



IV557 - June 2021

Let's federate to "storm the heavens"!

30 June 2021, by **Joséphine Simplon**

For more than a year, the health crisis has been accelerating the social crisis through widespread redundancies and job losses, an explosion of precarity and poverty but also provoking a democratic crisis with authoritarian and liberticidal policies. This government also persists in its lack of response to the ecological crisis – its "Climate and Resilience" law, which has been stripped of all content, is another illustration of this. It has to be said, unsurprisingly and despite the fine words, that for a year no significant change of course has been implemented. Indeed, the government continues its antisocial policies, destructive of social protection and public services, by persisting in its sweeping reform of unemployment insurance, which has become emblematic of this presidential term since the pensions reform was postponed (though far from abandoned).

At the same time, this government is giving a free rein to employers and financial interests, who have never paid so much in dividends to their shareholders and who lay off their employees for mere speculative reasons. While all economists are expecting an unprecedented wave of bankruptcy filings in the coming months and unemployment will explode, the CAC 40 groups will pay more than 51 billion euros in dividends to their shareholders while they continue to receive massive

public aid (short-time working, emergency plans, recovery plan and so on) without any conditions or compensation in terms of jobs, tax or environmental matters. The likes of Bettencourt, Bolloré, Arnault, Pinault, Blackrock, Amundi and others will once again be the big winners of the crisis while front line workers, students, and the precarious sink into poverty.

Concerning the health crisis, this government is continuing to drift, with no other policy than that of continuing to increase profits. And vaccination management is another example. While the government is now making vaccination the be all and end all of its pandemic management, vaccines continue to be supplied in dribs and drabs by the trusts that manufacture and sell them at high prices rather than considering them a "common good of humanity". This obviously requires the lifting of patents, but also the transfer of technology and the requisitioning of the pharmaceutical industry under social control.

Macron paves the way for Le Pen

The repressive, freedom-destroying and authoritarian policy of this government is not new, it has been one of its trademarks since it came to power. Macron is accentuating those

policies that were already the prerogative of his predecessors on both left and right and is strengthening many security laws that have existed for several decades. This law and order policy, which destroys freedom, obviously aims to gag social protest by criminalizing it. This is how Interior Minister Darmanin, under the pretext of "disruption of public order", has prohibited demonstrations of solidarity with the Palestinian people in Paris, Strasbourg and Nice.

The health crisis has been a fabulous pretext for the government to reduce democracy through ever more liberticidal laws: state of emergency, curfew, exit certificates, limitation of the right to travel and access to public places, banning demonstrations, regulation on public gatherings, total and partial lockdowns, thus installing an emergency regime that has lasted for more than a year. But that's not all: it adopted a global security law that equates protesters with terrorists, to provide it with the "legal" means to control, deter or even prevent any expression of popular opposition. In this authoritarian, antisocial and demagogic drift, a new "anti-terrorism and intelligence" law is being prepared, reinforcing an already well-stocked security arsenal. These so-called emergency measures are gradually being incorporated into ordinary law, in the logic of a permanent state of emergency. Let us not forget either, in this period, the

repression and police violence, the only political responses this government has to social protest. On 1 May, the police once again teargassed the trade union demonstration in Paris on several occasions.

Macron does not seem to want to draw a social and health balance sheet of the pandemic. And so that we avoid talking about his catastrophic management, he has found a diversion that is always a recipe: the “fight against separatism” which in fact is addressed only to Muslims. And unsurprisingly, the outbidding between members of the government, the right and the far right, relayed by all the reactionary media, has raged. But lest this diversion was not enough, Frédérique Vidal, Minister of Higher Education, has launched an investigation into the “Islamism” allegedly afflicting the universities. This was all that was needed to restart the machine of caricatures, stigmatization and accusations against organizations and personalities. And on several topics, it is increasingly difficult to distinguish between the discourse of Macron’s La République En Marche (LREM), Les Républicains (LR) and Marine Le Pen’s Rassemblement National (RN).

Far right gains confidence

Macron and his supporters are already campaigning for the 2022 presidential elections. And like Sarkozy in 2012, he has chosen to take on board the themes and discourse of the far right, thus claiming to be the best bulwark against Marine Le Pen coming to power. Thus, Darmanin goes so far as to denounce the “softness” of the RN leader. It is in this context that Action Française supporters forced their way into the Regional Council of Occitanie to denounce the “Islamists” who sit there, while fascists attacked a bookshop in Lyon and far-right activists attacked NPA members during the climate change demonstration on 9 May.

And it is obviously in this context that two op-eds from military figures were published a few weeks apart, in which authoritarian power and extreme

violence are turned against a section of the population, stigmatizing it. Calls from police officers also say a lot about the political moment we are experiencing. But let us make no mistake, if the military can dare to publish such op-eds, if Action Française enters a regional council or fascists attack activists, it is because the government has for months instilled a reactionary climate to face the social crisis that has been accentuated with the pandemic. Today, the only beneficiary of this strategy is indeed the RN. And now supporting the theses of the RN or publicly joining its lists for the regional elections is no longer a problem or a taboo for some, as is the case with certain journalists, pseudo-trade unionists or millionaires.

The regionals and the presidential election

While the first and second rounds of regional and departmental elections will take place shortly, it must be noted that these elections do not excite many people, especially workers, who consider that these elections will not change anything in their increasingly difficult daily lives. [1] But for some, these elections are important... one year before the presidential election.

Many elected representatives could more easily claim the nomination for 2022 after these elections, such as Xavier Bertrand, Valérie Pécresse or Laurent Wauquiez of Les Républicains. For LREM, the stakes are different: after his failure in the municipal elections of 2020, a new slap in the face a few months before the presidential election would weaken Macron. But for him, it is also already a full-scale dry run for the presidential election, especially in the Hauts-de-France where Marine Le Pen, even if she is not a candidate, is strongly mobilized. This is probably why Macron parachuted his justice minister into this area.

For the RN, winning regions such as Hauts-de-France and/or PACA (Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur), one

year before the presidential election, would prove its credibility on a very large scale and allow it to recover from its failure in the last municipal elections.

For the institutional left, the regional elections will also mark the start of the presidential election and both the Socialists and the Greens hope to confirm their results in the municipal elections. For these elections, their alliance strategy is one of variable geometry. Because what is currently obsessing the institutional left is obviously the presidential election. With a big problem: how to be in the second round when all the polls put Macron and Le Pen in the lead. We are therefore seeing a battle for hegemony between the various forces of the left. The battle rages on, with no component wanting to give up. The French Communist Party (PCF) has embarked on an identity-based candidacy that renews traditional discourses that mix social measures, recourse to the state, nationalism and an emphasis on security. Mélenchon has rejected the idea of a unity of the left and wants to be a candidate of the people. The EELV (Europe Écologie Les Verts - Greens) want the others to rally around them, the PS seems ready for such an alliance but the very weak result for Hamon’s candidacy in 2017 is not a guarantee for them.

There are two major omissions in this discussion: firstly, on what programme? What is the balance sheet? A mystery! No big deal, unity seems, for them, to be enough. Mélenchon speaks of 1981 as a “suspended revolution”, “why not until 2022?” whose betrayals, the turn to rigour from 1983, were caused by Europe and Germany. [2] In the current climate, nothing can be done from a search for unity on a reduced basis, without content, without appealing to the need for confrontation with the state and the ruling class. And this is the second major omission: this left does not want this confrontation! Even this patched-up left can no longer be credible, it no longer gives us hope for anything. Yes, we need unity, but unity in the struggles, in our mobilizations. Yes, we need a “left” but not that of the defenders of the current system, not the one that denies itself, not the one

that is mistaken!

Impose an anti-capitalist rupture without waiting for 2022!

In this nauseating context, of health crisis, of social and economic crisis, the difficulties for workers, young people, the most precarious, working-class neighbourhoods in reacting and responding are real. But social protest does exist. Indeed, whether it is against redundancies, for employment, for public services, the climate, the bioethics bill, women's rights, against police violence, state racism, or for Palestine... the mobilizations exist. They are certainly

still weak and dispersed, but they do exist. And for our part, without waiting for 2022, we believe that it is up to us to take our affairs into our own hands, without waiting for the "supreme saviour". Hope will come from our ability to act from below, on the streets, in the workplace... to federate our angers, our solidarity, our activist forces whether associative, trade unionist or political, and as in 1871 rise to "storm the heavens".

It is urgent not to give way in the face of the current wave, to build the necessary bulwarks with all those who are not resigned to the prospect of the worst, to bring to life solidarity and the prospect of another world in the face of the ongoing disaster. There is no inevitability to the rise of the far right and authoritarian powers, nor is

there any inevitability to the economic and ecological crisis. On condition that the world of work raises its head, becomes aware of its strength, organizes itself to fight, coordinates itself and sets itself political objectives. We want to play our part in this, by defending and fighting for radical social, ecological and democratic emergency measures. By being present at the next presidential election, in continuity with the campaigns led by Olivier Besancenot and Philippe Poutou, in order to offer a voice to all these angers, in an approach that combines the need for a unitary response, mass struggles and a programme of rupture with capitalism.

Translated by International Viewpoint from [l'Anticapitaliste la revue](#) May 2021.

1979 in Reverse

29 June 2021, by **Cédric Durand**

Volcker's '1979 coup', as Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy called it in *Capital Resurgent* (2004), came in a period when declining systemic dynamism in the advanced-capitalist world – brought on by intensifying competition, with successful Japanese and German catch-ups – was met by rising labour militancy and mass social movements, producing a general crisis of governability. Meanwhile radical forces in the former colonial countries called for a New International Economic Order, based on economic sovereignty and the regulation of multinationals. The 1979 coup was arguably the most consequential factor in turning the tide against these insurgent forces. The hegemony of the dollar was strengthened. Countries in the global south were brought to their knees by the rising cost of debt servicing and forced to adopt structural-adjustment programmes, drawn up by the IMF and World Bank in coordination with the US Treasury. In the global north, pro-US governments liberalized capital flows,

subordinating industrial relations and welfare systems to the growing power of finance.

Stabilize prices, crush labour, discipline the south. This was the basic logic of the 1979 coup. For four decades, financial returns were systematically prioritized over labour standards, employment, ecological conditions and development prospects. Now, in 2021, there are signs that this era is finally coming to an end. Yet to what extent, and by what means? The logical unfolding of the swing movement that occurred over forty years ago may help to illuminate the present moment. Are the Biden Plans merely a new inflexion of neoliberal norms, or do they amount to a clear break with the post-79 regime?

The most exaggerated expression of 'left optimism' to date comes from the *Wall Street Journal*. America's leading conservative newspaper tells us that 'Joe Biden may be the most anti-

business President since FDR'. His Administration is implementing 'a Bernie Sanders-Elizabeth Warren agenda that would vastly expand government control over business and the economy.' The *WSJ* is not particularly perturbed by Biden's spending spree; but it is incensed about the planned rise in corporate and wealth taxes, as well as the attempt to bolster union organizing with the Pro Act, 'the most far-reaching labour legislation since the 1930s.'

The Pro Act could indeed be highly consequential, both economically and politically, if the growing associational power of labour opened space for expanded organization, improved social conditions and rejuvenated working-class politics. Its effect will be undermined, however, as long as there is a large reserve army of unemployed and underemployed workers, putting downward pressure on wages and working conditions. Employment in the US remains severely depressed,

and Biden famously dropped the \$15 minimum wage from the Covid relief package. Nevertheless, reducing unemployment and underemployment appears to be an aim.

Biden's \$1.9 trillion stimulus combined with Trump's packages has injected a total of \$5 trillion - almost 25% of GDP - into the US economy, the largest-ever fiscal expansion in peacetime. More than enough to reflate the economy from its Covid-19 trough, this economic voluntarism is an unambiguous departure from the fiscal moderation of the Obama Administration and the dogmatic austerity of the EU. Its ideological significance should not be underestimated.

First, as Serge Halimi noted in the April number of *Le Monde diplomatique*, one of the most promising features of the American Rescue Plan was its universality. By the end of April, over 160 million Americans had received a Treasury check of \$1,400. This was a break with the punitive ideology of neoliberal social subsidies, typically distributed under strict and humiliating conditions. It paves the way for broader measures, with an eye to the 2022 mid-term elections.

Second, the scale of the Administration's public spending is deliberately designed to generate a high-pressure economy, which necessarily involves an element of inflationary risk. It is on this point that 2021 can be considered a 1979 coup in reverse. As Adam Tooze stressed - hailing the dawn of a new economic era - for decades 'the bias of technocratic judgement' has been in favour of price stability and against labour. This is changing - explicitly so. Since 2019, at least, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has been referring to arguments developed by Arthur Okun at Brookings in the 1970s, about the social advantages of a high-pressure economy.

Okun, briefly the chair of LBJ's Council of Economic Advisers, argued in 1973 that accepting slack - the under-utilization of resources, especially labour - as an insurance policy against inflation implied 'the sacrifice of upward mobility', while 'a

higher-pressure labour market' would launch a process of ladder-climbing, in which 'men formerly in poor jobs move into better ones, making way for women and young people in the less well-paid pursuits'. Wage differentials would narrow, as 'the same forces that make for more jobs also make for better jobs and more output per worker.'

This seems to be Biden's strategy: increasing employment, reducing inequality and fostering productivity growth, via high-pressure economic policy. As his speechwriters put it, 'trickle-down economics has never worked'; the objective should be 'to grow the economy from the bottom up and middle out'. Let's take a moment to enjoy these words - a plain U-turn from the kind of policies that Democrats like Biden have been implementing for decades. For the left, this represents the result of years of ideological and political mobilization with the Sanders campaigns, and AOC's rise as the tip of an iceberg of activist endeavour.

Yet it also responds to a situation in which financial markets, supposedly the central nervous system of the economy, have spent the past decade on life-support systems and have lost contact with underlying earnings. In other words, we need to ask: if the 1979 coup showed that the rise of finance entailed the fall of labour, could the 2021 pro-labour turn succeed in dethroning finance?

Brian Deese, head of Biden's National Economic Council, formerly at investment giant BlackRock, doesn't represent a break from the usual model of Wall Street-Washington technocrats. Yet in an interview with the NYT last month, he explained the rationale for the Administration's statist turn. The challenges were (1) climate change, (2) inequality and (3) China. None of these could be tackled adequately by the market, so the state had to step in. It's worth looking at all three.

Droughts, fires and hurricanes have made climate change a concrete reality in the US, and failure to mitigate it is no longer an option. According to Deese, all economic policy must be climate policy, and to

be politically sustainable it must be employment policy too. The Administration has duly deployed its ecological policies under the banner of a 'Jobs Plan', to defuse any clash between environmentalism and employment.

In contrast to the stimulus, the main problem with the American Jobs Plan - and the companion American Families Plan, for childcare and education - is that their scale is drastically undersized. Their combined \$4.05 trillion makes for big numbers. But this is to be spread out over a decade, so that all-in-all it accounts for just 1.7% of GDP per year - risibly small for the claim to 'rebuild a new economy' and a fraction of the \$16.3 trillion (or 7.6% of GDP per year) proposed by Sanders's Green New Deal.

On infrastructure, the American Society of Civil Engineers estimates that \$2.59 trillion of additional investment is required simply to maintain the existing infrastructure for 2020-29 in a state of good repair. Biden's plan will help to maintain the existing railway sector, but will not expand it to substitute for cars or planes. Biden's so-called 'green transition' aims to 'clean' existing processes, not to transform life and consumption patterns. An ill-founded optimism about technological advance complements the imperative to preserve capitalist social relations.

Interestingly, the plan in its current form does not rely on private funding. Financial investors are begging for long-term assets, particularly public-private partnership infrastructure projects. They are worried, explains Larry Fink, Deese's former CEO at BlackRock, because 'there are huge pools of private capital standing by', with a lack of safe projects to invest in. The Biden team is resisting these sirens for now, although it is still promoting that kind of privatization scheme in the global south. One obvious reason is because, as observed by the Financial Times, federal government debt always comes out cheaper than the commercial returns necessary to private-sector infrastructure operators, 'a cost that ultimately lands on the users of essential services.' But

it was precisely this kind of obviousness that neoliberal thinking stubbornly tried to obfuscate.

Instead, the Biden Administration plans a modest rise in corporate tax, from 21% to 28% – shy of the 35% rate before Trump – and calls for a minimum global rate of 15%. The top rate of income tax will inch up from 37% to 39.6%, and ordinary income-tax rates could be applied to capital gains and dividends for Americans earning over \$1m a year. In some states, the combined state and federal capital-gains tax could be above 50% – if the legislation makes it through Congress. Ideologically, its very articulation is a rebuttal of the neo-Schumpeterian claim that incentives for capital owners are the main drivers of innovation and employment. It is all the more compelling in a period when overabundant capital is extremely cheap, private investment is depressed and there is a widely recognized need for public and social infrastructure.

The third element is China's rise. It would be hard to overstate the strength of American national-imperial thinking here, or the challenges it raises for the internationalist left. Yet an unintended consequence is to further sideline financial markets as an apparatus of macro-economic coordination. Deese puts it bluntly: 'There's not a market-based solution to address some of the big weaknesses that we're seeing open up in our economy, when we're dealing with competitors like China that are not operating on market-based terms'. This is not a minor concession.

As Isabella Weber documents for the 1980s in *How China Escaped Shock Therapy* (2021), the balancing act of the CCP road to capitalism was grounded in a debate about the strategy of market reforms. On several occasions, the option of full-blown liberalization was considered, but ultimately set aside. Instead, the PRC engaged in capitalist globalization while keeping what Lenin called the 'commanding heights of the economy' under state control. Once Washington recognized that China was not only

catching up with, but in some areas surpassing the US, American officials began to consider what Deese described as 'targeted efforts to try to build domestic industrial strength' – the measures once mocked as 'industrial policy'.

With China, as with inequality and climate policy, the Biden Administration is ostentatiously relying on the re-legitimation of state intervention. As the WSJ lamented, the White House seemed to be shifting away from bipartisan assumptions that 'the public sector is inherently less efficient than the private, and bureaucrats should generally defer to markets'. Combined with tax rises on capital gains, the core interest of the financial class, this can only suggest a reversal of fortune for the hegemony of finance. If the size of the intervention is limited, its logic is distinct from any kind of neoliberal policy.

Since 2008, the financial sector has been dependent upon state support to shore up its returns, which have lost their inherent dynamism. For more than a decade now, financial assets have been persistently inflated by pro-corporate fiscal and monetary policies. Under this regime of escalating plunder, finance has become disconnected from market-based processes. It is sustained by hidden subsidies and central-bank interventions to prop up the structure of liabilities generated by financial leverage and speculation. Financial stability has become a matter of political decision-making, not of market dynamics.

As this situation persists, there is a logical reversal. While states used to be terrified that market liquidity would dry up – a typical feature of crises from the 1990s on – the configuration is now reversed: the financial community is on a permanent public lifeline to ensure liquidity, smooth market clearing and provision of assets.

This socialization of fictitious capital as the new normal is beginning to alter the balance of power between state and markets, and within the

capitalist class at the expense of financial rentiers. 'Bidenomics' is an early symptom of this reconfiguration. Moves to strengthen the relative position of labour, to overturn rentier-class tax privileges and to reject the neoliberal wisdom that market coordination is always preferable to state intervention: these signals amount to more than just a rhetorical shift. They point to a structural break in the regulation of capitalism, the shockwaves of which will reverberate in the global political economy for years to come.

Is this shift sufficient to tackle the century's social and ecological crises? Not nearly. Does it alter essential class relations? On the contrary: it strives to re-legitimize the social order. Is it unambiguous? No: while private finance has been kept out of new domestic infrastructure projects, the US is still driving privatization and deregulation in the global south and intensifying its new Cold War on China. Will it propel a new phase of economic expansion? I doubt it, due to the sheer scale of global overaccumulation and the fade-out of the industrialization bonanza. Even so, 2021 will be remembered as the moment when global capitalism was reorganized beyond neoliberalism, a tectonic shift that will irrevocably alter the terrain of political struggle.

That we have arrived at this moment should not be a surprise. There have been many signs that the neoliberal tool-kit was proving less and less effective for the day-to-day management of capital accumulation. The Eurozone crisis, global waves of 'populist' protest, the new assertiveness of digital monopolies, were indications of growing systemic instability. On top of that the pandemic accelerated the pressure for change. At this stage, one of the few things that can be said with confidence is that the possibility of tasting once again the flavour of popular victories is a just little greater than it was five months ago. That's not much. But for people like me, born in the 1970s or after, it is a first.

Source: [New Left Review Sidecar](#)

On the Arrests of Italian Militants in France

28 June 2021, by **Enzo Traverso**

A; The twentieth century came to an end back in 1989, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War. Since then, the world has changed — and so, too, Italy, which is no longer that of 32 years ago. In many regards, things are a lot worse: what the media usually call the "second" and "third" republics make us miss the first republic (1946-1994), created by men and women who had fought fascism and created a new Italy. Yet the legacy of the twentieth century remains a burden and many structural ills continue to afflict our country. We need only think of such examples as the Mafia, the Southern question, racism and corruption. Some of these problems have got even worse, for instance youth unemployment and postcolonial racism, which has become much stronger since Italy became a land of immigration.

During the second half of the twentieth century, Italy joined the wealthiest clutch of Western countries, but over the last three decades it has been falling behind. It has seen a constant demographic decline but it does not want to integrate immigrants, refusing to grant citizenship even to the second generation; its elites are getting older but the young remain excluded; the peninsula is experiencing an impressive intellectual diaspora, similar to what we see in the countries of the global South; and economic elites have enriched themselves enormously, without bringing development. *La Repubblica* is one of the most faithful mirrors of these elites — the CEO at FIAT-Chrysler now publicly nominates the paper's lead editors. "Closing the book on the twentieth century" would imply dealing with this tangle of problems. But for *La Repubblica* it seems that it means the extradition of Marina Petrella, Giorgio Pietrostefani and a few other refugees.

Unsurprisingly, there was a unanimous response across the whole spectrum of institutional politics and the Italian press, speaking of "the duty to settle accounts with history" (as Ezio Mauro put it), the "particularly painful wounds" that were left (Marta Cartabia), and so on. For many years you have worked on the relationship between memory, justice and politics (for instance with your very useful *The Past: A User's Guide*, published in Italian by Ombre corte in 2006). What do you think of this use of memory? Is there really a wound that needs to be healed?

For people from my generation who lived through those years, there's no doubt that these are painful wounds that have not yet healed. The exiles arrested in France would be the first to admit that. The problem is, how to come to terms with history. Mario Calabresi, the son of the police commissioner who was murdered in 1972, said that the news that Giorgio Pietrostefani had been arrested didn't give him any sense of relief, satisfaction, reparation or justice — just pain and embarrassment. In Italy the media and official culture — what Althusser called the "ideological state apparatuses" — have never been able, indeed never wanted, to process the memory of the Years of Lead. Rather, they have provided a backing chorus for a series of special laws and arrests, painting the "enemies of the state" as monsters. The pentiti ["repentant" ex-terrorists who provided evidence against their former organisations] were obviously cogs in this machine. Former terrorists, as well as a handful of historians (among whom I'd like to mention Giovanni De Luna) are probably among the few people who have made any real contribution to an awareness, an understanding, and the construction of a critical memory of

those years. Ex-Red Brigades (BR) members have admitted their wrongdoing — and sometimes crimes; they have reflected on their errors and sought to understand and explain why they made the choices they did. The interview that Rossana Rossanda and Carla Mosca did with Mario Moretti in 1994 is much more useful in this respect than all the articles published by *La Repubblica* or the *Corriere della Sera* over the last half-century. I've not read Ezio Mauro's article, but anyone with the slightest intellectual honesty has to acknowledge that the "duty to settle accounts with the past" means something very different to a delayed-action repression that comes over two generations after what happened. It seems to me that terrorism and the political violence of the 1970s are still viewed with the same blind and vindictive gaze of that decade. Terrorists are depicted as monsters who should pay for what they have done. This is, in my view, the worst way to "come to terms with the past" and to explain history to the two generations that followed the Years of Lead.

Another chapter of the book which I mentioned is dedicated to the relationship between "truth and justice". The "judicialisation of the past" (as Henry Rousso put it) is inversely proportional to the collapse of the horizon of expectation, and to the refrain about the "end of ideologies" — the key theoretical underpinning of the "capitalist realism" discussed by Mark Fisher. Is this how we should read the Paris sting operation?

The idea that the murders of commissioner Calabresi, Aldo Moro and his bodyguards can today be answered with a judicial response — by jailing the last of the exiles — is first and foremost an expression of the blindness and incomprehension of which I just spoke. But this blindness,

this incomprehension, are not the product of naivety — this has been going on for decades. It is anachronistic to think that in 2021 we can offer a judicial response to things that happened in the 1970s. If we accept the principle that no statute of limitations applies here — thus putting these actions on the same level as crimes against humanity — we get caught up in an inextricable tangle of contradictions. Are Pietrostefani and Petrella the same as Eichmann? In 1946, Palmiro Togliatti, minister of justice and pardons in the first republican government, declared an amnesty for those who had tarnished themselves with the worst fascist crimes during the civil war. So how can we justify such unrelenting persecution, decades later, of leading figures from the Years of Lead who have taken refuge in France?

Ever since ancient times — we need only think of the Peloponnesian wars — civil wars and political crises inflected with violence have always concluded with an amnesty. The amnesty law Togliatti promulgated in 1946 was part of a general tendency: there were equivalent measures across Europe. Up till the 1970s, interior ministries, police stations and government offices across the continent were full of collaborationists and ex-fascists. Historian Paul Ginsborg (2003) has highlighted the fact that at the beginning of the 1960s, all of Italy's police prefects were former top functionaries in the Fascist regime. In Spain, during the transition to democracy, there was an amnesty for both antifascist exiles and the officials of the Franco regime.

The end of the twentieth century saw a new, different perspective on trying to "working through the past" and heal its wounds, with the case of South Africa. After the end of Apartheid, that country set up truth and justice commissions that ruled out judicial inquiries and criminal sentences in exchange for being able to establish the truth. The South African example has been followed by many countries, especially in Latin America, from Peru to Colombia. Obviously, these historical experiences are hardly identical to one another. But the principle is still a useful one, for finding a way out of a

crisis and "working through the past". In Italy there has never been a discussion of this principle. The Italian paradox is that the only ones who have provided an account of their experience are the ex-members of the Red Brigades and other armed left-wing organizations, not their enemies. The state has done little or nothing to shed light on the coup plots, the neofascist infiltrators, the "deviations" by the secret services, the deployment of the "strategy of tension", the neofascist violence that enjoyed cover from within the state apparatuses, and which had far more victims than leftist terrorism ever did. No one has ever asked the state to explain the hundreds of people killed by the police in those years (militants, young people, students, workers...). Whoever insists on the "duty to settle accounts with the past" ought to be asking about that.

But this Italian "disease" isn't so hard to explain. The state is inflexible in combatting its enemies, but highly accommodating or indulgent toward the violence perpetrated by its own agents and representatives. The coup plots and the state apparatuses' collusion with neofascist groups who put bombs on trains are to be hidden; conversely, persecuting leftist terrorists reinforces the institutions' own solidity. This isn't only true of Italy. Many studies have shown how in the BRD (West Germany) the sentences handed to members of the Red Army Faction were far longer than the ones handed to ex-Nazis between 1949 and 1979. When we speak of "memory" we are always simplifying things: for memory is complex, heterogeneous and divided. There is the memory of the ex-terrorists and their victims (and the "post-memory" of their children); there is the collective memory, now muffled or extinguished, of the social movements; there is the cultural memory that moulds the public sphere; and there is also an institutional, state memory, which is probably the most unforthcoming when it comes to this affair. This also explains why those who took refuge in France some decades ago did not want to hand themselves in to a justice system that made no mystery of its determination to persecute them and offered very few guarantees of

impartiality. As Carlo Ginzburg demonstrated in a famous book on the trial against Adriano Sofri (1991), this justice didn't seem credible. We need only think of the role that the pentiti played in so many of these trials. I do not think we can simply say that these refugees "escaped justice".

In the last lines of the introduction to another very important book of yours (2017) you briefly refer to your experience as a "revolutionary activist" in the late twentieth century, when it seemed the world was hit by a new "civil war". In the unanimous narration of the recent arrests, weren't we missing the other side, the context? That is, who these people were fighting against and why?

Yes, the context was missing. This was a discussion of events dating back more than forty years ago, two generations back, but which still haven't been "historicised." They are not set within a past whose profile is already known and — even more importantly — which is properly attributed some meaning. Amidst great difficulties the refugees have reconstructed their own existence; they have reflected on their experience, and they continue to come to terms with their own consciences. The victims and the families are left with their pain. But historicising things — working through the past to being it onto the terrain of history — means going beyond feelings alone. This is a condition which simply has to be met if these same feelings are to be integrated into a collective space, into a historical consciousness, into the awareness that a cycle of history is now over. My impression is that in Italy justice has been an obstacle to this processing of grief — an obstacle to a process reconstructing the past that would finally allow us to grasp it historically.

The political violence of the 1970s was part of a political era that concluded with a defeat of the Left, of the workers' movement, of alternative movements. This defeat has never been processed. Rather, this past has been repressed. At three decades' distance, the congress at which the Italian Communist Party decided to change its name does not appear as its

"Bad Godesberg" moment [the German Social Democrats' formal abandonment of Marxism] but as an exorcism. We could call it "repression", in the psychoanalytic sense. The Years of Lead have been swallowed up by this repression and they have entered into the world of journalistic story-telling (and incomplete or unexplored archives) rather than our historical consciousness.

I'm not trying to avoid your more personal question, though it's wholly secondary, here. I remember the 1970s, the years of my youth, very clearly. I took part in my first demo in 1973, when I was 16. I never felt tempted by terrorism and I always criticised the choice in favour of armed struggle, not for reasons of principle but because I thought it was strategically and tactically mistaken. From 1979 onward a good part of my political activity consisted of taking part in assemblies and demos against repression. I didn't like the slogan "neither with the BR or with the state" because it established an equivalence between two incomparable bodies that couldn't be fought using the same methods. In retrospect, I think it's obvious not only that opting for armed struggle was harmful and suicidal, but also that it significantly contributed to undermining the protest movements and subduing the diffuse condition of political conflict. The BR had emerged in a period of struggles, as a fragment of the workers' movement, a group that considered itself a "vanguard" and practiced "exemplary action" or the "propaganda of the deed" to radicalise the social antagonism. Similar tendencies had already emerged in various countries already a century or more beforehand, especially within anarchist ranks. Mike Davis is one historian who has provided an impressive inventory of such tendencies (2017).

In Italy these practices passed through the filter of the memory of the Resistance and Communist culture, and that is why the Red Brigades did not set off bombs, but rather selected their targets. Gradually, in the bid to escape police repression — and thus for practical reasons that were theorised only a posteriori — the BR transformed into a clandestine

organisation, separate from the movements, which waged its war against the state by itself. It was thus drawn into a downward spiral which could only result in its elimination by the state. Part of the radical left was under the illusion that it could "take advantage of" or "ride on the coat tails" of terrorism: the BR were undermining the solidity of the state, so we had to ready ourselves for the uprisings that would follow. Such calculations were mistaken, and a very high price was paid for those errors.

