



IV559 - August 2021

Guatemala: Strike and Crisis

31 August 2021, by **Against the Current**

Sandoval, forced to flee the country after his firing, has been investigating corruption linked to Guatemalan president Alejandro Giammattei.

Sandoval has been replaced by Rafael Curruchiche, who previously served as an Electoral Crimes prosecutor. In that capacity Curruchiche refused to issue an arrest warrant against former president Jimmy Morales, and more recently moved to arrest anti-corruption figures Juan Solorzano and Anibal Arguello.

Successive U.S. administrations have been pretty indifferent to rampant corruption and atrocities in Guatemala, particularly during the genocidal counterinsurgency war of the 1970s and '80s, but the Biden administration appears to be concerned at least with appearances.

"Guatemalan Attorney General

Consuelo Porras' July 23rd decision to remove Special Prosecutor Against Impunity, or FECCI, Chief Juan Francisco Sandoval fits a pattern of behavior that indicates a lack of commitment to the rule of law and independent judicial and prosecutorial processes," said a U.S. State Department spokesperson. "As a result, we have lost confidence in the attorney general" and her intention to combat corruption.

Some U.S. visa restrictions have been placed on Guatemalan, Honduran and Salvadoran officials whom the State Department "believed to be responsible for, or complicit in, undermining democracy or the rule of law."

There was no indication that Porras has been affected by widespread international criticism, or that much of anything will change while U.S.-Guatemalan military ties remain

intact.

Responding to Sandoval's firing and other abuses including corruption in the provision of COVID vaccines, Indigenous leaders called a national strike on July 29 over the government's corruption and the rule of economic elites, the military, and drug traffickers at the expense of the population's lives and dignity.

Meanwhile, at the beginning of August a new law went into effect sharply limiting the work of NGOs, potentially criminalizing human rights defenders.

See: "Tensions Escalate as Guatemalan Attorney General Remains Defiant and National Strike Continues", Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA, August 6, 2021.

Source: September-October 2021, ATC 214

Abandoned and Betrayed

30 August 2021, by **Farooq Sulehria**

The first act of resistance, a day after Kabul fell, was embarrassingly miniscule in size but massively

electrifying in influence. On 17 August five young women protested outside of the Presidential Palace, abandoned a

day before by Ashraf Ghani. In the video footage that immediately went viral, one can watch them flashing

placards in the face of the Taliban. They are chanting: "We exist. We are half Afghanistan. Don't conceal us. Don't harm us. Support us." Armed with guns, the Taliban were rude and abusive. However, as media crew arrived on the scene, they become nervous. [1]

Next day, a few dozen youth gathered in Jalalabad, to hoist Afghan flag atop a monument. The flag, like the national anthem, has been banned by the Taliban. The Taliban responded by firing at the gathering. Death toll: 3.

Day 3 of occupation: 19 August is celebrated as Yum-e-Istaklal (national day) to mark the anniversary of Afghan campaign to drive out the Brits in 1919. Ever since, every ruler has observed this day, except the Taliban (1997-2001). They banned it.

Holding Afghan flag, symbolizing defiance of Taliban since 16 August, thousands of youth poured on streets across the country on national day. In Kabul, 200-strong rally included 7 women. Crystal Bayat (24), with Afghan flag scarfed around her head, spearheaded the rally. "Every Talib was saying only 20 days you guys are free. So I just wanted to use this 20 days and raise my voice," she later stated in a video message. Media-savvy Taliban have shown relative restraint in Kabul. But in provinces, it is another story. Hence, Asadabad buried 16 youth massacred by the Taliban on national day.

"But haven't they

changed?"

Briefly: NO. The global efforts to re-brand these fanatics is a two-pronged strategy. One: western governments are trying to justify, for domestic audiences, their lavish betrayal of the Afghans. Two: The make up being applied to produce good-looking Taliban for TV screens will help legitimize the forthcoming betrayal i.e. the recognition of Taliban regime. The cunning Taliban, for now, are also complicit in their re-packaging to remain valid and receive the western aid.

Beyond these image-building theatrics, reality is ugly. Afghans know. Hence, they are thronging the Kabul airport where Taliban humiliate and beat them.

In fact, the Taliban have been committing war crimes in the run-up to Kabul's capture. For instance, on 16 June 22 Afghan commandos were slaughtered in Dawlatabad after they had surrendered (footage available).

Reuters journalist, Danish Siddiquee (from India) was hunted down and assassinated after he had taken refuge in a mosque in Spin Boldik. The UN office in Herat was attacked, leaving the guard dead. Likewise, Sohail Pardis was beheaded mere because he had worked in the past as an interpreter for the US troops. This despite the Taliban promise that nobody would be targeted for having worked as interpreter. On August 3, Human Rights Watch regretted that the Taliban were committing war

crimes by summarily executing detained soldiers as well as civilians for their alleged ties to the Afghan government.

An Afghan activist, summed up the re-branding debate on his Facebook. "Taliban have only horns [guns], they have no head [ideas]," he says. If they give up their horns (barbarity), they will be dissolved.

In fact, it is not the Taliban but the Afghans (women, in particular) have changed beyond the Taliban's recognition. Another group incapable of recognizing the unchanging character of Taliban is the troupe of self-styled "anti-imperialists" detecting decoloniality in the fall of Kabul.

Life no doubt was bad under the US occupation. Taliban suicide missions further compounded the misery bombed onto Afghan villages by the US war jets. The latter claimed more civilian lives. However, under the Taliban it will go from bad to worse. Once consolidated, Taliban will start deploying their horns more ruthlessly. Ayatollahs always speak sweetly in their inaugural speeches. Imperialism and Islamic fundamentalism happily symbiose (Saudia et al). Only when the latter disobey (Iran, al Qaida), the former reprimands. Real anti-imperialism/decoloniality will be to save Afghan lives, build global solidarity for Afghan resistance, help refugee outflows from the country and, most importantly: don't abandon Afghanistan yet again.

28 August 2021

Negotiations in Mexico between the Venezuelan government and the right-wing opposition

29 August 2021, by LUCHAS

The negotiations - behind closed doors - began on 13-16 August with the

mediation of Norway and the support of Russia and the Netherlands.

LUCHAS wants to establish a position on this process to contribute to the

necessary debate with all workers, peasants, community members, youth, women's movements and also with all those who claim to be on the left inside and outside our borders. We previously stated that our organization is in favour of negotiations or agreements, however, in this statement we set out on what bases and conditions:

First, it must be made clear that the Maduro government is not negotiating with organizations with minor political differences, but with declared and proven enemies of national sovereignty and of the interests of workers and the Venezuelan people.

These opposition sectors have been recurrent protagonists of conspiracies, violent actions, armed raids, assassination attempts and attacks, supporting political, diplomatic and economic aggression and even mercenary incursions directed against our nation from the imperialist powers, as well as being accomplices of the brutal blockade against the Venezuelan people and the theft of their resources abroad, and have permanently called for military intervention in the country. All this in order to crush the Bolivarian revolutionary process and finally destroy the conquests obtained by the Venezuelan people since Chávez came to power as president and to once more push back for decades the desires for social justice and national independence.

The desire of the right-wing opposition is the attempt to impose by force and coercion a "parallel government" presided over by them, like that which was self-proclaimed in a public square in 2018, with the intention of inflicting a historic defeat on the Bolivarians, even with the physical annihilation of Chavistas who dare to respond. This government would be a faithful instrument to transform Venezuela into a shameful Yankee colony. Their political objectives were not achieved but the economic damage to the Nation and to the pockets and tables of Venezuelan working families has been enormous; with the imperialist economic sanctions they promoted, with the delivery of state assets (Monomers, Citgo, Venezuelan gold from the Bank of England and so on)

and seasoned with shameless corruption.

This process of dialogue takes place at a key moment, marked by the political defeat of the imperialist plan to crush the Bolivarian Revolution, embodied in the interventionist "parallel government" supposedly headed by Juan Guaidó.

The defeat of this plan did not result from a single act. It is the result of a cascade of defeats that includes: the "Battle of the Bridges" on the Colombian-Venezuelan border in January 2019; the failed coup d'état of April 30 that same year which received a massive popular mobilization of response the next day; the defeat of the mercenary invasion by the organized communities and the Bolivarian militia of the Costas de Aragua; the electoral defeat suffered by the right in the last elections in the National Assembly; the defeat of the mercenary incursion in Apure in May-June 2021, and the defeat of the attempted violent paramilitary uprising that took place in the southwest of Caracas.

The basis of this defeat of the imperialist plan is the stubborn resistance of broad sectors of Venezuelan women, the determined commitment of the Communes and behind these popular sectors as a firm rear-guard, Venezuelan working people who reject and isolate every conspiracy carried out by this bourgeoisie, which has demonstrated for two decades its intention to submit to overexploitation, to oppression, racism, humiliation and the most savage repression every attempt at justice and liberation of the working and popular classes.

It is a triumph of resistance based on the experience of struggle, on independent popular organization. It is a triumph based on the relationship of forces between the classes: although worn out and exhausted, the working class persists and inflicts defeats on its historical and concrete enemy.

We do not fight this battle alone. This triumph over the imperialist plan had the unforeseen and coincident help of the tremendous popular rebellions

that recently shook the US and Colombia; the headquarters and operations command of the counterrevolution against Venezuela. Also, with the support of the popular rebellions that occurred and continue to happen in Chile, Peru, Guatemala, Bolivia and other countries of the Continent. This has shattered the "Lima Group", a kind of interventionist club of counterrevolutionary presidents at the service of Yankee imperialism against the peoples of America and has also undermined the OAS and Almagro himself.

We repeat, it has been a difficult and costly triumph because the enemy has devastated our economy from within, with speculation and hyperinflation, and from outside with economic blockade; also enhancing its consequences with growing state corruption and added to this in the last two years the terrible effects of the covid-19 pandemic. All these elements have been combined and produced paralysis of industrial production and in particular the oil industry, hunger, unemployment, crisis in health, education, public services, among others. In addition, millions of Venezuelans, mostly young people, have emigrated and fled the country in search of other horizons and opportunities, taking a whole wealth of knowledge and experience acquired in our country, and today they are scattered around the world, often suffering abuse, xenophobia, discrimination, mistreatment and even being victims of murders.

The fact that the local bourgeoisie and its organizations are politically defeated has forced it to recognize the government that the people elected, and the implicit acceptance shown so far by imperialism also ratifies this.

Faced with the current negotiations, the Chavista bases show a mixture of expectations and distrust. No one likes secrecy, especially given what is at stake and our own interests. Less pleasing is the discourse and actions that show intent to maintain impunity for bourgeois terrorists; as evidenced by the unconsented liberation of the renowned Freddy "marihuanita" Guevara, and the offer of political freedoms for all conspiratorial

bourgeois organizations and characters. The government gives political oxygen to a bourgeoisie that now suffers from the symptoms of Covid 19.

