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Reparations for Police Torture

31 July 2021, by **Dianne Feeley, Linda Loew**

Dianne Feeley and Linda Loew interviewed Aislinn Pulley for Against the Current on April 30, 2021. Aislinn Pulley is co-executive director of the Chicago Torture Justice Center, co-founder of Black Lives Matter Chicago, former organizer of We Charge Genocide and founding member of Insight Arts.

Linda Loew: With the sixth anniversary of Chicago's historic and unprecedented Reparations Ordinance, what is your evaluation of how the reparations have been implemented? What is the struggle that remains in light of the continued police violence we see across the country?

Aislinn Pulley: May 6 will make six years to the date of when the Reparations Ordinance was passed unanimously by City Council. It also will mark the fourth-year birthday of the Chicago Torture Justice Center. I think both have similar but distinct things to celebrate and learn from. With the Reparations Ordinance, it's six years since the ordinance was passed and we still don't have the memorial.

The five main tenets of the Reparations Ordinance were:

- Creation of a center located on the south side to deal with the psychological effects of torture. This is the Chicago Torture Justice Center.

- Free access to all city colleges for survivors and the family members, including their grandchildren.

- A monetary compensation for selected torture survivors. The city budgeted \$5.5 million, and that's been distributed to 57 survivors, so it amounts to roughly \$100,000 each. It's not a lot of money, and only for an exceedingly small number of survivors.

- Implementation in all Chicago public schools of a curriculum that teaches this history in the eighth and sophomore Social Studies classes. This is the third year that this has been taught. It is an extraordinarily important victory. Implementation has varied along the lines that you could expect. The whiter, more affluent neighborhoods where cops live have put up resistance and have protested. In one case, it resulted in a principal being removed. Other areas of the city where there's less resistance, and especially where the fight against policing is more vibrant, have welcomed it. The Center has developed deep relationships with certain schools and teachers, but implementation is disparate and reflects the politics of the city.

- The public memorial has not been built, and the city has delayed implementation. Former mayor Rahm Emanuel rejected meeting about the public memorial, refused all proposals.

Mayor Lori Lightfoot has met or had people meet with the Memorial Committee. The delay, though, is a red flag. A site location hasn't been confirmed, nor has the funding, so all those things are still in motion.

The Center has been created, and we exist, which is great. We're the first and currently only center in the country dedicated to domestic torture. Federal regulations limit the 14 other torture centers in the country to accept only international torture survivors. We have been able to bypass that federal restriction because of the movement and because of the Reparations Ordinance. That's significant and important.

The city, however, continues year after year to threaten us by saying that they have fulfilled their reparations duty and therefore we're not owed any continued funding. Of course, the ordinance doesn't say that the Center will be funded only for three or four years. It says you will create and fund.

Our position is that the Center needs to continue to be funded until either no more police killing exists and the generations afterward have healed from the trauma, or other such radical transformations have happened in society so that these services are no longer necessary.

Survivors in the Lead

Dianne Feeley: How did the ordinance come about? You mentioned earlier that survivors were involved in shaping it. What were their concerns?

AP: The survivors have been involved and leading the way through every single step. The ordinance initially developed out of an exhibition that called on artists to answer the question, "What could reparations look like for survivors of Chicago Police Department (CPD) torture?"

This took place after Jon Burge, who implemented the torture, was tried and convicted of perjury and obstruction of justice in 2010, although he'd been suspended in 1991 and fired in 1993. Because the statute of limitations had expired for the crime of torture, those were the charges. He was sentenced to four years in federal prison. Survivors and their community felt "This is just another example of there not being justice."

Joey Mogul, one of the attorneys along with Flint Taylor who litigated the torture cases, is not an artist. She submitted an ordinance as part of her contribution to the exhibit. Survivors said, "Let's make this real." That's how it came out of this imaginative space of "Let's envision beyond the current confines of the system."

Through survivor leadership, the ordinance was revised. Survivors said, "We need housing, we need medical care." The first drafts were really expansive. Through the negotiations with the city, the city knocked down some of the demands, saying "No to housing, no to medical care," but then agreed to the final document. Survivors were in those negotiation meetings with the attorneys. Survivors testified at City Hall about their experiences. They were a part of it every step of the way.

DF: How many people were tortured over this period?

AP: Jon Burge became employed by Chicago Police Department in 1970

after his army tours in Vietnam and Korea. During the Vietnam war he had been engaged in "advanced interrogation techniques" or torture.

As soon as he got on the force, he began applying those techniques to the people in Chicago. His torture ring lasted until he was suspended in 1991. There's a conservative count that the city has accepted of 120 survivors and has apologized for. That number is primarily Black men, but some were children when they were tortured.

That's just between those years and just for those who acquired attorneys, had their testimony recorded and where the evidence has been found credible by Torture Inquiry & Relief Commission (TIRC) set up in 2009 by the Illinois General Assembly as well as other entities. That's a very conservative estimate because it presupposes a whole bunch of things. We can assume that the true number is in the thousands. I believe there are people who didn't survive, and we don't even know their names. And the cutoff date is 1991, when Burge was fired.

Torture didn't begin with Burge or end with him. Burge was a commander and trained thousands of other officers who carried on the torture after he was fired. Some of those who were tortured after 1991 are beginning to come out of prison. Survivors of Kenneth Boudreau, James O'Brien, Jack Halloran, Michael Kill and others who trained under Burge led torturing his way after him. The true number is in the thousands, really. If we look at the specific methods of torture that Burge used, then the number is huge.

DF: Where does recently released Gerald Reed, whose life sentence was reduced to time served by Governor J.B. Pritzker, fit into that picture? Was he one of the 120 or is he in a different category?

AP: He was tortured after Burge was fired by some of the officers, particularly Michael Kill, who trained under Burge.

DF: Many of those murdered by police or sentenced to prison are young men and women. Was this true of those who were tortured?

AP: Many of the torture survivors were in their teens. The youngest known one was 13. Mark Clements was 16. I believe Sean Tyler was 16 or 17. Most of them were children, they were teenagers and then sentenced to serve out massive lifelong and inhumane sentences.

Stanley Howard, who was sentenced to death row, was a part of creating and leading the Death Row 10. This group of survivors formed a study group and through their study realized that they were all tortured by Jon Burge and his henchmen.

Then they created the Death Row 10. They led the organizing work on the inside, which eventually led to a moratorium on the death penalty in Illinois. It was implemented in 2003 by former Governor George Ryan and led to commuting 167 death penalty sentences to life imprisonment and pardoning four. In 2011, the Illinois State Legislature officially abolished the death penalty, converting 15 sentences to life.

That abolition is a direct result of incarcerated folks organizing along with folks on the outside. However, Stanley, no longer facing the death penalty, is still incarcerated. He's been inside almost 40 years; we're fighting to get him out.

Technically parole doesn't exist in Illinois, although it operates in obscure ways. There's a movement led by incarcerated folks called Parole Illinois to re-establish parole so that folks who have life without parole sentences can petition the parole board to be released. They believe that this would be their only opportunity for release.

I've heard many stories of folks who are torture survivors and folks who are not torture survivors. This situation is the result of all the mass incarceration laws that have been passed. Many of these laws criminalized children.

Still Incarcerated

LL: How many other prisoners who were tortured are still in prison? Flint Taylor's book, The Torture

Machine, states there were upwards of 200 complaints, although only a certain number were able to make it into legal cases and go through the court system.

AP: We have a list of about 100 survivors who are still incarcerated. It's a contested number, so not definitive by any means. It's a number that reflects people who have been in contact, been working and speaking out. This usually means they are working with attorneys on their own individual cases. They have a consciousness around how to fight while incarcerated. It may sound odd to say, but these survivors have accepted that they were tortured.

There's a lot of repression and denial with torture survivors that mirrors other forms of torture such as rape. We don't really define rape as torture in the United States, but it is internationally qualified as a form of torture.

As with rape and sexual assault survivors, there's the denial that it could happen to them. There is the repression of memory and all those survival mechanisms kick in. That happens similarly with torture. People may not be ready for a wide variety of reasons to be public about having experienced torture. Also, there is the gendered aspect of who has been able to come out as a survivor as well.

There are women who were tortured and consciously do not want to be publicly known. La Tanya Jenifor-Sublett, who is now on staff at the Center organizing our Peer Reentry Program, is the only public woman survivor of torture. There are just many factors that play into people not wanting to be public.

LL: I remember reading in The Torture Machine that either a relative or a friend was brought into an adjacent interrogation room and forced to listen to the screams throughout the night. But are you talking about women who endured physical infliction of torture on their own bodies?

AP: Yes and were then incarcerated. Your point is important because if we

look at the effect, that's a form of psychological torture, where that person was forced to listen to their loved one experience these pains, excruciating pains that bring you to the point of death. Some people died and came back like Anthony Holmes, a torture survivor who talks about how they electrocuted him. He died and then came back over the 24-hour period he was being tortured.

Listening to that is a form of torture, but the way that the construct of survivorhood has been commonly framed it doesn't include those people. When we include that, then we understand its much larger impact, much larger on the family.

DF: We know something about the role of the survivors in organizing and defending themselves but what about their families? Where did they find their support?

AP: The moms have really led the organizing work on the outside. In the early days, it would just be the moms fighting for their child or trying to advocate for one of the others in prison. People like Mary L. Johnson whose son is still incarcerated and has been fighting for over 30 years. In the early days, she was the only one who would show up to a court date.

Mark Clements's mom, while he was incarcerated, would be out there fighting for him. Even as she was battling cancer she was still out there fighting. Rosemary Cade, who's fighting for her son Antonio Porter to be released, is undergoing cancer treatment now.

These moms have been the ones on the front lines leading this and aren't given enough credit for their work and their tenacity. Mary L. Johnson talks about how she suffered two breakdowns. The toll of this work has just been so massive on their bodies. Because of moms like Armanda Shackelford, Gerald Reed's mom, the community successfully rallied around him.

Continuing Trauma

DF: You say that the Center is open to not only the immediate victims but also to their families. Could you talk about trauma,

especially in the light of the Chauvin trial? I think many of us did not understand the trauma those witnesses suffered as they saw George Floyd being killed. For the world, it was a deeply moving experience to witness the trauma that they're suffering a year afterward. Dealing with trauma must be a big part of the Center's work. How do you do that?

AP: That is so important. In hearing the witness testimony at the Chauvin trial, viewers across the world and in this country were able to see a real-life example of how pervasive the consequences of police violence are. They could see the ripple effects of terror and trauma that then reverberate beyond the individual who experienced torture.

The trauma and the violence are also experienced, in different ways of course, by the witnesses and then by family members and community at large. That gives us a better understanding of the true breadth of who is affected by state violence and police violence.

It is way more than just the one individual. Part of the families were also doing time. The families were also affected by the incarceration. That trauma is being held in multiple ways that our dominant society makes invisible and then erases from consciousness.

The Chauvin trial and witnesses' testimony and experiences give visibility and language to acknowledging the real consequence of policing in communities. This one example is being constantly multiplied. Just during the trial, an average of three people a day were killed by police. Magnify that by the number of people affected and the trauma reverberating across the country. That's a lot of people experiencing trauma, experiencing the psychological, the socio-emotional effects of state violence and state terror. We can draw on our popular knowledge of rape survivors to find the many implications of how this continues to play out.

I return to the case of rape because it's so similar as a form of torture. We

understand that rape survivors develop survival strategies to protect themselves from a variety of situations ranging from being able to be emotionally intimate to sleep disturbances, panic attacks and anxiety, depression, and becoming a hermit, scared of the outside world (agoraphobia). All those consequences are then reverberated and magnified if we think about the true cost and social effect.

LL: Over the course of the Chauvin trial, particularly because several police officers — and even the chief of police — testified for the prosecution, Derek Chauvin was portrayed as a “bad” cop. Chauvin’s conviction on all charges was a victory, but that doesn’t stop the murders!

AP: That’s absolutely right. If it’s a victory, it’s in the sense that we were able to force the legal process to acknowledge the loss of one in its own army, which it is not designed to do. But we know that that doesn’t stop police. Just before the trial started there was the killing of Daunte Wright in Brooklyn, Minnesota and just 20 minutes before the Chauvin guilty verdict was announced, police killed 16-year-old Ma’Khia Bryant in Columbus, Ohio.

We know that even with convictions, police violence is not going to stop. Former police officer Jason Van Dyke was convicted of second-degree murder of Laquan McDonald along with 16 counts of aggravated battery and sentenced to almost seven years in prison. That hasn’t stopped the killing — but the rate has decreased.

I try to be scientific about why that decrease occurs. Is it the conviction or is it the movement? Of course, those aren’t separate. The movement is why the convictions happen. Scientific American released an article about a month or two ago (March 1, 2021) that pointed to data that suggests in areas where mass movements have been continuous, the result is a decrease in police killings. If we’re going to be scientists and look at cause and effect, based on the data, it’s the vitality of the mass movement. It’s people getting in the streets and organizing to protest systemic killings.

I think we’re still as a movement figuring out our demands. For example, what does it mean to call for the abolition of policing? I think the call to defund is a great demand because it puts the system in crisis and it forces a political crisis. I think, but what does that mean — because capitalism isn’t going to defund its domestic army. It’s always going to need a domestic army to repress the working class and the constituents within it that the government finds threatening.

How are we prepared to address the crisis? I think there are movement questions that I have not even solved, other than, of course, saying we must overthrow capitalism. But in terms of the actual details of what that means, I haven’t resolved those answers. These are questions we need to discuss.

DF: I think one aspect is that people are now seeing, “Gee, this person got killed because they had an expired license or that person got killed because maybe they passed a phony \$20 bill.” These are petty offenses. Why is society asking uniformed and armed police to handle these issues? If we look at all the people who have mental stress and their family calls for help, they are 18 times more likely to end up dead than other civilians. Is this the army that we send to deal with these issues?

Let’s look at other models. For a decade Eugene, Oregon has had a program of unarmed civilians trained in deescalation methods. Models like this show people we don’t need armed guards to be safe. We create problems of homelessness or drug addiction and then we send the cops out to resolve them.

AP: I think you’re absolutely right. All these are products of capitalism, all the disparities and unequal conditions that force deprivation and limit options for coping. It has created crises, manufactured crises, producing massive unemployment, racism, segregation, all those things. I think your point about helping people unlayer, unroll and disentangle concepts of public safety is really, really important. The narrative that

policing provides safety has been an effective propaganda tool to obfuscate their actual role.

We need to be able to have a conversation around how we create public safety. We need to develop an effective strategy to dislodge public safety from policing. We want people to have what they need so that they don’t go from crisis to crisis. And when they’re in crisis, they can get the help they need and not be killed.

Public Health Disaster

LL: What’s been the impact of COVID, not only on survivors but on all prisoners? What’s the consequence in the failure to release prisoners? And shockingly, Mayor Lori Lightfoot used COVID relief funds not for building up social services that had already been cut to the bone, but increase the already-bloated police funds. Where does the money for Chicago get allotted when it comes from the state and the federal government?

AP: Mayor Lightfoot put 65% of the Discretionary CARES Act money into policing! That is such an indictment of her craven inhumanity and demonstrates where her allegiance has always been. We, as a movement, have been trying to inform folks that this is who she is. This should not be a surprise. She has always defended cops. She’s a cop.

It’s been preventable horror after preventable horror as we see the number of folks who have died in U.S. detention facilities due to COVID. Our fragile public healthcare system has been decimated over the last 40 years. We have lost 200,000 public healthcare workers.

Our private healthcare system is not designed to figure out how to provide care for a national population. It’s designed around figuring out how to monetize care in a specific area, which means that it doesn’t function to prevent a global pandemic from decimating the population.

It's just been example after example of why the United States has been in an uprising over the past year. I think all those factors are threaded together. There was, at the height, 30 million people unemployed across the country. In 2019, official Black unemployment stood at five percent but by January 2021, it was 13.5%, almost triple.

We know that the folks who have been hit hardest by unemployment have been in the service industry. That means people who already were surviving on poverty wages have been forced into deeper poverty. They are struggling to survive off three stimulus checks while Jeff Bezos becomes the world's first trillionaire. It's a slap in the face.

All of this is happening as police continue to kill at a rate that has remained unchanged even though many of us are at home and sheltering in place. There're so many things that point to how this system is not working for us, is not designed to benefit the majority, and is killing us. COVID has probably best crystallized our crisis in a very acute way.

DF: As you think about the role of the Chicago Torture Justice Center and maybe for the larger movement, what do you see as priorities?

AP: We need to continue organizing and continue being in the streets. Almost with every case, with every instance of the CPD killing someone, there's a protest and there's organization around the case. Protest needs to be a permanent feature, that needs to be what the CPD can expect, and then it should broaden. Now we're seeing the movement broaden to include the demand to end home raids.

This is the result of Anjanette Young, who was forced to stand naked for over two hours when CPD did a so-called botched home raid. But most of these raids are "botched." We're seeing a widening of understanding about the horrors that are being inflicted on people and demands to end them.

The fight to get cops permanently out of the Chicago Public Schools should ramp up. We just got the notice a week ago that CPS voted to remove all police from schools for the rest of the year, which is great, but that needs to be permanent. I think it's very, very realistic that we can win the permanent removal of cops from all our public schools. I think we can do it this year.

My best friend's little brother was killed by CPD. Since I was eight years old, we lived right next to each other and walked to school together, both in grammar school and high school. When we were in our senior year her brother was killed by the police. There was no movement then. There was no protest. No family should experience that and be forced to suffer in silence.

We should be up in arms every time an incident happens and force police to feel they're constantly being watched. We should keep widening the net and organizing around every single instance of police violence. Every time they kill someone, we should be out there.

Teaching as Healing

LL: One of my close friends is a teacher in Washington High School on the southeast side. She told me how important it is in teaching the curriculum about CPD torture that the Center can send survivors to talk to the class. The bonds of solidarity and love created, despite the pain and suffering, seem magical. However uneven implementing the curriculum has been, this seems to be an important gift that the Reparations Ordinance has brought forward.

AP: Thank you for sharing that insight from your teacher friend. What I've heard from some of the survivors we send out is that it is a healing experience for them. Many talk about going into the classrooms and feeling

rewarded in their sharing their story. For decades, their story was not being heard by anyone — not by attorneys, judges, or even a doctor.

Now, they're able to share it. There's so much power that I have heard them talk about feeling when they're able to tell their stories to students and young folks in other spaces. Just as in any kind of therapeutic experience, when you talk about what has happened, you have those internal realizations: "Oh, I'm teaching them, and I'm teaching myself." They talk about that too, as being a generative experience and part of their healing work.

LL: Even scaled down, the Reparations Ordinance is still unprecedented. Has it laid the basis for developing reparations as an active reality — not just around torture, but also around centuries of discrimination? I know our neighboring city, Evanston, voted for a reparations program based on its history of segregation and discrimination.

AP: Yes, which is amazing. I was involved myself in the grassroots organizing component of the reparations struggle when we did a targeted push to get it out of committee, where it had been stuck for three years. When the Laquan McDonald assassination video was finally released, Mayor Rahm Emanuel faced a political crisis. We targeted him and used that weakness to force him to get the ordinance out of committee.

Throughout that organizing work, I didn't believe we were going to win. I was used to working on campaigns where you fight, you fight, you fight because it's the longterm struggle. But here we won. It's still amazing that it happened because it's so transformative and it doesn't exist anywhere else. It needs to exist everywhere, and needs to be expanded here in Chicago.

I sit with both realities all the time. I'm still in amazement because it's so trailblazing and should be emulated and expanded.

Source July-August 2021, [ATC 213](#).

Region's dilemmas reflected on the streets of Colombia

30 July 2021, by **Ana C. Carvalhaes, Israel Dutra**

Colombia's *Paro Nacional* (national strike) on 28-29 April 2021 opened a period of massive daily protests, with an unprecedented unity of urban, rural, indigenous, environmentalist and unemployed youth movements – the latter being the vanguard. Violent clashes have already left 75 people dead, 83 who have lost an eye, 1,468 cases of physical violence, 1,832 arbitrary imprisonments and 28 reports of sexual violence by the repressive forces. [1] As of 26 May 2021, INDEPAZ also reported 346 missing persons.

Faced with attacks by tanks and helicopters, the mobilization forced the government to withdraw its tax reform while the economy minister and Chancellor had to resign. The repressive brutality threw fuel on the fire of discontent, isolating the country at the international level (after the outcry caused by the massacre, US President Biden and the United Nations called for calm and dialogue), but did not prevent street demonstrations and road blockades continuing. While encouraging the most barbaric repression, President Iván Duque's government convened a round table of dialogue with the strike coordinators, not proposing anything in exchange for suspension of the actions. Gustavo Petro, leader of the centre-left Colombia Humana party and the main opposition figure, who sees himself as favourite for the 2022 elections, is taking advantage of this condition to call for social peace and discourage confrontation with Duque. On the streets, however, young people organized for an uneven confrontation said they would rather die under gunfire while fighting than be taken by Covid and hunger.

Continental dilemmas

Whatever the immediate outcome of the current protest, what is happening in Colombia is symbolic of the great economic and socio-political dilemmas of this region of the world. Plunged into a global crisis they had not foreseen, deprived of the extraordinary profits from the commodity boom of the first decades of this century, neoliberal governments and the bourgeoisies need more than ever to resort to austerity plans: reduction of social spending, increases in taxes and prices, privatization – in order to pay the growing public debts. To that end, they deny the growing needs of the people, plunged into poverty and misery increased by the recent recession. They are ready to impose their plans by force with rifles, bazookas, tanks and now helicopters. But at some point, a spark has arisen, such as Duque's tax increase (or Piñera's metro fares increase in Chile, or Lenín Moreno raising fuel prices in Ecuador), and the cauldron of popular fury has exploded.

Rage and mobilizations, even when as heroic as those led by Colombia's youth, are not enough on their own to reverse the tragic course of a continent colonized by global finance, sickened by Covid and infected by the global phenomenon of the neo-fascist ultra-right. It is certain that social struggles will continue – this is now even more likely due to the impoverishment caused by the pandemic. But the neoliberal counter-offensive of the past 40 years is not over, even though the right has fewer cards than it did two or three years ago and could be further weakened in new battles in the streets and at the

ballot box.

The workers and peoples of Latin America will continue to experience neoliberalism and its more or less ferocious “monsters” (Bolsonaro, Duque, Piñera, Lasso, Lacalle). They will have to learn from this. Just think of Ecuador: how will the banker Lasso manage to impose his recipe of “belt tightening” and subjecting the country to the diktats of financial companies, in the face of a complex society, organized and experienced in overthrowing or wearing down the governments that face it? The next period will be marked by more confrontations and social upheavals. We will have a better chance of winning partial victories if the institutional left does not dampen the will to fight and hinder the self-organization of the people, with its well-known tendency to channel everything into elections.

The unprecedented global economic crisis raging today and the intensification of the confrontation between the United States and China make it impossible to repeat a new period of stability modelled on a time when the United States, the European Union, China and Russia coexisted without major tensions. The examples of Ecuador, Bolivia and Chile indicate a growing social and political space for the construction of anti-capitalist alternatives.

Chile's political “earthquake”

The pandemic disaster, from the Rio Grande to Patagonia, has not prevented political and ideological struggles and clashes from affecting elections. Chile is perhaps the most advanced example. The result of the

“mega-election” on 15 May 2021 showed a resounding defeat for the right – which failed to obtain the two-thirds of the constituent deputies needed to veto the anti-neoliberal advances. The “respectable left” of the Concertación alliance (Socialist Party and Christian Democracy), which governed the country for 24 years (1990-2010 and 2014-2018), was also defeated. This election propelled forward alternative left-wing forces, such as the Communist Party and the groupings of what was the Frente Amplio (Broad Front). [2] Above all, it symbolized the invasion of Chilean institutions by “independents”, many of them from the anti-capitalist left.

The phenomenon of independents in Chile – candidates who emerged on the fringes of parties, sometimes on the lists of left-wing parties, but mainly through social movements or community-based lists, and who are now constituent deputies, governors, mayors or municipal councillors – added to the high abstention rate (almost 60%), confirms the breadth and depth of the crisis of representativeness of the Chilean political system over the past 31 years. [3]

The composition of the Constitutional Convention also reflects the scale of the popular victory: gender parity, guaranteed participation of indigenous peoples (17 seats out of 155), the possibility of candidacies and coalitions outside the traditional parties. It is the first Constituent Assembly in history where the number of men and women is practically the same: 78 and 77 respectively. The breakthrough of women in Chile to occupy representative space was so significant that the parity mechanism was applied (it was pre-established that there would be an equal number of women and men candidates, plus an adjustment mechanism that would guarantee equality in all cases) to ensure the same number of men, since 84 women and 71 men were elected. In other words, 7 women had to give way to men to guarantee balance! These elements can only be explained by the grandeur and depth of the October 2019 anti-systemic uprising, as well as by the strength of the struggle of women, youth and indigenous peoples.

Ecuador and Bolivia

In the same context of tectonic social plates in motion within societies, elections were held in two other Andean countries in early April 2021.

In Ecuador, banker Guillermo Lasso defeated Andrés Arauz, heir to Rafael Correa (57.58% versus 47.48%) in the second round of the election. In the first round, in February, the tiny difference between Lasso and Yaku Pérez of the Pachakutik Plurinational Movement was challenged by social movements, reinforcing indigenous people’s option of calling for an “ideological” spoiled vote. As a result, the government of Ecuador is back in the hands of a direct representative of the business class, for the first time in 35 years. Lasso has an ultra-neoliberal programme but also the terrible contradiction of facing an undefeated people and a left-wing opposition with a large legislative majority, which elected a Pachakutik deputy to the presidency of Parliament.

In Bolivia, the elections for the government of the departments of La Paz, Tarija, Chuquisaca (where Sucre is located) and Pando were defeats for the MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo). Its candidates lost in all these regions, although Evo Morales’ social and political movement remains the only established national party. The MAS secured the government of three of the country’s nine departments (Cochabamba, Oruro and Potosí), as it did in 2005. It lost in important cities like La Paz (where a former Añez minister won the mayoralty), Cochabamba and the strategic El Alto.

These results and, in particular, the performance of candidates linked to movements that once belonged to the MAS or that have a MAS base (such as former Senator Eva Copa, now mayor of El Alto, and the elected governors of La Paz and Chuquisaca) have heightened the internal debate in Evo Morales’ party-movement, where the choice of candidates “handpicked” by the former president is strongly questioned. The great party-movement, heir to the struggles and victories of past decades, is now

divided into three currents: that of Evo Morales, eager to transform it into a Bolivian version of Maduro’s PSUV, in an obvious authoritarian direction; also, although very close to Evo, the more technocratic neoliberal grouping represented by the current President Luis Arce; and finally that based in Bolivia’s heartlands, which identifies with Vice-President Davi Choquehuanca – against the approach that Evo intends to imprint on the “political instrument”.

No rising “conservative cycle”

From this general picture, together the ongoing conflict in Peru to guarantee the election to the presidency of the left candidate, Pedro Castillo, we can indicate some elements that will shape the political situation of the region in the period to come. The multifaceted crisis of global capitalism is expressed regionally through the deep crisis of bourgeois democratic regimes (more or less serious from one country to another), aggravated and far from being resolved by the rise here and there of neo-fascist alternatives. The failure of the neoliberal options of the beginning of the century (Carlos Menem in Argentina, Fernando Henrique Cardoso in Brazil, Enrique Peña Nieto in Mexico, Sebastián Piñera in Chile, Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada and Carlos Mesa in Bolivia) and the absence, for the moment, of a new type of anti-capitalist left, indicate that the next confrontations will take place between the neoliberal-oligarchic options (more or less weakened) and the heirs of the so-called “progresismo” who ruled for much of this century.

Despite all the differences between the region’s societies (experience of struggle, organization, recent defeats or victories), the indigenous capitalist alternatives, deeply linked to the United States, do not have projects capable of providing the responses in terms of economy, democracy and national sovereignty needed to overcome the health, environmental and social tragedies of the Covid

world. Their plans for over-exploitation and authoritarianism (open or disguised) will continue to clash with popular demands for vaccinations, hospitals, jobs, income, education, housing and transport and, above all, the right to organize and fight for life.

There will be no return to “progresismo”

A “new cycle” of so-called “progresismo” has not begun and is not likely to begin. “Progresismo” is a debatable category referring to experiences as different as the processes in Venezuela and Bolivia (with frontal struggles against imperialism) and the social-liberal processes of the Chilean “Concertación”, the Uruguayan Frente Amplio and the PT in Brazil (the latter, moreover, with sub-imperialist pretensions and practices). In other words, it is unlikely that the regional hegemony of centre-left or left-wing governments with greater or lesser anti-imperialist traits capable of promoting a certain redistribution will be repeated. This does not mean denying the importance of victories against the right in Bolivia, Mexico, Chile, and Peru, or ruling out the possibility of somehow supporting Lula’s return to Brazil’s government, in order to defeat the neo-fascist Bolsonaro.

The fact is that the “progresismo” of the first decade of this century, both in its more Bolivarian and more social-liberal aspect, was the result of very specific global (and also national) economic and political conditions, which will not be repeated. The relative success of the so-called “progressive” governments was supported by what was (and still is, given the current situation in Venezuela) their structural limit: they fed on the commodity boom, creating extractivist development models that have tended to reinforce the agrarian-exporting (and therefore colonial and predatory) character of the region’s economies. In their social-liberal version they consciously built class coalitions between popular forces and

more or less broad sectors of the ruling classes. The latter then disengaged from these projects and do not seem willing to experiment with them again.

Unfortunately, progressive options have not gone beyond this model and continue to call on the people to believe that it is possible to “recommence”, as if nothing had changed, as if they had not already governed and exhausted their supporters and new generations of activists, by clashing with their demands. As Franck Gaudichaud pointed out in a recent interview: “Latin America - like the rest of the world - has entered a period of strong turbulence, which combines a gigantic economic crisis, the very significant impact of the health crisis in structurally unequal societies, the deepening of the biosphere and climate crisis, and finally a new social, political and ideological polarization.” [4]

It is obvious that it is correct to fight side by side with the “progressive” sectors - even more so when faced with the existence of an ultra-neoliberal and conservative far right - and even, possibly, to join or support them in elections. But the strategic debate is impoverished when thought and action are locked into this tactic - the united front of Lenin and Trotsky. The united front was, more than 80 years ago, a tactic of struggle for the rank and file of European mass workers’ parties, in the fight against growing fascism. It is perfectly correct and necessary to apply a unitary tactic in the fight against authoritarian neo-fascism. But it must be remembered that - apart from Brazil and Colombia - not all South American countries have the possibility of the far right coming to power or staying in power. Latin America’s vast “social left” (both activists and electorate) is not entirely disciplined by the “progressives”, as was the case with the rank and file of European workers’ parties during much of the twentieth century. It is also necessary to rally those on the left who have never been “progressive” (such as the new generations taking to the streets) and those who have been disillusioned by these “progressives” without moving to the right. The struggle for the

consciousness of peoples and workers is not done exclusively by one tactic.

In the great social struggles of recent years, especially the most recent ones (Chile, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Mexico, as in Argentina, Brazil and now in Paraguay and Colombia) hundreds of thousands of anti-system activists have emerged and continue to emerge in the movements of poor neighbourhoods, feminists, environmentalists, anti-racists, indigenous peoples, rural communities, LGBTQI communities, youth and students, teachers and employees from new sectors. [5] All these movements put forward demands that come up against the limits of classical “progressivism” because they fight against the living conditions imposed by contemporary capitalism.

The cases of Ecuador, Peru, Chile and Bolivia, although electoral, express the enormous contradictions, problems and challenges that the new Latin American situation brings. Both the right and the traditional left, and those who propose to build a new anti-capitalist, ecological, feminist, anti-racist and democratic alternative, are faced with these problems. These recent examples confirm, each in its own way and with a different intensity, that there is a social and political space - more significant in Chile, Peru and Colombia, less elsewhere - for the construction of anti-capitalist alternatives with programmes that, emerging from social struggles, advance in responses to inequalities of all kinds, racism, hunger, corrupt regimes, police and military violence, environmental destruction, and the ethnocide of indigenous peoples.

The path will be neither linear nor easy, there will be ups and downs, defeats and victories. The big challenge is to be in the struggles, with this new combative generation fighter, to build with it (and not for it) our programme of rupture.

*This article is an expanded version of the article “Nas ruas da Colômbia, América Latina enfrenta sus dilemas”. This version first published in **Inprecor**.*

Recent Timeline for Colombia

2020

- An indigenous man is killed every six days, collateral damage of the struggle between paramilitaries and narco-traffickers.
- GDP fell by 6.6%. 42.5% live in poverty. Half of the population lives from the informal economy.
- Juan Manuel Santos' peace agreements with the FARC guerrillas provided for a reinvestment of the state in areas previously held by the FARC. But President Duque's opposition to these agreements is holding back the implementation of the peace plan.
- Killings of social activists and massacres have increased since Iván Duque came to power: 41 massacres have taken place in the country, killing

210 people since 2018.

- On 8 September, during a demonstration against the Duque government, lawyer Javier Ordonez was arrested, electrified and died in a Bogota police station.
- The repression of demonstrators against Duque's policy left at least 11 dead and more than 200 injured. Police fired shots at protesters.
- In October, for four days at the initiative of the Nasa Indians, more than a million indigenous people, Afro-Colombians and small farmers gathered in Bogota's largest plaza to demonstrate against the government. They denounced the assassination of several of their leaders. They demanded an end to violence, more democracy and the right to self-determination.
- With the fall in agricultural prices aggravated by the pandemic and the opening of the market to international

competition since 1990, small agricultural producers are impoverished.

