convergence) expressed the following when I asked her to give her insights about the election for this report:

We are confident that this constituent process has to face the people; it has to include all the voices that have been excluded during the last 30 to 40 years. It has to be done together with the feminists, with the ecologists, with the different unions, with the councils, and different territorial organisations. And that is where we will be: because we need a constituent assembly that is open and a new Constitution that becomes a useful tool to achieve social justice.

Jennifer Pérez, elected representative for the left-wing party Igualdad (Equality) for the Town Council of Independencia, a middle and low-income borough in Santiago, told me the following:

We are very happy that the outcome of the organisation surrounding the constituent, sovereign, and popular movement of the borough of Independencia was being able to give birth to a people's councillor. It has been hard work that has its roots in the neighbourhoods, from the borough's slumps, and has been able to genuinely represent the diversity in the territory.

We think that today we can already make some important analyses of the elections and I can guarantee that in other territories that was the perfect recipe: organising collective spaces that have the potential to transcend the institutions. Those were the projects that won, without a doubt. So, this will be a big challenge and

a process that will provide us with great lessons. The people always respond when the work is genuine

and is transparent to them.

17 May 2021

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

# Progressives Break with Biden Over His Uncritical Support for Israel

19 May 2021, by **Dan La Botz**

Democratic congressional representatives and progressive NGOs have strongly criticized the Biden administration for its failure to recognize the Palestinians' rights and to express sympathy with their situation. For the first time, the Democrats face a small but determined group within the party who demand a break from unconditional support for Israel and support for Palestinian rights.

Joseph Biden is following a long-established pattern of virtually uncritical U.S. support for Israel, but today that position is being challenged. Palestinian Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib, speaking in Congress declared, "To read the statements from President Biden, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, General Lloyd Austin and leaders of both parties, you would hardly know Palestinians existed at all." She went on, "There has been no recognition of the attack on Palestinian families being ripped from their homes right now. No mention of children being detained or murdered. No recognition of a sustained campaign of harassment and terror by Israeli police against worshippers kneeling down and praying and celebrating the holiest days in one of their holiest places, no mention of Al-Aqsa being surrounded by violence,

tear gas, smoke, while people pray."

Tlaib added: "If our own State Department can't even bring itself to acknowledge the killing of Palestinian children is wrong, well, I will say it for the millions of Americans who stand with me against the killing of innocent children, no matter their ethnicity, or faith," she added.

Twenty-five House Democrats signed a letter calling on Blinken to condemn the threatened evictions of Palestinians from homes in Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood living on land claimed by Jewish nationalists, one of the issues that has sparked the recent violence in Palestine/Israel. Congresswoman Marie Newman, an author of the letter, stated, "Palestinian families have every right to live safely in their homes. That's why I've led my colleagues in a letter calling on the State Department to immediately condemn these heinous actions by the Israeli government against Palestinian families in East Jerusalem. America must defend human rights everywhere."

Representative Betty McCollum has introduced a bill in the House that says that Israel may not use U.S. taxpayer funding for actions that violate the rights of Palestinians. "U.S.

assistance intended for Israel's security should foster peace and must never be used to violate the human rights of children, demolish the homes of Palestinian families, or to permanently annex Palestinian lands."

Senator Bernie Sanders wrote in a New York Times opinion piece, "...Israel remains the one sovereign authority in the land of Israel and Palestine, and rather than preparing for peace and justice, it has been entrenching its unequal and undemocratic control....Over more than a decade of his right-wing rule in Israel, Mr. Netanyahu has cultivated an increasingly intolerant and authoritarian type of racist nationalism....In the Middle East, where we provide nearly \$4 billion a year in aid to Israel, we can no longer be apologists for the right-wing Netanyahu government and its undemocratic and racist behavior."

In addition to the politicians, 150 NGOs that deal with foreign policy but also with immigration, the environment, racism, and many other issues have also called upon Biden to change his position. The Democratic Socialists of America and other U.S. left groups have long been supporters of Palestinian rights.

Source [New Politics](#).

## An urgent appeal to raise voices for the



# safety of political activist, human rights defender Shah Nawaz Ali Sher

18 May 2021, by **Nisar Shah**

Jammu Kashmir Awami Workers Party (JKAWP) central organizer Comrade Shah Nawaz Ali Sher was arrested in the Nakyal district of Pakistani-occupied Azad Kashmir on 17 May 2021. He was picked up by police outside court premises where he had gone to apply for pre-arrest bail. The local police had registered a First Information Report (FIR) against him in compliance with an application from assistant commissioner Nakyal Muhammad Umer Farooq on false charges of inciting hatred among the masses.

A police case registered against him on 5 May alleged that he has discredited the work of the administration and interfered in their job through social media and political campaigning against them.

The comrade arrested, Shahnawas Sher, is a young advocate and social media activist who speaks out unceasingly against malpractice by the local administration and injustice to the ordinary public and working class. Shahnawas has been critical of the policies of Pakistani establishment and intelligence agencies in ruling Azad Kashmir as its colony. He has defended the rights of indigenous people and advocated for a free and independent Jammu Kashmir in solidarity and support from international working class and peoples movement.

After the registration of the FIR, police raided his home and tried to arrest him, the police also harassed his family members for his arrest. He

successfully managed to save himself from arrest during the Eid holidays with the help of local JKAWP comrades. The state wanted to arrest and torture him during the holiday period as local courts were closed and no one could approach the court. This is normal practice in Pakistani-controlled Jammu Kashmir to detain the people before they can approach the court. This practice is totally against the fundamental human rights of the arrested person and the existing judicial system.

On 17 May, he was on the way to the local court for pre-arrest bail but before he could reach the court, was arrested on the premises, which is against the norms of the justice system and the same treatment as given to heinous criminals. His right to pre arrest bail and safely to defend himself was forcefully snatched. He is now being tortured, pressurized and harassed in police custody according to the reports.

Comrade Shah Nawaz Ali Sher is one of the main leaders of JKAWP. We strongly condemn the false and fabricated charges against him by state. JKAWP is proud of his revolutionary struggle for the rights of oppressed people and the working class.

The Jammu Kashmir Awami Workers Party strongly believes that the unity of local and international working class is the only way to fight against injustice of brutal capitalist state structure and system.

Comrade Shah Nawaz Ali Sher has been part of the international struggle for the emancipation of the working class. He has participated in international global justice school Manila organized by International Institute for research and education (IIRE).

We need your support and solidarity for the release and safety of our comrade, international unity and solidarity is the only way to restrain Pakistan and its colonial administration from their brutality and oppression.

18 May 2021

**Please write to:**

1. Prime Minister Secretariat Azad Jammu and Kashmir Muzaffarabad, 2 Kashmir House Islamabad. +92(582)-2921302. pm@pmajk.gov.pk.

2. Chief Secretary AJK +92(582)-2921034 E-mail csajk@gmail.com

3. Inspector General Police Azad Kashmir +92(582)-2930812 E-mail info@ajk.gov.pak

Appeal By:

Nisar Shah Advocate,

Jammu Kashmir Awami Workers Party

E-mail jkashmirawp@gmail.com,

0092-3002147960

# Republicans Pass State Laws to Restrict Voting Rights: A Return to Jim Crow

16 May 2021, by **Dan La Botz**

Leading the charge are Republicans in Georgia, where two Democrats won the last Senate election, one the first black senator and the other the first Jew in the state's history, securing the Democrats control of the Senate. So far, Republicans have proposed 250 new laws in 43 states, most of which would limit early voting and mail ballots, but some would introduce stricter identification requirements or shorten voting hours. Other laws would give more power to partisan poll watchers. These restrictive laws have the greatest impact on black, urban, working class, and elderly voters.

All of this is crucial for the November 8, 2022 election in which all 435 House seats and a third of Senate seats are up for election. Democrats at present have a narrow majority of six votes in the House, 218 to 212, while the Senate is tied 50-50, with Democratic vice-president Kamala Harris having the deciding vote, though Senate votes usually require a 60-40 majority because of long-standing conservative rules.

Only 25 percent of voters say they're Republican, compared to 31 percent who identify as Democrats and 41 percent who consider themselves independents. Yet, Republicans have a

good chance of taking over the U.S. Congress in the mid-term elections. How is that?

First, Republicans can compensate for their low level of support by making it harder for others to vote, which is why we have the blizzard of new election laws.

Election authorities of both major parties around the country have demonstrated that there was no significant voter fraud. Trump and the Republicans have attributed the fraud primarily to early voting and mail ballots—both common practices in the United States—so their new legislation is aimed principally at restricting those.

Second, every ten years the United States conducts a census, after which representatives are reapportioned, with states whose population grew getting more representatives and states whose population stagnated or shrank getting fewer. In 2020, the states that gained seats, like Texas, Florida, Montana and North Carolina, were mostly Republican, while Democratic states like New York and California lost seats. So Republican are likely to win more House seats in the next Congress.

Third, also related to the census, following reapportionment, state governments redraw their electoral districts. In most states, that means that the ruling party redraws the districts in ways that will enhance its strength and diminish that of its rival, for example by cutting up a Democratic area into quarters and attaching each quarter to a larger Republican area.

The Democrats are filing court cases against the new state laws and writing a federal law to protect voter rights. Many companies such as Netflix, Amazon, Apple, Alphabet (Google), ViacomCBS, American Express and Home Depot have also condemned Georgia's new law.

The Atlanta, Georgia chapter of Democratic Socialists of America, which is actively involved in opposing the Republican assault on voting rights in that state, says that the new law: "...is indefensible; it restricts voting methods, adds complicated and inaccessible hoops, allows the state to intervene in county elections processes, and bans voters taking care of each other while waiting for hours in lines."

Source [New Politics](#).

# The women's revolution: what the coup means for gender equality in Myanmar

15 May 2021, by **Laura Villadiego**

"Men think they have special powers just for being men," Khin Ohmar, a women's rights activist in Myanmar,

tells Equal Times. "And they believe that walking underneath a piece of women's clothing will make them lose their special powers." The htamein are thus used as shields to protect the protest areas and prevent the military from entering.

From the very beginning, women have been at the forefront of protests against the coup that deposed Myanmar's civilian government led by the iconic Aung San Suu Kyi.

As Wah Khu Shee, director of the Karen Peace Support Network and a member of the Karen Women's Organisation, both linked to the Karen ethnic group, explains: "The first people to take to the streets, the ones leading the movement, were young women in Myanmar. They were the ones that first began organising it. More people joined in and now it has become a national movement."

According to [data provided to Radio Free Asia](#) by the local organisation Gender Equality Network, women make up some 60 per cent of the protesters who have taken to the streets and between 70 and 80 per cent of the movement's leaders. Many are nurses, teachers and textile factory workers, who already found themselves in a [vulnerable situation due to Covid-19](#).

Many of the women who have taken to the streets have given their lives to protect Myanmar's fragile democracy, says Wah Khu Shee. The first was 20-year-old [Mya Thwe Thwe Khine](#), who became a symbol for the movement after her death on 19 February. Then came Ma Kyal Sin, a 19-year-old killed in early March at a protest in Mandalay, in the north of the country, who became another symbol, along with the phrase written on her t-shirt that day: "Everything will be OK."

The military announced its takeover in early February after months of refusing to accept the results of the November 2020 elections, in which [Suu Kyi's party was victorious](#). Since then, at least 769 people have been killed by security forces and more than 3,738 have been arrested, charged or convicted, according to the [Assistance Association for Political Prisoners](#).

## Signs of a failed democracy

Last February's coup d'état is nothing new for the people of Myanmar. The Burmese military first seized power in 1962 and would tightly control the country for nearly five decades. In 1990, after changing the country's official name to Myanmar in an attempt to gain greater international recognition, the military government allowed for elections to be held. But when Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) opposition party emerged victorious, the junta annulled the election results and increased repression.

When the military government once again announced a path towards 'disciplined democracy' in 2003, the process was seen as another attempt at improving public relations. A new constitution, which reserved significant power for the military, was adopted in 2008 and in 2010 the first elections took place. The NLD refused to participate in those elections in protest of an electoral framework that prevented Suu Kyi from running. However, new elections in 2015 led to a handover of power to a civilian government controlled by Suu Kyi, a decisive step for many towards democratic transition.

But according to Gabrielle Bardall, Research Fellow at the Centre for International Policy Studies, University of Ottawa, and Elin Bjarnegård, Associate Professor in Political Science at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study, the absence of women throughout this process has been conspicuous. The new constitution, for example, reserves 25 per cent of seats in parliament and several ministerial posts for the Tatmadaw, Myanmar's armed forces, which only recently opened up to women.

"It was proof that this democratic reform did not go as deep as expected. And while women would not necessarily have prevented the coup, things might have gone better, because there is evidence that the inclusion of women in peace talks contributes to better peace-building,"

says Bardall.

Not even Suu Kyi's presence in key positions of power - though the constitution prohibited her from becoming the country's president because she was married to a foreigner and had children of another nationality - was not enough to change the country's political dynamics. "The example of one woman [in power] is not enough. We need women who understand women's issues and stand up for women's rights," says Wah Khu Shee. Suu Kyi, whose whereabouts are currently unknown, has been criticised for not making gender equality one of her priorities.

According to Bjarnegård, there has also been little change within the political parties. "I haven't seen too many big changes or signs that reform has been an important priority for the parties," she says. As she explains, one of the main problems has been finding women who want to go into politics. "All the women we interviewed needed the full support of their families and husbands to enter politics professionally," she continues, pointing to the country's "patriarchal culture" as one of the main impediments. In the November 2020 elections, [women won only 15 per cent of seats](#).

## Shifting gender roles

Khin Ohmar still remembers how difficult it was to be a woman in her early years of activism. In 1988, the country rose up against the military junta after a student was killed by the police. Ohmar, also a student at the time, refused to stay home. "I had a very difficult situation with my family because they tried to stop me from taking to the streets," she says. Ohmar went on to become vice-president of one of the student unions that formed in those years, at a time when women were often relegated to administrative and financial positions. "Some doors opened for women to occupy certain leadership positions, but it was still very patriarchal," she continues.

While in exile over the following

decades, Khin Ohmar remained involved in the pro-democracy movement but felt that many still refused to take the issue of gender equality seriously. "They thought we only wanted to talk about women's issues. But we wanted to talk about politics, about the federal system," she explains. "That's why our country is stuck. The roots of this patriarchy run too deep."

But Ohmar has seen a change in gender roles over the course of the current protests. "In 1988, the leaders were men. This time, they're women. It's exciting," she says. According to the 2019 report *Feminism in Myanmar*, political reforms after 2010 "opened space for the coordination of efforts by women's organisations inside and outside the country," in an activism that has "engaged not only with fulfilling the basic needs of communities but also with the policy

reform process." The report further argues that women have improved their capacity for social mobilisation and networking during the years of democratic transition.

Bjarnegård has also observed a change in dynamics. "The current protests have shown us that something is changing. We see young people, both men and women. It's another generation that is in some ways more liberal, that has had access to Facebook and that has been influenced by other countries," she says.

Wah Khu Shee, however, fears that when the situation calms down, things will go back to the way they were. "When there is conflict and men are afraid, *women are welcome*. But when peace is restored, it's back to the usual gender discrimination," she says.