So, we do share those apprehensions of the Chavista popular bases. In addition, it inflames us and for this reason we denounce the fact that the government, while making all kinds of previous concessions to the bourgeoisie and its older *guarimberos*, continues to unjustly and inhumanely keep workers' leaders such as Eudis Girot, Sabariego (PDVSA) and others and others in prisons or jail houses, an example being two young PDVSA workers, Aryenis Torrealba and Alfredo Chirinos and ignore the requests for special care for some of these fellow prisoners in situations of illness, such as Rodney Álvarez, a ferro-mining worker who has spent more than 10 years in prison.

That is why we warn: The negotiating table cannot agree in secret, what the workers, peasants, women, community members, youth, pensioners and retirees, have defended and conquered with order and popular organization in the midst of the hardships of this crisis.

Can there be negotiations? Yes, and there must be negotiations. Negotiating from our popular victory to move forward. The conspiratorial bourgeoisie must be led to an Agreement of Peace with Justice, which consolidates the defeat that we have dealt to the enemy through all these years. The negotiations must serve to consolidate peace, to

dismantle speculation, to liquidate any internal support for the imperialist policy of sanctions so that they weaken and can fall.

Contrary to this, what we are observing for now, is the PSUV government using this triumph as a currency of exchange in its plans to establish an inclusive regime of capitalist exploitation (inclusive for the bureaucracy with the desire of a bourgeoisie) in exchange for impunity and freedom for all the openly counterrevolutionary actors of the bourgeoisie.

The surrender of Maduro and his "loyalists" lies not in the fact of negotiating, but in the elements of economic surrender, subordination to transnational and national capital, extreme labour flexibility and impunity for bourgeois terrorists and political persecution of workers who struggle, this is what is marking these negotiations.

Thus, the current negotiation not only wastes, but clearly threatens to betray that costly popular triumph.

LUCHAS calls on all workers; organizations, communes, organizations and intellectuals of the left, social movements of women and peasants to pronounce themselves in favour of a negotiation that is based on the defeat that we have inflicted on the fraudulent "parallel government" to advance in the resolution of the needs of the heroic working people in their resistance:

i) To allow a reconstruction of the national economy for the benefit of

those of us who have fought and resisted and not in favour of bourgeois and bureaucratic waste in casinos and window displays;

(ii) To achieve a peace that decides on the indexation of wages, the stabilization of a national currency that is not subordinate to the dollar, the defence and expansion of the communal economy and the rescue of collective labour agreements;

ii) To strengthen democratic freedoms for workers, peasants, community members and social fighters, instead of them being tried and imprisoned.

We do not deny that, under the current conditions, the bourgeoisie should have room for certain economic activities, especially the small and medium-sized food producers in the countryside. But let this not be done with starvation wages, without labour rights and with loss of national sovereignty. On the contrary, the more space it is necessary to give the bourgeois economy, the more democratic control the communal workers' and people's organizations must exercise.

We have defeated a new onslaught of imperialism and the criminal right through worker, peasant, communal and popular resistance. From there we must begin to rebuild our economy. We will see if the government representatives take into account this balance sheet, considerations and proposals.

National Secretariat of LUCHAS.

Venezuela, 23 August 2021.

Afghanistan's bravest woman: Sudaba organized first anti-Taliban demo

28 August 2021, by Farooq Sulehria

Amid this fear and panic, four Afghan women decided to protest as an act of resistance. They spontaneously

decided to hold a demonstration.

This first act of resistance, on 17 August, was embarrassingly minuscule

in size when these four women, all in their mid-20s, gathered outside of the Presidential Palace.

In the [video footage](#) that immediately went viral, one can watch them flashing placards in the face of the Taliban. They are chanting: "We exist. We are half Afghanistan. Don't conceal us. Don't harm us. Support us."



The gun-toting Taliban, visibly nervous appear at a loss as local and global media cover the event.

Small in size but Himalayan in courage, this protest began to dominate the TV screens and blogosphere. Conspiracy theories gained currency equally fast. 'The Taliban themselves sponsored the manifestation,' detractors commented in disbelief. Regardless of disparaging conspiracy theories, the action had electrified many across the country. In the next two days, demonstrations were held in many towns. In two cases, the Taliban responded by firing at the agitators. In Jalalabad the death toll was 3, in Asadabad, 16 [exact death toll remains unverified].

Who were these four brave women? It was a question on everybody's mind in Afghanistan and perhaps beyond. Sudaba Kabiri, the motivator behind the spontaneous demonstration, happened to be the friend of a Kabul-based journalist. Though underground since the fateful demonstration yet she

readily agreed to reply my questions on whats app. "Will send you voice notes," she told me in a brief whats app call. Her matter-of-fact replies were as brief, but to the point, as her call.

Read on:

Tell us something about yourself.

I am a university student. I was born during the period of first Taliban rule (1997-2001). I work with a private-sector employer as well.

Where was this protest organized? How did the idea of protest come to your mind and how many more friends were involved?

It was held outside of the Presidential Palace. We were a group of students. We were very upset. Our decision was sudden. It was not any pre-planned act. All the men and women are afraid of the Taliban. They were not ready to step outside of the homes. We want to demand our rights [through this action] and to encourage others to demand their rights.

The Taliban gunmen were present. What did they say?

Yes, there were the Taliban gunmen. They did not respect us. They were very angry. They snatched our papers and mobiles. However, when the national and international media crew

started arriving, they changed their behavior. Earlier, they were pointing their guns at us.

Are you underground after the demo? Any threats after the demo?

We are underground. Every day, we move to a new place. Our families, however, are staying on in their respective homes. They are afraid. We are all in big trouble. Understandably.

Do you think your protest led to more protests that started next day on?

This demonstration had significant impact on the Afghan society. Specifically, it encouraged the women to come out of their homes and lead the demonstrations.

What next? Are you planning to escape Afghanistan?

We plan to stay on until they are not threatening to kill us.

How have your families responded, were they aware of your action in advance?

Our families did not know anything. They did not even know that we had stepped outside of the homes. When they watched the demonstration on television, they were angry at us. We can understand them. They want us to be safe. But it is critical time. We cannot stay silent.

The colonial nature of pandemic management in Martinique has accentuated the people's mistrust

27 August 2021, by **Philippe Pierre-Charles**

Chlordecone, a pesticide harmful to humans, which was used between 1972 and 1993 on Martinique and Guadeloupean banana plantations to control weevils and contaminated 92% of the population. Both islands hold

the world record for prostate cancers per capita. Several studies link chlordecone exposure to cancer. This state scandal has accentuated mistrust towards Paris, particularly palpable in recent times. Many people

think that the vaccine will poison them like Chlordecone.

But the reluctance does not stop at this fear. Far from the fantasies around "voodoo" and "rum", the motives run from colonial crimes to

the failures of the communication campaign around the health crisis, Philippe Pierre-Charles, a founding member of the Groupe révolution socialiste (Socialist Revolution Group), trade unionist and history teacher, spoke to Yasmine Sellami of Mediapart to dissect the situation.

How do you analyse the discourse explaining the reluctance of the Martinican population towards vaccination by “cultural reasons”?

These are arguments that are very marked by racist prejudices. Like those made by a doctor that Martinicans were allegedly treating themselves with voodoo and rum. Voodoo practically does not exist here, and superstitions are equally present as in other places where the vaccination rate is very high. Our people are educated, and no more irrational than elsewhere. But in the colonial imagination, the colony is the place of magic, ignorance, superstition... a fantasy, without any search for reality.

How do you explain, from a historical point of view, this mistrust of Martinicans towards Paris?

The problem is that, when the dominant are the heirs of slavery and colonial history, and the dominated are the heirs of that same history, but from the other side, this inevitably feeds the mistrust of the latter towards the former. The strong reluctance can therefore be explained by historical reasons. Starting with the sense of injustice fuelled by a large number of unsolved colonial crimes.

For example, in 1971, Gérard Nouvet, a young high school student from Martinique, was killed by a military grenade while going out to see friends. There has never been any official acknowledgement of this crime. The authorities at the time even stated that he had died as a protester and not as a high school student, although he was not demonstrating when he was killed. Later, it was known that the soldier in question had been removed, but nothing more.

Another example, in 1974, in the midst of a strike movement, several protests

broke out in Martinique. Two workers were killed. The body of one of them was found lifeless on the beach, in the north of the island. Again, there was no prosecution.

We can also cite the case of the Martinican journalist André Alier. He was assassinated in 1934 because he was investigating embezzlement by a *béké* [French settler], Eugène Aubéry. He was killed following the publication of his investigation into Aubéry, after several attempts at intimidation and a failed assassination attempt. But the *béké* in question was never sentenced for that. As a result, one of André Alier's brothers took a gun and shot Aubéry. Colonial history is filled with scenarios like these.

Does the trauma of Chlordecone, the harmful pesticide used in Martinique and Guadeloupe between 1972 and 1993 which contaminated 92% of the population of the two islands, play a role in the lack of confidence in the authorities?

That is indeed one of the factors that explains the lack of confidence, yes. What is striking about the Chlordecone case, among other things, is that when the scandal broke, it remained, for several years, a subject that concerned only a few associations and a few lawyers. In 2005, there was the first social forum on the issue. But there was no big popular demonstration, as if this had been inevitable. As if it was in the order of things and there was nothing we could do about it.

In 2018, a second social forum, this time better organized, put the subject back at the heart of the debates. But it was not until 27 February 2021 that the largest demonstration against Chlordecone broke out. It was comparable in scale to that of 2009 [the year of the great general strike against the high cost of living in Martinique and Guadeloupe]. And it only happened when the people of Martinique had the feeling that there was going to be a statute of limitations in this matter. That's when the change of scale took place, because the sense of injustice strengthened. Before, there were a few demonstrations, but they did not attract more than 400 to

500 people.

This risk of prescription has meant that the Martinican people's mistrust of the French state has since manifested itself very strongly. To this is added a small detail, that of the backpedalling by Macron, who, when he came to Martinique, declared that the state must take its responsibilities. Then, during the major debates, during the *Gilets jaunes* movement, it was argued that Chlordecone was not carcinogenic.

Can you identify any other explanations, more recent than the Chlordecone case?

There are several. The first is common to all French territories. It is based on all the inconsistencies held at the highest level of the state at the beginning of the pandemic. Especially on the issue of wearing a mask. One day it is useless, another it becomes mandatory.

Then there is also an inconsistency peculiar to Martinique. In February 2020, it was necessary for the people to mobilize and demonstrate against the arrival of tourists from Italy, where the epidemic was soaring at the time while this was not the case in Martinique. It was the threats from the people that caused the plane to leave; the authorities would have done nothing otherwise.

Once the virus arrived here, there was a disproportion in the measures taken, as if we wanted to make up for past mistakes. The first lockdown took place in a climate of exaggerated terror when we did not have many cases. There has been a series of measures more or less out of time with limited consultation.

The binding nature of vaccination and the obligation to vaccinate, when related to Martinican history and in particular the Chlordecone scandal, inevitably create a terrible effect. People think that if we want to impose something on them, it is because it is not good for them.