2021

- 75,000 deaths per 50 million inhabitants due to the pandemic by May.
- The JEP court indicts eight former guerrilla leaders for crimes against humanity because of the 21,000 kidnappings committed by the FARC.
- At the end of April, the beginning of a mobilization with a general strike against a proposed tax reform that, in mid-pandemic, mainly affects the middle classes.
- In May, mobilizations against the government's health, education and health policies expanded. Police killed more than 30 people to break up peaceful protests.

Protests in Haiti repudiate authoritarianism and US intervention Interview

29 July 2021, by **Kim Ives**

What was the spark that ignited the protests?

The latest protests stemmed from Moïse's failure to leave office as president on 7 February 2021, as dictated by Article 134.2 of Haiti's 1987 Constitution. He had made it clear that he intended to remain in power in the months leading up to the date, but his refusal came in a very belligerent manner. The people didn't take to the streets on 7 February, because they hoped that he might resign at some point, but he didn't. Since then, every weekend the demonstrations have increased in size and the tone has become harsher.

There is a slight contradiction in Article 134, which says that the presidential term shall last five years. But 134.2 clarifies that the term will have to begin on 7 February of the election year. So, even though the

election was on November 20, 2016, that constitutional article says that the clock starts on 7 February.

Throughout Moïse's presidency there were constant demonstrations, as was the case with his predecessor, Michel Martelly. There were about eighty-four demonstrations per month by the end of 2020; this says a lot, given that COVID was already circulating. So, we could say that it wasn't exactly "the spark", but the straw that broke the camel's back.

Unlike in the past, I do not think it likely that these demonstrations will withdraw from the streets. They have been intensifying since July 2018, when Moïse had to dramatically raise fuel prices in the country because Petrocaribe's oil - and with it the money - was no longer flowing into the country. The IMF, which had to intervene to resolve the conflict, said:

"you have to raise oil prices, or you are not going to get a loan". So, he did, and that began the last two and a half years of weekly, if not daily, demonstrations.

What structural problems could be identified to explain the continued mobilization of the Haitian people?

Martelly's government was imposed from above by the then US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in January 2011, when she travelled to Haiti to - basically - twist the then President René Preval's arm and tell him he had to put Martelly in the runoff. Martelly had come third according to the Electoral Council, so she annulled the Electoral Council and dictated that Martelly was going to be in the runoff.

That marked the beginning of the neo-Duvalierist government in the country after twenty years of alternation

between [the Party] Lavalas and the semi-Lavaliste government, between Jean-Bertrand Aristide and his so-called "twin", [René] Preval. It was the United States that introduced this neo-Duvalierist group, which brought with it all the characteristics of Duvalierism: corruption, repression, total insensitivity to the demands of the people, and total openness to U.S., French, and Canadian imperialism to do whatever they wanted with the country. [6]

Indeed, that was its slogan: "Haiti is open for business", which, not coincidentally, was the slogan of Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier in the early 1980s, before his overthrow. The people of Haiti have demonstrated since the coming to power of Martelly's party.

This is the backdrop to all the demonstrations, which have been mainly against corruption and repression. But in 2018 they became fiercer and more massive because the flow of funds that Venezuela's Petrocaribe provided to Haiti was closed. At one point, Martelly's prime minister said 94% of the government's special projects were being funded by the Petrocaribe fund. When all that money disappeared, Moïse, who had made all sorts of fantastic promises to people (that in 18 months they would have electricity 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and so on), was left with an even more enraged population.

How serious is corruption in Haiti?

Most of the corruption (and this is what's behind the big protest movement) revolves around money stolen from the Petrocaribe fund. It was the anger generated by this that, shortly after the increase in gasoline in July 2018, became a call from social networks under the slogan "Where is Petrocaribe's money?"

The Venezuelans gave Haiti \$4 billion of cheap oil, about twenty thousand barrels a day. Haiti only had to pay 60% up front, and 40% went to this capital fund, which was supposed to pay for clinics, hospitals, schools, roads and anything that would benefit the Haitian people.

But instead of being used for that

purpose, it was stolen, wasted and embezzled on a myriad of fake projects: from invisible stadiums to fake food distribution programs, housing construction and so on. Martelly's government thus disappeared some \$1700 million. It is this corruption, this misappropriation of Petrocaribe funds, that animates the indignation of the Haitian people.

It must be said that Haiti had also received some \$13 billion in reconstruction funds after the earthquake. Ironically, they used in Haiti the same slogan they are using [in Washington] today: "Build back better." But it was wasted and intercepted by various intermediaries and NGOs, and what arrived in Haiti also appears to have been wasted by Martelly's government.

However, what is most present in the consciousness of the protesters are the Petrocaribe funds. It was a very popular solidarity fund, unlike the perception in the case of the earthquake fund (assigned by Bill Clinton), about which Haitians sensed, almost from the beginning, that it was probably not going to do much for them.

How has the Haitian government responded to the protests?

With very strong repression. In November, Moïse reinstated Léon Charles, who was in charge of the Haitian National Police just after the coup d'état against Aristide on 29 February 2004. He was responsible then for a very bloody and ferocious repression against the rebellious masses, mainly in Cite Soleil and Bel Air, the two largest slums in Port-au-Prince.

Moïse brought him back, and he has met all expectations and has even received new powers. Moïse, who has ruled by decree since 13 January 2020, has also created by decree a new repressive force, the National Intelligence Agency, which gives its agents the power not only to spy on citizens, but to arrest and even kill them, because their agents are armed. In addition, they cannot be prosecuted, they have total immunity.

It is a force very similar to the Tonton

Macoute of the Duvalier dictatorship. The Tonton Macoute had the same extrajudicial powers. They were the eyes, ears and fists of Duvalier's dictatorship, and allowed him to stay in power for three decades.

This intensification of repressive policies has become evident in recent weeks. Dozens of protesters were killed in the final months of demonstrations. Sometimes they were hit by tear gas grenades in the head, and others were killed by police forces acting as snipers, shooting at protesters.

In addition, another decree turned certain forms of street demonstration and protest into an act of terrorism. This provides the legal framework for severe police repression (although the decrees themselves are completely illegal). Even the US State Department has expressed its dismay at these measures, even if it is only rhetoric.

In the midst of Moïse's mania for issuing decrees, he formed his own hand-picked Electoral Council and rewrote the Constitution. Again, these are all tactics that François Duvalier employed in the early '60s to establish his presidency for life.

What do you think will be the results of the current protests?

I would be surprised if Moïse can stay in power until 7 February 2022, as he intends. But it's a complicated situation. At this moment, the political situation in Haiti could be defined as an unstoppable force colliding with an immovable object.

America seems to be hesitating. Julie Chung, the Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, tweeted last month that she was alarmed by the government's authoritarian and anti-democratic movements. But they did not go so far as to say that they were withdrawing their support. It seems they are maintaining the same policy that the Trump administration had, which is to urge Moïse to hold elections - which he should have held in 2018 and 2019 - and pass the presidential baton, renew the parliament and mayoralities of all of Haiti (right now, there are

only eleven elected officials in the country: Moïse and ten senators).

The Biden administration must be watching the magnitude of these demonstrations. The other factor is that, as the demonstrations grow in size and ferocity, the US Congress is putting increasing pressure on the Biden administration, saying that Moïse must resign and be replaced by an interim government.

Now, will this pressure lead the U.S.

to remove Moïse? I doubt it. The last time there was a civil transition, the president elected was Aristide, an anti-imperialist priest in the tradition of liberation theology. The US vetoed his election and staged a coup against him eight months after his inauguration in 1991.

Then there is the very important role played by Haiti in Washington's anti-Venezuelan campaign. For those two reasons, the US may feel that its only option is to withstand the storm and

continue to support Moïses.

The other possibility, especially frightening given the hawks and warmongers that populate the Biden administration, is a third foreign military intervention in Haiti. Of course, it would probably be hidden under the guise of "humanitarian" intervention. But that would be adding fuel to the fire because the Haitian people - I can say this without hesitation - are fed up with foreign military occupations.

For the climate, for life, for us and our children now is the time to fight!

28 July 2021, by **Daniel Tanuro**

The text is unambiguous on the dangerous threshold not to be crossed: going beyond 1.5° C will have "progressively serious, centuries' long and, in some cases, irreversible consequences." Among other phenomena, the dislocation of the Greenland and Antarctic ice caps would indeed be irreversible on the historical scale of time. However, the disappearance of the threatened glaciers in these regions (for some glaciologists, the process is under way and will not stop) would cause the level of the oceans to rise by about 13 meters in the centuries to come.

"The worst is yet to come"

The Paris agreement set the goal of "of keeping the temperature change to well below 2 degrees and to make efforts to prevent a change greater than 1.5 degrees...." IPCC experts are not satisfied with this ambiguous formula. According to the text, it should be well below 1.5° C: indeed, "even at 1.5° C, living conditions will change beyond the capacity of certain organisms to adapt", according to the report. As a reminder, the average temperature rise compared to the pre-

industrial era is already 1.1° C and the World Meteorological Organization warns that at the current rate of emissions, there is a 40% risk that the threshold of 1.5° C over one year is exceeded by 2025.

"The worst is yet to come", says the IPCC, with implications for the lives of our children and grandchildren far more than ours. Without radical anti-neoliberal measures 130 million more people will fall into extreme poverty within ten years. At 2° C of warming, the number of hungry people will increase to 80 million by 2050, and hundreds of millions of people in coastal cities will experience more frequent flooding, leading to greater migrations. Even at 1.5° C, the number exposed to water shortages will increase by 350 million by 2050.

It needs to be said over and over again: the poor and poor countries will be hardest hit by the escalation of the disaster. The draft report notes that "adaptation costs in Africa are projected to increase tens of billions of dollars per year if global warming exceeds two degrees Celsius". Who will pay? As a reminder, more than ten years after the COP in Cancún (2010), the rich countries have still not honoured their promise to contribute

100 billion dollars per year to the climate fund intended to help the countries of the global South. This is one of the sticking points in the negotiations ahead of the COP 26 scheduled for Glasgow at the end of the year. Thus, amidst the discretion carefully maintained by the financial and political leaderships, an unprecedented crime against humanity is slowly being prepared. A crime against the poor who bear almost no responsibility for climate change!

It's time to fight!

The text that has leaked to the press is not the draft report itself but the draft summary of the report for policy makers. The usual practice of the IPCC - an intergovernmental body, it should be remembered - is that this summary is the subject of negotiations - often fierce - between the scientists who wrote the full report and the representatives of the states. It seems likely that those who leaked the document did so to disseminate the original text, before state officials imposed watering down or elimination of the most alarming formulas. This hypothesis is very likely, because the capitalist fossil lobby has been striving

for decades to deny or minimize the danger and has powerful political contacts (for example, China and Saudi Arabia have ensured that the press and NGOs cannot attend the preparatory discussions for COP 26). The leak therefore constitutes a double alarm signal: on the extreme gravity of the objective situation, and on the danger that the final version partially conceals this extreme gravity from world opinion.

Whatever the case, there is no need to squirm: more than ever, social movements must ring the alarm bell with all their might and mobilize as widely as possible to force states to immediately adopt the radical measures needed to stabilize warming well below 1.5° C, in social justice and North-South justice (strict respect for the principle of “common but differentiated responsibility”). Without sleight of hand, without “temporary overshoots”, without resorting to sorcerer’s apprentice technologies, and by only deploying measures compatible with the imperative protection of biodiversity.

“Zero net emissions”, a

criminal policy

Let’s be clear: this is not at all what governments are concocting by promising us “carbon neutrality” (or “net zero emissions”) by 2050. At best these governments are preparing us for a scenario of “temporary overshoot” of 1.5° C accompanied by an increase in “low carbon technologies” (code name for nuclear energy) and the deployment of so-called “negative emission technologies”. While most of these only exist at the prototype or demonstration stage, some would have us believe that they will allow the planet to be cooled by removing huge amounts of CO2 from the atmosphere in the second half of the century, and by storing it underground. In truth, these sci-fi scenarios are only invoked to defend the holy cow of capitalist growth, and to protect the profits of those most responsible for the mess: the oil, coal, gas and gas and agribusiness multinationals. The recent report by the International Energy Agency (IEA) on “net zero emissions” points the way to this criminal policy. Indeed, to achieve “net zero emissions” by 2050 without

affecting growth, according to the IEA, would take: twice as many nuclear power plants; accepting that one fifth of the world’s energy continues to come from fossil fuel combustion, emitting 7.6Gt CO2/year; capturing and storing underground these 7.6Gt of CO2 every year in geological reservoirs (the sealing of which cannot be guaranteed); devoting 410 million hectares to biomass energy monoculture (this is equivalent to a third of the agricultural area under permanent cultivation!); doubling the number of large dams; destroying everything - even on the moon - to grab the “rare earths” essential for “green technologies”; and so on.

With variations, it is this senseless productivist policy that is being set in motion by the countries and groups of countries which are today rushing down the path of “green capitalism”. Their objective is not to save the planet but to offer capitalists the largest possible share of the new technologies market, the largest possible share of profits. Need it be said that this also implies, in order to “attract investors”, continuing neoliberal policies of destruction of social and democratic rights?

Not a single vote for United Russia! RSM statement on the Duma elections & Mikhail Lobanov’s candidacy

27 July 2021, by Russian Socialist Movement (RSD)

The September 19 Russian State Duma elections will be very different from previous ones. On the one hand, they will take place against a background of a rapid decline in living standards, the dire consequences of the pandemic, and the extremely unpopular pension reform passed three years ago.

On the other hand, the elections will take place after the constitutional

amendments, which have cemented Vladimir Putin’s lifelong rule and have seriously shifted Russia’s political system in the direction of open authoritarianism.

The referendum for last year’s constitutional amendments has opened a window of opportunity for the ruling elite: opposition campaigning has been outlawed, and the dilution of voting standards has

allowed the authorities to announce whatever election results they deem suitable.

The Duma elections will thus be held in the midst of a triple crisis: a socio-economic crisis, a domestic political crisis (associated with the final withdrawal from the “managed democracy”), and a foreign policy crisis: a deepening crisis in relations with the United States and the

European Union, with no clear prospects of solution to any of them.

The current Duma elections are meant not only to provide the Kremlin with full control over the parliament but also to demonstrate the consolidation of the bureaucratic vertical and the strength of the system as a whole. The only way to accomplish this in the face of growing social discontent and distrust of the government is through repression.

Preparation for these elections began last year, with the attempted poisoning of Alexei Navalny, and continued with the brutal crackdown on winter protests, the criminal cases against a number of opposition candidates, and the passage of the law against Navalny's FBK (now labelled "an extremist organization"), which reduced immensely the ability of voters to cast a ballot to the candidate of their choice.

All of this shows clearly that even extremely unequal parliamentary elections, devoid of any real power, pose an extreme danger to the existing authorities, since they can expose the scale of the growing deafening protest from below.

If the ruling United Russia, making use of social apathy and enormous administrative resources, succeeds in maintaining its monopoly in the Duma, this will not amount merely to a preservation of the status quo. Instead, a victory for the ruling party would signal an attack on the last vestiges of social and democratic rights.

This is why the RSD calls for citizens to take an active part in the upcoming elections.

- It is necessary to support leftist progressive candidates running in single-mandate districts (such as our comrade Mikhail Lobanov in the Kuntsevsky district of Moscow).

- It is necessary to sign up as election observers in order to prevent fraud, even in the current difficult conditions.

- Finally, it is necessary to agitate everywhere possible to vote against United Russia.

In these elections, the working majority, the millions of those who lost their jobs and their last savings in the pandemic, do not have a party ready to fight consistently for a democratic and socialist alternative. Yet the choice before us is not between programs or ideologies, but between a "yes" and "no" to an open dictatorship.

Therefore, in the current situation, we call for voting for the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, as the only "system party", which in some places still maintains relative independence from the Kremlin, has the best chance of success, and for many continues to embody the ideas of social justice.

Who is Mikhail Lobanov and why do we support him?

Mikhail Lobanov is an Associate Professor of mathematics at the Mechanico-Mathematical Faculty of Moscow State University (MSU) and one of the leaders of the MSU's Initiative Group and the University Solidarity trade union, which defends the rights of students and teachers. He is one of those independent politicians, who are not ready to be the left leg of the regime, but are fighting for a real alternative. An alternative linked to the real everyday interests of residents, workers, voters; to the values of self-government, labor and civil rights; to the agenda of democratic socialism. On June 24, the CPRF congress approved Mikhail Lobanov as a candidate for the State Duma elections in Moscow's Kuntsevsky District 197.

A brief interview with Mikhail Lobanov. See the Russian original in [Moskvichmag](#).

Many people do not believe in the fairness of these elections. Many candidates are not allowed to participate. Freedom of speech is not an easy thing. And the three-day vote is often perceived as a way to "get the count right in case the wrong votes

are cast." Do you agree with this analysis? Do you believe that the people can realistically influence the composition of parliament this year? How do you protect the results of the vote?

The main bet of the authorities is not on repressions (which are real enough) and not even on falsifications during the counting. It is clear what to do with repressions: instead of the knocked out candidates, we should support the remaining candidates of the opposition. Even if they are a little less famous, it does not matter. As for the three-day-long vote, we must make sure that everyone hears the call to come to the polling stations on the last day of voting, so that the ballot will go straight to the ballot box, and will not be swapped at night. However, the authorities' main bet is on plunging society into a state of learned helplessness. To convince people that resistance is futile, and that the result is a foregone conclusion. This is a bet on depoliticization. And I really hope that this bet will not play out, and that the 2021 elections will not just be a ritual event, but a step toward real collective, grassroots politics.

What would your three main promises to the voters be? What would you do if you get elected?

1) The income, which will exceed my current salary from working at Moscow State University, will go not into my pocket but into the development of local and university self-government, into the development of the trade union movement. To help fund the work of lawyers and organizers.

2) I will be a constant presence in all areas of my electoral district, interacting with all active citizen groups and municipal deputies, regardless of what party they were elected from. We will be together all these five years. I will hold regular meetings with constituents throughout the district - now one of the few opportunities for citizens to get together and make their demands known.

3) I will be introducing bills aimed at reducing the glaring economic and political inequality: repealing the

pension reform, proposing a progressive tax scale, and repealing the repressive laws of the last ten years.

What are the top three problems of the country and/or the city, from your point of view?

Blatant inequality, poverty, and the precarious situation of most citizens, which, among other things, reduces domestic demand and hits our economy. Criminal urban planning policy, from which only real estate developers, bureaucrats and banks

benefit. The city loses its parks and historic heritage and in exchange gets massive tracts of vacant, barely habitable housing. The so-called optimization and commercialization of education and medicine.

Source [Left East](#).

Democratic Socialists of America Faces Challenges at Convention

26 July 2021, by **Dan La Botz**

Attending will be 1,300 delegates representing some 91,000 members in 240 chapters. DSA's separate and subordinate youth group Young Democratic Socialists of America, has some 130 chapters, but holds a separate convention. Without fear of Donald Trump and hope in Bernie Sanders, DSA seems to have lost some of its energy. There has been less membership participation in preparation for this convention. In my Central Brooklyn branch, only 15 percent of members voted for delegates, an accurate reflection of the small percentage of active members.

A few years ago, caucuses played little role in DSA, but today some ten national caucuses are dominant forces and will play a decisive role. Most of them already agree that DSA should continue its involvement in electoral politics by running candidates in the Democratic Party, but some only want to endorse DSA members and others to endorse only candidates who run as open socialists. A tiny minority in the leftwing argue that DSA should build an independent socialist party. While there is some debate about exactly how to do so, one can expect delegates to continue this strategy of endorsing and working for Democratic Party candidates.

In recent conventions DSA debated labor strategy though it is not a major item on the agenda at this convention. That discussion revolved around whether or not to adopt a rank-and-file strategy, that is, to concentrate on organizing rank-and-file workers to fight both labor bureaucrats and the bosses. That issue became blurrier, as work with rank-and-file workers, some argued, could be accompanied by work with leftwing unions, or simply with support for unions in general (without any analysis of the bureaucracy's conservative role). Everyone agrees that DSA should become a more working-class organization, with more Black members, and more Latinos, and several resolutions propose ways to achieve that.

Most DSA members show little interest in international issues, yet they are likely to be the most contentious issue at this year's convention. DSA's International Committee has tended to adopt what has been called "campism," that is, the notion that the world is divided into geopolitical camps, in one, the United States and its allies, in the other, the "anti-imperialist powers" such as Russia, China, Iran, and Venezuela, which are not to be criticized. Others, like myself,

emphasize internationalism from below, solidarity struggles for justice, democracy and socialism, everywhere, including places like Iran, China or Venezuela.

The DSA IC's campist leadership seeks alliances with the mass leftwing parties of other countries: the Workers Party of Brazil, the Movement for Socialism of Bolivia, or the United Socialist Party of Venezuela, for example. On the eve of the convention, an official DSA delegation visited Venezuela where it met with President Nicolás Maduro, but the delegation failed to meet with the socialist opposition to the government. Support for authoritarian governments doesn't speak well of DSA's commitment to democratic socialism.

Many members feel that DSA's National Political Committee hasn't been very effective over the last four years, but it isn't clear that the caucuses fighting for power at the convention can provide a clear path forward. Unfortunately, recent DSA conventions haven't done very well at making democratic debate over issues possible. One expects that it will be even more difficult at this convention being held virtually over Zoom.

Source: [New Politics](#).

Erdogan's violent equilibrium

25 July 2021, by Uraz Aydin

It was later learned that a meeting of around 40 people scheduled to take place at the time of the killing was cancelled at the last minute. The assassin, whose photos show him in fatigues with an automatic rifle in northern Syria - where he allegedly worked as a health worker - and who had scouted the building several times, no doubt intended to carry out a massacre with most likely two accomplices, who managed to escape. It also appears that Poyraz was tortured before being killed.

Double standards

The benevolent attitude of the police officers who arrested the murderer in the act, and his remand in custody pending trial in 24 hours, without attempting to deepen the investigation into his probable political and other links, were severely criticized by some of the public. The contrast was drawn with the repression of students, women and in particular LGBTI + people, whose various events organized on the occasion of Pride were very violently repressed by the police.

Although President Erdogan waited two days before condemning the killing, the real shock was the Constitutional Court's acceptance of the indictment banning the HDP, three days after the attack for "terrorist activities". The indictment also calls for 450 party leaders and activists to

be ruled ineligible.

International reclassification attempts

While the godfather on the run, Sedat Peker, has revealed the level of complicity of the state apparatus with organized crime through his YouTube videos and tweets - from international drug trafficking to money laundering - Erdogan, weakened internally, above all because of an economic crisis which has deepened for three years, is trying to reposition itself at the international level alongside the Western clan, after a period of multilateral tensions.

Ankara's day-to-day foreign policy based on a disproportionate pride (like that of its leader) aimed to pursue an "independent" course by negotiating separately with rival powers. This prospect has indeed allowed to a certain extent a consolidation at the internal level, with the aim of slowing down the process of disintegration in the Islamo-nationalist base of the AKP. However, Ankara has seen its "independent" room for manoeuvre shrink, especially after Trump's defeat and Biden's coming to power, accompanied by growing tensions with Moscow (on issues such as Libya, Nagorno-Karabakh and Ukraine, despite significant military and energy cooperation) and Europe (especially

with Macron).

Western benevolence

Erdogan thus planned to take advantage of the NATO summit and that of the European Union to convince Western states of his new turn, while trying to maintain in the eyes of his electoral base his posture of a strong man who does not bend. Thus, his meeting with Biden was presented as an opportunity to demand accountability for Washington's recognition of the Armenian genocide. Erdogan came away with a commitment to outsource the security of Kabul airport after the US withdrawal, without even addressing the topic of genocide.

While Turkey was not at the centre of discussions at the European summit, it would seem that the Western clan, who need Ankara on their side given its geopolitical position, in particular with regard to the migrants, will not force Erdogan too much on the democratic question as long as he makes a pledge of allegiance and shows himself to be "cooperative". This does not surprise the left forces in Turkey, who are well aware that the fall of the dictator will be the work of the exploited and oppressed themselves.

1 July 2021

KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng are burning, we need to build a just peace

24 July 2021, by **Abahlali baseMjondolo**

We have warned for too long that people cannot continue to live in terrible poverty only to be ignored year after year. We have made it clear that people will not allow their humanity to be vandalised forever. For too long we have been explaining that we are ruled with violence and that the public often accept this by their silence.

The state has brought us violence each time we protest peacefully. When we deliver a memorandum, it will be thrown in the bin. Each time we engage the authorities in good faith only to be lied to and deceived. Each time when some sort of services or jobs are provided they are only given to members of the ruling party.

Our homes have been repeatedly destroyed with violence, in some cases more than 30 times. Municipalities like eThekweni have been ignoring court orders. Shack dwellers have been treated as if we are beneath the law. In all this, lies are put before the truth, promises made are broken, profit is put before people's needs and the commercial value of land continues to be put before its social value.

The riots that have been happening have nothing to do with Zuma. Poverty and hunger were a bomb and the break down in order caused by Zuma's people lit the fuse. Everywhere people who started taking food from the shops said that they are starving and have nothing to do with Zuma and are not doing anything for him. Migrants were also taking food. Everyone who lives in South Africa was taking food because the issue was hunger and poverty.

Many people were hungry before Covid. Now they have been starving since March last year. Many lost jobs and those few who were getting the R350 grant which was making a difference to their lives have lost it. More than 74% of the youth are unemployed.

The elites have always ignored the

poor. They do not see us. When the riots happened suddenly the poor were before their eyes.

But the poor will remain poor after the riots. In fact, our lives will probably be much worse. If you ask people what they will eat after the riots are finished they say that they are hungry now. They will say that hunger is more deadly than Covid. If you ask them about the people who will lose their jobs they say what about our children who graduated but have no jobs? People are only looking at the present, and not the future. This is because they do not feel that they have a future.

Many people are afraid that there will be no more food to buy and that when all the food taken in the riots is finished an even bigger hunger is coming. People are worried that unemployment will get worse. Others are afraid that there will be fires in the shacks because some people are drinking so much looted alcohol. Many Zimbabweans are saying that this reminds them of how the collapse started in Zimbabwe and now that things are so bad it is better for them to go home.

Hunger has turned some people into evil hearts in such a way that they can no longer even consider another person. Tavern owners are angry that they are still paying rent for their shops but they are closed while restaurants are open. There are people who are pushing the agenda of the Zuma faction in the chaos. People are saying that it was ordinary hungry people who took the food, but that it is Zuma's people who are burning the factories, warehouses, malls and infrastructure. What will happen to people's jobs now that factories and other places of work are being burnt? That is not a revolution. It is destruction that will leave the poor poorer.

In the beginning all kinds of poor people were taking food. Now under the surface the xenophobic and ethnic murmurs are starting. Xenophobia and

tribalism are coming. Some people are worried that there will be a tribalistic war between Africans and Indians. Local ANC structures are encouraging divisions, often using social media.

It cannot be normal to have more than 42% of the country's population unemployed. It cannot be normal to have such a high level of state corruption. It cannot be normal to have the poor ruled with so much violence from the state and the ruling party.

In October 2020 our movement took to the streets with nearly 5 000 people in protest against state corruption. We marched against violent and unlawful evictions that have become normal in our communities, and of course we marched against violence on minority groups and women. Nobody took us seriously. Even today the office of the Premier of KwaZulu-Natal pretended as if he was doing something about it only to create the fatal ground for what we see today.

The government is useless. Zuma and Ramaphosa both failed the poor. The government has failed to bring food and peace. The state teaches the people violence and not discussion and negotiation. Corruption continues. People are very angry about Zweli Mkhize who was stealing from us while we were not able to work and going to sleep hungry. Sihle Zikalala has not come out clearly to say what needs to be said by a real leader. He is a big part of the problem. People were very angry after the President's speech on Monday. He said nothing about the R350 grant, unemployment or hunger. He said nothing about the fact that even our educated children sit at home and do nothing, or that we no longer have money to send our children to school because all the money that we can find must be used to buy food. He said nothing about the fact that the politicians and their families have been eating while we starve.

We fear that the economic situation will become like Zimbabwe, and that

when the worms have finished eating the carcass they will eat each other.

The country is a mess and there is lack of leadership. On the first day it was young people taking food. Now it is old people too. Ramaphosa should understand that when mothers and fathers are going out to loot the situation in the country is hopeless and that the government has failed. He should understand that while there has been criminality the riots were the result of starvation. We need food, we need money and we need to be left alone on our land but instead Ramaphosa is sending us soldiers. Deploying the army is very risky as it could escalate the situation which could mean more death. Government cannot just address people through the television screens and think everything will be ok. People who say that they are leaders should be on the ground, with the people, in this crisis.

It is high time that the ANC takes responsibility for this crisis. The level of arrogance that we have witnessed in the past needs to come to an end. It is time that they swallow their pride if they really care about this beautiful country. They need to be able to put the people of South Africa first unlike Zandile Gumede who told the media that the ANC comes before South Africans.

We note that when an ANC faction instructs people to loot there are no police, no helicopters and no water cannons. But when we have a peaceful rally or a march, or build a home, there are all kinds of police resources in place.

The situation is tense and our members are very worried. A process of carefully listening towards the feelings and views of our members has shown that they say that for too long, they have been ignored as if they do not exist in this country. They say that for too long they have lived without employment and in deep poverty. They say that they have not had food for their families while politicians loot the state and enrich themselves. They say that the Covid-19 lock down hit us very hard but the state has stopped the Covid-19 grant despite taking the country back to alert level 4.

Our position, based on these listenings, is as follows:

- Zuma and Ramaphosa have both failed the poor.
- The riots are a result of starvation and not support for Zuma.
- We remain committed to the Constitution because the law gives us some protection from the political gangsters in the ANC. Without the law repression would be much worse. We would just be ruled by violence. Therefore, the Constitution must be defended at all costs.
- The Covid grant needs to be immediately reinstated and increased and all unemployed people must get a grant. Nobody can be without an income.
- Food parcels need to be made available in all communities. They need to be given directly to hungry people and not to councillors who are mostly corrupt and in support of Zuma.
- There must be a rapid release of land for housing and community farming and an end to evictions.
- Urban farming cooperatives must be supported with seeds, fertilizer, tools and land.
- There needs to be a serious programme of job creation.
- If Zikalala can't come out with a clear statement in support of the people he must be removed from office. He needs to

immediately call for calm in the province, provide clear leadership and assure the safety of the people. All he does is give statistics of the fatalities and the extent of damage.

- We all need to call for calm and peace, and to work for calm and peace.
- All forms of xenophobia and tribalism must be opposed.
- There need to be dialogues in each city and province, and nationally, on how to build peace and justice. This must include all membership-based grassroots formations to pave the way towards an inclusive future for South Africa. These dialogues can begin the process of forming solidarity councils in each city.

We repeat that people are not interested in Zuma's arrest. It is the fact that they have been unemployed and hungry for too long that has created this crisis.

Our movement has been very clear in all our actions and popular education that ubuntu and the living politic are central to the course of our struggle. We spend so much of time educating our members about ubuntu and that ubuntu ungumuntu ngabantu. With these teachings and emphasis, we want to reflect the kind of society we are advocating for. This is the most important part of the work we do before we actually engage on our living conditions and struggles for land, housing and dignity. Here we argue that unless we are responsible human beings with love for their country and fellow humanity, we will not win the battle of justice and equality.

In the past we have stood victorious against many forms of violence organised by reckless politicians

through xenophobia and ethnicity. We have built strong values of ubuntu and maintain high discipline in the mist of these challenges of state violence, poverty, unemployment and inequality.

Our members say that if Abahlali baseMjondolo was in charge we would be swimming together in the red sea.

Ungovernability will leave us poorer and more divided. The government of the ANC has failed. We need a new form of democratic government, a government of the people organised from below, to rebuild our society.

We will do all we can to bring peace, and to build a just peace.

Join us or work with us as we work towards a world in which each person counts as a person, a world in which the dignity of every human being is respected.

13 July 2021

Source [Abahlali baseMjondolo](#).

On the Chinese regime

23 July 2021, by **Pierre Rousset**

On President Xi Jinping

The Xi Jinping regime is a new regime, it is a different regime from the previous ones.

Before, there were three modes of governance in China that coexisted: the party apparatus, the administration, and the military. Everything has been brought together by Xi Jinping around a single-party leadership. And he became president for life.

You could call the Chinese Communist Party, the Chinese Capitalist Party.

What is unique to China is the allocation of points: depending on your social credits as collected with video surveillance, you will be allowed to travel or not, etc."

"The measures that used to be applied against dissident political activists, are applied on the whole population."

On China in the world

The whole world's political situation is structured by the emergence and development of the new Chinese power against the power of the United States.

The American obsession is no longer to let China do what it wants without reacting, the Chinese obsession is not to let itself be cornered in its immediate space."

If you try to hold back the Chinese

economic development too much – as the US is trying to do – you open the crisis of global recession.

On China and Europe

Xi Jinping's policy is to make agreements with as many countries as possible that do not involve them leaving their alliance with the US.

The US wants a bloc of alliances against China as a closed political bloc.

Xi Jinping proposes multi-lateral alliances without setting leaving the Western camp as a precondition.

China's political priority is not the European Union but the nation-states.

It is not through the European Union that China wants to impose its influence in Europe.

The big problem is that Europe does not exist as a world power.

On China and international relations

50% of Chinese imports are made by transnationals.

The success of Chinese development is due to the fact that it is driven by a state. State capitalism is a traditional Asian model.

Xi Jinping will more or less open up access to services in China, but he has two trump cards: the Chinese market

is too big, so there will always be compromise and trade-offs, and secondly, one of the problems is that the US doesn't want China's high tech sector to succeed. So it is contradictory.

We have entered a very indecisive phase: there are political blocs that are being re-assembled.