She cites the example of the peace process between the government and some of the principal ethnic guerrillas (2011-2015), in which only four women were present in the delegations sent to negotiations (less than 6 per cent of the total number of representatives, according to Bardall and Bjarnegård's data). However, she holds onto a small glimmer of hope: "I hope that, this time, we can see [the impact of] the improvements that women have experienced in decision-making [during the democratic period]." She hopes that these changes will prevent women from once again being "relegated to the kitchen" when peace returns. "There have been improvements but it's still very difficult...we have to wait and see."

7 May 2021

Source *Equal Times*.

## Solidarity with Palestinians against neocolonial aggression

14 May 2021, by **Fourth International Bureau**

In recent weeks, Palestinians in Jerusalem have mobilized en masse to defend their basic right - to live in their own homes, homes to their families for several generations - against the attempts of the Israeli government and extremist settler organizations to drive them out and replace them with Jewish settlers in a policy that can only be called ethnic cleansing.

They have been confronted with violent colonial repression, which was expressed in particular with the attack on the Al-Aqsa Compound on Friday 7 May as end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan approached.

Since 10 May, the Israeli army has been carrying out a violent bombing campaign against the Gaza strip in retaliation for the demonstrations of solidarity with the Palestinians of

Jerusalem and rocket attacks.

In Jerusalem and other mixed cities, as well as the violence perpetrated by the police and Israel Defence Force, far-right Jewish groups have attacked Arabs in the streets. In Jerusalem alone, hundreds of Palestinians have been injured and dozens imprisoned.

As a result of this violence there have been at least 83 deaths in Gaza (including 16 children) 3 in the West Bank. 7 Israelis have also been killed.

Western news sources lead on the rocket attacks from Gaza, Israeli prime minister Netanyahu and other politicians call for "calm" while Biden says that "Israel has the right to defend itself" and calls for a return to the situation pre-10 May as if that had been an acceptable situation. Almost inaudible criticisms of the Israeli

settler policy do nothing to change this stance of the "international community" - they will back Israel to keep their status quo in the region.

There can be no calm in this situation of colonial aggression. There is not "equal responsibility" for the violence. The settler colonial state of Israel is practising a form of apartheid and ethnic cleansing and Palestinians are denied all democratic and national rights. There will not be a "just solution" without the accordance of full rights to the Palestinians.

The current worldwide expressions of solidarity with the Palestinians - in widespread street demonstrations, in football stadiums from Chile to Scotland - must be strengthened and become an ongoing powerful movement to hold Israel accountable for its crimes.



This is the meaning of the BDS (Boycott-Divestment-Sanctions) campaign, which must be strengthened and developed to impose sanctions against Israel.

**Support for the Israeli state must stop!**

An end to the civil and military occupation!

Equal democratic and national rights!

The right to self-determination and the right of return for the Palestinian people!

*13 May 2021*

# Ethnic Cleansing Escalates in Palestine: U.S. Says “Stay Calm”

**13 May 2021, by David Finkel**

The origins of the current explosion are not obscure. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, fighting to hold onto power in the midst of his corruption trial and Israel's dysfunctional political gridlock, sent the army and police smashing into al-Aqsa mosque in the heart of occupied East Jerusalem, at the most sensitive time during the prayers in the closing days of Ramadan.

This provocation occurred at the same time as ultra-nationalist “Jewish Power” mobs have marched and violently attacked Arab residents, and as the mass expropriation of Palestinian homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood to make room for Israeli settlers (on the basis of 19th century title claims) is pending in the heavily stacked Israeli court system. Palestinians resisted in the streets of Jerusalem against escalating Israeli repression including rubber bullets, toxic pepper gas and skunk water with many hundreds wounded and arrested.

In Gaza, where the popularity of the governing Hamas movement has eroded, its forces are firing rockets toward Israeli cities. The unexpected reach of Hamas rockets boosts its prestige for the moment, while producing a massive Israeli bombing response over Gaza that has already killed dozens of children. As always, ratcheting up the military confrontation serves the Israeli state's purposes, as the military arena is where it has absolute one-sided

superiority - as well as the pretext of “defending” its civilian population against the consequences of its own violence.

According to many reports, an emerging feature of the current struggle is the growing involvement of Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel in the fighting and the defense of East Jerusalem from escalating ethnic cleansing. The long term significance of this development, and whether the current moment is the beginning of a new Intifada or another downward spiral in the colonial-apartheid Israeli destruction of Palestine, will take time to determine and can't be predicted from the outside

What's somewhat clearer is the immediate response of the rotten mess known as “the international community” led as usual by the United States. In “normal” circumstances, what's happening in Palestine/Israel has ceased to be of serious imperial concern. It's been decades since the Palestinian struggle for self-determination was perceived as a revolutionary threat to great-power regional interests. The formal “normalization” of state relations between Israel and Arab Gulf regimes, in a political-military alliance against Iran, has made public what's been happening unofficially for several years already. The concern of the United States is that the present explosion may undercut this important arrangement.

Accordingly, the proclamations of the Biden administration concentrate on one point above all: “Stop the violence (on both sides, of course). De-escalate and restore calm in order to revive the peace process.”

In secondary, almost inaudible phrases Washington of course records its concerns about expulsions of Palestinian neighborhoods. Let's be clear about what this garbage really means: Israel's ethnic cleansing of Sheikh Jarrah, Silwan, the south Hebron hills and so many other places all over Palestine is not really a problem as long as it happens in relative obscurity and “quiet.” Does it really matter to imperial elites how many more bullets are fired into the long-dead corpse of the “two-state solution”? In the fantasy world of diplomacy and wonkery, the pretense that it remains relevant can persist indefinitely. The Israeli state knows that the bedrock of its “special relationship” with the United States remains intact despite temporary embarrassments.

In the real world where Palestinians are desperately fighting to hold onto their homes and their homeland, it's the global grassroots response that matters. In many U.S. cities, demonstrations and rallies are being quickly organized by Palestinian activist groups and solidarity organizations including Jewish Voice for Peace, supporting the resistance as well as commemorating the anniversary of the Nakba (Palestinian

catastrophe) of the 1948 war. By all means, we urge U.S. social justice and political activists to build and join these activities. On an ongoing basis, there are sustained political and legislative campaigns to support.

One important issue right now is a bill introduced in Congress by Rep. Betty McCollum (DFL-MN), HR 2407 known as "No Way to Treat a Child," calling for cutting of U.S. military aid to countries that imprison children. Israel is particularly notorious in this regard, including the detention of children without trial in conditions that amount to torture under international law. A listing of more than two dozen co-sponsors, along

with facts and links to human rights reports, is [here](#). This initiative is particularly important at a moment when its supporters in Congress are essentially defying the Biden administration's unconditional support of Israel.

It's also critical to expand and defend the BDS (Boycott/Divestment/Sanctions) global campaign in defense of Palestinian rights. To understand why, everyone should read the explosive new Human Rights Watch April 27, 2021 report "[A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution](#)."

We don't know how long the immediate crisis that's capturing world headlines and coverage may last, whether it might lead to a sustained new round of resistance and break through of the political gridlock on the Palestinian side, or potentially a new war and mass expulsion of Palestinians that thoughtful observers inside Israel have warned might come about. The time to speak and act is now.

*David Finkel for the Solidarity National Committee*

12 May 2021

Source [Solidarity](#).

# The Struggle Against Ethnic Cleansing in Jerusalem

12 May 2021, by **Toufic Haddad**

For anyone following developments in Jerusalem the past month, it was evident that today (Monday) was going to be determinative: the Israeli High Court was to meet in a special session to rule on evicting Sheikh Jarrah families, and thousands of Zionist thugs were to march on the Al-Aqsa compound in a racist display of 'unified Jerusalem,' all under hundreds of armed guards.

What a difference an intifada makes!

The Israeli Attorney General was forced to intervene over the weekend to delay the Court's ruling on the evictions for a month (fearing international outcry).

The march of racists was stopped in its tracks - initially because Israel's intelligence agencies and army said it would ignite a powder keg - not just local but possibly regional and international.

Regarding the latter, we witnessed an astonishing series of retreats today - first pulling back from allowing the

march to enter the Al-Aqsa compound this morning after hundreds of Palestinians defended the compound starting at 8 am. Then by 2:30 pm, the occupiers retreated on the route once again, preventing access through Damascus gate. By 6 pm, once the rally had begun - with notably far fewer numbers than expected - it was forced to abruptly end under the sound of sirens from Gaza's rockets, and without even entering the Old City.

Israel is in a corner, traditionally preferring to pocket its achievements below the radar.

But resistance and solidarity work and today is a testament to that.

Of course the battle is long and by no means over.

They will try with the evictions again in a month. They will go back to their plotting on how to take over Al-Aqsa and other parts of the Old City. Twenty people have been massacred in Gaza, many of whom are children,

and the shelling still continues as I write this.

But it's also important to recognize the huge achievements we are witnessing.

Israel displays no control over East Jerusalem except through sheer force, and that too is also not enough. Its soldiers on the streets - despite their arms, armor, horses, cameras, drones, blimps and stink water - appear confused and clumsy, as street smart middle schoolers goad them, and Ramadan fasters fearlessly break bread in front of armed settlers.

Israel's allies (the overt and the covert) beg Israel not to escalate - some, so as not to blow their complicity in its crimes; others because they never supported Israel for some freak Messianic concept to begin with.

And an Intifada has broken out across the entirety of historic Palestine now.

The latter promises to draw attention not only to 'the problem of Jerusalem',

but also to the complete failure/sham of the 'peace process' and the glaring apartheid that has indisputably emerged here as a result of it.

If things persist in this fashion, there is a possibility that the contagion of 'people power' can spread across the Arab regional theater (and beyond?), reigniting the revolutionary fires that

the counter revolutionary forces (both East and West) thought they had extinguished these past few years.

Before one gets ahead of oneself, let us absorb these moments and their lessons and prepare accordingly.

I close with two images of the magnificent solidarity demonstrations witnessed this evening in Jenin and

Nazareth - two sides of the Green Line, one struggle - for a free Palestine and free Jerusalem. Bless.

11 May 2021



Source [New Politics](#).

## Peasant mobilizations against backdrop of agrarian crisis

11 May 2021, by **Sushovan Dhar**

A protest march in Delhi on 26 January, 2021, Indian Republic day, took a militant turn. Farmers stormed the historic Red Fort monument and police responded with tear gas and batons. Riot police and paramilitary groups descended in force into the camps and tried to quell the protests, installing concrete fences, spikes, and barbed wire around the camps. But this response only fuelled the determination of the farmers, and later the Delhi police partially withdrew their police officers. Since then, the government has tried to intensify its rhetoric against the farmers, accusing them of being infiltrated by foreigners and professional protesters, but this has not reduced the determination of the protesters one iota. The current peasant struggle in India is the largest mass mobilization in decades and represents the biggest challenge for the Modi government since coming to power. The protest movement by Indian peasants, who make up more than 50% of the working population, was the most sustained and was also the first movement to bring the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, known for stifling civil dissent, to the negotiating table.

### The three laws

It is perhaps important to remember that the timing of the new laws, which the government believes represent reforms which will help farmers reap long-term benefits, was perhaps not the most appropriate. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced the government's intention to move forward with the new laws at a press conference on 15 May, 2020, while Covid-19 lockdown was still in effect, as part of the \$300 billion fiscal stimulus package to help the economy, which was suffering the effects of the pandemic.

What the agricultural sector (and all other sectors for that matter) needed was measures to provide immediate relief that would help it through the period of government-imposed or self-imposed restrictions because of the nature of the virus, which it was clear at the time would last for several months.

The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act allows farmers to sell their products outside the *mandis* (markets) of the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) without paying taxes. The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and

Farm Services Act allows farmers to sell their future products to agri-food companies at a predetermined price, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act eases the centre's control over the production and sale of agricultural products.

The Indian government wants us to believe that these laws are a decisive moment for Indian agriculture because they free farmers from the influence of intermediaries. But farmers' organizations see it as a measure that increases the level of participation of private companies. There are two concerns about the laws. First, their content is seen as a threat to small and marginal farmers. Second, the haste with which they were passed in parliament is seen as a threat by states and regional parties. Let's examine why the laws have met with strong opposition from farmers' associations, opposition political parties and state governments:

The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act allows trade in agricultural products outside the *mandis* regulated by the APMC for the first time. Private *mandis* can be set up throughout the country, where anyone can buy products from farmers. The licenses purchasers must have in the APMC are no longer required. These *mandis* are also

exempt from payment of any tax or levy.

The government says the measure is intended to give farmers more choice as to who to sell their products to. Economics tells us that more buyers means a better price for the seller. But the real world is a little more complex than the typical economics class. Farmers do not like this change. They say that instead of offering them more choice, and therefore a better price, it will leave them at the mercy of a few private actors who will organize themselves into cartels and thus set the price. According to them, this will happen because the APMC *mandi* will continue to be subject to taxes and regulations, which will deter merchants from buying in this *mandi* and pave the way for the dismantling of the APMC structure.

The fear is that farmers with weak bargaining power will be forced to sell outside the *mandi* in an unregulated trading area, where relatively more powerful buyers are able to dictate prices, which will turn farmers from “price makers” in theory into “price takers” in reality.

In the face of protests from farmers, the Indian government submitted a proposal on 9 December 2020. It stated that he was prepared to amend the law so that state governments could design mechanisms for registering *mandis*. The government also stated that it could leave it to state governments to impose a tax or tariff on private *mandis* at the rate applicable to APMC *mandis*. This proposal was vehemently rejected by the farmers, who said that they would be content with nothing less than the repeal of the law.

The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act establishes a national legislative framework to allow contract farming, where an agreement can be reached between the farmer and the buyer before sowing, under which the farmer agrees to sell their product to the buyer at a predetermined price. The government argues this measure will help eliminate some revenue uncertainties by providing a buyer’s insurance at a predetermined price

prior to sowing.

Opposition to this measure stems from past experiences of contract farming in India, which have not always been beneficial to farmers. According to reports, contract farming in some parts of Maharashtra has made “participating households vulnerable to debt and loss of autonomy over land and livelihood decisions.” It only reinforced existing models of inequality, as the contracting company had relatively more power than the peasant.

This is also due to the fact that contract farming in India involves numerous wrongs done to farmers, notably unilateral contractual agreements (in favour of the contracting agency), late payments, unjustified rejections based on quality and outright cheating, not to mention the misapplication of contract farming provisions by the state government.

It is therefore the fact that farmers have never had the chance to benefit from contract farming that makes them fearful. They are also concerned that contract farming will allow big companies to seize their land, as the law does not provide adequate redress mechanisms for farmers.

Under this law, farmers can enter into a contract with agri-food companies, private companies and wholesalers for the sale of future products at a predetermined price. As farmers lack the resources and capital to negotiate on an equal footing with buyers, this bill will benefit large corporations more than farmers. In addition, companies will enter into contract farming agreements not only for food grains, but also for horticulture, floriculture, and a variety of other products, including cash crops, which they will sell not only on the domestic market, but also for export. One of the consequences of these contract farming agreements would be that they would lead, in due course, to a transfer of lands devoted to the production of food cereals to non-food crops. This shift in the area of food grain production to non-food and export-oriented crops could ultimately jeopardize the country’s food security. In addition, issues related to informal contractual agreements on

sharecropping and leasing are not addressed in the law.