But here I'm speaking with the benefit of hindsight. I was a Trotskyist, meaning, I made up part of a movement critical of the armed struggle. Unlike in other countries, Trotskyism was very much in the minority in Italy, where it remained intellectually insignificant compared to the theoretical creativity of operaismo, and politically marginal compared to movements that experimented with new practices, like Lotta Continua. Trotskyism did, nonetheless, have a deeper historical awareness that warned against certain dangers, like a sort of vaccine. But to say that is not to boast of its virtues. In those years, joining one political group or another was not only a consequence of ideological choice; it depended on myriad circumstances, which often weren't immediately ideological (emotions and forms of socialisation play a very important role in politics) and was sometimes purely accidental.

I have no problem admitting that in different, but entirely plausible, circumstances, I'd have been on demos not only wearing a helmet but with a pistol in my bag. So, I cannot feel wholly uninvolved in this affair and I believe that, if they have the slightest intellectual honesty, some tens of thousands of people from my generation would have to say the same about themselves.

You lived in France for many years before again emigrating, to the United States. Did the April 28 sting operation have more to do with the coming French presidential elections, or with the internal logics of Italian politics?

I think the Italian refugees in France

are the object of some rather petty political chicanery. Mario Draghi wants to establish his legitimacy as a statesman and prove that in a few weeks he can secure something that Italian governments have been requesting for years. This is a shrewd move, with a view to his future bid for election to the Italian presidency.

Macron wants to provide further evidence of his own authoritarian turn, which is today leading him to show a more repressive face than the right and even the far right, with a view to his possible re-election. So, there can be no indulgence toward "terrorists", even ones who ceased to be terrorists more than forty years ago, who have never hid themselves away, and who respect the laws of France, the country where they have been legally resident for decades, where they have laid roots and received hospitality. No one, not even Marine Le Pen, was asking Macron to extradite the Italian refugees. He probably thought this measure would add greater credibility to his struggle against "Islamogauchisme". Like the vast majority of the politicians who govern us, Macron is concerned with opinion polls and certainly not with "working through the past." He'd be ready to pursue any "memory policy" so long as it helped him win the elections.

Bibliography

Davis, Mike (2017) *Buda's Wagon: A Brief History of the Car Bomb*, Verso Books, London.

Fisher, Mark (2009) *Capitalist Realism*, Zero Books, London.

Ginsborg, Paul (2003) *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988*, St. Martins Griffin, New York.

Ginzburg, Carlo (1991) *The Judge and the Historian: Marginal Notes on a Late-Twentieth-Century Miscarriage of Justice*, Verso, London.

Moretti, Mario, Mosca, Carla, Rossanda, Rossana (1994) *Brigate rosse una storia italiana*, Anabasi, Milan.

Rousso H. (1998) *La hantise du passé. Entretien avec Philippe Petit*, Textuel,

Paris

politica, Ombre corte, Verona

Civil War, 1914-1945, Verso Books, London.

Traverso, E. (2006) Il passato: istruzioni per l'uso: storia, memoria e

(2017) Fire and Blood: The European

Source: [Verso](#)

Hungary: pre-election situation and emergence of a new anticapitalist left

27 June 2021, by **Inprecor**

INPRECOR : While the Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, and his party, FIDESZ, reigned supreme since 2010, they lost the capital, Budapest, five regional prefectures (Pécs, Miskolc, Eger, Tatabánya, Szombathely) and two towns of comital right (Érd, Dunaújváros) in the last municipal elections. And the polls show them the losers in the next legislative elections, which will take place in April 2022. How do you explain this turnaround? What is the opposition's strategy?

Péter Somogyi: FIDESZ won constitutional majority in 2010 amidst the deepening financialization crisis of 2008 which caused the downfall of the then incumbent socialist and liberal government and with it the collapse of the bipartisan structure of Hungarian political life, effectively putting an end to the liberal paradigm that defined the era after the regime change in 1989. While the left has lost its credibility and consistency due to the neoliberal policies it became associated with, FIDESZ have not increased its social base significantly. The field of the opposition became fragmented and contested. The new government restructured the electoral system in a way for it to favour the winner by means of compensation and therefore maintained the generally dual party system in Hungary with the difference of the "left" spectrum filled not with one large but more smaller parties. These are in a way forced to act in cooperation and form a common list by means of a primary that serve to maximise the chances of the "opposition" candidates. This method

was tested first during the 2019 municipal election with considerable success. Still, it needs substantial capacity for mobilization on the part of opposition parties which is mostly based in metropolitan areas. Rural areas are more easily controlled by the government through the direct subordination of subsidies and workfare programmes.

Ágnes Gagyí: Oppositional successes in the 2019 local elections were mostly due to a cross-party alliance strategy that comprised the whole opposition (Fidesz did not have $\frac{2}{3}$ of the vote in 2018; 49% of the votes translated into parliamentary supermajority due to the electoral system). Since local governments' power was extremely reduced earlier (mostly through the nationalization of local government debt, which later translated into economic dependence on the central government), oppositional local governance has meant less of a space for major policy changes, but rather a (however narrow) opportunity to build political outreach and administrative background for the 2022 oppositional campaign. Presently, polls do not signal a unilateral advantage for either Fidesz or the opposition. Fidesz has been stepping up measures that secure its influence even in case of losing supermajority, or even in case of an oppositional government. Most major issues have been linked to supermajority votes by changes of the constitution, while Fidesz-related domestic capitalist positions have been stabilized in various strategic branches, from banking to energy or the (by now privatized) higher

education. The general oppositional strategy involves collaboration to reduce Fidesz' seats, as well as a strong competition between parties. Oppositional parties have been starved of state funds, social outreach and capitalist alliances since 2010; 2022 means for them a crucial opportunity for regeneration. In general, oppositional politics targets the politically literate middle class (since 2010, it has been only Fidesz that has systematically maintained a political penetration of workers and the poor); the campaign so far has been about partly collaborative, partly competitive communication towards this base.

INPRECOR : To try to prevent the opposition from presenting a united front against FIDESZ, the Orbán government passed a law at the end of December 2020 (at midnight and during the holidays!) Under the new rules, a party would be able to present a national list * only if it has candidates in at least 71 of the 106 electoral constituencies in the country, instead of the current 27. How does the opposition manage to avoid falling into the trap? [3]

The six opposition parties which have formed an electoral coalition (MSZP, Demokratikus Koalíció, Green, Párbeszéd, Momentum and Jobbik) published a document entitled "Guarantees for a change of era" which promises in particular "the drafting of a new Constitution (...) subject to referendum", the return of "a balanced public audiovisual service" in place of "false and hate

propaganda ", "to restore the independence of the judiciary ", the accession of Hungary to the European public prosecutor's office, the establishment of an electoral law "based on proportionality" or the election of the president by direct universal suffrage. They promised that a more detailed program should be worked out in the coming months, but for now there are no economic or social measures in their program, and nothing on ecology or the rights of women, LGBTI and ethnic minorities, even though Hungary has a large Roma minority. How do you interpret this lack?

Annajuli Rosenfeld : Among the opposition coalition. political parties interested in extending social rights or in representing ethnic minorities are in the minority. The balance of power between the opposition parties and the necessity to reach an agreement between them keeps any issue that could jeopardise coordination between them off the agenda for the time being. From the SAG perspective, this is interesting in that the access of the critical organisations behind them to the instruments of institutional politics is not yet so extensive that they have a significant lobbying power.

P.S.: Partially successful grass-root mobilization in municipal elections alone have not led to any breakthrough in these areas, because opposition-led municipalities have found themselves in opposition to the government and their room for manoeuvre is drastically limited by their lack of resources. A good example is the crisis of rented housing, where municipalities are often only able to utilize part of their rental housing stock at the expense of selling other parts of it. Current moves by the government are reinforcing a general trend of legislating state assets into the hands of loyal partners or building a conservative middle class by means of privatization making the economic influence of Orban and his circles lasting way further than next year's election. What makes the situation interesting is how the coalition of opposition does not only need a one-time electoral victory but it's actors have a common interest in reinventing forms of democratic participation, general mobilization and

therefore contest regarding public policy. Of course in these times positions considering social policies are blurred since the parties are interested in the metapolitical issues of reestablishment of general constitutional rules, order, liberties, "checks and balances", and such.

Á.G.: Given the constitutional limitations and Fidesz' economic power that will be maintained even in the case of an electoral loss, the large part of these promises would be hard or even impossible to be carried out; they are rather to be interpreted as declarations of intent in a campaign context. In terms of social programmes, the oppositional parties are not to be expected to run a radical path: although poverty and anti-poor measures have been a topic of oppositional communication in opposition, according to both ideology and electoral target groups, oppositional parties represent various colours of the politics of embourgeoisement that has dominated Hungarian politics after the regime change. There is no oppositional party that would represent politics rooted in and influenced by an organized labor constituency, and would propose a broader conception of social reorganization for social or climate ends. The same dynamics have characterized Roma politics too (also a long-term characteristic of postsocialist politics). Messages by the independent candidate supported by Szikra have run counter to this general trend; without a larger electoral or party political base, this is an incipient step that at least has brought issues of labor and social reproduction into the vocabulary of the campaign.

INPRECOR : Since almost his election in 2010, Victor Orban has made an anti-European discourse, while refraining from leaving the European Union (EU) and taking advantage of European funds to enrich himself and enrich the circle of his close friends. At the same time, he has enjoyed a certain indulgence from the leaders of other EU countries, in particular Angela Merkel, and he is well known to be highly regarded by the bosses of the

German automotive industry. How do you explain this apparent paradox?

Zoltán Sido: Orban's main goal has been to establish a political system that enables both external and internal capital accumulation. On the one hand, in capital intensive, export oriented industries (like manufacturing) this means granting a very profitable economic environment for multinational companies, e.g. by lowering the corporate tax to 9% (lowest in the EU), providing generous state funds to companies in exchange for "creating jobs", introducing anti-labour legislation, etc. This explains the favourable position towards Orban from representatives of Western capital. On the other hand, in less capital intensive and more domestic oriented sectors of the economy (namely the banking sector, media, tourism, the energy industry, agriculture, retail, etc.) there's been a push to build a national capitalist class. The latter strategy requires some level of autonomy from the EU of course - hence, the strengthening of economic ties with Russia and China, coupled with a strong anti-EU rhetoric at home. However, the diversification of capital imports doesn't mean a loosening relationship with Western capital: Hungary, as a semi-peripheral country is still extremely dependent on Western capital and technology. Collaboration with German automotive capitalist lobbies has been part of this relation - a story Direkt36's investigative journalists covered in detail in 2020.

INPRECOR : Hungary has recently experienced several social mobilizations, in particular the demonstration against the "slave law" in December 2018 and the strike in the AUDI factory in Győr in January 2019. What are the reasons of these mobilizations? How do you interpret this renewal of social mobilization and how the trade union landscape is changing in this context?

Z.S: Maintaining the level of capital accumulation after the 2008 crisis, and particularly to sustain the crisis management of both Western and local SME capital, meant that the FIDESZ government had to suppress

workers' rights. As part of this, the government completely emptied out the institutions for tripartite social dialogue, custom-tailored the Labour Code to employers' needs, restricted the right to strike, etc. The "slave law" was part of this trend (fun fact: in the Austrian media the "slave law" was called the "BMW law", because according to anonymous sources, the German automaker company required this legal change in exchange for bringing a car manufacturing plant to the city of Debrecen). The decade-long anti-labour policies fostered resentment among workers and trade unions: the protests against the "slave law" and wage strikes popping up at various companies are clear signs of this. However, the Hungarian trade union movement is far from ready to fight back in an organised way. Union density is low and it's been decreasing over the years. In addition to this, unions are mostly present in the state sector and at big multinational firms, representing the less precarious part of the Hungarian working class. After the protests against the "slave law" several unions reported a slight upturn in membership, but most people joining a union today face a stark, disappointing reality: the vast majority of Hungarian unions today still maintain the union culture of the state socialist years - instead of rank and file organising, mass meetings and collective actions there's mostly lobbying towards employers and a partial redistribution of union fees in form of symbolic acts of welfare (gift cards for Christmas, etc.). In the past couple years there've been signs of more thorough organising efforts in various sectors, but still, the Hungarian trade union movement is still far from being a major political force.

P.S.: The series of protests triggered by the "slave law" was a formulating experience for many young leftists. It lasted for a few days, then oppositional parties "hijacked" them and reframed their agenda around the issues of freedom of the press and civil liberties. This confirmed the usual framework of ultra-leftists who generally abstain from electoral politics to work on "autonomous spaces" and incite the coming insurrection - but at the same time stimulated those who believe - with

the words of Mark Fisher - that "the emphasis on direct action conceals a despair about the possibility of indirect action", and therefore only an effect of capitalist realism. The latter embarked on - though at times desperately - building political organizations that might have helped us during the weeks of the slave law protests. How these projects will establish links with the working class - through rank-and-file organizing or making alliances with unions - is a strategic question which still needs to be answered in the years to come.

INPRECOR : for the past two years, we have seen the emergence and rapid development of a new anti-capitalist left. Can you describe this phenomenon and tell us what are and how are your organizations in this context, the „Solidarity Action Group“, the Solidarity Economic Center "and Szikra (Spark)?"

A.R.: As several sources point out (e.g. Solnit), crisis situations catalyse the emergence of mutual aid groups in society. The SAG, as a forum for coordination, was formed during the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the aim of facilitating coordination between green, feminist, and left-wing organisations. In the first phase, the work of framing the crisis needed to be done and avenues for practical assistance were experimented with. Now, joint thinking and institutionalisation has started among the participating organisations.

P.S.: Szikra started as a grassroots initiative with the aim of mobilizing leftist youth using the 2019 municipal elections as a possible point of entry where we can make our mark with relatively small effort. By carefully choosing a few candidates of the coalition of opposition to support we started to experiment with building alliances with stakeholders at the levels of both social movements and political institutions. All the candidates we worked for won and we used the experience and the momentum we built up to formulate our own organization with the aim of moving a bit forward in every possible corner, strengthening our position in the context of the fragile dynamics of

the opposition. We have tripled our core membership in numbers during last year and on the road to offer more and more activities for them and possible fields to organize in. We are slowly diversifying our work and making a point of financial autonomy: we cover all our operating costs on the base of membership fees. We therefore aim to extend our base, use our campaigns - electoral or single-issue - to facilitate our growth and not the other way around.

Á.G.: The three organizations we represent in this discussion have been funded in the last few years; yet the process of collective learning and organizing experiments that these organizations are part of is longer. Like elsewhere in the region, the generation that grew up in the first decades after the regime change, has produced a new wave of left politics by the 2010's, which was obliged to rediscover and recreate a left understanding of the postsocialist situation after the silencing of left voices in the transition process. Similar initiatives, including initiatives for party politics, have happened earlier in Hungary, just like in other EE countries. What is probably new is the cumulative deepening and broadening of the conceptual and organizing capacity of the new left, which makes it possible to root broader political ideas in local social and political contexts. Among the present organizations (which are more numerous than the three we represent here), Solidarity Economy Center specializes in deep organizing, linking solidarity economy initiatives with union rank-and-file organizing.

INPRECOR : Do you plan to participate in any form in the opposition candidate selection process and what sets you apart from the six coalition parties?

Z.S. and Á.G.: The Solidarity Economy Center won't participate in the upcoming elections. Not because we think party politics is useless in general, but because our aim is to build the structural power that is crucial to articulate, popularise and execute an anticapitalist agenda. We see the lack of this kind of organized power, and the exclusive reliance on the institutions of bourgeois politics in

the lack thereof, as a major limitation of left politics, something that the failure of Western "left populism" in recent years also highlighted. We do collaborate with political projects and local governments, but our main organizational focus is to enhance the type of rank-and-file level social organization and material basis that could serve as leverage for anticapitalist party politics in the future.

P.S.: We run one candidate for office next year by means of the primary. In this way we can focus our efforts in one constituency while still exacting pressure. We do not have illusions about the effects that we can create without a significant electoral base and infrastructure but have some arguments for trying. First, we don't believe that a structural force for leftist politics can be organised without actual leftist politics to be represented: organising can lose its sense of relevance without a link to superstructural institutions, questions and apparatuses of ideology and lawmaking.

Secondly, there are people we can reach only by using the nationwide platforms of parliamentary politics. Without building a wide and self-reliant movement we can only experiment with alternative economic forms and rank-and-file organising on a limited scale. These laboratory experiments can produce know-how but have serious epistemic limitations due to their small scale. Thirdly, abstaining from electoral struggles in a situation where the new constitutional order may be founded can cause anti-capitalist organizations and parties to become even more marginalized. Backing candidates without a mass party can be called "reformist" strategy - but that would be missing the point: in Hungary today there is no room for reform, we are at the verge of either a constitutional revolution or a social crisis.

INPRECOR : among the 29 organizations that make up the "Solidarity Action Group", Szikra is the largest numerically speaking and the only one that sees itself as the nucleus of a future political party, with an outline of programme and strategy. What are

its main programmatic elements and what is its strategy? Does it think that a coalition victory in the next legislative elections would open a new political period, and if so, what will be its strategy in this new period?

P.S.: Talking about a nucleus of a political party might be misleading. We're at an early stage of organisational development where our decisions are made to enable progress both intellectually and in terms of resources. Szikra is more easily understood as an effect of the current contradictions of the Hungarian anti-capitalist scene. Long years of marginalisation and collaboration with the liberal establishment, with the uneven reception of the experiences of alterglobalisation movements, and repression from FIDESZ left the "new" left in segmented subcultural territories. Financing these without engaging in political struggles pits the agents against each other, keeping them dependent from international funds, niche market consumers, academic grants, and enforces informal hierarchies, consolidating preexistent class relations among members of these organizations. Those who grew up under the last 10 years of authoritarian right-wing government need to find their political home outside the reach of these relations without getting integrated in the remnants of the status quo ante establishment. Our programme, in fact, is to acquire the tactical space to manoeuvre enough to form a programme. Sectarian differences that both stem from and perpetuate political passivity are overcome by structured action for attainable goals - we call this "a political realist turn" - and the political culture of formal party discipline - at the same time we pay the necessary price of tactical operational capability in terms of strategic short sightedness and theoretical incoherence. These are typical of young political organizations and are managed through internal mechanisms of feedback and constant cooperation with other organizations.

On a long run we see the current bipartisan structure unable to effectively address ecological, anti-capitalist, feminist concerns - even forces them out of the political field of

vision. Two answers present themselves to this dilemma: either building outside of this dual playing field - which can only work if we prepare for a political collapse - or using its dynamics to overcome it. The structural pressure that forces oppositional parties on the same coalition favours "third" positions: liberals and conservatives need to consent while none can represent the opposition as a whole. What the coalition of opposition will represent can only be a political vision of no particular party. As long as we have the leverage to use this platform to elevate the issues we find of strategic importance we are winning. The outcome of next year's election can not be seen beforehand and the country is looking forward to a long process of mobilization either way. Our general trajectory of movement building will not be altered on account of the composition of the parliament, electoral success only matters in terms of coverage and resources we can use to extend our horizon and organizational base. Future political parties are too far to consider in concrete terms, instead we look at our work as a necessary training exercise for those who need to be prepared when future anti-capitalist forces are to be built. By means of building a community around actual meaningful political work we acquire the experience otherwise unattainable. With the words of Trotsky, we can only learn to ride a horse by riding a horse.

INPRECOR : Another important organization in the "Solidarity Action Group" is the "Solidarity Economy Center". What is the role of this Center and what is the state of its thinking?

Z.S.: Briefly, the aim of the Solidarity Economy Center is to establish and strengthen initiatives that try to reorganise the most important areas of social reproduction (like work, housing, care, food and energy production, etc.) in a democratic and sustainable way, turning away from the exploitation of human and natural resources and developing an economic cycle that nurtures social and ecological systems. Our strategy consists of two large sets of activities. First, we build capacity to establish

various forms of economic autonomy: housing cooperatives, energy and food coops, etc, and the broader institutional models that allow for the scaling up of such circuits. Second, we do union organising, currently in the sectors of care work and education. Our goal is to link up these two strategic areas: namely, to help the unions we work with to go beyond wage fights towards demanding autonomy over social reproduction. We strongly believe that this kind of reproductive autonomy from the market is absolutely necessary to enable an anticapitalist agenda.

INPRECOR : A common point of the 29 organizations of the "Solidarity Action Group" is to say they are anti-capitalist. What does this mean in the particular context of Hungary, a small country of 10 million inhabitants within Europe, where 80% of the economy is controlled by multinationals, especially the German automotive industry? What are the main anti-capitalist measures that you recommend?

A.R.: Not all of the SAG organisations would define themselves explicitly anti-capitalist, for some, e.g. conservationists, food sovereignty organisations within the movement do not have such a direct political profile, while others are explicitly engaged in scientific research. The aim of SAG is for the participating organisations to identify common ground in their own and each other's struggles and to work together to develop a common political agenda.

Á.G.: Anti-capitalism as a broad agenda involves the radical transformation of a secular global system, which presently encompasses each and every aspect of our daily survival. At the Solidarity Economy Center, we don't think of Hungary as an exception from the broad relations of capitalist crisis and transformation that link our lives to that of everyone else on the globe. We see the state as an important institutional enabler and field of struggle, but we do not believe that the deep embeddedness of social reproduction in Hungary within global capitalist flows can be radically altered by local state policies alone. Within this context, we think of our

work as covering a specific aspect (that of deep organizing and institutional modelling for reproductive autonomy) within a larger collaboration with initiatives that cover other aspects of a common struggle, both locally and internationally. Within this framework, the mid-level tools we work on mostly involve tools of organization and policy that enable the broadening of organized reproductive power. We do think of this capacity as a condition of being able to enforce anti-capitalist state measures; yet instead of singling out and listing policies one by one (e.g. put the idea of strengthening the Forint next to a policy that strengthens workers' rights), our work focuses on the actual interrelations between the processes these policies target (e.g. how a cheap Forint is conditioned by Hungary's dependence on labor-intensive FDI), and finding out how building anti-capitalist capacity can be realized within those processes.

P.S.: At Szikra we are not in a position to recommend anti-capitalist measures outside the general outline of supporting workers ownership and management, the strengthening of workers rights and the restructuring of public funding along the line of participatory economic and solidarity principles. What we are working on is more like building a community and establishing channels by which we can enhance the usage of the movement's resources. Not being a think tank we would be over our head and utterly useless to form specific policies on every possible issue - we would even consider it dishonest and undemocratic. We prefer actual participation when it comes to policy-making and make policies on issues with regard we can ensure the participation of those affected. Typical of our policies is how we envision media funding structure, putting the decisions over the funding of outlets in the hands of those reading them, therefore proposing direct democratic control over public information. We do not think in terms of representing programmes during contests between elite factions: for us electoral strategy is not aimed at institutional power in itself but used as a pretext to reroute the energies of the anti-capitalist scene to form its own organizational

structure.

INPRECOR : A permanent campaign topic for Viktor Orban and his party is the fight against migrants (which is also largely fantasy, because migrants have no desire to come to Hungary but are looking for countries where they can find better paid work !). And as this subject seems to be running out of steam, in February 2020 they attacked the Roma community, which represents 8% of the Hungarian population, by challenging a decree of the supreme court which granted compensation to sixty young Roma victims of school discrimination. How do you react to this racist policy?

Á.G.: Fidesz' Roma policy is multifaceted: while anti-Roma sentiments are used as a potential electoral tool, meanwhile Fidesz' support among Roma is relatively high, due to the system of public work which has linked unemployment benefits to local governments' discretionary power, and thus created a direct political dependence. In its present efforts to secure its influence in case of an electoral loss, Fidesz has been stepping up the outsourcing of social policy to churches and church-related charities: this can be seen as another means through which they penetrate and control the poor, including poor Roma. Our stance on this matter focuses on the social levels of dependence that propel the use of the Roma issue as an extra political card up the sleeve of any party across the board since 1989.

INPRECOR : Viktor Orban and FIDESZ have another obsession: sending Hungarian women home to procreate, and rebuilding Christian families. They have not (yet) dared to legally attack the right to abortion, but support anti-abortion organizations and have not hesitated to divert EU funds to finance an anti-abortion poster campaign. They also attack LGBT rights head-on, de facto prohibiting adoption by same-sex couples and going so far as to enshrine the traditional notion of "gender" in the Constitution. Is there a feminist movement and an

LGBT movement in Hungary and how are they mobilizing against these attacks?

A.R.: SAG's radical feminist organisation, Women for Each Other Movement, was represented at the anti-abortion protests and, due to the pandemic, we mostly expressed our solidarity or disapproval through online platforms, and social media. We also joined the E.A.S.T. - Essential Autonomous Struggles, an international organisation that works on essential labour and women's reproductive rights at transnational level, and organised knowledge-exchange events such as roundtables as part of their campaigns.

P.S.: As for LGBT movements, they peaked during the socialist-liberal era since the government could use them as features of its culturally progressive image. There were efforts to radicalize them without any possible positive outcome. LGBT struggles became associated with this strategy, which caused the movement to frame its agenda exclusively in terms of civil rights and access to marriage and middle class life in general. (Also it is a somewhat ill-conceived copy of western LGBT movements, and got co-opted by multinational corporations' PR strategies.) In rhetoric the government monopolizes middle class values and uses LGBT people as punching bags whenever liberal opposition needs to be provoked or the cohesion of the right-wing electoral base reinforced. They are entrapped in this party dynamics and in a short term unable to be integrated into any form of anti-capitalist political agenda.

A.G.: The anti-gender campaign and the campaign against women's rights is part of an international conservative agenda that uses these issues to create a symbolic screen against which "normal" people can be pictured as beneficiaries of conservative politics. In Hungary, this tactic resembles most closely the government's anti-migrant and anti-homeless politics. Beyond a tactic of symbolic politics, both streams have caused practical harm to people, including forbidding gay couples to adopt children, and the government's

reluctance to recognize and tackle the problem of domestic violence, which has become endemic during lockdowns. The government's stance on women's labour is made clear in statements like Viktor Orbán's acknowledgement of women's hard work to take care of their husbands after getting home from their jobs. Also a member of E.A.S.T., SEC has been working on women's issues from the perspective of care work, focusing on social workers who faced the challenges of the pandemic both at work and at home.

INPRECOR : do you have contacts with the anti-capitalist left in the rest of the world and what do you expect from these contacts?

A.R.: In the EU context, Hungary's peripheral position in relation to core countries, especially Germany, is reflected in the strategic position of Hungarian anticapitalist organisations. European left-wing parties are interested in the development of peripheral countries as long as they see their left-wing parties as potential partners. They can serve these strategic goals by knowledge exchange and allocation of financial resources.

P.S.: With Szikra we have connections with European municipalist projects (e.g. Barcelona en Comú, Preston, Ne da(vi)mo Beograd), regional leftist parties (e.g. Možemo!, Razem, Levica Slovenija, Syriza) and movements (e.g. DIEM25) we aim to cultivate, mostly in the hope of exchanging ideas and experiences that may be relevant to us. It's a learning process. We have a diverse membership with ties to other movements and projects, contacts with anarchist networks or Trotskyist internationals, or even experiences with Bernie Sanders' campaign. We looked at European grass-root initiatives to find our initial inspiration and fashioned our organizational outlook after multi-tendential movements like DSA. Táncsics - Radical Left Party, one SAG member organization aimed to build ties with the European Left Party family. We expect political progress in the way of building coalitions between movements working in different fields that have strategic significance for anti-capitalist struggle (e.g. housing,

reproductive rights, ecology, education, solidarity networks and unions). For this we need institutions to facilitate formally coordinated efforts and joint strategic thinking.

Á.G.: In our work at Solidarity Economy Center, we have been building on a longer process of communication of new left initiatives across the region, as well as on specific international contacts and examples that are relevant for our type of organizing. One type of these contacts include regular collaborations on concrete projects, like with the East European housing cooperative network MOBA, or strategic consultations, like for instance with European initiatives who also work on linking community energy to community finance, or with East European union-based rank-and-file organizing projects. Another type of contacts involves following and learning from others' examples, like in the case of Kerala's large cooperative network and union-cooperative collaborations, the Croatian cooperative network ZEF, or the Preston model and related policy plans for institutional scaling in Corbyn's program. We are members in international networks, but have not been part of international-level campaigns yet as our work so far focused on rooting solidarity economy ideas in local organizing capacity.

INPRECOR: Orbán is promoting a project of construction of a huge Chinese university in the South of Budapest, and more generally is offering to China that Hungary becomes the entry to Europe of the new silk road, the huge ambition of the so-called Chinese communist party. What is your position regarding that?

Á.G.: The plan for the Budapest Fudan campus, and the related loan agreement, has been used by both Western and local oppositional communication as a perfect example case of the "democratic backslide" narrative, which sees Hungary as (re)turning to Eastern despotism after its postsocialist project for Western democracy. This is an ideological treatment that ignores a structural analysis of both postsocialist transition (which was anything but a process of

democratization in the social sense), and of the present global transformation in which Hungary's capitalist elites of course navigate according to their own interests. In the latter respect, what is important to remember is that Hungary won't necessarily be the "entry to Europe" of the new silk road. The Budapest-Belgrade railway project is one of the first Chinese-funded infrastructure projects that are framed as part of the BRI within the EU. It is part of the infrastructure that is planned to link the port of Piraeus (in which a Chinese company gained majority ownership after the Greek crisis and its Troika treatment choked the Greek economy) to rich European markets. The promise of those markets has been recently enhanced by the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, the main European initiators (and beneficiaries) of which are French and German multinationals seeking entry to Chinese markets. Most of Hungary's economic interaction with China happens within the value chains of the German automotive industry. Fidesz has been making efforts to use Chinese investments as a way to differentiate

external financing away from European and IMF loans, in order to maintain manoeuvre space for domestic economic policy. But what has happened so far remains below the levels of dependence from both EU financing and Western FDI. The opposition campaign has so far been happy to use the opportunity of the Fudan investment to amplify its own voice by joining Western new Cold War narratives. From our perspective, these immediate tactics boil down to aiding a murderous tendency for military conflict in the middle of a global hegemonic crisis. The alternative to (intransparent) Chinese loans is not a happy subordination to the Troika or the IMF, but an international solidarity that opposes both Eastern and Western aspects of capitalist exploitation.

P.S.: This became one of the most controversial topics recently, since it enabled the opposition coalition to play their card of cultural war and make it an issue of choosing between the values of either East or West. From their point of view it is too good to miss. The way we see in Szikra it is more of an issue of national sovereignty and transparency

regarding state security - also a symbol of the ongoing housing crisis, since the Uni is supposed to be built in place of an accessible student housing facility. We're not against Fudan University per se. It is a typical example of how we can try to cause cleavages in the existing field of oppositional politics. FIDESZ claims to be "anticommunist" and allies with China, claiming China is not communist despite what the Chinese government thinks of itself. The opposition claims to be anticommunist, argues China and the FIDESZ are communist. We endorse communism in itself while being critical of China, FIDESZ and the opposition - nobody could understand this on the grounds of either the government's or the opposition's discourse while the public is still forced to make sense of it. What we miss is transparency with regard to state matters. It is obviously of public interest while still impossible. Revolutionary strategy in general is exactly this: demanding impossible but nevertheless necessary measures. We don't believe capitalism can be "reformed" - that is exactly why we need to demand it.

"Infrastructure" is all the rage, and not only...