Added to this is the somewhat dismissive attitude towards the local pharmacopoeia. The contempt for local plants presented as witchcraft,

as opposed to science, generates a defensive reaction of opposing the chemistry imposed by the state.

What about the communication campaign in Martinique since the beginning of the health crisis?

The colonial nature of pandemic management in Martinique has accentuated the people's mistrust of the authorities. They thought that getting the prefect and the director of the regional health authority to speak would be enough. They were not aware of the level of mistrust among Martinicans.

Another problem is that the measures were taken from Paris. There was even one lockdown, here in Martinique, which was announced not by the prefect but by Macron from the capital of France.

Now that the authorities have been able to see the reluctance of the Martinicans, they wanted to rectify the situation by holding meetings with local elected representatives and asking them to raise awareness among the population. But here again, it doesn't work, because the decisions come from the state and the prefect.

A few days ago, I was in contact with the prefect on behalf of the CDMT [Centrale Démocratique Martiniquaise des Travailleurs, an anti-colonialist and anti-capitalist trade union]. I suggested they organize a confrontation of these around the policy conducted to fight against Covid. A confrontation under the aegis of people and structures that enjoy the trust of the population. He replied that he was working on something, without specifying what it was.

A few days later, the following

information was published in the press: the prefect had set up a citizens' transparency committee. By communicating it in this way, he wanted to show that it was he who decided the thing. Again, this is a typical colonial reflex.

Do local elected representatives have any influence to reassure the Martinican population?

Local elected representatives do not have much influence on the population. We only have to look at the fairly high level of abstention in the territory. The local authority has already taken a stand against compulsory vaccination and against the health pass. It went relatively unnoticed. Criticism from elected officials continues to fall by the wayside because this motion was not accompanied by collective action. It has not led to anything at all.

Sri Lanka's abortion law: A straitjacket on women

26 August 2021, by Sierra Amarasiri

This article critiques section 303 of the Penal Code (Ordinance No. 2 of 1883), which criminalises abortion in Sri Lanka. It evaluates the state's role in interfering with a woman's bodily autonomy. First, it discusses the right to bodily autonomy. It then discusses the archaic Sri Lankan law with reference to Indian legal reform. Finally, it examines this anti-abortion law using the concept of bodily autonomy as a frame of reference. It argues that the power women have over their bodies provides sufficient interest to impose a duty of non-interference on the state.

The domain: The right to bodily

autonomy

John Stuart Mill asserts that an individual is sovereign over their own body, and is therefore the 'proper guardian' of their wellbeing. Think of bodily autonomy as your power over a particular space. Imagine a room, in which you have complete power and authority. Within this space, you are at liberty to decide for instance, the colours of the walls, and the types of windows you want. Within this space you have the power to decide what you want to change; it is your domain.

Similarly, you have dominion over what is within the physical parameters of your body. This dominion is identified as your bodily autonomy. In most instances, the right to bodily autonomy is respected. Your right not to be physically assaulted is a part of

your right to bodily autonomy. Acts that violate the right to govern your body are recognised in everyday life, especially in matters of medical intervention. For example, the requirement of consent when receiving medication or an invasive medical procedure is typical of the right to bodily autonomy. Such an understanding of bodily autonomy is precisely what governs a woman's dominion over her body in the case of abortion.

The straitjacket: Abortion laws in Sri Lanka

Section 303 of the Penal Code provides that 'causing a miscarriage' is a punishable criminal offence. The

only instance abortion is permitted under the law, is 'for the purpose of saving the life of the woman'. The person causing the miscarriage is deemed to be the 'perpetrator' within the meaning of this offence. The perpetrator may also be the woman if she causes herself to miscarry. The law in this case puts a straitjacket on a woman. She is deprived of power over her domain when faced with an unplanned pregnancy.

Sri Lanka's anti-abortion law, like India's penal offence (i.e. section 312, Indian Penal Code of 1860), originates from colonial rule. In 1971, India enacted the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, No.34 of 1971 to decriminalise abortion in certain cases. For instance, section 3 of the MTP Act includes the failure of contraceptive devices 'used by any married woman or her husband', which may result in 'grave injury to the mental health of the pregnant woman', and pregnancy caused by rape, as grounds for medical abortion. However, the opinion of a 'registered medical practitioner' for medical abortion within 12 weeks, and two such opinions for a period not exceeding 20 weeks, was a prerequisite in accessing legal abortions in India.

Nonetheless, Indian legal reform and the Indian Supreme Court, unlike Sri Lanka, have acknowledged the state's duty in securing reproductive rights. In *Suchita Shrivastava v Chandigarh*, the Indian Supreme Court delivered a landmark judgment, which acknowledged that 'a woman's right to make reproductive choices' was within

her right to personal liberty. The court further stated that a 'crucial consideration' should therefore be to respect 'a woman's right to privacy, dignity and bodily integrity'. In March 2021, India amended the MTP Act of 1971, to expand the scope of accessing safe and legal abortions. For instance, section 3 of the MTP Act was amended to include failure of contraceptive devices 'used by any woman or her partner', as a ground for medical abortion within 20 weeks of pregnancy. In addition, the Act extended the period to 24 weeks in certain cases such as rape, with the requirement of two medical opinions. By contrast, Sri Lanka's archaic law remains unchanged for over a century since its enactment in 1883. Some opponents of reforming abortion laws base their objection on the idea that a foetus can attain 'personhood'. Yet these objections do not explain how the personhood of a foetus can supersede a woman's absolute authority over her body. In 2013, a proposal by the Law Commission of Sri Lanka recommended including medical abortions as an exception in the cases of rape and incest. However, attempts to reform the law have thus far seen no movement. Opposition voiced by the Catholic Church, and Buddhist and Islamic religious groups were a key factor in placing the proposal at a standstill.

Despite the criminalisation of abortion, in 2015 the Ministry of Health issued guidelines on making post-abortion care accessible to all.

The state's role of

interference

Imagine the room again. This time, someone puts you in a straitjacket and still claims you have 'dominion'. Your movement is now limited; your power is limited, and so is your choice. The straitjacket is an interference of a particular kind. It is designed to prevent you from exercising full power over that space. Sri Lanka's abortion law is similar. As a result of this law, women cease to have meaningful dominion over their bodies. The decision to undergo a pregnancy is strictly within the physical parameters of their body. However, in Sri Lanka this decision is made without their consent. Under Sri Lanka's law, a woman is compelled to undergo a pregnancy, contradicting her right to bodily autonomy. A woman in this context has only two options, remain in the straitjacket she is placed in by the law, or be vulnerable to potentially life-threatening 'unlawful' abortion procedures.

Bodily autonomy imposes a duty of non-interference on the state in relation to reproductive rights. A woman who is an autonomous individual has the right to bodily autonomy, and with it the right to choose what happens within her domain. The state's refusal to acknowledge such rights, and its current role of interference have created a vicious cycle. This cycle that stems from the criminalisation of abortion in 1833, continues to undermine a woman's right to choose what happens to her own body.

Source: [The Sunday Morning](#)

Taliban victory the product of US-NATO intervention

25 August 2021, by **Malik Miah**

Symbolically, the former Bagram US military base near Kabul was captured by the Taliban. The 350,000-strong

Afghani army collapsed. Weapons were turned over to the Taliban. Soldiers and police put on civilian

clothes.

It is a total victory for the Taliban.

The US defeat today is the culmination of an unfolding defeat for imperialism that occurred years ago. The US and NATO forces had more than 130,000 troops in the country, after its 2001 invasion. It could not defeat the Taliban.

The decision to finally withdraw was recognition that a military victory was impossible. And there was no stable regime.

The Pentagon is sending in 5000 troops to evacuate citizens. The US embassy has closed and embassy staff shred secret documents. NATO allies are doing the same.

How could this happen so quickly? Why did the defeat of the largest military in the world become inevitable?

In the final year of former US president Donald Trump's administration, a deal was made with the Taliban for the US to remove its troops from the country if the Taliban agreed not to allow "terrorist" groups to operate on Afghan territory.

The Taliban agreed and demanded the Afghani government resign.

The agreement came after the Taliban agreed two years ago to stop attacking US forces. It focused its war against the Afghani army and police, which was five times larger than the armed militants.

President Joe Biden accepted the Trump administration's deal and agreed to withdraw by September 11.

The US still recognised the Ashraf Ghani government as legitimate, but if any proof was needed that the elected government was a puppet of Washington, it was shown by its quick collapse.

The Taliban's historic support is in southern Afghanistan among the Pushto (Pashtun) ethnic group. Its capital was in Kandahar, where founding leader Mullah Mohammed Omar lived. He died in 2013.

The Afghan people are making clear that the foreign invaders should go, and a stable government is only possible with Afghan forces not

beholden to the West.

Despite US military and CIA propaganda, there has been no bloodbath. The Taliban is taking over by agreements with local leaders.

Origins of US intervention

The US first intervened in Afghanistan in the 1980s after the 1978 democratic revolution that brought to power a secular regime whose program included political democracy, land reform and equal rights for women.

That revolutionary government came after the fall of the British-imposed monarch in 1973, and political factional warfare in the new republic.

The US, through the Central Intelligence Agency, sought to bring down that government. In 1979 the Soviet Union sent troops in to back the new regime.

The US and its allies backed the mujahideen peoples force to defeat the urban-based secular government. The mujahideen was made up of different groups, led by landlords that oppressed the peasantry where they ruled.

The regime had little support in the rural countryside where most people lived.

When the Soviets were forced to leave the country in 1989, the mujahideen took power. The Soviet intervention was a disaster.

The Taliban came out of these forces. Its main patron was the Pakistani military intelligence services and it was financed by Saudi Arabia. It used that money to become well armed and defeat competing warlord groups.

The Taliban came to power in 1996, after a civil war among factions that followed the Russian withdrawal. The nationalist Taliban imposed an Islamic regime along the lines of Saudi Arabia's, in which women have few rights.

The US recognised the new Taliban

regime, which even had positive ties to some US businesses.

The Taliban allowed al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden to set up operations on its territory.

After the September 11, 2001, attack on US territory, then-President George W Bush invaded Afghanistan, to destroy al Qaeda and bin Laden.

Bush declared the Taliban an "enemy" regime in 2001 and refused to accept its surrender. Its leaders fled to Pakistan.

While the Taliban is not al Qaeda or Islamic State, which seeks a new caliphate, its objective is to rule Afghanistan, as it did from 1996 to 2001.

After its occupation of the country, Washington thought it could "nation build" a country it still does not understand.

The Afghan resistance just had to wait them out. The Taliban knew this would happen.

What next?

Biden and the State Department are spinning the collapse as proof that their decision to leave was correct. Biden repeatedly said it was up to the Afghani people to defend their government.

The main victims of the change of regimes will be women and girls, human rights activists and intellectuals. This could be a repeat of what happened after the pro-Soviet government was overthrown by the US-supported mujahideen. That secular government had allowed girls to be educated.

The US did not give a damn then, so long as the "communist" Soviet troops were defeated.

The countries that backed the mujahideen included Saudi Arabia, Egypt and other hard-line Arab rulers.