The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act is another law that is considered to benefit large companies. It purports to remove arbitrary and periodic storage limits on basic agricultural products that the government imposed on traders.

Instead of arbitrary triggers, the new law introduces price triggers that will only be used in “exceptional circumstances”. Storage limits can now only be imposed when prices for perishables increase by more than 100% and non-perishable food prices by more than 50% over the past year. According to an earlier report, these limits have been breached 69 times in total over the past ten years, contrary to the idea of the reform. More recently, stock limits were imposed just one month after the legislation was passed, when the price of onions began to rise as every season. Under the new law, the price should have increased by more than 100%, which was true for only one of the four major metropolises, but stock limits were imposed across the country in order to keep the price of onions low for consumers.

This law relaxes the production, storage, movement, and sale of agricultural products, except in the case of extraordinary situations. This removes limits on the amount of food grain that can be stored, allowing large traders to hold large amounts of inventory. Removing stock limits and facilitating wholesale purchase and storage by amending the Essential Products Act could attract large companies to the sector and lead to new investments. But it could also lead to the hoarding of large quantities of crops, creating an artificial shortage, to sell them later at higher prices.

## The question of the minimum price

At the heart of these protests is an issue that is not explicitly mentioned in the three new laws. This is the issue of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) which is announced for 23 crops. In



reality, however, large and sustained purchases concern only wheat and paddy in Punjab and Haryana. [63]

Farmers fear that with the three new laws, the government is signalling that it is moving away from current MSP supply models. This fear is the product of multiple factors. It was suggested that the food subsidy bill be reduced. Economists have argued that the MSP regime as it exists today is not sustainable. And also, or perhaps more importantly, farmers simply do not trust the government after a series of broken promises over the past six years. They are therefore concerned that the government will lay the groundwork for its withdrawal of support for the MSP by allowing the dismantling of the APMC through the "APMC circumvention law".

They want the government to pass new legislation that treats the MSP as a legal right. The Punjab assembly has already passed such a law, but it still needs the president's assent. Even if assent is obtained, how the law will be implemented remains uncertain.

A demand for such legislation dates back to 2018, when peasant unrest spread far across the country - the long march of peasants in Mumbai, the protest march to the parliament in Delhi. In August 2018, for the first time, a law to this effect was brought to parliament by Raju Shetty, but this bill was not discussed in Parliament. It was drafted by the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC), a coordination structure comprising several hundred peasant organizations from across the country, which was formed after the Mandsaur unrest in 2017, and which continues to be in the forefront of the current agitation.

After 2018, the peasant protests died out and are now re-emerging. The demand to make the MSP a legal right is again on the table and farmers' leaders have said that the protests will not end until this demand is met. Another demand that is coming back to the table is to fix the MSP at cost plus 50%, as recommended by the Swaminathan Commission in 2007. Prior to 2014, the BJP promised to implement this measure as soon as it took office.

Since 2018, the BJP has said it has kept that promise. But that is not true. The Centre stated that it will provide "written assurance" that the existing procurement mechanism will be maintained. It did not specify what form this written assurance will take. Nor did it address the issue of setting the MSP in accordance with the recommendations of the Swaminathan Commission.

Also causing controversy is the proposed change in electricity legislation. Farmers in several states currently benefit from subsidized electricity tariffs, where they pay a fraction of the total tariff they consume. Governments of the respective states pay the balance to distribution companies (DISCOM). Payment is often delayed. This situation, along with other factors, has led to a situation where DISCOM balance sheets are distorted. The main feature of the new bill that irritates farmers is that it changes the way the subsidy is paid - farmers will have to pay the full electricity costs to DISCOM. The state government will transfer a subsidy amount to farmers' bank accounts, moving to a mechanism for direct transfer of profits. Again, farmers are not convinced that the mechanism will work as planned and are concerned that the transfer will not be enough to cover the increase in their electricity costs. The government has said that the bill, which is still under consideration, could be amended to ensure that there is no change in the way farmers pay their invoices.

## The agrarian crisis

The current mobilizations of the Indian peasantry against the three new agricultural laws and the MSP are only the tip of the iceberg. Rather, it is a real explosion against the gradual erosion of their lives and livelihoods as a result of the severe agrarian crisis that the country has been facing for three decades. A simple number could be enough to explain the scale of this crisis. In just over a quarter of a century, 400,000 peasants committed suicide due to heavy debt. Moreover, the number of suicides does not reflect the magnitude of the problems, because

entire categories of peasants are not on the official list because they do not have land titles - mainly women, Dalits, and indigenous peoples.

A study conducted by the Institute of Applied Manpower Research (New Delhi) revealed several facts about conditions in the agricultural sector. During the ten-year rule of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government (2004-2014), some 15 million workers, including peasants, became unemployed or left the agricultural sector to become casual/informal workers. India, the world's fourth largest economy, has not been able to achieve significant growth in the non-agricultural sector or create the jobs needed to absorb the surplus population of the agricultural sector. The study also noted that 15 million workers have moved from agriculture to manufacturing and services, resulting in a decline in the share of agriculture in total employment from 57% to 53% over the 2005-2010 period, while some 18 million additional workers were employed as casual or contract workers in the construction sector, as the government invested heavily in infrastructure development. Out of a total of 44 million construction workers in India, 42 million (nearly 95%) are informal workers with no social security. Thus, the growth of the construction sector is accompanied by an increasingly precarious and casualised workforce, mostly originating from the agricultural sector.

The construction sector has seen a phenomenal increase in the number of jobs, from 16 million to 50 million, at a rate of 17% per year. In rural areas, construction site employment increased from about 9.4 million in 1999-2000 to 37.2 million in 2011-12, up almost 300% over a 13-year period. This suggests that construction projects provided the second largest employment opportunity in rural areas after agriculture. However, this is by no means a ripple effect of the construction boom in urban India. Rather, it is the public works of the central government under the Employment Guarantee Act or MGNREGA that account for most of the growth in construction work in rural areas. [64] The other aspect of

growth is that real wages have increased by 61%; however, price inflation has tended to offset wage increases.

The period between 1997 and 2009 saw suicides of peasants on a scale that India has never experienced in the last century. In the states of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra (five states), there were 240,000 peasant suicides during this period. Combined with the 2010-11 figures, the total number of peasant suicides was 256,000 over the 13-year period. But the first seven years accounted for 53% of these deaths, while in the remaining six years, 118,000 suicides occurred. This means that in the second half of this period, no less than 17,200 peasants committed suicide each year. In Maharashtra state alone, between 2001 and 2010, 47,670 peasant suicides were recorded, three times more than in West Bengal. However, state governments and the central government have been insensitive to the problem of victims' families. The Minister of Agriculture at the time, Sharad Pawar, did not visit the families of the victims as a gesture of sympathy and did not even make a public statement on the suicides. The most affected area was the Vidarbha region, the largest cotton growing area in Maharashtra State. In 2006, the Indian Prime Minister visited Yawatmal district, Vidarbha region, where the highest number of peasant suicides was reported.

It is then perfectly legitimate to raise a question: which side is the state on? Does the state protect the interests of peasants and their families affected by suicides, or is it on the side of the usurious lenders and corrupt officials (who are often in league with local politicians), banks and credit unions that force peasants to commit suicide? In a shocking case of the suicide of a peasant in the Buldhana district of Maharashtra's Vidarbha region, the family concerned filed a complaint against the money lender who had charged an excessive interest rate and committed a fraud that had forced the peasant to commit suicide. However, the Chief Minister at the time, Vilasrao Deshmukh, prevented the police from recording a First

Information Report in such a criminal case against the lender who happened to be the father of a member of the then-Congress legislature. [65] But when the case was prosecuted by the victim's family, the former chief minister was censored by the Supreme Court for his statements and action to prevent the arrest of the usurer concerned. After this censorship, Deshmukh was transferred to the rural development portfolio during a cabinet reshuffle at the centre.

## Contract farming or debt bondage?

An important study entitled "Effects of contract farming practices on the peasants in general, and their effectiveness in bringing about equity in Hoshiarpur region of Punjab" highlighted the fact that a multinational, PepsiCo - involved in contract farming - and a large cooperative such as the Marketing Federation (Markfed) sought to maximize their profits by imposing certain operating conditions on farmers in the draft contract, leaving very little bargaining space for farmers to price agricultural products. Similarly, farmers do not have the right to decide the terms and conditions of the contractual document they sign. The contractual agreement between PepsiCo/Markfed and the peasants preserved the interests of the companies but did not protect the rights and interests of the peasants.

This empirical study focused on farmers in Punjab and Haryana who had contracted with companies to grow Basmati tomatoes, potatoes, and rice. Farmers were required to sell their products only to their respective contracting companies - PepsiCo and Markfed - which were allowed to penalize farmers who did not comply with the contract. From the germination stage of seeds and tender plants, the harvest was considered the exclusive property of the contracting company; in the event of a loss or crop, the companies could terminate the contract unilaterally; the farmers could then sell their products on the

open market.

When the entire Basmati crop failed in 2006 because of infested seeds provided by Markfed, the risk of the contract was not shared by the companies. In the same year, a complete tomato project had to be abandoned because the contract did not provide for any risk sharing. Over the years, the enormous increase in the cost of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides has increased the financial burden, misfortunes and miseries of contract farmers. In addition, contracting firms have delayed payment of purchases in the past, compounding the livelihood difficulties of smallholders.

Contract farming companies often used intermediate traders (particularly for export and import), which did not change the existing marketing system, and the real producer was at the end of the line. The most important finding of the study of contract farming in Punjab is that it has encouraged the rental practices of farmland owners. For example, non-resident Indians who owned land or those who were present but could not manage self-cultivation, as well as those who owned small farms but could not compete with large businesses, were tempted to lease their farmland to wealthy peasants. Thus, contract farming has led to "reverse renting" (i.e., small farmers lease their land to wealthy peasants who become de facto tenants of smallholders); such a practice eventually led to irreversible dispossession of small owners (i.e. "depeasantisation"). For example, Punjab's experience with contract farming has shown that:

- Contract farming denies equal opportunities to different classes of peasants;
- The gap between rich and poor peasants is widening further;
- rich farmers also have to deal with asymmetrical relations with contracting companies.

As well as contract farming, free trade agreements (FTAs) have been damaging for Indian agricultural producers. When the Indian economy became part of the global market following the introduction of

neoliberal economic reforms in the 1990s, India's trade policy shifted considerably towards bilateral trade. The main change is noticeable in India's growing commitment to FTAs in relation to unilateral trade liberalization by the WTO. The FTA between two or more partners has now become a more effective tool for promoting trade liberalization. This change has had a significant impact on the Indian agricultural sector. While the Indian government has been more aggressive in liberalizing trade in other sectors, it has been more cautious about its involvement in agricultural trade, albeit ironically by reducing tariff rates (especially on imports), and because the majority of small and marginal farmers, who do not receive remunerative prices, face competition from imported products sold at reasonable rates due to reduced tariffs. As a result, a significant portion of the agricultural labour force lives below the poverty line, as reduced import duties have lowered wages. Paradoxically, India has achieved the food self-sufficiency necessary to ensure the food security of the poor and marginalized groups, but it is an exporter of food grains, which does not provide any substantial benefit to agricultural producers, while cheap and imported raw materials are supplied to domestic industries.

Another example of the decline in the credibility of the Indian state is that it cancelled loans to farmers amounting to Rs 23.76 billion in 2009-10. However, the government rarely mentions that it cancelled Rs 8 billion in loans to industries during the same period, and that the total amount of industrial loans cancelled in 15 years (1995-2010) amounts to 5,700 billion rupees. It is ironic that the rules of the Indian government on behalf of rural populations, seeking legitimacy mainly from the rural electorate, sacrifice their interests on the altar of industrial groups and commercial societies that generously give electoral funds to the political class!

It is true that India's nationalized

banks are instructed to ensure that at least half of their loans are made to the agricultural sector. However, the procedures for processing and approving loan applications, as well as the actual disbursement of loans, remain a mystery. The National Capital Region (NCR) - Delhi, a metropolitan megalopolis - is a concrete jungle where agriculture is least present. However, according to data published by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), Delhi has more farmers than Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, and West Bengal. Delhi's "farmers" received Rs 220.77 billion in agricultural loans in 2009 at an interest rate of only 5%, while in most other states banks have an annual interest rate of between 9% and 13% on agricultural loans. The amount of loans disbursed in Delhi was the second highest in the country, with the exception of Punjab, where farmers received Rs 270 billion in loans in the same year. Even farmers in Uttar Pradesh (210 billion rupees), Madhya Pradesh (134.3 billion rupees) and Haryana (149.15 billion rupees) received much lower total loan amounts, while the number of farmers in these states far exceeds that of Delhi.

The high level of disbursement of agricultural loans in Delhi is inexplicable as the NCR has only 39,000 hectares of agricultural land. However, records show that only 26,785 ha cover the net area cultivated in the Delhi NCR. The available figures therefore suggest that NABARD has granted loans to farmers in the Delhi metropolitan area worth Rs 8.06 million per hectare. However, NABARD has provided agricultural credits for the purchase of inputs such as fertilizers and new seed varieties, for the installation of wells or drip irrigation systems for horticulture, aquaculture, floriculture, and sericulture, as well as for the purchase of agricultural equipment. Farm owners, who appear in elitist Delhi posing as "peasants", have often obtained loans at lower rates, which is

the worst scam in Delhi, as some of them have obtained loans through Kisan credit cards.

It should be noted here that discriminatory interest rates are applied to farmers seeking agricultural loans, at a rate of 9% to 13% interest per year. On the contrary, luxury goods, such as imported cars, can be purchased by obtaining a bank loan at an interest rate of only 7%. In the poor region of Marathwada Maharashtra, loans were granted for the purchase of 146 Mercedes cars, at a cost of Rs 0.63 billion, including 0.42 billion rupees from nationalized banks, in particular the State Bank of India.

## A lesson for workers

The way in which more than 40 agricultural unions and other organizations have worked together is a lesson for workers' union federations. Because the new laws represent a death sentence for them, which should be enough to encourage them to act. Here, one-day ritual strikes throughout India, while useful, are not the answer. What is needed are large-scale strikes every few days in different industrial sectors and states. In this way, the economic burden of the strikers is reduced since these actions are not continuous but spread over time and among different sections and occur in different places and regions.

Today we have the opportunity to forge with the peasants the kind of unity of struggle that can inflict the most powerful blow ever on Modi's neoliberal project. We can only hope that it will be seized. Even if this opportunity is lost and the result is a compromise but not a total repeal of the laws, politically things will not be the same. There has been a more lasting breach in the popularity of Modi's regime. For this reason, this struggle of the farmers deserves our deep admiration.