26 June 2021, by Against the Current Editors

A combination of circumstances have changed the discussion. The objective realities include the pandemic; its devastating economic impacts most heavily on Black, brown and women's employment; the necessity of rapid conversion to renewable energy, now clear even to much of capital — and yes, the pressures of deepening competition and rivalry with China. The obvious immediate political factors are the defeat of Trump and the ascendance of the Democrats to narrow Congressional and Senate majorities.

It became clear, however, that there would be no Republican support for anything resembling Biden's infrastructure program — even after he'd stripped several hundred billion dollars and scrapped raising the corporate tax rate to pay for it.

Instead, the Senate has hastily come together around "research and development" legislation explicitly aimed at facing China's rising capacity. It signals that anything happening in the name of government economic development policy will be coming with a stop-China tinge — as

was also clear in Biden's statements at the G7 summit.

Gridlock

President Biden's and the Democrats' "nearly two trillion dollar infrastructure package," as it was called, could only be enacted in the Senate with all 48 Democratic and two independent votes (Bernie Sanders and Angus King), plus Vice President Kamala Harris' tie-breaker. That's in order to pass the bill through the "budget reconciliation" provision that

bypasses the Senate's 60 votes required to choke off the buffoonery that passes for "debate" in that spectacularly unrepresentative chamber.

As the Republican Party at the congressional level consolidates itself as the party of the Big Lie and the still-to-be-indicted Big Liar lurking in his Mar-A-Lago bunker, the long tradition of "bipartisan" negotiation (with all the cynicism and pork-barrel tradeoffs it entails) has become middle-of-the-road kill. Loyally ensconced for decades in the old habits, Biden routinely reaches across the aisle to Mitch McConnell, who responds by stomping on the president's face. After several repetitions, most Democrats not named Joe Manchin get the point.

In essence, the Democrats were left negotiating with their own Senator Manchin and one or two Republicans he might bring along — maybe Lisa Murkowski, whose main purpose in political life is to keep her state of Alaska open for ecocidal oil and gas drilling. Under more bipartisan circumstances, the Democratic leadership would likely be willing to sacrifice their bill's more innovative measures — "social infrastructure" like expanded child credit and health care access, as well as some first steps toward mitigating climate disaster — to get Republican support, even though enraging their progressive-minded base.

Now, however, the Democrats need that base and its Congressional voices to once again, as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez put it to journalist Marina Hinojosa about the 2020 election, "save the party's ass." If the Democrats don't "go big" and deliver serious results, they might well be electorally dead in 2022 and beyond. That pressure, along with the party's left wing, put some backbone into the administration's posture although the "progressive" forces certainly don't control the agenda.

Size and Scope

Without trying to predict what if any infrastructure spending might finally survive the filibuster-blockaded mess

known as the United States Senate, it's worth looking at what the Biden administration and congressional Democrats hoped to accomplish. These proposals are by no means "socialist," as Republicans absurdly pronounce. We'll come back to the issue of what a socialist infrastructure program would look like.

Importantly, however, the Biden proposals were big — even ground-shifting by the standards of decades of neoliberal gutting of social spending by both capitalist parties. It's worth exploring why. Dollar figures do matter, although they fluctuate with each day's news reports. (To paraphrase the late Illinois Senator Everett Dirksen, "a trillion dollars here, a trillion there, and pretty soon you're talking real money." In the long-ago 1960s, Dirksen actually said "billion." How outdated is that?)

The biggest attempted innovations, however, are over the Democrats' "wide range of concerns, including elder care, parents and families" and social support, scorned by Republicans like John Barrasso of Wyoming "as 'socialism camouflaged as infrastructure.'"

"Maintaining their belief that any package should hew to what they describe as traditional infrastructure," the Senate Republicans' new plan "proposes more than \$500 billion for roads, \$98 billion for public transit, \$46 billion for passenger rail and more than \$70 billion for water infrastructure" and other items. ("Senate Republicans make new infrastructure offer as House Democrats urge Biden to dig in," Washington Post, May 27, 2021)

Through budget legerdemain, however, Republicans propose paying for some of this through money already legislated, but not yet spent, under the previous COVID relief bill. Under no circumstances, McConnell pledges, will any part of the sacred Trump tax cuts for corporate capital and the rich be touched. In any case the Republican proposition adds up to something less than half of the Biden administration's proposal.

Proposing infrastructure spending to meet social needs is a departure from

established practice. That fact shows the depth of our society's crisis, and the backwardness of its politics. Consider the amazing reality that both Joe Manchin and Senator Shelley Moore Capito, the Republican "negotiator" put in charge of sabotaging Biden's proposal, are from West Virginia — a state that needs human as well as "traditional" infrastructure repair probably more than any other.

Here's what Biden proposed, as summarized by CNN politics (March 31, 2021) from White House figures:

- Transportation — \$621 billion, including \$174 billion investment in the electric vehicle market.
- Home care services and workforce — \$400 billion, including improving wages for home health workers (anathema to Republicans, of course).
- Manufacturing — \$300 billion, including domestic semiconductor and medical manufacturing as well as "focus on clean energy, rural communities, and programs that give small businesses access to credit."
- Housing — \$213 billion toward retrofitting, renovating or building two million-plus homes and housing units to improve energy efficiency. (Clearly much more is needed to make this a transformative program.)
- Research and development — \$180 billion "to advance U.S. leadership in critical technologies" as well as climate science. (It's not clear how this intersects with the Senate's hastily passed \$250 billion R&D bill.)
- Water — \$111 billion including replacement of lead pipes and service lines.
- Schools — \$100 billion to build new and upgrade existing public school buildings. (An additional \$37 billion are requested for infrastructure needs of community colleges and child care facilities.)
- Digital infrastructure — \$100 billion for universal high-speed broadband access.
- Workforce development — \$100 billion for dislocated workers and

underserved populations.

- Veterans' hospitals and federal buildings modernization — \$18 and \$10 billion respectively.

To most of which we can apparently bid R.I.P. As we go to press, a "bipartisan" group of 10 Senators is floating a proposal just over half the size of the original Biden/Democrats' bill. The outcome is an open question.

Socialist Infrastructure for Real

Taken individually and as a package, the Biden/Democratic measures respond to the crisis of infrastructure decay in capitalist America. They would be helpful to tens if not hundreds of millions of people whose lives are blighted by the existing mess. The argument that they're needed "in order to globally compete" is partly a patriotic selling pitch, but also an objective reality facing U.S. capital.

The immediate blockage is the extreme dysfunction of a political system that's become a paralyzed hostage to the far right. Still, the very real differences between the Biden and Republican infrastructure policies are dwarfed by the gap between either of them and what a socialist program would look like — not just in scale but above all in priorities and objectives.

No question, trillions of dollars need to be invested — but for what, and controlled by whom? A socialist program would entail not only spending but enormous inroads on capital, beginning with nationalization of the sectors of the economy most critically in need of renovation and

transformation to a sustainable future, notably energy and transportation. Preferably those nationalized industries would be reorganized under workers' control ; in any case, the most fundamental change would be full public discussion and democratic decision-making about priorities.

Consider for example a range of hugely complex issues around tackling the environmental crisis. Does our society's future lie in mass conversion to individually-owned electric automobiles, or should the emphasis be a whole new infrastructure centered on public transportation? And should the decision be based on where the profit is, or what people and the planet need?

Does the energy solution mean industrial-scale wind turbines and solar panels, or localized alternatives and significant reductions in energy consumption? What's the pathway to sustainable agriculture replacing corporate monopoly agribusiness? What can replace gigantic factory farms that destroy land, water and Indigenous farming communities globally — and how to get there?

For some discussion of these challenges, see for example two posts on the Solidarity website, "Biden's Climate Pledge is a Promise He Cannot Keep" by Howie Hawkins and "What Would a Deep Green New Deal Look Like?" by Don Fitz.

We don't claim to have quick answers. The essential point is that fundamental problems that affect everyone's lives need to be decided by society democratically and collectively on the basis of science-based knowledge of the options and their consequences, rather than by the necessity to preserve and expand

corporate profit.

Another set of priorities revolves around the scope of what's called "human infrastructure." For socialists, the resources required to develop universal health care, public education that works for everyone, universal child care, guaranteed child nutrition and cleaning up our fouled waterways and toxic dumps — to name just a few priorities — are immense. They demand, for openers, cuts in military spending beyond what either of our capitalist parties are able to even contemplate.

On top of the quantitative scale of the task is the social necessity to put the most resources into the very places, the communities of oppressed people and in rural areas, which were never properly served by capitalist development and are now especially ravaged by recent decades of neoliberal policy.

The Biden program responds in part to the reality that neglect of physical, social and human "infrastructure" (pretty much everything except the military) has reached the point of weakening U.S. capital's ability to compete in the world, notably against a rising China. As we've noted, for the Democrats it also means that if they can't deliver serious relief for their constituencies, they might as well fold up. That confluence of circumstances opens up possibilities.

In short, the answer to our question "Infrastructure. Who Needs It:" Capital needs it. Workers and families need it. Black, brown, Indigenous and rural communities need it. We all need it. But what kind we get, and who benefits, will be decided not automatically but through political struggle and social mobilization.

Source: [Against the Current](#)

Massive mobilisations in Greece against a slavery law

25 June 2021, by **Andreas Sartzekis**

The bill can be summarized as follows: to make people work more (10-hour day, extension of Sunday work, increase in the annual ceiling for overtime) while paying less (partial recovery in the form of “rest days”, reduction in the rate of overtime), and to impose serious attacks on the right to strike and to organise (with pressure to sign individual agreements).

Translation by the Prime Minister, the ultra-liberal Mitsotakis: “A law favourable to workers and allowing development”, which will clean up “the jungle of the world of work” and ensure the future of the young generations! In reality, it is a confirmation that the only project of the revanchist right-wing in power is to do everything to attract investors (and tourists) and to favour their cronies in Greek big business.

This project, for which the daily *Efimerida ton Syntakton* hesitates between “Welcome to the 19th century” and “Back to the Middle Ages”, received a first response with an encouraging national mobilization on 6 May. Various local initiatives followed, reflecting in depth a growing feeling since the autumn. And it was this working class pressure that forced the union leaderships, including that of GSEE, the single

private sector federation led by a bureaucracy linked to Pasok and irrevocably compromised in the acceptance of the memoranda, to launch a call for a general strike for 10 June, which was put forward by the most combative unions.

From the 10 June strike to the vote on the law

Despite many obstacles (including threats of dismissals in the private sector, the ban on the strike by the sailors, who led it and succeeded), this day, without being a tidal wave, was a great success, with demonstrations in more than 70 towns and cities, and massive support for the mobilisation. In Athens, several tens of thousands of workers and young people demonstrated in three marches: the KKE (CP) and its trade union current PAME, the two federations GSEE and ADEDY (public sector) with Syriza and other reformist organisations, the grassroots unions and the anti-capitalist left. But as a sign of combativity, the processions were so dense that they joined!

Of course, in the evening of this beautiful day, the most clear-sighted

knew that the union bureaucracies were going to put the brakes on, so as not to be overwhelmed, while the right displayed even more firmness. Instead of immediately calling for at least another national strike on the day of the vote, 16 June, GSEE fell back into silence and ADEDY called for a work stoppage which, under pressure from union members, became a strike call in extremis. Under these conditions, participation in the mobilization on the 16th was down. Nevertheless, all over the country, thousands of workers demonstrated, surrounding the Parliament in Athens.

The question that arises with more urgency after the vote of the law, in order to continue a victorious mobilization, is that of a trade union reorganization taking into account contradictory elements: even if the GSEE leadership has sold out, its national call to strike widened the mobilization thus felt as unitary; the activity of the combative rank and file trade unions alone will not be enough, and the trade union left has to elaborate a tactic of combative pressure preventing the retreats of the various trade union leadership. The fight only goes on!

23 June 2021

Athens

From revolt to process

24 June 2021, by **Karina Nohales**

Right at this point, the pandemic arrived in Chile, postponing the constitutional itinerary and making many feel that the revolt was becoming a thing of the past. But there is no deadline that is not met or debt that is not paid. The elections showed that the revolt is still open and that it is becoming a process,

confounding both the oligarchic framework agreed upon by the parties of order and the fatalism of various sectors of the extra-parliamentary left, accustomed to predicting defeat. This time the people trusted in their own strength and won.

From the plebiscite of October 2020 to

the creation of electoral lists

On 25 October 2020, the Approve option was approved by 80% in the plebiscite that consulted the people whether or not they wanted a new Constitution. Previous polls correctly projected that the Approve would triumph by over 70%. Rejection prevailed in only five of the 345 municipalities of the country, one in the extreme north, another in Antarctica and the rest in the three municipalities of Santiago where the super-rich are concentrated.

The organized social world critical of the Agreement that enabled the constitutional process, called for a broad vote in the plebiscite with the aim of inflicting a resounding defeat on the right and demoralizing it, thus affirming the self-confidence of the broad popular layers. And, indeed, the overwhelming result generated enthusiasm and immediately various organizations began the discussion of raising candidacies for the Constitutional Convention.

Significant fringes of organizations decided to promote candidacies independently, that is, outside the political parties that have administered the last 30 years, as well as those that signed the Agreement and the repressive laws that followed. A wide deliberation took place, limited by the context of the pandemic, but no less latent for that. The constituent process opened in October was continuing its course and was preparing to claim the ownership that had been taken away by its petty institutional reflection.

Although people who are not active in legally constituted parties can ordinarily be candidates occupying a place in party lists, for this election, extraordinarily, independents were allowed to form their own electoral lists, something which does not happen in any other type of election, including parliamentary ones.

Previous forecasts

None of the establishment pollsters dared to publish forecasts of the results of these elections. Various representatives of the parties of order argued in the hegemonic media that the Constitutional Convention would be similar to the current Parliament, that is, without significant surprises.

More or less, everyone, including popular organizations, agreed that the unity of all the right-wing parties in a single list at the national level contrasted with the dispersal of the heterogeneous opposition would translate into an over-representation of that sector in the constituent body, where it only needed a third of representatives to block any structural transformation to the model.

The only forecast close to what finally happened was by Axel Callís, political analyst and director of the DataInfluye survey, who said that in this election “a reset of everything known” could take place.

In the end the right did not achieve one third, the former *Concertación* collapsed and the revolt entered the Convention en masse. The general feeling was one of surprise. For the parties of order, a surprise that happened despite them; for the people, a surprise that happened thanks to them, a surprise that they deliberately wished for; and that desire guided the efforts and steps taken, producing the result. It just worked! When a people has experienced its strength, as in October, there is no agreement at the top that can stop its transforming will.

The composition of the Constitutional Convention

The social pressures towards the democratization of the constituent process enabled the institutional adoption of mechanisms of participation that displaced the centrality of the classic mediations of the political system, starting with the political parties.

We have seen many times that social irruptions are incorporated into the institutional framework mediated by certain forms and actors that transform both their dynamics and their content. The particular fact that independents could participate in these elections through their own lists meant that the social revolt passed directly and scarcely mediated into the Constitutional Convention.

The Constitutional Convention is made up of 155 members, 17 of which are reserved seats for indigenous peoples, and it is based on gender parity. The right won 38 seats, of which 16 entered as independents in right-wing party quotas. The former *Concertación* (an alliance between the Socialist Party and the Christian Democrats) won 25 seats, of which 11 entered as independents in the quotas of those parties. The Christian Democrats only got one seat. The alliance of the Communist Party and the *Frente Amplio* obtained 28 seats, of which 13 entered as independents in the quotas of those parties.

The independents elected on independent lists without the tutelage of parties amount to 48. Eleven of them are from the Non-Neutral Independent list, aligned with the former *Concertación* and financed by big business. Of the 155 members, only 52 are active in parties, all the others are independents from all sectors. Of the 17 seats reserved for indigenous peoples, the majority, 9 of them, are from the left, with 5 from the centre-left and 3 from the right. Leaving aside the points of entry to the Constitutional Convention, the left-wing members elected in party lists, in independent quotas, in independent lists and in reserved seats amount to 78. Those identified as centrist add up to 36. The right-wing elected 41 members.

With the exception of the list of the right and that of the former *Concertación*, in all the other lists and in the reserved seats many more women were elected than men. Parity - unprecedented in the world for this type of process - had to be applied to correct the male under-representation. While eleven men entered the Convention under the parity correction, only five women did.

This result confirms that feminism has an inescapable political content in this period, and that in the popular field it is recognized as the legitimate bearer of the general popular aspirations for transformation. With the feminism of the social movement, the political program against the precarity of life enters the Convention.

In the coming elections, we need to fight for a parity whose result has no ceiling, that is, to maintain *entry parity* and *exit parity* that guarantees a representation of *at least* 50% of women, but without a maximum limit, as was the case in this case.

Significant absence

From the organized social world, representation of the socio-environmental and feminist organizations of struggle, as well as the territorial assemblies and organizations, prevails. From the unorganized social world, figures prevail who were in the streets from the beginning of the revolt until now, resisting and denouncing the repression.

The revolt has entered the Convention en masse, but trade unionism has been left out. The main trade union federation in the country (CUT) ran 22 candidates, none of them successful. The same fate befell the candidacies of the unions of employees in teaching, taxation and primary health care, as well as some private sector unions, such as Unión Portuaria and Sindicato Starbucks. NO + AFP, a space that led the massive mobilizations for the end of the current private pension system and whose composition is mainly trade union based, presented 19 candidates and only one of them was elected. In contrast, two female assembly members representing non-salaried work organizations (caregivers) - jobs that have not yet found their space for participation in traditional unionism - were elected.

Numerous diagnoses and long-discussed critical balance sheets explain this lack of identification between the revolt and trades

unionism. Undoubtedly, it is related to the decay of the unionism of the transition, subordinated to the parties of these last 30 years; it is also partly about the impotence of a trades unionism that fails - and in many cases has not tried - to include huge layers of informal workers, unemployed, unpaid, migrants, willing to organize and fight, but with respect to whom the trade union form has been uprooted from its organizational experience. But the fact is that unlike other transcendent debates, the programmatic and ideological debate on salaried work in the Constitutional Convention will not be made in the first person by trade union representatives. For the social movement and, in particular, for the feminist movement, the important political task of taking over the legitimate ownership of that debate remains, especially since on 29 May the Socialist Party swept the CUT elections, taking the Communist Party off the podium. This can only be done with bold organizational initiatives on this level.

Trembling in the political centre, impotence of the right

Presidential and parliamentary elections will take place in Chile next November. Three days after the Convention elections - Wednesday, 19 May - the deadline for the political parties to register pacts to hold presidential primaries expired. That day became an opposition soap opera. While the Communist Party and the *Frente Amplio* had already agreed to hold primaries between their respective candidates to the presidency, on the eve and with the permission of both sectors, the Socialist Party joined in with its candidate. This fact is of significant importance, since it supposed that the PS put an end to its historical alliance with the Christian Democrats, leaving it to its fate after its devastating result in the Convention.

However, at the very moment when all the parties met in the electoral offices

to proceed with registration, the Socialist Party came hand in hand with the Partido por la Democracia (Party for Democracy - a minor party in the former *Concertación*), announcing that it had stood down its presidential candidate to back the PS candidate, and consequently demanding the inclusion of the PPD in the pact so that the joint primary could proceed. Added to this requirement was agreement on joint lists for parliamentary elections. After tense hours which brought out the differences within the parties that make up the *Frente Amplio*, both this bloc and the Communist Party closed the door on the PS for trying to sneak their little brother in the window.

Finally, the right-wing registered its own primary, the CP and the FA did the same and the former *Concertación* failed to register legal primaries for the presidential elections. This does not mean that this sector cannot have its own candidacy, but it does mean that it will have to find a way to reach a consensus in the midst of feelings of betrayal and electoral debacle to achieve a single presidential candidacy, or else not agree on anything at all. and compete separately.

However, an unprecedented shift in political coordinates has taken place. We see a right of defined contours stagnant at 20% electorally and with little room to grow outside that margin; we see a new pact of left-wing parties that is occupying the place of the ghostly centre and, undeniably, the whole country knows that *something* has broken into the constituent power that is further to the left of these expressions.

Transcendence of the electoral moment

On 20 May, in an editorial on *Bio Bio* - Chile's main radio station - its owner Tomás Mosciatti, known for his conservative positions, stated that: "The victory in the elections was not for the centre left, it was for the left... From now on, the left has never had so much power. This victory is

superior to that of Salvador Allende because at that time Popular Unity did not intend to modify the Constitution, but rather accepted a reinforcement of it, called the Statute of Democratic Guarantees, in order to gain power. What has happened now is that the left has managed to have the popular mandate, that is, a legitimate mandate, to draft the Constitution without any limitation, because the only one it had, that of the 2/3 that required negotiation, does not exist”.

The claim is debatable, but the significance of what is at stake is quite real. To think about the transformative magnitude that the current constituent moment opens up, it is necessary to link it both to the realization of various political and organizational challenges that the popular movement faces and to the possible results of the presidential and parliamentary elections.

From different benches, three bills have been presented to Congress that seek to enable the participation of independents in their own lists for the parliamentary elections, as with the constituent elections. It would be counterintuitive for the legislature to approve such a reform, but it is not a possibility to be ruled out. If this happens, it is most likely that the Congress that accompanies the work of the Constitutional Convention will have a composition similar to the latter. Failing that, the country could enter a period of unstable and tense duality between constituted power and constituent power.

The same thing would happen in terms of the presidency if one of the old coalitions prevails in winning executive power. However, if the PC-

FA bloc prevails at the current constituent moment, the scenario could take an unprecedented turn to the left. This is not about the radicalism of the bloc in question but starts, as during Popular Unity, from the popular expectations put into play and the self-organized initiatives these expectations unleash. It remains to be seen what will happen at this level in the coming months. Some scenarios - like the presidential one - are not only possible, but probable.

Tasks to come

The people have won a victory. It has won it from below and from the left, heterogeneous like the revolt itself. The organized sectors have won it and the little organized also. No agreement from above could stop the will of a people that rose up, determined to overthrow so much injustice. It is the people that will now do what the post-dictatorial governments did not achieve in 30 years: to put an end to Pinochet's legacy and thereby open up a new way of organizing life in Chile. Unlike the constituent processes seen in Latin America during the so-called progressive cycle, here it has been done despite a government that declared war on it and despite a pandemic.

The people has its own history, not starting from scratch, but neither is it proposing a nostalgic return to a violently interrupted past. The central presence of feminism, socio-environmental struggles and plurinationality look forward, with a memory of the future that brings into play emancipatory political imaginations.

Although in these decades, peoples have risen up around the world to impede the advance of neoliberal reforms, the Chilean case has the peculiarity that its anti-neoliberal tone does not consist in stopping this advance, but in dismantling a neoliberalism that has been radically installed to the very end. There is nothing existing to protect or to leave intact. In this sense it is a novel experience.

Internally, some leftists view the diversity of popular representation in the constituent body with some suspicion. There are certain leftists who fear saying what they want or simply succumbing to their own impotence in relation to a popular movement which they were late to and have related to badly. Nothing is more dangerous for these leftists than this conservatism that leads to mistrust of the power of a people who have rightly decided to trust in their own strengths, leaving the field open for a broad encounter with anti-capitalist ideas.

The popular representations of the Convention have already undertaken the task of forming the bench of the peoples, first of all demanding minimum political conditions so that the constituent process can take place, namely unconditional liberation of all the political prisoners of the revolt, the demilitarization of the Wallmapu-Mapuche ancestral territory - and the creation of a truth and justice commission with a policy of comprehensive reparation for the victims of human rights violations, as well as the determination of the political and judicial liabilities of those responsible for these crimes..

From civil disobedience to armed resistance - what new Myanmar can emerge from today's challenges?

Last February, the junta could have been defeated if the international sanctions had been radical and if solidarity with the Civil Disobedience Committee (CDM) had been equal to the task. This was not the case, and the army had time to take the initiative again, waging an all-out war against the population - a war that is all the more deadly because China and Russia are providing it with heavy weaponry (aircrafts, tanks, artillery) that it did not have before, and because firms (including Western ones) are selling it the latest electronic surveillance devices.

As a result, popular resistance continues under extremely difficult conditions. The civil disobedience movement has gone underground and forms of self-defence are spreading throughout the country, not just in peripheral areas populated by ethnic minorities.

Traditional street demonstrations have become impossible and strikers face severe retaliation. However, "non-violent" forms of struggle continue, including strikes (albeit much less widespread than before) and passive resistance. The junta had to pay lip service to the fact that the "return to normalcy" was not complete [4]. Indeed, the number of qualified personnel working in the banks or in the administration remains insufficient and health workers to a large extent continue to refuse to work under military orders.

Despite the risks, in some urban centres, such as the capital of the Sagaing region (Monywa), flash demonstrations are organised to keep the symbol of civil disobedience alive [5]. The 2021-2022 school year started on 1 June, but the army has not been able to effectively enforce the reopening of schools (which were closed for a year due to Covid-19) [6].

The junta responded to this multiple and diffuse resistance by evicting people from their homes, by the intervention of paramilitary groups, by assassinations or arrests, or by

convictions for collaboration with the new National Unity Government (NUG).

The National Unity Government

The formation of the Government of National Unity (NUG) is indeed one of the new factors of the situation. Rather than being in exile, it is a clandestine government whose members apparently remain in the country. It embodies the continuity of legal civilian power. It still has Aung San Suu Kyi as its 'State Counsellor', who is now in detention and on trial for high treason, totally isolated from the world. Nevertheless, the NUG is emancipating itself, for the better, from the traditional orientation of the National League for Democracy (NLD, of which Suu Kyi was the leader), which was marked by Bamar ethno-nationalism (Bamar is the name of the majority ethnic group in Burma).

The composition of the National Unity Government is multi-ethnic [7]. On 3 June 2021, the (NUG) published its "Policy Position on the Rohingya in Rakhine State". [8]. This is an important document in many ways. It shows how 'new' Burma could be in the future.

- The NUG acknowledges the seriousness of the harm done to the Rohingya Muslim population, victims of genocide in Rakhine [Arakan] State, a subject that was previously taboo. The dominant Arakanese armed parties [9] in this coastal state violently denounce this statement and for good reason: they were complicit in the genocide and are more often on the side of the Burmese military junta than the democratic resistance. The National Unity Government pledges that "striving to hold perpetrators accountable is not only a way of achieving justice, but also a deterrent to future atrocities. That is why we consider this a priority task. Reparation and justice will be guaranteed in the future constitution

of the Federal Democratic Union." The NUG proposes that a genuine international criminal court be established.

- The NUG proposes that true federalism be established in the Union [10] "Sovereignty belongs to the member states and the people of the member states [...]. Everyone in the Union has full enjoyment of fundamental human rights. All ethnic groups who are native to the Union have full enjoyment of individual rights held by individual people and collective rights held by ethnic groups. All citizens who swear allegiance to the Union regardless of their ethnic origins are considered to have full enjoyment of citizens' rights. The National Unity Government will not tolerate any form of discrimination."

- On this occasion, the NUG clarifies its understanding of citizenship, which should replace the 1982 law, in preparation for the drafting of a new constitution: "This new Citizenship Act must base citizenship on birth in Myanmar or birth anywhere as a child of Myanmar Citizens." This definition, commonplace for a Frenchman, represents a real revolution in Burma.

The 1982 law distinguishes three degrees of citizenship designated by the colour of the corresponding identity paper [11]. The **pink card** grants full citizenship. It is automatically granted to all persons whose ancestors resided in the country before 1823 [12], or born to parents recognised as full citizens. The **Blue Card** is reserved for associate citizens, i.e. those who were recognised as citizens under the previous Union Citizenship Law of 1948. The **Green Card** is for citizenship by naturalisation of persons who can prove their presence on Burmese soil before 4 January 1948 and who apply for the first time after 1982. The granting of cards is subject to arbitrary exceptions or restrictions, notified by the Council of State, for sometimes surprising reasons. For example, persons applying for citizenship by naturalisation must be

of good character (art. 44d).

It could hardly be more complicated.

A **white card** was distributed in the 1990s to residents who did not fit into any of these categories. It does not give any rights.

Finally, citizenship is recognised through membership of one of the 135 officially recognised ethnic groups. Not only is it unequal, but it also contributes to the entrenchment of these affiliations (as well as the rejection of populations declared to be 'foreign') according to divisions born of the colonial era between Barmans in the plains, minorities in the periphery and imported labour.

There is obviously a long way to go between such commitments and their implementation, but they confirm that there is indeed a generational break and that the "possibilities" envisaged yesterday by marginalised circles, with little voice, are today widely debated by all those who think about the future, about the post-military junta. This rupture is also manifested in the expansion of armed resistance.

Armed resistance

Popular opposition to the military putsch was evident throughout the country, but the response of parliaments, parties and armies in the ethnic states was often effectively cautious and wait-and-see. A constellation of organisations emerged in many of these states, some negotiating a ceasefire with the junta, others fighting it. This in-between (fighting and negotiating) has been something of a tradition since independence. New factors in this area include:

- **The role of China.** It absolutely needs an agreement with the military junta to protect its investments (considerable in infrastructure) and its companies (textiles in particular, which have been attacked by the resistance in industrial zones). It needs to guarantee the development of its "Burmese Corridor" which gives it access to the Indian Ocean, west of the Strait of Malacca, which the US can block. In particular, it has

strategically important oil and gas pipelines there. The border area is the scene of a thousand traffics, from teak wood to precious stones, which in return allow the enrichment of a good number of Burmese army officers. On the northern border, China uses its strong and direct influence on ethnic movements to prevent them from dissenting. This is the case of the very powerful United Wa State Army (UWSA), the best armed and comprising some 30,000 regular soldiers.

- **The use by the Burmese army of its air force and artillery.** It was not equipped with them during the previous major conflicts. It bombed villages, causing massive displacement of the population. This is how the leadership of the Fifth Brigade of the Karen National Union (KNU), which played a leading role in the resistance to the coup and which hosted and protected representatives of the Civil Disobedience Committee (CDM), explains the fact that it signed a ceasefire with the junta: the human cost was becoming too high. However, she says that when the National Unity Government launches an offensive, she will participate. In any case, the Karen state is one where many dissident armed groups have emerged and are still actively fighting.

- **The formation of the People's Defence Force** (PDF, attached to the NUG). There had been talk of forming a federal army - too ambitious a project at the moment if it were to include armies from the ethnic states on the periphery. The government of national unity then created the PDF, under its authority, which operates throughout the Irrawaddy basin. It is staffed by police and army defectors and former officers.

- **The spontaneous emergence of numerous local groups** that take action with makeshift means. They are not under the command of the PDF and the NUG, which they regard (sometimes, often?) with distrust, as a structure that is too bureaucratic for their taste. They are the ones who exploded bombs in schools before the start of the school year as a warning - a mode of action officially condemned by the PDF.

- **Making the junta's supporters insecure.** In lowland areas, armed action rarely takes the form of a frontal attack on the military. It often targets informers in the service of the junta who provide information to the military, or administrators who have taken over from opposing local authorities - some groups also threaten the families of soldiers, which is a matter of debate, especially with the PDF.

- **The beginnings of a guerrilla war in the plains.** As a recent development, actual guerrilla operations are reported in the Sagaing and Mandalay areas. According to information received by *The Irrawaddy* [13], a thousand members of the civil resistance have carried out a series of coordinated attacks with makeshift weapons, which have cost the lives of some thirty soldiers. In Mandalay, three soldiers, including a lieutenant colonel, were killed when they entered a building used as a PDF base.