Xi Jinping's strategy is intelligent: to counter the closed alliance blocs that the United States would like to see with flexible alliances without conditions that China is proposing to other countries

On inequality in China

As long as the Chinese think their children will live better, the system works.

The problem is that today the Chinese economy is in crisis and unemployment is starting to rise again.

If people start to think that their children will not live better, a social and political crisis may open up in China.

The Chinese economy is in crisis and the social and political balance is in question.

There is nothing communist about the Chinese model, which is run by billionaires.

The credibility of the regime is in

question: many of the big Chinese families are sending some of their children abroad, which shows that they do not necessarily have confidence in the long-term future of the regime.

Xi Jinping wants to control everything and there are people inside and outside the party with a lot of grudges against him.

We may see the combination of a political and social crisis in China linked to the economic crisis.

Source [Anti*Capitalist Resistance](#).

Old Wine in New Bottles? -The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) celebrates its centenary

22 July 2021, by **Peter Wong**

About the same time Beijing is also stepping up its repression of the Hong Kong opposition which is demanding universal suffrage. It had vaguely promised universal suffrage for Hong Kong in its Basic Law but it has no intention to honour it. Today, the CCP still claims to be the faithful successor of the great 1926-27 Canton-Hong Kong general strike (which was led by the CCP), but one thing proves it is not. One of the central demands of the then strike committee was, no more and no less, the demand for universal suffrage for Hong Kong.

It is plain silly to describe today's CCP or China as "communist" or "socialist". Not even the term "progressive" is appropriate, unless it is applied in the way Marx once did in his critique of capitalism in general - if capitalism is somehow progressive it is only because its rapid development of the productive forces laid the ground for the proletariat to capture power and to reorganize the society along the principles of equality and fraternity. By turning China into a global sweat shop the CCP has simultaneously enriched its leaders while industrialising and urbanizing the country in a pace unseen in world history. In 1949 China's peasant population accounted for 90 percent, today it has fallen to 40 per cent. In terms of the active labour force the figures are even more impressive. In 2019, not only the share of agricultural labour forces dropped to

one fourth of the total, making the total share of both manufacturing and services 74 percent, what is also worth noting is the fact that services had significantly increased its share to nearly half of the total (47 percent), numbering 360 millions - a pattern increasingly similar to developed countries. [7]

With such a great leap forward to industrialisation the number of the working class has reached 570 million. The spectre of a rebellious working class continues to haunt the Party. Thanks to its insistence on suppressing all forms of free organization under its rule, from 1949 onward - nay, from 1942 - it has been very successful in fending off the this spectre. Despite all the twists in its political line, sometimes leftist sometimes rightist, one single thread runs through the period from 1942 to 2021, namely its monolithic and autocratic nature.

This leads us to a discussion of "six important moments of the CCP" below, which may be helpful to readers to grasp how this once revolutionary workers party degenerated into a party of bureaucrats, capitalists and murderers, although it must be added that this party also promoted industrialization of the country, albeit at a neck-breaking speed with unnecessary and tremendous costs.

1921

1921 was the year when the CCP was founded. Before 1925 it was still a very small party with less than a thousand members. Then came the 1925-27 great Chinese revolution when millions of workers and peasants rose up to fight against both Western colonialism and the Chinese warlords. This allowed the very young party to grow quickly, to nearly 60,000 members, and half of them were workers (the rest were either students, intellectuals or peasants). At one point, the party, through leading three workers uprisings, was able to overthrow the Shanghai warlord government and established real control over this vital city. Ironically the many thousands of party members, instead of fighting under their own banner, actually fought under the Kuomintang (KMT- Chinese Nationalist Party) flag and its discipline - a result of the infamous policy of "entry into the KMT" policy dictated to the CCP by the Comintern, despite objections from the party leader, Chen Duxiu. This sealed the fate of the party when the KMT stabbed it in the back. The revolution was lost, and its members were either killed or hunted down.

Birthplace of Chinese Communist Party

1928

The year 1928 began with the tragic defeat of the CCP's uprising in Guangzhou at the end of 1927. Unlike previous uprisings, this was conducted

when the revolution had already been defeated. It was imposed on the CCP by Stalin, who was eager to artificially manufacture an uprising in order to save face from leading the Chinese revolution into great defeat. This suicidal uprising helped the KMT to further eliminate more than 90 percent of the CCP's urban forces. From then on the party would shift its base to the countryside and transformed itself into a party of peasants while the proportion of worker members became negligible. Both Stalinisation of the party and its engagement in chiefly guerrilla warfare now further transformed the party's once lively internal democratic regime into a top down party.

1942

1942 marked another watershed in the evolution of the party. It was the year when Mao conducted his infamous "Yanan rectification movement". According to the historian Gaohua's book *How the Red Sun Rose* this "movement" was in essence a purge against the last remnants of the Party's democratic legacy inherited from the great 1919 May Fourth Movement and the New Culture Movement. No wonder after the purge Mao was officially recognized by the leadership as the top leader who would make the final decisions for the party. Mao's personal cult was literally built upon the corpses of those being framed up and purged and also upon the final death of Mr. Democracy and Mr. Science — a metaphor used by Chen Duxiu to propagate these values when he was the undisputed leader of the New Culture Movement. The Party was still launching a revolution against the KMT, but with an autocratic leadership and personal cult becoming dominant. In terms of political form it was increasingly in alignment with the traditional Chinese ill-named "peasant revolution". In the history of Imperial China — they always end up as another Yixinggeming, or a revolution which just brought about "a change of the family name of the Emperor". In social terms it was different. But politically speaking the Party in 1942 was no longer the same party as when it was founded.

1953

In 1949 the CCP decisively defeated the KMT and founded the People's Republic of China. A great land reform was conducted nationwide. Yet it was overshadowed by the further consolidation of the monolithic Party and the autocratic leader Chairman Mao. Not only was there no genuinely free elections ever and opposition parties banned, it went so far as to practically outlaw most of the autonomous civil associations.

Meanwhile, the persecuted Chinese Trotskyists worried that the Party's "New Democracy" program (a four-classes alliance which included the bourgeoisie and which would further promote the development of capitalism) would preclude the possibility of a turn to the left when the moment of class struggles between the landlords / bourgeoisie and the working people sharpened. To the surprise of the Chinese Trotskyists, in a matter of several years, the Party abruptly abandoned its program of New Democracy, and opted for the "general line of socialism" in 1953, which soon evolved into the madness of the "Great Leap Forward" to "communism". Small peasants would see their lands confiscated by the local communes, small merchants and craftsmen would be incorporated in the so called cooperatives, while capitalists would be eliminated, not necessarily physically, but definitely as a class. This sudden ultra-left turn was made possible by Mao's one-man dictatorship. Among top leaders he was nearly alone in arguing for dumping the old program of New Democracy into the rubbish bin and starting to introduce "socialism". The autocratic regime established in 1942 guaranteed Mao's absolute authority to accomplish the turn.

It was this turn that reminds us of the limitation of defining the CCP in its guerrilla war period as "peasant party" pure and simple. It was also a party which had very strong link to the Soviet Union, constantly looking to its leadership. Hence if this was a "peasant party" it was one which was practically led by a foreign state founded, at the beginning at least, by the Russian proletariat. This international element constantly shaped the course of the CCP. Upon

the founding of the new state Mao had already called for copying the "model" of the USSR, which would later evolve into total nationalization and collectivization.

The great "left" turn seemed to deserve applause from the left. Yet socialism is not just about "nationalization". Choosing a correct timing and the proper way to do it is as much important as the objective itself, and this means full democracy, initiatives from below, and acting within the objective economic and technical limits. In doing the opposite the CCP under Mao had created with this Great Leap Forward one of the greatest tragedies in human history.

The fact that Mao's adventure failed miserably did not make him come back to his senses. A face-losing Mao would soon whip up another mad campaign, the Cultural Revolution, so as to wipe out those leaders like Liu Shaoqi who dared to grumble about the Great Leap Forward. The logic of rotten autocracy now fully played itself out, despite all the rhetoric about Marxism and Socialism. Precisely because of these tragedies, Mao had deeply discredited the very idea of socialism, laying the ground for the right wing counter offensive in the future.

1976

When Mao died in 1976, the country was totally exhausted by this ultra-left madness. The "old cadres" soon came back to power. They were more practical, and would soon do away with the communes, the legacies of the Cultural Revolution etc, and announced that from there onward the Party, instead of focusing on "class struggles" it would now uphold the "four modernizations". However their comeback also symbolized the ultimate triumph of the bureaucracy. Mao, the emperor without a crown, suffered the same fate of countless emperors in Imperial China — he could kill any bureaucrat he wanted, but ultimately the bureaucracy itself would always win — it would grow bigger and bigger, and devour a larger and larger share of social surpluses (until it becomes increasingly unbearable by the people).

Yet in 1979 when Deng became the new head of the bureaucracy his promises of “modernisation” was welcomed by the people who wanted to see the end of Mao’s madness. For Deng, the tragic experiences of Mao’s “communism” now supplied the Party with the best argument to turn to capitalism and enrich themselves. Eventually the country’s most important branches of the economy would be controlled by a handful of families of the “second red generation” and the “offspring of government officials”. It was also a moment when the Party has to spend a budget on internal security larger or similar to the defense budget – it

knows very well who their main enemies are, namely, the people themselves.

The 1989 democratic movement was the people’s response to the Party’s bureaucratic capitalism – a kind of capitalism where the ruling party simultaneously fused political and economic power in its own hands. Ironically it was the CCP who in the 1930’s accused the KMT’s regime as a kind of “bureaucratic capitalism”. The Party’s bloody crackdown on the movement signifies nothing but the complete and irreversible degeneration of the ruling Party into a bureaucratic capitalist party. No

wonder the dominant social composition of this party now is officials. In thirty years the Party would once again crack down on the people, this time on the Hong Kong democratic movement, so as to complete its project of building a perfect Orwellian society in China. In this sense the CCP has exhibited most perfectly the original meaning of “revolution” – a course of events that eventually lead back to the starting point. One could say that CCP’s China is just a reborn KMT regime of the 1930s, only this time it is much more successful than its predecessor.

Source [Anti*Capitalist Resistance](#).

From Pakistan to the Philippines, facing the health crisis and authoritarian regimes

21 July 2021, by **Pierre Rousset**

Responding to the Covid-19 Pandemic

In South and Southeast Asia (with the very specific exception of Thailand), the authorities have never implemented effective health policies against the coronavirus. The whole region is now living under the impact of new variants that appeared for the most part in India, including countries that managed to block or limit the first wave. Currently it is Delta, but there are others looming, which may prove even more dangerous. The financial appeals we are receiving now are aimed, at least in large part, at strengthening the logistics necessary for the deployment of multifaceted support to the victims of the pandemic - or victims of the state of emergency decreed by the authorities: distribution of essential goods (food, health, hygiene, etc.) even in remote areas, despite confinements and curfews; informing the population about the support measures promised by the administration (rights often unknown to the people concerned);

facilitating effective access to official aid, vaccines and treatments, etc.

“The rich have nothing to fear”

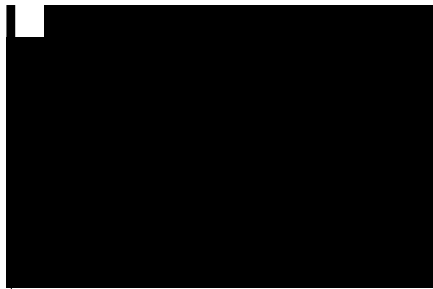
Bangladesh, India’s neighbour, has been hit hard. The farmers’ associations BKF (men) and BKS (women) write that:

the situation in the country has become very alarming. No district is protected from the epidemic anymore and it is particularly severe in border areas. Members of the BKF-BKS are affected, especially in the North. More generally, containment measures are being applied in an inhumane way, with day labourers losing all income (without receiving any assistance), even tea sellers are not allowed to go out in the street: their kettles and cups are seized by the police! The rich, on the other hand, have nothing to fear; they can drive around and buy whatever they want. So this is a crucial time.

Indeed, the situation is getting worse by the day. The rate of infection is increasing in rural areas. The concern is all the greater because the rural health structure is dilapidated. In the cities, the hospitals are overcrowded. Most of the patients who die are due to lack of oxygen. There are no places available. Patients in severe critical condition queue outside the hospital. They pray that the inpatients in the intensive care unit will die so that they can fill the vacant places.

The work of Free Women in Indonesia was initially focused on defending the reproductive rights of women workers in an industrial area of Jakarta. It had already broadened its scope of intervention after natural disasters. It now informs us that:

the members of the association who are currently living in our centre [in the industrial area] are



Since this article was written, the coronavirus epidemic has suddenly worsened in Indonesia, the archipelago having become one of the epicentres of the pandemic in Asia, and the association Free Women has launched an appeal for international solidarity. [8]

“Free vaccines for all”

In addition to the above, our partners in Pakistan, a large coalition of political and social movements, launched a new federal campaign called “Free Vaccines for All” back in March and initiated a new movement that will spread throughout the country, the People’s Movement for Free Corona Vaccine. Pakistanis are now actively involved in international calls to lift private patents on Covid-19 vaccines and to build self-sufficient production capacity in the South. They contribute to regional networks in South Asia and international networks such as the Asia-Europe People’s Forum (AEPF). Together with the CADTM, they are part of a broad call for the immediate cancellation of the debt of South Asian countries, as an essential measure for the deployment of an effective health policy.

The new pandemic wave is expected to be more deadly than the previous one in many countries in the region, while the social crisis has worsened. In general, the official number of infections and deaths per population is much lower than in France. There is obviously a bias, as many victims from working-class backgrounds are never tested (that a poor person dies is both normal and irrelevant) or die first of malnutrition, which prevents the authorities from monitoring the real evolution of the epidemic. However, it is also true that the human cost of Covid-19 in Europe has been particularly high. Official French data (not overestimated) give 111,152

confirmed deaths on 3 July 2021. This is considerable.

Total war in the Philippines

After Burma, the situation is probably most serious in the Philippines. President Rodrigo Duterte is known to have given immunity to the forces of repression, which have multiplied extrajudicial killings in the wake of his election in 2016 (probably some 20,000 deaths), all in the name of the “war on drugs”, which has taken on the appearance of settling scores and a “war on the poor”. The war against the epidemic has been part of the same repressive logic. The Duterte government’s handling of the Covid pandemic has been militarized. This logic was accentuated by the adoption of a new anti-terrorist law in 2020, followed by the criminalization of political opposition and the launch of an all-out war against the “reds” (real or supposed). After declaring that anyone violating the lockdown must be shot, Duterte ordered soldiers to finish off on the spot any “communist” injured in a confrontation. No quarter given!

Local Initiatives

The country is in recession. It is estimated that by the end of 2020 six out of ten households had gone hungry, and that more than 5 million Filipinos will be pushed into poverty if the government does not provide sufficient assistance. Faced with the emigration of health care workers, who have paid a very heavy price for the epidemic (being deprived of protection), no measures are being taken to strengthen the hospital system. The new budget maintains the policy of large-scale infrastructure works which are sources of corruption and enrichment of the rich, instead of investing in health and social services. The vaccination policy is chaotic. Concentrated in the capital region, the epidemic is on the rise and is gradually spreading to the rest of the country. In fact, experts are identifying Davao (Duterte City) as the new epicentre of Covid-19 in the country – an early warning sign that complete management of a military

type will be applied in the city and a good set up for eventual control of the results of elections next year.

The population must learn to cope without the help of the administration. Local initiatives are multiplying to organize community canteens and ensure the distribution of food and aid. The Mihands coalition is involved, along with others, in this movement. Based in Mindanao, it comprises some fifty associations, each with its own speciality, which coordinate their action to respond to humanitarian disasters of all kinds. This coalition has acquired its own dynamic and is not the instrument of any party. Its field of intervention is vast. For example, it often has to respond to an increase in the multiple tensions at work on the island, including the defence of the Lumad mountain peoples whose ancestral territories are threatened by economic lobbies (timber, mining), the army, and the militias of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the new Bangsamoro administrative entity, which has a Muslim majority. The CP (Maoist) New People’s Army (NPA) itself can threaten communities that want to preserve their autonomy and do not want to fall under their command. Negotiating conflict resolution, truces or peace agreements is an ongoing emergency that Mihands tries to address as best it can.

Targets for Assassination

All organizations that have been engaged in perfectly legal progressive activities for years, if not decades, are now being singled out as targets for assassination by the Duterte regime. This is the case for members of Mihands, as it is for many others. The situation is deteriorating particularly rapidly in Mindanao, but even in the capital, the University of the Philippines is denounced by the authorities as a leftist hideout, threatened with military occupation, against academic freedom – not seen since the Marcos dictatorship. Trade unionists, lawyers, journalists, leaders of popular communities, leaders of mountain populations, defenders of rights or the environment, political opponents... are executed without trial, others arbitrarily imprisoned.

Armed clandestine movements are obviously also targets, even those that have not carried out any offensive action for ages. The Revolutionary Workers' Party-Mindanao (RPM-M) and the People's Revolutionary Army (RPA) emerged from the CPP (CPP-NDF). They broke away from the central party leadership during the crisis that profoundly transformed the CPP at the turn of the 1980s-1990s. Other regional structures and national commissions also asserted their independence on this occasion.

Even before the split, the regional structure of the CPP that was to found the RPM-M / RPA had learned many lessons from its experience with the popular communities in Central Mindanao, be they Christian, Muslim or Lumad, as well as from the paranoid purges that tore the Communist Party apart nationwide. They changed their programme and strategy accordingly and this evolution continued after the split. The RPM-M put the socialist perspective on the agenda (which the CPP never did). It re-evaluated, in a democratic process, the nature of its relationship with the working class in their areas of operation, respecting the decisions taken by the communities, rather than trying to impose the party's own tactical choices.

Armed Self-defence

The RPM-M understood that armed struggle was not necessarily, at all times and under all circumstances, the "principal form" of revolutionary combat. It engaged in peace talks. These talks never came to fruition, not least because it would have had to disarm, and disarmament would have meant, given the situation in Mindanao where militarized groups of all kinds (from gangs to radical Islamists) operate, leaving much of its home areas and thereby abandoning the popular communities where its members live and for whom it was an irreplaceable force for self-defence.

The RPM-M and the RPA then placed themselves in a defensive posture to the extent that their theatre of operations became a sort of zone of relative peace, compared to what was happening in other parts of the island. It was able to maintain a "non-

offensive" armed force for a long time, despite numerous provocations, without disintegrating or degenerating, which is not an easy thing to do. It therefore ensured that the members of the RPM-M / RPA did not lose their social roots. The political-military experience of this movement, too little known, is full of valuable lessons.

In March 2021, in the face of the Duterte regime's merciless war affecting even the peaceful peasant communities with red-tagging and profiling, the RPM-M / RPA once again changed its orientation, calling for a people's war and reactivating their military capacity. The basis of their policy, its justification, remains self-defence, but a passive posture no longer allows them to ensure the protection of their own members, as well as that of popular communities or militant networks that were once legal but are now forced underground. This violent change in the situation shows that if the RPM-M / RPA was right to adopt a defensive posture when it did, it was also right not to disarm.

Acting Despite Threats

In no country in the region do our sister organizations operate in "normal" security conditions. Helping the poor always upsets the rich and powerful. In Bangladesh, the BKF-BKS organizations are fighting for the recognition of the rights of peasants occupying large islands that emerge in rivers. Some of their leaders have ended up seriously injured in hospital after being attacked by the henchmen of big landowners.

Pakistan in a State of Permanent Violence

The political landscape of the Pakistani left has been recomposing itself for years, with generational change, regroupments and new forms of convergence of struggles. Our historical "lineage" is part of the non-sectarian legacy of the Labour Party Pakistan (LPP). Its cadres went into exile or underground during military dictatorships, but this was only temporary. Religious (Islamic

fundamentalism), social (in companies as well as in the countryside), state (secret services, army) and political violence is a constant feature of Pakistani reality. These forms of violence can be combined, as in Okara where the landowner is the army. When the peasants mobilized for their rights, they were subjected to a military blockade for months, their leaders were imprisoned, tortured, convicted of terrorism and detained in a harsh high security prison. It took many years of mobilization to get their rehabilitation - as it did for Baba Jan, a popular figure in Gilgit Balistan in the Himalayan foothills, or in the North West with MP Ali Wazir.

Pakistan is a geographically fragmented country where regionalism is strong, nationalism too (Baluchistan), and where borders are sometimes disputed. This is particularly the case in Kashmir, which is divided between Pakistani and Indian administration (not to mention the Chinese presence). The country is in a permanent state of war around the border line and the situation is only getting worse with the territorial ambitions of Prime Minister Modi in India and the Hindu far right.

One of the greatest successes of the militant left in Pakistan is that it has been able to develop a sense of solidarity that breaks down the traditional divisions in the country. It has countered repression with democratic mass mobilization and the ability to campaign in defence of imprisoned activists. It is showing remarkable dynamism in a situation that remains uncertain.

Regional Tussle Over Burma

We had no links to Burma until the country plunged into a major crisis following the February 1st putsch and the announced failure of the "democratic transition". Since then, the number of people killed by the military is approaching a thousand and armed resistance is gradually spreading throughout the lowland regions and no longer only in various territories on the outskirts inhabited

by ethnic minorities.

Multifaceted Resistance

The population is also facing a new wave of Covid-19, as health workers have dissociated from the army and the civilian government's vaccination programme has come to a halt. As in many countries, the pandemic is an opportunity for the junta to try to strengthen its grip on society at the cost of the effectiveness of health policies - as in many other regimes with more or less authoritarian tendencies (including in Europe). Currently, there is no vaccination being done in the country, pushing foreign governments and embassies to procure their own vaccine for its staff and their nationalities living and working there.

The governments of Burma's neighbours support the ruling junta: Modi's India, the generals' Thailand, Xi Jinping's China... This alliance of reactionary regimes is being met with

solidarity by progressive movements in the region. All our partners in the region believe that the outcome of the Burmese conflict, which is now shaping up to be long and difficult, will have profound geopolitical consequences and that the Burmese resistance must benefit from the broadest international solidarity.

The situation in Burma today is both complex and fluid, particularly in the ethnic minority states. However, important steps forward have been taken with the formation of the Government of National Unity and the People's Defence Forces (PDF), along with many uncoordinated local armed resistance groups. Thanks to our regional network of partners who can follow developments closely, we can dedicate our financial support to active resistance groups.

The Climate Crisis

A last word on the combined

consequences of the climate crisis, which are particularly serious in the region, and the activation of the Pacific Ring of Fire, leading to increasingly frequent and violent typhoons, volcano eruptions, earthquakes, tsunamis, especially in the Philippine or Indonesian archipelagos, also threatened by rising sea levels. Much of Bangladesh is likely to be under water tomorrow. For various reasons, the Indonesian capital of Jakarta is slowly sinking and one neighbourhood after another is being submerged.

Southeast Asia is spared nothing. Humanitarian disasters (whether caused by wars, natural hazards, etc.) are cumulative and multiplying their effects to the detriment of the populations. Activist movements must respond to a multifaceted global crisis that can only get worse. They need our help to respond.

See ESSF's call for financial solidarity towards these countries.

Genoa didn't last for only 48 hours

20 July 2021, by Giulio Calella

After twenty years, memory plays tricks on you. Perhaps this is why a singular interpretation is emerging - above all in a moderate key, but sometimes also in a radical version - of the events of the movement that invaded the streets of Genoa twenty years ago against the G8. There is the idea that it was a "speeded up 1968, lasting 48 hours", a movement that died in the cradle under the blows of repression.

The thesis of the "68 of forty-eight hours" is that of the director of the *Espresso*, Marco Damilano. He expounded it in the [editorial](#) of the Sunday 3 July issue, dedicated to Genoa 2001 and enriched by the wonderful [cover](#) illustration of the cartoonist [Zerocalcare](#). *L'Espresso* has the merit - thanks to the effective and accurate reconstruction by [Simone Pieranni](#), which will continue in

subsequent issues - of taking a clear position and without playing down the police violence in those days. Damilano himself defines the actions of the police as a "massacre" perpetrated by suspending the constitutional guarantees, and is not afraid to point the finger at "state lies which protected the top managers of the violent butchery, first and foremost, the Chief of Police of the time, Gianni De Gennaro". A stance all the more important today when we have been forced to see images so similar to those of twenty years ago inside the prison of Santa Maria Capua Vetere, this time to the detriment of prisoners. Images that remind us how certain dynamics of law enforcement are systemic and repeat themselves in a similar way in different contexts and historical periods.

What leaves us puzzled, however, is the reading of the movement of twenty years ago. An analysis that ends up being useless for those who still believe another world is possible, and misleading for those who simply seek some historical tools to understand what has happened in the last twenty years.

Basically, according to the director of *l'Espresso*, the traumatic repression of those days caused:

the retreat of those who were then twenty or thirty years old and who no longer wanted anything to do with a collective project after encountering violent and lying politics and institutions. Genoa is also this: the lost opportunity, the end of commitment, the chasm. The black hole into which everything has fallen.

In short, the left in Italy ended at that moment, because of carabinieri Mario Placanica's gun which killed Carlo Giuliani, the raid on the Armando Diaz school (headquarters of the Genoa Social Forum) and the torture at the Bolzaneto barracks. [9]

The opposite of retreat

I am among those who in Genoa 2001 were in their early twenties, like most of the protesters who tried to march from Via Tolemaide towards Piazza Alimonda where, Carlo, who was 23 years old like us, lost his life. Yet after that July 2001, among those of my generation who were in those streets, and among those who were not there but who in the following weeks felt the need to participate, I saw the exact opposite of retreat. We came out of Genoa not as mere victims, but strong in the hope aroused by that movement and in the anger and indignation at that same repression. Already on Saturday 21 July it brought unexpected numbers to the streets, despite the fear and death of the previous day. Hope and anger that convinced us another world was not only possible, but also necessary.

This is what dragged us into the two-year period 2001-2003: the dramatic days in Genoa were a formidable boost that multiplied participation and enthusiasm. Social Forums were born in every city, even in the smallest towns and neighbourhoods, a myriad of different paths and disputes were opened, moments of mass discussion with tens of thousands of people and, one after the other, continuous demonstrations that are still some of the biggest street events in the history of our country. The Social Forum in Florence in November 2002 had an incredible participation in the discussions in the Fortezza da Basso and then a final demonstration of 500,000 people, bigger than that of 21 July 2001 in Genoa. On 15 February 2003 there was the biggest demonstration in the history of our country with three million people in the streets against the war, in a global day of action that led the *New York Times* to define that movement as "the second world superpower". That same

movement had a significant influence on the battle of Sergio Cofferati's CGIL against the reform of Article 18 of the Workers' Statute by the Berlusconi government. In March 2002 it filled the Circus Maximus with one of the largest trade union demonstrations ever. It blocked the reform, which was then approved in 2015 by the Renzi government with very little opposition from the confederal unions. In between, there were:

- the world social forums around the world
- great efforts to invent and renew anti-capitalist content
- the multiplication of student collectives in schools and universities
- new occupations of social centres
- the birth of magazines and publishing houses (our *Alegre* was born in 2003 with a name that is not exactly random)
- self-managed communication paths that revolutionized the web such as Indymedia, which after Genoa and until 2004 had its phase of greatest strength and visibility (and then closed not surprisingly in 2006)
- not to mention the many environmentalist, feminist and territorial struggles.

It was a real explosion of so-called "civil society" which Damilano evidently does not remember. Zerocalcare himself, as quoted in the editorial, curiously claims that "what disappeared after Genoa was civil society. When something happened [before] there were the Arci, the Catholics and the social centres, city assemblies", then, after Genoa, there was apparently nothing. Yet it is very difficult to find a historical moment with a greater number of town

assemblies on the most varied themes than between 2001 and 2004. Certainly without comparison to the two decades preceding Genoa and the two that followed.

What produced the disillusionment

There is also a radical version of the interpretation of the days of Genoa as a "48-hour 1968", that of those who had the feeling of having lived in those days an attempt at insurrection aborted because of the violent repression. They consider the enormous mobilizations of the following years politically tame because people were too little inclined to clashes in the streets. In the moderate version of *L'Espresso*, on the other hand, any responsibility of the left-wing parties for that movement is removed. Because of that repression, Damilano writes, "a generation was left without politics. And ended up in anti-politics."

In fact, he immediately contradicts himself by quoting two 20-year-olds then on the streets of Genoa, Pablo Iglesias and Alexis Tsipras, who years later became vice-president of the Spanish government and Greek prime minister respectively. But his argument requires a direct link between the repression of the movement and the subsequent evolution of Italian politics: the nipping in the bud of a movement that imagined a different politics has supposedly produced a generational distrust such as to favour the birth of populism Grillo-style. [10]

The "*Vaffaday*" from which the *Five Star Movement* was born actually dates back to 2007, i.e. to the time when the effects of the second Prodi government were in full swing, which in 2006 had managed to beat *Silvio Berlusconi* by the skin of its teeth after five years of intense social movements against his government, but which in a few months had created disappointment and mistrust in the possibility of a real alternative.

Damilano glosses over the fact that the largest party of the left - the Democrats of the Left (DS -

Democratici di Sinistra), who in 2001 were moving from the Communist Party of a decade earlier to the Democratic Party of a few years later - in that July not only was not in the streets with the movement but was on the side of the G8. Among the eight big names of the time were not only the hated George W. Bush and Silvio Berlusconi, but also the leader of the German Social Democrats, Gerard Schröder, and the leader of the British Labour Party Tony Blair, the theorist of the "third way" seen as a winning example by the main leaders of the DS: Massimo D'Alema, Walter Veltroni and Piero Fassino. They were fascinated by the "magnificent destinies and progressions" of liberalist globalization, by the beauty of labour flexibility against the prison of the fixed job, with a neophyte enthusiasm for the free market accompanied by the confused myth of meritocracy. And a few months later, following the attack on the Twin Towers on 11 September, they rushed, united and aligned, to support Bush in the war in Afghanistan.

In addition to the political responsibilities of the centre-left parties, Damilano also glosses over those of the radical left, which was an active part of that movement. The spokesman of the Genoa Social Forum, Vittorio Agnoletto, was elected to the European Parliament in 2004. In the same way as one of the most prominent media leaders of the March 2001 No Global Forum in Naples, Francesco Caruso, became a member of the Italian Parliament in 2006. Moreover, in the dynamics of growing social conflict in the years 2001-2003, the role of that party and of its leader Fausto Bertinotti was very important, until his stint in the Prodi government

during which he became President of the Chamber of Deputies. In a short time, from being the political leader closest to the movements he became the one most hated by them.

It is too convenient to say that it was the police that caused the retreat. If ours has become "[a country without a left](#)" because of repression, we can do very little about it and certainly we cannot reproach ourselves for anything, neither those who were part of that movement nor those who were outside of it, like Damilano himself. If that movement was a 48-hour flashpoint, we cannot even learn anything from the valuable contents and practices expressed. In the best of cases these lessons were not grasped, in the worst of cases they were explicitly opposed by the political left. And which today it is evidently convenient to forget.

That movement got into difficulty in 2004, certainly because of its striking impotence in the face of the escalation of the war in Iraq despite the millions of people in the streets, because of the difficulty in obtaining concrete results (apart from the withdrawal of the reform of Article 18) and in taking root in the workplace. But without doubt the birth of the new centre-left, alongside the same Communist Refoundation that invested the consensus of those years of movement in a new governmental alliance with those who had opposed those same mobilizations, was decisive in creating the gradual retreat and disillusionment with active politics that we still suffer from today. An anti-system movement met on the one hand a moderate left that wanted to represent the system, and on the other a radical left that at a certain point was unable to propose anything other

than the "lesser evil option". This resulted in a formally left-wing government that continued to manage neo-liberalism at a time when, from 2007, that system was entering a deep economic crisis that increased inequalities and made an alternative even more urgent. It was this disappointment that made those who claimed to want to replace politicians with honest citizens appear more credible as an anti-system force, despite not proposing radically alternative policies.

Today, when even the Grillo project appears to be in an endless crisis, showing the weakness of a diversionary discourse with respect to the contradictions of advanced capitalist societies, those years of mobilization should not be removed but rediscovered. We need to analyse the political potential, the errors and horrors committed at the time by a left that then rapidly self-destructed, the long range impact that its contents and practices had, which resisted the very crisis of the Social Forum, influencing first the birth of the student movement of the [2008 Onda Anomola](#) (student movement) and then the 2011 [referendum victory for public water](#). But it also faced the limits of the roots and errors of perspective of that same movement.

Only a serious and sincere reflection on these events - that is not comfort-seeking, nor victimizing or aimed at obliterating - can make this twenty-year period a fruitful basis for rebuilding a politics on new foundations that can still aspire to another world.

*Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [Jacobin Italia](#).*

Floods: this is not a natural disaster

19 July 2021, by **Daniel Tanuro**

This is what

looks like

This disaster is almost certainly a manifestation of climate change caused by greenhouse gas emissions (mainly from burning fossil fuels). Ultimately if this were an isolated event, there would be some doubt. But this is not an isolated event, quite the contrary. Firstly, this exceptional rainfall follows two years of equally exceptional heatwaves and drought (remember: the heatwave of 2020 caused 1400 deaths in Belgium...). Secondly, the fact that this deluge in Western Europe coincides with a deadly and unprecedented heat wave in Canada (British Columbia) is not a coincidence: it is highly likely that the two phenomena are linked and result from the disturbance of the circumpolar jet stream (powerful winds that rotate at high altitude around the pole). Thirdly, the increase in extreme weather events (more violent storms and cyclones, more intense heat waves and cold waves, unprecedented droughts and fires, rain, floods and mudslides, etc.) is indisputable and corresponds perfectly to the consequences of global warming as projected by the IPCC since its first report... more than thirty years ago.