Women leaders and other pro-democracy supporters face an uncertain future. Many are trying to leave the country or go underground.

Anti-war forces and supporters of Afghani self-determination must tell the truth about the collapse and the imperialist project in Afghanistan and worldwide. It must demand an end to

US military bombings and attacks on alleged "terrorists", as it does in other countries in the region.

The next stage for the democratic

forces in Afghanistan is building an independent movement to take on the Taliban and other reactionary forces.

Source: [Green Left Weekly](#)

"Haiti has always been the scene for violent conflicts between the powers"

24 August 2021, by **Marco Morel**

What is happening in Haiti? What led to the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse, a right-wing figure until recently aligned with the dominant foreign interests in the country?

Although the situation is still unclear, in detailing the circumstances, there is no doubt that transnational imperialism has once again put its foot in the stirrup in Haiti, through its main weapon of war and politics, the United States. Local authorities point the finger of responsibility at the United States and vice versa. It is likely that both are right and that there was a collusion of sectoral interests in the face of the tragic negligence of Jovenel Moïse, who was a successful businessman exporting bananas and had no previous experience of political activity.

It is important to remember that Haiti's territory was literally occupied by the United States through the marines for two decades, between 1914 and 1934, with the objective, not hidden by President Woodrow Wilson (President 1913-1921), of protecting US economic interests. These are structural problems of society.

What is the scale of the crisis in Haitian society?

In Haiti, there is a very serious multifaceted crisis. Political, social, and economic. The national state has lost its monopoly on the use of legitimate violence and the result is that violence has spread. The capital Port-au-Prince is dominated by rival

gangs and the practice of kidnapping people and making ransom demands has become recurrent in the country. Gang rapes happen, out of any control.

Parliament was due to be re-elected in January 2020. But the elections were not held. Famine and rising commodity prices are terrible. And such a situation confirms the ineffectiveness of international organizations and international occupations such as MINUSTAH (United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, which lasted from 2004 to October 2017), whose real objective is to maintain order and not to pacify.

MINUSTAH, by the way, has benefited from a significant participation of Bolsonarist military leaders from Brazil, who, in some cases, even try to shield their actions in that country from criticism.

Exactly. General Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz led the United Nations Mission in Haiti from January 2007 to April 2009. He held the secretariat of Bolsonaro's government, after which he opposed the government. General Floriano Peixoto Vieira Neto, commander of the mission between April 2009 and April 2010, also became secretary general of the Brazilian presidency at the beginning of the current administration. General Edson Leal Pujol, who led MINUSTAH from 2013 to 2014, was commander of the Brazilian army from 2019 to February 2021. Tarcísio Gomes de Freitas, Minister of Infrastructure, served from 2005 to 2006 in Haiti as

head of the technical section of the engineering company of the Brazilian Peacekeeping Force. General Otávio Régio Barros, former spokesman for the Bolsonaro government, was commander of the 1st Infantry Battalion of the Peace Force. Fernando Azevedo e Silva, former Minister of Defence, held the position of Chief of Operations of the Brazilian contingent in Haiti from 2004 to 2005. And, General Luís Eduardo Ramos, current secretary of government to the president [since 21 July 2021], served from 2011 to 2012 in the Brazilian troops in Haiti.

Not to mention, of course, General Augusto Heleno, current head of the Internal Security Cabinet (GSI) and right-hand man (we might say!) of the president, who was the first commander of MINUSTAH in 2004. He is strongly suspected of being responsible for a massacre in the poor district of Cité Soleil, in Port-au-Prince, in 2005: operation "Poing fort", with 300 soldiers, invaded this community and caused about 70 deaths, including women and children, after firing 22,000 shots. The fact is that Lula's government, after drawing accusations, withdrew General Heleno from Haiti.

We note that the military presence in Haiti has served as a kind of laboratory for the genocidal policy of the Bolsonaro government, including the federal intervention in Rio de Janeiro in 2018, commanded by General Braga Netto, current Minister of Defence. The latter was not in Haiti, but went directly to the seat of the

operation, acting as military attaché to the United States in 2013-14.

It should not be forgotten that the legitimately elected Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was deposed in 2004 by the US army with the support of the French and Brazilian governments, among others. It is a question of controlling the poor and black populations in a situation of increasing poverty, in Haiti and here in Brazil.

Haiti has a specific and little-known history, which stands out in the Americas. How do you relate the country's past to the present?

Haiti was the first country to proclaim the abolition of slavery and the second to proclaim its independence in the Americas. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the French thinker Abbé Grégoire (1750-1831, who argued in the Constituent Assembly for the abolition of privileges and slavery as well as universal male suffrage) stressed that Haiti was like a beacon that shone in the West Indies, bringing hope to the oppressed and arousing the hatred of the oppressors. The Haitian revolution highlighted the capacity for struggle of enslaved workers and their ability to transform society, destroying slavery and colonialism.

Haiti has always been the scene of violent disputes between the powers, and, after its independence, it became a wasteland due to the action of France and other European countries. Little by little, the US has established itself as the new leader. The victorious Haitian independent state at first defeated all the European powers and the United States politically and militarily. But these countries have gradually regained control of the economy and have exercised a kind of terrible revenge.

There is a strong break with the historical past and memory in international perception. Haiti is usually presented today as the poorest country in the Americas. And that's it. The concealment of the Haitian revolution is symptomatic and is one of the ingredients of oppression. Although a large part of the Haitian population, the oppressed majorities,

know who Jean-Jacques Dessalines, the slave who proclaimed independence in 1804 and who also became the most popular figure in voodoo, was. The historical past is in permanent reconstruction and in tension with the present.

In the end, isn't the level of interventionism in the country, given its anti-imperialist pioneer past, a cruel and real representation of a certain racism and white supremacism, bequeathed by colonialism and slavery that are at the root of these discriminatory ideologies? Are we not talking about a country punished by bourgeoisies inherited from this historic stage who are simply unable to deal with the self-determination of non-white peoples?

Yes, it is a good way of understanding what is happening in Haitian society today, beyond the stereotypes of poverty and violence. The Haitian revolution initially brought a dose of political, economic, and social liberation. But even these partial achievements were to be destroyed by colonialism and imperialism. And, it is worth saying, with alliances between the new local elites which emerged from independence and colonialism. The Revolution itself, with its clearly liberating dimension, already bore the germ of its self-destruction, which would be realized in an alliance between national and international dominators; now most of the population is oppressed by the exploitation of its labour power and the concentration of land, even if they are no longer slaves.

Although Cuba and Haiti have presented themselves as two rebellious Caribbean islands, there are differences in this process. What happened in Haiti after independence was an anti-blockade. The new nation-state struggled to structure itself in a sovereign manner, despite the determination of some of its leaders and the population, because the isolation then imposed on Haiti led to a frantic race by the European powers and the United States to a predatory and unregulated trade. Without customs tariffs, charging abusive prices, in a looting imposed by force.

That is why the current situation is inherited from post- and counter-revolutionary violence, based on racism, on white supremacy on the notion of considering as unacceptable the sovereign and popular autonomy of the black and mulatto population as protagonists of their own history.

Haiti and Cuba have been (and are) the protagonists of a striking example of resistance to capitalist models and white supremacy, despite the many specificities and dissimilarities of their respective historical trajectories. This explains the treatment they are currently receiving, including from the mainstream media.

In this sense, we have seen this type of tension manifest itself here in the recent case of the burning of the statue of the *bandeirante* (adventurers who from the 17th century penetrated Brazil in search of mineral wealth and reducing Amerindian populations to slavery) Borba Gato in São Paulo (in the early 18th century, he was appointed General Superintendent of Mines and set up two huge fazendas, named Borba and Gato

First, my total and unrestricted solidarity with comrade Paulo Galo, one of those who are still in prison [following this "attack" on the statue of Borba Gato], and to all those who participated in or supported in any way the "attack" on the monument. They are political prisoners in this frightening and sick Bolsonarist Brazil in which we live.

The mainstream media were not outraged when the statues of the "Soviet" leaders were destroyed with much more violence. On the contrary, such acts were considered a gesture of freedom and civilization... It is therefore not the defence of the integrity of works of art that is at stake here.

What saddens me most in this episode is that the statue of Borba Gato remains intact with its structures firm. Businessmen in São Paulo have already offered to finance its restoration, which will not be complicated. It is a crude metaphor for Brazil's history. Colony,

independence, empire, republics, and domination metamorphoses, but its general features remain. It has emerged almost unscathed from the offensives to which it was subjected. Therefore, the hypocritical bourgeoisie is affected by attacks on monuments but supports or is indifferent to the daily attacks of the

state against the poor population in Brazil. It mourns the memory of those who enslaved Indians and blacks, but not that of the Amerindian peoples and Afro-descendants who are massacred in our daily lives. How many thousands of black people and natives have been beheaded by

characters like Borba Gato!

It is necessary not only to destroy all the symbolism of these monuments, but also to move forward and create new reference symbols. This applies to the past, present and future of society. Let us get to know and not forget the Haitian revolution.

Afghanistan: A Double Tragedy

23 August 2021, by Radical Socialist

The single most important democratic advance in the whole of the second half of the 20th century was the end of foreign colonial and imperialist rule even where this unfortunately resulted in the emergence of indigenous dictatorships. In a world where peoples are constituted as belonging to separate and multiple states, the fundamental moral-political principle to uphold (minus the rarest of exceptional cases) is respecting the freedom of agency of a people to overthrow their own tyrants. This is why it was the responsibility of Indians to overthrow British rule, of Indonesians the Dutch, of South Africans against Apartheid, and so on. Calling for external help of all kinds, even military aid, was one thing; calling for external military liberation, No!

In the 1978 'Saur Revolution' a secular and reform-minded pro-Soviet 'Communist' party, the PDPA (People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan) came to power but was bedeviled by internal armed faction-fighting and had no real social base beyond Kabul. The Soviet invasion in 1979 to support this government was morally unjustified and condemnable while politically disastrous, handing over as it did the mantle of 'popular nationalist struggle' against the foreign invader, to a host of ethno-tribal Islamist groups including Al Qaeda and Taliban. The primary military aiders, equippers and trainers of these were the US, its British/French allies along with

Pakistan. The Soviets finally withdrew in 1989 with its factotum government collapsing three years later amidst a civil war waged by the various Islamists until the Taliban capturing 90% of the territory established its dominance in 1996.

In 2001 the US government deliberately refused to characterise the assault on Twin Towers and Pentagon as what it was, namely an international crime against humanity. For that would have meant going after the criminals and their network only. Instead, by declaring a 'Global War on Terror' and claiming that no distinction would be made between the guilt of the perpetrators and that of the governments of countries which the US declared to be 'housing terrorists'---the way was cleared for the US to transform a conflict between itself and a non-state network into one against any number of countries in West and Central Asia in keeping with its wider geo-political ambitions of achieving global dominance. In the new millennium Afghanistan was the first of many to suffer such military assaults. The US foreign policy establishment had already identified China, Iran and Russia as the ones to watch out for and were accordingly well aware that Afghanistan, apart from Pakistan, abuts Iran, China and pro-Russia Central Asian Republics, the latter also a region having large relatively untapped sources of oil and gas.