In the future, the question of the coordination of armed resistance (and the improvement of its armament) will arise. So, perhaps, will the place of women in the struggle. It was prominent in all the popular social sectors from the first hours of the uprising which followed the putsch of 1 February (high school students, health workers, textile workers, civil servants, educators...). It remains evident in the clandestine civil disobedience actions. For my part, I have no indication of their role in the military field.

Solidarity in the long term

Long-term resistance must be matched by the development of long-term political and financial solidarity. Too few organisations in France mobilised immediately at the beginning of February to build it. We must push for the extension of international sanctions against the Burmese military-economic complex. We must demand the formal recognition of the NUG as the legal representation of the country in place of the junta. Cooperation between the

various components of solidarity must be ensured.

The association Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières (ESSF) had launched an appeal for financial solidarity with the Burmese resistance. It has collected and transferred €6080. We have recently received confirmation that these funds have been received and distributed via a border area for emergency food and health aid to

refugee populations, for the distribution of indispensable means of communication, for the reinforcement of the organisational infrastructure of the CDM-GUN and the links with regional solidarity...

The least we can say is that the French government and presidency are not very vocal about the situation in Burma. Yet they are particularly implicated, because of Total's role in

the crisis, given its past and present links with the regime.

The employees of Total would like to go on strike to protest against the oil giant's support for the military order, but they fear being sacked if they are not defended by the "international community". Emmanuel Macron is silent.

Source [ESSF](#).

Detroit's Tale of Two Water Crises

22 June 2021, by **Josiah Rector**

He observed that "when you begin to ask that question, you are raising a question about the economic system, about a broader distribution of wealth. When you ask that question, you begin to question the capitalistic economy." He went on to ask: "Who owns the oil? [...] Who owns the iron ore? [...] Why is it that people have to pay water bills in a world that's two-thirds water? [14].

Taken literally, King's last question suggests that desalination technology, harnessed to human needs rather than profit, could make the world's oceans a viable drinking water source for the world's population. (This was not a totally impractical idea; by 1961, Kuwait was already desalinating over six million gallons of water per year [15])

Whether taken as a rhetorical flourish or as a literal statement, King's deeper message was clear. Despite the growth of the postwar middle class, the wealth of a small elite and the poverty of 40 million Americans were still two sides of the same coin. So were the control of natural resources by private monopolies and the denial of access to necessities like water to poor people.

Even during the so-called "golden age" of American capitalism between 1945 and 1973, the system made the meeting of basic human needs a class privilege rather than a universal right.

After over 40 years of neoliberal retrenchment, King's critique of capitalism resonates more powerfully than ever.

Today, three billionaires have more wealth than half the U.S. population combined, and 26 billionaires have more wealth than half of humanity as a whole. [16] The Poor People's Campaign estimates that 140 million Americans are poor or low-income, and the minimum wage is lower — in real terms — than when King was assassinated in 1968. [17]

This article will discuss how Detroit avoided mass water shutoffs during the 1930s Great Depression and imposed them in the recent Great Recession.

Shutoffs, Poverty and COVID

In 2016 alone, over 15 million Americans had their water shut off; at least 1.4 million people lost water service due to non-payment of bills. [18]

In addition to the stress and humiliation of being unable to flush toilets or to properly bathe and clean, water shutoffs make people more vulnerable to dehydration and infectious disease with lethal consequences during the COVID-19

pandemic.

A recent working paper by the National Bureau of Economic Research estimates that a national moratorium on utility disconnections between March and November 2020 could have reduced COVID-19 deaths by 14.8% (over 37,000 people). An eviction moratorium could have reduced deaths by 40.7% (over 100,000 people). [19]

Needless to say, these numbers cannot begin to convey the unnecessary human tragedy each of these deaths represents. Depriving people of water, heat, light and shelter on the grounds of inability to pay is not just cruel and inhumane. It is a crime against humanity.

Detroit, often called the "Blackest big city" in the United States, became notorious for mass water shutoffs in the decade before COVID-19 hit. Since 2014 the city has shut off water for over 141,000 residential accounts.

In a city with 2.51 persons per household, this means that shutoffs forced over 300,000 people — almost all of them Black and poor — to live without running water for days, weeks, and in some cases months or even years in the past decade. Not coincidentally, the shutoff numbers closely parallel the number of Detroiters officially living below the federal poverty line in 2019:

243,891. [20]

However, Detroit's mass water shutoffs are not simply a result of poverty and the long history of racism that has concentrated it in Black communities. Those problems long predated the past decade but mass water shutoffs are a relatively recent development.

Rather, they're a product of 21st century austerity policies implemented by the federal government, the state of Michigan, and the City of Detroit that prioritize the interests of largely white capitalists over the health and safety of the Black urban poor. They are also entirely preventable, as the history of Detroit shows.

Water Crisis in the Depression-Era

To see why mass water shutoffs did not need to happen during the 2010s Great Recession, it is helpful to go back to the 1930s Great Depression, the last time a comparable water affordability crisis happened in Detroit.

In the four years after the stock market crash of 1929, as automobile sales nosedived by 75%, Detroit manufacturers laid off 45% of their workers. Payroll at the Ford Motor Company fell from 128,142 to 37,000 between 1929 and 1931. [21]

As the newly unemployed fell into destitution, the city's welfare rolls exploded from 3,977 in 1928 to 229,000 by 1933. Detroit's unemployed were unable to pay bills, rent or mortgage payments, leading to a rapid increase in utility shutoffs, evictions and home foreclosures. Meanwhile, the administration of Mayor Frank Murphy faced the prospect of municipal bankruptcy as Detroit's tax revenues collapsed, forcing the city to default on its debts to Wall Street banks in 1933 and to begin paying city workers in scrip. [22]

At the Detroit Department of Water Supply, staffers watched as ratepayers stopped paying their bills. Hal Smith,

the Head Water Consumer's Account Clerk for the City of Detroit, wrote in a 1933 article that unpaid water bills "had not been a serious problem" before 1929.

By 1932, however, "many, through no fault of their own, were unable to meet their bills, and further, we knew that we would have to handle about 20,000 delinquent accounts per month." Delinquent accounts reached 90,000 by April 1933, and over 100,000 by March 1934. [23]

In response to the crisis of the Great Depression, the Communist Party (CP) began organizing mass demonstrations of the unemployed in January-March 1930, including in Detroit. [24] CP-led Unemployed Councils used direct action tactics to fight evictions and utility shutoffs, including reconnecting gas and electric lines. [25]

Black Detroiters in CP-affiliated groups like the Nat Turner Club — an offshoot of the League of Struggle for Negro Rights — played a prominent role in these struggles. As Joseph Billups recalled in a 1967 oral history interview, "the Nat Turner Club turned out to be an Unemployed Club, taking care of evictions, turning on the lights, and so on." [26]

As historian Eric Rauchway has shown, by 1932 President Hoover and his White House staff "were sure that Communist agitators would take advantage of unemployment to foment revolution." Indeed, "Hoover was sure that the New Deal was bringing communism to America" and portrayed Roosevelt as a Bolshevik in public statements on the campaign trail. [27]

The New Deal, of course, was a far cry from socialism — let alone communism. The 1932 Democratic Party platform did include a tepid endorsement of "unemployment and old-age insurance under state laws" and called for expanded federal relief aid and public works programs.

The 1932 CP and Socialist Party (SP) platforms also called for unemployment and old-age insurance, but called for them to be funded by employers as well as the state. Unlike

the Democratic Party, they both called for civil rights protections for African Americans and labor rights protections for union organizers. The SP called for "social ownership and democratic control" of the "principal industries" of the country. [28]

The New Deal was fundamentally a liberal project of saving capitalism. During this period, however, militant organizing by the unemployed and industrial workers (often led by communists and socialists) did succeed in unionizing auto, steel, and other mass production industries, and won significant concessions from capital and the New Deal state. [29]

Following the failure of 11,000 banks under President Hoover, New Deal policies prevented the collapse of the banking system and brought crucial federal aid to cities. Under the Emergency Banking Act, signed by Roosevelt on March 9, 1933, emergency loans from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and the Federal Reserve enabled the banks to recapitalize and established a system of federal deposit insurance to protect depositors. [30]

The Rescue of Detroit

It was only in June 1933, once these measures were in effect, that Detroit was able to refinance its municipal debt with Wall Street banks, converting all the city's bond debt into 30-year loans. [31]

The New Deal also brought substantial federal aid into the city. Over the next decade, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) would create nearly 100,000 public works jobs in Detroit, putting the unemployed to work rebuilding the city's roads, water and sewer infrastructure, parks, and municipal and federal buildings. [32]

These policies made it possible for Detroit's Department of Water Supply to avoid a policy of mass water shutoffs. In the Hoover years, debt service had climbed to a staggering 89% of revenues at DDWS. [33]

Detroit's debt refinancing sharply

reduced its short-term debt service obligations at DDWS and other municipal departments while the WPA and the Public Works Administration (PWA) financed long-delayed infrastructure projects. [34]

On the one hand, New Deal federal aid funneled resources to the Department of Public Welfare and other city departments, reducing unemployment and making it possible for more people to pay rent, mortgage payments, and utility bills. [35] On the other hand, reduced debt service obligations enabled DDWS to extend more credit to ratepayers behind on their bills.

According to Hal F. Smith, DDWS made “an effort to assist the delinquent consumer toward working out some plan whereby his water supply will not be cut off, such as granting more time, accepting part payments, etc.” In cases where “the lack of water service was causing a health menace [...] the Department of Public Welfare would pay out of Welfare Funds the amount required to have service resumed.” [36]

As a result of these policies, DDWS settled 100,165 water bills in 1933-1934, for a total of \$533,541. With the use of credit installment plans, DDWS was able to settle most unpaid bills by 1936.

DDWS Office Manager Daniel C. Grobbel told the Detroit Free Press, “There have been about 1,000 shutoffs altogether, but in most instances the bills are paid and the service is resumed within 24 hours.” [37]

Of course there is much to criticize about the New Deal, as radicals and civil rights activists did at the time.

The Homeowners’ Loan Act of 1933 and the National Housing Act of 1934, which established the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), helped end Detroit’s home foreclosure crisis during the Great Depression. But in Detroit as in cities across the country, the HOLC created racist “residential security maps” that classified virtually all neighborhoods where African Americans lived (and many where foreign-born immigrants

lived) as “hazardous” to mortgage lenders.

Although the HOLC and FHA insured loans for African Americans in Detroit at higher rates than in most cities, they also trapped African Americans in a few restricted areas of the city and suburbs like Inkster. They refused to insure mortgages for African Americans who sought to move into segregated white neighborhoods and required developers to use racist “restrictive covenants” that barred sales to Blacks, and often other people of color and Jews. [38]

Similarly, New Deal labor laws — made politically possible by the strike waves of 1933-1937 — were at best a mixed blessing for Detroit workers in the long run. While they established a legal framework for collective bargaining between capital and labor, management succeeded in excluding fundamental production decisions from the realm of negotiable issues by the late 1940s. (This was reinforced by purges of Communists from the CIO unions.)

UAW contracts increased wages and fringe benefits for auto workers, especially between 1950 and 1973, but racism, sexism, seasonal layoffs and unsafe working conditions remained rampant in Detroit auto plants. The postwar collective bargaining regime also gave workers no say in the corporate investment decisions that reduced the number of manufacturing jobs in Detroit from 349,000 in 1950 to 62,000 by 1990. [39]

From New Deal to Urban Crisis

By the time of the 1967 rebellion, the combination of deindustrialization and virulent racism against African Americans in housing, jobs and policing had produced an “urban crisis” in Detroit and other cities that would only deepen in the late 20th century. [40]

In many ways, the urban crisis was a product of the fundamental class and racial contradictions of a “New Deal order” based on the Democratic

Party’s tenuous alliance among “corporate moderates,” organized labor, white southern Democrats, and northern African Americans and white ethnics. Any serious grappling with those contradictions requires that we dispel romantic, liberal illusions about the New Deal. [41]

That being said, the history of the Great Depression and the New Deal in Detroit does demonstrate that an unemployment and water affordability crisis does not need to translate into mass water shutoffs — or, for that matter, mass evictions and foreclosures. Those tragedies are entirely preventable through progressive public policies, of exactly the kind that SP and CP members called for at the time.

The contrast between the history of water shutoffs in Detroit during the Great Depression and the Great Recession is stark. While shutoffs occurred sporadically between the 1940s and the 1980s, they increased dramatically as a result of “welfare reform” in the 1990s and 2000s, which replaced another New Deal program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), with the punitive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

AFDC itself was a flawed program, yet welfare rights activists succeeded over the decades in expanding some benefits, including the Vendor Pay Program, which provided utility bill assistance to welfare recipients in Michigan. In 2002, Republican governor John Engler eliminated Vendor Pay as part of welfare reform, making nearly 30,000 TANF recipients in Wayne County alone immediately vulnerable to shutoffs. [42]

Detroit’s water shutoffs only took on truly crisis dimensions, however, after the 2008 financial crisis. In contrast to the New Deal, the Obama administration’s Home Owner Loan Modification Program (HAMP) provided meager assistance to distressed homeowners and 10 million people lost their homes to foreclosure during the Great Recession. [43]

Between 2005 and 2015, a third of homeowners in Detroit lost their homes to foreclosure, due to both

predatory subprime mortgages and illegally high property tax assessments. [44] While Washington bailed out banks that had marketed predatory loans, crashing the economy, and provided loans to two automakers (General Motors and Chrysler) that had driven Detroit's deindustrialization, there was little federal aid to Detroit after 2008.

The city's fiscal crisis — driven by collapsing tax revenues caused by the 2008 crash, population loss, and deindustrialization — gave Governor Rick Snyder a pretext to impose an Emergency Manager in Detroit and force the city into bankruptcy. In Flint, similar policies notoriously led to the poisoning of nearly 100,000 people in the same period. [45]

Today's Avoidable Disaster

This is the context in which Detroit's mass water shutoffs have occurred. In 2014, when Detroit was under the appointed Emergency Manager, Kevyn Orr, the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department implemented its harshest policy on unpaid bills yet. DWSD hired private contractors to shut off any account behind by \$150 or 60 days, regardless of public health consequences. [46]

Despite civil disobedience, protests, and lawsuits filed by water rights

activists with the People's Water Board and other organizations — and even denunciation by the United Nations Human Rights Council — the mass water shutoffs continued after Emergency Manager Orr ceded authority to Mayor Mike Duggan and DWSD was regionalized under a Great Lakes Water Authority. [47]

It was only in March 2020, with the out-break of the COVID-19 pandemic (and under pressure from Detroit activists), that Governor Gretchen Whitmer issued a water shutoff moratorium in the state of Michigan.

Whitmer's Executive Order 2020-28 required public water suppliers to "restore water service to any occupied residence where water service has been shut off due to non-payment," but only for the duration of the pandemic. [48]

On December 8th, 2020, Mayor Duggan announced that the city would extend Governor Whitmer's shutoff moratorium through 2022. However, activists like Sylvia Orduño of the People's Water Board have pointed out that Duggan continues to oppose a water affordability plan, which would limit water and sewer bills to no more than 4.5% of household income. Currently, poor households in Detroit spend over 10% of their incomes on water. [49]

As organizations in the No Utility

Shut-offs Coalition have demanded, a national moratorium on utility shutoffs, and state and local water affordability policies that restructure water and sewer rates, are imperative. [50] However, a long-term solution requires ending the poverty that makes water unaffordable for anyone in the first place.

Policies like a jobs guarantee, a homes guarantee, Medicare for All and direct income assistance — coupled with "blue" and "green" infrastructure projects as envisioned by many Green New Deal advocates — would do just that. Like CP and SP militants during the 1930s, socialists today should support such progressive policies, while recognizing the need for a deeper systemic transformation away from capitalism. [51]

We must also ensure that the racist treatment of African Americans and other people of color by New Deal housing and welfare agencies is never repeated again.

Ultimately, we cannot end water or other utility shutoffs without working toward a world without evictions, foreclosures, homelessness and poverty wages. We must work toward a world where everyone has access to decent and affordable housing, living-wage jobs, healthcare, and clean air and water. That necessarily requires fighting for a socialist future.

Source: [*Against the Current*](#).

COVID-19 Vaccine Apartheid: No One Is Safe from Big Pharma

21 June 2021, by **Jack Gerson**

The arrival of effective vaccines has dramatically reduced death and hospitalization rates in countries able to carry out mass vaccination campaigns, providing hope that the pandemic that has infected at least 180 million people and killed at least 3.9 million (these figures are probably

gross underestimates) can be brought under control. But that will not happen while much of the world's population remains unvaccinated. &In unvaccinated areas, Covid-19 will spread and mutate, causing sickness and deaths and producing new lethal variants that will spread to more fully

vaccinated countries. We see this now, as more transmissible and resistant variants have emerged, especially: the alpha variant (formerly known as the UK, or Kent, variant); the beta (South African) variant; the gamma (P1, or Brazilian) variant; the delta (Indian) variant.

No one will be safe until everyone is safe.

But that message was not heeded for many critical months by affluent countries and pharmaceutical corporations that dominate manufacturing and distribution of the vaccines. Promises were made, but those promises were not kept. Now, shaken by the spread of the delta variant — which so devastated India and is now responsible for 95% of new cases in the United Kingdom — there's a fresh wave of promises from the G7 and Big Pharma vaccine manufacturers. Still not enough — and coming late.

Big Pharma

The pharmaceutical industry has a deserved reputation for profiteering to the detriment of the public good, and it's at it again. Without three decades of public subsidization of research on messenger RNA vaccines — conducted in academic and public labs in the U.S. and Germany — there would be no Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine and no Moderna vaccine. In addition to the public subsidization of research, there has been assistance with production and guarantees of sales.

Pfizer and Moderna each expect to accrue billions of dollars in profit this year and considerably more next year. Moderna estimates sales of \$19.2 billion for one billion doses of its vaccine in 2021 and projects selling three billion more in 2022. Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech project selling three billion doses this year with revenues of at least \$26 billion, and sales of an additional four billion doses next year.

Oxfam estimates that universal vaccine access requires a price under \$3.40 per dose, but Pfizer and Moderna charge five times that, pricing their coveted vaccines too high for low- and middle-income countries to afford an adequate amount.

Consequently, the mRNA vaccines have gone disproportionately to affluent countries — the United States, the UK, the EU, Israel. Well over half the adult populations of these countries will soon be fully

vaccinated. These countries have bought or reserved rights to over a billion more doses than they need to vaccinate their entire populations. But in Africa, where the delta variant is beginning to take hold, less than one in a hundred have been vaccinated. (South Africa is experiencing a third wave of Covid infections following a series of delays in its vaccination program. Uganda medical facilities report an extreme shortage of vaccine and oxygen amid a new surge in cases, with five Covid variants identified there.) And in South America, where the current weekly per capita death rates are the highest in the world, less than one in ten adults have been fully vaccinated.

In addition to the mRNA vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna, vaccines from two other western pharmaceutical giants — AstraZeneca (AZ) and Johnson and Johnson (J&J) — have been authorized and used in various parts of the world. These vaccines did well in clinical trials, although nowhere near the spectacular (95%) effectiveness estimated for the mRNA vaccines. But unlike the mRNA vaccines, the AZ and J&J vaccines did not require refrigeration, and therefore were easier to distribute and store and better suited for use in rural and remote areas. AZ and J&J vaccines were also far cheaper than Pfizer's and Moderna's. Both suffered from manufacturing problems, and even more from bad publicity: coronary blood clotting leading to death was detected in elevated numbers (about seven per million doses) in these vaccines. Consequently, AstraZeneca has never asked for authorization of its vaccine in the United States, while only relatively small doses of J&J vaccine have been administered (11.5 million). Both are being used widely in Europe.

For the first several months of the Biden administration, the United States refused numerous pleas to share vaccines, even refusing to allow vaccines manufactured in the country to be exported to other countries. The U.S. position was expressed by a Biden administration official quoted in the February 18 New York Times: "The United States will not share vaccines now, while the domestic vaccination campaign is expanding."

This position was reiterated in subsequent weeks by other Biden administration officials, including Press Secretary Jen Psaki — even though the United States had no need for and no intention of using the tens of millions of doses of AZ vaccine it had stockpiled. It was only when domestic mass media — albeit belatedly — began to publicize this position to the ridicule it deserved that Biden reluctantly backed away from it.

Even more disgraceful has been Israel's vaccine apartheid policy towards Palestinians. Israel is the most vaccinated country in the world, with 60% of its population vaccinated. Yet Israel has not repeatedly refused to share vaccine with the West Bank and Gaza (where COVID has surged) and even tried to prevent the Palestinian authorities from receiving vaccines donated from abroad.

COVAX

COVAX, a vaccine-sharing alliance sponsored by the World Health Organization, set a goal last fall of acquiring and distributing 2 billion doses to 142 developing nations in 2021. COVAX estimates that it needs to raise \$33 billion to meet its target. It has only raised one-third that amount with the G7 countries only contributing \$7.5 billion thus far. Pharmaceutical corporations have pledged to make two billion doses available, but to date the United States and friends outbid COVAX for available vaccines. In March, COVAX projected that by the end of May, it would only have supplied enough vaccine to vaccinate 3.3% of the population of 142 developing nations. This objective was not met — and especially not in Africa, where COVAX had hoped to focus.

COVAX had relied on acquiring vaccines from the Serum Institute of India (SII), the world's largest vaccine manufacturer, which had leased manufacturing rights from AZ. But when the delta variant surge struck India, the Modi regime suspended all vaccine exports, cutting off COVAX's main hoped-for source. COVAX is now relying on a pledge from the G7 leaders, who promise to work through

COVAX to deliver 870 million doses — half in 2021, half next year. The United States plans to provide 200 million doses of Pfizer vaccine this year, and another 300 million next year.

Even in the unlikely event that COVAX acquires its two billion dose target this year that would only be enough to vaccinate 20% of the population of its 142 target countries. A lot more is needed.

Low- and middle-income countries are scrambling on their own to find vaccine sources. Unable to afford the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, unable to acquire vaccines from the Serum Institute of India, and with COVAX lagging, these countries have been scrambling to find alternative sources. **Alternative Vaccine Sources**

Russia reported deals to supply 1.2 billion doses of its Sputnik V vaccine abroad this year. Sputnik V is recognized to be highly effective, but limited manufacturing capacity makes it unlikely that anything close to the target will be reached this year.

Four leading Chinese vaccine manufacturers have pledged to supply about 500 million doses abroad this year, targeting low- and middle-income countries. China has supplied a significant amount of its Sinovac-Coronavac vaccine to Latin American countries however summary figures from Phase III clinical trials for this vaccine lag well behind even those for the AZ and J&J vaccines.

For many countries, there has been little recourse. In the words of an Egyptian official: “Vaccines, particularly those made in the West, are reserved for rich countries. We had to guarantee a vaccine. Any vaccine.” And the right-wing Serbian nationalist Aleksandar Vucic commented: “Did we turn to the Russians and the Chinese? You have built very expensive lifeboats for you. And whoever is not rich and is small, is condemned to sink with the Titanic.”

Even under the wildly optimistic scenario that COVAX, Russia, and China all meet their ambitious distribution targets, only about 40% of

the population in the 142 developing countries would be vaccinated this year. In contrast, the United States, the UK, the EU, Israel, the UAE and a few other affluent countries expect to vaccinate nearly all of their entire adult populations by fall.

Likely Scenario

Entering the second half of 2021, more sources of vaccines may finally become available. AstraZeneca and Johnson and Johnson seem to finally be solving their manufacturing problems. They plan to target sales of their relatively low-priced vaccines to low- and middle income nations. Novavax, using a well-tested technology, just announced very impressive results from their Phase III clinical trials, and are likewise targeting sales to the developing world. Sanofi / GlaxoSmithKline will soon complete Phase III testing of its candidate vaccine. So more vaccines will undoubtedly be available in 2022. This increased supply may lead to a reduction in price per dose of all vaccines.

However, there will almost surely be more variants emerging in the coming months. Thus far, the first generation vaccines from Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna, and to a somewhat lesser degree the AZ and J&J vaccines, have done well in greatly reducing hospitalizations and deaths from most Covid variants. However, they haven't done quite as well against the delta variant.

Should new variants emerge that are more resistant to the current vaccines, North America and Europe may well be plunged back into the dark lockdown world from which they are just now emerging. And, to a large degree because of the grossly negligent inequitable distribution of vaccines globally, more lethal variants are almost sure to emerge.

It's likely that the following scenario will play out: after the US and its affluent friends are fully vaccinated, more first generation (i.e. this year's) vaccine will be made available to developing nations — some excess doses donated from the United States et al, more made available by

pharmaceutical companies, some at cut rates. But by then it's likely that new variants resistant to this year's crop of vaccines will have emerged. As a response, Western pharmaceutical companies will be producing booster shots and second-generation vaccines effective against these new variants. The United States and friends will corner the market on these. This could recur over and over, with the haves being the first to get protected and the have-nots being left unprotected again and again.

There Are Alternatives

This does not have to be. The rapid development of the Covid-19 vaccines shows what can be done when the research community shares information and works cooperatively. It gives us a glimpse of what could have been done over past decades when Big Pharma, acting as rent-collecting patent holders, blocked development.

Vaccines might have been developed in advance of the pandemic, including vaccines capable of stimulating immunization against a wide range of coronaviruses. For example, five years ago virologists at Baylor University College of Medicine applied for funding to develop a vaccine that would be effective against all coronaviruses — a pan coronavirus vaccine. They were denied funding. Now such research is underway. Research is further along on developing vaccines effective against any SARS-Cov-2 variant. Clinical trials will soon be under way on antiviral nasal inhalants capable of preventing infection by blocking the virus's entry.

Such research should take place in all health-related areas — and it should be done collaboratively, with knowledge freely shared. It shouldn't take a pandemic to make that happen. The resulting products should likewise be made available to all, especially those most in need. The Covid vaccines should not be the intellectual property of Big Pharma corporations, sequestered behind patent walls. They should be in the public domain, freely accessible, with no profits taken. More

biotechnologically advanced countries should help others to develop manufacturing and distribution capabilities. Vaccines should be made globally available, not hoarded by rich countries and denied to poor ones.

Covid-19 may not be the worst health threat we face in the near future. In the past twenty years, we have seen Sars, Mers, and now Sars-CoV-2 (the

virus responsible for Covid-19). The pharmaceutical industry has demonstrated that it won't be ready in advance, will only act if it is guaranteed gigantic profits, and then will act in ways that favor the rich and put the poor in harm's (and death's) way.

What's needed is a reorganization of the way health care, public health, and biomedicine is organized and

delivered, locally and globally. Human lives should not have a price tag; health should not be sacrificed to profit. To make this happen will require a radical reorganization of social priorities and society itself. It's not too soon to organize and fight for that.

Source *Against the Current* May/June 2021.

A placeholder government going nowhere

20 June 2021, by **Omar Karmi**

And it has been particularly amusing to see Netanyahu go full Donald Trump.

Allegations of election fraud caused by a conspiracy of left-wing terror supporters, dog whistles to his base and a final, angry, paranoid farewell speech [linking](#) the Jewish holocaust with US policy on Iran.

It's [all there](#).

That, however, is the only positive thing about a new coalition that initially will be led by [Naftali Bennett](#), a man who brags about "[killing Arabs](#)," wants to annex large swathes of the West Bank and supports neither sovereignty for Palestinians nor [equal rights](#).

"I strongly oppose the giving of even one inch of land to the Arabs," [Bennett said](#) in 2020.

Bennett is one component of a loose coalition that runs from the United Arab List and Meretz through Yair Lapid's Yesh Atid to, well, Bennett's Yamina and Avigdor Liberman's Yisrael Beiteinu.

It's an eight-party group that holds a single-seat majority in Israel's parliament and indeed was confirmed by just [60-59 votes](#) with one abstention in Israel's parliament yesterday.

It is a constellation of parties that agrees on only one thing, ousting Netanyahu. And it will almost certainly fall at the first or second significant hurdle.

Same, same

That first hurdle might come sooner rather than later.

On Tuesday, Israeli Jewish nationalists are supposed to be marching through Jerusalem to loudly proclaim their exclusive ownership over the city.

It is the kind of provocation that provided the spark for last month's escalation and led to an Israeli assault on Gaza and the deaths of at least [67 children](#).

Final approval for the route is expected Monday, after Israeli police on Friday gave the go-ahead as long as marchers do not walk through the Old City.

Hamas has already warned that the march [could imperil](#) a "fragile ceasefire."

A statement from its military wing, the Qassam Brigades, [called on](#) Jerusalem's youth to confront the marchers and on the "military wings of Palestinian factions to be on high alert and to defend Jerusalem if needed."

A full escalation might not happen. But it could. And while there may be a new prime minister, but the defense minister is the same - [Benny Gantz](#), no longer PM in waiting: the Israeli military will act with the brutality it always does.

Whether the United Arab List can stay in a coalition killing children in Gaza remains to be seen.

Will Mansour Abbas - the first leader of a party representing the Palestinian minority to become a part of an Israeli government - be able to prevent that from happening? No.

So when it comes to policy on Palestinians in occupied territory there will be no significant change.

There will be no change in the international approach either, judging by the many [welcoming statements](#) from around the world.

There is audible relief in some of these statements. It's almost as if Netanyahu embarrassed all these fine, upstanding Western politicians by not only disregarding mild European or US protest and hand wringing, but repeatedly lecturing [Europeans](#) and [Americans](#) on how to behave better.

Placeholder government

International politicians may feel more comfortable around Bennett, but he offers [no similar solace](#) to Palestinians anywhere.

While [attempts](#) to ensure a bigger budget for Israel's Palestinian population are certainly welcome, there have been no similar proposals to reform a [discriminatory legal system](#) that lies at the root of Palestinian discontent inside the country.

On the occupied territory, Bennett is as hardline if not more so than Netanyahu, and he was a fervent advocate of unilaterally annexing swathes of West Bank land as implicitly sanctioned by former US President Donald Trump's [Ultimate Deal™](#).

He is of course constricted by a coalition which will almost certainly have to avoid any tough decisions on the Palestinian issue if it is to survive.

But that cuts both ways, and to those politicians and "Middle East experts" who believe the time is ripe to restart

some kind of dead-end peace process, the answer is clearly: not going to happen.

For as long as Western countries continue to hold their hands over Israel, protecting it from sanctions and any other consequences of its violent discrimination against and oppression of the land's Indigenous population, no Israeli government is going to take any significant strides anywhere.

Least of all this one, which is simply a placeholder.

Source [Electronic Intifada](#).

G7: Vaccine apartheid maintained!

19 June 2021, by **Frank Prouhet**

For the time being, in the race between vaccines and variants, whose dynamic to contaminate more and more is clear, vaccines remain globally very effective. But for how long? So there is an urgent need to vaccinate the world's population, the entire world population. And to do this, we need to increase production capacity, and therefore lift patents on vaccines [52], impose technology transfers, requisition production capacity, and turn our backs on the vaccine nationalism that has led to rich countries monopolising Big Pharma's vaccines at a high price, and that sometimes, as Macron was obliged to acknowledge, poor countries have to pay more than the European Union or the United States to buy a batch of vaccines in this context of global shortage!