# Madrid: Rise of the Right, Defeat of the Left

10 May 2021, by **Brais Fernandez**

The victory of the right has been overwhelming. Overall, it achieved results that surpassed those of Esperanza Aguirre, previous right wing president of Madrid assembly, winning 58% of the votes against 41% for the left. This result becomes even more striking when we look at the turnout data. 80% of the people who could have voted have done so. The excuses about disaffection, the hidden left, the abstentionist masses who are really left-wing... disappear as quickly as they were frivolously outlined during the fever of the election. In this article, we will try to unravel some of the issues that have emerged from these elections in the Community of Madrid, with no other pretension than to contribute to the discussion within the political, cultural and social left.



## The problem of hegemony

The hegemony of the right has several layers. On the one hand, it is built on a series of material relations that generate a certain consciousness. These are the public education system, the strategic position of Madrid in relation to the rest of Spain, the capacity to absorb a certain executive class that arises from it, and the neoliberal relationship between the public and the private sectors. Behind the power of the right there are social relations. But this relationship only forms the core of the hegemonic operation. To extend its influence, the right has broken with the dilemma of the left that placed “health” before “economy”. By defending the primacy of the economy, the right has incorporated large cohorts of the working class into its bloc. It has done so by offering a haven in the face of fear of

unemployment and economic meltdown. Honestly, I do not believe that the left could dispute the centre of this hegemonic construction with the right in a “war of manoeuvres” or through short-term discursive operations. For that, years are needed. But I do believe that there was a layer of the electorate that was potentially winnable for the left. That layer, joined to the core of the right, has seen in the PP an option that responded to the issue of economic insecurity. We do not like the response of the right, but what is the response of the left? An insufficient and non-functioning minimum living income? A moralistic stance that (correctly) defends people who have to go to the food banks, but does not give them institutional support? In its moral arrogance, the left fails to realize that, by pitting health against the economy, it only reveals middle-class privilege. The right has taken advantage of the fact that people have been more afraid of the economic shutdown (with no guarantees or insurance) than of the pandemic. It is a terrible thing to say, but it is the truth.

## The question of fascism

In spite of the strategic “unity” shown in the campaign, the results for the left are really bad. The most significant thing is how the “fight against fascism”, the defence of the 78 regime as a barrier against it and the politics of blocs has worked out. We suppose, and forgive the irony, that the left will be happy: since the sum of the votes of the PP is greater than that of the left, Vox will not enter the government and will cease to be decisive. Now, once the elections and the moment of leftist delusions have passed, we can begin to reflect more seriously. Vox is a danger and is a party in the process of post-fascist radicalization. They must be fought by

all means. But right now, the hegemonic enemy is Ayuso’s authoritarian neoliberalism, based on a conservative interpretation of the 78 regime. All the rhetoric about fascism (which, in a moment of delirium, even extended to the PP) must be reassessed. It is not an academic debate: is there a fascist regime in Madrid? Was a fascist regime going to be implemented in Madrid? I believe, I insist, that Vox is evolving towards post-fascist positions. But making an impressionistic analysis to try to mobilize your base, indirectly calling a part of the people you want to win over fascist, is just a mechanism of hyperventilation, to consolidate your base, in the face of political impotence, and isolate yourself from the rest of the people. Because let us be even clearer. The situation has even been compared to Berlin in 1933. What is the response to this, if it is not frivolous talk? Is a response being prepared accordingly? Are we facing the prelude to a dictatorship and a political genocide? What is the phase of the struggle and what methods are adequate to face a moment of resistance of this type? We must raise this debate without underestimating the legitimate fear of a part of the people, especially the most oppressed sectors, in the face of the reappearance of post-fascism. It is necessary to fight in the streets against the extreme right, always from a broad perspective and in accordance with the times. But this means placing the problem of fascism in its precise place at this juncture, not turning it into a weapon to keep your base together that seeks to hide the fact that the institutional “left” is not governing in the interests of working people. And, above all, we must approach the rise of the hard right as a social process and not as a moral identity.

Let us be clear: the institutional left does not offer anything to the people that they feel the need to defend and,



beyond the propaganda of its media spokespersons, its economic and social policy is favourable to the business classes. The progressive government is not delivering public policies that support and guarantee security to the most impoverished sectors of the people. There is nothing similar to the welfare policies of the first Lula government in Brazil or Peronism in Argentina. We are facing a progressivism as verbally oversold as meagre in its political impact, which does not even fulfil the programmatic promises it made when it became a government. The economic elites live in peace and the working class in fear. The progressive government is going to rescue the big companies with the money of the European Union. If the right wing were doing so, we would be talking about a general strike. Blindness and ideological fanaticism lead to allowing your own side to do the same as your adversaries. Instead, the left should be as loyal to the working people as the right is to the business class.

## **Rise and crisis of the Eurocommunist revival**

The main characteristic of the Podemos constitution is its dependence on the hyper-leadership of Pablo Iglesias. Undoubtedly, Pablo Iglesias is the most talented and brilliant person in his political current. He does not deserve the attacks he has suffered. But having said that, political balance sheets are necessary and, from my point of view, Pablo Iglesias's is very negative. Once all the elements of its internal life were purged, Podemos (which was also founded by the organization, Anticapitalistas, to which I belong) has been reduced to a small apparatus closed in on itself, with no internal life. In practice it is nothing more than a partner of the PSOE bloc. It compensates for these weaknesses with a certain management of its inheritance. Podemos came out of a relationship of semi-instrumental hegemony with the social movements of Madrid, based on a policy of

transfers without nurturing their organizational strength and political autonomy. It does not make much sense to oppose the "political" level to the "social" one. They are two mutually dependent phenomena that feedback on each other and, whether we like it or not, the exhaustion of a whole cycle goes in both directions. There is a current in the social movements that is clearly pro-institutional and there is another that proposes a different perspective, one that does not want to be a mere transmission belt of the State. The decline of the Spanish left has deeper social roots than we would like to recognize.

One of the worst legacies of our times is the hegemony of political science over politics. Everything is reduced to rhetoric and the arithmetic of winning without a strong political project. I think we must assume that nobody has a political potion to remedy the victory of the right. But we must return to a political position based on the "must be". This clashes with the common sense of a whole generation, forged on the opportunistic idea that in order to win, principles can be twisted at will. It ended up in an extreme politicization finally resulting in an endless number of tactical turns, programmatic abandonments and rhetorical games. I think that a left must emerge that abandons the rhetoric in which we have moved in the previous cycle to assume the thankless minority task, to save its progressive elements that have been buried today. We need to articulate political and social struggles around a confrontation with the economic elites. We support the necessity of a new political framework that addresses constitutional questions. In my opinion, this involves reversing the strategy offered by the left. The left has acted as a unity politically, assuming in practice the project of a "left constitutionalism" (to different degrees) but divided socially. These elections have resembled a Democratic Party primary: a strong consensus around the defence of order, different identities competing under a shared horizon. But in the social sphere there is no united struggle. The equation must be inverted: clarity to rebuild politically, "separating" from the institutional left

while always trying to maintain (and this is important) a relationship of non-sectarian dialogue and maximum unity on the front of social struggles. I do not believe that this strategy should be presented as an electoral winner (although the current strategy has not been either) or as the source of all solutions, but as a different path to be taken. From my point of view, anti-capitalism should not be the radical wing of the progressive front. It should build another political pole and, at the same time, be socially united. The politics of unity must move from the political to the social, with the aim of increasing the self-confidence of the working class people through struggle. I believe that without a "social" regeneration of the left, the emergence of new repertoires and new organic intellectuals linked to new resistances, the situation will not improve but will tend to stagnate and rot. Moreover, I believe that we must begin to think that, although the great changes can only be made by the social majority, the existence of a class struggle pole is a democratizing element in itself. It allows certain problems to be put on the table and makes social progress possible: if there is only a "left" management, any reform is impossible.

## **A new left? On Más Madrid**

I think it would be an illusion to see in the rise of Más Madrid a turn to the left. Not because UP was on the left: UP represents the return to the politics of right-wing Eurocommunism of the 70s, based on the defence of the constitutional-capitalist system against the right. Incidentally, there is no right-wing that wants to break with that regime, but to radicalize it in a reactionary way. I believe that Más Madrid overtook the PSOE not because it is more radical, but because it represents something different. This does not diminish the importance of the fact, but it does put it in its context. It has acted as a bloc and there has been no ideological conflict between the parties. Más Madrid has always adopted the political trend of green progressivism, but it has a number of advantages over the "left" parties. The first is to

appear as something new, despite their experience in the Madrid City Council, which did not weaken it, but rather strengthened them, unlike the PSOE-UP, whose presence in government weakens them. The second is that they connect with a sui generis political component of Madrid, a working class and enlightened middle class, linked to the defence of the public sphere, but also to the struggle for liberties and civil rights. Although its leaders have an upper-middle class profile, its electoral base penetrates better in heterogeneous and plural working class neighbourhoods that no longer correspond to the conceptions of the old post-communist left. We only have to compare the results of MM and UP in working class neighbourhoods such as Orcasitas or Vallecas. Their campaign has been successful because it has connected with the political composition to which it appealed. United Podemos appeals to the working class, but does not connect with it. Thirdly, they had a candidate with an excellent profile for this type of election. Más Madrid has also opted for addressing the left without the mediation of social movements, but at the same time, it has a territorial structure, not very visible in struggles but real enough, especially through neighbourhood members and councillors. In my opinion, with all the limits of comparison, Más Madrid can have the same competitive relationship that the German Greens have with the SPD: a green "social-democratic-liberal" project. But it remains to be seen if this strengthens Más País at the state level. I think it opens a strong internal squabble. In a country with a confederal political composition, MP appears as too Madrid-based, which is a constraint on its expansion

## What perspective for anti-capitalists?

I believe that anti-capitalists, politically isolated in a situation where the main axis has turned towards the constitutionalist defense of the regime of 78 in the face of a "greater evil", must readjust their strategy and discourse. It is about playing on an anomalous playing field: proposing fundamental solutions for the left, but assuming that you cannot apply them and that, therefore, it is necessary to strengthen an anti-capitalist project as a precondition for this. To be socially united, but to promote resistance and not to stop it, fighting against the "extended state" intervention in the social movements (that is, turning social movements into lobbies within the institutional framework, without a global perspective of transformation). At the same time, we must generate a political pole at the margin of the progressive bloc, relating with it in a pedagogical way but without falling into the opportunism that ends up turning anti-capitalism into the left wing of progressivism. To understand that we must work culturally to regenerate a militant network. Above all because, in the absence of the masses, the people who have taken over as organic intellectuals have been a caste of journalists and political scientists enslaved to their material interests in the progressive court. Also we need to work on forms of political communication that renew worn out repertoires. We take on board that the electoral arena is not enough, but that in the absence of a revolutionary situation, it is necessary to orient ourselves towards the construction of a political reference point. If we do not want the elections

to be an exercise in cognitive dissonance, where verbal radicalism in social matters correlates with support for political options that defend the regime of 1978. Saying "down with capitalism" in theory and supporting co-government with the PSOE in practice.

Despite the restoration of the old order, the Spanish political situation remains unstable. Madrid may be a warning that the "magical" thesis that the progressive bloc would rule for ten years in Spain is simply a positivist fantasy. The right wing may rearm and go on the offensive: the progressive government has already announced social cuts such as tolls on highways, which put the right wing in an ideal position to recompose itself, since they allow it to take its anti-tax discourse to the popular classes. Nobody knows what will happen at the state level. How the figure of Yolanda Diaz (Iglesias's anointed successor and the representative of the social consensus) will work, and how the left will recompose itself. There are many unknowns: Andalusia, new alliances... Podemos was the product of an exceptional situation. Today that situation does not exist, and the left is once again occupying its traditional positions in the political order. But although we have entered a much rockier phase, we are still imprisoned by the moral legacy of the previous cycle, where the illusions of victory monopolized the electoral intervention. In my opinion, the possibility of moving forward as a whole will depend on the resurgence of a social and political force outside the official left and progressivism. Or, at least, not retreating too far.

*Translated by International Viewpoint from Jacobin America Latina.*

## 'Death to the Arabs': racialized violence has always defined Israel

## 9 May 2021, by Zarefah Baroud

The journalist asked the young protester if the phrases employed by the demonstrators, phrases like, "Burn the Arab's villages" and "Death to Arabs", represented them and their presence at the protest.

In response, she said "I say it in a mannered and proper way. I don't say 'let's burn their villages,' I say that 'they should get out and we take over their lands'," she smirks "...exactly what we do in the Old City."

There is a great deal to unpack in this telling response. Primarily, the colonial attitudes which exist within all sects of Israeli society, not simply the government or military. But also, the ways in which settler communities have normalized racial violence and the perpetual ethnic cleansing - what some call the ongoing Nakba - that their ever-growing settlements have required.

Settler violence

Settler violence is just as old as Israel and acts as an imminent threat to Palestinians on a daily basis, rooted in European settler entitlement to Palestinian land. In fact, during the Nakba, the original mass expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians to create room for the Jewish state, was materialized not only by the Zionist forces, but by settlers who promptly replaced the native population, building homes on

the ruins of the exiled and protected by the developing Zionist regime and the British government before them.

Currently, there are at least 600,000 Israeli settlers living in illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian West Bank as well as East Jerusalem in direct contravention with international law.

Regardless of their unlawful presence in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the rogue and extremist violence many of these settlers produce is not only heavily protected by the state and Israeli security forces, but the state relies on the presence of these settlers to indirectly consume more land in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem without consequence.

Many reports have documented that army or police personnel protect and assist settlers in their attacks against Palestinians. Many Palestinians, including children at play, have been arrested and imprisoned by Israeli forces in order to meet the needs of those residing in these illegal outposts.

The Israeli human rights organization, Yesh Den, recorded 1,293 cases of settler violence between the years of 2005 and 2019. Out of these incidents, a mere 8 percent of investigations

resulted in criminal charges against the offending settler.

Just days after extremist mobs rioted in Jerusalem, a group of three extremist Jewish settlers attacked and hospitalized 66-year old shepherd, Ibrahim Hamdoun, while he grazed his stock on his land in Jenin, West Bank. A reflection of Israeli society

If this should teach us anything, is that settler-colonial violence, and that of the state, is part and parcel of Israeli society as a whole. These connections between all sects of Zionist violence are verified in a 2019 public opinion poll conducted by the Institute for National Security Studies which concluded that 70 percent of Israelis surveyed believe that the values of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) do indeed align with the values of Israeli society as a whole.

Even if Israelis choose to sugar-coat their approach to settlement expansion and annexation, they will continue partaking in and benefiting from the ethnic cleansing of Jerusalem, and the rest of historical Palestine, through evictions, home demolitions, the racist denial of building permits, and as we witnessed this week, physical violence and intimidation.

Source [Mondoweiss](#).

## Right sweeps Madrid, left must rethink

### 8 May 2021, by Raul Camargo

There is no other explanation for Ayuso's victory in virtually all the municipalities of the Community of Madrid with significant rises in the traditional bastions of the left that have not been the result only of vote transfers from the other right wing parties or the PSOE.