In these 20 years the US military and

its puppet regimes (themselves corrupt and internally fractious) have carried out massive bombings ('daisy cutters', cluster bombs), drone attacks (extending into Pakistan) and brutal and indiscriminate 'search and destroy' missions against unknown insurgents and their families. US deaths (soldiers and contractors) have been around 6500. In contrast, by extremely conservative estimates, total Afghan deaths up to the end of 2019 (government soldiers/police, opposition fighters, civilians) were around 160,000. Other sources which try to take account of unreported deaths have estimates of civilian casualties alone running from a few hundred thousand to over a million in an overall population between 35-40 million. Four million Afghans have been internally displaced with another 2.7 million external refugees. As of now around 48% are below the national poverty line. Some progressive laws and reforms have taken place but they no more justify US presence and rule than the fact of the British building hospitals, schools and introducing some legislatures, elections and limited franchise would have justified the persistence of colonial rule in India.

That the 300,000 plus official Afghan forces (soldiers, police, special militias) numbering 5 to 6 times more than Taliban fighters and also equipped with the most advanced arsenal of weapons and having full mechanical control of airspace should have so dramatically collapsed,

indicates that the Taliban did have a measure of ground support and public acquiescence (no doubt considerably fear-induced) beyond its predominantly Pushtun base. However, it is strongly hostile to the Persian-speaking Tajiks who make up 27% of the population as compared to the 42% of Pushtuns which means there is every reason to fear serious internal repression and even a possible civil war type situation in the future. Taliban may or may not have learnt something from its past international isolation and avoid some forms of social and civic repression. But given its history and social/civic programme of religious sectarianism, anti-democratic, anti-women measures---it has declared it will impose Sharia Law---there is every reason to oppose it forthrightly and without equivocation.

Governments everywhere including India's, will shed crocodile tears for the Afghan people, but are in fact (accompanied by respective bus loads of 'strategic experts') only motivated by the crude and amoral considerations of realpolitik. Claiming to pursue the 'national interest'---standardised subterfuge for the actual pursuit of ruling class interests that these different states actually represent---they will decide whether or when to establish diplomatic relations of some kind with the new Taliban government; or else to join hands with other self-serving major

powers and their cohorts be these the Western Alliance or the possible front of Russia, China and Pakistan that looks more favourably at the new dispensation in Afghanistan. No Afghan government has ever accepted the Durand line and the Taliban with even stronger sympathies with Pushtuni nationalism is not as beholden to Pakistan as the Islamophobic Modi government (some of whose Hindutva prescriptions are as debased as those of radical Islam) would like to make out for the purpose of whipping up anti-Pakistan sentiment domestically which then pays dividends for deepening repression in Kashmir.

It is the good of the Afghan people not our supposed 'national interest' that must be our point of departure for reflecting on what we must support and oppose. There should be no economic sanctions against Afghanistan. These hurt the people much more than the elites that govern. Humanitarian aid on an appropriate scale routed through progressive international and civil society organisations to this war-torn country is a must. No recognition to the Taliban regime while political, diplomatic and cultural pressures of various kinds (but not military) can play a role in pushing it to be less repressive in its laws and actions against women and ethnic and religious minorities. A basic test for

the West and many other countries will come with regard to the posture they adopt towards the flow of Afghan refugees now and afterwards. There should be no restriction to those seeking refuge or asylum and adequate provision be made for them to stay or relocate to where they can. This holds for India as well. Even before the advent of Modi, India was and remains a non-party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol which among other things rejects refoulement (forcible return of refugees to their places of displacement/persecution). This Modi government has carried this out to a number of Rohingyas simply because they are Muslims. This hostility to Muslims and Islam is also reflected in the Citizenship Amendment Act applicable to Afghanistan. While New Delhi may in current circumstances allow for selective refugee influx this is not enough. Free flow must be allowed even as there can be discussion among neighbouring states for sharing the responsibility. Moreover, those Afghans, students and otherwise who are already in the country and wish to remain must have their visas extended until such time as they feel confident of returning back or they can in due course apply for Indian citizenship.

NO TO IMPERIALISM, NO TO THE TALIBAN

18 August, 2021

Wales since the election

22 August 2021, by Geoff Ryan

Climate Change and the Environment

One of the first acts of the new government was to introduce a new Ministry for Climate Change which has responsibility for transport, housing, planning, regeneration,

energy and environment. The main function of the Ministry is to 'ensure that all Welsh Government policy on new infrastructure projects, energy schemes, and planning decisions can meet environmental targets and be justified in the context of Wales' current and future climate challenges'. Julie James, the Minister and Lee Waters, her deputy, are generally thought to be on the left of

the party and close allies of First Minister Mark Drakeford. [2]

One of the first acts of the new ministry was to put a complete halt to all new road building. This was opposed by the Tories, many of whom still dream of getting the go-ahead for the M4 relief road near Newport despite Senedd majority against. At least one Labour MP, Mark Tami who

represents Alyn and Deeside, has complained about the fact that the 'red route' linking the A55 to the A494 and A550 as been put on ice. And Cardiff Council is using £300,000 of its 'clean air fund' to make Castle Street wider for traffic while reducing the pavements - hardly an environmentally friendly step. [3]

Of course there are a few instances when new roads may have to be built. In fact the government quickly reversed its freezing of the Llandeilo bypass in Carmarthenshire, a road that has been planned for years and has become more necessary because of the number of HGVs passing through which have started to have a serious impact on the structural safety of some buildings as well as posing a threat to pedestrians in this small, picturesque town which attracts significant numbers of tourists.

The ban on road building has been followed up with proposals to introduce 20 mph speed limits in all built up areas, including villages. There are also proposals to ban all parking on pavements. While these proposals have been largely welcomed there has also been opposition. While the 20 mph limit is anathema to the Top Gear brigade who think they have a right to drive as fast as they see fit, the proposals on parking have often been criticised by local residents because many towns do not have wide enough roads to allow for parking close to one's house.

But, in fact, there is a link between issues of speed and parking on pavements. For example, where I live, on a busy main road, some drivers frequently exceed the 30 mph limit. Because the road is narrow, despite being a main route, car owners often park partly on the pavement to avoid their car being damaged by the boy racers. Slowing down the traffic would mean there would not be the necessity to park on the pavements.

And of course there are far too many cars on the road. The problem in many areas is the lack of reliable public transport, especially in the evenings. Where I live it is impossible to go to Ammanford (about 8 miles away), never mind Swansea (15-16 miles) after about 18.30 other than by taxi or

car. Given the enormous cost and scarcity of taxis, it is not surprising that many people rely on their own private transport. This problem is currently being taken up by the Labour Party in the Amman Valley with the intention of building a broad based campaign for regular and cheap public transport, preferably using electric vehicles.

The Welsh government is trying to develop an approach that recognises the linked nature of many issues. In my village, for example, there are proposals for a housing estate off my road and a hotel, holiday accommodation and a diving school further down the road at a former coal mine. While these projects may be beneficial for the village, they have potentially negative aspects such as considerably increasing the amount of traffic as well as creating problems for the already overburdened local school if significant numbers of children move to the new estate. Consequently plans for the estate and the diving school complex are on hold until all these issues can be resolved satisfactorily. No doubt this has been repeated throughout Wales.

Labour has also promised a national forest for Wales, stretching the length and breadth of the country. The aim is to plant 86 million trees in 9 years. This is very much a personal project for Mark Drakeford but is generally popular. Tory MP for Aberconwy Robin Millar has criticised the scheme for taking away farm land, mainly because he doesn't understand, or pretends to not understand, the difference between reforestation (which is what is proposed) and afforestation i.e. the establishment of a forest where there has not previously been tree cover.

Swansea council has announced free buses for 4 days per week while it looks likely that the Swansea Bay metro may go ahead, with plans to link up much of west and south west Wales by public transport. Both these initiatives show there is considerable enthusiasm for environmental friendly projects. There are also plans to use 'Homes As Power Stations' in Neath Port Talbot and spreading to much of South West Wales. [4]

And, somewhat unusually for Welsh Labour, on 30 June the government supported the Plaid Cymru motion calling on the Senedd to declare a nature emergency as well as calling for legally binding biodiversity targets. This makes the Senedd one of the first Parliaments on the world to declare such an emergency. The holding of COP 26 in Glasgow later this year didn't appear to have much impact on the Welsh Tories, 13 of whom voted against the motion.

Housing

Wales has a serious housing problem. According to Nation.Cymru (29 July 2021) 25,701 homes worth £4 billion pounds sit vacant across Wales.; partly because of second homes and holiday homes that are occupied for only a small part of the year. Though Janet Finch-Saunders, Tory spokesperson on housing, tried to dismiss the impact of second homes: perhaps she is influenced by the 7 residential and 4 retail properties she owns, as well as the trusteeship of a further 2 residential properties in Llandudno.

In addition, Wales has some of the oldest and least efficient housing in Western Europe, which impacts on climate change. According to Sophie Howe, Future Generations Commissioners for Wales a £15 billion retrofit plan would create 26,500 jobs by 2030 and would reduce fuel poverty. She recognises that there is a link between the climate emergency and fuel poverty. [5]

On Saturday 10 July, hundreds of protesters turned out at the Tryweryn dam to call for action from the Labour government to stop local people being priced out of the housing market by second home owners and to protect the Welsh language. Tryweryn is a potent symbol of Welsh resistance since the artificial lake there was created by the drowning of the Welsh speaking village of Capel Celyn against the wishes of the overwhelming majority of the population. The rally was addressed by, among others, Mabon ap Gwynfor the Plaid Cymru MS for the Dwyfor-Meirionnydd constituency in which Treweryn is to be found and Cian Ireland, former Labour candidate for

the seat and a member of Labour For An Independent Wales.

Welsh language campaign Cymdeithas yr Iaith was involved in the protest, not least because one of the effects of second homes is to weaken the position of the Welsh language as villages are taken over by relatively wealthy incomers from England. To get some idea of the scale of second homes it was revealed in the week before the protest that almost half of all houses sold in the constituency in the previous 12 months were second homes.

And Norton Finance is encouraging investment in buy-to-let properties in Wales' national parks, particularly the Brecon Beacons, while the Telegraph encouraged its readers to invest in the 'staycation boom' by snapping up a holiday home in Wales. Property clearly outranks the preservation of Welsh culture and language for them.

The Welsh government has published a plan for dealing with the second home crisis but this has been called 'weak' by Plaid Cymru and Cymdeithas yr Iaith. Mark Drakeford has also said he will explore the possibility of a 'tourist tax'. This, not surprisingly, attracted the hostility of the Tories. Yet the idea is not totally farfetched: certainly it's not unusual to pay a local tax, collected as part of a hotel bill, in a number of other European countries.