Yet at the WTO TRIPS (Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) Committee meeting on 7-8 June, the EU, with the support of France and Germany, again blocked the proposal by India and South Africa to suspend patents. This did not prevent Macron, two days later, on 10 June, from declaring at a press conference, with violins in his voice:

"We must commit ourselves at the WHO, at the WTO, to guarantee that intellectual property will never be an obstacle to vaccines (...) This is why we have decided to put on the table, with South Africa, a proposal that would make it possible to set up a derogation, limited in time and space, from this intellectual property. This proposal was dropped the very next day. Because at the G7 meeting in Cornwall, the world's leaders promised to give a billion doses of vaccine to poor countries. The problem is that there is no real timetable. And what is filtering through is worrying. Biden promised 200 million doses in 2021 and 300 million by June 2022. France has planned to send 30 million doses by the end of the year. And essentially Astra Zeneca, which the French have shunned and which is not very effective against the beta variant that has emerged in South Africa! This country had in fact stopped vaccinating with Astra Zeneca following the study by the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, which showed that the vaccine was only 22% effective against this variant!

Far too long, far too late, far too many

deaths. Who would dare to boast to the opinion of rich countries about such a timetable for their own people! And what the peoples of the world are asking for is not charity from the rich countries, it is not to have the vaccines shunned by the rich countries, it is not a schedule that depends on the goodwill of the masters of the world, with announcement effects that are all too familiar. The requirement is that they themselves produce the vaccines they need. India, South Africa, Brazil and Thailand have production capacities. It is up to activists around the world to force the masters of the world to lift Big Pharma's patents so that vaccines can be produced everywhere at low cost, for immediate, free and universal access to vaccines that are common goods of humanity. To the unbearable speech of Seth Berkley, director of Gavi, which manages the Covax system, who dares to congratulate himself that the fund-raising of 2 June will make it possible to "protect nearly 30% of the population of low-income countries by the beginning of... 2022", let us show our solidarity in order to lift the patents. The next deadline is 17 June, at the informal meeting of the WTO TRIPS Council.

Imperialist Keynesianism

18 June 2021, by **Ashley Smith**

Longtime liberals and recent converts greeted Biden's program with breathless celebration. [Joan Walsh declared that Biden](#) "wrapped up FDR's New Deal and LBJ's Great Society, plus Obama's good ideas and some of Senator Bernie Sanders's better ones, into a Scranton-inflected agenda for racial and economic justice. It went beyond anything he promised running for president."

Even sections of the Left pronounced their surprise and couldn't help but voice their support for Biden. [Faiz Shakir](#), Bernie Sander's campaign manager, praised him for making an "investment in working people on a scale we have not seen since FDR." While socialists should welcome many of his reforms, we should not become the administration's naïve cheerleaders.

Biden's Keynesian turn is his attempt to overcome the failure of neoliberalism to restore U.S. capitalism's profitability and competitiveness after the Great Recession. Neoliberal policies certainly enabled capitalists to accumulate fictitious wealth on the stock market. But they did not revive the real economy and they underfunded the maintenance of infrastructure, creating crises in key institutions central to the social reproduction of the system like education, healthcare, and child care.

Biden's Keynesian turn is his attempt to overcome the failure of neoliberalism to restore U.S. capitalism's profitability and competitiveness after the Great Recession.

The failure of neoliberalism has undercut U.S. capitalism's ability to compete within—and by extension dominate—the world system. That is why there is broad support among business elites and the political establishment for Biden's turn and

why it is a dangerous illusion to present it as a concession to the Left. His imperialist Keynesianism is designed to re-cohere a deeply divided nation, rehabilitate the foundations of U.S. capitalism, and reassert U.S. hegemony over the world state system—especially against China, its rising imperial rival.

Systemic Crises of U.S. Imperialism

As Biden made clear in his address, Washington faces an unprecedented set of interconnected crises. The most important of these and the one that shapes the priorities of the ruling class and state managers is the [low profitability](#) of U.S. capitalism.

Their attempt to restore the profit rate after the Great Recession failed. Bush, Obama, and Trump bailed out corporations, cut their taxes, kept interest rates at zero, and imposed austerity on workers. Instead of solving the system's problems, these measures compounded them.

Rather than clearing out uncompetitive capital, they kept it alive in the form of [zombie corporations](#), which have had to take out loans just to make interest payments on their existing debt. With the space for profitable investment clogged up, even healthy corporations have balked at spending money in the real economy and have instead bought up their own stocks, generating an enormous stock market bubble.

The problem of overaccumulation and low profitability was the underlying cause of both the Great Recession and the last decade's weak recovery. The world system is locked in what Michael Roberts calls a "[long depression](#)" and David McNally calls a "[global slump](#)" of oscillating recessions and weak recoveries in a

declining system.

This slump sharpened Washington's imperial crisis. As a result of its defeats in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as the Great Recession, the U.S. state and its corporations have suffered a relative decline against China's state-managed capitalism.

Beijing now oversees the world's second largest economy, has [more corporations on the Fortune 500](#) than the U.S., and has become increasingly assertive both economically and geopolitically. Washington and its [commentariat](#) now view China as a rising power that threatens its global dominance.

This new imperial rivalry has blocked any solution to the third great crisis: climate change. Under the systemic pressure to ensure growth and profitability, capitalist states—[especially the U.S. and China](#)—refuse to enact desperately needed environmental reforms, which cut into their bottom lines, while increased global warming destabilizes societies around the world, driving people from their homelands to become climate refugees.

Maladies of Imperial Decline

In the U.S., these three great crises have deepened the already horrific class and social divisions wrought by four decades of neoliberalism. The relentless, one-sided bosses' war against workers and all oppressed groups, in particular Black people, has created [inequality unseen](#) since the Robber Baron era.

These inequalities have triggered extreme political polarization. A new socialist Left has emerged out a wave of struggles from Occupy Wall Street to the red state teachers' revolt,

#MeToo, and the uprising for Black Lives. These found electoral expression inside the Democratic Party through the campaigns of politicians like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio Cortez.

On the other end of the political spectrum, Trump galvanized a new white nationalist Right, rooted in the enraged petty bourgeoisie worried about its precarious businesses and sections of the working class hammered by deindustrialization, economic destitution, and the accompanying [diseases of despair](#) like opioid addiction. Trump swept aside the Republican establishment, defeated Hillary Clinton, and [imposed a toxic combination](#) of giveaways to corporate America, racist domestic and international policies, and a nationalist break with Washington's project of superintending global capitalism.

The pandemic—[itself a product of global capitalism and climate change](#)—intensified all these problems. The entire political establishment, not just Trump and the Republicans but Democrats like New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, failed to stop COVID-19 from ripping through the U.S., sickening millions, killing hundreds of thousands, and throwing a weak economy—already on the verge of recession—into the deepest decline in decades.

With U.S. society beginning to come apart at the seams, the racist police murder of George Floyd triggered a Black-led multiracial rebellion of [some 26 million people](#) that paralyzed cities across the country and launched campaigns to defund and abolish the police. [Job actions by essential workers](#) from nurses and teachers to meat packing workers and immigrant agricultural laborers further rocked the system.

On top of all this, Trump's far right minions staged their insurrection against the election, briefly taking over the Capitol Building and threatening the safety of key leaders of the political class. Before the eyes of the world, the U.S. appeared to be a crisis-ridden basket case.

Desperately Seeking a New Strategy

All these developments forced a realization on the U.S. ruling class, Washington's state bureaucracy, and its managers of the institutions of global capitalism. Their neoliberal economics and imperial strategy were not working and they faced a growing domestic and international legitimacy crisis. Thus, their think tanks and institutes, not those of the Left, have begun to entertain new strategies to revive capitalist accumulation and restore U.S. imperial power.

Capitalists—from [Warren Buffet](#) to the [Business Roundtable](#) and Chamber of Commerce—signaled their openness to redistributionist economic policies to quell resentment. [Business executives](#) have realized that climate change is a threat to their system and to investment opportunities. Even the [Pentagon](#) is concerned that global warming challenges its ability to enforce Washington's dictates.

U.S. businesses continue to feel threatened by [China's rise](#). Some more nationally-oriented industries like steel support protectionism against their competitors in China. Others, such as tech companies, complain about the conditions China puts on access to its enormous market, its violation of intellectual property rights, and its support for national champions in tech. They are lobbying the U.S. state to force China to conform to the WTO's neoliberal terms and open its market.

Ever beholden to capital, Washington's state bureaucracy and [the political class have turned sharply against China](#). The Pentagon, State Department, and both political parties abandoned the view of Beijing as a "strategic partner" and now view it as "strategic rival" and threat to the so-called "liberal, rules-based international order" the U.S. has overseen since World War II.

A whole layer of economists—like former World Bank Chief Economists Joseph Stiglitz and [Paul Krugman](#),

who had spent decades debating the problems of the neoliberal world order, the rise of China, and the need for a domestic industrial policy—started agitating for a return to Keynesianism as strategy for capitalist growth. They were joined by none other than the IMF and World Bank, who, during the depths of pandemic recession, called for massive state spending. That led the *Financial Times* to pronounce a "funeral of austerity" and a rebirth of "[fiscal activism](#)."

The combination of Trump's four years of incompetent misrule, the far right's takeover of the Republican Party and its insurrection against the election, and the Black Lives uprising focused the minds of the Democratic Party establishment. They realized they could no longer rule in the old neoliberal way.

In a wave of articles by [Joe Biden](#), [Antony Blinken](#), [Kurt Campbell](#), and [Hillary Clinton](#) in *Foreign Affairs* and other organs of the imperial establishment, the Democratic Party's éminence grise concocted Imperialist Keynesianism as their new strategy. In early 2020, before becoming Biden's National Security Adviser, Jake Sullivan wrote a piece entitled, "[American Needs a New Economic Philosophy](#)".

[T]he United States needs to move beyond the prevailing economic ideology of the past few decades (sometimes imperfectly termed neoliberalism) and rethink how the economy operates, the goals it should serve, and how it should be restructured to serve those goals—and this is a geopolitical imperative as well as an economic one.

The new Biden leadership cohort consulted [the masters of big business](#)—who had been thoroughly alienated by Trump—throughout the process and especially in drafting Biden's plans.

Biden's Imperialist Keynesian Program

Biden realizes that Washington cannot maintain global hegemony when it resembles not an exceptional "shining city upon a hill" but a "shithole" with crumbling infrastructure, deep inequalities, intractable political divisions, and a state incapable of even saving its own subjects' lives. The administration's policies are designed to revive U.S. competitiveness abroad while preventing renewed unrest among working and oppressed people at home.

Biden's first initiative was to roll out a rational plan to vaccinate the U.S. Benefiting from Trump's sophomorically-named "Operation Warp Speed," the new administration had plenty of vaccines available to inoculate the population, enabling state and local governments to open schools, push people back to working and consuming as usual, and stabilize U.S. capitalism after its 2020 collapse.

Of course, Biden's vaccine rollout was focused almost solely on the U.S. Like other advanced capitalist states, his administration hoarded vaccines, initially protected Big Pharma's intellectual property rights and profits, and prevented states in the Global South from manufacturing their own vaccines.

It took mass pressure from health activists, an alliance of third world states, and various institutes of global health to force Biden to shift and support the suspension of intellectual property rights. But as the [Financial Times documents](#), he adopted this new position not primarily to save lives but to improve Washington's geopolitical standing against China and other states that have been far more generous in distributing vaccines to the developing world.

The second part of the Biden plan's rollout was his \$1.9 trillion [American Rescue Plan](#). Following the precedent set by Trump's CARES Act—itsself evidence of the pre-existing ruling

class appetite for massive fiscal intervention in the face of the economic crisis—Biden broke with Obama's response to the Great Recession when the latter, in the words of Occupy, bailed out the banks and sold out workers.

Instead, Biden sent \$1,400 checks to each citizen, temporarily expanded child tax credits, increased unemployment insurance, and disbursed \$350 billion in bailouts to state and local governments to cover budget shortfalls. This support for consumer demand juiced the U.S. economy that was already beginning to recover. Growth is now expected to hit 6.5 percent this year (albeit in comparison to the contraction in 2020).

Getting U.S. Capitalism Fit to Compete (with China)

Biden then proposed the \$2.7 trillion [American Jobs Program](#), the establishment's alternative to the Green New Deal, which it rejected. It is, in the [administration's words](#), "an investment in America that will create millions of good jobs, rebuild our country's infrastructure, and position the United States to out-compete China."

It plans to spend \$621 billion on national infrastructure investment—roads, bridges, and transit systems. It earmarks \$590 billion to fund domestic manufacturing research and development, state support for U.S. industry, and job training. These are the basis of a [new industrial policy](#) to ensure U.S. capital's dominance in tech and the

[independence of the Pentagon's military industrial complex](#)

. [His administration declared](#), it invests "in the future of the American economy and American workers, and will help the U.S. out-compete China and other countries around the world."

It is designed to shore up the social infrastructure of the U.S., a society that has been shredded by neoliberalism. It seeks to guarantee free pre-K childcare, two years of free community college, more aid for four year programs, increased Pell Grants, and more funding for teacher training. These are all weighted toward Science, Technology, Mathematics, and Engineering (STEM) disciplines, to provide U.S. capital the workers it needs for the high tech battle with China.

The plan also promises paid family leave, maternal health spending, and improvements to strengthen Obamacare instead of adopting Medicare for All. While important reforms are presented as feminist, Biden's overriding motive in proposing them is to get women, who had [left the paid workforce in record numbers](#) to take care of children during the pandemic recession, to [get back to their jobs](#) making products, providing services, and making profits for capital.

The last component of the plan provides tax relief to workers. It makes tax credits permanent for parents caring for children with disabilities, extends the temporary child tax credits for another five years, and grants tax credits for childless low wage workers.

Finally, Biden proposed the [Made in America Tax Plan](#) to pay for this \$6 trillion fiscal program. He promises to increase taxes on the wealthiest to a pre-Trump level of 39.6 percent, impose higher taxes on the rich's capital gains, raise the corporate tax rate to 38 percent, fund the IRS to go after rich tax cheaters and tax corporations that park their profits in international tax havens, and give tax incentives to onshore investment, production, and profits.

Inadequacies and Limits of Biden's Plans

There is no doubt Biden's program represents a break with the Democratic Party's allegiance to the

Washington Consensus of privatization, welfare state cuts, deregulation, and globalization. But, for all the liberal triumphalism and right wing panic, Biden's Keynesian project is completely inadequate to redress the deep systemic inequalities of U.S. capitalism and halt, let alone reverse, climate change.

While the American Rescue Plan was an unprecedented and immediate stimulus to revive consumer demand and bolster state and local government budgets, the remaining \$6 trillion in for infrastructure, jobs, and social spending is, as [Adam Tooze argues](#), actually very small, especially considering that most of it is spread out over eight years.

Biden's proposed expansion of welfare state spending will do little to mitigate the profound social inequalities of the U.S. As [Susan Watkins argues](#), if enacted the plans will not even bring the U.S. welfare state up to the current level of those in Europe, which themselves have been ravaged by neoliberal cuts. She points out:

The American Rescue Plan is playing catch-up. U.S. unemployment benefits are desperately low by OECD standards—less than a tenth of the UK's. As a proportion of GDP, social spending in France and Italy is some 50 percent higher than in the U.S. Public spending on American families is barely a quarter of German, French and British levels.

The spending to address climate change pales in comparison to the \$10 trillion allotted in the Green New Deal, does not match the scale of the crisis, and will do little to solve it. As the Center for Biological Diversity's [Brett Hartl argues](#),

Biden's industry-friendly infrastructure plan squanders one of our last, best chances to stop the climate emergency. Instead of a Marshall Plan approach that moves our economy to renewable

energy, it includes gimmicky subsidies for carbon capture, fantastically wishes the free market will save us, and fails to take crucial and ambitious steps toward phasing out fossil fuels. Biden has pledged to cut carbon emissions 50% and decarbonize our electricity sector but this proposal won't even come close.

Despite the corporate complaints about their increased tax burden, *The New York Times* points out that "if all of Biden's proposed tax increases passed...the total federal tax rate on the wealthy would remain significantly lower than it was in the 1940s, '50s and '60s. It would also remain somewhat lower than during the mid-1990s."

Finally, increased taxation will in no way alter the class structures of U.S. society. As [Michael Roberts argues](#), "Because inequality of wealth stems from the concentration of the means of production and finance in the hands of a few; and because that ownership structure remains untouched, any increased taxes on wealth will fall short of irreversibly changing the distribution of wealth and income in modern societies."

Biden summed up the limits of his liberal tinkering with the system when [he told his Wall Street funders](#),

When you have income inequality as large as we have in the United States today, it brews and ferments political discord and basic revolution. It allows demagogues to step in and blame 'the other' . . . You all know in your gut what has to be done. We can disagree in the margins. But the truth of the matter is, it's all within our wheelhouse and nobody has to be punished. No one's standard of living would change. Nothing would fundamentally change.

Forging a New Nationalist Consensus (Against China)

Nevertheless, Biden is trying to use his plans to accomplish several interrelated political, economic, and imperial aims. A recent *New York Times* report on Biden's congressional address, entitled "[Biden Calls for U.S. To Enter a New Super Power Struggle](#)," captured the dynamic:

President Biden has justified his broad vision to remake the American economy...as the necessary step to survive long-run competition with China, a foot race in which the United States must prove not only that democracies can deliver, but that it can continue to out-innovate and outproduce the world's most successful authoritarian state.

Domestically, Biden wants to head off the polarization that threatens stable capitalist rule. To undermine the Right, he hopes to recapture Trump's base in sections of the working class by creating jobs and funding services, especially in the country's devastated deindustrialized areas.

Biden also wants to co-opt the "progressive movement," especially its parliamentary representatives, and otherwise neutralize the growth of the Left. His administration has to definitively re-establish some control over a persistent process of radicalization symbolized by the Sanders' campaigns and epitomized by the breadth, depth, and power of the mass anti-racist rebellion during the summer of 2020.

To this end, Biden and the Democratic Party leadership will do their best to marginalize and, if they can, silence calls for demands like The Green New Deal, Medicare for All, and most significantly Defund the Police. His mild liberal reforms are designed to head these off and at the same time

secure support from liberal NGOs and [the union bureaucracy](#) so that they will turn out their members in the midterm elections in 2022.

Biden has already scored some victories in co-opting the Left. Compared to resistance under Trump, struggle has dropped precipitously since Biden came into office. He has also secured unwavering support for his plans from Sanders, AOC, and the rest of liberal wing of the Democratic Party. [Sanders](#) went so far as to call the Biden administration “the most progressive since FDR.”

Biden can use their support to help cohere a new nationalist consensus to bolster the foundations of U.S. imperialism. The naming of his four major initiatives (the American Rescue Plan, American Jobs Plan, the American Families Plan, and the Made in America Tax Plan) was deliberate. This is nothing less than a liberal version of “America First” policies.

In turn, the administration hopes to win hegemony among Washington’s allies, which were alienated by Trump, and build a “league of democracies” to discipline China as well as other states like Russia and Iran. Sadly, [Sanders as well most progressive Democrats](#) support such multilateral imperialism.

Will Imperialist Keynesianism Work?

The question remains whether Biden’s Imperialist Keynesianism will work. He faces two problems that could undermine the entire project. First, it is altogether unclear whether he will be able to get his plans for jobs, families, and taxes through congress.

To do so, he would either have to smash the filibuster—for which he has so far been reluctant to advocate for fear of alienating right-wing Democrats like Joe Manchin—or pass it through the reconciliation process, like he did with the American Rescue Plan. Even then he would have to cut deals with Manchin and others to pass a package, compromising already inadequate reforms.

But the odds are good that he will squeak something like his program through Congress. His proposals are [extremely popular](#) with the electorate. And capital, represented by the Chamber of Commerce and Business Roundtable, despite its complaints about paying even minor tax increases, is supportive of Biden’s fiscal activism. In a sign of corporate support, the stock market has soared to record levels, [besting every president’s first hundred days](#) from Trump back to Truman.

Biden’s bigger problem is that his Keynesian policies cannot overcome U.S. capitalism’s persistent problem of over-accumulation and low rate of profit. Despite tall tales, all too often embraced by sections of the Left, that Keynesianism is a solution to capitalist crisis, Keynesian methods failed to drag the U.S. out of the last two great crises of the system.

Roosevelt’s New Deal did not revive the system during the Great Depression. Actually, the era’s mass bankruptcies did that; they cleared out uncompetitive capital, restored the rate of profit, and opened space for profitable corporations to invest again. Roosevelt’s programs and especially his war spending worked to stimulate the economy because it was already recovering. And the war’s destruction of Europe and Asia cleared out further space for profitable investment, leading to the long post-war boom.

During the 1970s crisis, Keynesianism had no answer to stagflation—stagnant growth with high inflation—which was rooted in overaccumulation and low profitability. Despite repeated attempts by Richard Nixon, who famously declared “[we’re all Keynesians now](#),” to use state spending to trigger growth, the strategy failed. That’s why the ruling class first under Jimmy Carter and then decisively under Ronald Reagan turned to neoliberalism as a new strategy.

Today, Biden’s domestic vaccination campaign and stimulus checks have triggered a surge in growth. But this recovery, as Michael Roberts has argued, is likely to be a [sugar rush](#), followed by a return to the stagnant

economy that prevailed before the pandemic recession.

In reality, just as in the previous great crises of the system, Biden’s Keynesianism will not trigger a new boom. No amount of government spending, especially the relatively small amounts proposed by Biden, can make up for the low level of investment from private capital caused by low profitability.

Even worse, Biden’s state spending could exacerbate the system’s problems. For example, the Federal Reserve’s commitment to keeping interest rates at record low levels even as the economy recovers continues to give a life-line of cheap loans to the zombie corporations. That blocks the clearing of uncompetitive capital out of the system and stops the restoration of the rate of profit.

Biden’s spending splurge could also cause new problems for the system. It risks driving up demand on supply that is limited by capital’s reluctance to invest. That excess of demand could trigger a bout of inflation amidst relatively stagnant growth—a return to the [nightmare of 1970s stagflation](#).

Already [inflation is creeping up](#) and if it continues, the Federal Reserve will be forced to raise interest rates to stop the economy overheating, making it difficult for zombies to afford new loans and thereby putting them at risk of bankruptcy. If that happens, capital could turn against Biden and support the GOP to drive through austerity measures at the expense of workers and the oppressed.

Socialists Must Not Become An Appendage to Biden’s Liberalism

For now, though, Biden’s Imperialist Keynesianism is in its Halcyon Days. It has been embraced by the Democratic Party base and it has caught the socialist Left by surprise and without clarity on how to respond.

The new Left, mainly in DSA, has radicalized in opposition to neoliberal

Democrats and right wing Republicans and were therefore unprepared to handle Biden's Keynesianism. Even worse, Sanders has equated socialism with New Deal liberalism and, along with AOC and "the Squad," support Biden in implementing it.

This has set the Left on a path to become an appendage to Biden's Imperialist Keynesianism. Unsurprisingly, liberals have adopted a position of jubilant support for Biden, and some sections of the Left have joined them. They believe—wrongly—that Biden is listening to us and even adopting our program. He is not; he's implementing a liberal imperialist program crafted by the Washington establishment to strengthen U.S. capitalism.

Others have become critical supporters of Biden's programs as all we can get through Congress now. At best, they campaign for superficial improvements to them. This politics of realism ends up trapping the Left in supporting completely inadequate reforms, essential parts of which we should actually oppose, and diverting us from fighting for more radical ones.

Some who are critical of Biden try to [separate the Keynesian program](#), which they support, from its imperialist aim to confront China, which they oppose. But there is no way to do this; the entire design of Biden's programs, as he and everyone in his administration repeatedly stresses, is to improve the competitive position of the U.S. in the world economy against China.

Based on these mistaken positions, the majority of the Left now believe or implicitly accept the argument that voting for and running as Democrats are the key to changing society. In reality, however, mass, disruptive, and even illegal struggle outside of and often opposed to the Democratic Party

represents the best way for the Left to push for necessary reforms.

Remember, Occupy forced class inequality into public discussion. Strikes by the Chicago Teachers Union, the United Teachers of Los Angeles, and the illegal strikes by teachers in red states, all compelled the establishment to address the grievances of teachers, students, and the community. And most importantly, the uprising for Black Lives forced the Democratic establishment to at least rhetorically recognize the problem of systemic racism.

A Socialist Alternative to Imperialist Keynesianism

Socialists must resist Biden's siren call to line up behind his administration and instead maintain our independence, join and organize struggles for radical reforms, and build a socialist alternative to Biden and the Democrats.

Of course, we must avoid the ultra-Left trap of dismissing Biden's liberal reforms as meaningless; while not their primary aim, they will improve people's lives. But rather than just support them as is, we should demand their dramatic expansion and fight for the inclusion of those currently left out of the administration's nationalist project—especially undocumented immigrants.

At the same time, we must oppose Biden's attempt to funnel the Left into supporting reactionary liberal measures. We should [join the Movement for Black Lives](#) in coming out against the George Floyd Act, which like other police reform bills will shore up racist police

departments rather than defund them.

We must follow the lead of migrant justice activists in campaigning against [The Farmworkers Modernization Act](#), which in the guise of immigration reform impedes legalization, expands exploitative guest worker programs, and drives workers underground through imposing new E-Verify checks on their immigration status.

We should also insist on principled rejection of U.S. imperialist policies, including its support for client states like Colombia and the Israel apartheid state, with the latter's policies of ethnic cleansing. And perhaps most importantly, we should oppose Biden's reassertion of U.S. hegemony over the world and against China. Our task as internationalists is to build solidarity across borders, not take sides in a fight between the world's dominant imperialist power and its lesser but no less reactionary rival.

Finally, we must escalate the fight for our program of radical domestic demands, which the Democrats at best pay lip service to and more often oppose. These are demands like the PRO Act, Free Higher Education, Medicare for All, the Green New Deal, Cut the Pentagon, Defund the Police, and Abolish ICE. The only way to win these is through mass disruptive and even illegal protests and strikes, similar to those that won radical change in the 1930s and 1960s.

To lead these struggles, we must avoid the trap that caught our forebears—dissolution of the Left into the Democratic Party. We should reaffirm the need to build a party of our own to fight for radical reforms along the road to replacing the failing capitalist system with international socialism, a society that puts people all around the world before profit.

Source [Tempest](#).

Ortega Arrests Opposition Candidates Ahead

of November 2021 Election

17 June 2021, by **Dan La Botz**

While for decades there has been nothing progressive or democratic about Daniel Ortega and the FSLN, the current wave of arrests of his political opponents represents a new, even more authoritarian development. Since the 1990s Daniel Ortega had been moving to the right, engaging in corrupt deals with capitalist parties, forming alliances with both domestic capitalists and with the right wing of the Catholic Church, while protecting the interests of domestic and foreign capitalists. He changed the country's constitution to make possible his continuance in power and to permit his wife Rosario Murillo to become his vice-president. There has been harassment of his opponents in the past, but never the complete repression of all opposition parties such as we now see.

The government argues that its opponents are trying to undermine the country's sovereignty and are "inciting foreign interference in internal affairs, requesting military interventions and organizing with foreign financing." Those arrested have been charged with various specious crimes. While there is no doubt that some of his opponents would like to see the United States bring enough pressure to drive out Ortega, the opposition parties are not working to bring about a military intervention. They wanted to oust Ortega through a fair election.

It is also true that the U.S. government's [National Endowment for Democracy](#) (NED) and [USAID](#) provide money to various Nicaraguan NGOs some of which may oppose Ortega's policies, but it is not U.S. money that determines the opposition or even influences it very much. It is Ortega who has created his own opponents over the last 14 years and turned many, perhaps a majority, of the Nicaraguan people against him. Without the U.S. State Department and the CIA, the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie is quite capable of coming

up with its own political program for change—though much of it is tied to Ortega—and similarly the Nicaraguan people proved in 2018 that they can create a mass movement of tremendous power without relying on anyone else.

Ortega and the Nicaraguan Crisis

Ortega's crackdown on the opposition comes as Nicaragua experiences a series of economic, political and public health crises. In 2018 a national political rebellion took place involving hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans of all walks of life throughout the country who protested Ortega's violent suppression earlier that year of demonstrations of the elderly and students opposed to a new retirement plan. To suppress the resulting rebellion, police and Ortega's FSLN thugs murdered 300 people, wounded 2,000, arrested and tortured hundreds of others, and effectively prevented any opposition protests in the country. Opposition media was shut down and NGOs were harassed. All of this led some 100,000 Nicaraguans to flee the country.

Then in 2020 came the COVID pandemic crisis, with the [Ortega government flagrantly flouting international health recommendations](#) by ignoring social distancing and holding mass public events both out of doors and indoors. Some [700 Nicaraguan doctors](#) signed a letter "urging the government to acknowledge that the virus was spreading in Nicaragua and to put in place preventive measures recommended by the World Health Organization to limit its further spread." Based on a study of excess deaths, [some media](#) accused the Nicaraguan government of underestimating fatalities by more than 90 percent. Nicaragua has also

failed to vaccinate its population. "Nicaragua has administered at least 167,500 doses of COVID vaccines so far. Assuming every person needs 2 doses, that's enough to have vaccinated only about 1.3% of the country's population. The country is [now scheduled to receive enough vaccine](#) through COVAX to cover 20 percent of its population.

As in other countries, the COVID pandemic also brought an economic crisis. In 2020 Nicaragua, already the second poorest country in the hemisphere (second only to Haiti) with a per capital GDP of under \$2,000, saw its economy shrink by 4 percent. On top of the COVID pandemic, in November of 2020, hurricanes Eta and Iona with record winds devastated parts of the country. Nicaragua's economic crisis also resulted in part, however, from the severe economic depression in Venezuela, which under presidents Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro had been providing billions of dollars to the Nicaragua government. Facing its own desperate economic situation, Venezuela could no longer afford to be so generous.

Nicaragua has depended for decades upon foreign assistance from governments and NGOs in order to attempt to deal with the country's widespread poverty and social problems. But after the 2018 national uprising against the Ortega government and the accompanying repression, several NGOs assisting with economic development or social services were either driven out of the country or because of harassment left of their own volition, adding to the country's economic difficulties.

The Repression

Clearly Ortega fears that these various crises have created deep discontent that could lead to one of his challengers winning the election—so

he has eliminated them from the contest. Among those candidates arrested by Ortega are some of the country's most important political figures. Placed under house arrest in early June was Cristiana Chamorro, whose father Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, editor of the country's leading newspaper *La Prensa*, was assassinated in 1978, presumably at the order of then president and dictator Anastasio Somoza. Her mother defeated president Daniel Ortega in the 1990 election, serving until 1997. No doubt Ortega feared that Cristiana Chamorro, wealthy, influential, and bearing the famous family name might defeat him in the presidential election. (See this September 2019 [interview with Chamorro](#).)

The Ortega government also detained other moderate or conservative presidential candidates: Arturo Cruz, Félix Maradiaga and Juan Sebastián Chamorro. Other conservative political figures arrested include: José Adán Aguerrí, former president of the Superior Council of Private Enterprise (Cosep), Violeta Granera, and José Pellais.