There will be time to analyse the root causes of Ayuso's sweeping victory and how the bloc on the right has been strengthened because Vox also increased its vote from 2019 (going from 12 to 13 seats). With 76% participation (the highest in electoral history in this region) it is obvious that

the support bases for the right are robust and have been cemented with care over 26 years leading the government. Confronting them only in parliament or during election campaigns is not enough. They need to be fought with alternative social organization and political proposals

that will be at the root of the reproduction of their power. That is, fighting for the extension of the public network in education and health and for the dismantling of subsidised private education and private health, or for a model of residences of 100% public nursing homes. Also, an urban policy radically different from the current one, which produces isolated and anomic cities and in which the difference between right and left is indistinguishable. They look like utopian slogans these days. But if we don't approach them seriously from the left, we'll never get lasting change in this community.

The PSOE sank miserably, reaping the fruits of a terrible campaign by an exhausted candidate who did not want to be there and a central government whose social measures have been less than insufficient. Despite the propaganda, the social shield is not perceived by the working classes as a protection worthy of the crisis caused by the pandemic. The failure of Sanchez and his all-powerful advisor Redondo is obvious and could lead to changes (for the worse) at national level, in the form of even greater moderation in economic policy and the increasing isolation of Unidas Podemos.

The left wing Más Madrid slate recorded a very good result,

overtaking the PSOE, the result of good opposition work, a good campaign and a health worker candidate who benefited from the general gratitude for their work during this pandemic. It has also benefited from not being in the central government, with the erosion that afflicted the two coalition partners in the form of unfulfilled expectations (remember that the PP's employment reform, the Mordaza Law, has not been repealed, there has been no tax reform, and the price of rents has not been regulated).

Unidas Podemos recorded a slight advance from 2019 but did not achieve the goal of stopping the advance of the right with the presence of Pablo Iglesias at the head of its list. Following these results, Iglesias has resigned from all his posts. We will see whether there is any reorientation among those staying in UP or even deepened support for widespread pacts with the PSOE. The designated successor to Iglesias, Yolanda Díaz, bases her current prestige on a policy of social concertation with employers and trade unions from the Ministry of Labour. This policy could enter into crisis soon as thousands of layoffs are announced in companies of all kinds and it does not appear that the PSOE will turn to an employment policy more favourable to the interests of workers. What is evident is that UP's

presence in the national government adds nothing to its appeal and in every election they fall back or barely hold what they had and, despite their activist campaign and a candidacy with a good handful of references from social movements, they scored well below Más Madrid, which even achieved Pablo Iglesias' old goal of overtaking the PSOE.

Ciudadanos have disappeared from the Madrid Assembly and, very soon, will be gone from everywhere. A washed-up party whose only interest is knowing how long it will take those in governments with the PP to move to that party. The political centre in the Spanish state is an empty space.

But disappointment with these results should not prevent the left from continuing to fight against the neoliberalism that will be administered in Madrid. Anticapitalistas will build a broad social front against this strengthened right and find ways for an opposition not confined to parliament. Tough times are coming, but it is up to us to build a broad social front against this strengthened right with a horizon of profound social transformation and to recover the spaces of socialization hit so much by the pandemic. We will get down to that task right away. Sooner rather than later, we'll move the tab again.

## Between May Day struggles and indiscriminate repression in Algeria

7 May 2021, by **Adel Abderezak**

### Weaknesses of the trade union and workers' movement

Béjaïa is today at the forefront of new experiences of struggle and the

Numilog workers are leading the way. The autonomous unions are attempting unity in action and the UGTA is calling for a general strike. Bougie indicates a future configuration of the trade union and workers' movement. A process that is at its beginning, fragile and reversible. The trade union movement remains fundamentally bureaucratized and institutionalized, acting through

declarations and formal organic activism. Trade union competition is more about apparatus and egos than ideas and action. The trade union figures who make up the consensus are no longer there. Achour Idir was closing a cycle of trade union awakening and class consciousness. He paid with his life, as did Osmane Redouane. Neo-liberal policies, privatization, de-industrialization and



employer authoritarianism have had their effect. We must add the weakness of the workers' parties, a sanitized left and very damaging traditions of fragmentation.

Today, the trade union and workers' movement cannot influence the political course of events and even less weigh on the political balance of power. The labour movement is paying dearly for this and the revolutionary utopia is still far from reality. All the indicators show that revolutionary change brought about by the workers' movement is not for tomorrow. Nevertheless, what is happening in the field of social struggles and the salutary advent of the hirak shows that a new political cycle is taking shape, characterized by a radicality of antisystemic political demands and a programmatic formulation that is still in its infancy and very confused.

## Singularities of the hirak

The hirak, as a radical and mobilizing popular movement, brings a singularity to this political cycle where the political and social awakening is

more citizen than class. The inter-class dimension of the hirak contributes to this accumulation of ambiguities, confusions or political contradictions within the hirak because its sociology is bipolar. Between a heterogeneous social "bloc" made up of workers, civil servants, unemployed people, socially downgraded young people, etc. and a social "bloc" of middle strata ranging from academics to shopkeepers or independent entrepreneurs, the interplay of interests is complex and convergence is even more difficult. The whole strategy of the government and the political police is to break the connection that was made between the two social blocks through the hirak. The fear of a political convergence against a background of radicalization pushes the strategists of this illegitimate power to break the activist elements or influencers considered as subversive.

From the Rachad activists to the trade unionist Chouicha, from the poet Tadadjit to the student icon Abdenour Ait Said, from the academic Mhanna Abdesselam to Dalila Touat, from the journalist Drareni to Jamila Loukil: the objective is to break this fraternity

between two social poles, which carries an alternative political project to the government. The objective of the zealous reformers of the system is to reappropriate the middle classes by freeing them from radicalized elements and then to make them a privileged actor in an economic and socio-political model validated by the supporters of capitalist globalization. The social bloc of the "oppressed", where workers and the lumpen, the unemployed and the socially declassified cohabit, will be isolated in a classic permanent confrontation with a state power that is used to social crises.

This indiscriminate repression is the expression of this strategic desire of the government and at the same time the expression of its difficulty. It must be countered by a concrete mobilization of solidarity on the ground. Working for the hirak to integrate social and labour demands and that the trade union and labour movement to integrate the hirak and contribute to giving it a political perspective, this is the task of the hirakists, bearers of democratic and progressive values.

6 May 2021

## Biden's "Bullshit" Climate Summit

6 May 2021, by **Barry Sheppard**

"At the Leaders Climate Summit, countries will present their new climate commitments, like net-zero emissions by 2050. They will call these hypothetical targets 'ambitious.' But when you compare their insufficient targets with the overall current best available science, you clearly see that there's a gap. There are decades missing."

What are the missing decades? The science she is referring to is the conclusion that we must reduce global emissions to zero by 2030 to avoid catastrophic consequences.

To reach that target we should have

already begun to cut back carbon emissions, but instead the world continues to move in the opposite direction.

Howie Hawkins, the Green Party candidate for president in 2020 wrote: "It's too late for gradualism. We must at least aim for the 'initial target' of 350 ppm (350 parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere) that was prosed 13 years ago by climate scientists James Hansen and colleagues in a 2008 study."

That target was the inspiration for the name of the "350.Org" that opposes climate change.

"The earth sailed past that 350 ppm at the end of 1988," Hawkins wrote. "At the Mauna Loa Observatory in Hawaii, carbon dioxide averaged 414 ppm in 2020, averaged 418 in march of this year, and set a record of 421 ppm on April, 3.

"The last time atmospheric carbon was this high was in the Mid-Pliocene Warm Period 3.6 million years ago when the temperature was 4 degrees Celsius (7 degrees Fahrenheit) hotter and sea levels were 27 meters (78 feet) higher than today.

"At last year's annual rate of carbon dioxide rise, the planet will hit 500

ppm around 2050 ....

"These climate changes are locked into the climate system by the contemporary carbon emissions unless the world not only zeroes out emissions, but soon gets to negative emissions by drawing carbon out of the atmosphere and into the biosphere by reforestation and by rebuilding carbon-rich living soils with regenerative agriculture.

"Today's rapid climate change entails more than the heat waves, extreme weather, and flooded cities in the headlines. Between now and 2050, we face mass extinctions, collapsing land and ocean ecosystems, agricultural crisis and food shortages, economic contraction and increasing poverty, hundreds of millions of climate refugees and escalating social conflicts and resource wars."

At this "summit" Biden announced that the U.S. would cut its emissions by at least 50 percent below 2005 levels, and reach net-zero emissions by 2050.

The European Union has pledged to cut carbon immersions by 55 percent of 1990 levels by 2030. China says it will continue to increase emissions until 2030, and then cap them and be carbon neutral by 2060.

China is the world's present chief emitter, and the U.S. has the dubious honor of being second. On a per capita basis the U.S. is number one.

Leaving aside Greta Thunberg's observation that all this is too little too late by decades, these goals are "fluff" according to In These Times. If we look at the U.S.'s "goals" and what's proposed to meet them, we get a good look at what the other countries' are also doing.

Biden has no proposals for the fossil fuel industries to cut their emissions of carbon dioxide. He knows any such proposals would meet with stiff resistance from the fossil fuel industry as well as most Republican and Democratic politicians.

Instead of such a "stick" he proposes the "carrot" of support to clean energy to make it more profitable than fossil fuels. He gives no timetable when this

could occur, even if he could get sufficient funds passed through Congress to do this.

He is also vague or misleading on the scale of funds needed, or how to deal with the huge investments the fossil fuel industry has already made in everything from drilling and fracking, pipelines, refineries, etc.

Power production accounts for only 27 percent of carbon emissions, transportation 28 percent; heating buildings 12 percent and agriculture 10. All productive sectors would have to be transformed.

"That huge emergency transformation can only be met by an ecosocialist approach using public enterprise and planning," says Hawkins.

Also in Biden's proposals there is the concept of "net-zero" emissions. "Net zero" looks something like "zero" to most people which is why this misleading term is used.

It means balancing continued emissions with removal from the atmosphere of carbon dioxide.

What he mentions as a possible way to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere is technology that would pump air with a lot of carbon dioxide, say from chimney stacks, by pipes underground to where it could be combined with certain rocks, and sequestered there.

This works in laboratories, but has only been actually proven to work on a small scale because of the costs of doing so. Right now there is zero prospect of using this on a large scale.

Moreover, it wouldn't work on heating buildings, or on transportation. Converting all trucks, cars, etc. to electricity, is not possible in the near future, but we must act now. Electrifying airplanes is far off, if ever possible.

And how would this work regarding bringing down carbon dioxide in the whole world's atmosphere, not just from sites close to chimneys? It's impossible. It is a quack idea.

We would have to take greenhouse gases out of the atmosphere to get

back down to 350 ppm even if we achieve no further burning of fossil fuels. There is only one way to do this, as was indicated by Howie Hawkins.

That is to restore the balance with nature that capitalism has disrupted, by reforestation and rebuilding carbon rich living soils with regenerative agriculture.

Rebuilding those world's forests which capitalism has already destroyed and continues to destroy is necessary because they, like all green plants, take carbon dioxide from the atmosphere in the process of photosynthesis, the basis of all our (and other animals') food, and replace oxygen back into the atmosphere.

Marx long ago saw that capitalism has created a "metabolic rift" between the cities and the countryside. Plants and animals grown for food and fiber in the countryside are sent to the cities to be consumed. The waste from this consumption is no longer returned to the soil, where it replenishes and reinvigorates it.

The result is the need for chemical fertilizers and pesticides, which create pollution in the biosphere, and the plants are not as efficient as they are when part of a natural balance.

The waste goes into the rivers, sewage systems, and eventually the oceans polluting them. Along with acid rain from burning fossil fuels the plant material in the oceans is being diminished, harming the ability of the oceans to absorb carbon dioxide.

We have to re-green the earth.

Today's Marxist ecosocialists have built upon what Marx and Engels noted in the harmful disruption of nature caused by capitalism to tackle the much increased and increasing harm capitalism has and done and is doing to the ecosystem in many aspects.

In truth Biden and the other world capitalist politicians at the "summit" have no plan at all to avert climate catastrophe. With nice-sounding vague promises they continue on the road to hell.

It will take mass movement and mass

action centered on the world's working people to effect meaningful change. The road ahead is difficult,

but socialists must embark upon it.

3 May 2021

Source *ESSF*.

# Our solidarity with the Colombian people!

5 May 2021, by **Fourth International Bureau**

## Background

In the midst of the brutal pandemic crisis, the government of Iván Duque launched a Tax Reform whose fundamental goal is to increase taxes on the population to the benefit of the richest. The government took advantage of the health situation to launch this bill, ignoring the 500 deaths per day and the 70,000 deaths in total, in addition to the enormous impoverishment of Colombians.

## Development of the movement

Faced with this situation, social movements called for a National Strike on 28 April to stop this tax reform. Mass mobilizations were unleashed all over the country, including in the medium-sized cities, and they brought together not only formal workers, but also informal workers, unemployed youth, women's, and neighbourhood organizations. The government responded to this with the same recourse as always: savage violence against the people.

The breadth and strength of the popular mobilization was due to the fact that, among other factors, the Tax Reform is not an isolated act; it is the culmination of the neoliberal policies of the current and previous governments that finally clashes with the resistance of the Colombian people. It is a legitimate struggle that has been building up against all the abuses of power and the historical postponement of the most basic rights.

## Anti-social offensive

For several decades, Colombia has had governments whose economic policy has been reduced to transferring public money to the

financial groups that control private banks and big business, and to accepting investments from extractive industries that displace populations, destroy territories, and pollute water and biodiversity. The social consequences of this policy have been devastating: unemployment is at historic levels and the threat of throwing a significant segment of public workers out of work as part of the adjustment plan is imminent. The indebtedness of families as a result of government-sanctioned financial speculation is evident. And the list could go on and on.

## Failure to comply with the peace accords

To this we must add the daily assassination of social leaders and the killing of peasant and indigenous populations prepared to implement a plan for the voluntary substitution of illicit crops, as agreed in the peace accords signed in Havana in 2016, by drug trafficking mafias. Crimes that count on the full complicity of the army, which does nothing to stop them, while the government, on the contrary, has decided to fumigate the territories where they live with glyphosate.

## Catastrophic management of the pandemic

The management of the pandemic could not have been more disastrous.

- Unconditional support for the big pharmaceutical companies, including international discussions at the World Health Organization when the temporary elimination of patents was proposed, including the secret payment of the cost of vaccines and the recognition that in the case of illnesses resulting from vaccination,

the victims cannot take legal action for reparation.

- Unconditional compliance with the conditions of payment of the public debt to the IMF and the rating agencies to the point of opening up the possibility of a debt-for-nature swap.

- Lack of public resources to resolve the situation of the millions of Colombians who have been dragged into unemployment and those who live in informality, forcing them onto the streets in the midst of the pandemic and with a privatized health system that abandons them to their own fate - only 4 million people have been vaccinated out of a population of 46 million inhabitants.

- The increase in poverty is alarming. The official statistics themselves recognise that poverty now reaches 60% of the population, which has consequences: of the total number of deaths caused by Covid-19, more than two thirds belong to the poorer sections of the population.

## A great victory, but the struggle continues

After four days of huge protests and more than thirty deaths and 100 disappeared at the hands of the military forces, on Sunday 2 May the popular movement achieved a very important victory when the right-wing president of the government, Duque, was forced to appear on television and announce the withdrawal of his regressive tax reform bill in order to stop the mobilizations.