Wales and the UK

After the election Mark Drakeford published *Reforming Our Union* [6] (a follow up to a previous version originally published a few years ago and also *We The People* [7] largely identified with Mick Antoniw, a left wing member of the government and now Counsel General and Minister for the Constitution. Drakeford and Antoniw are both in favour of maintaining the UK though, as Mark Drakeford recognises in his foreword, this is becoming increasingly harder to argue. But they certainly want significant changes, though stopping short of independence.

In fact, the Tories have made it harder and harder for Drakeford to hold back

demands for independence and indeed at times they behave as if they want to break up the UK. The ridiculous attempt to prevent journalists referring to the 4 nations and insisting there is only one British nation (at a time when England, Scotland and Wales all had their own teams playing in the Euros), the demand that the union flag (aka the butcher's apron) be flown higher than the Saltire or Red Dragon on all government buildings, the demand that children in Welsh and Scottish schools sing the dire We Are Britain anthem on 'One Britain, One Nation Day' (totally ignored in Welsh schools, schools in Scotland were already on holiday) has now been upstaged by the plan to install a 100 foot union flag on the UK Government's tax office in Cardiff. Tory MP Darren Millar welcomed this display of imperial rule and demanded the Welsh government take action against Yes Cymru for a proliferation of stickers.

All of this comes against a backdrop of increasing hostility to Wales and the Welsh language among sections of English people. Most recently Carol Decker, singer with T'Pau, who was born in Shrewsbury and lives on the English-Welsh border, claimed that a supermarket in a photo she was shown couldn't be in the UK because some of the signs were in a 'foreign' language. They were: Welsh, a language Ms Decker must have come across many times given where she grew up and continues to live.

Guardian writer Rhiannon Lucy Coslett was recently abused online after she wrote an article Wales eerily beautiful slate quarries are getting the recognition they deserve after the North Wales slate quarries were awarded World Heritage Status. The editor of the Spectator joked about the Welsh language after Labour deputy leader Angela Rayner accidentally typed nonsense in a tweet. TV newsreader Huw Edwards was told to take off his mask by a fellow passenger on the London underground because they objected to the red dragon flag of Wales on said mask. English newspapers complained about the 'bias' of Gaby Logan and her team when reporting on Wales' matches in the Euros (unlike the totally neutral English media!) And the list goes on.

Perhaps worst of all in its attitude to the Welsh language was an article written by a Belfast based sociologist Dr. James Dingley for the Unionist supporting *The News Letter* in which he compared the Welsh language movement to the Nazis. [8]

Even the relatively mild proposal from the Welsh government that public servants should be able to speak a few Welsh phrases (not at a level where they could compete at an Eisteddfod, just a few simple phrases to answer the telephone, greet someone) was met with considerable hostility from the Tories for whom Wales is essentially an English colony. I can't speak Welsh but I think I could meet the requirements set out by the government.

A Crisis in Yes Cymru

Unfortunately this is all taking place against a serious crisis in Yes Cymru, the campaign for Welsh independence [9].

Exactly what has been happening is unclear. One of the complaints is the lack of minutes. There have been a number of resignations from the recently elected Central Committee and Sion Jobbins, one of the founders of the organisation, has stepped down as National Secretary. Some members of the CC have been suspended. Allegations of harassment and bullying have been made. Most of the allegations and complaints about different issues are very vague, don't give names etc so it is difficult to work out exactly what is going on.

However, it is quite likely there has been an orchestrated campaign by right-wing currents against the largely left-wing leadership elected at the last AGM. The right didn't put much effort into the election and are now attempting to oust the left. Apart from the allegations of bullying etc the opponents of the left are insisting that Yes.Cymru must be an organisation solely committed to achieving independence. I don't think there are any currents inside Yes.Cymru which disagree with this; the real problem for them is that the left (Labour For

An Independent Wales, Undod) have gained places in the leadership which sections of the membership seem to believe makes it impossible for Yes.Cymru to remain a broad based campaign.

But seriously, anyone who believes that members of the thoroughly unionist Conservative and Unionist Party (the clue's in the name) or the equally pro-unionist Liberal Democrats are going to join and work with Yes.Cymru to break-up the union to which they are thoroughly committed is living in a fantasy land. It may be possible to attract a few Tory or Lib Dem voters but there is zero chance of winning the parties to support for Welsh independence. Realistically only Plaid Cymru and sections of the Labour Party, along with the Greens and far-left, are going to seriously champion independence for Wales.

There may be another AGM later this year and the remaining members of the current CC will remain in place until then though many members are unhappy with even that proposal and want an EGM as soon as possible and the current CC to step down. And the remaining members of the Central Committee are not helping themselves by a failure to recognise there may be some justification for the complaints, dismissing the views of local branches far too readily.

The destruction of Yes Cymru would be a major defeat for all those committed to independence. Both sides need to row back immediately from a potentially damaging split.

Free School Meals

While the Labour government's record on the environment has much to commend it they have completely failed on the issue of free school meals. This was a major issue before,

during and since the Senedd elections. Wales had, and continues to have, the worst provision of free school meals of any of the nations of the UK. The Bevan Foundation, the Child Poverty Action Group Wales have both been active in calling for an extension of the provision, as has Labour MP Beth Winter. But much of the lead has been taken by People's Assembly Wales (PAW), in conjunction with the others. There finally appears to be some movement by the government with letters being exchanged between Vicky Howells MS, Chair of the Senedd Labour Group and Len Arthur of PAW and Pasty Thomas-Turner of Unite Community Wales. [10] This is at least a step forward since previously the Labour Group has tended to ignore criticism of its policy on providing free school meals and has voted down resolutions in the Senedd from Plaid to expand the provision with the entire Labour Group, including the supposed left-wingers, voting as one.

Coronavirus

From Saturday August 7, most restrictions in Wales have come to an end, several days earlier than in England despite Boris Johnson's boastful 'Freedom Day'. For virtually the first time Keir Starmer has spoken out in support of the Labour government in Wales. He has usually been silent or supported Johnson and ignored Mark Drakeford.

While there have been some anti-restrictions, anti-vax protests in Wales they have generally been on a much smaller scale than in England, though the most recent saw a few hundred people outside Drakeford's home.

This is very much an aberration. The Welsh Labour government has generally been credited with running a more efficient (and more humane) Covid campaign than their English counterparts. Wales, despite a slow

start, has now vaccinated more people than any UK nation and, indeed, has one of the best records in the world.

Despite the trolls, particularly on WalesOnline, and the protests outside his house, Drakeford has a much higher satisfaction level than Johnson. Of course this is partially because he is the First Minister in Wales and therefore attracts support from people in Wales whereas Johnson is identified much more with the UK or, especially, England. But it is also because at least some of the praise for the Welsh government's handling of the crisis is justified.

Nevertheless we should not ignore some unpleasant facts. WalesOnline may be seen as a cheerleader for the Welsh government, especially by Unionist and anti-Labour trolls who constantly spread vitriol in the comments section, but it has posed some difficult questions for the Welsh government. The refusal of the Welsh government to agree to a Wales specific enquiry into the handling of the pandemic is particularly problematic - but was reiterated on August 6 by the new Health Minister Eluned Morgan. [11]

On its refusal to hold an enquiry into its handling of the Covid pandemic and its unwillingness to increase the numbers entitled to free school meals the Welsh government certainly should be held to account. Unfortunately we don't appear to have an equivalent figure to Marcus Rashford so that puts the onus on the left in Wales to work together to support the government when they deserve our support and to fight them whenever necessary. Left Unity in Wales has recently issued a letter in which they appeal for the Welsh left to create an ecosocialist, radical independence current. This would certainly be a step forward and one Anti*Capitalist Resistance welcomes.

Source:AntiCapitalist Resistance

Interview: Afghan Women's Struggles against Patriarchy, Imperialism and Capitalism

21 August 2021, by RAWA

Can you please tell us about the history and mission of RAWA? What were Afghan women's conditions when your organization was first formed? What is your role in society? How do you organize?

Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), is the oldest women's organization in Afghanistan that fights for freedom, democracy, social justice, and secularism. RAWA's founder was Meena who formed this group at a young age in 1977, with the help of some other female university students in Kabul. Meena was assassinated in Quetta, Pakistan in 1987 by agents of KHAD (Afghanistan branch of KGB) with the help of the bloodthirsty fundamentalist gang of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. She was only 30-years-old. What distinguishes RAWA from other associations is the fact that we are a political organization. When RAWA was found, Afghanistan was under the oppression of the USSR puppet government and later Russian invasion, and Meena felt that the struggle for independence, freedom, and justice was inseparable from the struggle for women's rights. After Meena's martyrdom, RAWA continued fighting against the Afghan Islamic fundamentalists and their international backers till today.

RAWA still works underground in most parts of Afghanistan but faces enormous difficulties. The Jihadi leaders, warlords with bloody pasts of horrific crimes, are in control of the current government and parliament, and have their separate kingdoms in different parts of Afghanistan. Abdullah Abdullah, the CEO of Afghanistan, is one of these Jihadi leaders who belongs to the criminal gang of Shorae Nizar. This creates a dangerous situation for us as these thugs our biggest enemies who do not

hesitate in hindering our work and harming us. In other parts of Afghanistan where the Taliban fundamentalists are in control, RAWA faces the same oppression. All our members use pseudonyms for protection and we can never go public with our work. Despite these obstacles, it is still possible for us to continue our political activities in most parts of the country due to our contact with locals and the fact that their hatred for these criminals translates into support for us.

Our political activities include publishing our magazines and articles, and mobilizing women to get this consciousness and join our struggle. We collect and document the killings, raping, pillage, extortion, and other crimes of these warlords in remote parts of Afghanistan. Our social activities are providing education to women (not just literacy classes but social and political awareness as to their rights and how to achieve them), emergency aid, making orphanages, and health-related activities.

What is your analysis of patriarchy? In what ways is it linked to the state, imperialism and capitalism?

Patriarchy is constantly supported and nurtured by reactionary feudal, capitalist and imperialist governments all over the world mainly to erase the role of women in the society, especially in politics. Governments of all kinds, especially feudal governments tied to imperialist colonizers like Afghanistan's, see the strength and consciousness of women as a serious threat to their domination and have used different means to stop their growth and consciousness. Considering such governments are anti-people by nature and can only last by oppressing the masses and their

struggle, the suppression of women is their prime target. By strengthening feudal misogyny and culture, they deprive women of all their rights and thus cripple half the society and can be assured of no struggle and resistance from it. These governments never take any steps for the emancipation of women, rather they tighten the chain around women. Today Afghan women's situation is more disastrous than ever. The US invaded Afghanistan under the pretext of 'women rights' but the only thing it brought on our women in the past eighteen years is violence, murder, sexual violence, suicide and self-immolation, and other misfortunes. The US brought to power the most vicious enemies of Afghan women, the Islamic fundamentalists, and committed an unforgivable treachery against our suffering women. This has been its tactic for the past four decades. By nurturing Jihadi, Taliban and ISIS which are all Islamic fundamentalist elements and not just murderous criminals, but misogynists as well, the US has practically oppressed our women.