Governments ignored weather warnings

The meteorological services of the countries concerned had diagnosed the presence over our regions of a "cold drop" - an isolated and stable low-pressure system associated with a cold air mass. This type of phenomenon is known to cause heavy rainfall. We know that this precipitation can last for several days, as the depression is stationary. In this case, the threat was all the more serious because the "cold drop" was surrounded by huge masses of warm air, loaded with large quantities of water vapour. As this water vapour circled the depression, it was bound to condense and fall as rain. Meteorologists and hydrologists had

warned that an exceptional event was on the way. The two-three days before the deluge began could and should have been used to analyse the threat, take emergency measures, mobilise civil protection and the army, warn the population, and evacuate the most threatened homes.

This would not have prevented the floods, but the damage would have been limited and, above all, loss of life would have been avoided. Cuba's experience with cyclones confirms that prevention makes all the difference. But here, nothing was done. Once again (as with COVID19!), warnings were ignored. The reasons are always the same: governments have their snouts in the economic trough, their priority is the "competitiveness" of companies, they refuse to integrate the fact that humanity has entered the climate catastrophe (in Belgium, while the clouds were gathering, part of the political "class" even found it more important to spread gossip about the links between Ms Haouach and the Muslim Brotherhood). [11]

A host of aggravating structural factors

In addition to this unpreparedness, the scale of the floods and their consequences was multiplied by a host of structural factors of various kinds. Let's mention in general: budget cuts (in civil protection and the fire brigade, in particular - thank you Jan Jambon!); the concreting of land (which prevents water from draining); the rectification of streams and the draining of wetlands (which act as a sponge); urban sprawl; the management of rainwater (which is sent to the sewer and then passes through treatment plants before flowing into rivers); land speculation (encouraging building in flood plains); agricultural policy (encouraging large-scale monoculture farming) and farming practices (deep ploughing, lack of soil cover, disappearance of hedges). [12]

In all these areas, essential preventive measures should have been taken

years ago - and must be taken without delay to avoid new tragedies. But the so-called "adaptation" needed to deal with the irreversible part of climate change must not be used to avoid the root of the problem: the climate itself. We need to get out of fossil fuels as soon as possible, and to do so, it is not enough to increase the share of renewables: we need to break with capitalist productivism, to completely change our mode of production, consumption and relationship with nature, and to do so according to a public plan.

A loan of 2500 Euros per household is an insult to the victims

The government declares a day of national mourning, calls for solidarity and unity, but by its statements it keeps the part of the population that is not aware of climate change in the dark. The Belgian Prime Minister spoke of an "exceptional, unprecedented" event. The bottom line is that with global warming, the "exceptional" becomes the rule, the "unprecedented" becomes commonplace. We can clearly see the link between "knowledge" and "power": stressing the "exceptional" nature of floods without mentioning the climate allows politicians to keep a monopoly on decision-making while shirking their responsibilities. Without explicitly saying so, they pass on the idea that the disaster is "natural", when it is not.

It goes without saying that this discourse plays into the hands of the climate deniers (represented in the government by the Reform Movement's David Clarinval, deputy prime minister, side-kick of Drieu Godefridi and the late Istvan Markó). [13]

(The president of the Reform Movement, GL Bouchez, saw fit to take issue with the link made by "some" - notably the climatologist JP van Ypersele - between the floods and

global warming.)

But all the political tendencies in power have a certain interest in promoting this discourse. Talking about “natural disasters” allows the climate inaction of successive coalitions to be swept under the carpet. If the victims had a clear idea of the responsibility of the governments, the loan of 2,500 Euros per affected household (a decision of the Walloon government) would appear to them as another injustice, an insult to the victims. Instead of this loan to be repaid, the populations are entitled to demand a reparation worthy of the name, financed by the companies, banks and shareholders who continue to invest in fossils against all the odds.

Flooded and starving people all over the world, unite!

Beyond the imperative solidarity with the victims, we must learn the lessons of the tragedy, and lesson number one is that the time is short, that there is not another minute to lose. The most decisive measures must be taken as a matter of urgency to stop the climate catastrophe; otherwise it will turn into a cataclysm.

Lesson No. 2 is that we cannot trust governments: they have been telling us to do something about the climate for more than thirty years and they have done almost nothing. Or rather, they have done a lot: their neoliberal policies of austerity, privatisation,

support for maximising the profits of fossil fuel multinationals and support for agribusiness have brought us to the brink. “We are all in the same boat”, say policy makers. No: in the North as in the South, the rich get away with it and get richer through the disasters for which they are mainly responsible (the richest 10% emit more than 50% of global CO₂). The working classes are footing the bill, facing both worsening global warming and deepening social inequalities. The poorest pay twice, three times, when they have no other solution than to migrate, risking their lives, in the legitimate hope of a better life. Climate change is a class issue.

Lesson No. 3 is that all those who are victims of this policy - small farmers, youth, women, workers, indigenous peoples - must unite, across borders. There is no difference between the poor people wading in the water in Pepinster or Verviers and the poor people wading in the water in Karachi or Dhaka (1/3 of Bangladesh under water in 2020 due to the disruption of the monsoon by climate change!) Let's not fall for the government's cynicism, which will take advantage of the floods to divert attention from the undocumented migrants who have been on hunger strike in Brussels for more than 50 days, even though they are in danger of dying.

The EU's criminal non-statement: the “temporary overshoot” of 1.5°C

In the next few days, we will hear governments swearing that the dramatic floods confirm their desire to green capitalism, that the European Union is in the vanguard and that everything would be better if the rest of the world followed its example.

Lesson No. 4 is not to let governments put us to sleep with this rhetoric. Green capitalism is a sham. The EU's climate plan is full of false solutions (planting trees), sleight of hand (not counting emissions from global aviation and shipping), dangerous technologies (carbon capture and sequestration, nuclear power, energy crops on millions of hectares), new colonial injustices against the South (carbon offsets, EU border taxes), and new anti-social market measures (carbon payments in the construction and mobility sectors, which companies will pass on to consumers). The real aim of this plan is to square the circle: combining capitalist growth with climate stabilisation. Its unspoken aim is the insane plan to “temporarily exceed” the 1.5°C warming threshold, compensated later by a hypothetical technological “cooling” of the planet.

The floods in Belgium and Germany, as well as other disasters around the world, suggest the nightmarish consequences of this “temporary overshoot”. On 10 October in Brussels, let's make the climate demonstration a popular tidal wave for a different policy. [14] A policy for the common good, a democratic and social policy to meet real human needs, a careful and loving policy of borderless care for people and Mother Earth.

17 July 2021

From Cuba: a description of the protests

18 July 2021, by Comunistas

Almost simultaneously and with greater or lesser intensity, on Sunday 11 July, Cuba experienced a series of social outbreaks that encompassed at

least six of the 14 provinces that make up the country. In the 62 years since the triumph of the revolution led by comandante Fidel Castro, Cuba had not

faced a situation like this.

Although the first protests began peacefully, almost all the

demonstrations ended up seeing violence, which was carried out by both sides. This series of simultaneous anti-government demonstrations is something never before seen in socialist Cuba. This must be taken into account to understand the events.

It should be remembered that in Cuba, the last massive protests date back to 5 August 1994, later known as *Maleconazo*, which was contained in a few hours with the appearance of Fidel Castro at the protests.

A demonstration of 200 people chanting anti-government slogans in a central location is something almost inconceivable in Cuban society. Yet, in Havana there has been a spontaneous march of at least 3,000 people.

The events in Havana

The protests—triggered by the demonstration that broke out in the city of San Antonio de los Baños, located no more than 100 kilometres from the capital—quickly spread to Havana. Shortly after 3pm local time, around 200 people took to La Fraternidad Park in the city centre, later moving in front of the Capitolio, the official Parliament building.

During the first hour of the protest, the police arrests were isolated, allowing, at least tacitly, the protesters to march, who moved to Máximo Gómez Park, located between the Spanish embassy and the headquarters of the National Bureau of the Union of Young Communists.

By that time, more than 500 people were peacefully concentrated in the park's esplanade, while sporadic arrests continued.

Subsequently, a group of approximately 100 people, waving Cuban and 26 July Movement flags, with socialist slogans and in favour of the government, peacefully took the Máximo Gómez Park. At the same time, other groups linked to the Communist Party and the Union of Young Communists, together with Ministry of the Interior cadets, occupied the area.

Voluntarily, the protesters demobilised, and it seemed that at least in Havana, where they had

originated, the protests had ended, almost without clashes. However, later it was known that the march turned into a long demonstration that ran through important streets of Havana.

As the protest march progressed, people joined it, and according to data issued by unofficial sources, between 2,000 and 3,000 protesters chanted slogans against the government.

Revolution

The protesters decided to go to the emblematic Revolution Square, where the headquarters of the presidency, the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of the Armed Forces, as well as the HQ of the main national newspapers are located. Near the Square, the demonstration was resisted by public order forces and pro-government civilian groups, leading to violent clashes, which resulted in an undetermined number of arrests and injuries.

At the same time, in the Calzada de 10 de Octubre, Havana, there were serious violent events, where two police cars were overturned.

Subsequently, videos of serious vandalism have been released, such as the stoning of a children's hospital. The death of the civilian Diubis Laurencio Tejeda during the protests has been confirmed. So far, no other deaths have been reported as a result of the demonstrations.

Both the protesters and the civilians who came out to confront them used violence, mainly with stones and sticks. The number of those injured by both sides is unknown. The number of detainees at the scene is also unknown, as is that of subsequent arrests related to the protests. We still do not know the number of citizens who, six days later, are still in irregular detention.

While the protests were taking place in Havana, similar events unfolded in the cities of Bayamo, Manzanillo, Camagüey, Santiago de Cuba, Holguín, among others of less significance. These also ended, and in some cases started, violently.

Origin and essence of the protests

Three characterisations of the protests in Cuba on 11 July have been given. The government claims they were a confrontation between counterrevolutionaries and communists; the bourgeois press says they represented the oppressed rising against a dictatorship; others have argued this was a revolutionary working class against a politically degenerate bureaucracy.

None of the three is useful to understand the nature of the protests.

In reality, the 11 July protests brought together the three previous perspectives: the counterrevolutionary organisations—financed by the United States—violently attacking the Communist Party; groups of intellectuals, who feel their civil liberties severely restricted, facing censorship; and the working class demanding that the government improve their living conditions.

However, although the overwhelming majority of protesters belonged to the third category, this cannot be understood as a politically conscious socialist mass, demanding more socialism from a stagnant bureaucracy.

The protests of 11 July have nine essential characteristics:

1. Most of the protesters were not linked to counterrevolutionary organisations, nor were the protests led by counterrevolutionary organisations. The immediate trigger of the demonstrations was the discontent generated by the terrible shortages caused by the economic crisis, the economic sanctions imposed by the US government and the questionable and inefficient management by the state bureaucracy.

It was the shortage of food and health products, the existence of stores in Freely Convertible Currency that can only be accessed through foreign currency and that hoard supplies of basic products; the long queues to buy food as basic as bread; the shortage of medicines; the restriction of the deposit of dollars in cash in banks; the rise in prices of public services

(Havana transport saw a price increase of 500 percent); the cuts to subsidies; the drastic inflation rise; the rising cost of basic products; and the long power outages.

These are the objective factors that created a scenario conducive to a social outbreak.

Crisis

At the same time, Cuba is experiencing its greatest economic crisis in 30 years. For Cuba's Gross Domestic Product to grow by 1 percent in 2020, the country would have required the visit of 4,500,000 tourists and stable prices in the international market. Instead, in 2020 tourism was down to one and a half million tourists, and the world economy went into crisis.

The decline in foreign visitors caused a loss of around 3 billion dollars in 2020. Cuba imports around 80 percent of its food and the government allocates two billion dollars to this end.

Barring a modest recovery in China, the rest of Cuba's trading partners fell into economic recession. Up to June 2021, Cuba had only received just over 130,000 tourists. Most of the country's reserves had been consumed by 2020.

The health emergency response to coronavirus has caused serious damage to the Cuban economy. To this must be added the serious sanctions imposed by Donald Trump, which have not been lifted by president Joe Biden, intensifying the impact of the blockade.

However, the reasons why the Cuban economy is in crisis do not matter to the working family when it comes to putting food on the table, even more so when the political legitimacy of the government is progressively eroding.

2. The political legitimacy of the government is considerably diminishing. Official political discourse is ineffective and doesn't reach the youth. The political propaganda of official youth organisations is alien to the youth. This is shown by the large number of young people among the protesters

(an exact figure is impossible at the moment).

The wear and tear of several years of crisis and the cumulative errors by the state administration have had an impact. Added to this, the current government doesn't have the political legitimacy of the historic leadership of the Revolution.

There is a widening gap between the leadership of the country and the working class, with differences in living standards becoming increasingly visible.

3. The protests originated in the working class neighbourhoods with the greatest social problems. Social inequality is a growing problem in Cuban society. Poverty, social neglect, precariousness of public and social policies, limited supply of food and basic products by the state, as well as poor cultural policies, are characteristic of life in peripheral and lower-income neighbourhoods.

In these areas, political consciousness tends to decline, with survival coming before ideology. Political discourse doesn't address the daily needs of ordinary people. In these socioeconomically vulnerable neighbourhoods, the country's leadership is perceived to have high living standards.

4. The protests did not represent a majority. Most of the Cuban population continues to support the government. Although it is true that the protesters had support from the residents of the areas where the events took place, an important sector of the population also has rejected the protests.

Although the protests in Havana generally gathered around 5,000 people, this is not to say the demonstrations had majority support. Despite the political deterioration suffered by the Cuban government, it's still the repository of the legacy of the Revolution, capitalising on the image of Fidel Castro and maintaining hegemony over the socialist imaginary. It is largely through these mechanisms that it achieves considerable political legitimacy among the majorities.

5. In the protests there were no socialist slogans. The slogans launched in the demonstrations focused on "Patria y Vida" (Homeland and Life), "Libertad" (Freedom), "Abajo la dictadura" (Down with the dictatorship) and attacks on president Miguel Díaz-Canel. "Patria y Vida" is a slogan drawn from an openly right-wing song, popularised from Miami and by the right-wing opposition.

The other slogans mentioned have the character of claiming civil liberties, which does not imply socialist demands. Beyond the claims against censorship and the demand for greater civil liberties, the slogan "Down with the dictatorship" is frequently used by the Cuban right and counterrevolutionaries.

Comunistas Editorial Board members spoke to protesters who were not against Fidel Castro or socialism, and whose motivation was demanding better lives. However, this differentiation was not made explicit in the protests.

6. A small number of intellectuals were linked to the protests. A minority group of intellectuals, mainly part of the 27N movement, took part to demand citizens' rights, centred on the right to free expression and uncensored artistic creation. However, this was not the central character of the protests.

This is because the demands of dissident intellectuals did not correspond to the needs of the majority, who protested to demand basic improvements in life.

7. The lumpenproletariat played a significant role. These were the groups that carried out looting and violent acts of vandalism, which distorted the originally peaceful spirit of the demonstrations in Havana.

8. Counterrevolutionary propaganda had a role in organising the protests. Although this was not the main factor that triggered the protests, it is undeniable that a strong right-wing campaign was orchestrated from the United States on social media, openly focused on the overthrow of the Cuban government. This campaign had a strong impact on

an important sector of the population. 4.4 million Cubans have access to social networks from their phones.

9. The demonstrations turned violent. In Havana, initially, except for isolated events, the demonstration took place in a peaceful manner. However, the demonstration degenerated into a serious confrontation with police forces and citizens in favour of the government when the demonstrators tried to access Revolution Square.

Both sides were involved in violent actions, causing serious injuries to civilians. Violent groups carried out acts of vandalism, attacking communist militants and government supporters with sticks and stones.

Why was comrade Frank García Hernández, founder of our Editorial Board, arrested?

Comrade Frank García Hernández, on his way to a friend's house, with whom he had been since the beginning of the demonstration, accidentally ended up at the site of one of the violent clashes that took place near Revolution Square.

Comrade Frank had been present at the protest since its start, but attending as a member of the Communist Party. When the protesters left the Máximo Gómez Park (around 6pm), Frank and his friend assumed that the protest had ended, which is why they both went home.

The building is located less than 200 meters from where the violent clashes took place between the protesters and the police forces, who tried to prevent the access of the protesters to Revolution Square.

According to Comrade Frank, the moment they reached the corner of Ayestarán and Aranguren streets, shots were heard in the air.

Both ended up in a pro-government group that was marching accompanied by police officers.

At that moment, Comrade Frank accidentally met Maykel González,

director of the LGBTIQ rights magazine Tremenda Nota, a publication that has reproduced the texts of Comunistas. Maykel González had participated in the course of events, from the beginning of the march to the violent events between the two groups, taking part in the protests, although without carrying out any type of violent acts.

When the protests were ending in the presence of Comrade Frank García, a police officer detained Maykel González, falsely accusing him of having thrown stones at the forces of public order. Faced with this, Comrade Frank García, in his capacity as a member of the Communist Party, tried to intercede in a calm manner between the officer and Maykel González.

While trying to convince the policeman, asking him not to arrest Maykel González, Frank García was also detained by this officer. The police officer accused Frank of carrying out violent acts and being on the side of the protesters. Later, the authorities verified the falsehood of this accusation.

Arrest

The arrest took place around 7pm. Both were taken to the nearest police station. Later, around 1.30am, Frank was taken to another detention centre, where the facts were immediately clarified, showing that he had not participated in violent acts, nor in the group opposed to the demonstrations.

Together with the director of Tremenda Nota, Maykel González Vivero, comrade Frank García Hernández was released on Monday 12 July at around 8pm.

During his little more than 24 hours of detention, Frank affirms that he did not receive physical abuse, nor any type of torture. Currently Frank García is not in custody, but rather a precautionary measure where his ability to move is regulated, his movement being limited to his workplace and medical access.

However, Frank doesn't need to make

any statements to the authorities about his daily movements. The legal measure is part of the procedure to follow until their non-participation in violent acts or in the demonstration is officially demonstrated.

The Comunistas Editorial Board appreciates the impressive wave of international solidarity that demanded the release of Frank García Hernández. Soon, Comunistas will publish a detailed report on the internationalist campaign, through which a fair recognition will be given to the people and organizations that fought for the freedom of our comrade.

It is worth noting that during the protests no other member of the Editorial Board, collaborator or comrade close to our publication was arrested.

Because our starting point is our elemental sense of revolutionary justice, this, however, doesn't prevent us from demanding the immediate release of the rest of the detainees in the 11 July demonstrations; as long as they have not committed actions that have threatened the lives of other people.

Somewhere in Cuba, 17 July 2021

NOTE: At the time this statement was published, Comunistas are aware of the call made by both the government and the opposition to go out and demonstrate in the streets. Apparently, both sides have called to concentrate on the same point in Havana, known as La Piragua. Comunistas rejects both calls, considering it irresponsible, taking into account the seriousness of the coronavirus health situation, with more than 6,000 daily cases. But with greater force we condemn any possible act of violence that may occur in the clash between the two groups.

This is a translation of an article published originally published in Spanish on the website comunistascuba.org. For the original go [here](#). Thanks to Héctor Sierra for the translation first published on [Socialist Worker](#).

For nearly 50 days, undocumented migrants have been on hunger strike in Brussels

17 July 2021, by **Charlotte Fichet**

These men and women come mainly from North Africa but also from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Nepal. They have been living in Belgium for many years and have, for the most part, worked for low wages and contributed to the country's wealth. They therefore describe themselves as "unregistered citizens". Their precarious condition, aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, pushed them in January 2021 to organize themselves into a collective called the Undocumented Migrants' Union for Regularization (USPR in French). The collective quickly decided to occupy various symbolic places in Brussels in order to make their struggle visible and to assert their rights, and began to demonstrate three times a week in the streets of the capital.

The occupied buildings - the Béguinage church located in the heart of the city center and the premises of the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB - French-speaking) and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB - Dutch-speaking) - are regular sites of the undocumented migrants' protests in Brussels. The migrants' support networks were quickly activated to widely communicate the demands of undocumented migrants and to provide logistical support to the occupations. The organizing committees of each of the occupations are made up of students, activists, researchers and academics, ordinary citizens acting in solidarity, church people, etc. The two major trade unions of Belgium - FGTB and CSC - as well as various left-wing organizations also participate. The undocumented migrant representatives from the different occupations decide together on the direction of the movement and discuss it regularly in larger assemblies with their supporters.

In spite of this powerful mobilization, Belgian politicians continued to ignore the undocumented migrants' calls, forcing the 475 occupants to go on hunger strike. The strike pushed the directors of the two universities, as well as many political and cultural figures, to support the regularization of undocumented migrants— but the government has remained unmoved. Nearly 50 days of hunger strike, six suicide attempts, four strikers with their lips sewn shut and the refusal of some to be supplied with water and sugar have not changed anything. How did this situation of desperation come about? And why is there no political solution in sight?

A particularly restrictive policy

It is generally estimated that there are between 100,000 and 150,000 people living in Belgium without access to legal residency status. These figures, probably underestimated, already make up between 1% and 1.5% of the Belgian population. The mechanisms that produce undocumented migrants are the same in Belgium as elsewhere in Europe: inadequate legal channels for migration leading to visa overstays and an exclusionary asylum policy. Compared to other European countries, however, Belgium has particularly restrictive laws on the regularization of residence for undocumented people. The law governing the status of foreigners does provide two mechanisms - firstly for medical reasons, and secondly for so-called "humanitarian" reasons - but its terms remain evasive. The scope of the medical regularization has been reduced to a minimum, while the humanitarian option is entirely subject to the discretionary power of the government. Cases submitted on this

basis are therefore very rarely successful, which makes the current legal channels for regularization inoperative in practice. In addition, the law on the employment of foreign workers states that an undocumented person residing in Belgium is simply not eligible for a work permit that could give him access to a residence permit. Belgium has not transposed into its national law the EU directive allowing the granting of temporary residence permits to victims of exploitation who wish to lodge a complaint against an abusive employer (article 13.4 of the EU Employers' Sanctions Directive).

Faced with this bureaucratic machine that produces illegality, self-organized collectives of undocumented migrants first began to appear in Belgium at the end of the 1990s. Their mobilizations twice forced the authorities to carry out massive "one shot" regularization operations based on a list of criteria, in 1999-2000 and 2009-2010. While the first operation is generally considered a success (about 40,000 people legalized permanently out of 50,000 applications), the 2009 regularization survives in memory as a bitter failure. The long and ambiguous procedure was marked by many pitfalls. The main criterion for regularization, the possession of a work contract, was very restrictive and gave rise to all sorts of abuses and fraud on the part of dishonest employers. In the end, the campaign only regularized a small portion of the small number of applicants, mostly on a temporary basis.

The failure of the 2009 regularization operation necessarily led, in the years to follow, to a reorganization of the undocumented migrants' movement. A new and dynamic phase of struggle from 2014 onwards has brought the different collectives together around a

demand for structural change that had already been made during the previous period. This consists of demanding the inclusion of clear and permanent criteria for regularization in the Law on Foreigners and the establishment of an independent commission to process cases, in order to counter the arbitrariness and opacity of administrative decisions. However, this demand was swept aside by the coalition government in place between 2014 and the end of 2018, known as the most right-wing in Belgium's recent history. The refusal of any so-called "collective" regularization operation was written into the government's coalition agreement and hammered home by the Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration, Theo Francken, who comes from the hardest ranks of the Flemish nationalist right (NV-A). During this period, he had free rein to pursue a deeply repressive policy fuelled by a discourse of racism and criminalization.

Undocumented migrants left behind during the COVID-19 pandemic

As mentioned above, the precariousness in which undocumented migrants are kept in Belgium has been further aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of them lost the work that allowed them to survive. Lacking any safety net, they also often lost their housing, which led to an increase in the number of people having to turn to squatting. Conversely, others have had to continue to work regardless of their health status, particularly in cleaning and personal care, making them even more vulnerable to health risks and police controls when they travel. The closure of borders, the closure and/or stripping-back of certain public services, particularly the administration in charge of foreigners, and certain front-line social assistance services, have also made it difficult to access certain rights, such as healthcare. While most

workers in Belgium were able to benefit from state support, undocumented migrants were left out of the pandemic response.

In response to this invisibilization, undocumented migrants were the first to deconfine social struggles in Belgium. From the first confinement, campaigns were conducted online to push the government to carry out a regularization campaign as part of the pandemic response, similar to what was done in other European countries (Portugal, Spain and Italy in particular). These mobilizations continued in the streets from the spring of 2020 until the negotiations for the formation of a new Belgian government approached in September 2020. But the new coalition government, which was sworn in on 1 October 2020, has generally continued to ignore the demands of undocumented migrants. It also announced a second lockdown in Belgium on 2 November, precipitating a further decline in the economic and psychological situation of undocumented people. Their continued mobilisations in this context led to the emergence of the USPR, some of whose members were already among the so-called "victims" of the 2009 regularization.

The USPR had initially taken up the historical demand of the undocumented migrants' movement, namely, the inclusion of clear and permanent criteria for regularization in the Law on Foreigners and the establishment of an independent commission. Today, faced with the deteriorating health of its members, the collective demands an immediate solution for them, in parallel with the opening of a real societal debate on the question of regularization.

Political blockages

How then can we explain that the Belgian government remains deaf, blind and insensitive to the demands of the hunger strikers? As mentioned earlier, the previous coalition government contributed greatly to polarizing the public debate around migration. It had moreover collapsed following the withdrawal of the Flemish nationalist right-wing party

NV-A, which had a majority in the coalition, under the very timely pretext of the party's refusal to ratify the Global Pact for Migration, known as the "Marrakesh Pact", in December 2018. After the spring 2019 Belgian parliamentary elections, in which the NV-A emerged as the big winner, led to a political stalemate, a provisional government consisting mainly of the remnants of the former coalition was then appointed in March 2020 to deal with the pandemic.

The coalition that emerged from the September 2020 negotiations aimed to isolate the NV-A and the far-right Flemish party Vlaams Belang (VB), which have been leading in the polls since 2019. A heterogeneous conglomerate of parties oscillating between the French-speaking and Flemish centre-left and right, this is a particularly fragile balance. Although a number of the parties involved are to varying degrees in favour of regularizing undocumented migrants (notably the French-speaking Socialist Party and the green parties), the issue has been sacrificed on the altar of government co-management. In what is increasingly becoming a tradition, the government has thus entrusted asylum and migration matters to a party of the Flemish right, in this case the Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams (CD&V), in the person of State Secretary Sammy Mahdi. While this new face, who was born to a refugee father, is supposed to embody a cooling-off of the "discourse" on migration, the recipes for migration policies remain largely the same. The government, now forced to negotiate in the face of the tragedy unfolding before its eyes, has also positioned the Secretary of State as the only contact point for the strikers— and he is inflexible and intractable. Sammy Mahdi has thus become the guard dog of a government that refuses to assume responsibility for the situation, arguing that they must respond to the rise of the extreme right in Flanders.

Years of restrictive migration policies have clearly not prevented the Flemish far right from growing wings. As Andrea Rea, professor of sociology of migration and member of the ULB-VUB support committee for undocumented migrants, recently pointed out on Belgian public radio:

"The ideas of Vlaams Belang are already in the heads of all those who govern, which immobilizes everyone." The hunger strikers, who are now particularly weakened, therefore need

the widest possible solidarity from below, in Belgium and beyond, in order to make their voice heard and to show the world their dramatic

situation, and remind the Belgian government that one cannot fight the extreme right with its own recipes.

16 July 2021

Social explosion in Cuba: the ignored signals

16 July 2021, by **Alina Bárbara López Hernández**

The signals

In an interview for *OnCuba* a little over a year ago, Alex Fleites asked me if I believed that a new historical moment was incubating on the island and what would be its most visible signs. This was my answer:

Yes, I think. A crisis is not a crisis until social actors become aware of it; that's when the subjective factor is decisive. It is a kind of malaise of the times, to put it in a way that some critics will find metaphorical. It is almost always related to the exhaustion of a model, note that I am not talking about a system (...).

In my opinion, there are two determining factors that have led to this moment of malaise. On the one hand, the inability of our rulers to channel a successful reform path. It has been more than three decades since the collapse of the socialist camp and two periods of attempted reforms, one in the 1990s and another since 2010, the latter including in a formal way and with a large amount of supporting documentation. On the other hand, there is the ability of citizens to submit this incapacity to public judgment, which is something new. The breakdown of a one-way information channel makes the warning signs visible. And those in power are well aware of this, but have been unable to respond adequately.

My view is that we are witnessing the definitive exhaustion of an

economic and political model, that of bureaucratic socialism. Those in power are unable to move the nation forward with the old methods, but are unable to accept more participatory forms, with a greater weight of citizens in decision making.

Twelve months later, I published in LJC the article "Cuba, the trees and the forest", where I stated:

In Cuba, the objective conditions for a transformation have been mature for some time. There is no doubt that the nation has stopped moving forward: the economy has not been growing for years, the foreign debt is steadily increasing, as are poverty levels, and yet reforms have been inexplicably delayed. It is clear that those at the top can no longer administer and govern as before. But what about those below?

Without the maturation of the subjective factor, such a transformation was not possible. It required the will of the people to want to change, a civic energy that had been crushed by political, educational and media conditioning. "Learned helplessness" also exists in a socialist model in which the system controls to some extent how its citizens behave.

In the absence of the subjective factor, objective conditions alone would determine nothing.

However, there are now very clear signs of its existence. Such signs have not been understood by the ideological apparatus, which wrongly reduces the manifestations of discontent to "a soft coup," to "widespread manipulation," or to "the creation of negative opinion matrices about the government"; without my categorical denial that this is also happening. The leadership of the country has not yet located itself in:

- The new environment created by mass access to the Internet and social networks, which has deprived them of the absolute monopoly on information they had for decades and democratized its dissemination and generated the possibility of campaigns and denunciations of arbitrariness.

- A state of permanent polemic, visible in the networks and fomented by the country's own leadership as a result of the popular consultation to draft the new Constitution; perhaps they thought that once the consultation was over and our views were no longer needed, we would stop offering them, naive on their part, we now have the means and don't need their calls.

- The declaration of Cuba as a Socialist State under the Rule of Law, which made the prerogatives of Cuban men and women more visible and forced them to demand the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution itself.

- The existence of young

My conscience does not allow me to remain silent.

The result

The intellectuals who for months warned the government about the possibility of a social explosion of greater magnitude were called mercenaries. The party and the government apparatus negligently ignored the warning signs. This is the result of their attitude.

On Sunday, July 11, thousands of people demonstrated in many cities and towns on the island. Alongside those calling for change, better living conditions and political freedoms, as is common in any conflict of this scale, there were also those who sought only to commit crimes and vandalize, but this was the exception, not the rule.

President and First Secretary Miguel Díaz-Canel reacted to these events, unprecedented in Cuba's recent history, with the following appeal: "The order to fight has been given. Let the revolutionaries take to the streets."

In his first television appearance, he acknowledged that there were confused revolutionary people among the demonstrators. In his second appearance, on the 12th, he claimed that they were all counter-revolutionaries and mercenaries and that what happened was the result of a plan conceived from the outside. This is the narrative that has been sustained ever since. For him, the thousands of protesters are not part of the people. Big mistake.

The forces of law and order - from the Interior Ministry, the FAR, the Special Troops, the cadets from the military academies, and even the reserves - have violently suppressed them. Some groups of protesters have also been violent.

At least one person is known to have been killed and others injured, beaten, and detained. Some of them were released the next day. This has not been the case in other cases, such as that of Leonardo Romero, a young physics student at the University of Havana who was arrested two months

ago for raising a banner saying "Socialism yes, repression no." He was walking near the Capitol with a pre-college student of his. The boy tried to film the huge demonstration that had gathered there. He was viciously attacked. He was a minor and Leonardo defended him. Both were arrested.

It is impossible to know exactly what happened, because the internet service in Cuba was cut off at 3 pm that day. We are a blind people, without the right to information and without the possibility to express ourselves. The official journalists show with their attitude that they are merely propagandists for the government. May all the shame of the profession fall on them.

Justified and sometimes incoherent statements have set the tone for the government. The Political Bureau met today in the presence of Raúl Castro, but nothing came of what was discussed. Apparently, there is no roadmap designed to resolve an internal situation like this explosion, which is presented to public opinion as a major international conspiracy that has emerged from the SOS Cuba label.

They have limited themselves to demanding the elimination of the US blockade. Not a single self-critical admission about delayed reforms and constitutional transgressions. Not even an invitation to dialogue. They believe, or want people to believe, that the inconvenient blackouts of recent weeks are responsible for the discomfort of citizens, without acknowledging the immense social debts accumulated over decades.

Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, said in a conference with the accredited foreign press that in Cuba "nobody goes hungry." This statement is further proof of the government's level of disconnection with ordinary people. It is comparable only to Raúl's criticism in his "Central Report" to the 8th Congress as outgoing Secretary General, of the "certain confusion" that some leading cadres had in attacking the "supposed inequality" that dollarized commercialization has created in Cuba.

The desperation of the people threw them into an explosion of mass protests in the middle of the worst moment of the pandemic on the island. One can expect to see a huge increase in contagion, both among the protesters and among the forces of law and order and in the rapid response groups gathered in workplaces to show support for the government.

Added to all this is the political opportunism of some exiled voices calling for a military solution for Cuba.

They should know that affecting national sovereignty with the thesis of a humanitarian intervention is totally unacceptable to a large majority of these people, including many of those who are demonstrating today against the government.

Addressing the foreign press, Rodríguez Parrilla argued lightly that this was not the worst moment Cuba had ever experienced. It is true that in the 1990s we had a terrible crisis and *maleconazo*; however, I remind you that at that time we had a leader with

enough vision to offer short-term change and a people with hope that, in the face of the fall of real socialism in Europe, the government would have enough intelligence to channel a rapid and continuous path of change.