On the left, the Ortega regime arrested several figures associated with the opposition party [UNAMOS](#), a party created by FSLN dissidents. Two of those arrested are veritable heroes of the Sandinista Revolution of 1979: Dora María Téllez, 65, and Hugo Torres, 73, both of whom were once FSLN comandantes. Torres said in a recorded video message that was shared on social media, "These are desperate acts from a regime that can feel itself dying." He continued, "Forty-six years ago I risked my life to get Daniel Ortega and other political prisoner comrades out of jail. And in 1978 I once again risked my life alongside Dora María Téllez to free about 60 other political prisoners. But that's how life goes, those who once welcomed principles today have betrayed them."

Other leftists arrested included another former leading activist of the revolutionary movement of the late 1970s, Victor Hugo Tinco, and two younger women, Suyen Barahona, president of the [Sandinista Renovation Movement](#) (MRS), and Ana Margarita

Vigil, the group's former president.

The U.S. Response

Throughout most of Ortega's presidency in the 2000s, the United States and Nicaragua had amicable relations. The two countries cooperated in a number of areas, including the policing of international drug cartels. Ortega also accepted some U.S. military assistance as well as tolerating various U.S. agencies such as USAID. The reason for the U.S. toleration of the Ortega regime, and vice versa, was that it was good for U.S. business and for the Nicaraguan capitalist class. Sixty percent of Nicaraguan trade is with the United States. Ortega could be relied upon to facilitate such international trade and to prevent the organization of independent labor unions in the country's maquiladoras.

Now, however, Nicaragua has become a problem. The United States prefers countries with at least a veneer of democratic institutions and procedures and wants social peace. But since 2018, Ortega has been incapable of delivering either. So, it is not surprising that the United States government has taken strong measures against leading figures in the Ortega government. Following the violent repression of the national uprising in July of 2018, the U.S. government imposed sanctions on Daniel Ortega, his wife and vice-president Rosario Murillo, and on the country's top police officials.

This month U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken called upon Ortega to release the presidential candidates and other opposition leaders as he announced new sanctions against members of the Ortega government and family, including on the president's daughter Camila Ortega Murillo. These U.S. Treasury Department sanctions affect only he thirty or so individuals who have been named and do not affect the Nicaraguan population as a whole.

"As these sanctions demonstrate, there are costs for those who support or carry out the Ortega regime's repression," said Blinken. "The United States will continue to use all

diplomatic and economic tools at our disposal to support Nicaraguans' calls for greater freedom and accountability as well as free and fair elections."

We know the U.S. government is less interested in elections and democracy than it is in maintaining its role as the dominant power in the Western Hemisphere and that its real concern is that the Ortega government has created instability in a small but strategic corner of the empire. Such instability could lead either to popular rebellion and a left-of-center government or to great-power foreign involvement from Russia or China, neither of which does the United States want.

Since his election in 2007, Ortega has sought a counterweight to U.S. power by strengthening ties to Russia, supporting Russia's seizure of Crimea from Ukraine in March of 2014 and hosting a visit by Russian President Vladimir Putin in July of that year. [Russia has also been rearming Nicaragua and training the Nicaraguan military](#) both in Russian military schools and in Nicaragua.

Then there is China, whose influence has waned. In 2013, Ortega pushed through the National Assembly a plan for a transoceanic canal to be built by the HK Nicaragua Canal Development Investment Group (HKND) headed by Chinese businessman Wang Jing. The canal, which was to begin operations last year, has been a total fiasco and some have [called it a scam](#) intended to boost the image of Ortega and to enrich him and his friends. It was farmers' and environmentalists' protests against the canal that led to some of the first large public protests against Ortega. The canal seems to have been abandoned in 2017.

In any case, it is clear that, as the editors of *Against the Current* recently wrote, with President Joseph Biden "Empire is Back," and his administration may take advantage of the current Nicaraguan situation to assert greater influence. This would likely happen in alliance with the Nicaraguan capitalist class as represented by the Superior Council of Private Enterprise (Cosep) though it would also require brokering by the Catholic Church. No doubt the U.S.

State Department and the CIA are already looking for Nicaraguan leaders that they can entice or suborn in order to create a safe capitalist opposition that might help to facilitate the fall of Ortega and his flight with his family to some friendly state.

What Should the Left Do?

We in the U.S. and the international left, while avoiding any ties to the U.S. government and demanding that it keep its hands off, should place ourselves on the side of the movements for democracy in Nicaragua. Unidad Nacional [Azul y Blanco](#) that was created in October 2018 has formed the broad umbrella organization of the opposition, but it has been dominated by conservative business elements. The somewhat more left-leaning and activist *Articulación de Movimientos Sociales*, which brought together students, peasants, social movements, feminists, the indigenous and business groups, proved unsuccessful in providing an alternative. *Azul y Blanco* has understandably been focused on the elections with the goal of ousting Ortega.

Nicaraguan working people—mostly

agricultural workers and government employees, but also some miners and industrial workers—and the urban and rural poor have not succeeded in creating their own political movement or party. The FSLN, which attempted from above to turn itself into such a party in the 1980s, became in the 1990s and 2000s simply an electoral machine. Without independent labor unions and facing severe repression since 2018, it has been virtually impossible to create a political presence for working people.

The left in Nicaragua is extremely weak. The FSLN's leftwing members resigned one after another during the 1990s and 2000s, forming opposition groups such as the MRS, the Sandinista Renovation Movement and the MPRS, Movement for the Rescue of Sandinismo. These groups, having rejected Ortega and the FSLN's authoritarianism, tended to adopt social democratic practices, though there were some radicals within them. They failed, however, to establish a base among Nicaragua's working people and the poor. Nevertheless, their leaders such as Dora María Téllez and Hugo Torres—now both arrested—kept alive both the struggle for democracy and for a more progressive society.

During the upheaval of 2018, some

university students involved in the protests in support of the elderly concerned about a social security reform, and then after the initial police killings of students in the national protests, became interested in socialism in one form or another. So far, however, with some forced into exile and others facing the regime's repression, they have been unable to create an independent party. No doubt the current struggles will create new opposition groups and some of them may become socialist.

We should reject the argument made by some on the left that we have to support the dictator Ortega and his government because the United States is now opposed to it. We on the left should be opposed to both the United States and to the Ortega dictatorship. We in the U.S. left, while supporting the general movement for political democracy and civil rights, should seek to identify and to work with emerging socialist groups in Nicaragua and with workers, feminists, LGBT activists, environmentalists and others. As international socialists, we stand with all movements for democracy, civil rights, and for socialism.

This article was published simultaneously by [Against the Current/Solidarity](#) and [New Politics](#).

To Address Increasing Inequality and Global Poverty, We Must Cancel Debt

16 June 2021, by **Éric Toussaint**

"The indebtedness of the working classes is directly connected to the widening poverty gap and increasing inequality, and to the demolition of the welfare state that most governments have been working at since the 1980s," says Toussaint in this exclusive interview for Truthout.

C.J. Polychroniou: Over the past few decades, inequality is rising in many countries around the world,

both across the Global North and the Global South, creating what UN Chief António Guterres called in his foreword to the World Social Report 2020 "a deeply unequal global landscape." Moreover, the top 1 percent of the population are the big winners in the globalized capitalist economy of the 21st century. Is inequality an inevitable development in the face of globalization, or the outcome of

politics and policies at the level of individual countries?

Éric Toussaint: Rising inequality is not inevitable. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the explosion of inequality is consubstantial with the phase that the world capitalist system [entered into in the 1970s](#). The evolution of inequality in the capitalist system is directly related to the balance of power between the fundamental social

classes, between capital and labor. When I use the term “labor,” that means urban wage-earners as well as rural workers and small-scale farming producers.

The evolution of capitalism can be divided into broad periods according to the evolution of inequality and the social balance of power. Inequality increased between the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the first half of the 19th century and the policies implemented by the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt in the United States in the 1930s, and then decreased up to the early 1980s. In Europe, the turn towards lower inequality lagged 10 years behind the United States. It was not until the end of World War II and the final defeat of Nazism that inequality-reducing policies were put in place, whether in Western Europe or Moscow-led Eastern Europe. In the major economies of Latin America, there was a reduction in inequality from the 1930s to the 1970s, notably during the presidencies of Lázaro Cárdenas in Mexico and Juan D. Perón in Argentina. In the period from the 1930s to the 1970s, there were massive social struggles. In many capitalist countries, capital had to make concessions to labor in order to stabilize the system. In some cases, the radical nature of social struggles led to revolutions, as in China in 1949 and Cuba in 1959.

The return to policies that strongly aggravated inequality began in the 1970s in Latin America and part of Asia. From 1973 onward, the dictatorship of Gen. Augusto Pinochet (advised by the “[Chicago Boys](#),” the Chilean economists who had studied laissez-faire economics at the University of Chicago with Milton Friedman), the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines, and the dictatorships in Argentina and Uruguay are just a few examples of countries where neoliberal policies were first put into practice.

These neoliberal policies, which produced a sharp increase in inequality, became widespread from 1979 in Great Britain under Margaret Thatcher, from 1980 in the United States under the Reagan administration, from 1982 in Germany

under the Kohl government, and in 1982-1983 in France after François Mitterrand’s turn to the right.

Inequality increased sharply with the capitalist restoration in the countries of the former Soviet bloc in Central and Eastern Europe. In China from the second half of the 1980s onward, the policies dictated by Deng Xiaoping also led to a gradual restoration of capitalism and a rise in inequality.

It is also quite clear that for the ideologues of the capitalist system and for many international organizations, a rise in inequality is a necessary condition for economic growth.

It should be noted that the World Bank does not consider a rising level of inequality as negative. Indeed, it adopts the theory developed in the 1950s by the [economist Simon Kuznets](#), according to which a country whose economy takes off and progresses must necessarily go through a phase of increasing inequality. According to this dogma, inequality will start to fall as soon as the country has reached a higher threshold of development. It is a version of pie in the sky used by the ruling classes to placate the oppressed on whom they impose a life of suffering.

The need for rising inequalities is well rooted into World Bank philosophy. Eugene Black, World Bank president in April 1961, [said](#): “Income inequalities are the natural result of the economic growth which is the people’s escape route from an existence of poverty.” However, empirical studies by the World Bank in the 1970s at the time when Hollis Chenery was chief economist contradict the Kuznets theory.

In [Capital in the Twenty-First Century](#), Thomas Piketty presents a very interesting analysis of the Kuznets curve. Piketty mentions that at first, Kuznets himself doubted the real interest of the curve. That did not stop him from developing an economic theory that keeps bouncing back and, like all economists who serve orthodoxy well, receiving the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences (1971). Since then, inequalities have reached levels never before seen in

the history of humanity. This is the result of the dynamism of global capitalism and the support it receives from international institutions that are charged with “development” and governments that favor the interests of the 1 percent over those of the enormous mass of the population, as much in the developed countries as in the rest of the world.

In 2021, the World Bank reviewed the Arab Spring of 2011 by claiming, against all evidence, that the level of inequality was low in the entire Arab region, and this worried them greatly as it was symptomatic of faults in the region’s supposed economic success. As faithful followers of Kuznets’ theory, Vladimir Hlasny and Paolo Verme [argue](#) in a paper published by the World Bank that “low inequality is not an indicator of a healthy economy.”

Gilbert Achcar summarizes the position taken by Paolo Verme of the World Bank as follows: “[in the view of the 2014 World Bank study](#), it is inequality aversion, not inequality per se, that should be deplored, since inequality must inevitably rise with development from a Kuznetsian perspective.”

Finally, the coronavirus pandemic has further increased the inequality in the distribution of income and wealth. Inequality in the face of disease and death has also increased dramatically.

Neoliberal policies have created massive debt levels for so-called emerging markets and developing countries, with debt threatening to create a global development emergency. What’s the most realistic solution to the debt crisis in developing countries?

The solution is obvious. [Debt payments must be suspended](#) without any penalty payments being paid for the delay. Beyond suspension of payment, each country must carry out debt audits with the active participation of citizens, in order to determine the illegitimate, odious, illegal and/or unsustainable parts, which must be canceled. After a crisis of the size of the present one, the slates must be wiped clean, as has happened many times before

throughout human history. David Graeber reminded us of this in his important book, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*.

From the point of view of the CADTM, a global network mainly active in the Global South but also in the North, the need to suspend payments and cancel debt does not only concern developing countries, whether they are emerging or not. It also concerns peripheral countries in the North like Greece and semi-colonies like Puerto Rico.

It is time to dare to speak out about canceling the abusive debts demanded of the working classes. Private banks and other private bodies have put great energy into developing policy of lending to ordinary people who turn to borrowing because their incomes are insufficient to pay for higher education or health care. In the U.S., student debt has reached over \$1.7 trillion, with \$165 billion worth of student loans in default, while a large part of mortgages are subjected to abusive conditions (as the subprime crisis clearly showed from 2007). The terms of certain consumer debts are also abusive, as **are most debts linked to micro-credit in the South**.

Indebtedness of the working classes is directly connected to the widening poverty gap and increasing inequality, and to the demolition of the welfare state that most governments have been working at since the 1980s. This is true all over the world: whether in Chile, Colombia, the Arabic-speaking region, Japan, Europe or the United States. As neoliberal policies dismantle their systems of protection, people are obliged, in turn, to incur debt as individuals to compensate for the fact that the states no longer fulfil the obligation incumbent upon them to protect, promote and enact human rights. Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya and Nancy Fraser emphasized this in their book, *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto*.

What are the alternatives for a sustainable model of development?

As stated in the manifesto, “**End the system of private patents!**”:

The health crisis is far from being resolved. The capitalist system and neoliberal policies have been at the helm at all stages. At the root of this virus is the unbridled transformation of the relationship between the human species and nature. The ecological and health crises are intimately intertwined.

Governments and big capital will not be deterred from their offensive against the populations unless a vast and determined movement forces them to make concessions.

Among new attacks that must be resisted are the acceleration of automation/robotization of work; the generalization of working from home, where employees are isolated, have even less control of their time and must themselves assume many more of the costs related to their work tools than if they worked physically in their offices; a development of distance learning that deepens cultural and social inequality; the reinforcement of control over private life and over private data; the reinforcement of repression, etc.

The question of public debt remains a central element of social and political struggles. Public debt continues to explode in volume because governments are borrowing massively in order to avoid taxing the rich to pay for the measures taken to resist the Covid-19 pandemic, and it will not be long before they resume their austerity offensive. Illegitimate private debt will become an ever-greater daily burden for working people. Consequently, the struggle for the abolition of illegitimate debt must gain renewed vigor.

The struggles that [arose] on several continents during June 2020, notably massive anti-racist struggles around the Black Lives Matter movement, show that youth and the working classes do not accept the status quo. In 2021, **huge popular mobilizations in Colombia**] and more recently in Brazil have provided new evidence of massive resistance among Latin American peoples.

We must contribute as much as

possible to the rise of a new and powerful social and political movement capable of mustering the social struggles and elaborating a program that breaks away from capitalism and promotes anti-capitalist, anti-racist, ecological, feminist and socialist visions. It is fundamental to work toward **asocialization of banks with expropriation of major shareholders; a moratorium of public debt repayment** while an audit with citizens' participation is carried out to repudiate its illegitimate part; the imposition of a high rate of taxation on the highest assets and incomes; the cancelation of unjust personal debts (student debt, abusive mortgage loans); the closure of stock markets, which are places of speculation; a radical reduction of working hours (without loss of pay) in order to create a large number of socially useful jobs; a radical increase in public expenditure, particularly in health care and education; the socialization of pharmaceutical companies and of the energy sector; the re-localization of as much manufacturing as possible and the development of short supply chains, as well as many other essential demands.

A few years ago, you argued that the socialist project has been betrayed and needs to be reinvented in the 21st century. What should socialism look like in today's world, and how can it be achieved?

In the present day, the socialist project must be feminist, ecologist, anti-capitalist, anti-racist, internationalist and self-governing. In 2021, we commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Paris Commune when people set up a form of democratic self-government. It was a combination of self-organization and forms of power delegation that could be questioned at any moment, since all mandates could be revoked at the behest of the people. It has to be clearly stated that the emancipation of the oppressed will be brought about by the oppressed themselves, or will not happen at all. Socialism will only be attained if the peoples of the world consciously set themselves the goal of constructing it, and if they give themselves the means to prevent

authoritarian or dictatorial degradation and the bureaucratization of the new society.

What Rosa Luxemburg said in 1918 is as valid today as it was then: “[without a free and untrammelled press, without the unlimited right of association and assemblage, the rule of the broad masses of the people is entirely unthinkable.](#)”

She added:

Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party — however numerous they may be — is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently. Not because of any fanatical concept of “justice” but because all that is instructive, wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on this essential

characteristic, and its effectiveness vanishes when “freedom” becomes a special privilege.

Faced with the multidimensional crisis of capitalism hurtling towards the abyss due to the environmental crisis, modifying capitalism is no longer a proper option. It would merely be a lesser evil which would not bring the radical solutions that the situation requires.

Who's afraid of Pedro Castillo?

15 June 2021, by **Pablo Stefanoni**

Pedro Castillo Terrones is far from being a messiah, but he appeared “out of nowhere” in the electoral contest, as if he were one. With the results of Sunday 6 June, he is about to become the most unlikely president. Not because he is an outsider - the country has been full of them since the “Chinese” [Japanese] Alberto Fujimori took power in 1990, after defeating Mario Vargas Llosa - but because of his class background: he is a peasant from Cajamarca, tied to the land, who - without ever abandoning this link with the mountains [the town of Cajamarca is at a height of 2,750 metres] - has overcome various difficulties. He became a rural teacher. In presidential debates, he used to end his speeches with the phrase “the word of a teacher”.

Pedro Castillo came from the teaching profession and entered the national scene in 2017, following a combative teachers' strike against the union leadership. A recent documentary, precisely entitled “[The Teacher](#)”, gives several insights into his person, his family and his environment. Unlike Luis E. Valcárcel - whose indigenism was inserted into the feud of the elites: Andean Cuzco and “white” Lima - Pedro Castillo comes from a much more marginal north in terms of Peruvian geopolitics. His identity is more “provincial” and peasant than strictly indigenous. From there, he

won over the electorate of the southern Andes and also attracted, albeit to a lesser extent, the popular vote in Lima.

That is why, when Keiko Fujimori accepted the challenge to go and debate in the town of Chota [in the north] and said with disgust: “I had to come all the way here”, this phrase remained as one of the setbacks of her campaign. Pedro Castillo managed to take politics out of Lima and into the most remote and isolated corners of the country, which he visited one by one during his campaign with a giant pencil in his hand.

Castillo's surge in the first round - with almost 19% of the vote - caused hysteria in the wealthy sectors of the capital. In keeping with the current fashion for zombie anti-communism, it was expressed in a widespread “No to communism”, even manifesting itself in giant posters in the streets. There was no shortage of racism either. Peru seems to be less shy about expressing it in public than its neighbours, Ecuador or Bolivia.

For example, the “controversial” journalist Beto Ortiz expelled the Perú Libre deputy [the party that presented Pedro Castillo], Zaira Arias, from his

TV show, showing that “political correctness” does not reach certain sectors of Lima's elites. He then called her a “fruit and vegetable seller” and then disguised himself as an Indian - in his usual antics - to sarcastically welcome Pedro Castillo's “new Per”.

Pedro Castillo's candidacy has also been a constant victim of “*terruqueo*” (accusations of links to terrorism) due to his union alliances during the teachers' strike and - given his lack of previous experience in the electoral arena - his own missteps during interviews.

As Alberto Vergara wrote in the [New York Times](#) on 8 June: “Those who used the politics of fear most treacherously were those in the pro-Fujimori camp, the upper classes and the mainstream media. Businessmen [threatened to fire their employees](#) paid for by the businessmen warning of ‘an imminent communist invasion’.” Even Mario Vargas Llosa abandoned his traditional anti-Fujimorismo stance - which is why he had even called for a vote for Ollanta Humala in 2011 - and decided to give a candidate with the Fujimori surname a chance.

Pedro Castillo is far from coming from a communist background. He spent several years in local politics under the banner of Perú Posible, the party of former president Alejandro Toledo

(president from July 2001 to July 2006). Although he ran for Perú Libre, he is not an 'organic' member of the party, which was originally born as Perú Libertario. Perú Libre defines itself as "Marxist-Leninist-Marist", but many of its candidates [deny being "communists"](#).

The leader of the party, Vladimir Cerrón, has defined the movement behind Pedro Castillo as a "provincial left", as opposed to the "caviar" left in Lima. Pedro Castillo is an "evangelical compatible" Catholic: his wife and daughter are active in the Evangelical Church of the Nazarene and he himself joins their prayers. During the campaign, he repeatedly spoke out against abortion or same-sex marriage. This is despite the fact that today many of his technicians and advisors come from the urban left, led by Verónica Mendoza [a Franco-Peruvian who ran in the first round on the left-wing list Juntos por el Perú; she called for a vote for Pedro Castillo against Keiko Fujimori], with progressive social visions. It remains to be seen how these tendencies will coexist in Pedro Castillo's future government, which is not expected to be easy.

Castillo also defines himself as a "rondero" [a member of the peasants' rounds], referring to the peasant groups created in the north in the 1970s to fight against cattle theft. These groups were then developed in the country during the 1980s to deal with the Shining Path guerrillas. They often act as a reference authority in the countryside.

The uncertainty of a future Castillo government has nothing to do, precisely, with the constitution of a "communist experiment" of any kind. A "Venezuelanization" as announced by his detractors also seems highly unlikely. The armed forces do not seem easily controllable; the parliamentary weight of "Castillism" is limited; the economic elites are more resistant than in a purely oil country like Venezuela; the structuring of the social movement does not announce a "revolutionary nationalism" of the Chavist or Cuban type. Professor Castillo's statements show a certain plebeian disregard for institutions, a lack of clarity about the government's direction, and visions of crime control that favour the extension of 'rondera justice' to the rest of Peru (a type of justice that often imposes various types of punishment on those who commit crimes). But they also include rhetoric referring to an iron fist, as seen in the electoral debates.

The presence in government of the "other left" - urban and cosmopolitan - can function as a virtuous balance between the progressive and the popular. Nevertheless, it will also be a source of internal tensions. Some compare Castillo to Evo Morales. There is undoubtedly a shared symbology and histories. But there are also differences. One is purely anecdotal: rather than exaggerating his achievements in terms of meritocracy, Evo Morales claims not to have completed high school (although some of his teachers claim otherwise). The other is more important for the government's purposes: the former Bolivian president arrived at the Palacio

Quemado in 2006, after eight years at the head of the parliamentary bloc of the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) and following the experience of a presidential campaign in 2002, as well as having behind him a confederation of social movements with strong territorial weight, articulated to MAS. Pedro Castillo has, for the moment, a party that is not his own and a social-electoral support that is still diffuse.

Castillo's "white fear" is linked, more than to a real danger of communism, to the prospect of a loss of power in a country where the elites have avoided the region's left turn and co-opted those who won with reformist programmes, such as Ollanta Humala (president from 2011 to 2016). To put it in a more "old-fashioned" way: the "white fear" is the prospect of a weakening of "amoralismo", as the system of power built by hacienda owners before the agrarian reform was called in Peru, and which has continued in other forms in the country. No one knows whether the elites will also be able to co-opt Pedro Castillo. However, in this case the class gap is deeper than in the past and the scenario is generally less predictable. The 'Castillo surprise' is too recent and in many ways he is an unknown, even to those who will be his collaborators.

It is possible that the "electoral storm" will be the harbinger of more to come if the elites want to continue governing as they have become accustomed to doing.

Article published 13 June 2021 on the site [Sin Permiso](#). Translated from French version [A l'Encontre](#).

Israel: Bibi, is it over?

14 June 2021, by **Dominique Vidal**

A very right-wing government

Another question: assuming that this

coalition really takes shape, will its policies really differ from Netanyahu's? Certainly, the quartet that should lead this government -

Bennett, Lapid, Sa'ar and Liberman - will necessarily take into account the presence of the "Zionist left", without which it would not have a majority. He has already had to promise something for the Raam party. But it would be more than surprising if the Islamists, Labour and even Meretz were to oppose the "heads" of the cabinet head-on, assuming they want to, at the risk of breaking up the combination and thus allowing the return of... Netanyahu.

In short, we are dealing with a government that is clearly leaning to the right, even if it has the merit - let's hope at least - of "clearing out" Netanyahu, a *sine qua non* condition for any evolution. Bennett, Liberman and Sa'ar are ideologically and politically right-win, and even, for the first, far right - and what can we say about Ayelet Shaked, who once posed next to a bottle of perfume entitled "Fascism"? Their Palestinian policy is no different from that of the outgoing government - Right Wing is an annexationist party and Israel Our Home a transferist formation [53], and both promise the settlers that they will not stop... settlement. They also share

with the Likud a neo-liberal vision of the economy and society. They will even be able to pursue these "external" and internal policies by taking advantage of a certain newfound virginity. Some people like to claim to be part of the movement which, since last summer, has gathered massive but heterogeneous crowds, united by a single will: to finish with Netanyahu.

Reasons to hope?

The only likely change is that this team will be less sensitive to blackmail by the ultra-Orthodox parties, which, for a while at least, will not be part of it. As a result, the "secularists" - who are not only Horowitz and Michaeli, but also Lapid and Liberman - could push the coalition to take better account of the majority's aspirations for civil marriage and divorce, for the operation of public transport on Saturdays, for a certain control of the religious education sectors - in short, for the state to distance itself from the Synagogue.

Another (timid) hope on the left in Israel is that the change of team will put a stop to the authoritarian

evolution of the last governments. What about the "Nation-State of the Jewish People" law and the apartheid it formalizes? What about the liberticidal arsenal voted by the Knesset? What about the threats against the status and competences of the Supreme Court? Given the overall balance of power and within the coalition itself, a real reversal of the trend would however require a popular mobilization for the preservation of what remains of democracy after fifteen years of Netanyahu's reign.

How, moreover, can we envisage a clear and unambiguous break with the course chosen by the previous governments? Four successive elections have confirmed that, if a (small) majority of Israelis no longer wanted Netanyahu, a (large) majority was still on the right, on the extreme right and in the ultra-Orthodox camp: a total of 72 deputies out of 120. Let us add that, on the Palestinian question, neither the Zionist "left" - except Meretz - nor the centrists have a clear perspective, certainly rejecting the annexation but without advocating the creation of a real Palestinian state.

Legislative elections without any legitimacy

13 June 2021, by **Kamel Aïssat**

The regime is not hegemonic over society. In two years, it has not succeeded in building a social base or a new political apparatus. It has only recycled the old FLN and RND members, the old caciques of the system, with a few new faces but linked to the clientelist networks of the regime.

Repression everywhere

To impose its electoral roadmap, it resorted to an unprecedented repression, and created a climate of

terror in society. After a year of interruption of the movement because of Covid, it had counted on the movement not resuming. But since last February, there has been a resumption of the movement. It is true that it is not as big as before, but Fridays have resumed in most of the departments. This has pushed the authorities to start a process of repression. The regime in power has a legitimacy deficit.

It has therefore chosen repression as a response, as a way of managing popular demands.

The repression did not only affect the Hirak, but the whole social movement:

the firemen's strike, the education workers' strike, etc. They were afraid that there would be a conflict between the two movements. They were afraid that there would be a junction between the popular movement and the social movement.

The population is experiencing an unprecedented social crisis: redundancies, job cuts in the context of Covid, even if deindustrialization has been a policy since Bouteflika. They have transformed the Algerian economy into an economic import mode and broken the national productive sector.

For the population, after two years,

there is no defeat, but there is a lot of questioning, drawing back. Is Friday enough, why march on Friday and not on other days, what are our objectives? The rejection of the system is intact and structural. 2019 has created a rupture between the population and the central regime.

Indifference to the elections

The process of terrorization is impressive. Since the beginning of the electoral campaign, there have been more than 2,000 arrests, more than 226 people imprisoned, especially young activists, and bans on all militant activities. On 10 June, the Penal Code was amended to introduce activities that can be characterised as terrorist, such as political organizations aiming to challenge the current governance system. Kabyle organisations such as the MAC and Islamist organisations such as Rachad are labelled as terrorists even though they are not really organizations that participate in the Hirak movement.

Those who prevent the election or try to dissuade people from voting are punishable by law – they are liable to 20 years in prison.

Concerning the legislative elections, in the usual departments, especially in Kabylia and the neighbouring departments, there are very few voters. In Bejaïa, for example, they announced 4,000 voters out of 500,000 voters. They tried to open the polling stations this morning, but without success. Often it is the forces of order, army and police, who vote, almost secretly.

The turnout is very low.

At the national level, they announced a 10% turnout at 1pm and 14.5% at 4pm, which represents about 2.2 million voters out of a total electorate of 24.5 million.

Building an anti-repression front

We always put forward the same orientation: any revolution must be organized at the base, where we must discuss how to confront repression, what system we want to build... If we don't have this organization at the base, the representatives will be designated by the bourgeois media, by the spheres close to power. It is from there that we can provide the movement with a democratic and social platform that is the outline of the new system we want to build. Try to link up with all the social and democratic movements. So we have this triptych: self-organization, joining the social and popular movement, a sovereign constituent assembly that is the emanation of the needs of the population at the base.

For the past two months, the PST has been fighting to build an anti-repression front. The PST itself is threatened with dissolution, as are many other organizations: all those involved in the PAD (Pact for Democratic Alternative) have been threatened with dissolution, and proceedings against some have been initiated at the Council of State. They have also put pressure on associations, such as SOS Bab el Oued or RAJ. They have arrested many activists who are active in the field. A

leader of the MDS was arrested at his bus stop.

We consider that in the face of the terror that they want to impose, we need a front against repression, as broad as possible, with all the forces and all the groups that want to resist. Freedoms are precious, for the workers, for the popular camp.

When we build these fronts against repression, our aim is also that the young people who gather, who discuss, take advantage of it to build nuclei of self-organization. Because self-organization only comes from the concrete needs of the popular masses, it's not a slogan that doesn't fit the reality, the dynamics of society.

The regime is illegitimate

A few days ago, President Tebboune said that participation would be massive and now he says that the important thing is just to have organized the vote, that the participation rate is secondary! This is a statement worthy of dictators: the democratic minimum of a president would be to worry about establishing his legitimacy.

Now he says that the minority must respect the majority. But who is the majority? It is those who did not vote! Yes, the majority has not been respected: a minority decides for the majority of Algerians, who reject the elections. It is time to cancel all the elections that have no value for the people, no legitimacy.

12 June 2021

A Century Since the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921

11 June 2021, by **Dan La Botz**

The Tulsa sheriff deputized hundreds of white men who were told to go home and “get a gun and then get a nigger.” The white mob of a thousand men went through the black neighborhood, including the area called Black Wall Street, said to be the wealthiest black community in America, looting homes and then setting them on fire, while shooting and killing an estimated 300 black residents. When the whites proved incapable of subduing the armed blacks fighting in self-defense, private planes dropped fire bombs on the neighborhood and the National Guard was called in. When the smoke cleared, Greenwood, an area of 40 square blocks, had been completely erased. Some 1,000 black people set up tents outside their old neighborhood and lived there. The insurance companies paid whites, but rejected all black claims. The courts accused no white men, but 57 black men were indicted for causing the riot.