The capitalist offensive does not stop, but neither does the popular resistance.

The Colombian people have resisted and continue to resist, encouraged by

this great victory. What is now on the agenda is to stop Duque's "package deal", which in addition to the tax reform includes an even more privatising health reform, a labour reform and a pension reform... All this to further cut workers' rights, which has been demanded by transnational finance capital through the IMF and the risk rating agencies. Therefore, these just demands must be associated with the slogan of the immediate suspension of the payment of public debt as an unpostponable measure to find budgetary resources to resolve the humanitarian tragedy that the country is experiencing.

The resistance is taking the form of territorial assemblies, which is a magnificent opportunity to broaden the social base of the struggles, to coordinate them better, to democratise them and, especially, to elaborate a broad platform, a great national platform that brings together the main demands of all social sectors: Women's struggles against the unfortunately recurrent femicide in the country, the fulfilment of the peace agreements starting with the voluntary substitution of illicit crops, the demands for the right to land and decent work, the defence of nature from an ecosocialist perspective.

**Stop the massacre of the repressive forces, put an end to the militarization of society**

In the immediate future, the urgent and united action must be to stop the massacre that the national police and its elite body, the Anti-Riot Squad (ESMAD), are carrying out against an

unarmed population on the direct orders of the general command of the Armed Forces and President Duque. They are arriving at the sites of demonstrations, firing on the demonstrators and nearby neighbourhoods with long arms, grenades and gas, in violation of the conventions of International Humanitarian Law. They are also detaining mainly young people in official vehicles or vehicles without official insignia, which then disappear. On 3 May, during the night, in neighbourhoods of Cali - the city where the largest protests have taken place - after laying siege to the city, they even strafed and threw incendiary bombs from official helicopters at residences.

#### **The human cost of armed violence**

This war-like treatment of legitimate protest is unjustifiable. The human cost being borne by the Colombian people for exercising this right is enormous. The numbers of dead, disappeared, wounded, and those brought to justice are increasing daily. This systematic violation of human rights has been recognized by the United Nations delegate office in Colombia, by Michelle Bachelet on behalf of the OAS and by Human Rights Watch, among others. The moment demands, and therefore we support it, a humanitarian solution to this unbridled militarization of social protest. For this reason, we support the proposal for an urgent International Observation Mission that has already been put forward by democratic and progressive sectors in the country. At the same time, we will

support the demand for international condemnation of the Duque government for its genocidal and repressive character.

The symbiosis of the reactionary government of Colombia with the US, which for years has facilitated the installation of US military bases in the country, is well known. From there, military operations are planned in other countries, such as in the south of Chile against the legitimate demands of the Mapuche people and fundamentally on the border with Venezuela, from where armed attacks on that country are being implemented to facilitate a military invasion. Duque rejects any peace initiative in the region and is subordinate to the dictates of the master to the north.

In view of the current events, the Fourth International calls on the social movements and revolutionary, progressive and democratic organizations to organise solidarity and to speak out urgently for a humanitarian solution to stop the massacre that the Duque government is carrying out against the Colombian people.

**For the distribution of wealth and labour, for an ecosocialist transition, for an anti-capitalist democracy,**

Down with the criminal and genocidal government of Duque!

*Executive Bureau of the Fourth International  
Tuesday 4 May 2021*

## **Turning a Profit from Death - On Modi's Pandemic Response in Neoliberal India**

**4 May 2021, by Tithi Bhattacharya**

Two images bookend the current crisis and contain in them a trajectory of the crisis. The first is the image of the Indian police hosing down migrant

workers with bleach last spring, during the first wave of the pandemic, and the grimmer, more recent one of cremation fires burning all over the

country. The road between the 2 markers was expected, but the violence lies in the fact that it could have been avoided.



When the infection rate fell after the first lockdown, the Modi regime declared victory over the virus. Lacing his propaganda with Hindu mythology, in March the prime minister told the nation that while the Mahabharat [mythic battle of Hindu epics] war had been won in 18 days, he would win the corona battle in 21.

Policy was shaped around these wild superstitions. The government's coronavirus task force stopped meeting and the Health Minister declared that India was "in the endgame of the pandemic." The government [boasted](#) that it had sold 55 million doses of vaccine to 62 different countries.

It was an example of a perfect marriage between Hindutva and capitalism. Hindutva assured the government that the virus was over, while capitalist greed monetized a global pandemic.

## Vaccine Capitalism

The lifesaving vaccine is available for free in almost all countries of the global North, in India it is not. The Serum Institute of India (SII), the world's largest vaccine maker, is currently the chief manufacturer of the vaccine in the country. In January they sold the first 100 million doses of the vaccine to the Indian government at a "special price" of [200 rupees](#) (\$2.74) per dose, after which they raised the price. On the private market the vaccine is being sold for 1,000 rupees (\$13.68) per dose.

SII is a private company headed by one of the richest men on the planet, Cyrus Poonawala whose net worth is about \$13 billion. Poonawala made his fortune as a horse breeder and racer. These superior gambling instincts guided his son, Adar Poonawala, to look at a devastating global pandemic last year and decide that it was his moment to make a killing. In his interview with [international media](#), Poonawala emphasized that he was going to "take the risk and become a front-runner."

The usual suspects jumped on this bandwagon of turning public health emergencies into private profit. The

Melinda and Bill Gates foundation invested \$150 million, while the vampiric firms of Goldman Sachs, Citi and Avendus Capital became SII's [chief advisors](#). Like all elites from the global south trained well in neoliberal speak, Poonawalla [declared](#) his lofty anticolonial goal to be the supply of "A majority of the vaccine, at least initially... to our countrymen before it goes abroad."

In reality, nearly [80 percent](#) of SII's went abroad for a steep profit, till the Indian government finally forced a ban on exports as the death count began to rise.

The lineaments of this capitalist macabre soon revealed themselves. Cyrus Poonawalla's wealth [rose](#) 85% in 5 months. And as the smoke from funeral pyres began to darken Indian skies, in late March, Adar Poonawalla [signed a deal](#) to rent a London mansion for a record \$70,000 a week.

## Neoliberal Death-making

The Modi regime is directly responsible for the current bloodshed. But the road here was paved by all who came before them, those who, since the 1980s, eagerly complied with the IMF's structural adjustment programs and destroyed India's life-making institutions and infrastructure. We apparently needed more cars, more dams, at the expense of food and healthcare.

The Indian economy was formally liberalized in 1991 under a Congress government. The story that followed will be distressingly familiar.

Reducing the fiscal deficit, the holy grail of neoliberalism, in reality opened up "[a revenue deficit](#)," as the rich were relieved of taxation and the state, while increasing military expenditure, slashed public sector investment and social spending. I want to emphasize that not just the Congress or the BJP but every ruling coalition, at the state and federal level, followed this trajectory, including the Stalinists in power in my home state of West Bengal, whose most celebrated effort was to

dispossess peasants from their land in order to build a car factory. More than 50 million Indians were dispossessed to make way for development projects like large dams in the first 50 years of independence to power capitalism's productivist imperative. Research [shows](#) that over 50 percent of the dispossessed were adivasis or indigenous people living in hills and forested land where most of the dams and mines were built.

The healthcare sector told a similar story of predation. According to the [BMJ](#), today, India has just 0.8 doctors and 0.7 hospital beds per 1000 population and is the [third largest military spender](#) in the world, after the US and China. But not everyone was left without healthcare. The private healthcare industry exploded under neoliberalism, with the country ranking among the [top 20](#) countries for its private healthcare spending, while being amongst the lowest for spending on public health.

Austerity, as Ruthie Gilmore teaches us, is the "organized abandonment" of life and life-making paired with "organized violence." The closing of schools and hospitals and the expansion of prisons and defense budgets hold a mirror to each other.

Austerity, however, merely amplifies what is a key organizing principle of capitalism, the lowering of the value of human life. While capitalism strives to lower the value of labor power in order to increase surplus value, what this means concretely for the working class is, following Rosemary Hennessy's concept of abjection, what we might call the manufacture of abjection. This mechanism goes beyond the economic effort of lowering wages. Indeed, wages are mostly effectively lowered when capital can successfully lower the parameters of social reproduction of life and labor power. Social oppressions such as race, gender, and caste are some of the key drivers for lowering social reproduction.

We should be reminded of a dark passage in Capital where Marx describes how, during his time in Britain, women were "still occasionally used instead of horses for hauling canal boats, because the labour

required to produce horses and machines is an accurately known quantity, while that required to maintain the women of the surplus-population is below all calculation." Michael Goldfield recently made a similar point about the role of slavery and racism in the US, showing how "both planters and northern industry benefitted from cheap labor whose lower limit was determined by racism" producing across time "a callous disregard for human dignity and the sanctity of human life." To paraphrase [Gillmore](#), where life is not precious, life is not precious.

We are seeing this murderous logic - of capitalism devaluing life through austerity - playing out in India on such a scale that even the rich and powerful are not safe. A former ambassador died while waiting in the parking lot of a Delhi hospital. There are no hospital beds. There are no ambulances. In Surat, an industrial city in Gujarat, the grills used to burn bodies have been operating so relentlessly that the iron on some of them melted. Almost all the mortuary staff in crematoriums and burning ghats are from Dalit or Bahujan communities, whose average monthly pay is around \$134. They are working round the clock, without any PPE, providing last rites, grief counselling and consolation to families who in life would have probably advocated for their continued ritual segregation from elite society. Bezwada Wilson, an organizer for the rights and welfare of sanitation workers, told [VICE World News](#), "No one knows how many cremation workers have tested positive for this deadly disease and no one knows how many have died as a result. It is because government officials don't see the cremation workers and sanitation workers as human."

But as the country gasps for oxygen, the stock of Linde India, a supplier of medical oxygen, has [doubled](#). Adar Poonawalla has honorably done a Ted Cruz, fled India and sought refuge in his modest London mansion, as have the [ultrarich](#) in their private jets.

Meanwhile the rest of India burns, as BJP leaders continue to peddle cow dung and cow urine as medical solutions to covid 19. As of Saturday,

[only 1.9 percent of India's population has been fully vaccinated](#) and over 400,000 new daily infections are confirmed by tests, the actual figure is surely far higher.

## Capitalist State against the People

Narendra Modi, more than any Prime Minister since the 1980s, has brutally wielded the might of the Indian state to shape a polity safe for capital, Hindutva has been the ideological battering ram for this project. While absent from any life-making work, such as healthcare or education, the state has been all too present in death-making, from the Gazafication of Kashmir to erecting detention camps for Muslims, Dalits, and Adivasis. Indeed, it's not the state that is currently keeping the neoliberalism-ravaged health care system operational, but ordinary people. Teams of volunteers have set up mutual aid networks across the devastated landscape and are trying to reduce harm in ingenious and deeply loving ways. Gurudwaras and mosques are working tirelessly to provide food. The fascist Shiv Sena's chief Uddhav Thackeray was forced to [thank](#) the Muslims of Ichalkaranji town of Maharashtra for donating Zakat money to fund a 10-bed ICU at a local hospital. People have set up COVID helplines to reach the sick and the suffering and are setting up car pools to act as ambulances, while politicians in Maharashtra and Gujarat have been seen hoarding essential drugs and oxygen to sell at a hiked price on the market.

This murderous division of labor between the state and the people needs to be reversed and the state forced to act on their behalf. A number of steps can be taken immediately to stem the tide.

- First, the government needs to invoke the Essential Commodities Act to stop the hoarding of essential drugs, oxygen, and so forth by predatory businesses.

- Second, the state should commandeer spaces to set up field hospitals and open up hotels for the

unhoused.

- Third, the government needs to invest money in vaccine production immediately and take steps to make vaccines free and universal. The differential pricing of these drugs, instituted by corporations like SII, needs to be scrapped and vaccines made free for all, and with distribution according to vulnerability, and not wallet size or ability to push to the front.

- Fourth, while Anthony Fauci has recommended a hard lockdown, in a country like India this step is neither humane nor effective without a stimulus payment from the state to families allowing them to be off work. Where there can and should be a hard lockdown is on religious and social gatherings, one of which in recent past, hailed by the government as safe, was undoubtedly been a superspreader.

- Fifth, public funds raised to deal with Covid-19 should be made immediately available in an open and transparent way. During the first wave last year the Modi government set up a Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund (PM-CARES) to deal with the crisis. More than 70% its funds have been donated by public sector units, but PM-CARES is set up to be unaccountable to government audits and hence the public. In reality no one knows how these funds are being spent.

- Finally, the international Left, especially in the global North, has a vital role to play: we need to pressure our own ruling classes to stop hoarding vaccines. Vaccine imperialism may work for the rich countries in the short term, but it allows the virus to mutate in the parts of the globe without the vaccine and eventually return to strike the hoarders. Internationalism in this case is not just a political principle, it is a public health necessity.

In Bhopal, Javed, an auto-rickshaw driver, has converted his auto into a makeshift ambulance, ferrying patients to hospitals for free. Courtesy: ScoopWhoop Media

My 13-year-old niece and nearly 80-year-old mother in Delhi are terrified to pick up the phone lest they hear of more losses.

I feel the need to marshal more than language to convey the scale of the crisis. How to convey the feel of air saturated with the ashes of cremated

bodies? How to translate into words the sound of the wailing mother who just lost her child? But we must use our words, more loudly now than ever. The dead demand that mystical veils of inscrutability be ripped from history, for beneath them lie the banally obvious explanation for this carnage: *capitalism*.

As we strive towards stabilizing life in India, we need to constantly remind ourselves that we can no longer afford to stabilize the system.

3 May 2021

Source [\*Spectre Journal\*](#).

## Islamophobia in Europe

3 May 2021, by **Joseph Daher**

Western states built up Muslims as a dangerous “other” in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. The so-called “War on Terror” helped the USA and its allies to justify imperialist wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and the wider region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) under the guise of combating terrorism.

At home, in both Europe and the United States, new counterterrorism policies and measures very largely targeted Muslims, who have been treated as legitimate objects of suspicion, and other non-white populations. Building on this “otherness” and “dangerousness,” authorities have increased laws and means to monitor Muslims, to control their every move, and to constantly ensure their adherence to so called “Western Values” or in France “Republican Values.”

Islamophobia has continued to grow in the USA and European countries over the past decade, with governments exploiting the rise of a new jihadist organization, the “Islamic State” (IS), and the arrival of millions of refugees from the MENA region to deepen their racist and repressive policies. The refugees of course are fleeing the deadly repression of authoritarian and despotic regimes, such as in Syria, the rise of the IS in Syria and Iraq, along with foreign interventions.

European Union (EU) countries are home to 20 million Muslims. Increasing number of far right and fascistic political parties throughout

the continent have scapegoated Muslims and other non-white populations. National Rally (formerly known as the National Front), the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), the English Defense League, Spain’s Vox Party and the Austrian Freedom Party are some of the political parties that share a common discourse and policy to rid Europe of its “Muslim issue.”

These far-right political movements, however, are not the ones that have implemented the racist and exclusionary policies against Muslim populations. It’s the social liberal and right-wing governments that have done so. Successive center-right political leaders have, for instance, repeatedly spoken against “Islamist terrorism” (German Chancellor Angela Merkel) and the incompatibility with European values of so-called “Islamist separatism” (French President Emmanuel Macron).