None of these things exist today. But asking the Cuban government to listen to signals is, as we have seen, plowing into the sea.

15 July 2021

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Towards a General Strike

15 July 2021, by **Amandla!**, **Zwelinzima Vavi**

Amandla!: One way to assess the state of the trade union movement is to look at the proportion of workers who are union members. And it seems we are now down to 23 per cent, compared with 45% in 1997. SAFTU has always said, and you have always said, even from before Saftu, that its purpose is to go out there and organise the unorganised. How is it going?

Zwelinzima Vavi: Not yet anywhere close to where I would like to see it being. We have a great plan from the Congress and always the problem is execution. The biggest stumbling block to execution of that plan is that all of our unions are start-up and they are fishing in the same pond as the bigger unions. So you've got many manufacturing unions, and quite a number of service and public sector unions. Coordination of recruitment from that perspective is exceedingly difficult.

We're thinking now very, very hard about how we can perhaps develop the idea we raised in the Congress, the idea of "bridge" unions. Bridge unions means that unions accept to focus on a particular area. Even if you are a general union, you can accept to organise in a particular geographical area. So that doesn't lead you into

competition with another union. And where there is already an established union, you must allow that union to continue recruiting and to work in that area.

Only when we have that strategy coordinated properly, can we begin to make progress in terms of our recruitment strategy. But for now, we tried in the public sector. There were tensions immediately. We have not even tried in the private sector because the problem of overlapping scope is much more pronounced there.

A!: What is it that is interrupting it, what is stopping unions merging? There are lots of precedents; Cosatu was formed out of mergers; Numsa was created out of mergers with a number of unions. What is the obstacle to these mergers taking place?

ZV: The old problems. You know the old problems where leadership think that their logo and their colours and their positions are more important than unity. They don't pronounce that. You just see a dragging of the foot to realise that, no, we still have much more work to do at a political level for the leadership to embrace unity as the principle, instead of regarding their current positions as the principle.

A!: So SAFTU is now 4 years old, what has happened to SAFTU's membership numbers between 2017 and now, 2021?

ZV: They increased, you remember we launched a federation of 600 000 it went up 70,000, way below our target. We wanted to hit a million in the second year of our launch. We're not anywhere close to that. And it's stagnant.

A!: If you look at that stagnant situation, one of the things we hear about is workers who are terribly disappointed with the service they get from their unions. So one of the reasons for the failure of unions to grow is that they can't provide the service that members want and so they leave. Is that also your impression and how do we remedy this situation?

ZV: Saftu has to do what it said it was going to do. If Saftu is no different from the rest of other unions it won't attract members, full stop. Our battle, and the battle as we go to the Congress of Saftu, is to implement the service charter that we have adopted at a federation level; to help train the leaders of the unions, train their organisers and develop manuals to help unions train their own shop

stewards. We had no capacity all along, but now we have just employed about 2 months ago a person to do that.

The major problem we face is that shop steward training has died, even amongst the big unions. Once you don't train the shop steward, the union dies. You don't need sharp organisers, you need sharp shop stewards.

Al!: Another challenge that you've raised quite continuously is the issue of social distance, the fact that people, leadership and membership of unions inhabit different universes and this leads to mistrust. How can that be solved?

ZV: Political training, deeper ideological grounding of the leadership. Look, the gap now is no longer between General Secretary and the rest of the membership. Even amongst the shop stewards, between the shop stewards, there is a gap between the full-time shop stewards and the ordinary shop stewards. The full-timers are more likely to never go back to work. They are full-time officials of the union; they have cars, they have smart phones, they have i-pads and sometimes they even have laptops. They have offices, air-conditioned and they treasure never ever going back to work. I was told a story of a shop steward who lost his position of a shop steward, who just collapsed in the morning in the bathroom whilst having a shower. That's how serious this matter has become.

As Marx once said, it is the material conditions that determine your levels of consciousness.

Al!: But if your material conditions determine your level of consciousness, that seems to me not to be compatible with an approach which says we will change consciousness by political education. Don't you have to change material conditions as well?

ZV: We have to. We have to change the material conditions. We can't be chasing as general secretaries, the

same pay as the director generals or ministers or even the CEOs of private companies. If we continuously improve the size of the car, of the cellphone, of the latest laptop, and then the massive housing and benefits and all of that, that gap increases in reality. Before you know it, the level of anger in the leadership is not the same as that of members who are queuing up in the public transport in Joburg.

Al!: And then the person receiving that big package, that big car and the rest of it, really, really wants to hold on to it, they really want to keep it, they will do almost anything to avoid losing it.

ZV: You said it. Including being prepared to commit murder in order to retain their position. The issue now becomes so personal because there is so much at stake, if you lose it, you just look at your kids. You have to look at your kids.

Al!: What about the old maxim of the labour movement - anybody who works for the labour movement gets paid the average skilled wage and no more than that.

ZV: That is what is written in the Saftu constitution. The constitution says you will not be paid above your skill, your comparable skill level in society. The question is, is the GS of Saftu paid above the comparable skill level in society? I don't think so; I don't know.

Al!: Another of the ingredients of this crisis is the investment companies and all that has gone on around them. We know in many, many cases that they are the cause of terrible trouble either by people openly looting them or by these companies using the structures of the union as its salesforce of financial services products. How do we deal with all of this?

ZV: Let me tell you what happened the other day to me. Workers who are members of Ceppwawu, the Cosatu union, came to my office last year. And they told me the tales of how they were battling for the food parcels which ended before they could even reach them. They were suffering. And

they asked me a question, "GS we know that Ceppwawu invested in the pharmaceutical company and the last time we checked the union had R6bn; are we not entitled to that R6bn as former members who were there when this thing was taken on our behalf?"

Jesus. And they're then saying "should these things not be orientated around a worker, a worker in retirement, no longer having an income, a worker who got dismissed at work even if he's still searching for employment, a worker unemployed wanting a job and therefore looking at the direction of the investment company?"

That made me to think. We discussed with them for hours, to say perhaps the union must rethink the whole thing as to who benefits from them essentially, outside the CEOs and the top leadership getting some goodies. How does a worker, who was a member who is now no longer a member, benefit from this thing?

And I know that some unions such as Sactwu for example, have done a great job in terms of resuscitating factories that would have collapsed and therefore getting workers that would have lost their jobs to continue being employed. Is that a model we should follow? Really be serious about taking over collapsed factories and run them as cooperatives, not for profit, but to sustain workers? Or ideologically is this thing completely not compatible with the whole idea of a trade union?

Al!: In the beginning when Saftu was formed, relations with other federations, particularly Cosatu, were very frosty. Has that moderated over the last four years? What are relations like now, particularly with Cosatu?

ZV: Sort of improved, to the point that last year when Cosatu called a strike, the NEC of Saftu said "let's join the strike and raise our own issues". But the symbolism that was registered on 7th October last year was massive. And that was carried on 24th February when Saftu called the strike. Even though Cosatu didn't practically join, but we found ourselves singing the same tune against austerity. And as a result Cosatu issued a formal

statement to support Saftu strike.

What I had hoped is that we will by now have met Cosatu leadership and have a coordinating centre, even if it means moving towards a confederation of some kind. And a confederation will agree on the minimum programmes: let's fight austerity, let's coordinate better the public sector strikes. And I've made a call for the public sector to coordinate with the private sector and embark on a single strike, one day across all of the sectors of the economy.

And let's face it, Cosatu is weak even though it has most of the public sector workers. The reason why government saw it fit and safe to just impose a wage freeze and to walk out of a signed agreement is because they knew they would face no consequences. And yet if we were to coordinate properly, not just the federation, but bring all of the 200 plus independent unions, I think workers will begin to have hope again that unions are about them and not about the leadership and the logos.

AI: I suppose some people would say it's interesting to talk about the unity between Saftu and other federations but you've also got a problem at home, of unity within Saftu. There are significant reports of conflict in the leading structures of Saftu. What happened to the unity that Saftu is supposed to represent?

ZV: All federations are contested. We are a contested terrain. And we are a new brand, and political formations are contesting that brand and that creates tensions. What I hate about these tensions is that Saftu has no tensions about whether we should fight against the LRA amendments or not. It's all about the political policy, whether we support or do not support, or whether one is accused of being closer or not closer to that political formation. It's all about politics. The elephant in the room is the politics. And even Cosatu was split by the politics and not by the campaign against or for basic income grant for example. And that's very sad.

AI: It seems to a bit ironic. In 2014 when Numsa was expelled from

Cosatu, the issue that caused that expulsion was the relationship with the ANC and Numsa's call for Cosatu to sever that relationship. My impression was that one of the founding ideas of the new federation was that we wouldn't have that contest again. We wouldn't ask the federation to support a particular political organisation because to do so is divisive; individual unions could support particular formations but why should the federation do so? Why is it that we seem to have fallen into exactly the same trap again?

ZV: The politics is juicy, very, very sweet. Because the politics speaks to the individuals' careers beyond the trade union. For example, here is what I think has created a tension in Saftu.

When Saftu was formed 2017, there was no SRWP. Saftu makes a call for a debate on the creation of a mass workers' party. Immediately there are tensions between what Saftu congress decided and the process that is unfolding in Numsa that crystallises with the creation of the SRWP later, when it was formed in 2018. And so the delay in the formation of the SRWP, the emergence of Saftu and the failure to coordinate these two aspirations, from Saftu Congress and the Numsa congress, have created all of the tensions that you are seeing.

The fight now is either to get Saftu to endorse SRWP or to allow it to implement the decisions of its congress and the working class summit it convened.

AI: If we turn to the more material battles, there is a huge confrontation that's looming in the public sector. And it increasingly looks like there can't be any room for compromise between the 0 per cent, if you can call it an offer, of the state, and the 7 per cent demand of the unions. It feels like this battle is going to be crucial in setting the tone of the balance of forces, political engagement maybe for years to come. So how do we win this battle?

ZV: In my view, the only way we can win that battle is when we do not fight

it in isolation. And that's my call. And I hope that this call will be endorsed by the NEC. The only way to win that battle is when we coordinate the public sector as a whole, meaning the PSCBC, the local government, the parastatals, all of them. And we coordinate the disputes. And we coordinate those disputes with the rest of the private sector.

Already a number of private sector employers are refusing to even talk about wages. And in fact if you look at private security, the employers have bolted out of the agreement and they are saying, "no your government has led the way so we are not coming to implement or even in the next round of negotiations, to talk to you about the wages". So that's where we are and we ought to be coordinating that effectively. And we are not.

AI: Am I right in interpreting that as a call to build a general strike?

ZV: Exactly. Without the general strike we can't achieve our strategic programmes. Forget it. Let's face it, even a Saftu-coordinated general strike, even if the other federations can join, 1, 2, 3 days it will make no real mark. What can change the whole scenario is a protracted strike over wages. But in that strike we don't just talk wages. We say "fix our public hospitals, introduce the NHI now, we are tired, we are working there, we have no infrastructure, get the infrastructure, employ, fill the vacancies. You make the same demands in education: fill the vacancies, get us laboratories, libraries, employ security, fence our schools, get rid of latrine toilets. And you do the same in every police station: fix our police stations, renew the infrastructure get more vans and ensure there is more training for the police officials. Same in correctional services: we can't cope with these current levels of overcrowding, we need correctional centres to be correctional centres and not a breeding ground for training of criminals.

And we make the same demands centred around the overall economy: nationalise the mineral wealth but put it under the democratic control of workers. Take us out of the quagmire

of the current levels of carbon-based economy, put us into the just transition, but place that ownership under the communities and under the workers.

You make those fundamental transitional demands. But you then go into a protracted strike around them. I think that if we can do that, we will force the government to increase corporate taxes and introduce something about the illicit cash outflows. It will stop the bleeding of this procurement budget which is currently losing 35 to 40 per cent, and it will address corruption. And we will see a real reconstruction of society again.

And we can say, fine we may not be

ready to pull such an action in 2021 with this corona virus. So we need to maybe see what goes beyond August/September and begin to coordinate for such an action next year, with every worker knowing, that “fine they can impose a wage freeze for now but we are coming next year. It’s not just going to be about the 7 per cent. It’s going to be about reconstructing this society totally”.

AI: A protracted general strike would be completely unprecedented in this country.

ZV: The levels of attack on workers are unprecedented. If you don’t do that type of a strike, we are finished. We are going to be on our backs throughout. And unemployment which is at 42 per cent will go to 50 per cent.

Already the Eastern Cape is 52 per cent; already it’s 47 per cent for women. Already.

If we strike one by one, we will be defeated. The current conditions are putting so much pressure on each worker family that they can hardly afford a protracted strike that will go 6, 8, 10 weeks. But if you can pull everything together, it won’t be 2 weeks before the government is forced to come with their real discussion. And the discussion must be, “fix the economy, fix the economy, this growth path is going to reproduce this poverty, unemployment, and inequalities, fix that”.

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The Other Regional Counter-Revolution: Iran’s Role in the Shifting Political Landscape of the Middle East

14 July 2021, by **Danny Postel**

Saudi Arabia’s role as a counter-revolutionary force in the Middle East is widely understood and thoroughly documented. Historian Rosie Bsheer calls the Saudi kingdom “a counter-revolutionary state par excellence,” indeed one that was “consolidated as such.” [15] The Saudi monarchy has gone into counter-revolutionary overdrive since the onset of the Arab uprisings, scrambling to thwart popular movements and keep the region’s dictators in power — from Egypt and Bahrain to Yemen and Sudan (and beyond). [16]

What is less understood is the counter-revolutionary role that Iran plays in the region’s politics. This is poorly understood and under-examined because it flies in the face of the dominant narrative, that of Iran as a “revolutionary” state in the vanguard of a regional “Axis of Resistance” to US imperialism and its allies. This

view is shared across the ideological spectrum, from neoconservatives and US foreign policy hawks (for whom Iran’s “revolutionary” policies are dangerous and must be contained/confronted) to large swaths of the “anti-imperialist” Left and antiwar movement (for whom Iran is merely defending itself and “resisting” US/Israeli/Saudi belligerence). While the two camps disagree about whether Iran’s “revolutionary” agenda is a good thing, they agree that it is “revolutionary.” This is also the official line of the Islamic Republic itself, whose self-image as a “revolutionary” state in the vanguard of an “Axis of Resistance” is central to its identity — and legitimacy. [17]

Here we have a classic instance of what the sociologist Ulrich Beck calls a zombie category. Zombie categories, he argues, “are dead but somehow go on living, making us blind to the

realities” of the world. [18]

The view of Iran as a “revolutionary” state has been dead for quite some time yet somehow stumbles along and blinds us to what is actually happening on the ground in the Middle East. A brief look at the role Iran has played over the last decade in three countries — Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria — reveals a very different picture: not one of a revolutionary but rather of a counter-revolutionary force.

Lebanon’s “October Revolution”

In October 2019, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets across Lebanon in “the most

comprehensive anti-government protests the country has seen at least since the civil war ended in 1990, in terms of numbers, geographic spread, and diversity of sects and class.” [19]

While the proximate causes were the government’s inept response to the wildfires that engulfed the country and its announcement of a tax on WhatsApp voice calls, the uprising — which came to be known as Lebanon’s “October Revolution” — had deeper roots and gave expression to grievances that had been simmering for several years. The 2015 “You Stink” protests against the disfunction and mismanagement that led to a crisis of uncollected garbage, for instance, in many ways prefigured the 2019 uprising. [20] But the 2019 demonstrations were more far-reaching: people throughout the country — “not only in Beirut but in all major coastal cities and smaller inland ones” — took to the streets “in a show of solidarity never before seen.” [21] They were “rebell[ing] against the socioeconomic violence...produced by the sectarian order” with its “rampant clientelism and corruption,” notes Lebanese political scientist Bassel Salloukh. [22] Along similar lines, Lebanese sociologist Rima Majed characterizes it as a revolt against “sectarian neoliberalism.” [23]

There were three distinct “streams” within the uprising, according to Majed. What she calls the “radical” stream “has been thinking intersectionally, centering class inequality, gender inequality...questions of citizenship, race, and refugees. It is mobilizing around all these issues and making links between them, and demanding an overhaul of the neoliberal economic system as well as the sectarian political system.” [24] Majed and Lana Salman note the centrality of a feminist politics in the uprising, one that aims to “dismantle interlinked manifestations of patriarchy, capitalism and sectarianism.” [25] Majed characterizes the second stream as essentially “liberal” and the third stream as “more ad hoc,” lacking a “clear political project or vision.” A spectrum of orientations was thus present in the Lebanese uprising, with a decidedly progressive center of gravity.

Close to a million people — a critical mass in a country of less than 7 million — participated in the demonstrations. An embodiment of what Yasser Munif calls “the politics of life” [26] or what Asef Bayat calls “the politics of fun,” [27] Jade Saab and Joey Ayoub describe the “carnival atmosphere” in Lebanon’s public squares, “with music, dancing, DJs and fireworks at night” and a vibrant intellectual scene with “daily public lectures on the economy, the constitution, history,” and other themes. [28]

“In these ‘classes’ you could see attempts at the creation of a new Lebanese identity,” Saab and Ayoub observe — one that rejects and transcends the “myths of sectarianism.” In the same vein, Salloukh sees Lebanon’s “October Revolution” as a “truly foundational moment” in which “people are redefining their subjectivity.” [29]

The uprising, he notes, “has allowed for a reimagining of the Lebanese nation beyond top-down imposed narrow sectarian affiliations.” He detects

a shift in how people define themselves as agents: not as sectarian subjects in a political order cut along sectarian and religious lines, but rather as anti- and trans-sectarian citizens operating in a polyphonic and democratic civic space. [30].

Counter-revolution

Where does Hezbollah, Iran’s key ally in Lebanon, figure in this picture?

The defining slogan of Lebanon’s uprising — “all of them means all of them” (*kellon yani kellon*) — called out the country’s entire ruling class, which includes Hezbollah. One pointed variation on the slogan was “All of them means all of them, and Nasrallah is one of them.” [31] Protesters chanting “the people want the downfall of the regime” (the defining slogan of the 2011 Arab uprisings) gathered outside the office

of Mohammed Raad, the head of Hezbollah’s parliamentary bloc.

Hezbollah returned the favor: after some initial hedging, the “Party of God” unleashed a mob on Beirut’s main protest site, beating unarmed activists at a peaceful sit-in and burning down their tents. [32]

In the southern Lebanese town of Nabatiyeh, according to Human Rights Watch, several hundred Hezbollah supporters “attacked peaceful protesters, with sticks and sharp metal objects, including beating women, children, and older people indiscriminately.” [33]

In response to that assault, protesters declared a “day of solidarity with Nabatiyeh” on October 24. [34] “Those who oppress Beirut don’t liberate Palestine,” read graffiti scrawled in downtown Beirut in a poignant critique of Hezbollah. [35]

Hezbollah’s attacks on the demonstrators were not only physical but rhetorical, framing the popular revolt as part of a foreign plot against Hezbollah and its regional allies in the “Axis of Resistance” — accusations that were “met with ridicule, especially since it was being spearheaded by a party that openly flouts the fact that it is almost exclusively funded by Iran.” [36] Activists fired back with satire, “distributing free sandwiches with ‘funded by [name of foreign government]’ written on them.” [37]

Nasrallah is “coming up with conspiracy theories just to get people to stop revolting,” a university student active in the protests, Ahmad Bshennaty, told Al Jazeera. [38] Tehran amplified this line, blaming the protests on “America and Western intelligence services” and warning of the “insecurity and turmoil” they portended [39].

Supreme leader Ali Khamenei invoked a highly revealing domestic comparison: in an apparent reference to the mass protests that rocked the Islamic Republic in late 2017 and early 2018, he said that foreign powers “had similar plans” for Iran, but “the armed forces were ready and that plot was neutralized.” [40]

This “campaign against the protests,” Salloukh notes, “backfired among the public, even inside the Shi’a community, for it portrayed Hezbollah as the main defender of the sectarian system with all its corruption and distortions.” [41] Hezbollah is “now viewed by many demonstrators as part of the corrupt and morally bankrupt political establishment that must be replaced,” as Joseph Haboush observes. [42] Lebanese activist and podcaster Nizar Hassan characterizes Hezbollah’s role in the uprising as that of a “counter revolutionary guard.” [43]

Hezbollah’s aim was to “end the protest movement by proposing solutions that maintain the Lebanese sectarian and neoliberal framework, while continuing to use intimidation and sometimes violence against protesters,” writes Joseph Daher, author of a book on Hezbollah. [44] Although Hezbollah has been firmly entrenched in Lebanon’s power structure for over a decade — Lebanese author Elias Khoury calls it “the system’s staunchest supporter” [45]— the 2019 upheaval brought what Daher calls “the contradiction between Hezbollah’s proclaimed support for the ‘oppressed’ and its orientation favourable to Lebanese neoliberalism and the country’s elite class” into ever sharper focus.

The Lebanese writer and podcaster Joey Ayoub captures the Orwellian upside-down-ness of this ideological sleight of hand in his formulation “Hezbollah’s Resistance™ against resistance.” [46] Hezbollah, he shows, tries to have it both ways: on the one hand, defending the status quo and maintaining Lebanon’s “sectarian-capitalist structures,” while at the same time banking on its membership in the so-called “Axis of Resistance.” That is, posturing as a force for “resistance” — a zombie category amid Lebanon’s current political landscape — while attacking people engaged in *actual* resistance to the ruling system and undermining progressive social movements.

Iraq’s Tishreen uprising

The parallels between the Iraqi and Lebanese revolts are manifold, starting with their timing: mass protests engulfed both countries starting in October 2019. Iraqi and Lebanese protesters were conscious of the connections between their struggles: “in the different protest squares people are shouting: ‘One revolution, from Baghdad to Beirut,’” notes Sami Adnan, an activist in Baghdad with the group Workers Against Sectarianism. [47]. It’s also important to see the two upheavals in their wider regional context, as part of the “second wave” of Arab uprisings that also included momentous popular movements in Algeria and Sudan — or, as some argue, the uprisings that have been ongoing across the Middle East and North Africa since December 2010. The emergence of the 2019 wave of the uprisings in Algeria, Sudan, Lebanon and Iraq showed that the Arab Spring did not die,” Asef Bayat observes. “It continued in other countries in the region with somewhat similar repertoires of collective action.” [48]

Moreover, all four of these cases were part of a global wave of simultaneous mass protests in late 2019 — in Chile, Hong Kong, India, France, Ecuador, Guinea, Haiti, Colombia, Iran, Argentina, and beyond — which could be “the largest wave of nonviolent mass movements in world history.” [49]

The protests that erupted in Iraq in October 2019 were arguably the “biggest grassroots socio-political mobilization” in the country’s history [50] At root, that mobilization was “about the poor, the disempowered and the marginalized demanding a new system,” notes the Iraqi sociologist Zahra Ali. [51] The *Tishreen* (October) uprising, as it came to be known, quickly spread to “cities and towns across central and southern Iraq” [52] and eventually “engulfed virtually the whole country (though they were most concentrated in Baghdad and the Shia-dominated southern governorates).” [53].

By no means did this upheaval come out of nowhere: Iraq has seen a steady stream of protests in recent years — in 2009, 2011, 2015, and 2018. [54] But the 2019 protests represented “the most serious challenge yet to the post-2003 political order,” the Iraq scholar Fanar Haddad observes. [55] The 2019 rebellion was “backboned” by those previous protests — it was the “culmination of a decade of mobilization” [56] — “but its identity was more radical and firmer,” notes Zeidon Alkinani. [57] “People were no longer asking for better job opportunities, electricity or water. They were calling to overhaul the system.”

Alkinani underscores that the movement “classified itself as a ‘revolution’ in terms of discourse, demands, and objectives.” “[E]ven if the current movement fails to achieve a political revolution,” Haddad argues, “and even if it is not a revolution, it is undoubtedly a revolutionary movement that has already achieved a cultural revolution.” [58]

What were the protesters calling for? First and foremost, “eradicating the *Muhasasa* system,” Alkinani notes, referring to the ethno-sectarian scheme in which political representation and power are based on sub-national identities (Shi’a/Sunni/Kurd). [59] This system — established under the US occupation following the 2003 invasion and sustained by both American and Iranian influence in the years since — became “the target of popular rage,” Haddad notes: “rage at the systemic failures, dysfunction and criminality that have marked the post-2003 order.” That order has created a massive chasm, Haddad observes, between “the ruling few and those with connections to them” on one hand and “the vast majority of impoverished and excluded Iraqis” on the other [60]. In 2019, those impoverished and excluded Iraqis rose up “demanding a whole new system,” Zahra Ali and Safaa Khalaf write. [61].

As in Lebanon, Asef Bayat’s “politics of fun” was on full display in Iraq, especially in the epicenter of the 2019 protest movement, Baghdad’s Tahrir Square, home to an “explosion of cultural, political and intellectual

expression and creativity,” writes Haddad.

Amidst a forest of tents blaring everything from hip hop to poetry to Shia mourning recitations, reminders of why Iraqis have taken to the streets, and at what cost, abound in the form of pictures, murals, memorials, prayer meetings and other forms of commemoration dedicated to the young men who lost their lives over the course of the past two months of mass mobilisation. [62]

And like Lebanon, the uprising involved an intellectual component. “Tahrir Square in Baghdad today is a revolutionary zone,” says the aforementioned Baghdad-based activist Sami Adnan.

There are places for reading books in one tent, and a medical tent. Some tents represent specific regions of Iraq, or retired people, or professional groups, like unions of engineers, etc. ... [People] discuss day-to-day things about what to do, but also questions of leadership, writing a new constitution, or putting on seminars about different political topics. [63]

“A new political awareness and culture have been formed” through the protests, Haddad writes. [64] Indeed, Alkinani argues, the uprising has “opened a new chapter in Iraq’s modern history.” [65] The Tishreen uprising has “opened the door to a new Iraqi identity and national consciousness,” proclaim the editors of Tuk Tuk, a newspaper that grew out of the revolt, on the front page of its second issue. [66]

Counter-revolution

As Berman, Clarke, and Majed note:

A movement demanding wholesale political change represented a real threat to the system of cronyism and rapaciousness that has enriched Iraq’s politicians over the last two decades, and these elites quickly mobilized an array of state and non-state security agents in an attempt to quash this challenge. [67]

Mohammad al Basri, a figure affiliated with Iraq’s paramilitary Popular Mobilization Units, expressed this mindset with rare bluntness: “Do they really think that we would hand over a state, an economy, one that we have built over 15 years? That they can just casually come and take it? Impossible! This is a state that was built with blood.” [68]

Those forces wasted no time in launching a “war against unarmed protesters” that left several hundred dead and several thousand wounded. [69] Amnesty International documented the use of “military-grade tear gas grenades, live ammunition and deadly sniper attacks” [70] in what the organization calls a “lethal campaign of repression against protesters” and an “ongoing wave of intimidation, arrests and torture” of Iraqi activists. [71] Whereas this bloodbath of repression against crowds of protesters has been perpetrated in broad daylight, an ominous chain of assassinations targeting activists connected to the uprising has been happening in the shadows, creating what protesters call “an atmosphere of terror.” [72]

The uprising has been “profoundly shaped by the Iraqi security forces’ violent repression,” Ali and Khalaf observe. [73] Indeed, Haddad notes, the demands of the protesters were “only hardened by the violence that has been unleashed on them.” [74] “The more the political establishment cracked down on protests, the more outrage it triggered, resulting in fresh rounds of mobilization,” write Chantal Berman, Killian Clarke, and Rima Majed. [75]

Iran is deeply implicated in this counter-revolutionary repression — both indirectly, as the chief political ally and patron of the Iraqi government over the last 15 years, and directly, through the web of militias and paramilitary forces coordinated by the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which have opened fire on protesters. [76] Those militias “committed bloody massacres against peaceful protesters” in multiple Iraqi cities, including Baghdad, Nasriyah, Basra and Najaf.” [77] “The authorities, paramilitary forces and

militias connected to the political elite, backed by Iran, are those primarily responsible for killing, beating, threatening and intimidating demonstrators, civil society activists and journalists,” Zahra Ali notes [78].

Tehran also intervened politically, maneuvering to keep Iraqi Prime Minister Abdel Abdul Mahdi in power in the face of demands from protesters that he step down. [79] (Mahdi eventually did resign, in late November 2019 — a major victory for the protest movement that Tehran endeavored to circumvent.)

Iraqi protesters weren’t just rebelling against Iran’s local allies, but against Iran itself. Protesters in Baghdad’s Tahrir Square smashed banners of Khamenei with their shoes. [80] Others put up a white banner with red Xs drawn through photographs of Khamenei and Quds Force commander Qasem Soleimani, the architect of Iran’s regional policy. [81] “Images of Ayatollah Khomeini were removed from cities like Najaf, and pro-Iran political parties with prominent militias that were involved in the violence against the protesters had their branch offices attacked and burned,” Alkinani notes. [82] Most spectacularly, protesters set fire to the Iranian consulate in Karbala and Najaf amid chants of “Iran out of Iraq”. [83]

Among the demands of the protesters, Adnan notes, are “an end to the rule of militias, and an end to corruption and foreign rule — especially Iranian rule, but also US rule.” [84] “Most Iraqis are increasingly outraged at the way their national sovereignty is constantly infringed” by both Washington and Tehran, notes Middle East scholar Gilbert Achcar. [85] Vividly illustrating this point, Haddad observes that in Baghdad’s Tahrir Square, while gazing at a mural proclaiming ‘America go out of Iraq’ complete with a depiction of an American dagger bleeding Iraq dry, a looped recording of a voice chanting ‘Iraq is under Iranian occupation’ can be heard.. [86]

The Associated Press reported that the very day after the protests began in Iraq in October 2019, Soleimani flew to Baghdad in a helicopter for an emergency meeting with high-ranking Iraqi security officials. According to

two of those officials, Soleimani said to them in that meeting: “We in Iran know how to deal with protests. This happened in Iran and we got it under control.” [87]

Despite the many parallels between the Lebanese and Iraqi uprisings, there are two key differences: (1) the protests in Iraq were met with a staggering level of violence, in contrast to the largely nonviolent Lebanese case; (2) Iran played a much more direct role in the Iraqi counter-revolution than it did in Lebanon, where its key ally, Hezbollah, represents and reflects the stance of the Islamic Republic. But what both cases illuminate is this: in the face of popular uprisings expressing emancipatory demands, Iran sides not with the protesters but with the ruling establishments they’re protesting against. And the story is far from over: while the COVID pandemic dampened protests, the issues that gave rise to the uprisings remain unresolved, and activism in both countries continues. [88]

Syria’s forgotten revolution

Moving in reverse chronological order, I’ll now briefly examine Iran’s response to the Syrian uprising in 2011. I will not examine Iran’s role in the Syrian conflict writ large; rather, my focus will be on Iran’s response to the initial, nonviolent phase of the Syrian uprising, from the spring to the autumn of 2011.

With the colossal violence that has engulfed Syria over the last decade, it is often forgotten that it all began with peaceful protests expressing democratic demands. In March 2011, mass demonstrations broke out across the country — in provincial villages and urban areas alike. Syrians representing a cross-section of the country (Sunnis, Alawites, Christians, Druze, Ismailis, Kurds, and others) took to the streets chanting slogans that echoed those of their counterparts in Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere across the region, and expressing the same aspirations — for freedom, dignity, social justice, democratic rights, and an end to

dictatorship. Because this history has been largely obscured by the calamity that befell Syria, buried under the rubble of the tragedy — in some cases it has been actively *erased* in the war of narratives over the conflict. [89] — it’s critically important to take stock of the emancipatory, visionary, pluralistic, and radically democratic goals of the Syrian uprising. This is not the place for an in-depth discussion of that story, but I want to point to the rich literature on the subject, and to the vital archival and storytelling work of websites like [SyriaUntold](#), [Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution](#), and [100 Faces of the Syrian Revolution](#). [90]

Iran’s official narrative is that its role in Syria is all about fighting terrorism — specifically Al Qaeda and ISIS. But this is a classic case of reading history backwards. In fact, Iran rushed to the defense of the Assad regime as soon as the uprising began — when there was no Al Qaeda or ISIS presence whatsoever (the only jihadists were the ones the regime intentionally let out of its prisons as part of its jihadization strategy). [91] “From the very moment Assad faced popular protests, the Quds Force and Tehran were ready to do all they could to save the rule of the Baath Party,” notes Arash Azizi. Indeed, the Islamic Republic’s emissaries “were pushing on Assad to suppress the uprising mercilessly.” [92]

And that is precisely what the regime did. As I wrote in 2016:

The Assad regime’s response to those peaceful demonstrations across Syria in 2011 can be summed up in two words: live ammunition. The regime’s security forces fired on crowds of unarmed protestors for upward of six months. The Islamic Republic defended its staunch ally in Damascus, as the latter unleashed a bloodbath of repression against a popular and nonviolent democratic uprising. [93]

In his book *The Battle for Syria*, Christopher Phillips reports that Ali Akbar Salehi, Iran’s foreign minister at the time, “made numerous trips to Damascus to reassure Assad.” Tehran, Phillips notes, provided riot equipment to the Assad regime and dispatched hundreds of Quds Force operatives “to

offer security advice.” [94] Jubin Goodarzi, author of *Syria and Iran: Diplomatic Alliance and Power Politics in the Middle East*, adds:

Iran provided technical support and expertise to neutralise the opposition; advice and equipment to the Syrian security forces to help them contain and disperse protests; and guidance and technical assistance on how to monitor and curtail the use of the internet and mobile phone networks by the opposition. Iran’s security forces had learned valuable lessons in these areas during the violent crackdown against the opponents of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad that followed the disputed presidential elections of June 2009. [95]

Iran expert Reza Marashi offers a similar analysis. The Islamic Republic’s “first reaction” to the demonstrations in Syria “was to open its own playbook and show Assad pages from the post-election protests in 2009,” he observes. “Decision-makers appear to have hoped that Assad would use enough brute force — arrests, beatings, and a limited amount of killings — to spread fear and quickly re-establish control.” [96]

This “security advice” was augmented by a narrative strategy: Iran helped flip the script and present the Syrian protests not as part of the wave of Arab uprisings — which it decidedly was — but as a foreign-inspired terrorist plot. This rhetorical framing was awkward for the Islamic Republic, which had voiced support for other Arab uprisings — those in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, and Libya. This put Tehran in a bind, praising the people of the region for rising up against the dictators that oppressed them but siding with the dictator in Syria. [97] Amin Saikal characterizes this Syrian exception as “an intervention that ran counter to Tehran’s declared rhetoric of supporting the downtrodden masses.” [98]

Ewan Stein notes that Iran (and its ally Hezbollah) committed to “denying the democratic aspects of the [Syrian] revolution and instead casting it as a terrorist insurgency.” “In so doing,” Stein observes, “they appropriated the discourse of the [Global War on Terror].” [99] This framing allowed

Iran to present itself as being on the “right” side of the Syrian conflict: fighting extremists. The militarization and sectarianization of the conflict [100] — processes of which the Assad regime was the principal (though not exclusive) driver — were a godsend for Iran’s war on terror framing: a self-fulfilling prophesy that was very much by design.