In what ways do you link women's liberation to the resistance against occupation?

We see the liberation of Afghan women in their liberation from imperialist colonizer, Islamic fundamentalists and the puppet government. The freedom of women is directly tied to the resistance and revolutionary struggle of women against the main cause of their suffering and misfortune, meaning occupiers and their internal lackeys. We believe that fundamentalists and murderous and corrupt groups involved in killing, looting and other crimes and treacheries have no source of support except for foreign powers, without which they would not survive

a day. By raising the political consciousness of women and by exposing these people as the root cause of their misfortunes, we want to organize women in a resilient struggle against them who will be as readily annihilated as they were created by their foreign masters.

Afghan women's rights have been instrumentalized especially by US imperialism to justify and legitimize the invasion of Afghanistan. In what ways did this narrative undermine your women's activism on the ground?

The US is a master at diverting revolutionary and political struggle of people, especially women. In the past eighteen years, in addition to supporting the most anti-women elements all over Afghanistan and ensuring that these elements remain untouchable, the US has introduced a stream of educated women into the government and other institutions, NGOs, civil society, and women's networks. This has a dual purpose. First, it uses these women to deceive the world about the real situation of Afghan women and presents them as its achievement in its tiring war. Second, by taking such educated women under its wing, it makes sure that they don't join the revolutionary struggle, thus depriving the women's movement of valuable people. Recently, a group of sell-out, power hungry women from 'Women's Network' met with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar as 'representatives' of Afghan women. Gulbuddin is one of the most bloodthirsty misogynist criminals who is well-known for throwing acid on the faces of women in his younger days and these women went to meet him to whitewash his misogynist Islamist party, all for fame, power and money. Women like Fawzia Koofi, Habiba Sarabi, Sima Samar, and others sit with Jihadi and Taliban criminals every other in exchange for money and power, and treacherously introduce themselves as representatives of the oppressed women of Afghanistan. These women ignore the flogging and stoning of women by the Taliban and point to their 'good' programs for women if they join the government! These women stand next to the ruling powers as traitors to our suffering

women and have no ties or sympathies to the Afghanistan women.

Why did RAWA decide to stay in Afghanistan or in the region, instead of moving its activities to Europe/Western countries? What do you think about the increasing NGO-ization in Afghanistan and other countries in the Global South, sponsored by western institutions?

RAWA believes that it can only turn into a powerful movement with the backing of the masses, and this backing comes by staying and working in Afghanistan, even if the situation is hell-like. People only trust revolutionary organizations that stand by them in practice and are active inside the country. Our experience has shown that organizations that have clipped their roots from Afghanistan and moved to Europe and other countries have been dissolved shamefully. One of the reasons RAWA has lived for this long and continues its struggle is because we chose to stay in Afghanistan despite the bloody situation.

NGOs are a major part of the backbone of imperialism in our country. NGO-ization, we believe, is almost as dangerous as the formation of the puppet government of Afghanistan. The NGOs formed in Afghanistan are almost all through the funding of the US and other Western powers. They are a hotbed for recruiting youth to form the future puppet governments of Afghanistan which will have the appearance of a modern, democratic government, but whose heads will be brainwashed to serve as much more loyal lackeys of these powers. NGOs are also used to suck out nationalism and revolutionary struggle out of the heads of our youth by giving them huge salaries and lives abroad. It is well-established that none of these NGOs serve the people and women and are simply giving out slogans of 'reconstruction' and 'aid for people' to hide their true purposes.

Afghanistan has been invaded, exploited, attacked and severely damaged by imperialist forces over the past decades. This has affected women in particular. Although RAWA has led campaigns to put

the Taliban's systematic sexual violence before justice, we have seen misogynist corrupt people rise to high political positions with the support of the US. How do you analyze sexual violence in war? In what ways and with whose support has sexual violence been used as a tool of war in Afghanistan? And what does justice for Afghan women look like in your perspective?

Like in every conflict in most of history, women and children have been the prime targets in the war and conflict of Afghanistan. They have been the most vulnerable targets of fundamentalist groups that have ravaged our nation for almost three decades now. Rape and other forms of sexual violence became common after the Jihadis, created, nurtured and backed by the US, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, came to power in 1992 after the defeat of the Soviets. The different factions of Jihadi warlords divided on the lines of ethnicity led by Gulbuddin Hekmatary, Burhanuddin Rabbani, Abdul Rab Rasool Sayyaf, Karim Khalili, Ahmad Shah Masood and Abdul Rashid Dostum, looted and raped the people of Kabul, door by door. Women were abducted and kept in basements and empty buildings and repeatedly raped and tortured. Most were eventually killed with their mutilated bodies found after the faction members left a particular area. The accounts of such women are stories of horror and nightmares.

Justice for women can only be achieved by the complete annihilation of the present government composed of Islamic fundamentalist elements and other US sell-out. Leaders of Islamic fundamentalist parties involved in war crimes particularly against women need to be prosecuted and punished. Once our women accomplish this task, we can say that justice has been served.

In war-torn countries, women are often victimized and silenced during war and peace alike. It seems as though their agency, will power and political demands are sidelined at all stages of conflict, even in peace-making efforts. In rare instances, women are essentialized in a tokenistic

manner as crying, helpless victims, incapable of speaking for themselves. What is Afghan women's role for peace and justice?

For Afghan women peace can only be achieved by justice and justice can only be attained by freeing Afghanistan of foreign occupation and Islamic fundamentalism. The removal of these traitors and murderers from power, and their persecution and punishment is the justice women are seeking for peace, prosperity and real democracy. And this is on attainable by an organized struggle of conscious women.

The peace talks that are ongoing between the US, Taliban and several prominent Afghan figures, including women, is salt on the wounds of our women. The phony women claiming to represent women are their worst enemies and they are negotiating with the most dangerous enemies of women to give them more power and money than they already have.

What is the kind of society that you are struggling for? What efforts do you make to realize your utopias in the here and now?

We are struggling for an independent, free and democratic society run on the pillars of social justice, and where women and men are equal in every aspect. The path to this is a long and hard one and it is a huge task to mobilize and organize women into a large movement, but we believe there

is no other option for attaining these values.

What does women's freedom mean to you and your movement?

Women's freedom for us is our participation in every sphere of the society built on independence, democracy, secularism and social justice. It is our complete equality with men in every aspect. This freedom and equality is tied directly to politics and society. Only a society free from occupation and the fundamentalist misogynist virus, where democracy and social justice are implemented can break the chains of violence against women and accommodate the complete freedom and rights of women.

As the Kurdish Women's Movement, we know that RAWA values internationalism as an important aspect of resistance and liberation. Women in Afghanistan have taken to the streets in support of the women's revolution in Rojava. What are your thoughts on the women's struggle in Rojava or in Kurdistan more generally? What can we learn from each other?

The struggle and sacrifices of the lionesses of Kurdistan have been an inspiration and source of strength for us. Their struggle against ISIS and other medieval-aged criminals have given us huge lessons. We know that no force on earth, not ISIS and its superpower backer and other countries in the region, can stand in

the face of true resistance from the masses. We know, for the millionth time, that no struggle can succeed without the participation of women. We understand the sacrifices we have to make in order to attain our dream society. When we hear the name of ISIS in Afghanistan we associate it with the resolute and brave women of Kurdistan, not with the terror it is waging in our country. We believe they are defeatable and don't stand a chance in the face of a genuine women's movement. While we obviously believe these things as we have set foot on this path, this struggle is a luminous proof of our beliefs.

In terms of women's global struggle for freedom, what do you think is the way forward for us to be working together in common fights against patriarchy and other systems of violence and oppression?

RAWA believes international solidarity with independence-seeking, freedom-fighting, democratic and progressive organizations and parties as a vital part of our internal struggle. Our struggle converges with the Kurdish people's struggle as most of our enemies are similar in nature. We are fighting imperialism and their fundamentalist mercenaries. On this point, we have to share our experiences and lessons so we can better go through this arduous struggle.

Source: [Komun](#)

Welcome to [ecosocialist.scot](#)

20 August 2021, by [ecosocialist.scot](#), Socialist Resistance

[ecosocialist.scot](#) will provide news and views on Scottish politics from the standpoint of ecosocialism and internationalism.

[ecosocialist.scot](#) will cover

developments in the environmental, the trade union movement and the feminist and LGBTQ+ movements in Scotland and beyond. There are four themes of [ecosocialist.scot](#)

[Ecosocialism](#)

[Feminism](#)

[Internationalism](#)

[Scottish Independence](#)

and we have written brief statements setting out our views on each of these

on the site.

A particular feature of ecosocialist.scot over the next few months will be to focus on the [COP26 UN Climate Summit in Glasgow](#) this November.

The ecosocialist.scot website has been under development for some months by [Socialist Resistance \(SR\)](#) and Fourth International (FI) supporters in Scotland. Whereas we have previously a long history of covering developments in Scottish politics through the SR website, the situation is such that we now wish to establish a new website for a distinctive Scottish audience.

SR will also be increasingly supporting coverage of English and Welsh politics on the new [Anti*Capitalist Resistance](#) website and we hope to see collaboration between A*CR and ecosocialist.scot.

ecosocialist.scot members and supporters are active in environmental movements and political campaigning across Scotland. The environmental movement in Scotland is very diverse and strong and ecosocialist.scot will support the efforts of organisations building action on climate change, such as Stop Climate Chaos Scotland, Climate Camp Scotland, ScotE3 (Employment, Energy, Environment), XR Scotland, Fridays for the Future and the COP26 Coalition. We will mobilise for the strong Scottish protest movement against the Trident nuclear weapons based on the Clyde and will support Scottish CND.

ecosocialist.scot will strongly support Scottish independence. Within the independence movement, supporters have been involved in the recent relaunch of the Radical Independence Campaign and its local groups, and participated in the Republican Socialist Platform. Some members have been active within the Scottish Socialist Party, but we also support a dialogue with ecosocialists across the party spectrum - including those involved in the Scottish Green Party, SNP and Scottish Labour Party - and those in no party. We welcome the flurry of new campaigns and organisations recognising the need to unify and strengthen the

independence movement in the light of the majority for independence elected to the Scottish Parliament in May's historic election.