The article will discuss the growing Islamophobic political atmosphere and rising violence against Muslims in Europe, which also served to attack more generally the democratic rights of wider sectors of the society, especially leftist groups and activists. Continuation of Racism

Islamophobia does not measure a person’s religiosity. It’s a form of racism against individuals and populations considered or perceived as Muslims, whether he or she is a practicing believer or an atheist, but bearing a Muslim name.

Racism is not an opinion located in a psychological and individual level, but a relationship of domination: racialized groups are not simply perceived and thought of as citizens entirely apart, but also treated in a particular way. This difference, which should rather be characterized as unequal treatment, translates very concretely into denial or at least inequality of rights and opportunities — for example when one is Muslim, Arab or Black to find a job or housing, or for Muslim women the right to wear a headscarf in public school.

After World War II serious attempts to classify people according to race ended, but racism took on other forms. The conservative “revolution” of the 1980s reinforced the official rhetoric of governments with the promotion of “culturalist” explanations to promote discriminatory and racist policies. This was accompanied by the implementation of neoliberal policies. It was also connected to the ascendance of Samuel Huntington’s concept of the “clash of civilizations.”

Neoliberal policies in Western countries led to further precariousness and a massive impoverishment of working-class populations. As trade unions and resistance from below were being crushed, competition between workers rose. In working-class circles, those who pay the most for these neoliberal policies were women, young people and populations with immigrant and/or minority backgrounds.



Under these circumstances inequalities in society could no longer be denied — but their causes were located in “cultural factors” supposedly specific to a person or a minority group. Inequalities were therefore explained by a group’s culture which was regarded as homogeneous.

In France, for example, Arab/Muslim populations (or those considered as such) were accused of “insufficient integration.” Their cultures and/or religions were seen as “incompatible” with “French culture.”

In Great Britain, similar dynamics were at play. The “War on Terror” in the 2000s was built on an older idea that Muslims “self-segregate” and don’t accept “British values.” This actually became a cornerstone of the Prevent strategy (see below), which pushes public sector workers to spy on Muslims for signs of radicalization and “non-violent extremism.” [66]

Inequalities in society are no longer understood or seen as produced by the state’s social, political and economic policies. The objective is to disqualify the legitimacy of the claims and demands denouncing the inequalities in a particular society.

The development of racist discrimination in all spheres of social life leads to a triple process of precariousness, ghettoization and ethnicization of minority and/or migrant populations.

## Attacking Democratic and Social Rights

The so called “War on Terror” led to justifying two massive wars, the occupations Afghanistan and Iraq, and other military interventions in Muslim majority countries, while criminalization and exclusionary policies against Muslim also increased.

Over the past two decades, the prohibitions on forms of Muslim veiling in various public spaces has gone from the hijab ban in French schools and restrictions for teachers in

some parts of Germany to an outright interdiction of the face-covering niqab in public spaces in Denmark, Belgium, France and more recently in Switzerland.

This has been accompanied by rising violence targeting Muslims, mosques and their symbols. This demonstrates how anti-Muslim feelings have penetrated far beyond certain limited sections of society, to reach wider sectors.

In a report published in 2012 titled “Choice and prejudice: discrimination against Muslims in Europe,” Amnesty International was alarmed by the Islamophobic climate. Many European countries (France, Switzerland, Austria, etc.) were singled out for their practices, while political parties quietly encourage them in their quest for electoral votes, the report adds.

The editor of the report describes, for example, how “Muslim women are denied jobs and young girls are prevented from going to school simply because they wear traditional clothes like headscarves...Men can be fired for wearing beards associated with Islam.” Muslims in Britain are generally paid 13-21% less than others with equal qualifications, while Muslim job seekers were three times less likely to be offered an interview. [67]

This has continued throughout the continent. In France, numerous laws in the past two decades directly or indirectly targeted Arab/Muslim populations, starting with the ban on the hijab in schools in 2004 and the niqab face veil in all public spaces in 2011. The burkini (swimwear for conservative Muslim women) clampdown followed in 2016.

The Collective Against Islamophobia in France on numerous occasions accused the French state and public authorities of participating, through their action, in the spread of Islamophobia. The implementation of the state of emergency and more broadly the anti-terrorism policy conducted since 2015 have led, according to the Collective to “the emergence of a security Islamophobia.” [68]

French President Macron announced a “separatism” law on October 12, 2020, and it was adopted on February 16, 2021, by the National Assembly. The discussion and adoption of the law were the pretext for all kinds of racist declarations by a majority of deputies of the right and far right. Unfortunately, some sections of the left joined in too.

[Now pending in the Senate and sharply criticized by Amnesty International, the sweeping “anti-separatism” law imposes regulations on religious organizations and allows the state to ban preachers for alleged extremism — ed.]

Meanwhile, the government-owned and mainstream media accused organizations and individuals opposing this law of “Islam-leftism.” It sought to delegitimize any solidarity the left shows to the Muslim population.

In France’s new “anti-separatist” law, 51 articles provide more security tools. To receive grants from the state, associations will have to sign a “Republican engagement contract on respect for the principles and values of the republic.” This is accompanied by an extension of the grounds for dissolving associations which “threaten public order,” just as the government banned and dissolved certain Muslim associations in the past few months, such as the Collective Against Islamophobia in France, whose role is to provide assistance to victims of Islamophobia. [69]

At the same time, the so-called “religious neutrality” required of public service agents is extended to private sector agents entrusted with a public service mission, with all the obligations that go with it, in particular the headscarf ban. There will be increased control over mosques, an obligation to declare donations received from abroad, a change in the status of Islamic worship activities from the 1901 law to a more restrictive “separation” law of 1905, and increased control over all the activities of their cultural associations.

More generally, this new law is about



silencing Muslims and their organizations, harassing them by making them responsible for the discrimination they denounce.

Similarly in the UK, the British government also stigmatized Muslims through various so-called “security” policies such as the “Prevent” security program, which began to be implemented in 2005. This program, redesigned by the Conservatives in 2011 but first launched by Tony Blair’s New Labor in 2007, aims to “fight terrorism” and “extremism.”

The program allows British authorities to put under surveillance anyone who disagrees with government policy and the actions of the British state, such as opposition to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the bombing of Libya or support to the Palestinian cause, and “British core values.”

Muslim students were particularly targeted in this campaign. The Prevent program also asked teachers to denounce the signs of “radicalization” of young Muslims...

According to a study published in 2017, the vast majority of teachers and school employees affirmed their concern about the stigmatization of Muslim students in the “Prevent” program strategy and on the contrary undermines inclusion efforts in schools, while being ineffective against religious extremism. [70]

As Narzanin Massoumi explained, “a Pakistani citizen is 150 times more likely to be stopped and searched under Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act — a draconian piece of legislation that allows people to be stopped at ports without ‘reasonable suspicion’ — than if you are white.”

The law allows officers to detain people without suspicion and hold them for up to nine hours at airports, ports and international rail stations. Yet only 100 people have been charged and 44 convicted since the law came into force in 2001.

In both, France and Britain the rise of Islamophobic policies also played an important role in a process of controlling and limiting the political rights of everyone — not only

Muslims. In France, so called “anti-terrorist” and “security” laws targeted leftist and ecologist activists and group. On November 28, 2020, massive demonstrations occurred in France against “the global security law” uniting various democratic and progressive forces — from journalist organizations to the radical left — to fight the impunity of the police and the extension of surveillance power.

More generally this demonstration was to struggle for self-defense against the state apparatus and policies that deny liberties. These rank high among the instruments of the ruling class in the period of global crisis.

Similarly in England, the “Prevent” security program did not stop with attacks against Muslims, but later on targeted the left — ecologists, left groups, pro-Palestinian movements etc. For example, Marxist teaching texts are for marked as potentially radicalizing tools and therefore school teachers can no longer use anti-capitalist material.

## Demonizing Muslims

The policies of governments and mainstream media have participated in the demonization of Muslims. Numerous studies have demonstrated that the display of negative portrayals of Muslims in the media make the population more likely to support government policies that are detrimental to Muslims and an erosion of their rights.

In 2007 a Greater London Authority report exposed that in a week’s coverage by the British media, 91% of the stories about Muslims were negative. A more recent study by the Muslim Council of Britain revealed last year that not much had changed.

An Arab News/YouGov poll in 2017 pointed out that the majority of British people supported racial profiling against Arabs. In 2019, YouGov found that 38% of British people believed that Islam was not compatible with Western values. A much higher proportion of respondents had an

unfavorable view of Islam compared to any other religion. [71]

In addition, after Boris Johnson’s comments comparing women in burqas to “letterboxes” and “bank robbers,” Islamophobic incidents reportedly jumped by 375% in the following week. An internal inquiry by the Conservatives, however, characterized them as “respectful and tolerant.”

In 2019, research conducted for the Bertelsmann Stiftung’s Religion Monitor yet again confirmed large mistrust towards Muslims across Europe. In Germany and Switzerland, every second respondent declared they considered Islam as a threat. [72] Forty-four percent of Germans, for example, saw “a fundamental contradiction between Islam and German culture and values.” The figure for the same in Finland was a remarkable 62%; in Italy, it’s 53%.

In Spain and France, about 60% thought Islam is incompatible with the “West.” In Austria, one in three didn’t want to have Muslim neighbors. [73] In Hungary, which has seen growing anti-immigrant and racist policies since 2015, 72% had unfavorable views of Muslims in 2016 according to a survey by the Pew Research Center, while in a survey in 2017, 64% of respondents from Hungary agreed with the statement that “all further migration from mainly Muslim countries should be stopped.” [74]

More broadly, a new report by Amnesty published in the beginning of 2021 describes how discrimination in European counter-terrorism policies has promoted an environment where Muslims are more likely to be the subject of hate speech and attacks, while reinforcing the racist view that Islam is a “threat.” Muslims continue therefore to suffer ethnic profiling and are disproportionately subjected to surveillance, limitations on their movements, arrest and deportation. [75]

## Explosion of

# Violence

The constant criminalization and racist policies against Muslims led to an explosion of Islamophobic acts in recent years, including killings and forms of terrorism by far-right movements and/or fascist individuals and organizations.

In 2018 alone, France saw a 52% increase of Islamophobic incidents while in Austria there was an increase of around 74%, with 540 cases. In Germany, the number of crimes classified as Islamophobic rose by 4.4% to 950 offenses in 2019, according to German police statistics.

Repeated or foiled attacks on refugee centers and mosques have multiplied, as with the killing of nine people in Hanau in February 2020 as the most blatant example. [76] The perpetrator of the attack in Hanau possessed what the German authorities have called “a deeply racist mind-set.” [77]

In Britain there were 143,920 anti-Muslim or anti-Islamic Tweets sent from the UK — an average of 393 per day between March 2016 and March 2017. The number of Islamophobic attacks also multiplied by five the day after the May 22, 2017 suicide bombing at the Manchester arena.

Islamophobic attacks are also part of an increasingly aggressive and hostile political atmosphere, while the fascist and far-right movements are mobilizing ever more on these issues. In England two fascist group, Britain First and the English Defense League (EDL), have also increased Islamophobic attacks.

Leaders of Britain First have been banned from going to all mosques after a series of attempted intimidation of Muslims in their places of worship. On the other hand, EDL leader Tommy Robinson called for the formation of “militias” to “settle” the issue of Islam in Great Britain.

Muslims and mosques have also increasingly been targets of French far-right and fascist movements and groups. Far-right terrorists have justified their attacks as struggling against a “Muslim invasion.” The

fascist Anders Breivik who assassinated 77 individuals in 2011 in Norway, claimed for instance to act to preserve Christianity against multiculturalism and to avert the “Eurabia” — a theory popularized by Bat Ye’or (the writer Gisele Littman — ed.) that Europe will be colonized by the “Arab world.”

The line from policy to act, from rhetoric to violence, is very hard to draw. And the process by which Islamophobia spreads across European society is complex, multicausal, endlessly ramifying.

## Feminism or Femo-Nationalism?

Similarly, there has been an instrumentalization (opportunistic manipulation — ed.) of women’s rights to attack the Muslim population, which is widely viewed as more patriarchal, essentializing Muslims as a threat to women’s rights. A form of femo-nationalism has been developing. As academic Sara Farris explained, this is an “instrumentalization” of migrant women in Europe by right-wing nationalists — and neoliberals. [78]

The far right and the right have taken over part of the feminist discourse, not to effectively defend women — they continue to maintain conservative and reactionary positions regarding women’s and LBGTIQ rights — but to erect a barrier between “Us,” the supposed egalitarian and emancipated Western society, and “Them,” an oppressive and threatening Islam. [79]

For example, banning the burqa in several countries in Europe was implemented for the so-called purpose of struggling for women’s rights and equality. The main objective of these interdictions, however, were new campaigns of stigmatization against the Muslim populations.

Other voices claiming to be “left and feminist” also support the initiative in the name of equality, declaring that “the full veil is nothing but a mobile prison for women.” Their paternalistic

argument — “we have never considered the fact that certain individuals accept or even adhere to the discrimination they suffer as a reason to stop combating this same discrimination” — denies the agency of women wearing the burqa, and ignores that this initiative will, on the contrary, only reinforce the discrimination to which they are already subjected.

More generally some prominent feminists, although a minority, have supported laws such as the veil and burkini bans in France — for example, the well-known feminist intellectual Elizabeth Badinter — and this has strengthened anti-Islam positions in the name of women’s rights.

It is indeed a real trap for the feminist movement. It breaks the solidarity among women by putting on one side Muslim women, with or without headscarves, portrayed as submissive victims and never as actors of their own emancipation unless they demonstrate their adherence to “Western values.” On the other side Western society, even Western feminism, is considered capable of deciding the norms of gender equality and paths to liberation.

Such orientations are at odds with any idea of ??women’s self-determined action, by anathematizing women wearing the burqa or headscarves, speaking on their behalf and declaring them automatically oppressed without giving them speech or even listening to them.

Moreover, use of the repressive state apparatus is never a vehicle for emancipation. Muslim women, already sufficiently discriminated against and subject to stereotypes having a considerable impact on the realization of their rights, do not need to have their rights and activity decided for them.

The issue of the veil and the burqa only concerns women; they must decide for themselves and in complete independence whether or not to wear it. Either imposing or removing the veil and burqa by force — by a state and/or an individual — is a reactionary act that goes against any support for women’s autonomy.

Tackling the structural problems of sexism and racism cannot be done by choosing to stigmatize a group that is itself discriminated against. Only an anti-racist and anti-capitalist feminist movement can tackle these issues.

Conclusion

The continuously growing Islamophobia in Europe over the past two decades is not limited to a reaction to the terrorist Islamic State attacks or due solely to propaganda of far right groups, as claimed by mainstream media and governments, but are above all the result of the increasing authoritarian and racist policies of European governments.

The Islamophobic and racist policies of the ruling classes have the objective of consolidating a nationalist imagination by inviting the majority ethno-racial group to unite against invented threats posed by Muslims and more generally non-white populations.

Meanwhile various European governments are deepening their neoliberal and nationalist agendas, while most of the liberal and social-liberal parties have not opposed them, quite the opposite.