Iran has projected this framing backwards, as if fighting terrorists had always been its mission in Syria. But this sleight of hand leaves a fundamental question unanswered: why was the Islamic Republic on the side of the Assad regime when it was shooting, detaining, torturing, and disappearing peaceful demonstrators [101] whose demands and vision were decidedly democratic and emancipatory, well before any jihadist groups were present? And let’s be clear: the Islamic Republic intensified its support for the Assad regime in 2011 but its stalwart support for the dynastic dictatorship in Damascus goes back several decades — and while the Assad regime exponentially heightened its level of repression in 2011, violence has been at the very core of its rule throughout. [102]

The answer is that Iran’s rhetorical posturing aside, its response to the popular uprising in Syria revealed its increasingly counter-revolutionary role in the region — a development that would come into sharper focus with the Lebanese and Iraqi uprisings of 2019-2020.

Paradigms Lost: Time to Dispense with Zombie Categories

Azizi characterizes the contours of Iran’s post-2011 regional policy as follows:

Iran would orient itself to the Arab Spring not in the spirit of revolutionary fraternity but with cold calculation worthy of a scheming

monarch. Despite the words that came out of his mouth, Khamenei was now more of a sultan than a revolutionary. [103]

The Islamic Republic is out “not to foster revolutions against dictators,” Azizi notes, but “to preserve its own regime and spread its influence by any means necessary.” [104] Along these lines, Borzou Daragahi observes, “[t]he ‘revolutionary’ slogans of Iran’s ‘resistance’ are empty rhetoric that merely back whatever policies benefit the corrupt ruling elite in Tehran.” [105] In the same vein, Stein argues that the so-called Axis of Resistance, “ostensibly dedicated to furthering the emancipatory aspirations of the Arab and Muslim masses,” has in reality “played a critical role in *containing regional revolution* and preventing the emergence of a more democratically oriented regional order.” [106]

Indeed, for all the talk of Iran’s “disruptive” role in the region, what the cases of Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon reveal is instead an Islamic Republic hell-bent on keeping entrenched political establishments and ruling classes in power while helping them quell popular movements for social justice, democratic rights, and human dignity. In an insightful essay, Rami Khouri notes this growing disconnect between ideological rhetoric and political reality, in which “‘resistance’ troops try to beat down ‘revolutionary’ protests” across the Middle East. [107].

This development has yet to be properly theorized, but it has not gone unnoticed. Saikal, for example, notes “Iran’s growing shift towards being a middle power supportive of the status quo.” [108] The Islamic Republic “sounds more and more like those same sclerotic rulers it once railed against,” Daragahi observes — “suspicious of any new development that threatens the status quo it dominates.” [109] Even Edward Wastnidge, in a highly sympathetic account of the Islamic Republic’s regional policies, acknowledges that Tehran “is trying to maintain the post-2003 status quo, which has seen

its influence in the region grow.” [110]

We need to revise our lexicon to reflect that post-2003 status quo. We need to retire zombie categories — like that of Iran as a “revolutionary” force in the Middle East, and the fiction of the “Axis of Resistance” (a term that should always appear in quotes or be qualified by “so-called,” if not dropped altogether) — that function as distorting mirrors and mystifications.

The idea that Iran is a revolutionary power while Saudi Arabia is a counter-revolutionary power in the region is a stale binary. Both the Islamic Republic and the Saudi Kingdom play counter-revolutionary roles in the Middle East. They are competing counter-revolutionary powers, each pursuing its counter-revolutionary agenda in its respective sphere of influence within the region.

Christopher Davidson speaks to this dynamic when he observes that “Saudi Arabia and Iran’s respective forms of authoritarian theocracy continue to serve as brakes on any prospects for meaningful reform in the wider Middle East.” Both the Saudi Kingdom and the Islamic Republic, Davidson argues, “have an equally vested interest in maintaining the *counter-revolutionary status quo* in the territories they now contest.” [111]

The counter-revolution confronting the Middle East today in this period of dramatic upheaval is not headquartered in a single capital. Riyadh and Tehran form what we might think of as a regional counter-revolutionary hydra. (Abu Dhabi also belongs in the regional counter-revolutionary discussion — a development worthy of more research than it has yet generated.) With signs now pointing to some sort of rapprochement between the Saudi Kingdom and the Islamic Republic, [112] Davidson’s argument about the counter-revolutionary roles of both states might become less counter-intuitive: the rivalry between the regional hegemony has obscured what the two states share in common.

Source: [New Politics](#)

Right-wing attacks on the working class in Greece - back to the 19th century

13 July 2021, by **Antonis Davanellos**

The title of the daily was legitimate. The new law abolishes the 8-hour working day and the 5-day week. It removes the obligation for employers to provide additional wages when they request additional work, beyond the 8 hours and 5 days. Instead of extra pay, it promises that employers will give compensatory days off a little later. Probably during times of low demand for the products or services the company provides.

This flexible “working time arrangement” was first introduced into labour law by the Social Democrats, during the period of neoliberal degeneration of their parties and unions. Initially, at the beginning of the 1990s, it was implemented in marginal sectors of the economy (in Thessaly and West Macedonia, sectors in crisis were subjected to this flexibilization, but this was a failure, given the Constitution) and was supposed to remain a marginal and secondary element of industrial relations in Greece. Today, the government of Kyriakos Mitsotakis is generalizing this extremely liberal “arrangement”, extending it to the whole of the working class. According to the new law, it is now legal for industrial workers (whose work is hard and arduous) to work 150 more hours per year, without any additional pay!

The worst thing is that this law destroys any possibility for workers to have a collective right of scrutiny on questions of working time and its link with wages. These issues will be resolved in “individual contracts” between each worker and the employer, bypassing the unions completely! This could be the final blow to the effectiveness and legitimacy of collective bargaining agreements, which were already seriously devalued during austerity

memoranda, after the 2010-2011 crisis in Greece (a devaluation which, unfortunately, was also a feature of the SYRIZA government, in 2015-2019).

The government knows that the effort to implement this policy in practice will meet with resistance from workers. The new labour law is therefore reinforced by a series of draconian provisions which affect the legal functioning of trade unions and the possibility of declaring a legal strike. Trade unions are now obliged to keep a digital “membership register” which will be available to the Ministry of Labour and employers’ organizations. To be able to declare a strike, the decision must first be approved (by electronic vote) by 50 per cent + 1 of all staff (and not just union members). If a court finds that a particular trade union strike is illegal, the strike cannot be declared again, with another reason or by another trade union organization (a federation or confederation of trade unions). In critical sectors of “public services” (health care, education, transport, energy, etc.), in the event of a strike, 35 per cent of the workforce must continue to work, in order to demonstrate “social responsibility”.

This law is clearly an anti-worker monstrosity. Even the Association of Judges and Lawyers, even the “committee of experts” of Parliament ruled that the law violated articles of the 1974 Constitution (which define strike action as a legal right and institutionalize trade union freedoms, articulating workers’ rights with democratic political rights). Despite this, the bill was passed by the parliamentary majority of New Democracy (158 deputies).

This orientation is based on a reality that was shaped in Greece during the disastrous period of the memoranda. Contrary to propaganda (on the land of the sun, joy and carefree laziness ...), the working class in Greece is forced to work more than in any other EU member state, and more than in many other countries in the world. According to OECD data (for 2019), the average effective working time in Greece is 1,950 hours per year, which is lower than that of Korea and Mexico and much higher than that of Germany, for example (1,386 hours per year). And the price of this hard work is constituted by the salaries which were reduced by 30 per cent between 2008 and 2019: the real average salary fell from around 1,300 euros (in 2008) to 950 euros (in 2019). This race to the bottom is the result of the reduction of the legal minimum wage and, above all, of the constant pressure to lower all wages towards the legal minimum.

Greek capitalists know that during the crisis they also suffered some losses, falling back in the rankings of global competition and still facing the dangerous “trap” of debt. But they also know that in order to “seize the opportunity” of a potential period of post-pandemic growth, they must increase the rate of exploitation of the working class and demand more work for the same or less pay.

This is what the Mitsotakis government is trying to do, “without sedatives”. Kostis Chatzidakis’s labour law will not be the only brutal counter-reform. Plans are being drawn up for the privatization of the public pension and social security system, as well as massive privatizations of all that remains of public goods

This political orientation is not a walk in the park. Six well-known right-wing

politicians (former ministers, parliamentarians or spokespersons for New Democracy), who identify with the "tradition" of the party's founder, Konstantinos Karamanlis, in 1974, have chosen to publicly declare their disagreement with "this estrangement from the principles of social liberalism, which defined New Democracy governments", at least during the years following the fall of the military junta.

What they are actually saying is that they doubt that Mitsotakis can enforce this orientation while maintaining relative stability and lasting viability. But it would be unwise to expect a serious backlash from the ranks of the right. In parliament, New Democracy MPs were aligned in a single rank and voted as a bloc in favor of the labour law.

Mitsotakis's government is not an easy opponent. The support he received from the ruling class for the new labour law, as the prevailing media coverage shows, was universal. Two "advisers" of Alexis Tsipras, Antonis Liakos and Myrsini Zorba (both former social democrats and newcomers to SYRIZA), put it this way in a recent article:

The Mitsotakis government is not a government that stumbles. We will not confuse our wishes with reality. After a decade of crisis, the Greek bourgeois forces are regrouping, and this is expressed in the current government and its great openness (to other actors). We must not understand this opening as a simple addition of political currents ... but as a

leading bloc with social alliances, means of communication and above all a strategy ... Radicalism is not only the privilege of the left. Right-wing radicalism is proving to be strong and decisive today, going so far as to violate the rule of law." Their diagnosis is correct.

What is amusing is that in the face of this phenomenon, the tactic they propose is an even greater adaptation to it, by getting rid of all the "burdens" of past left radicalism, by adopting a strategy of national unity, and even by "emancipating the left from the concept of" party "which keeps it locked in the past.

But what is tragic is that these views are in fact predominant within the leadership of SYRIZA. Outside parliament, SYRIZA has maintained an oppositional rhetoric of outright rejection of the new labour law. But inside parliament, Alexis Tsipras's party voted in favour of a series of articles (55!) of the law, opting for a tactic that "distinguishes the good and bad parts" of the law, instead of the necessary complete political and rejection of this extremely reactionary law (as the Communist Party did for example). In my opinion, it was a clear message from Alexis Tsipras to the ruling class that, despite the wishes of its base, SYRIZA will remain a "responsible" party which will not "burn the bridges" of relations, even in the face of extreme challenges.

In the streets, the reaction was strong. The labour bill became an opportunity to try to organize a general strike in Greece after a long time. We all knew

it would not be simple and easy. The pandemic context that has not disappeared, the union bureaucracy which declared the strike but did everything to undermine it ..., actual negative changes that affect workers, in everyday life and in the workplace, all of these are limiting factors. But the result was better than expected. The demonstrations were numerous, and anger was expressed. The "people of the left" made up the bulk of the troops. The Communist Party, the anti-capitalist left and, for the first time in a long time, a sector of SYRIZA. This composition is still a long way from the broad participation of the working class that is necessary to overturn a labour law, but it should not be underestimated. Anyone familiar with the resistance movement in Greece knows that this is usually how long marches begin, which aim at and succeed in greater upheavals.

The new labour law is now a reality. An important part of the organized movement refuses to submit to it and will try to break it in practice. It will not be isolated: despite the hysterical media propaganda, all the polls reveal a social majority (up to 65 per cent in certain sectors...) which considers that the demonstrators "are right". It hopes for the overthrow of this crucial counter-reform. This "showdown" will be decisive for a large part of the social development of Greece. In my opinion, it will also determine the political situation, unlike the parliamentary manoeuvres or the social democratic adjustment adopted by the SYRIZA leadership.

20 June 2021;

Original translation [A l'Encontre](#),
English translation **International Viewpoint**.

Iranians, Elections, Sanctions: Oppressed by the Islamic Republic and Starved by the International Regime

12 July 2021, by **Saladdin Ahmed**

On November 8, 2000, in a comment regarding uncertain election results, [Bill Clinton said](#), “the American people have now spoken, but it’s going to take a little while to determine exactly what they said.” In the case of the Iranian presidential elections that took place on June 18, 2021, as well as in prior Iranian elections, the equivalent statement would be something along the lines of: ‘the Iranian people have not been allowed to speak, but we already know exactly what they would say,’ or ‘the Iranians Have Spoken but Were Not Allowed to Say Anything.’

Most Iranians, like most Americans, or the majority of any population anywhere in the world for that matter, would choose the freedom to vote without any hindrances. This much is certain.

This time around, more than half of eligible Iranian voters boycotted the whole show, precisely because they refused to accept anything less than free and fair elections. In various parts of the country, several Iranian citizens used their cellphones to record the [deserted voting centers](#) and make a statement, telling the world that their silence is indeed an unmistakable political statement.

The declared winner of the elections is the hardline cleric Ebrahim Raisi, who has been at the heart of the regime’s violence against Iranians for four decades. He was appointed General Prosecutor of the city of Karaj in 1980, when he was only twenty years old. Then, he became the Prosecutor General of Hamedan and later the Deputy Prosecutor of Tehran. In 1988, as one of the four members of the notorious “[death commission](#),” he played a major role in the execution of thousands of political prisoners, whose bodies were buried in unidentified mass graves. Raisi has continued to hold top positions within the juridical establishment of the regime, prosecuting tens of thousands of political prisoners. Since 1988, he has always held an influential office in the regime’s penal apparatuses, such as the Prosecutor of Tehran, the First

Deputy to the Head of the Judiciary, the Prosecutor General of Iran, and finally the Head of the Judiciary. In 2018, he referred to the 1988 massacre of thousands of political prisoners as “one of the proud achievements of the system.” (see page 13 of [this report](#)).

Aware of numerous reports that indicate Raisi’s involvement in vast human rights violations and crimes against humanity, on June 19, 2021, [Agnès Callamard](#), the Secretary General of Amnesty International, stated, “We continue to call for Ebrahim Raisi to be investigated for his involvement in past and ongoing crimes under international law, including by states that exercise universal jurisdiction.”

However, it is not likely that calls from Amnesty International and other human rights organizations, as well as the Iranian opposition, will lead to an effective international effort to persecute Raisi. What could and should be done to prevent another embarrassing blow to post-WWII international law, international human rights law, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights may be too complicated to even mention here.

Nonetheless, we can easily point out what should not be done in the name of punishing the Iranian regime: namely, an economic embargo on the country. There are many countries that were, or have been, subjected to economic embargoes, including North Korea, Iraq, Myanmar, Cuba, Venezuela, and Syria to name a few, and in every case, the embargo intensified the targeted population’s suffering and further disempowered them politically.

To date, American—or wider international—economic embargoes have not led to a single regime change since 1950, when the first sanctions were imposed on North Korea, and 1962, when J. F. Kennedy’s administration put an embargo on Cuba. In fact, we could deduce from past experiences that embargoes have

the opposite effect. North Korea and Cuba suffered from the longest and most severe American and international embargoes. There were of course various partial sanctions on the Soviet Union and Eastern European states within the East bloc, but none reached the length and the severity of the North Korean and Cuban cases. Is it a coincidence that both regimes, despite their significant differences, have survived three decades after the fall of the Soviet Union and its East European satellite states?

Saddam Hussein’s Iraq was subjected to a tightened embargo by the [United Nations](#) from 1990 until 2003. In this case, I have first-hand experience, as I witnessed how the impoverishment of the vast majority of the Iraqi population in the 1990s completely paralyzed civil society. It was as if the regime’s oppression was not enough, so the United Nations imposed a [devastating blockade](#) on the Iraqis, resulting in starvation and near-total deterioration of the health and education systems. The embargo completely disempowered Iraqis, rendering the potential for popular revolt against the regime next to impossible. Eventually, it took another devastating US war to remove Saddam Hussein. Iraqi survivors and new generations continue to pay the price for the economic embargo that destroyed the country’s infrastructure and an American invasion that ended up turning Iraq into a failed state.

Referring to the actual genocidal effects of the sanctions, in 1999, [Noam Chomsky](#) said, “the number of Iraqi people who have died in the last eight years as a result of the sanctions exceeds the death toll due to all the weapons of mass destruction used in human history.” The following passage by Domenico Losurdo on the embargo on Iraq is also worth quoting here:

We are dealing with a kind of postmodern version of the concentration camp. In the age of globalization, there is no need to deport a people: it is enough to block

the flow of food and medicines – especially if one succeeds in destroying aqueducts, drainage systems and health infrastructure with ‘intelligent’ bombing, as happened in Iraq. What will future historians say about this ‘man-made famine’, this collective death sentence, pronounced not in the course of a ruthless civil war or a dramatic life-and-death struggle between great powers, but in ‘peace’ time, without even the justification of the Cold War? [113]

“Man-made famine” is indeed more fitting to describe what happened in 1990-2003, or the ongoing situations in North Korea and Venezuela, than the starvations that were caused by Stalin’s economic policies, simply because in the case of sanctions, the famine is an entirely intentional and premeditated outcome of the crime, as opposed to unexpected, or at worst, partly or arguably intended, results of state policies. By the same token there is no exaggeration in labeling such indiscriminatory embargoes on a whole population, “weapons of mass

destruction,” or means of creating a “postmodern version of the concentration camp.”

Raisi should be “investigated for the crimes against humanity of murder, enforced disappearance and torture,” as the [Secretary General of Amnesty International](#) said. Also, the regime should be prevented from causing more threats to the region, but it has become clear that international economic sanctions will not achieve any such foreign policy goals. The economic deprivation of any population can only bring about more political deprivation. Put briefly, there is no grounds or rationale for justifying economic sanctions against Iranians, or North Koreans, Cubans, and Venezuelans for that matter. The only sanctions that should be imposed—and rather widely—are those that are carefully designed to end arms trade and industry. In other cases, so called “smart sanctions” may be effective if they target individual officials and fanatical organizations.

Despite all the international sanctions and the regime’s manipulation of scarce sources of livelihood, Raisi’s regime still does not have the support of the majority of Iranians. Whatever the international players do or do not do, they should immediately stop penalizing the primary victims of the regime, the peoples of Iran. In addition to the endless suffering of innocent people, the only tangible outcome to be expected from the continued economic sanctions is the antagonization of more and more ordinary Iranians, which is precisely what the fundamentalist regime aims to accomplish. We are talking about an extremely despotic and discriminatory regime that portrays the West as the mortal enemy of Iranians. Yet, the policy and decision makers in the United States continue to act as if this is exactly the message they want to deliver to ordinary Iranians.

28 June 2021

Source [Left East](#).

Still no solution for undocumented migrants on hunger strike in Brussels

11 July 2021, by [Ufuk Karaoglan](#)

The state of health of the hunger strikers, already strained by their condition, is worsening day by day: weight loss of up to 20-30%, heart attacks and hypoglycaemic comas. The despair in which some of them find themselves has led them to attempt suicide, seeing that nothing is moving on the part of the government despite more than a month of hunger strike and more than five months of occupations. Supporters and healthworkers on site confirm this is an unmanageable situation.

“Hunger strikers

do not have a right to stay”

The support committee also spontaneously occupied the Office des Étrangers and the headquarters of the French-speaking Socialist Party. The aim was to put pressure on the French-speaking parties that are currently in the Vivaldi coalition, so that they can put regularisation on the table of the federal government De Croo (socialists, ecologists and French-speaking and Flemish liberals, including also the Christian Democrats).

The federal government still has no

intention to proceed with a new collective regularisation campaign, and the Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration Sammy Mahdi, whose competences are rather limited, still does not want to deviate from the governmental agreement, which was put in place in 2020 and does not include anything about collective regularisation. Regarding its asylum and migration policy, the Vivaldi coalition led by liberal De Croo had opted for what they call “a firm but humane solution”, i.e. an expulsion policy.

On Twitter, Sammy Mahdi explained: “The hunger strikers do not have a right to stay. Most of them were ordered to leave the country years

ago. They didn't do it, they stayed here working illegally for years and now they are asking for papers. Just because you don't respect the rules for 5, 10 or 20 years doesn't mean you automatically get a right of residence. Otherwise, we can abolish all residence procedures. And there are procedures: asylum, student immigration, immigration for work, family reunification, etc. They are accompanied by clear rules. They are accompanied by clear rules.

Building a balance of power

The PS, after rejecting a first proposal from an opposing liberal party, asked a week ago for an interministerial conference to be convened in order to find a solution - without assuming its own responsibilities.

While the situation is becoming critical for the health of undocumented migrants, nothing concrete seems to happen. Several support committees have been set up but they do not function in a coordinated way. Academics, academics, intellectuals, health workers... have spoken out in the press to alert the authorities to the seriousness of the situation.

However, it is not as if the government was unaware of anything. After more than 40 days of hunger strike, it is no longer the time to try to convince a government that has its head in the sand. Building a relationship of forces through a unitary struggle bringing together citizens (with and without papers) from both parts of the country (Flanders and Wallonia), associations, non-governmental political organisations, universities and students is becoming more and more necessary for the regularisation of all undocumented migrants and the freedom of movement and settlement.

8 July 2021

Palestinian liberation and the MENA revolutions

10 July 2021, by **Joseph Daher**

The new regime's policy is no different to Netanyahu's. Proving this reality, Bennett ordered fresh air strikes on Gaza just a few days after his assumption of power. These new acts of violence and repression prove why the international left must stand in unconditional solidarity with the Palestinian resistance.

But we also must engage in the strategic debates about how to win liberation and our role in it. Socialists should see the Palestinian struggle as inextricably tied to the revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) against all the region's states, most importantly Israel. This combination of resistance in Palestine and regional revolution is the only realistic way to free Palestine and all the peoples of the region.

Israel: a settler-colonial state

The Zionist movement from its origins in Europe to its foundation of Israel in

1948 and its displacement of Palestinians today has been a settler-colonial project. To establish, maintain, and expand its territory, the Israeli state has had to ethnically cleanse Palestinians from their land, homes, and jobs. Throughout this process it allied with, and found sponsorship from, imperialist powers, first the British empire and then the United States, which used Israel as their agent in the struggle against Arab nationalism and socialism.

Thus, the Israeli state's support for Zionist settler's expropriation of Palestinian's homes in Sheikh Jarrah must be seen as a continuation of the Nakba ("catastrophe" in Arabic) that drove over 700,000 Palestinians from their homes in 1948. This process of ongoing colonization is the reason why more than [5 million Palestinian refugees](#) live in camps and cities in the Middle East and North Africa.

Even mainstream groups now recognize the reactionary nature of Israeli colonization. For example, both [Human Rights Watch](#) and Israel's

[B'Tselem](#) have recently denounced Israel's ongoing seizure of Palestinian land. They have documented how Israel has violated international laws to back 620,000 colonists building colonies in the occupied territories of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. They also concluded that Israel is an apartheid state that gives Jew's special privileges and reduces Palestinians to second-class citizenship.

Given the utterly reactionary nature of Israel, the far right's political hegemony over the last decade should come as no surprise. It is in some sense the logical outgrowth of the Zionist movement, its ethnonationalism, Israel's institutional racism, and its more than seven decades of oppression and dispossession of Palestinians. These create the conditions for the flourishing of right-wing Zionist mobs that march through Palestinian neighborhoods chanting "[Death to Arabs](#)."

Mistaken alliances with authoritarian regimes

Just like any other population under colonial occupation and apartheid, Palestinians have the right to resist, including with military means. Support for this right should not be confused with support for the political perspectives of the various Palestinian political parties. None of these parties—Fatah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front of the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and others—offer a political strategy capable of winning Palestinian liberation.

The dominant Palestinian political parties look not to the Palestinian masses and the regional working classes and oppressed peoples as the forces to win liberation. Instead they seek political alliances with the region's ruling classes and their regimes to support their political and military struggle against Israel. They collaborate with these regimes, and argue for non-intervention, even as those regimes oppress their own popular classes and Palestinians within their borders.

One of the key examples in the evolution of this approach was in Jordan 1970, and culminated in the events known as Black September. Despite the strength, organization and popularity of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), within Jordan—a country whose population was seventy percent Palestinian—the Fatah leadership of Yasser Arafat initially refused to support a campaign to overthrow the country's dictator, King Hussein. In response, and with the backing of the U.S and Israel, Hussein declared martial law, and with the regional Arab governments largely passive, Hussein attacked the PLO camps, killed thousands of Palestinian fighters and civilians, and ultimately drove the PLO out of Jordan and into Syria and Lebanon.

Despite this history, and its subsequent experiences in exile, the PLO pursued this strategy of

collaboration and non-intervention for decades. Today, the Palestinian Authority's (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas supports Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's dictatorship in Egypt. In another shocking example, Abbas recently sent a message of congratulations to Syrian autocrat Bashar al-Assad on "[his re-election](#)" in May 2021, despite Assad's brutal repression of Palestinians participating in the Syrian uprising and destruction of the Yarmouk refugee camp.

Hamas pursues a similar strategy; its leaders have cultivated alliances with monarchies in Gulf states, especially Qatar more recently, as well as the fundamentalist regime in Iran. In 2012, Ismail Haniyeh, prime minister of the Hamas government in Gaza at the time, praised [Bahrain's "reforms"](#) while the regime with the backing of its Gulf allies smashed the country's democratic uprising. Many Hamas leaders viewed it as a "[sectarian](#)" coup d'état by the Shi'ites of Bahrain supported by Iran.

In April 2018, former Hamas leader Khaled Mashal praised [Turkey's invasion and occupation of Afrin](#) in Syria during a visit to Ankara. He stated that "Turkey's success in Afrin serves as a solid example" hopefully to be followed by similar "victories of the Islamic ummah in a lot of places in the world." The occupation of Afrin by Turkish armed forces and its reactionary Syrian proxies drove out 200,000 mostly Kurdish people and repressed those who remained.

Unfortunately, the Palestinian left has for the most part implemented its own version of the same strategy. It too has withheld criticism of its allies' repression of their people. The PFLP, for example, has not voiced any objections to the Syrian regime's crimes and has even supported its army against "[foreign conspiracies](#)," declaring that Damascus "will remain a thorn in the face of the Zionist enemy and its allies." The PFLP's relationship towards the [theocracy in Iran](#), and the [military dictatorship in Egypt](#) follow a similar pattern.

Regimes betray the liberation struggle

Rather than advance the struggle, despotic states in the region have repeatedly betrayed it and even repressed Palestinians. As noted earlier, the Jordanian state crushed the Palestinian movement in 1970, killing thousands and expelling the PLO during Black September.

In 1976, Hafez al-Assad's regime in Syria intervened in Lebanon against Palestinian and leftist organizations in support of far-right Lebanese parties. He also conducted military operations against Palestinian camps in Beirut in 1985 and 1986. By 1990, approximately 2,500 Palestinian political prisoners were held in Syrian prisons.

Egypt has collaborated in Israel's blockade of Gaza since 2007. Iran opportunistically seeks to use the Palestinian cause as foreign policy tool to achieve its wider objectives in the region.

While the Syrian regime has supported Hamas, it drastically cut assistance to it when it refused to support the regime's counter-revolution against the democratic uprising in 2011. Iran only resumed formal ties with Hamas after the election of Ismail Haniyeh and Saleh al-Aroui as the new leadership.

Tehran collaborated with U.S. imperialism in Afghanistan and Iraq. That's why during the recent Iraqi uprising protesters marched under the slogan "[Neither USA, Nor Iran](#)". These examples alone demolish the idea that Iran is a reliable ally of the Palestinian cause or that is an ant-imperialist state.

Turkey, despite Recep Tayyip Erdogan's criticisms of Israel, maintains close economic connections with it. Erdogan has increased the volume of trade with Tel Aviv from the \$1.4 billion when he came to power to

\$6.5 billion

, destroyed progressive Palestinian

and Lebanese forces, and installed a friendly regime in Beirut.

Israel's victories against Arab nationalist states and its intervention in Lebanon led to the retreat of radicalism in the region, isolating the PLO. This predicament led, in 1978, to Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction adopting the two-state solution, a necessary step along the path to its signing off on the 1993 Oslo Accords.

In effect, this meant the surrender of the struggle for the liberation of historic Palestine, and the transformation of Fatah into the Palestinian Authority (PA), administering the occupied territories. The Palestinian intellectual Edward Said, who [opposed the Oslo agreement](#), declared that it represented "a massive abandonment of principles, the main currents of Palestinian history, and national goals" and "relegated the diaspora Palestinians to permanent exile or refugee status."

The U.S. and Israel have supported the PA controlling Palestinians in the West Bank as well as Gaza (before the latter was taken over by Hamas in 2007). The PA has been happy to serve as Washington and Tel Aviv's cop. For example, during the recent uprising, the PA arrested more than [20 activists](#) for their social media posts and leadership of protests. More recently, Nizar Banat, a leading Palestinian activist and critic of the PA, was killed in a raid by its security forces on his home in Dura in Hebron.

With the PA functioning as a quisling regime, the U.S. has promoted Israel's political and economic integration with states in the region, most recently through the Trump administration's Abraham Accords. This normalization of relations between Israel and several Arab states further isolates the Palestinian liberation struggle.

Newly elected president Joe Biden has reaffirmed Washington's unflinching support for Israel, whatever its crimes against Palestinians. In the midst of its most recent bombing of Gaza, a sale of [\\$735 million](#) in precision-guided weapons to Israel passed Congress and the billions in annual aid will

continue to pour in. The PA strategy of collaborating with the U.S. entails surrender to the occupier and its imperial sponsor.

The Weakness of the Palestinian Working Class

If strategies based on the region's states and peace deals brokered by the U.S. are dead ends, what about an alternative orientation on the Palestinian working class? That too is foreclosed by Israel's particular nature as a settler-colonial state.

Unlike apartheid South Africa, which relied on Black worker's labor in its factories and mines, Israel has driven Palestinian workers out of any central role in its economy and replaced them with Jewish workers. As a result, Palestinian workers do not have the means to shut down the Israeli economy through strikes like Black workers did in South Africa.

That does not mean that the Palestinian resistance is powerless within the state of Israel and in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. The struggle of workers of other groups remains central to the movement.

The most recent wave of Palestinian struggle demonstrates its power as well as its potential to forge a new strategy to supplant the failed one of relying on support from the region's regimes. New youth and feminist groups such as Tal'at as well as the working class has been at the heart of the recent resistance.

The worker's general strike on May 18 was called and led from below. It shut down sections of the economy from Israel to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. As Haaretz noted: "The Israel Builders Association observed that Palestinian workers had observed the strike, with only 150 of the 65,000 Palestinian construction workers coming to work in Israel. This paralyzed building sites, causing losses estimated at 130 million shekels ([nearly \\$40 million](#))."

The character of the strike, while

extremely important, should not be exaggerated. As Assaf Adiv, the director of the MAAN Workers Association — the only Israeli trade union that organizes Palestinians in the industrial zones of the West Bank settlements (from which Palestinian trade unions are barred)—noted the observance of the strike by Palestinians who work in Israel was in part "[due to closure of the checkpoints and uncertainty on the roads of the West Bank](#)".

Regardless of the breadth of the participation in the strike, the Israeli economy was relatively unscathed, showing that the Palestinian working class and other social movements need solidarity from other workers, peasants, and oppressed peoples. The question is which ones should Palestinians orient on to win a secular democracy in historic Palestine.

The Israeli working class—not a strategic ally

The first and perhaps obvious strategic orientation would seem to be on the Israeli working class. But it has always placed [loyalty to Israel over and above class solidarity](#) with the Palestinian masses.

This is not just the result of ideological devotion but material interest in the Israeli state, which provides Israeli workers with homes stolen from Palestinians as well as inflated standards of living. The Israeli ruling class and state thus integrate the Israeli working class as a collaborator in a common project of settler colonialism.

Its working class' institutions such as its union, the Histadrut, have played a central role in the ethnic cleansing of Palestine. Labor Zionist leaders established the Histadrut in 1920 as an exclusively Jewish union and used it to spearhead the displacement of Palestinian workers.

Its slogan "Jewish land, Jewish work, Jewish product" neatly summarizes its ethnonationalist class-collaborationist project and underlines how

fundamentally hostile it is to solidarity with Palestinians. Applying these slogans during and after the founding of Israel, it has helped ensure that land was only leased to Jews; farms and industries hired only Jews; and Palestinian farms and industries were boycotted.