Why had the white riot and the massacre occurred? The accusation of

a black man looking at, touching, or befriending a white woman was often the excuse for lynching or for the many white attacks on black neighborhoods. The real reason for the massacre and other similar events was the growing presence, increasing wealth, and assertiveness of black people in America. The economic boom that accompanied World War I had led many black people to move from the plantations of the South to the North in the First Great Migration. Some had started small businesses and most had earned higher wages than in the South. Black soldiers returning from the war, had learned how to use guns and were prepared to defend themselves. Tulsa was a special case because oil had been discovered in the state, some of it under black-owned ground, which led to the rise of a group of wealthy black people, the city’s famed Black Wall Street. The attacks on Greenwood and other black neighborhoods and cities were intended to enforce Jim Crow segregation and disfranchisement in the South and the North, to prevent black people from accumulating wealth, and to strike fear into the

hearts of the black working class. Keeping the black working class down necessitated violence. Between 1900 and 1917, 1,100 black men were lynched. Equally serious was what African American historians John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr. called a “pandemic of race riots” that started in 1895 and continued through the 1920s. The white race riots led not only to black armed self-defense, but also led W.E.B. DuBois and other black leaders and white allies to meet in Canada in 1905 to found the Niagara Movement, which later became the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the country’s first national civil rights organization. Led by well-off blacks and white liberals, the NAACP used the courts in an attempt to stave off the lynchings and white mobs, but it would be another fifty years until the civil rights movement’s civil disobedience began to turn the tide. Racism remains endemic in America, and the struggle continues today with the Black Lives Matter movement that brought millions into the streets against police violence.

All to the borders! A successful feminist and internationalist demonstration despite indifference and repression

10 June 2021, by Correspondents l’Anticapitaliste

This mobilization was the work of activists organised in local collectives: transport, accommodation, choirs, batucada... Self-organisation was the order of the day at all stages. Buses came from Bordeaux, Toulouse, Grenoble... Speeches by exiles and performances by artists punctuated the demonstration and kites carried our message of freedom. Readings and concerts took place in the wake of the march, but unfortunately the number of participants was very limited due to the health situation.

Strength, inventiveness, subversion

This mobilization shows the vitality of a plural feminist movement, capable of coming together to defend the most vulnerable among us, the exiles fleeing wars and persecution. The presence of migrant women’s or solidarity groups and associations should be noted in particular. However, although supported by a

large number of associations, trade unions and political movements, the event would have gained in strength with a greater investment from traditional organisations. The internationalist dimension, initially at the heart of the construction of the event, was undermined by the health situation and the repressive politics. In particular, Italian comrades were illegally and violently turned back at the border.

On the spot, the repression was also consequent since, from the morning,

five activists carrying out a collage were arrested and held in custody all day, thus preventing them from participating in the demonstration. Then one person was arrested halfway through the march for damaging street furniture and four more were arrested on the terrace after the march. All of them were finally released, some of them risk fines and are summoned to appear at the beginning of the school year. In addition, the march was twice

subjected to provocations and attacks by identity activists. These obstacles to the right to demonstrate are part of a local situation that is particularly repressive and violent towards political activists and migrant aid networks.

The day was a demonstration of the strength, inventiveness and subversiveness of the feminist movement. The end of gender oppression is not yet in sight, but this international dynamic is a

fundamental movement that moves us forward on the road to the emancipation of women and gender minorities. This demonstration is a precious step in the creation of more spaces of solidarity, resistance and European convergence in feminist and anti-racist struggles, combining demands for unconditional mass regularizations, open borders and struggles against all oppressions.

10 June 2021

Vaccination as Class Struggle

9 June 2021, by **Ekabali Ghosh**

This is a guest post by a socialist and feminist militant on an important topic. How from early 2020 the Government of India has been treating vaccination as it has treated everything for the benefits of monopoly capital, and for the political gains of the BJP. Administrator, Radical Socialist website

India's vaccine campaign has been perhaps the worst the country has ever seen. The public vaccination system of India, which boasts polio and multiple other effective vaccination programmes for children, has been brought to a staggering failure only the Modi government is capable of. Although other local governments (especially the ones run by opposition parties) have attempted slightly better vaccination campaigns than the centre, they have essentially had to kowtow to capitalists and pander to liberalization in order to get a few lakh doses.

Amid the devastating second wave of COVID-19, getting a vaccine in India has proven to be a function of social and economic privilege. And this should not come as a surprise. The Indian government never planned to vaccinate everyone for free, knowing fully well that leaving a large section of the population to pay for the vaccines would result in the creation of a huge market which could then be

exploited by large pharmaceutical companies to sell more doses at higher prices.

As early as December 2020, Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan announced that the government of India had never claimed that it will vaccinate the entire country. [54] In January, NITI AAYOG member Dr. Vinod Paul declared that the government would vaccinate only about 300 million people for free. [55] Harsh Vardhan, the union minister for Health and Family Welfare, said the same thing the day after (Jan 2) but framed it as vaccines will be free across the whole country, all 30 crore doses [56] This claim was widely misreported by mainstream media as Indians will be getting free vaccines across the country (paraphrased). Such claims by the media are a result of the corporate media's own complicity with the fascist central government as well as its own desperate desire to create clickbait headlines. Further, in March when quizzed on the failure of the government's vaccination policy, the union health minister again claimed that the central government had never promised free vaccination to all Indians.

No. The central government did not. But the BJP, which runs the central government, did.

During the elections in Bengal, the BJP promised that if elected they would provide free vaccines to all in West Bengal. [57] This came after the liberalization of vaccination policy. BJP's campaign promises in Bengal and Bihar regarding vaccines show that the central government never considered it as a healthcare right but as both a carrot and a stick that could be used as to lure and to discipline people during a hot election season.

Under its liberalized vaccine policy which came into effect from April 21 [58], the centre in association with the multi-billion dollar vaccine businesses in India (Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech) has decided that the central government will no longer be supplying vaccines to state governments and private hospitals. Rather, state governments have to buy their doses directly from the manufacturers at a price higher than what the centre pays for the same. The repercussions of such a decision are massive. State governments are now forced to practically bid against each other in the middle of an acute crisis where people are dying by the minute, in order to get more vaccine doses for their states. Private vaccination centres buy doses from the manufacturers at a higher price than state governments but can sell vaccines at their own prices. There is

no cap to vaccine pricing. There is a rush to get vaccinated in these centres among the upper and middle classes. Private vaccination centres are charging whatever they can from this populace which can afford to pay thereby increasing the gap between the rich who have been vaccinated and the poor who have not. SII is charging 300 INR per dose of Covishield (originally 400 INR which was reduced under criticism and Bharat Biotech is charging 600 INR to state governments. [59] Compare that to what the central government is paying, which is 150 INR per dose to each company. Private facilities are buying Covishield at 600 INR from SII, and Covaxin at 1200 INR from Bharat Biotech. Since these private facilities can sell the vaccines at whatever price they like, Covishield prices in a private facility in West Bengal range from 750 INR to 1100 INR. Covaxin can be bought at 1500 INR at specific hospitals.

This, despite the fact that Covaxin (the great nationalist boast of the BJP, completely “made in India”) is yet to publish its Phase III data in any peer reviewed international journal. All of Bharat Biotech’s claims of close to 80% efficacy are at this point just that, claims made by the developers of the vaccine. Similarly, Zydus Cadila, another large pharmaceutical company is expected to seek Emergency Use Authorization for its Zy-Cov-D vaccine, from the Drugs Controller General of India in late May or early June. The company is yet to release data from its phase 1 and 2 trials which include the crucial safety data. These are the vaccine candidates which are being celebrated as a triumph of Indian science. The much-touted benefit of liberalizing vaccine policy is that the country can now import foreign vaccines like those of Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson and Johnson. Yet, it was not unexpected that after the Indian government’s early snub to Pfizer and its lack of storage facilities, it would be next to impossible to import Pfizer and Moderna vaccines in time to turn the tide of the current wave. [60] What then, was this government aiming at? My hypothesis is that the foreign vaccine line was used by the central government to open up a market that ultimately benefitted SII and Bharat

Biotech, at a crucial point in time (rising cases fast approaching the peak) where little criticism was possible. This open market would then serve not just the two largest COVID vaccine makers in India right now but also many other big pharma companies that would enter the market later. Currently, the Indian government is at loggerheads with Pfizer over signing an indemnity bond which if signed by the Indian government would protect Pfizer from being sued in case of damages (say, someone dies after taking the vaccine) [61] Given India’s lack of infrastructure and cold storage facilities, it is not surprising that Pfizer wants to push for the indemnity bond. Ultimately, the Indian government will probably have to give in to their demands. [62]

In comparison to the central government and despite the barriers placed on their way, the opposition ruled state governments have done slightly better at vaccination campaigns. But that is only because the bar for good performance has been set drastically low by the centre. As it became clear that India was headed for a disaster, queues of people waiting for their second doses in front of government vaccination centres increased in West Bengal all through late April and early May. People queued up from the middle of the night, foregoing their sleep. In certain parts of the state, a new profession of “line keepers” developed. These are persons you can pay to “keep” your line (or hold your position in a queue) all night in return for a few hundred rupees. Those who can afford this amount can take their overnight rest. Others have to stay in queue all night or from the wee hours of the morning in order to get a jab. As the demand for second doses grew, the central government set the gap between the first and second dose of Covishield to 12-16 weeks. While there is some scientific evidence that a 12-week gap between two doses of the Oxford-Astrazeneca vaccine does increase efficacy, there is absolutely no literature to support a 16 week gap. [63] This has been done by the central government purely because the country was facing an acute shortage of the vaccine.

One of the reasons why the vaccine hub of the Global South suddenly has to grapple with vaccine shortages is due to India’s featherbrained policy of vaccine diplomacy. India’s Ministry of External Affairs was wooing imports from other countries for months before the second wave struck. This was done under India’s Vaccine Maitreyee initiative, created to counter China’s vaccine diplomacy which resulted in the export of some 660 million vaccine doses to other countries. Admittedly, a chunk of this was given to GAVI’s COVAX initiative. While we do not support the hoarding of vaccines by powerful nations (and India is relatively powerful compared to much of the Global South), there are some long-term implications of India’s unplanned vaccine exports. Exports should have been more planned so that if cases rose, no export ban would have to be put in place. The sudden ban on exports from India has harmed poorer nations the most, particularly those in Africa which are completely dependent on SII for their vaccines. Moreover, a [large chunk of the total number of doses exported was supplied to the UK](#) which SII was required to do under contract with AstraZeneca. [64] Due to delays caused by rising cases in India and the ban, the UK alleged that its vaccination programme had been thrown off course by India. UK, which had vaccinated 50% of its adult population demanded more vaccines from India which had vaccinated only 3% of its population and was facing a deadly wave. [65] The Global North-South dynamics at play here and its collaboration with capital (especially the demands placed by AstraZeneca and its contract with SII) cannot be ignored. Take for example a concerning report from Uganda in early February according to which Uganda was paying 7\$ per dose of the Oxford AstraZeneca dose to SII, as opposed to 2.06\$ paid by the Indian central government to SII and 2.16\$ paid by EU for the same vaccine doses to its manufacturers in the first world. Countries with lower populations are reportedly paying higher prices because they do not need to place bigger orders. This is essentially an incentive to make smaller nations place orders for more doses to one manufacturer, which increases market

risks of monopoly and only makes manufacturers grow larger at the cost of ethical healthcare.

Advanced capitalist nations of the Global North and its collaborationists (including fascists) in the Global South have used a cocktail of patents and nationalist priority etc. to keep vaccines out of the hands of the poorest nations [66] Poorer nations of the Global South cannot manufacture their own doses as vaccines are patented products. Here is an example that demonstrates how completely lacking in ethics these big pharma companies are. Pfizer and Moderna have not even committed to not making profits from their vaccines during the pandemic. AstraZeneca has committed to not making profits during the pandemic but reserves the right to call the end of the pandemic so that it can start making profits. Why should AstraZeneca decide when the pandemic ends? If its vaccines are still needed long enough to make profits, then how is that the end of the pandemic?

While these structural inequalities are not always palpable, several other local developments tell a clearer story about the inequalities of access inherent in a privatized vaccine distribution policy.

As the liberalized vaccine drive for 18-44 olds (the only viable vaccine option for this age group, by the way) was opened up from May 1 (oh the irony!), tech savvy young people developed newer ways to cheat the online system. Extreme scarcity led to greater demand and software codes were made public by coders which could be run on Arogya Setu (one of the apps meant for booking a slot for a dose). Running these codes require tertiary level digital knowledge which the vast majority of Indians do not have. Until very recently, an online registration was a compulsory for vaccination in India which pushed many million people out of the rush for vaccines. [67] The reason provided by

the central government is that it will reduce “crowding”. Private vaccination centres are still charging close to 1000 thousand for one shot of Covishield (the Oxford AstraZeneca jab) and 1500 INR for Covaxin (the “Indian” vaccine). The injustice in this becomes clearer when we note that the Indian government has already provided both Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech with significant assistance during clinical trials, according to its own admission in the Supreme Court [68]

These are not unrelated incidents but rather the fallout of a vaccination strategy that prioritizes profit over public health which is only part of a larger system of broken public healthcare in India (understaffed, poorly equipped government hospitals, lack of ambulances etc.). Take for example the prices and “packages” offered by private hospitals to treat COVID 19 patients. Some people have reported paying as high as 4 million INR for a hospital stay of two weeks at private hospitals. More recently, a trend emerged where five star hotels were providing vaccine stays at package rates. Packages include doses of a vaccine, luxury stays and meals etc. Although warnings against such practices have been issued, the existence of such business schemes speak to how far privatization has been allowed unchecked in the country.

On a local scale, the West Bengal government has very recently, during the development of this article, started vaccinating 18-44 year olds in a limited capacity for free. But anecdotal reports of local TMC lumpen withholding information on the same so that they and their families can receive a dose first is concerning. Access to doses is guided by privilege and connections, not by need and rights.

Let us not for a moment pretend that COVID-19 has not been a disaster of

neoliberal and privatization and the underfunding of public health. More concerning is perhaps the theory that pandemics are connected to deforestation and the increased contact between unusual animal species and human beings [69] As capitalism enables more climate change and deforestation, pandemics are going to become a regular feature in our lives. Underfunded public healthcare systems will only make sure that they are manhandled and reap increasing death tolls. The only way out is sustained international action from socialists and leftists of all hues coming together to push for free healthcare for all, medicines and vaccines without patents, and against climate change. The last should not include mealy mouthed calls to watch individual action (which we should be taking anyway) but has to be a clarion cry against governments and companies that contribute the most to pollution, deforestation and climate change. To prevent further climate change and pandemic mortality, we need structural change that only international socialist collaborations can provide.

Just when the world needed a strong socialist response to a pandemic that has killed millions, we have had to deal with the most horrific of neoliberal policies sold to us as innovation and efficiency. Instead of a people’s vaccine which many in shades of the left have already called for (which gives me hope), we have been served arch capitalism. The world does not need vaccine princes, it needs an angry mass of people with a strong will to demolish capitalism.

Source **Radical Socialist**, with the following note: This is a guest post by a socialist and feminist militant on an important topic. How from early 2020 the Government of India has been treating vaccination as it has treated everything - for the benefits of monopoly capital, and for the political gains of the BJP. - Administrator, Radical Socialist website

“A turning point in the Palestinian struggle”

8 June 2021, by Wissam al-Haj

“This war is different”

Gaza, that open-air prison, once again saw its skies ablaze with missiles and the colonizer’s anger. Since the guns fell silent, 55 days after the start of the 2014 clashes, the war has not stopped in Gaza, it has instead taken another form: blockade, negotiations on reconstruction and starvation of the inhabitants, orchestrated by Israel with the complicity of regional regimes and the so-called international community. For its part, the resistance in Gaza, with all its factions, continued to strengthen its capacities. Israel has repeatedly threatened an operation against Gaza, and the resistance has asserted its readiness to confront this threat. No one was unaware that the battle for Gaza was inevitably to come. The only unknown in the equation was the context and the timing.

“This war is different”: a phrase you hear among Gazans with every war and every escalation. But this battle is genuinely different, whether in the unprecedented unanimity in supporting the resistance, or in its evolving capacities, or because of the feeling that Gaza is no longer alone. It is also different because of the enormity of the destruction that the colonial state’s missiles inflicted on humans and buildings.

Gaza was not alone

Because with the acceleration of the course of events in Jerusalem and the call of some inhabitants of the city that Gaza to enter the front line, the people of Gaza have not hesitated in turn to put pressure on the leaders of the resistance factions, demanding support for Jerusalem, despite their full awareness of the risk of killings and devastation that this could entail

for them. This is why the few voices that criticized the rocket strikes at the start of the clash remained marginal, since most of them came from outside the besieged Gaza Strip, and they quickly fell silent because of the unprecedented broad popular support for the action of the resistance.

It’s certain that the military and political leaders of the resistance factions heeded these demands. But the most decisive factor remained the resistance’s conviction that this was the most appropriate time for a confrontation that would come sooner or later. With the launch of the resistance’s first rocket salute, settlers stormed the area around the al-Aqsa Mosque and cheers from Palestinians spread across the country.

For more than a decade, the inhabitants of Gaza have become accustomed, during wars and waves of escalation, to bearing the brunt of the battles on their own, while in the rest of Palestine the question was confined to demonstrations of support in the West Bank (when the Palestinian Authority allowed this) and the same was true in the occupied interior (within the limits of Israeli goodwill). The great surprise of this clash is that Gaza was not left alone to the murderous Israeli machine, despite the repression by the Authority in Ramallah of any solidarity action and any attempt to defy the colonial state from the areas of the West Bank it controls. The inhabitants of all the towns and villages of Palestine came out, from Jaffa and Haifa to the Triangle [of Galilee], to Al-Jalil and Al-Naqab. The city of Lod has become the icon of the most violent clash, thus belying the legend of “the specificity of the situation inside the Green Line”. All of this revived Palestinians’ ability to dream and their full readiness to rise up to continue the battle for freedom.

Palestinians surprise themselves

This shook Israel and was a traumatic wake-up call for its people. The army and intelligence services considered Gaza as a secondary front which could simply be placed under siege, while buying the silence of the resistance by allowing the passage of some goods and aid, which allows people to survive, nothing more. As for the other front, the enemy believed they had already settled the business and had moved it away from the heart of the conflict since the Nakba of 1948. But Tel Aviv, once far away from the battlefields, has received a deluge of rockets, and the Palestinian masses are now revolting in the very heart of the main cities of the colonial state. There is no longer a safe place in Israel. And it gave a great moral boost to the people in Gaza, who began to closely follow all the information and images of what is happening in the towns and villages, from which they had been driven. Better still, for many of them, talking about return or release now seems a question to be discussed rationally and no longer a dream that is difficult to achieve. This is how the Palestinians have surprised themselves, as if discovering an extraordinary strength enabling them to overcome all the shackles of the dream.

It is in this sense that the Gazan activist, Awssaj, wrote on his twitter account: “The best thing will be that after these days, when you talk about the liberation of Palestine, you will be taken for an optimist, but never again for a dreamer, or even for a madman”. For his part, Rafat Abu Aish tweeted from Bir Essabâa: “Even if the liberation does not take place today, it is enough that everyone has realized that it is possible!”. [...]

No one yet knows how this round of the conflict will end, what is certain, however, is that it has broken all the political ceilings created by the various Palestinian political parties, which must also rethink their action in the light of this event or disappear.

Likewise, the impact of this round on the conscience of the Palestinians will remain engraved as a turning point in the history of their struggle. And despite the great pain and deep wounds, the people, with Gaza's usual stubbornness, refuse to be victims,

they prefer to be the spark that ignites the flame.

*Translated from the French version in **l'Anticapitaliste**. Full version in French and Arabic on [Assafirarabi](#). Translated by Saïda Charfeddine.*

Struggle continues against military regime

7 June 2021, by **Correspondents l'Anticapitaliste**

On 19 May, a large-scale demonstration was to take place. The Chadian Ministry of the Interior broke its own promise and had it banned at the last moment. From dawn, the capital was cordoned off by police and "red berets", who violently dispersed gatherings with live ammunition and rounded up suspects at random. This did not prevent the most determined demonstrators, in N'Djamena, as in Bongor, Mondou or Sarh, from going out to defy the military to shout slogans and burn French flags. The day after the banned demonstration, the Minister of Higher Education of the civilian transitional government, set up by the WCL, had to flee the university where she had come to promote the new regime, after being booed and pelted by the students.

A very measured opposition

The failure of the demonstration is not only explained by the violence of the repression. While almost all Chadian opposition political parties unanimously denounced Idriss Deby's re-election to a sixth presidential term before 20 April, the two main parties, the National Union for Development and Renewal (UNDR) and the Party for Liberties and Development (PLD), which provided large contingents during the demonstrations, rallied to

the new regime in the name of 'transition'. Thus, Mahamat Ahmat Alhabo, leader of the PLD, has just entered the government as Minister of Justice. For his part, Saleh Kebzabo of the UNDR has been more cautious, contenting himself with sending two of his associates into the government without getting directly involved.

For the time being, the protest is therefore led by Wakit Tamma ("The time has come"), a very broad-based collective that brings together most of the opposition forces to the CMT. It includes first and foremost the Union of Trade Unions of Chad (UST), which led many strikes in the previous period, associations of the unemployed, pensioners and unemployed students, as well as the League of Human Rights and the few politicians who hope to be able to play their card in the event of radical change, such as Succès Masra, the head of a small party but with a certain reputation because of his career as an economist at the African Development Bank and his presence in the demonstrations last February. However, this politician, presented as the leader of the protest by the Western media, limits himself to calling for "a civil-military transition process", a formula that Macron did not hesitate to use during Idriss Deby's funeral, and which says a lot about his perfect compatibility with the interests of FrancAfrique.

An explosive situation

From this point of view, there is not much to expect from this very measured opposition for all those civil servants, precarious workers, pensioners or young people from the working class areas of N'Djamena, "unemployed graduates", etc., who have been taking part in the demonstrations for years.

The revolt against the military junta is itself part of a series of social movements and strikes, such as that of public service workers during the winter of 2018-2019 to demand their salaries, which had been unpaid for months. The movement then spilled over into other sectors, such as Cotontchad, one of the country's main companies. A new public sector strike broke out last January, a few weeks before the demonstrations against Idriss Deby's 6th term in office.

More generally, the protest against misery and the phenomenal increase in inequality - all the more visible with the arrival of the oil windfall in the 2000s - has continued to grow over time. It is this situation, and not just the death of Deby and the replacement by his son, that makes the situation in Chad so explosive today.

Biden, the Oil Companies, and the Environment

6 June 2021, by **Dan La Botz**

Joseph Biden ran for president as an environmental candidate, pledging to address global warming. On day one as president, he blocked all new gas and oil leases on federal lands and water, stopped the Keystone XL pipeline, and took the United States back into the Paris Climate Agreement. Now he is proposing a 2022 budget with \$36 billion (\$14 billion more than last year) for clean energy, improved water infrastructure, and more research. He also proposes to spend \$174 million to develop electric vehicle infrastructure—though the Republican Party wants only a small fraction of that.

Environmental groups like the League of Conservation Voters, the Sierra Club, Environmental Defense Fund, and Sunrise, spent some \$1.5 million in the 2020 elections mostly for Biden and other Democrats. Yet, in the last few months the Biden administration has given the go-ahead to various projects either on federal land or necessitating federal approval: the Willow project, a large oil drilling project on Alaska's North Slope, oil and leases in Wyoming, and the continued use of the Dakota Access pipeline. All of these projects were

approved by Donald Trump's administration and fiercely opposed by environmental organizations. As Gregory Stewart, a leader of the Alaska chapter of the Sierra Club, said of the Alaska project, "They are opening up a lane for the oil and gas industry to cause irreparable harm to Arctic communities' public health and wildlife habitats."

Since the COVID pandemic, the environmental movement—unlike the racial justice movement's spectacular demonstrations—has not been very visible. While local environmental protests continue, there is no large, active national movement. Environmental activists have focused on support for the Green New Deal legislation sponsored by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Sen. Ed Markey.

"We're going to transition to a 100 percent carbon free-economy, that is more unionized, more just, more dignified and guarantees more health care and housing than we ever have before," Ocasio-Cortez says. "Do we intend on sending a message to the Biden administration that we need to go bigger and bolder? The answer is absolutely yes." The Democratic Socialists of America says of the Green

New Deal proposals, "they are conversation starters—not complete and adequate blueprints." While the GND calls for a transition to a more sustainable economy and a more just society, it does not take on the oil and gas companies directly.

The more radical wing of the U.S. environmental movement challenges the culture of growth and argues that carbon emissions can only be reduced by virtually stopping oil drilling and coal mining and closing down and drastically retrenching the industries that drive them: steel, auto, and plastics, among others. To do that, one would have to nationalize the energy industries and bring them under the control of a genuinely democratic government. That is, one needs to fight for socialism as the solution to the climate crisis. As the group System Change not Climate changes states, "The current ecological crisis results from the capitalist system, which values profits for a global ruling elite over people and the planet. It must therefore be confronted through an international mass movement of working people around the world."

2 June 2021

Source: [**New Politics**](#).

Tiananmen: For a Different Kind of Remembrance

5 June 2021, by **Anonymous**

If last year's ban had any credible pretense of public health concerns

under the pandemic, this year the ban is simply a blunt political intervention

to stop mass gathering — Hong Kong has not recorded any community

transmission of Covid for over a month. Despite the ban last year, tens of thousands still showed up. For defying the ban, organizers of last year's vigil and prominent participants have been prosecuted. [70] If the message is still not clear, Hong Kong's Security Bureau has threatened anyone attending this year's vigil with up to five years in prison, and one year for simply promoting the event. [71]

Under the threat of a sweeping national security law that has criminalized a wide range of acts of dissent and with many of the organizers of the annual vigil and opposition party leadership in prison or held awaiting trials, this may be the first time that there will not be any mass gathering to publicly remember the 1989 democracy movement in any Chinese territory. As many feared, the government's suppression of opposition activists ranging from the most radical protesters to moderate democrats for their role in the 2019 protest movement and beyond has enveloped other areas of political life in Hong Kong.

June 4th held a special meaning to a generation of young and idealistic Chinese from the 1980s who dared to imagine a different political future for the country. The total and bloody clampdown on the protest movement on June 4, 1989, extinguished that hope not only for one generation but for many others who came after too. It has become more and more unimaginable that an event like the 1989 democracy movement could ever recur or indeed has actually occurred at all. For this reason alone, not even mentioning of the unacknowledged victims of the suppression, it needs to be remembered.

But it is easy and indeed very comforting to romanticize the 1989 movement, as many do with justification. This was the last truly mass movement in mainland China with progressive ideals: a student-led movement, participated in by tens of millions not just in Beijing but across the country, including organized contingents of supportive workers (at the time mostly state-sector employees prior to the wholesale privatization of the 1990s) and

ordinary citizens (many of whom put their bodies on the line to stop the tanks from rolling into the square). The moral authority of the students and their aspirations for a more just society made the movement all the more righteous and beyond controversy.

The event is all the more important because no movement since in China has matched such a scale or had such a political and emotional impact on the participants and observers for decades. And despite censorship of the event in mainland China, its memory has served to politicize later generations of young Chinese, albeit a very small minority, including myself, who discovered this event as a key moment of their own politicization.

In mainland China, such remembrance can only be confined to small pockets, which will be harshly dealt with if found out by the authorities. Nowhere has such a mass remembrance been taking place year after year as in Hong Kong. The student protests of 1989 found reverberations among Hong Kongers, young and old, in 1989, too, who demonstrated in the tens of thousands and donated in the millions to support the protesters. The subsequent crushing of the movement disillusioned many in Hong Kong who might have hoped to live under a more democratic system after the handover of the territory to Chinese rule in 1997. Out of the disappointment and disillusionment, an annual public vigil has been organized for over three decades.

But even without the bans and threats of criminal charges, some in Hong Kong have been turning away from the annual vigil. New generations of Hong Kongers are fighting their own battles against the city's erosion of freedom and waves of political prosecutions. Many are asserting their local and localist identities, and feeling much less affinity with mainland students from two generations ago or their counterparts today. Why remember June 4th when the city is burning? It feels irrelevant at best, and a political distraction from Hong Kong's own movement at worst. Do they have a point?

I admit that years ago I too had my

misgivings about such remembrance for not entirely dissimilar reasons. Had the annual vigil become too ritualized and divorced from any actual movements on the ground? After all, in mainland China there have been no movements explicitly drawing inspiration from and seeing themselves as a continuation of the 1989 democracy movement. Even apart from the state censorship of June 4th commemorations, does the event resonate at all with young Chinese today, or Hong Kong youth for that matter? I was not sure it would, and I am still not sure now.

My own ambivalence arises out of a sense of frustration with the too comfortable way of remembering June 4th. It's been talked about and commemorated year after year, in pretty much the same ways and often by the same former student leaders who for the most part had not been able to build new movements, to the point of mythologizing. I feel less and less a connection to a remembrance stripped of much of its content and incapable of critical self-reflection. It has too often morphed into an ossified simple story of "student-led protests crushed by authoritarian government."

Is a different kind of remembering possible?

I think it is, but it has to start with recognizing the movement for what it was, with all its mistakes and limits, and remembering and honoring it by transcending it. There is much that was problematic within the movement, none of which is surprising to any observer. The movement leadership's refusal to align with the masses of workers who came out again and again to support the students - until the very last days when they realized they would need their support against a strong state refusing to back down - deprived the movement of a truly mass base and source of social power.

Factionalism and disunity within the student leadership weakened the movement well before the clearing of the square on June 4th. Failure to consolidate the movement outside of the square, not only in the universities but in the workplaces, made the movement dependent on continuing

student occupation of the square, but not much else as an additional and alternative basis of its power.

It was also a movement limited by a vision for a rule-based capitalist transition. It aimed to bring about a more politically plural capitalist society by curtailing some of its excesses and official corruption, but it was not a challenge to the development of capitalism itself. And, as an indictment of their political judgments, much of the student leadership, many of whom were exiled or self-exiled in the years since, later aligned themselves with questionable and right-wing politics out of steps with progressive movements.

None of this is to negate the mass movement in 1989 itself, and one may well read these criticisms as unfair to the at the time extremely young student leadership who had little political experience up to that point. But to make the remembrance relevant, and more than just a comforting moment, it has to go beyond the romanticization. The

remembrance, either in Hong Kong or elsewhere outside China, cannot be simply a retelling of the heroics and a condemnation of the government for its brutality, as true as we find them.

It should also not stop at the recognition of mistakes and limits. How to avoid their repetition and find better ways to build mass movements is the real goal. The social movements in China, be they labor, feminist, LGBTQ, environmental, or rural, in their current forms have largely emerged only after 1989, and later generations of youth have played important roles in these movements. Decades of deepening capitalism, accelerated particularly after 1989, means that today's movements for a more just society in China are different from that of 1989. The issues animating the student protesters in 1989, abuse of political power and lack of accountability, are surely still alive today. But if the movement of 1989 had presented an image of a uniform movement with unified demands which in practice subordinate diverse interests (e.g.

peasants, workers) to that of the students, today's pluralistic social movements represent aspirations more sensitive to the needs of varying social groups and classes.