Moreover, it's important to understand how Islamophobia plays a larger social role by trying to normalize attacks by the ruling classes and the expansion of state control, directed not only at Muslim populations characterized as dangerous, but at everyone on the left who challenge the ruling system.

Therefore, struggling against

Islamophobia and all forms of racism is also a way to defend the rights of all engaged in challenging this unequal authoritarian system. In this perspective, let us not forget that jihadist organizations and others also feed in part on the racist, anti-social and imperialist policies of Western governments.

At the same time, there has been growing resistance from Muslim, Black and non-white populations and sections of the left against various governments' racist and security policies. The murder of George Floyd under the knee of a police officer in Minneapolis in the spring of 2020 sparked a wave of anti-racist mobilization, historic in its scale and duration but above all by its global dimension.

Nearly all the Western countries were affected. In Paris, at the call of the Adama Committee, tens of thousands of people rushed to the court to demand "truth and justice." Demonstrations condemned state racism, socio-economic discrimination and police violence.

Marxists must challenge Islamophobia along with all forms of racism. Similarly, we must defend freedom of religion, and at the same time the right of oppressed groups to self-determination. In his Critique of the Gotha Program, Karl Marx argued that we must reject state interference in matters of belief and worship.

Workers' struggles alone will not be sufficient to unite the working classes. Socialists in these struggles must also

champion the liberation of all the oppressed. That requires raising demands of rights for women, religious minorities, LGBT communities, and oppressed racial and ethnic groups. Any compromise on the explicit commitment to such demands will impede the Left from uniting the working class for the radical transformation of society.

The left must indeed understand how beyond capitalist dynamics, gender issues, discrimination based on religion and/or "race" influence the structure and dynamics of our societies, our workplaces and the development of consciousness. It is not whether class issues come before gender/race/religion or vice versa, but how these elements come together in capitalist production and power relations, which result in a complex reality.

Discrimination based on race, gender, economic, cultural and ideological oppression should not be underestimated, at the risk of losing sight of the complexity of the task when building a progressive movement including workers of all backgrounds.

Failing to consider these interconnections will negatively impact the hard struggle to unite the working class and developing the political project for a radical transformation of society.

All forms of exploitation and oppression are opposed by Marxists. As Marx declared: "Labor in white skin cannot emancipate itself where black skin is branded."

## Regime intensifies repression, but struggle continues

2 May 2021, by **Pavel Katarzheuski**

This question concerned all opponents of the authorities, for the mass actions on these days would make it clear

whether the regime's repressive measures had worked and whether the political revolution was going to

have a prolonged character.

# Police violence

It should be noted that by the end of November 2020, protest actions had started to acquire a local and ad hoc character, having moved from the central streets of the cities to the dormitory towns and suburbs. The latest event that prompted the masses to take to the streets and sparked an outbreak of police violence was the murder of opposition supporter Roman Bonadrenko by law enforcement officials. On 11 November 2020, he was beaten by plainclothes law enforcement officers for asking them not to destroy the symbols of protest in the courtyard of his apartment building. The next day, Roman died in the hospital emergency room. A spontaneous popular memorial formed in this courtyard, and the police have repeatedly assaulted it. After the brutal repression of popular demonstrations linked to Bonadrenko's death, the regime, taking advantage of the ebb of the wave of protest, launched a repression and set out in search of the most politically active citizens: civic and trade union activists, human rights activists, leaders of the "neighbours' committees" which had been formed in buildings in the most contested areas and all those who took the most active part in the events of August-September 2020. On 17 March, the Belarusian Prosecutor's Office reported that 468 criminal cases had been opened against 631 people because of their participation in protest activities, and that more than 270 people had the status of political prisoners. The Investigation Committee says more than 2,300 criminal cases related to "extremist" activity have been opened since last summer. At the same time, not a single law enforcement officer has been prosecuted for abuse of power - even protester Gennady Shutov, killed in August, was posthumously found "guilty" of resistance and use of violence against a state official - and the police officers who confessed to the murder were tried as victims.

All of these figures are important for understanding the state of Belarusian society as the protesters prepared to return to the streets: an atmosphere of frightening terror, the real possibility

of receiving a prison sentence for coordinating protests in your apartment building or workplace, and even being tortured or killed.

In addition, the penalties provided for by the Code of Administrative Offenses for participation in an unauthorized mass event have been tightened - measures such as warnings have been removed, the amount of fines and the duration of administrative arrest have been increased. At the same time, it is impossible to organize a legal protest rally in Belarus, as all decisions are taken by the authorities. There are plans to strengthen the law on the procedure for the organization of massive events (which was already repressive in nature) and to give the executive the exclusive right to grant their authorization.

## Dictator's victory not recognised

On 25 March, the Interior Ministry press service reported isolated instances of protest activity, but the facts say otherwise. Because Belarusian police said more than 200 people were arrested for participating in protest actions. On that day, the main opposition media reported that protests were "back in the streets", but after a long, politically glacial winter, people were unable to organize and take to the streets in droves. Nevertheless, small spontaneous "chains of solidarity" formed in the centre of Minsk. After that, the format was instantly changed: opposition media called on drivers to honk their horns in support of the protests and protesting citizens to fire fireworks at 9 p.m.

In Minsk and other cities across the country, the sky trembled under fireworks for at least half an hour, and car horns could be heard even several kilometres from the city centre. Everything was very clear: nobody recognized the victory of the dictator, nobody forgave the terror and the repression, but all these beautiful actions were rather gestures of revolutionary impotence. Of course, KGB policemen, and Lukashenko himself in his pink palace, probably

had to grit their teeth when they saw the Minsk sky lit up with thousands of bursts of protest and heard the howl of hundreds of car horns. But however beautiful the performances, one thing deserves to be understood: Horns, fireworks and other symbolic acts of defiance do not overthrow dictatorial regimes or even bring victory closer.

On 27 March, the residents of Minsk again attempted to rally for street action, but the increased concentration of the forces of order and military equipment in the city did not give the opportunity and at least 240 people were arrested. According to more precise data, from 25-27 March, more than 500 people were detained. This attempt by people to support each other and declare continued resistance in difficult times of reaction cost the protesters 15 days in inhumane conditions.

## Form and content

Why were the actions scheduled for 25 March? Unfortunately, some "Marxists" put form over content and categorically refused to support the protests as a whole, especially because of the date. For it was on 25 March 1918 that the independence of the "Belarusian People's Republic" (BPR) was proclaimed. Every year this day is celebrated by the national democratic Parties, including the social democrats. Those who participated in the proclamation of the BPR were left-wing socialists by conviction and were members of the Bielaruskaya sotsialistichnaya Hramada (Belarusian Socialist Community) party. The announcement of the establishment of the BPR became possible thanks to the October Revolution and Lenin's national policy, for, as we know, Lenin, in his article "Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?" (September 1917) was probably the first politician in history to put forward the idea of complete independence for Belarus, and not just autonomy.

Thus, the BPR was initially founded on good principles, in particular the reduction of the working day, the socialization of the means of production and the confiscation of land holdings without compensation.



Nevertheless, the BBR was in reality a stillborn project: having no citizenship, monetary system, or army. This “republic” existed in the territory occupied by German troops and was in fact an organ under the administration of the occupier. Over time, the BPR increasingly became an affront - a fact recognized even by its leaders - and the project itself acquired an anti-Bolshevik character. At the end of its existence, the BPR leadership sought the support of various reactionary forces, from the German Kaiser to the White Guards. As a result, on the territory liberated from the Germans, on 1 January 1919, the real Belarusian state - the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic - was founded.

As one might expect, for the Belarusian left the date of 25 March is questionable: the social democrats see it as a failed socialist project and the national democrats appreciate it for its subsequent anti-Bolshevism. As for Marxists, they have always distanced themselves from this date. Every year on this day, authorized and unauthorized actions were organized by part of the Belarusian opposition. The authorities tolerated the holding of a rally or march on that day, although there were usually arrests. This year, the authorities refused to organize a legal event, arguing that it could be used “by destructive forces to destabilize the situation in the country”. In fact, the right to freedom of assembly has been violated without any reason, as is always the case in Belarus. But part of the left has adopted an openly sectarian position and thus approved the actions of the authorities, refusing to participate in the protests or remaining silent on the torture and detentions. All this solely for the historical reasons described above related to the date of 25 March.

Analysing the situation from a Marxist perspective, our party, “A Just World”, understands that form cannot define content and that we must support the democratic demands of the people, which coincide with our political program. This is why the Minsk committee of our party condemned the actions of the authorities aimed at intimidating the citizens and creating an atmosphere of a state of emergency in the capital. Our party also said that all detainees should be immediately

released while those responsible for using violence and restricting citizens’ rights to freedom of assembly should be punished and publicly apologize to all victims. Furthermore, it is no exaggeration to say that most of the protesters were unaware of the historical and ideological background of the day the protest was to take place. The fact that people take to the streets on dates other than those associated with the history of the labour and communist movement only demonstrates the left’s lack of systematic work with protesters and the snobbery of most left groups, which place “ideological purity” above support for the just demands of the masses.

## New repressive laws

Although the actions of 25 and 27 March were repressed and took place in a “clandestine” manner, the authorities have grasped this indication of the will to continue the struggle given by the majority of Belarusians and have announced a new package of repressive laws. On 16 April 2021, the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus adopted at second (last) reading a bill “on the modification of the fight against extremism”. Among other things, this draft broadens the definition of “extremism” and “extremist activity”, effectively allowing the Interior Ministry to decide who is extremist. In addition, under the new law, the police now have the right to use force “at their own discretion, taking into account the development of the situation” and are no longer liable for any damage resulting from the resort to force. Of course, there are some caveats in the law, such as the fact that when using means of restraint or other devices, a police officer must strive to cause as little damage as possible, but it is clear that they are simply formal, because such reservations existed previously without preventing the police from using brutality and torture. But it is the amendments to the Penal Code that are most important in this package of repressive laws. They provide for the

criminal prosecution of a person who has allegedly been administratively sanctioned twice in the name of the Law on the Organization of Mass Events. In other words, if a person is caught by the police at a rally for the third time in a year, they can be handed a prison sentence of several years. The new edition of the law “on mass events” also introduces repressive innovations: from now on, political parties are responsible (!) for each member of the party who participates in an unauthorized rally. This creates a legal basis for the liquidation of opposition parties, because if a second warning is issued within a year, according to the law the party can be dissolved by the Supreme Court.

However, despite the passage of repressive laws and the massive sentences of a political character, we must remain optimistic. Despite all these frightening things, the left opposition and all those who are against the dictatorship are not weakened. Just a year ago, few people would have imagined that support for the regime would be so low and interest in politics so high. Only a year ago, no one could have imagined that even under conditions of severe repression, independent trade unions would develop, and Belarusians would actively join existing opposition political parties and talk about the creation of new political structures. Despite repression of a magnitude comparable to that of the Stalinist era, the grassroots initiatives and strike committees, created at the height of the protest mobilization, continue. As for the other tactics of socialists, it is impossible to say anything new, as there are no magic recipes that will set the masses in motion and destroy the fear that has been sown by the regime in these long and difficult months. Our tasks remain the same: to strengthen ties with the labour movement, try to maintain the structures of our parties and unions and to carry out the explanation of our socialist program as much as possible under the existing conditions.

## Popular discontent

# inevitable

Of course, there is now an atmosphere of demoralization and pessimism. However, the political crisis has not gone away, and the dictatorship has received a severe blow, the regime continues to be afraid and operates under conditions which are an existential threat to it. Many civil servants, police officers, teachers, medical and cultural workers left public service in 2020 in protest, and the dictator has reason to doubt the

loyalty of those who still continue to work in the public sector. The number of opponents of the regime has not decreased since last autumn but has increased following the repression and threats against all those who voice criticism. The living conditions of citizens continue to deteriorate: wages have continued to fall for several consecutive months, the real amount of pensions reached its lowest level in February, there are cases of wage arrears, prices increased significantly, and inflation was much higher than expected by the National Bank. In addition, there is information about

the preparation of mass layoffs and the lack of funds in the budget.

A massive explosion of popular discontent in the near future is not only possible, but inevitable. The only question is what the trigger for a new wave of mobilization will be. It is worth recalling here one of the laws of dialectics: the passage from the quantitative to the qualitative. An event in itself may not be the cause, but it may be the last necessary element in the chain of other events that lead to social explosion.

## Chauvin's Conviction and the Future of Policing

1 May 2021, by **Dan La Botz**

Three things brought about Chauvin's conviction. First, Darnella Frazier, a courageous girl of 17, used her cellphone to videotape Chauvin's murder of George Floyd. The video showed Chauvin with his knee on Floyd's neck for nine minutes as Floyd repeatedly said, "I can't breathe." Her video became the key evidence in the trial, the prosecution telling jurors, "Believe your eyes."

Second, the Chauvin's murder of Floyd on May 25, 2020 set off national protests that grew throughout the spring and summer of 2020 with at least 15 million Americans demonstrating and marching from coast to coast. The Black Lives Matter protests led to demands for police reform and change public attitudes.

Third, the mixed-race jury broke with the usual practice of police impunity and brought a conviction of murder. Chauvin has not yet been sentenced, but he could go to prison for over forty years.

President Joseph Biden commented on the verdict: "It was a murder in the full light of day, and it ripped the blinders off for the whole world to see

the systemic racism...that is a stain on our nation's soul; the knee on the neck of justice for Black Americans; the profound fear and trauma, the pain, the exhaustion that Black and brown Americans experience every single day."

Yet even as Chauvin was being tried, in a Minneapolis suburb a white woman police officer shot and killed Duante Wright during a stop for an expired car registration. The officer claimed that she mistook her gun for her Taser. Black people are two and a half times more likely to be killed by the police than are white people. Already in 2021 police have shot and killed 241 Black people nationally, compared to 235 in 2020. Most of those killed are black men, though some are women and others are children.

While Black Americans and progressives celebrated Chauvin's conviction, and some see it as a possible turning point, others are skeptical. In the United States, states and cities generally control policing and there are 49 state police agencies and 17,985 local police departments. Democrats drafted the George Floyd

Justice in Policing Act that would give greater power to the U.S. Justice Department to investigate police misconduct issues, create independent state agencies to investigate excessive use of force, establish a federal registry of complaints, reduce the qualified immunity that police enjoy, require body cameras, end chokeholds, and abolish "no-knock" warrants. Republicans, who have a reputation as the party of law and order and generally support the police, will oppose the bill, saying they want more moderate changes.

During the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, Black people and progressives called for "defunding the police," meaning the transfer of funds for policing to other areas such as mental health programs. The far left, including the Democratic Socialists of America, advocate abolishing the police. But only a handful of cities reduced their police budgets and no city has abolished the police. A majority of Black voters oppose drastic budget cuts or abolition of the police, since many live in high crime neighborhoods. Nor do progressives support abolition of the police.

The Chauvin conviction was momentous, and could be a turning point, but police reform ultimately depends on building a popular

movement for reform in education, health, housing, as well as ending police racism and violence. We need to end inequality in wealth and power,

and ultimately we must abolish capitalism.

Source [New Politics](#).