On top of that, the Israeli state has militarized the incorporation of Israeli workers through mandatory conscription. This compels them to participate in the repression of Palestinians, enforce the occupation, and defend Zionist settler's theft of Palestinian homes and land.

Given this incorporation into the colonial project, it should come as no surprise that, with few exceptions, workers supported the most recent assault on Gaza. In just one example among many, the union of the [Israeli Electric Corp \(IEC\)](#) went so far as to declare that it would not repair power lines to the Gaza Strip until two Israeli soldiers and a missing Israeli civilian were returned.

Does this mean that Palestinians should not seek collaboration with progressive sectors of Israeli working class? [Of course not](#). Examples of small-scale solidarity exist, but they are rare.

It is hard to imagine these becoming a counter to the overwhelming pattern of ethnonationalist unity of Israeli workers with the Zionist state. A strategy focused on trying to build working class unity against Zionism between Israeli and Palestinian workers is thus unrealistic.

The regional revolutionary strategy

The key to developing a better strategy for liberation is putting Palestine in the regional context. Because Palestinian refugees in their millions are integrated in the Middle East and to a lesser extent in North Africa, their national and class struggle is necessarily intertwined with that of the region's masses.

Those workers and peasants

remember their forebearers' fight against colonialism, confront imperialist powers' that support the regimes that oppress them, identify with the struggle of the Palestinians, and therefore see their own battle for democracy and equality as bound up with its victory. That's why there is a dialectical relationship between the struggles; when Palestinians fight it triggers the regional movement for liberation, and the regional movement feeds back into the one in occupied Palestine.

Their united revolt has the power to transform the entire region, overthrowing the regimes, expelling the imperialist powers, ending both forces' support for the state of Israel, weakening it the process, and proving to Israeli workers that the regional transformation can end their exploitation. Far-right minister Avigdor Lieberman admitted the danger posed to Israel by the Arab Spring in 2011 when he declared that the Egyptian revolution that toppled Hosni Mubarak and opened the door to democracy was [a greater threat to Israel than Iran](#).

The power and potential of this regional strategy has been repeatedly demonstrated. In the [1960s and 1970s](#), the Palestinian movement spurred a rise in class struggle throughout the region. In 2000, the Second Intifada opened a new era of resistance, inspiring a wave of organizing that would eventually explode in 2011 with revolutions from Tunisia to Egypt to Syria.

In the summer of 2019, Palestinians in Lebanon organized massive demonstrations for weeks in refugee camps against the Labor Ministry's decision to treat them as foreigners, an act they considered to be a form of discrimination and racism against them. Their resistance helped inspire the broader Lebanese uprising in October 2019, which in turn has led to the popular uprisings in Iraq.

To implement a strategy based on this regional solidarity, Palestinian groups and movements must abandon the policy embraced by the PA, Hamas, and most of the left of non-intervention in the affairs of countries in the region. Such non-intervention

was the precondition of getting aid from various regimes. Accepting that policy means cutting Palestinians off from the social forces that can help them win liberation.

Instead, the Palestinian struggle must recover the regional revolutionary strategy that was pursued by leftists in the 1960s. Unfortunately, most abandoned this strategy to tail the PLO in allying with the region's reactionary states.

The strategy of regional revolution based on class struggle from below is the only way to win liberation from Israel to Saudi Arabia and Syria as well as their imperialist backers from the U.S. to China and Russia. In that fight, Palestinians and those in other countries must embrace the demands of all those that suffer national oppression like the Kurds and others who suffer other forms of ethnic, sectarian, and social oppression.

Now is the time to resurrect the regional strategy. The whole of the Middle East and North Africa is in a [long-term revolutionary process](#) rooted in the masses' blocked political and economic aspirations. There have already been two waves of uprisings, the first in 2011 that rocked the whole region and a second in 2018 and 2019 that swept through Sudan, Lebanon, Algeria, and Iraq.

With none of the popular grievances won, no doubt a third wave is on its way. And Palestine can and must be at the center of this next wave in a fight to liberate it and the entire region.

Palestine in the revolutionary process

Only through this regional revolutionary strategy, can we envision the establishment of a democratic, socialist, and secular state in historic Palestine with equal rights for both Palestinian and Jewish people within a socialist federation throughout the Middle East and North Africa. In the new Palestinian state, all Palestinians would have the right to return to their land and homes from

which they were forcibly displaced in 1948, 1967, and after. In addition to this, the liberation of Palestine must also include a global project of economic development and reconstruction to guarantee Palestinians their social and economic rights.

To implement this strategy, Palestinians must forge a new political leadership committed to self-organization from below within historic Palestine and the region. They cannot do that alone but must do so through collaboration with socialists from Egypt to Lebanon, Syria, Iran,

Turkey, Algeria, and all the other countries.

The most important task for those outside the region is to win the left, unions, progressive groups, and movements to support the campaign for Boycott Divestment and Sanctions against Israel. Forcing this on institutions and corporations in the imperialist powers, especially the U.S., will help block their support for Israel and other despotic regimes and weaken their hold in the region.

The liberation of Palestine thus passes through the liberation of all the peoples living under tyrants in

Damascus, Riyadh, Doha, Tehran, Ankara, Abu Dhabi, Cairo, Amman, and all the others. As a Syrian revolutionary wrote from the Israeli-occupied Syrian Golan Heights in the summer of 2014, “freedom—a common destiny for Gaza, Yarmouk and the Golan.” This slogan holds out the hope of regional revolutionary transformation, the only realistic strategy for liberation.

**I would like to thank Ashley Smith and Sai Englert for their help in the writing of the article.*

Source [Tempest](#).

What Juneteenth means in the battle for equality

9 July 2021, by **Malik Miah**

A bill was passed unanimously in the Senate on June 15 to make Juneteenth the 11th [official federal holiday](#). The House passed it the following day and President Joe Biden signed it into law.

It is only the second federal holiday connected to African Americans. The first was declared in 1983 to honour the leader of the civil rights revolution, Martin Luther King jnr.

Juneteenth’s significance is more than a symbol for African Americans and the country as a whole.

If Juneteenth can be fully implemented and Black history incorporated into US history, it would mark the possibility that the racism of the country’s founding and past can be discussed objectively.

Many — if not a majority of — whites reject teaching that integrates Black and white history. There is a collision between progress and white extremism that seeks to return to an era where only whites had full citizenship.

The racist far right and powerful

Republican Party are pursuing a legal strategy to deny Blacks and other ethnic minorities the right to vote and have any political power. This was the norm until the civil rights movement won the Voting Rights Act in 1965.

After that law and others were implemented, African Americans began to be elected in large numbers to city, state and federal offices. Blacks began to integrate at the middle and higher levels of business and sport.

Since the 1980s, many of these gains have come under assault. The Voting Rights Act was gutted by the Supreme Court in 2013. The push to overturn the right of Blacks and others to vote has accelerated since.

Yet, the Senate and House voted to add a new national holiday in recognition of the end of slavery. Why? For Republicans, recognising the end of chattel slavery with a holiday means nothing more needs to be said or done about inequality and institutional racism.

Republican hypocrisy

Boston Globe African American columnist Renee Graham [exposed the hypocrisy](#) behind the Republican Party’s support for the Juneteenth holiday.

“[Republican] Senator [Rand Paul](#) of Kentucky has stymied anti-lynching legislation. Senator [Lindsey Graham](#) of South Carolina denies the existence of systemic racism in America. Senator [Ron Johnson](#) of Wisconsin, who characterises the white Capitol insurrectionists as patriots, said he would have felt ‘a little concerned’ if they had been Black Lives Matter protesters,” she said.

“All of these Republican senators voted to make [Juneteenth ... a federal holiday](#). Don’t mistake hypocrisy for bipartisanship.”

Washington Post columnist [Christine Emba](#) wrote that [elevating Juneteenth “to the stature of the Fourth of July may not change everything”](#).

However, “history is written by its victors” and “to have our story represented means that we are finally victors too” and “Black memory is respected”.

“It means that as we come to terms with the truth of our past, the more difficult conversations — about reconciliation, about reparation, about the racism that still very much exists — are given space to begin.

“The acknowledgment of race in America has always been less than enough. Progress is a two-step Texas style, moving forward, then back.

“Juneteenth itself reflects this. It’s a holiday of progress mixed with disappointment. Black Americans were told of their freedom, yes — but years delayed. It’s a celebration of the end of something that never should have existed to begin with. And yet, it is celebrated anyway.

“A new holiday is inadequate. But as [Frederick] Douglass concluded in his contemplation on the Fourth, we can do more than sit in resignation. “[Notwithstanding the dark picture](#) I have this day presented of the state of the nation,” he said, “I do not despair of this country. There are forces in operation, which must inevitably work.”

Juneteenth is an important victory that deserves understanding and can be a weapon in the fight for full equality for African Americans.

Juneteenth’s origins: Texas 1865

Union Army Major General Gordon Granger stepped onto a balcony in Galveston, Texas, on June 19, 1865 — two months after the Civil War ended — and announced that more than 250,000 enslaved people in Texas were free.

President Abraham Lincoln had freed them two and half years earlier in his Emancipation Proclamation, but since Texas never fell to Union troops in battle, they had remained in bondage.

Slavery had finally ended. Congress passed the 13th Amendment to the US Constitution, in 1865, ending slavery and allowing freed enslaved people citizenship. The 14th (1868) and 15th (1870) Amendments sought to codify those fundamental changes.

However, the end of slavery did not bring equality for Blacks. The right to vote (considered a privilege by the rulers) was never codified, and “state rights” have been used ever since to limit the rights of African Americans and people of colour, including immigrants from Asia, Latin America and Africa. Indigenous peoples were not considered US citizens until 1924.

The history has been of bloody battles to make African Americans equal in every way to whites, and to reject the ideology and power of white supremacy.

It is no surprise that Blacks did not see the victory of the revolutionary war of independence from Britain in 1776 as applicable to them, until the second unfinished revolution of 1861-65.

Frederick Douglass

“What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July?” Frederick Douglass asked in 1852. Douglass was a former slave and perhaps the greatest African American spokesperson and leader of the 19th century.

Not much, was his conclusion. White Americans celebrated their independence from an oppressive regime. But enslaved Black people remained unfree.

Douglass’ speech remains emblematic of the racial inequality that persists in the US. “The blessings in which you ... rejoice, are not enjoyed in common,” he said. “All your religious parade and solemnity are ... mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety and hypocrisy.”

The country celebrates its achievements in the 21st century, as it did in the past, with outsized self-regard — even when those achievements are only fully realised for some.

June 19 celebrated for decades

For more than 150 years, Black people have celebrated Juneteenth. But in the summer of 2020, the day gained broader national and cross-racial attention, as part of the belated wave of recognition for Black stories during and after the protests following George Floyd’s murder by police.

[Major brands](#) — including Twitter, Nike and the NFL — made Juneteenth an official holiday within their corporations. Many politicians honoured the day in [speeches](#).

Symbolic change — if that’s what it becomes — is not the same as substantive improvement. Anti-racist reading lists haven’t stopped African Americans from being killed by the police. Corporate diversity, equity and inclusion workshops haven’t closed the racial wealth gap.

Jim Crow 2.0: Back to 1890

The modern-day party of segregation — the Republican Party — is led by former president Donald Trump and his loyal accomplices in the Senate, Congress and state legislatures.

As Republicans voted to establish the new holiday, they blocked a new law to federalise voting rights. States have adopted new voting restriction laws that take us back to the end of Radical Reconstruction in 1877 when Union troops were withdrawn from the former slaveholding states.

A battle ensued in these former Confederate states by freed Blacks and white radicals to protect the newly won voting rights. The pivotal point came in 1890, when a debate in Congress for federal election protections was stopped by segregationists with the complicity of northern Republicans.

The [Democrats](#), then the party of segregation, used violence — by [paramilitary](#) groups, such as the [Ku Klux Klan](#) — and fraud to suppress Black [Republican](#) voters and throw

Republicans out of office

After achieving control of state legislatures, white Democrats added to previous efforts and achieved widespread [disfranchisement](#) by law. From 1890 to 1908, Southern states adopted new constitutions, constitutional amendments and laws that made voter registration and voting more difficult, especially when administered by white staff in a discriminatory way.

They succeeded in disenfranchising most black citizens and many [poor whites](#) in the South, and state voter rolls dropped dramatically. The Republican Party was nearly eliminated in the region.

Radical Reconstruction's bloody defeat led to nearly 100 years of Jim Crow apartheid-style laws that did not end until after the adoption of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

That defeat also prevented a successful socialist revolution because white workers bought the lie about race (a made-up social construct) and white victimhood, if Blacks became equals. Trump positioned himself as spokesperson for views already held by millions of whites.

This set back the possibility of a truly multiracial bourgeois democracy and

the working-class solidarity required to bring about a social revolution and Black self-determination.

Race is again being used by the ruling class to keep whites from supporting full equality for all citizens; and keeps the white ruling class in power.

After the 1960s urban rebellions, a government commission acknowledged what African Americans and whites knew: In the US there were two separate and unequal nations — one Black, one white.

Jim Crow 2.0 is on the rise. The counter revolution against inequality is surging. It could lead to a repeat of what happened a century ago.

As [Emba](#) wrote, "A new holiday on June 19 won't fix the material injustices that continue to fall most heavily on African Americas: poverty, state violence, incarceration, environmental hazards, poor access to health care, a legacy of financial discrimination and limitation on political power".

Civil rights leaders, including Jesse Jackson and William Barber led a protest at the Capitol on June 23, demanding an end to the Senate filibuster (a Jim Crow relic) that was used to deny a debate on voting

rights. The US is the only bourgeois democracy in the world where it takes a super majority to have a debate on important issues like the right to vote.

Former police officer, Derek Chauvin, was sentenced to 22.5 years in prison for the George Floyd's murder on June 25. Floyd's death inspired the international Black Lives Matter movement. No white cop had ever been convicted for murdering a Black man in Minnesota's history. It is a victory, but few expect more successful prosecutions of cops for their crimes.

Meanwhile, top Democratic Party elected officials focus on legal and legislative actions to protect voting rights and reform policing but refuse to end minority rule in the Senate.

What happened after 1877 could happen again if the state Republican parties successfully move to overturn and prevent democratic elections. We have to fight in the streets and defeat those who would use legal and extralegal violence to smash voting rights and murder innocent Blacks.

Let Juneteenth be a renewal of the fight for full equality and working class liberation by the working class in all its multiethnic diversity.

Source [Green Left Weekly](#).

“Israel is a state that is moving rightwards, with more and more fascist tendencies”

8 July 2021, by Julien Salingue, Thomas Vescovi

L'Anticapitaliste: What lessons can we learn from the last legislative elections in Israel, which took place on 23 March 2021 and which, as we recall, were the fourth legislative elections in two years ?

Thomas Vescovi: We find ourselves for the fourth time in two years in the same schema, with a majority of MPs who are opposed to keeping

Netanyahu in power, but who are unable to form a more or less credible government.

As a reminder, Netanyahu has built for himself, since 2009, a fairly significant political armour, which goes from the far right to the more traditional right, but there are several elements that have gradually weakened his power. First, his triple indictment, for breach of trust, embezzlement and fraud,

which means that even within his own camp, we have people who are tempted to leave the ship, such as Gideon Sa'ar. [114] This shows that Netanyahu is no longer so hegemonic, even on the right. And in society we have a very strong protest, unprecedented in Israel in its scope and duration, with Israeli citizens who, since the end of 2018 and especially in 2019, have been

demonstrating almost every week near Netanyahu's residence to protest against his continued maintenance in power.

But the opposition is very heterogeneous. Thus, at present, the two political figures who could potentially be prime minister are the centrist Yair Lapid, a figure of a sector of the progressive, liberal, and "secular" Jewish population, and Naftali Bennett, the settlers' candidate, a religious nationalist. The opposition is therefore above all an opposition to the person of Netanyahu, but not an opposition with an alternative political programme. So even if they managed to reach an agreement between them, one can doubt whether such a government could last for long, already because Netanyahu is not finished, contrary to what some people say, and he will not fail to destabilize them, and then because there is no agreement on economic and social questions, while Israel, an already very unequal country, is going through a major crisis. On the side of the centrists, it is thus envisaged to restart forms of the welfare state, at the very least state aid to the poorest citizens - without however attacking the dogmas of the market economy - while people like Bennett and Sa'ar defend the idea of using the crisis to create a new neoliberal shock, to go even further in dismantling the "socializing" heritage of the State of Israel.

It has now been almost two decades since at every election in Israel we have heard commentators say that the government about to take office is "the farthest to the right in the history of Israel." It is a formula obviously, but is there all the same a bit of truth in it, with a strong tendency to the rightward shift of the Israeli political spectrum. How is this expressed in the Israeli political arena, in terms of programmes and organizations? We get lost sometimes, since some of those who were presented yesterday as being far-right are now classified as being centre-right, even in the centre ...

To give you an idea, the first Israeli Parliament, elected in 1949, had 71

deputies (out of 120) who could be classified on the side of the "left", whether Zionist or anti-colonial. Today we must have 72 deputies who are from the right or from the far right.

This is just an anecdote, but it is significant. I remember that in 2009, Avigdor Lieberman, with his party Israel Beytenou ("Our house Israel"), a Russian-speaking party], was considered as a representative of the most radical far right., nationalist, etc. Today Lieberman is presented as "centre-right". Naftali Bennett, when elected in 2013, was then considered to represent religious nationalists and settlers, embodying what was most extremist in the Israeli political spectrum. Today he is presented as being the "hard right", and it is the Kahanists [115] who inherited this status of being far-right, racist, religious, belligerent, and so on.

So yes, Israel is a state that is moving rightwards, with more and more fascist tendencies, because for me there is no doubt that the Kahanists are fascists. The rightward shift is such that sometimes we no longer have the lexicon to characterize it, hence this formula about "the most right-wing government"...

What unites this hard right and this far right is the question of annexation and the exclusively Jewish state, without any form of concessions to the Palestinians, with less and less room for Palestinian citizenship in Israel or for the rights of the Palestinians in the occupied territories.

This bloc is also opposed to what can be called "the other Israel". Today, in the Zionist political arena in Israel, the central debate seems to me to be that of the form of the state. A Jewish state with a synagogue separate from the state and a form of "secularism", or a Jewish state with religious law, exclusive rights for Jews, etc. And within the framework of this debate are emerging more and more figures defending an exclusive Jewish religious identity, racist and colonial: rights for the Jews, and not shared rights.

And on the left and the centre-left?

Within the Israeli Zionist left there is

an inability to go beyond, so to speak, the question of Zionism. There have been profound changes in Israeli politics since the creation of Israel (in 1948, with a whole part of the left electorate gradually shifting to the centre, voting for economic and political liberalism. Jews of Russian origin have an increasing tendency to vote for an exclusive type of nationalism, which refuses to share rights with the non-Jewish population. On the part of the Eastern Jews, the vision that has prevailed is that of a Jewish identity which is not, as the left incarnates it, a cultural identity, but an aspiration for Israel to endow itself with Jewish laws.

In reality, we cannot understand Israel if we do not understand the existence of what can be called a pyramid of power: at the head of Israel, there are still many Jews of European origin, among the political and economic elites; at the bottom of the scale we have the Palestinians of Israel; and between the two, there is a form of competition between different sectors of the Israeli Jewish population, to be as close as possible to the top and as far as possible from the Palestinians. Thus, among the Eastern Jews, to whom it was made clear that in Israel it was necessary to be a Jew and not an Arab, which did not have much meaning for them since Jews and Arabs is what they were, for centuries, and they gradually separated from this Arabity, in favor of an exacerbated Jewishness, to the point of not wanting to share rights with the Palestinians and rejecting the Zionist left.

Finally, we must not forget that Israel has been, since 1967, a state that has colonized massively, mainly in the West Bank, and that this process of colonization crystallizes tensions in Israel itself. The right and the far right put the pursuit of colonization and annexation at the centre of political debate. The centre-left, without saying that it is necessary to stop colonizing, continues to maintain the myth of the two states, with a Palestinian state that would be next to Israel. But colonization continues, there are more and more settlers, and even though it is a myth, they do not want to hear about two states and the resumption of negotiations, and they are increasingly radicalizing their

discourse.

The project of establishing a Jewish state in a territory overwhelmingly populated by non-Jews necessarily involved the disappearance, physical or political, of the natives. But they are still there. Isn't what we are witnessing, ultimately, the "logical" radicalization of a colonial society within a state which is fundamentally a settlement colony, but which has not succeeded in getting rid of the indigenous society?

In the title of my book, when I say "the failure of a utopia", it is because, without making a value judgment, I am assuming that people sincerely believed that they were going to be able to form a state for the Jews on, say, leftist bases. And in the book, we follow the trajectory of this project and we try to understand how, over the course of history, things have drifted and taken a completely different turn than what some had initially foreseen. And it turns out that this left-wing Zionist project, which had an emancipatory vocation for Jews who were victims of anti-Semitism, was nonetheless a fundamentally colonial project. Moreover, what the Zionist left does not seem to have taken into account is that their definition of what it is to be Jewish was not one that all the Jews in the world might have. And in creating a state that posits itself as a Jewish state or a state of the Jews, that definition is necessarily going to be central to the life of the state, as well as debates about what it means to be Jewish and to live in a Jewish state. Little by little, and we can see how things are today, a desire has emerged for the state to be Jewish in the sense of exclusively Jewish, and therefore increasingly colonial.

Jerusalem is an exemplary case. It is a place where colonization is still contested, and increasingly so. Today we still have nearly 40 per cent of Palestinians in the greater Jerusalem area, an area where colonization is very violent, with expulsions, expropriations, etc. And it is because this Palestinian presence is maintained that we see the development of extreme right-wing

groups which carry out organized attacks on Palestinians, etc. They are confronted with a population which stays there, which does not want to leave, and which in addition fights for its rights. The authorities keep repeating that Israel is a state for the Jews, that Jerusalem is its "eternal and indivisible" capital, and at the same time there are tens of thousands of Palestinians, who sometimes wave a flag that is not that of Israel: hence the radical rhetoric on the need to expel all Palestinians, a condition for the principles to become reality.

The progressive Jewish camp is in the minority, but does not seem to understand that if you continue to be part of the Zionist project, to defend a state for the Jews, with more rights for the Jews and not full equality of rights, you cannot oppose the rise of Jewish identity but contribute, even in spite of yourself, to legitimize it.

The rhetoric of the "fight against terrorism" also plays its part ...

Israel, from its inception until, say, the 1980s, fought mostly in the name of its right to be recognized as a legitimate state. As things gradually normalized at the international level, in the 1980s we saw the development of a critique of the militarization of the state, of wars waged abroad, particularly in Lebanon, and the idea was little by little imposed that it would be possible to live with, alongside, a Palestinian state. But with the failure of the Oslo accords in the 1990s, there was a renewal of the Zionist discourse: the "amicable" separation advocated by Rabin had failed, they had before them people, Palestinians, who did not want peace, and therefore a separation by force and only on their conditions was necessary. Right-wing personalities like Sharon and Netanyahu were the incarnation of this discourse, with for example Sharon who repeated that it was necessary to stop pretending to be a "Jewish and democratic" state, because what mattered was to be a Jewish state. A Jewish state in civilizational struggle, outpost of the "fight against terrorism" (especially from 2001): this is what was explained to young people who were doing their military service, telling them that they were not an occupying army but a

vanguard in the international fight against terrorism. We can understand why the right-wing Israeli press does not hesitate, concerning Jerusalem and the inhabitants fighting not to be expelled, to point the finger at Hamas, which has nothing to do with that... Sharon said in his time that Arafat was Israel's bin Laden. The question is therefore no longer so much, with the exception of speeches about Iran, the struggle for existence, as a civilizational struggle, in alliance with Western countries. A significant anecdote: in January 2017 a conference was organized at Tel Aviv University with Philippe Val and Frédéric Encel, the title of which was very clear: "France-Israel: two democracies facing the Islamist scourge". The Palestinian national question is completely evacuated, and all the conditions are being created for a more and more radical identity discourse to develop.

Is there any future for a non-Zionist left in Israel without the Palestinians of Israel?

I would go even further and say that there is no future for the left in Israel in its plurality if it does not turn more to the Palestinians of Israel. If we go back a year, during the legislative elections of March 2020, the "Unified List" [116] bringing together the Palestinians of Israel, was the expression of a new strategy: this list, led by the communist Ayman Odeh, wanted to explain to the Palestinians of Israel that the strategy of the past of engaging in politics by declaring oneself an anti-Zionist and refusing any government negotiations with the left, including the Zionist left, was over and had brought nothing, and therefore it was important to take into consideration that since the progressive Israeli Jewish left was in the minority, it was possible to envisage alliances with it, however with conditions to be defined and on a clear programme. It turned out that this strategy, whatever one thinks of it, had underestimated an essential factor: even within the Israeli centre-left, where people declare themselves as Zionists, the contradictions are too strong when it comes to allying with the Palestinians. After the election and the good score of the Unified List, we saw a triumphant Ayman Odeh,

admittedly criticized in his own camp, but many people wondered if he would succeed in his bet, and land an alliance with a number of guarantees, more rights, more equality, the end of demolitions, etc. But it was a failure, as the Israeli Jewish centre-left came under pressure on the theme, "You are going to form a government without a Jewish majority". What therefore remains dominant, including among the progressive Jewish forces of the

centre-left, is to put the Jewish character first, before the democratic content...

On the side of the non-Zionist left, there has always been a policy of building links with the Palestinians of Israel, especially around cities like Nazareth, Haifa, etc. Their problem is rather how to address themselves more to the Jewish population who, as we know, and we have seen in some cities, would be ready to vote for lists

like the Unified List. So there is this difficulty: if you want to be able to address progressive Israeli Jews, you cannot limit yourself to explaining that all Zionists are colonialists, full stop, but if you want to address the Palestinians in Israel, you cannot put aside your radical criticism of Zionist institutions.

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Burma: The War vs. the People

7 July 2021, by **Carlos Sardiña Galache, Suzi Weissman**

Suzi Weissman: Since the military coup that overthrew the civilian government of Aung San Suu Kyi on February First, a massive civil disobedience movement has emerged. The economy has been paralyzed through strikes in key sectors. The military has been in power most of the time since the country's independence from British colonial rule. What are the sources of this repressive form of rule?

Carlos Sardiña Galache: Burma never finished its nation building. Ever since independence in 1948, most of the ethnic minorities who live in the periphery of the country don't feel a sense of belonging to the country and have been trying to separate — or at least have autonomy — within the federal system. The Bamar, comprising the majority, tried to impose a centralized model of the state.

By 1962 the Tatmadaw, as the Burmese military is called, took power because they saw themselves as the only ones who could manage to keep Burma united. That inaugurated 50 years of military dictatorship, first under the guise of the so-called "Burmese way of socialism" government, which was not socialist, but that's another question. After a massive uprising in 1982, they

adopted a capitalistic model on neoliberal lines.

In 2011, they initiated what they call a "disciplined, flourishing democracy," which meant a multiparty electoral democracy with parliament. The Tatmadaw kept control of over 25% of the parliament and three key ministries. This process culminated in 2015 with the victory of Aung San Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy.

Although Aung San Suu Kyi spent 15 years under house arrest, we might call this process a convergence of elites: the pro-democracy elite led by Aung San Suu Kyi, and the military elite.

For reasons that are not altogether clear, the military decided to put an end to that experiment with democracy on February 1 this year. The reasons they give is that there was voter fraud during the election last November, but nobody believes that. Something happened that made the military say, OK, we take the power back.

Now, they claim that the coup — which they don't call a coup, of course — is constitutional. But even according to their own constitution, it's not constitutional. However, the coup triggered a huge popular response against the military. And

right now, you can describe the situation as a war between the military and virtually the whole of the Burmese population, ethnic minorities included.

Minorities in a "Failed Nation"

SW: The Financial Times headline asked, "Is Myanmar on the road to becoming a failed state?" You argue that it's never been a functioning state. What do you mean and why did that lead to the coup?

CSG: It's not so much a failed state as a failed nation. When I say that it's a failed state already, it's not in the sense of complete chaos. What I mean is that the military, the government, ever since independence hasn't managed to control the whole of the territory because several guerrillas from ethnic minorities have established their own power along the borders with China and Thailand.

Apart from the Bamar who live in the heartlands, nobody feels they are Burmese. If you go to the border areas and ask people, what are you? if they are Kachin, they will say, I am Kachin, not Burmese — whereas if you go to the Philippines, they won't tell you I'm Locano, they will tell you I'm Filipino,

and secondly I'm Locano.

In Myanmar, that's not the case because the project of nation building was a Bamar project from the beginning.

That means the pro-democracy camp led by Aung San Suu Kyi and the military are more or less on the same page. There are no essential differences: both want a centralized state in which the ethnic minorities are going to have little autonomy.

The reasons for the coup must be found somewhere else. In my opinion, they are not ideological. The difference is who should have the power, not what to do with it.

SW: Is there a difference between calling the country Myanmar and calling it Burma?

CSG: I much prefer Burma. The name was changed to Myanmar in 1989 by the former military junta. In Burmese it was called Myanmar, so basically it is like Germany telling people, you must call me Deutschland in English.

The junta argued that Myanmar was more inclusive of ethnic minorities, but both Burma and Myanmar refer historically to the Bamar kingdoms in the central areas of the country, not the minority area.

They said that Burma is a colonial name. But when the British arrived, they didn't change the name. It's not like the Philippines, which is a colonial name, the name of the Spanish King at the time. That's what I would say is a colonial name.

SW: How did the National League for Democracy develop during the years of military rule?

CSG: Aung San Suu Kyi is the daughter of Aung San, the father of modern Burma. He's the one who fought against the British and then fought against the Japanese in World War Two. He negotiated the terms of independence with the British in 1948 but he was assassinated a few months before independence when Aung San Suu Kyi was two years and a half years old.

Aung San was from the majority and

tried to get the ethnic minorities on board, but it was a very sketchy process. He signed an agreement with only four groups but it was not spelled out before he was killed.

In 1988, during the uprising against Ne Win [ed: Army Chief since 1949 who led two coups], Aung San Suu Kyi, who had been living in the United Kingdom and was married to Michael Aris, the famous scholar, was taking care of her mother in Rangoon. She was convinced to join the National League for Democracy and lead the pro-democracy movement.

The chairman of the National League for Democracy, U Tin Oo, who is now 95, was a commander in chief of the military during the Ne Win dictatorship. The leaders are Bamar and view ethnic minorities with certain distrust. All share this idea of a national project, which is dictated on Bamar terms and excludes groups deemed as foreigners, including the Rohingya.

SW: Could you explain the citizenship rule? I think that people in the West who were championing Aung San Suu Kyi and her road to democracy were shocked to see that she didn't lift a finger to help the Rohingya when they were being subjected to genocidal killing and forced to flee.

CSG: According to the citizenship law passed by Ne Win in 1992, only the so-called national races are to have citizenship. This means that whoever had citizenship, according to their previous citizenship law, should keep the citizenship.

Many Rohingya were citizens. Then the regime went to all the Rohingya people and took away their documents, supposedly to give them new ones, then suddenly then said "No, you are not a citizen because you are not members of a national race." These are defined as those ethnic or racial groups who were in Burma before 1824, the date of the first Anglo-Burmese war and the beginning of colonialism.

The debate is over whether the Rohingya were already there or not.

Of course they were already there, but others arrived from what is now Bengal during colonial times. They mixed with the ones who were already in Burma. Now it would be completely impossible to separate the descendants. The military said most, if not all, arrived during colonial times and therefore are not a national race.

SW: Does this citizenship law mirror the Indian one? [This law introduced by the Hindu-nationalist Narendra Modi government will strip over two million Muslims of Indian citizenship — ed.]

CSG: This nativist, racist conception of citizenship in Burma might be a model for India, which seems to be going in the same direction.

SW: You have emphasized the ideological similarity between the generals and the Aung San Suu Kyi forces. Is there a class aspect that is being disguised? Help us understand the strikes in the context of political economy that is operating.

CSG: During the first military dictatorship and during the Ne Win era there was a kind of pseudo-socialist system or a state capitalism. From 1988 to 2011, the State Law and Order Restoration Council and its puppet, Burma Socialist Program Party, instituted a purely capitalist system.

The Tatmadaw wanted to open the markets and create a neoliberal model but it never took off because of the sanctions imposed by Western countries. Instead, what happened was a kind of crony capitalism in which the military controls a big part of the economy through two conglomerates. There is a group of rich cronies who made their fortunes through their contacts with the military and who have a big slice of the pie.

After 2011 and the transition to democracy this neoliberal model took off. At the same time a vibrant group of trade unions took advantage of the new political liberalization. Aung San Suu Kyi was not sympathetic to them because she wanted to assuage the

military. Mass movements are unpredictable and not easy to control.

She was interested in deepening intra-elite rapprochement between the pro-democracy forces and the military. She admonished the cronies and encouraged them to be moral: "You have gotten your riches through your dealings with a dictatorship. But I believe that everybody has a second chance, and now you should use your riches to be good."

But she did not demand increasing taxes or control over their fortunes or redistributive policies whatsoever.

That's what leads me to say that the difference between Aung San Suu Kyi and the military is not ideological. Both are neoliberal conservatives. Perhaps the closest Western model to Aung San Suu Kyi is Margaret Thatcher.

She is moralistic but committed to the free market. Yet the military didn't want to share power with her. The ultimate question was: Is the military over the civilian government or is the civilian government over the military? That was the conflict. At some point the military decided: We are the power.

Massive Resistance

SW: Were you surprised at the level of resistance? Do you think the military miscalculated when they took power, thinking they could just easily shove Aung San Suu Kyi out of the way and go back to what they used to have?