Capitalist exploitation and commodification have been driving young people, rural migrant workers, and urban white-collar employees alike, into physical and mental exhaustion against which they have resorted to rebellion. Patriarchal structures and attitudes are awakening youth to take a public stance and confront violence against women and discriminations. Youth are at the center of many of these movements; they are just as young as in the past but in many ways more politically seasoned. Only by becoming connected to them and their movements can any remembrance of a past movement stand a chance of continuing to renew itself and inspire new generations for social change.

2 June 2021

Source [New Politics](#).

Between regime crisis and a possible late {progresismo} in Peru

4 June 2021, by **Johnatan Fuentes**

What is the background to this political crisis?

The defeat of Keiko Fujimori and Fuerza Popular in the second round of the 2016 elections by Pedro Pablo Kuchinsky (PPK) opened a scenario of political tension in the institutions of the Peruvian state. A congress with a *Fujimorista* majority was formed that blocked some government measures except those of an economic nature. These political tensions worsened after the investigations into Odebrecht since it involved PPK and several former presidents such as Alejandro Toledo, Ollanta Humala and Alan García who ended up committing suicide after the progress of the

investigations against him.

The *Fujimorista* far right, Fuerza Popular, which dominated parliament, chose to use the presidential vacancy mechanism on two occasions that were finally frustrated by the understanding of a sector of Fuerza Popular led by Kenyi Fujimori, Keiko Fujimori's younger brother, with the PPK government. The progress of the investigations for corruption against PPK was overwhelming and videos were also discovered in which parliamentarians linked to the Kenyi faction negotiated with the ruling party during the second vote, which forced PPK to resign its presidential office in 2018.

The accession of Martin Vizcarra, vice president of PPK, to the presidency of the republic in March 2018 came about as a result of a brief reconciliation with *Fujimorismo* that quickly ended with the resumption of political tensions between the parliamentary majority and the ruling party. Martin Vizcarra decided to dissolve congress on 30 September 2019 with significant support from the Peruvian people in the face of the congress's great loss of prestige.

Can we talk about the new relationship of forces in the congress?

The formation of the new 2020

Congress evidenced the decline of the traditional ultra-right, Fuerza Popular and APRA, and the consolidation of emerging rights such as Alianza para el Progreso (APP) and Podemos Perú (PP). At the same time, the resurgence of the traditional centre-right through the Acción Popular party (AP), whose more oligarchic and conservative fraction had in the dissolved congress played a role as a minor partner of *Fujimorismo*. In the absence of a ruling bloc, the Partido Morado (PM), a new centre-right force, serves as a support for government measures.

Unión por el Perú (UPP) and FREPAP were the surprise of the electoral process since they were almost invisible in the electoral polls. Both political forces are located on the right, although they are more permeable to some specific progressive measures in the economic sphere and are conservative in terms of gender or environmental issues. UPP is a coalition based in nationalism and linked to Antauro Humala, brother of former president Ollanta Humala, while Frepap is a theocratic organization with important grassroots community work with community logics.

On the left, only the Frente Amplio obtained parliamentary representation, although with various tensions within its organization. Nuevo Perú participated in an alliance with Juntos por el Perú (JP) but did not win seats, repeating the poor performance of the regional elections of October 2018. Peru Libre (PL), also did not achieve parliamentary representation in these elections.

Is the regime crisis generating restorationist manoeuvres as a counterpoint?

The political crisis worsened with the political manoeuvring in the parliament of the emergent rights, UPP, *Fujimorismo* and a sector of the AP, who voted in favour of the presidential vacancy of Martín Vizcarra on 9 November. Just as Vizcarra institutionally closed the congress last year, the new congress dismissed Vizcarra using the institutional mechanisms under the pretext of the corruption cases that he is accused of. In both political sectors,

institutional mechanisms have been used to politically nullify each other, leading us to this crisis due to their conflicting spurious interests.

AP quickly declared through its organic channels that it would not join the new Manuel Merino cabinet, as well as the different parliamentary forces that voted for the presidential vacancy. The assumption of Manuel Merino, representative of the conservative sector of the AP, to government did not have popular legitimacy and his cabinet was made up of far-right groups such as Coordinadora Republicana, former Aprista ministers, representatives of business organisations which accounts for the level of political isolation of the brief government and its weak alliance with the emergent rightists. All this reflects the internal fissures in the bourgeois parties and the precariousness of the institutional framework of the neoliberal constitution of 1993 that allowed the political impasse that has been going on for years, since we are actually witnessing a profound crisis of the neoliberal political regime that triggered the awakening of the youth and popular outrage nationwide.

Through broad mobilizations of a democratic nature young people achieved the resignation of Manuel Merino in less than a week, which later made possible the formation of a new government, now under Francisco Sagasti, of the Partido Morado. This new defeat of the right-wing, emerging and conservative opposition by the liberal right had the following factors: 1. The support of a sector of the media related to the ruling party 2. The neutrality of the armed forces 3. The erosion of the Peruvian neoliberal institutional framework. 4. An awakening of youth as it had not been seen in years.

In December 2020, the agricultural proletariat of the southern and northern coast of Peru embarked on a process of struggle against the special labour regime that has governed them for decades, the so-called Chlimper Law. Of course, this struggle did not have the support of the mass media, nor of the liberal right; even so, the historically questioned law was repealed.

Some progressive neoliberal/liberal right intellectuals tried to discredit this struggle by linking it to an alleged coup attempt, now against Francisco Sagasti. The truth was that it did not have the support of any parliamentary sector except the Frente Amplio. Somehow the coup/anti-coup cleavage has been installed in political debate as a form of renewal of the classic Fujimori/anti-Fujimori cleavage, with the usual aim of subordinating the left.

It seems that a disintegration of the right is taking place, is there a danger of the rise of the extreme right before the 2021 elections?

According to the latest electoral poll by the Peruvian Studies Institute (IEP) released on 28 March, two weeks before the general elections, the traditional centre-right Acción Popular party (AP), which is supporting the presidential candidacy of Jonhy Lescano, leads the electoral preferences with 11.4% of voting intentions. Lescano represents the AP political sector, apparently the majority, which did not support the dismissal of Manuel Merino. This political sector is more permeable to specific short-term progressive measures in the economic-social plane but is framed in the social market economy and therefore represents a *sui generis* variant of progressive neoliberalism. They oppose the wealth tax and do not propose a comprehensive reform of the pension system. In addition, several of its candidates for Congress represent the most oligarchic and conservative sectors of the party.

In second place is the businessman Rafael López with 9.7%, from the far-right Renovación Popular party which went from being a stranger in national politics to achieving sustained growth in electoral polls, although this latest survey shows relative stagnation. He is located to the right of *Fujimorismo*, constituting an open and unbridled extreme right political project, different from *Fujimorista* pragmatism. Rafael López has declared that he wants to prevent Peru from becoming Cuba or Venezuela at all costs, he is a member of Opus Dei and strongly opposes the legalization of abortion and the gender approach. In sum, he represents a real

danger to the democratic freedoms of the working class, women, and sexual dissidents, entering into tune with extreme right-wing political phenomena like Bolsonaro in Brazil.

Fourth place is occupied by Hernando De Soto with 8.5% of voting intentions, from the Avanza País party. Hernando is an organic intellectual of the Peruvian extreme right, he was a presidential advisor to the autocrat Alberto Fujimori who implanted neoliberalism in Peru with blood and fire, and recently advised Keiko Fujimori in the 2016 presidential campaign. Fifth place is occupied by George Forsyth with 8.2%, from the right-wing Victoria Nacional party and sixth place is held by Keiko Fujimori with 7.9%, from the far-right Fuerza Popular party that continues the nefarious legacy of *Fujimorismo*.

The right-wing dispersion is shocking, and political forces such as Victoria Nacional and Fuerza Popular characterized by a certain pragmatism and political accommodation will surely try to capture votes from the political centre of the national electorate. *Fujimorismo* has been partially defeated within the framework of the inter-bourgeois struggle in recent years and has not been able to regain the political/electoral weight it previously had. And in this scenario, it is possible that their traditional/conservative vote will migrate to other candidates from the extreme right like Rafael López or Hernando de Soto.

Do you think it is pertinent to refer to the contradictions of late *progresismo* to understand the Peruvian situation?

Verónica Mendoza, originally from Nuevo Peru, is participating for the second time in the presidential elections, now through the electoral coalition now through the electoral coalition Juntos por el Perú (JP) and occupies third place in the IEP survey with 9.6% of voting intentions, a relative advance after a few weeks of stagnation in the polls. Unlike the 2016 electoral process that was promoted by the Frente Amplio, the parties of the traditional left (PCP, PCP-PR, MS) with a bureaucratic character and known for their policy

of class collaboration, make up the leading team of the coalition that supports the candidacy.

JP's program is anti-neoliberal, neo-developmental and soft post-extractivist, consisting of redistributive economic measures that do not intend to seriously modify the privatized management of natural resources in our country and that strongly promote productive diversification. Regarding the environment, they propose territorial ordering, economic ecological zoning, and oversight by indigenous peoples on energy projects in forest areas; while in the aspect of gender and sexual diversity they propose comprehensive sexual education, equal marriage and decriminalization of abortion, among other interesting measures embodied in the so-called Micaela Plan. Regarding the agrarian question, they propose a second agrarian reform that, centrally, consists of granting credits to small farmers without posing a direct questioning of the concentration of land, which is the main problem in agriculture. The *progresismo* that Verónica Mendoza represents is in tune with the new late progressive governmental processes in Argentina and Mexico, in terms of moderation of the proposals for change and geopolitical alignment. Anti-capitalist tendencies that dispute the strategic and programmatic orientation do not find a place within their political project.

Perú Libre (PL) is a party of a Stalinist matrix which supports the presidential candidacy of Pedro Castillo, a teacher and former social leader who was prominent in the teachers' strike in 2017 during the neoliberal government of PPK. He occupies seventh place with 4.3% of voting intentions, which shows a certain growth and a good campaign in areas of the southern Andean region that by tradition tend to be oppositional voters and lead struggles.

PL's program is anti-neoliberal, neo-developmental, and extractivist. From the beginning of its campaign, it emphasized the proposal to nationalize natural resources as a central axis, but at the same time it is quite limited in the aspects of

environment and gender. In general, it proposes redistributive measures, media regulation, popular consultation mechanisms to decide on the composition of the Constitutional Court and a new constitution through a popular constituent assembly. Like JP, it lacks anti-capitalist tendencies within the party that dispute the political orientation. This project expresses another variant of Peruvian *progresismo* but very marked by a certain regionalism and campism, too uncritical of the extractivist policy of progressive Latin American governments.

Both leftist formations lack a policy of promoting popular self-organization and have not managed to build a project of popular majorities that will overturn the electoral board. And although electoral polls are not defining, they do provide a certain approximation to the performance of the political forces in contention. There is 20.2% of the national electorate that will spoil or void their vote, which reflects the process of political disaffection exacerbated by the Covid 19 health crisis. It is key to target this sector of the people, but with radical proposals that go beyond regionalism and the moderation still present in the campaign of the left.

In this electoral process, there is no anti-capitalist candidacy, and it is very possible that the second electoral round will take place between the right wing candidates, which would mean a disaster for the lives of working people who suffer the onslaught of the social, ecological, economic and health crisis. Given the possible rise of the extreme right with Rafael López and the consolidation of the traditional centre-right of the AP, it is essential that the radical left deploy a tactic in accordance with the political tasks of the moment.

The approach of a critical vote for Verónica Mendoza and JP in the first round aims to hinder an inter-rightist ballot that prolongs the political crisis still unresolved in the dynamics known until now. Recognizing the limitations and problems of JP, considering its relative better electoral position, and assessing the progressive nature of its proposals on issues of sovereignty, environment and gender.

If the Peruvian radical left wishes to rebuild the political representation of the popular classes, it must come out of its isolation by building bridges with the most combative social sectors that have certain expectations in reformist projects without adapting to their leadership, while dedicating

ourselves to building a radical political alternative to the left of *progresismo* and open to pluralism. Strategic delimitation or building from below around the perspective of the constituent popular assembly are insufficient if they are not articulated

to a project of power, which is the ongoing strategic task for this political period.

28 March 2021

Original; **Punto de Vista Internacional**.

Death, housing and taxes - Upcoming threats to Irish economic strategy

3 June 2021, by **John McAnulty**

What is not so clearly seen is that the housing crisis arises when the Irish model of collaboration with transnational capital is working normally. The low tax rate is compensated by the volume of capital inflow which generates the claims of miracle growth. The same process does not produce enough revenue to provide public health or housing services, which are dependent on privatization and capital inflow.

The bad news is that this terrible system of exploitation which enriches the elite but serves the workers so badly, is almost certainly in decline, with the Dublin government lacking a convincing alternative.

The immediate cause of the crisis is the election of Biden as US president. His appointment as leader of the US Secretary to the Treasury Janet Yellen, announced that she would drive for a global minimum on corporation tax.

Most economists agree that she will not be able to meet that target, but they also agree that there will be a great deal more pressure to iron out inconsistencies and that a similar process will roll out in Europe.

All this is bad news for Irish capitalism. Through thick and thin they have held to a corporate rate of 12.3%, sacrificing jobs, public sector social provision and housing to the Holy Grail of low corporation tax (in practice it can be much lower than the

formal rate).

All societies need capital investment. The imperialist powers achieved this by robbing colonies they had invaded. For other societies investment involves what is called primitive accumulation, where worker's surplus value is used to build up industrial strength. However, this is quite a slow and painful process and even a socialist government may look to strike deals with transnational companies.

Ireland long ago gave up dreams of an independent capitalist economy and the major goal of the government became a mad scramble to attract inward investment. The government claims that a low tax regime for corporations is central to attracting this investment.

The CEOs of the companies say tax is not the draw that Dublin believes. They claim that what they require above all else is stability - knowing in advance what costs they will face. What they also say is that the slavish willingness of the Irish government to cater to their every whim is an enormous draw.

But is that level of servitude a requirement? Transnational companies make placement decisions on strategic considerations. Some of Ireland's recommendations are as a gateway to Europe, use of English and a relatively high level of skilled

workers.

One can map out an alternative approach to transnationals, but the big picture is that Ireland was here before. The oil boom came before the transnational finance boom and the Irish response was instructive.

In 1958 Madonna Oil, a consortium of US speculators, were granted exclusive exploration drilling rights by the minister for industry and commerce, Seán Lemass, for the sum of £500. Later Whiddy island was rented out for the same annual amount only for the state to meet the environmental cost of a massive fire. More recently Shell was granted permission for a large high pressure gas pipe down the West Coast that involved mass state repression of local protesters.

One Danish government oil advisor narrated with despair conversations with minister Justin Keating in 1975. Keating was considered a radical in looking for a greater tax intake from the oil companies but balked at the high rate suggested by Denmark and ignored the proposal for mirror management structures, with state officials working in parallel with oil executives, that would have left the state in a position to take overall control of the industry.

The oil boom has largely come and gone without any substantial gains for the population as a whole. Now we are

at the tail end of large scale capital investment. Intel has promised a large investment in chip manufacturing, but at this technical level of production few jobs are produced.

The majority of current investment is purely financial and involves deformation of the Irish economy and legal system. The International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) operates in the centre of Dublin, largely in total secrecy and runs tax scams for thousands of offshore companies. The money flows through Dublin, and the sheer volume of capital generates income for the government but is otherwise totally unproductive in terms of the Irish economy.

The whole of the Irish economy is built around this revenue stream on the one hand and sovereign debt and the constraints of the European Central Bank on the other. Within these narrow confines government and trade union leaders agree the limits of health, housing, public sector serves and pay rates. Forced tax changes from the US and Europe could break the system.

Dublin has a plan B. The proposed alternative is education, science and state investment. The problem is that to a certain extent that is the plan of most capitalist societies. None are well placed because they all, over decades, replaced broad "blue sky" research and replaced it with narrow support of industrial and military interests, with many sectors organising against education and science and subsidising religious bigotry in order to cover up issues such as global warming.

The Irish state itself has a weak deformed economy. The most fundamental problem is illustrated by the fact that, when the International Financial Services Centre was opened in Dublin and declared that ultra-low tax rates were available, the first firms through the door were Irish. Technically the Irish government represents a comprador capitalist class, running the economy in the interest of transnational firms, and

thus unlikely agents of a national economic resurgence. It is true that there is a class of small entrepreneurs, but the extent to which they are an independent force, rather than outsourcing from big tech, is highly questionable.

One perspective is summed up by proposals for a green new deal. The proposals so far are quite modest, amending the existing economy is a very gradualist way and depending for funding on the European Central Bank.

The proposals for science investment and a green revolution are largely fantastical. The reality is that Ireland's low tax binge is coming to an end and the immediate solution is a ready supply of low cost money supplied through central banks at almost zero interest. The post Covid-19 era will be an era of repayment and it the working class who will be asked to pick up the tab.

So, what's the alternative? At the moment workers do not believe that there is one. That's why they plod grimly behind political organizations that are obvious charlatans, accept pay deals that are in reality wage cuts and struggle desperately to adapt to crushing rent and mortgage payments. Socialist groups are part of this general retreat and focus on parliamentary action, reformist proposals on improving capitalism and the illusion of a "left" government led by Sinn Fein.

Socialists must paint a picture of what a just society and economy would look like. We must set a goal of repudiating the sovereign debt that acts as a silent barrier to much progress. The International Financial Services Centre must be investigated, and charges and fines brought against the crooked companies, transnational and local, who hide in its shadows. Unused property would be expropriated to allow housing for all. Church control of health and education and the built-in oppression of women and the working class in these institutions must end. Mass free public transport should be provided. The national herd

should be abolished to develop a mixed agricultural economy and our prosperity in general would be based partly on geography - agriculture, mariculture and renewable energy and partly in an explosion in education. Working collectively in a group, having control of your life, requires totally different skills from those installed by a regimented Irish education system.

A socialist government would resource a "blue sky" science research centre. It would recognize that science is an international activity and seek to attract migrants, especially those trying to secure human survival in those areas in the world most affected by climate change and industrial pollution.

How would such a society be built? The starting point is what already is: housing action groups, community organizations, radical press, workers' action groups, defenders of women's rights. Even at a low level these groups find themselves immediately in confrontation with the state, union bureaucrats, NGOs and the reformist left.

The Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky, charged in court with preparing a revolution, answered by saying that he was in fact preparing for a revolution. No one can seriously argue that Irish workers are in a revolutionary ferment. What we do argue is that they will find themselves with no choice but to confront their oppressors and that revolutionaries should prepare today for that moment.

There are two further points. Ireland is a small country. Revolutionary waves do not normally originate here but reflect global trends that reach our shores. The wave does not yet exist, but there are ripples on every continent, growing in pitch. The failures of imperialism in Ireland mirror failures on every continent.

Secondly, we believe that the revolution will require a revolutionary party. No new revolutionary wave can ignore the memory of past struggles or lessons learnt at such great cost.

The Vendôme Column and the internationalism of the Commune

2 June 2021, by **Jaime Pastor** , **Miguel Urbán Crespo**

From the proclamation of the Third Republic, in the revolt of 4 September 1870, a gradual duality of powers emerged within Paris between the Government of National Defence and the Central Committee of the National Guard. A dispute centred on who held the legitimacy of the republican revolution of September and the resistance against the Prussian troops in national defence. But it was not only a clash of legitimacies, but gradually, as the siege of Paris progressed, a clash of projects between the bourgeois Republic and the universal Republic. As Marx put it in "The Civil War in France" the slogan of 'social republic' expressed "a vague aspiration after a republic that was not only to supersede the monarchical form of class rule, but class rule itself. The Commune was the positive form of that republic." In this sense, "it is important to recall the vehemence with which many Commune survivors combated the idea that they had acted to 'save the republic'. 'The republic of our dreams was surely not the one we have. We wanted it democratic, social and universal, not plutocratic'." (Ross, 2015)

In fact, the Universal Republic, far from implying a return to the principles of the bourgeois Revolution of 1789, rather marked a break with its legacy, relying on a proletarian internationalism truly consistent with the idea of equality and fraternity. This break was especially symbolic with the burning of the guillotine in Place de Voltaire on 10 April, breaking any equivalence between the revolution and the scaffold; and the destruction on 16 May of the Vendôme column as an anti-imperialist reaffirmation: as Louise Michel said, "it was decided to demolish the Vendôme column, a symbol of brutal force, an affirmation of imperial

despotism, because this monument threatened the brotherhood of the peoples".

For most historians, the internationalism of the Commune is measured in the number of foreigners it incorporated under its banner and the importance of the positions they held: a Hungarian-German, Frankel, as Minister of Labour, a Pole, Dombrowski, in charge of defence, and a Russian, Dimitrieff, as founder of the Women's Union. And the truth is that the presence of so many foreigners in the Commune obsessed the Versailles. In fact, the image of the Commune full of Poles, Germans and Italians was a common insult in anti-Communard discourse, generated in part by the recurrent assimilation of the foreigner with the figure of the "foreign agitator" and of the Commune with the International, accused of serving hidden foreign interests contrary to those of the nation.

Marx himself had to deny these accusations in "The Civil War in France": "The police-tinged bourgeois mind naturally figures to itself the International Working Men's Association as acting in the manner of a secret conspiracy, its central body ordering, from time to time, explosions in different countries. Our Association is, in fact, nothing but the international bond between the most advanced working men in the various countries of the civilized world."

But the internationalism of the Commune was much more than the number or name of the foreigners who participated in its development. As Marx affirmed, the Commune "was an international government in the full sense of the word (...) that annexed the workers of the entire world to France". The internationalism of the

Commune was constructed as an antithesis to the colonialism and nationalist chauvinism of the Empire. Perhaps the most genuine example of communal internationalism as an antagonism to French imperialism, was the decree of 12 April by which the demolition of the Vendôme column was decided. Which said the following

"We consider the imperial column in Place Vendôme to be a monument to barbarism, a symbol of brute force and false glory, an affirmation of militarism, a denial of international law, a permanent insult from the victors to the vanquished, a perpetual attack against one of the great principles of the French Republic, fraternity:

Decree:

Sole Article: The column in Place Vendôme will be demolished".

Finally, the Vendôme column was not destroyed until a month later, on 16 May, when the Commune was already on the verge of exhaustion and defeat, which gives the fact, in addition to its political value, a certain heroic connotation. And if we judge the strength and political impact of the gesture by the reactions it generated among its detractors who considered it an attack on the very history of France, we will understand the importance of the act itself at the height of colonialism.

The strength of the Commune's iconoclastic gesture as an anti-hierarchical and anti-imperialist act can be measured by the hysteria recorded in the narration of the event by the Versailles, who denounced the demolition of the column as an attempt to destroy French history itself. The Communards were branded as "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, 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 its idea of a “universal republic”.

The truth is that the “iconoclastic fury” has been reproduced in

practically all revolutions or protest movements throughout the 150 years of history from the demolition of the Vendôme column to the present day. It is thus clear 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 the past but living elements of our present, so that the “iconoclastic fury” against supposedly past statues gives a historical dimension to the struggles

of the present against racism and oppression. A red thread that connects the demolition of the Vendôme column during the Commune and its internationalist idea of a “universal republic” with the anti-racist protests in the streets of half the world. Remembering the Commune 150 years later should not be understood, therefore, as a nostalgic or academic exercise, but as a militant one, rescuing essential political legacies such as the Commune’s anti-imperialist internationalism for our present struggles.

From the electoral conjuncture to the recovery of popular initiative

1 June 2021, by Igor Goicovic Donoso

At the level of the delegates to the constitutional convention, the right, grouped in the *Vamos por Chile* list, obtained only 37 of the 155 available places. But the fate of other traditional parties, such as the Christian Democrats (2) or the Radical Party (1), was not very different. Only the Socialist Party, which made up the *Lista del Apruebo* (List of Approval) with the aforementioned, escaped this trend, electing 15 representatives. For its part, the self-proclaimed progressive left (*Lista Apruebo Dignidad*), elected 28 delegates to the convention, with standout results for *Revolución Democrática* (9), the Communist Party (7) and *Convergencia Social* (6).

Discounting the 17 seats corresponding to indigenous peoples, the remaining 48 seats correspond to a wide and heterogeneous range of independent candidates, among which the 22 elected by the *Lista del Pueblo* stand out. A highly fragmented scenario that does not allow anyone to make predictions regarding the text that should be subject to a plebiscite (on an undetermined date), 60 days after the delivery of the proposal by the Constitutional Convention.

The right, undoubtedly the hardest hit group here, did not attain the one third of delegates needed to block the reforms that the popular movement has been demanding for years: recognition of civil, social and political rights, redistribution of wealth, nationalization of natural resources, environmental protection, plurinationality and so on.

However, the representation of the interests of the ruling classes has also ceased to be monopolized by this group for a long time, so that the defence of the institutional framework of the current system of domination will also be carried out by some delegates on the list of *Apruebo* and *Apruebo Dignidad*. Moreover, many of the current “independent” delegates have political trajectories that allow us to presume that they will vote to contain the most radical reforms.

Thus, to suppose that the summation of delegates from the lists of *Apruebo*, *Apruebo Dignidad*, *Independents* and *Indigenous Peoples* (118), will inexorably lead to the profound transformation of the current institutional system constitutes naivety. The ruling classes have undoubtedly suffered a severe blow,

but they have shown historically and in the recent past (*Agreement for Social Peace and the New Constitution* of 15 November 2019), their great capacity to react and their community of interests in defence of their privileges. The enemy is weakened but is in no way defeated.

In fact, if we look at the results of the remaining electoral processes, the scenario becomes quite nuanced. In the regional governorship elections, the *Pacto Chile Vamos* again had an unfavourable result (19.4% of the votes), but it placed 9 candidates in 16 regions into the second round of this election. The prognosis for them is not good, but it reveals that they continue to have a significant electoral flow.

But the candidates of those who have administered the system since the early 1990s is not as bad as in the case of the Constitutional Convention. The *Unidad Constituyente* list, which brought together the Christian Democrats, Socialists and Party for Democracy, obtained 25.9% of the votes, electing two governors (*Aysén* and *Magallanes*) in the first round and getting 11 more into the second round, with high expectations of being elected. The *Frente Amplio*, in turn,

managed to directly elect the governor of Valparaíso and aspires to win in the second round in Tarapacá and Santiago.

The independents, in this case, appear much more diminished. They did not win any governor's office in the first round and placed only three candidates in the second round. In one case (Atacama), the candidate is a former socialist activist, in another (Maule), it is a lawyer specialized in citizen security issues and, finally in Bio Bío there is a former Christian Democrat activist.

But while in the constitutional convention and the gubernatorial elections, the political representation of the traditional elite has deteriorated, at the local level, which forms the basis of the political power of the territories, the scenario looks much more favourable, according to the preliminary figures available the former Concertación parties, grouped into two different lists (Unidad por el Progreso, led by the PS and Unidos por la Dignidad, led by the DC), should elect 128 mayors out of 345. In fact, the Christian Democrats continue to have the most elected mayors (46). Further back is Chile Vamos, which elected mayors in 88 municipalities.

While the remaining lists, Chile Digno, Verde y Soberano (which included the Communists), Frente Amplio and Dignidad Ahora (the movement led by parliamentarian Pamela Jiles), managed to elect 24 mayors. The independent candidates, in turn, elected 105 mayors, but in this case a significant number of the candidates have had long political careers in the traditional parties, both the former Concertación and Chile Vamos.

It should also be noted that this time electoral participation fell significantly compared to the October 2020 plebiscite, with only 43.35% of registered voters participating. Moreover, in some popular municipalities of the Metropolitan region, this participation was below the national average: La Pintana (36.3%), San Bernardo (37.0%), Independencia (37.9%), Estación Central (38.2%), El Bosque (38.7%), Recoleta (municipality led by the CP presidential candidate, 40.0%), Lo

Espejo (40.9%), Conchalí (41.1%).

The pandemic situation affecting the country, the multiplicity of electoral events called at the same time, the lack of clarity regarding the proposals underlying each event and a systematic trend towards institutional disaffiliation that has dragged on since the presidential elections of 2000 explain to a large extent this lack of interest in the process.

It is important to emphasize that no radical group or analyst (among which I include myself), can attribute this disaffiliation to the political agitation carried out by the fringe of social and political activists that chose to exclude themselves from this process. No way. The same doubts and suspicions that an important part of the population has with the traditional political elite also exist with respect to the revolutionary groups.

This forces us to reflect not only on the electoral situation, but in broader terms on the political situation and the current correlation of forces. It is evident that the adversary, the ruling classes and their political representatives, are very much weakened. But it is no less evident that this weakness extends to the field of revolutionary social and political actors.

The popular sectors have not arrived at the Constitutional Convention with a common program. Those who have acceded to this body, taking on the representation of the popular sectors, only share a diagnosis: "This is what we do not want". But they do not share a constitutional platform that is capable of becoming an option for the workers and the people. This being the case, and beyond the goodwill or consequence of the popular conventions, a constitutional text (consensus) may end up being sanctioned, which will not reflect the set of expectations of the popular camp.

In the signing of this agreement, the capacity for adaptation and negotiation developed by the conventional delegates from Chile Vamos, the former Concertación and the Frente Amplio, will have an important influence, a provision that

many of its leaders have already rushed to point out.

Being wary of these manoeuvres and accompanying the constitutional process with a systematic and permanent mobilization appears as a fundamental requirement. But it is also essential that popular sectors get together and discuss the constitutional proposals that will be brought to the Convention. Only the articulation of a Program of radical changes with a state of permanent mobilization will allow us to turn this body into an effective field of accumulation of forces.

It must also be assumed that the current convention scenario is an experience which an important segment of the popular sectors has chosen, and we cannot remain indifferent in this regard. This does not mean validating each and every one of the electoral processes to which we are summoned, much less legitimizing those who seek to become representatives of the most deprived, as they have done on previous occasions.

It is about turning these electoral events into part of a process of accumulation of forces that allows us to effectively transform ourselves into an alternative of power. At that point, it is necessary to articulate participation in the Constitutional Convention (which is already a political fact), with permanent and radical mobilization. But it is essential to give clear objectives to this mobilization and it is also necessary to scale up in the development of the different forms of struggle.

This means accompanying the constitutional debate with the mobilization of the people, not only to impose a constitutional text that endorses the expectations of the popular sectors, but also aiming to deepen the defeat of the ruling classes and, on that basis, configure a horizon of power in which the workers and the people become masters of their own destiny.

This requires that both in our territories (local space), as well as at the sectoral level (union, student, environmental, feminist organizations,

and so on), we can agitate the popular project. A decalogue that brings together the demands that have been developed in recent years, as well as the economic, social, political and cultural guidelines from which we will build a new society.

For this, it is necessary to strengthen popular organization, as a space for debate and discussion, and as an instance of agitation and mobilization. The strength of the people cannot be mortgaged in the Constitutional

Convention. It is necessary to convert our spaces of organization and struggle into deliberative spaces and, from them, transform the conventional space into a Constituent, Democratic, Free and Sovereign assembly.

The results of the current electoral situation are a political opportunity, while the Constitutional Convention is not an end in itself. But from the current situation of relative weakness of the dominant classes, we must

advance towards the formation of those instances of power, of popular power, that allow us to deploy with all its strength and energy the popular tornado that must transform not only the political institutions, but refound Chilean society from the ground up.

28 May 2021

Source: Translated by **International Viewpoint** from **Resumen “De la coyuntura electoral a la recuperación de la iniciativa popular”**.