CSG: There is a lot of debate about this but I think they really miscalculated and did not prepare the coup or create a crisis to make a military takeover acceptable to some significant sectors of the population.

But people really hate the military

government. I have lived through the 2014 coup in Thailand when the military took over. Thai society was quite polarized. Large sectors of the population — conservatives, Royalist sectors — supported the coup. Nothing of the sort is happening in Burma. Nobody supports the coup outside the military, because the military doesn't have ideological legitimacy in the eyes of the Burmese population.

Over the years I have talked with many Burmese people. Nobody really likes the military. Unfortunately, the only time they liked them was when the Rohingya people were attacked in 2017.

During the liberalization process, there was a modicum of political liberty that many people didn't know before. There was internet access that people didn't have until 2012.

Importantly, there was the growth of trade unions. These unions are at the forefront of most of the protests. They have used their skills and networks to organize against the coup and the military.

It is no wonder that the repression in big cities like Yangon or Rangoon is especially bloody in the working-class areas. These are the people who are on the barricades; they are people who have nothing to lose.

Most of the middle class were happy having Aung San Suu Kyi in power and trusting her to deal with the military. Whatever Aung San Suu Kyi did wrong, they could blame on the military since she didn't have much room to maneuver. But once they took Aung San Suu Kyi from them, they fought back. They, and especially the younger generation, have had in the last ten years certain liberties and don't want to renounce them and go back to military dictatorship.

Then you have minorities who are the people who have suffered for decades, on a daily basis, the violence of the

military.

One of the most encouraging things I am seeing is that in social media and talking with friends, a lot of people in the heartlands of the country, who until two or three months ago didn't want to think about the wars going on in the ethnic areas between the armed groups and the military, are now showing a newfound solidarity with ethnic minorities, including the Rohingya people.

So right now, it seems that the ethnic minorities and the Bamar are united — I would say even for the first time in history — against a common enemy, which happens to be the military.

SW: What do you see ahead?

CSG: I'm very reluctant to make predictions because I was one of many people who would have said no, there's not going to be a coup — and then there was. Virtually nobody saw it coming until two or three days before.

I think we are going to witness a very long, protracted and bloody conflict. The military is not going back. It is ruthless and relentless and the more they commit crimes, the more inflexible they are going to be.

The population, from what I am seeing, sees this as a struggle for life or death. So right now I think the only hope is for all the armed groups, and there are conversations, to unite in a common front and create a Federal Army that attacks the military at the same time.

If the military attacks the civil disobedience movement in the streets of Burma's heartlands and all or most of the armed groups in the peripheries are attacking them at the same time, the Tatmadaw is going to have trouble managing to defeat all these enemies. But I think this is going to be very long and very violent.

Source: July-August 2021, [ATC 213](#).

Under the Heat Dome

6 July 2021, by **Frann Michel**

The heat dome occurs because temperatures in the western Pacific Ocean have risen more in recent decades than in the eastern Pacific, creating pressure differences that cause more warm air to rise over the western Pacific, where the jet stream traps it under a high-pressure dome. [117] In case you were wondering-and since reporting may not have made explicit the seemingly obvious connection-Yes, this is an effect of climate change caused by releasing greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere through human actions like the burning of fossil fuels. [118]

Not only were such heat events predicted by climate models, but also scientists have gotten better at linking particular weather events to longer-term climate developments. [119] Our only planet is now trapping twice as much heat as it did 14 years ago. [120] Despite decades of warnings from the National Academy of Sciences, James Hansen, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and other experts, we continue to see increases in use of fossil fuels and emissions of carbon dioxide. While heat waves and other variations in temperature have been part of normal weather, they are now hotter, longer-lasting, and occurring more often. In major US cities over the past 40 years, the frequency of heat waves has tripled, and their duration increased by over six weeks. [121] Moreover, the intensity of heat waves has increased by 3-5 degrees. [122]

But No, this is not the new normal, since the frequency and intensity of extreme weather will continue to increase rather than stabilize any time soon. [123] As for whether this heat wave is, as at least one report called it, a thousand-year event? [124] Only if you are looking at the past thousand years instead of the next thousand. [125] We are entering an era of tipping points and vicious

cycles. Heat waves increase the likelihood of forest fires, which endanger watersheds as well as destroying trees that sequester carbon, thus releasing more greenhouse gasses. Air conditioners or vehicles used to escape the heat also contribute to warming the planet. [126] And so on.

Of course, like other extreme weather events, heat waves have been happening not just in the US but around the globe. In Siberia, north of the Arctic circle, temperatures recently reached 118F (48C); Jacobabad, Pakistan hit 126F (52C). [127] Those numbers are all the usual dry-bulb temperatures and take no account of humidity. Still more significant are temperatures measured with a wet cloth over the thermometer to take account of heat and humidity: a wet-bulb reading of 95F (35C) can be fatal within a few hours, even for fit, healthy humans, because the body can no longer cool itself by sweating. A recent study found that both Jacobabad and Ras al Khaimah, in the United Arab Emirates, have already had brief periods of reaching that deadly temperature, years ahead of the predictions of climate scientists.

Extreme heat can not only make demands on power grids that cause them to fail-itself potentially fatal to those dependent on machines for breathing or other health needs-but can also damage infrastructure. In Portland, light rail service shut down because of melting equipment. [128] In Washington, sections of the I-5 highway were closed because pavement buckled. [129] Most pressing, though, heat is a health issue, even when less extreme than the fatal wet-bulb readings. The late-June heat wave in the Pacific Northwest led to hundreds of deaths. [130]

As with other consequences of climate change and other [consequences of](#)

[capitalism](#), heat is also a matter of inequity and justice: not everyone experiences heat waves in the same ways, and the ill effects of heat impact most heavily those in already-disadvantaged groups. [131] Wealthy neighborhoods tend to have more tree cover and thus remain cooler, while those with fewer resources are also less likely to have air conditioning. The history of redlining, moreover, insures that these heat islands disproportionately affect people of color. [132] Similarly, those who are incarcerated and those who are houseless have fewer options for getting away from heat. [133]

Hot weather also has particular impacts for workers in some occupations. Research has confirmed the increasing risk of heat-related illness and death among construction workers. [134] During the June heat wave, Portland closed outdoor public pools after several lifeguards suffered heat illness; at least one farmworker in Oregon died of heat-related illness [135]; and workers in a Portland donut shop took strike action in response to inadequate air conditioning. [136] As the [Northwest Labor Press](#) has noted,

The Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 says employers have a “general duty” to provide a place of employment free from recognized hazards that may cause death or serious harm. But federal OSHA has never developed specific workplace protections addressing heat safety, despite the fact that worker safety experts have been pushing since the 1970s for a national rule to protect workers from heat stress.

While a few states have developed guidelines for addressing heat safety,

most have not.

But workers and activists are addressing this and other of the related issues illuminated under the heat dome. For instance, the United Farm Workers are pressing for a new national heat regulation bill. [137] Climate [activists continue](#) campaigning for the provisions of a [Green New Deal](#), including the need for [green public housing](#), and continue working to stop fossil fuel infrastructure, including [Portland's Zenith Oil Terminal](#), Enbridge's new

[Line 3 in Minnesota](#), and the [Appalachian Mountain Valley Pipeline](#). (Recent victories have included the termination of the [Keystone XL Pipeline](#), defeat of plans for a [massive fracked gas refinery in Kalama, Washington](#), and development of the [Portland Clean Energy Fund](#).) During the latest heat waves, not only local governments and social service agencies but also groups providing [mutual aid set up cooling stations](#). Such [mutual aid](#) groups can not only help ensure what the Black Panther Party called survival pending

revolution-what we now might consider survival during climate turmoil-but can also help build organizing skills and community solidarity. We will continue to face increased heat waves-as well as [floods, cold spells](#), and other [extreme weather](#) worsened by climate change, and we need to continue organizing to save each other and to create a more livable world.

July 3, 2021

Source [Solidarity webzine](#).

Batley — No Great Victory for Starmer

5 July 2021, by [Phil Hearse](#)

Given the awful record of the Johnson government on the pandemic, corruption, inequality and poverty, Labour should be racing ahead in by-elections, not squeezing in with tiny majorities in heartland seats. But in Batley, Labour probably won because their candidate, Kim Leadbetter was the sister of popular local MP Jo Cox, gunned down by a fascist thug during the Brexit referendum in 2016. [138]

Obviously she did not win on the basis of the decisive radical policies and critique of the government put forward by Starmer—because there were no such clear and radical alternatives advanced. Batley, like Hartlepool before it, reflected a Labour leadership intent on saying as little as possible, particularly on the pandemic, for fear of being criticised by the right-wing media and thus becoming ‘unpopular’ with sections of the electorate. The constant complaint, apparently, from Labour canvassers in Batley and Spen was that ‘people don’t know what Starmer stands for.’

While the Johnson government engages in an utterly irresponsible lifting of Covid-19 restrictions, Labour says nothing. Neither is there any clear Labour plan for overcoming the dire rise in poverty and inequality

shown by last week’s revelation of the sharp decline in life expectancy in Greater Manchester.

The intervention in this election by George Galloway and his wholly owned mini-subsidary, The Workers Party of Great Britain, who won more than 8000 votes, was bad news for the radical Left. [139] Bad news because while correctly criticising Starmer’s economic and pandemic policies from the left, Galloway deliberately set out to build support among socially conservative voters on the basis of rampant homophobia and transphobia.

Galloway openly adopted the position of the *Telegraph-Mail-Spectator* radical Right, that Labour and the whole Left is dominated by ‘woke’ urban elites who are middle class and made a ‘California turn’ some decades ago. Galloway’s attempt to divide economic radicalism from social radicalism is a gift to the Tory and Labour Right. It is exactly on these issues, particularly of racism and immigration (about which Galloway and his party say nothing), that the far right and the Tories attempt to drive a wedge into the working class. It is on this basis that the pro-Brexit side in the 2016 referendum won substantial support in those former industrial towns of the North and Midlands ‘Red

Wall’, which later voted Tory at the 2019 election.

The by-election was marked by street confrontations, in which mainly young, Muslim activists, sometimes apparently led by Shakeel Afsar from Birmingham, heckled and harassed Labour canvassers on the issue of LGBT+ friendly education in schools. Galloway disclaimed all knowledge of these events and his campaign denied any connection with the Birmingham activists.

Still Galloway himself deliberately tried to stoke up and capitalise from anti-LGBT+ feeling in the conservative sections of the Muslim community. Afsar was a leading figure in the picketing of Anderton Park primary school in Birmingham in 2019, where reactionary sectors of the Muslim community campaigned against LGBT+ friendly education in schools.

In the current situation, the real militant Left will want to campaign against the British government’s harsh treatment of refugees and asylum seekers, exemplified by their housing in the Covid-unsafe Napier barracks in Kent and the inadequate provision made for the many unaccompanied children arriving from France. The Left will want to join and support Black Lives Matter campaigners in

their fight against the glorification of Britain's racist and imperialist past in the slave trade.

The real militant Left will also take a stand against violence against women, and in support of those raising this issue.

Fighting against racism and sexism is fighting back against the real oppression that people face daily in their lives. This lived experience, which involves mountains of sexist and racism violence, and equal mountains of racist and sexist discrimination, cannot be pushed aside by courting the support of socially conservative Muslims or those in the working class supporting right wing and reactionary ideas. Or saying that anti-racist and anti-sexist campaigners are 'woke' elites.

Galloway's tactics have a distinct echo of the 'national Bolshevism' stand of the German Communist Party (KPD) in the early 1930s. The KPD made correct criticisms of the Social Democrats on their pro-capitalist

economic policies, but tried to woo workers influenced by the nationalist ideas of the Nazis and other right-wing parties, particularly trying to create a broad political front, on a German nationalist basis, for the return of Alsace-Lorraine from French occupation.

This policy was a disaster. Making bids for support from extreme right and reactionary political forces, or those in the working class influenced by their ideas, leads to strengthening the Right and not the Left.

Galloway's campaign rightly spoke out against Islamophobia and in support of Palestine. Absolutely correct things to do, but you cannot divide Islamophobia from racism in general. Nor pick and choose which sections of the oppressed you back, while staying quiet about others—or even adopting reactionary and hostile positions towards them.

Galloway's attempt to forge an alliance of socially conservative forces from the white and Asian communities will never work, because it will always

be disrupted by racism towards Muslims.

Galloway's 8000 votes doubtless reflected disillusion with Starmer, but for a variety of reasons, some correct and some reactionary. Galloway is drifting to the right. His 8000 votes represent not a surge for the Left, but a reactionary dead-end. One which the very name of his party—the Workers Party of Great Britain—reveals.

Galloway appeared on pro-Brexit platforms with Nigel Farage during the referendum campaign, and inveighed not just against the EU, but also national self-determination for Scotland. He dismisses criticism of this as the Left not understanding alliances. But it is those who stand with and make concessions to, the reactionary right who do not understand alliances. Or maybe understand them all too well. Hostility to social radicalism is a gift to the Tory right and to creeping fascism.

3 July 2021

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

A “scientific” congress confines women to role of reproducers

4 July 2021, by **Andreas Sartzekis**

"Fertility Congress"

The Greek leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis, on the other hand, enjoyed a benevolent silence from his colleagues in misdeeds during the European summit, while (yet another) political scandal broke out in mid-June in Greece. It was revealed, by a provocative promotional spot, that the “First Panhellenic Congress of Fertility and Reproductive Autonomy” was being prepared for the beginning of July in Iannina. The aim of this congress was to “To highlight the

value and importance of information around fertility issues, to present the current situation, which clearly shows that the birth deficit is ravaging contemporary society, with the main reason being the lack of knowledge on fertility issues.” And as a bonus, the message hammered home was to shame women who prefer to work, selfishly forgetting that after 40 it is too late to contribute to the national destiny!

The participants in this congress, whose steering committee was obviously composed of four men, were divided between doctors from gynaecological departments in two or

three hospitals, journalists... and ecclesiastics, the Greek Orthodox Church having recently distinguished itself scientifically by establishing an annual day devoted to the “unborn chil””. The participation of clergymen was not symbolic but massive, since for example the animation of the workshop “Role of the decentralized administration in the protection of fertility” was entrusted almost exclusively to priests... And the scandal of such a congress aiming at forbidding women to decide for themselves does not stop there: In the workshops, we also find: “Ministry of the Interior: fertility, central axis of development”, with the minister

himself, Makis Voridis, former head of the youth of the colonels' junta (1967-1974), as speaker! In fact, this congress at least had the active support of the government, and in any case, it corresponds to the dangerously reactionary wind that the right-wing of Mitsotakis junior is imposing, notably in national education with, for example, replacing sociology by... religion classes.

“What a scandal”

The scandal goes even further: in their search for support, it seems that the brilliant enlightened leaders forgot to inform their interlocutors of the real content of the famous congress. The singer Kaiti Garbi explained (to the newspaper *Ef Syn*) that she saw the advertisement and was shocked. ““It presented women as part of the reproductive process without giving them the right to free choice. What a scandal!” Even worse: the organizers had arranged for the congress to be hosted by the President of the Republic, Katerina Sakellaropoulou. After the screening of the spot and the reactions, she withdrew her support for this sinister symposium of nostalgic women's subjugation and big business doctors abusing their power against women. The latter aspect was not lacking either: while it is known that doctors in Greece abuse

caesarean sections in order to be able to charge more, the congress also had as its perspectives the development of artificial reproduction methods within the framework of medical tourism called for by the Minister of Development, Adonis Georgiadis, who also comes from the fascist extreme right...

Following the broadcasting of the advert, reactions abounded, between campaigns on social networks and various statements. The personalities solicited withdrew or felt obliged to withdraw their support, and the same goes for organizations or businesses, TV channels or banks. It must be said that the continuation of this congress could have given rise to massive reactions against such a provocation: because at the same time, the reality for women is feminicides, rapes, and also the consequences of the slavery-like law on working time voted on 16 June, the effect of which will be to make it even more difficult for women and men to be more available to their children. And following the numerous withdrawals of support, following very critical articles even in the right-wing press, the congress was finally cancelled.

“Purity of the Greek people”?

The other worrying aspect of this congress, noted by our comrades of NAR in their newspaper *PRIN*, is what is hidden behind the real obsession with a “demographic problem”: why not immediately give Greek nationality to all immigrants and refugees in Greece, many of whom are very young? Behind this question, whose answer is based on a nationalism congenital to the right but relatively shared by the left, we find the obsession with the “purity of the Greek people”. So the response of workers' organizations and the left to this obscurantist offensive worthy of the Middle Ages cannot be limited to the necessary demands that favour the choice of having - or not having - children: reduction of working hours, information on contraception, sex education in schools, resources for public hospitals, reinforcement of public aid to families... The right of refugees and immigrants to live and work with dignity in Greece, to have children with the same rights as children of Greek families (this year there have been many cases of refugee children being prevented from attending school) is a fundamental battle for an internationalist response, based on the principle of the fundamental right of women to have a child if they want, when they want.

Athens, 29 June 2021

Palestinian Americans Take the Lead

3 July 2021, by Malik Miah

Many American Jews have joined the protests, including supporters of Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP). Supporting full equality for Palestinians and Jewish Israelis, JVP is the only major U.S. Jewish group to support the Palestinian civil society call for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS).

Marches and rallies in solidarity with Palestine have stretched from California to New York. May 15

marked the 73rd anniversary of al-Nakba or “catastrophe” in which more than 700,000 Palestinians were driven from or left their homes during the war that created the state of Israel.

A rally held in Santa Rosa, the heart of California wine country, was sponsored by the North Bay Coalition for Palestine. Reported by the local Press Democrat, speakers called for justice.

Voices from Marchers

“We are here because we are human beings who care about the suffering of other people,” said Therese Mughannam. She was born in Jerusalem before the British withdrew from Palestine and the creation of the Israeli state.

Protesters in many cities showed up

with handmade signs, marching and chanting through megaphones their solidarity with the Palestinian community. As reported by CNN, one protester said: "I definitely feel that the tide is turning in the American public. I feel that we have a lot more support from individuals that are coming out to our protests, that are joining us. They have begun to see Palestine and the liberation of Palestinians as another social justice cause that they should be concerned about."

Another Palestinian activist added, "I've seen on social media like a huge shift of support towards Palestinians. I think what's really different this time is that people's communities have grown and expanded and so have our definitions and concepts of liberation. I just want people to know that Palestinians are human beings just like anyone else in this world and we deserve our right to self-determination."

Adil Abbuthalha, 23, grabbed his camera and made his way to downtown Sacramento, California on May 16, motivated to march the streets of the state's capital in solidarity with Palestinians, he told CNN.

"As a Muslim, our prophet teaches us that humanity is like a body — when one part hurts, the rest of the body hurts," he said. "The unity we saw, regardless of religion or ethnicity, it speaks volumes for the people in Palestine."

Demonstrators filled the steps leading to the entrance of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The Black and Brown Coalition of PHL told CNN that protesters marched from Rittenhouse Square Park to the museum. Many Palestinians had participated in the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020.

Supermodel Bella Hadid, of Palestinian heritage, attended a New York City protest. "The way my heart feels. To be around this many beautiful, smart, respectful, loving, kind and generous Palestinians all in one place... We are a rare breed!!," a caption on one of Hadid's Instagram posts read. "It's free Palestine til Palestine is free!!!"

Rehma Mohamed, 26, joined a big protest in Dallas, Texas. She said she's never seen a turnout like this before. "I've attended every Palestine protest in Dallas, and even during the war in 2014 ... the turnout was only in the hundreds."

Febi Ramadhan, 27, and his wife, Annisa Mawarni, 25, took to the streets of downtown Chicago and posed for a photo with handmade signs.

"I was saddened and enraged by these continuous acts of violence, and I participated in the rally in downtown Chicago to fight together with Palestinians against this pogrom until the liberation of Palestine actually happens," Ramadhan told CNN.

BLM Stands with Palestinians

Black Agenda Report (BAR) senior columnist Margaret Kimberley wrote of the freedom struggle: "There aren't many issues which clearly and unequivocally delineate right from wrong. The question of justice for the Palestinian people and their right to be protected by international law is one which gives no wiggle room for ifs, ands, or buts. Israel's apartheid system is of such long standing and is so brazen that millions of people feel not only outrage but an insult to their own personal integrity and now speak up though they once demurred."

;"We understand that the liberation of Black people in the United States is tied to the liberation of Black people all over the world, and tied to the liberation of oppressed people all over the world," said Melina Abdullah, co-founder of the Los Angeles chapter of Black Lives Matter.

"Being in solidarity with the Palestinian people is something that's been part of our work as Black Lives Matter for almost as long as we've been an organization."

Reuben Telushkin, a Jewish African-American and organizer for JVP, attended the mass rally and march of the Arab-American community in Dearborn, Michigan on the day of

Biden's visit. Telushkin was quoted by Julian Borger in The Guardian (May 21, 2021) about how Palestinian and Black activists linked up around the Black Lives Matter actions.

"People were connecting in the streets, connecting online and so pre-existing solidarities were deepening," as well as politicizing previously uninvolved folks.

In the Ferguson, Missouri 2014 protests, "Palestinians were demonstrating their solidarity by sending tweets to protesters in Ferguson about how to treat teargas."

Blood on Biden's Hands

President Biden, like former presidents Trump and Obama, has come under protest and pressure from Palestinian American and their allies because of the U.S. government's total support to the criminal acts of Israel.

Biden's pledge to defend Israel's "right of self-defense" over occupied people who have no air force, no real military for protection from Israeli bombs, is like saying that slaveholders had a "right of self-defense" as they beat and lynched slaves who dared to revolt.

Biden has blood on his hands. But some in the progressive wing of the Democratic Party, led by Rashida Tlaib from Detroit, the only elected Palestinian congresswoman, have begun speaking out about Israel's oppressive system.

Historically in South Africa, apartheid wanted Blacks separated into Bantustans. Today's eviction of Palestinian homeowners in Jerusalem, leading to the current resistance and war, is a continuation of the historic Zionist goal to remove and replace Palestinians from all the land Israel occupies.

Protests will continue. The example of the 2020 mass protests against police violence lives on.

The truths about Israel and U.S. policy are beginning to be told because of the resistance shown by Palestinians

around the world. Self-determination
and in the end a secular democratic

state can be won.

Source [July-August 2021, ATC 213](#).

Afghanistan's Tragedy

2 July 2021, by **Valentine Moghadam**

Taliban gunmen attacked the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul in January 2018. Daesh attacked offices and staff members of international NGOs. Women and men who have worked with those offices have been targeted with threatening “night letters” and some with assassination.

In early 2020, the UN estimated that some 100,000 civilians had been killed over the past decade, mostly by militants but also by Afghan and U.S. military strikes. [140] More assaults occurred after the Trump administration’s announcement of the withdrawal of U.S. troops and the Biden administration confirmed the withdrawal’s completion by September 11, 2021.

In May 2020, horrific attacks took place on a maternity ward in Kabul. On the morning of December 10, 2020, Malala Maiwand, the first woman TV presenter for Enikass News in Nangarhar province, was killed along with her driver, when gunmen opened fire on their car near Jalalabad. Two women judges working for the Afghan Supreme Court were shot dead in January 2021.

In early March, gunmen fatally shot three women who worked at Enikass News. Seven Shia Hazara workers were murdered at a plastics factor in Jalalabad.

In April, a suicide bombing took place in Afghanistan’s Logar province, killing over 20 civilians. A girls’ school was attacked in May in a majority Shia Hazara district of Kabul, killing at least 30.

Costs of Intervention

This litany of tragedies and crimes in Afghanistan is a reminder — especially to those of us who have followed events since 1978 — of the consequences of foreign military interventions. Afghanistan remains among the countries with the lowest human development rankings and the highest insecurity rankings.

Is it any wonder that thousands of young Afghan men, along with many young Afghan families, try to find refuge in Europe? Or that over the years, the present writer has prepared affidavits for pro bono lawyers representing Afghan professional women seeking asylum in the United States?

This is Afghanistan, 20 years after the Bush regime launched a military attack in the aftermath of 9/11 to punish the Taliban for harboring Osama bin Laden, and years after the Obama administration ordered troop enhancements and drone attacks.

But the roots of Afghanistan’s insecurity and instability go back further, to the fateful decision by the Carter Administration in 1978-80 and the Reagan administration in the 1980s to undermine a modernizing left-wing government supported by the Soviet Union and to promote a tribal-Islamist rebellion. In the waning days of the Cold War, U.S. politicians, pundits, and even human rights advocates considered communism a greater threat than political Islam — despite what they saw occurring in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The attack on the Intercontinental

Hotel hit home to me because that is where I stayed in Kabul in January-February 1989, as the last Soviet troops were leaving Afghanistan. I had come to explore the government’s social policies, particularly its commitment to literacy, schooling for girls and women’s equality.

Born in Iran, I was able to converse with Afghans — from hotel employees and shopkeepers to members of the ruling People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and employees of the various agencies and organizations I visited. I found most of them proud of the accomplishments to date despite the almost decade-long internationalized civil conflict. But they also were uncertain of the future, given that their main ally was withdrawing.

As it happens, the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) and its military stayed in place for another three years, finally succumbing in April 1992 to the Mujahideen rebellion reinforced by Islamist fighters from other countries, arms delivered by the United States via Pakistan, and funds from Saudi Arabia.

Almost immediately, Mujahideen commanders began to fight each other, plunging the country into more chaos until the Taliban came rampaging in, finally removing the Mujahideen in 1996 and creating their own, nightmarish version of stability. Will the same happen after the last of the U.S. and NATO forces leave in September?

Remembering

Revolutionary Afghanistan

In 1978-79 I was a student, first in Canada and then in the United States, determined to return to Iran after what we leftists hoped would be a democratic socialist Iran. I was aware of the revolution in neighboring Afghanistan but was fully focused on Iran's revolution.

Iran's outcome went from bad to worse — with summary executions of Pahlavi-era officials, executions of the first group of leftists in August 1979, the U.S. embassy hostage incident, the imposition of compulsory hejab, the war with Iraq in the 1980s, the arrests and killings of numerous dissidents, and the self-exile of other dissidents. I turned my attention to events and developments in Afghanistan.

Here was the leftwing alternative that we had sought in Iran, even though by the mid-1980s it was clear that the Afghan experiment was under siege. I began to read what I could, including Afghan government and Soviet publications, academic studies and press accounts. U.S. press accounts and academic and "human rights" reports alike evinced the kind of knee-jerk anti-communism that led logically to sympathy for Islamist rebels. The dispatch of young Afghans to school and university in the Soviet Union was denigrated as "Sovietization." [141]

As I was about to embark on a postdoctoral fellowship for which I would be comparing gender policies in Iran and Afghanistan, I decided to pay a visit to the Afghan mission to the UN in New York to request contacts in Kabul. I also spoke with Inge Kaul, then of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), who had spent two years in Kabul. She offered a positive assessment of what the Afghan government under president Babrak Karmal had been trying to accomplish.

What the Afghan government tried to institute in the years after it came to power in April 1978 is worth recalling: land reform and redistribution, free and compulsory schooling, rights for women, and equality for all ethnic

groups (including the oppressed Shia Hazara). [142] It should be noted that the DRA's program included elements that had already been achieved in Iran, and much earlier, albeit under a state system that had been strong and centralized for much longer.

In 1978, the DRA had the advantage of a loyal military and a ruling party committed to the country's modernization. The disadvantage lay in intra-party rivalries and opposition from Maoist groups and rural landlords, which weakened the government's efforts. [143] The hostility of the United States and Pakistan deepened the internal crisis and elements within the ruling party several times appealed to the Soviet Union for assistance, which finally came in December 1979. [144].

Denouncing the "Soviet invasion," the Carter administration made its covert destabilization program more overt. The Reagan administration intensified it further, prolonging the Soviet army's presence and the suffering of the Afghan people. [145]

Nonetheless, when I visited Kabul in early 1989, I met with and interviewed committed party members and government workers, saw placards across the city that showcased the literacy program or called for peace and reconciliation, toured a factory, shopped at the bazaar, observed a meeting at the women's organization, attended a press conference by president Najibullah (the DRA's third and last president), and visited a women's literacy and training center.

Upon my return to the United States, I tried to publish an article about my visit to Afghanistan but was preempted by the Salman Rushdie affair; Ayatollah Khomeini's appalling fatwa [condemning Rushdie to death for purported "apostasy" — ed.] finished off my efforts to present a different picture of Afghanistan in the mainstream media. My academic writings, however, continued. [146]

It is worth imagining what Afghanistan could have been today, had the Carter/Brzezinski administration refrained from efforts to destabilize the Afghan government — which had come to power in a

military coup in April 1978 — and the Reagan administration had not created a "Vietnam quagmire" for the Soviet Union, which had sent troops to bolster the Afghan military after appeals from the government. [147]

The DRA government very likely could have defeated the tribal-Islamist uprising and continued to carry out its social reform program, especially after the DRA's more moderate "second stage" (*marhaleh dovvom*) under Babrak Karmal, the DRA's second president. It would have strengthened state institutions, increased literacy, schooling and healthcare, built roads and a railway system, and promoted business, agriculture and industrial development.

Of course, the global shift to a neoliberal economic model would have weakened such initiatives, as it did in many developing countries but at least some semblance of good governance and infrastructural development would have prevailed, and the country would not have been plagued by Taliban attacks.

What Comes Next?

That the U.S. "investment" in Afghanistan has been an utter failure cannot be denied. The recent Congressional Afghanistan Study Group Report describes the financial and human costs, although it calls for an extension of the withdrawal date. The UN assistance mission in Afghanistan, UNAMA, published a study, "Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2021 First Quarter Report," documenting 1,783 civilian casualties (573 killed and 1,210 injured).

UNAMA adds: "Of particular concern is the 37% increase in the number of women killed and injured, and a 23% increase in child casualties compared with the first quarter of 2020." The UN mission tweeted on April 28: "UN steadfast in support of inclusive peace process, with meaningful participation of women & youth for a lasting peace." Given the continued violence, how can this come about?

The Congressional Study Group's recommendation of a "regional

diplomatic strategy implemented over the longer term” is sound, as is UNAMA’s emphasis on the participation of women and youth. For that to occur, the United States would need to become an honest broker, and refrain from undermining a regional strategy that would of necessity include Iran, Russia, China, India and Pakistan (and possibly the Central Asian states Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan).

A broad-based caretaker government may need to be in place to complement a regional peacekeeping force. The United States would have to ensure that its ally Pakistan would no

longer provide support for anti-government extremists. Further, the following steps are needed:

1) The presence of Afghan women’s rights groups in peace talks and involvement of the international feminist peace movement. This will ensure the inclusion of programs and policies for the physical security and education of women and girls in all deliberations and outcome documents.

2) A dedicated fund for Afghanistan’s reconstruction and social development, to be administered by the appropriate UN agency.

3) A broader mandate for UNAMA to extend beyond September 2021 so that it can continue its peacebuilding, humanitarian and governance activities. [148]

States that have been most involved in Afghanistan’s destabilization and decades of military conflicts have the responsibility to help foster and fund peace, reconciliation, reconstruction and development — with the rights and participation of women and girls at the center of all programs, projects and policies.

Source July-August 2021, ATC 213.

Black Candidates Lead in New York City, Black Socialist Wins Mayor in Buffalo

1 July 2021, by Dan La Botz

In New York City, where thirteen candidates ran for mayor, the two top vote-getters were both Black: the former police captain and Brooklyn borough president Eric Adams and the progressive attorney, legal counsel to Mayor Bill de Blasio, and television news commentator Maya Wiley. Adams won 31.7%, while Wiley got 23.3%. Adams and Wiley won every borough except wealthier, whiter Manhattan. Yet because for the first time New York is using ranked-choice voting the final results may not be available for weeks and it is possible that another candidate with more second, third, fourth, or fifth place votes could end up winning. If that happens, the other most likely possible winner is the moderate Kathryn Garcia, a white woman, who won 19.5%.

Still, it is clear that most New Yorkers voted for a Black mayor as their first choice. New York City has only had one other Black mayor, David Dinkins (1990-93) and it has never had a woman mayor. While these are only primary elections, in New York City 70% of registered voters are

Democrats and the winner of the Democratic primary is almost sure to win the election.

Most of the New York mayoral candidates, including both leading Black candidates, avoided using the term “defund the police.” Adams appealed to Black homeowners, promising to improve police protection by getting rid of illegal guns, while Wylie, who has been very critical of the police, says she will redistribute funds from the police department to other agencies, such as mental health. Surprisingly in the Democratic Party primary, there more debate about policing than there was about the city’s economic crisis. While all of the candidates talked about reviving the economy and helping workers, those issues were second to policing.

The big surprise of the New York State election, was the victory of India B. Walton, a Black woman and a self-described socialist in the Democratic mayoral primary in Buffalo, New York, a poor city of 250,000 people, 37% Black. She would be the first socialist mayor of an American City in sixty

years. Walton, who is 38 and a registered nurse, had a hard life. She had her first child at age 14 and premature twins at 19, an experience that led her to want to study nursing. She became a community activist, and though she had never run for public office, she defeated four-term incumbent Mayor Byron Brown, a former head of the state Democratic Party and an ally of Governor Andrew Cuomo, by 52 to 45%.

Walton first appealed to progressive white voters and won the backing of the progressive Working Families Party and of the Democratic Socialists of America. Then she took her case to the more conservative Black community and its churches and won their support. She did not talk about defunding the police, but about reallocating police funds for mental health, jobs, education, and housing. Brown, believing he would win, would not debate. Walton won in part because her well organized campaign had an advantage in the low voter turnout primary election—just 20 percent—much like Congresswomen Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s election. In

any case, New York State's second socialist mayor in November.
biggest city is now likely to elect a

Source ***New Politics***.