We will support workplace struggles and report on strikes and other developments in the trade union movement and social movements like Living Rent, Scotland's tenant movement. We will support anti racist struggles across Scotland, especially those like the "No Evictions" movement to support refugees and asylum seekers that culminated in the magnificent occupation of Kenmure Street in Glasgow in May. We are opposed to Tory Brexit being imposed on Scotland.

ecosocialist.scot stands in the proud tradition of the Fourth International in supporting feminism and women's struggles around the world. The Fourth International supported the new wave of feminist radicalisation and the need for an autonomous women's liberation from its new rise in the 1960s and developed a deep understanding through major resolutions, a theoretical development that is still ongoing. That understanding also extends into our understanding and support of LGBTQ+ liberation. We support the recent statement of Socialist Resistance on [Trans Liberation and Feminism](#) and will support those unequivocally campaigning for trans rights in Scotland.

ecosocialist.scot will be an internationalist site. We will publish material from across the world, from Fourth International and other ecosocialist sources. We will pay particular attention to reporting struggles that have a major resonance in Scotland, such as in Catalunya/Euskadi/Galiza in their battles within the Spanish state, in Quebec, in Palestine, in Kurdistan and elsewhere. ecosocialist.scot will through its support for the Fourth International engage in solidarity with struggles across Latin America, Africa, Asia and Europe. We will support and promote Resistance Books and the Fourth International's education centre IIRE. We will also seek to link up with fellow ecosocialists in Wales, England, Ireland, particularly in the run up to COP26 in November, where

we hope to welcome ecosocialist activists from across the British Isles, Europe and wider afield to Glasgow.

ecosocialist.scot may be a new site but it follows in a long tradition of the Fourth International organising in Scotland. A small but significant contribution of the site will be to reproduce historic and education material of our past. On our launch site we have in a section called "[Our History](#)" the first fully transcribed publication of the late Neil Williamson's 1977 groundbreaking contribution to the Fourth International's understanding of Scotland: "[Socialists and the New Rise of Scottish Nationalism](#)". More material will follow.

Above all other things, ecosocialist.scot will focus its news coverage on the concerns of young people - climate, independence, anti-nuclear, defending nature, decent work and job rights, anti-capitalism, opening up education, sexual liberation and so on.

The ecosocialist.scot website can be found at the following URL: <https://www.ecosocialist.scot/>

In due course it should be locatable through search engines. There are several recent articles on the site at launch and these will increase over the coming months. Links to a growing social media presence will also be found on the site. We particularly hope that twitter users will give tweet us a friendly welcome!

Please visit the site, comment on the articles/pages and follow us regularly. We hope to publish a regular newsletter to keep in touch and will be organising both online and in person meetings in the near future. If you are in Scotland, please get in touch and maybe join us? We can be contacted at info@ecosocialist.scot and there is also a contact or join form on the site.

Forward to an ecosocialist independent Scotland!

ecosocialist.scot and Socialist Resistance editors

4 August 2021

Source: [Socialist Resistance](#)

Who is buried in the graveyard of empires?

19 August 2021, by **Gilbert Achcar**

The tragic pictures of the Afghan government's collapse along with its state and the panic that got hold of a big fraction of Afghan society, especially in urban areas and above all in the capital Kabul, led to reactions split between two opposite poles: while one pole blamed Biden for having misjudged the situation and having failed to do what should have been done to make sure that the Afghan pro-Western government carries on, the other pole rejoiced and celebrated the magnitude of the defeat suffered by U.S. designs, comparing what took place in Kabul these last days to what happened in Saigon, South Vietnam's capital, when it was taken over by Communist forces in 1975, two years after the U.S. troops' withdrawal. It is difficult to decide which of these two reactions is more short-sighted; they both ignore basic facts.

Let us first consider the reproaches made to Biden for his misjudgment (in other words, his intelligence services' misjudgment) of the Afghan government's capacity to withstand the Taliban's offensive. It is truly extraordinary that anyone could believe that the failure of twenty years of occupation in building the foundations of a state with enough credibility and popular support to stand up without being protected by foreign troops, that that failure could have been made up for by prolonging the presence of NATO troops by a few months! The claim is all the more extraordinary in that none of the critics is capable of explaining what the U.S. occupation could have done during a few more months that it hadn't done for two decades.

In reality, the Afghan government's fate is but the most recent in a long list of cases of puppet entities created by a foreign occupation that collapse when that occupation ends. Ashraf Ghani was preceded on this same path by Mohammad Najibullah, who had

been appointed as president of Afghanistan by the USSR's rulers in replacement of Babrak Karmal whom they had installed in power when their troops invaded the country, in the same way as Ghani was appointed by Washington in replacement of Hamid Karzai, whom U.S. forces installed in power when they invaded the country. This refers us to the obvious fact that the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks was not a "liberation" of that country, no more than the American occupation of Iraq was less than two years later. It was a seizure of the country for reasons pertaining to U.S. imperial strategy in Central Asia and toward Russia and China, coated in the pretext of liberating the Afghans, the women in particular, from the Taliban's obscurantist yoke, that same yoke that Washington and its regional allies had played a key role in helping to get hold of the country.

Those who hail the Taliban from a standpoint claiming to be on the left or "anti-imperialist" should be reminded that only four governments recognized diplomatically the Taliban's regime after it took control of Afghanistan in 1996, and those were not Cuba or Vietnam or China or even Iran, but Pakistan, Turkmenistan, the Saudi kingdom and the United Arab Emirates! Add to this that it is well known that behind the Taliban stood, and continue to stand, Pakistan's military intelligence, which adds to the anxiety of neighboring countries, starting with Iran.

The truth is that Washington didn't entertain much illusions about Afghanistan's fate, but knew from the USSR's defeat in that country and from its own Vietnamese experience that controlling Afghanistan is impossible for several reasons, including the country's geography and the strength of age-old tribal and ethnic bonds that still prevail there. That's why Washington's strategy in

Afghanistan was from the beginning qualitatively different from its strategy in Iraq: whereas it aimed at exerting full control over Iraq and deployed there forces adequate for that purpose (in Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's belief, despite warnings from the U.S. high brass that his estimate of the adequate number of troops was highly optimistic), Washington only deployed a limited number of troops in Afghanistan, while relying upon the Afghan anti-Taliban Northern Alliance to take control of the country and putting pressure on its NATO allies to send in troops so that the U.S. doesn't need to deploy more.

The strategic goals of the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan, or more accurately of parts of Afghan territory, consisted first of all in building American air bases in this country of highly prized strategic location and in the extension of U.S. influence to Central Asian republics that were previously part of the USSR. With time, Washington came to the conclusion that the cost of its continued presence in Afghanistan was no longer commensurate with these strategic benefits that had lessened over time, especially that the Taliban's offensive and their ability to control increasingly vast areas of the country indicated that Afghanistan was on its way to confront Washington with a Vietnam-like dilemma between endless escalation and withdrawal.

This said, the closest situation to what is occurring in Afghanistan isn't Vietnam in fact: the South Vietnamese forces were much stronger than the Afghan government's forces, and they managed to stand up for two years against Communist forces that the U.S. itself had been incapable to defeat and which enjoyed much larger international and regional support than the Taliban ever had. The closest situation to what has occurred in Afghanistan is what happened to the

troops of the Iraqi army that Washington had built up and that collapsed disgracefully in front of the offensive launched by the so-called Islamic State (IS) in the summer of 2014 in the same way that the forces

of the Kabul government collapsed in front of the Taliban's offensive. Needless to say, the resemblance between IS and the Taliban is only matched by the huge difference between the two jihadist groups, on the one hand, and the Vietnamese

Communist forces on the other.

This article is translated from the original Arabic published in the issue of [Al-Quds al-Arabi] dated August 18, 2021.

Cuban dilemmas, socialist debates

18 August 2021, by **Manuel Garí**

There is an urgent need to debate the best way to defend (and extend) existing social gains in a post-capitalist country like Cuba against the imperialist siege. That means looking at strategies to short-circuit capital's restorationist designs, be they of Cuban or international origin, learning from the processes of capitalist restoration in other settings. Which raises the question of the political scenario, or better yet, what the political-institutional architecture best suited to these aims might look like. None of these three questions can be looked at in isolation from the others; and this short essay can only provide a cursory look at them.

For starters, we should make it clear that this debate has nothing to do with the claptrap arguments put forward by the Right - in the Spanish case taking the form of the Partido Popular and Vox cynically vociferating "against the communist dictatorship" in their usual publicity-seeking way. That's not the debate, and it's certainly not a debate to be had with them. What's more, those who didn't condemn the Franco dictatorship and who remain silent, or express approval, in the face of massacres in Chile or Colombia or the outrages of Bolsonaro or the Saudi regime, have no moral authority whatsoever. The Cuban Right just wants to get their mills, lands and casinos back and impose a neoliberal regime on the Cuban people. The Spanish Right is merely one more conduit for the Miami Cuban gang and its reactionary project of capitalist restoration - some of whose proponents are calling for a

murderous US military intervention, the consequence of which would be a new form of neocolonial domination.

Winds of revolution

Few can deny the legitimacy of origin of the 1959 revolution or the significance of its growing over into socialist aims in 1961. The encouragement this gave to popular aspirations in Latin America is a "structural" feature of class struggle in the region; and the enthusiasm it sparked in many generations of left-wing activists the world over was expressed through admiration for its two emblematic figures, Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. After years of slavery, and colonial dependence on the Kingdom of Spain and then on the American colossus, the Cuban people achieved dignity as a sovereign nation. The legitimacy of origin was initially consolidated because the overthrow of the dictator was accompanied by important social gains and undeniable advances in the Cuban population's living conditions. The first few years also saw lively open and public socialist debates about the economic model, with multiple viewpoints and international participation. This also involved discussions on political decision-making mechanisms, since at the time the task was still seen to be one of sustaining the revolution's legitimacy in practice through new popular revolutionary institutions, beyond the figures of Che and Castro.

That's why imperialism was so quick

to intervene. As Eduardo Galeano has said, "what bothers them about Cuba aren't the revolution's errors, of which there have been many. What they really can't stomach is that a poor, small country has not bowed down to the empire". It served as an example to discipline other wayward travelers. It was about nipping the experience in the bud; on top of failed military adventures, imperialism decreed a blockade to thwart 1959's revolutionary promise of freedom with bread and bread without terror.

Blockade, damn blockade

The impact of American bullying - intensified following the 1996 Helms-Burton Act and yet again by the coming into force of its Chapter Three in 2019 and Trump's onslaught of further measures - has been devastating. The measures have prevented the island from substantially altering its place in the international division of labour - whether this has meant its sugar monoculture export model or its later conversion into a major tourist hub. Add to this the country's dependence on energy and food imports, for which advances in education and health, and in cutting-edge biomedical research and training, have been insufficient counterweights. As a result, and we should all be very clear about this, the population's living conditions in 2021 have been hit by greater scarcity and also by unequal access to goods and services - especially in the wake of the

dollarization of a wide variety of transactions via the hard currency (MLC) mechanism. This situation has been made worse by the inflation that has resulted from a series of wrong decisions.

Broad swathes of the population have been severely hit. Especially affected are the three million Cubans paid by the government in pesos, and the some three million more who live off the more or less informal part of the economy - in addition to whom there are a few hundred thousand people who operate limited types of private businesses. Despite the country's healthcare advances and the targeted efforts that have been made, the pandemic has been a blow to public health and the GDP. The US ban on family hard-currency remittances, the shortfalls in Venezuelan oil deliveries, and the return of many healthcare professionals working abroad, have all made things worse.

Imperialism has lost many battles but it might win the war by undermining the material bases for existing revolutionary gains and any renewed efforts at building an institutional framework of socialist democracy. This is very clear and it would be naïve to expect imperialism to assist in the economic development of a dissenting country. The internationalization of the revolution is not a flight of fancy, but rather a practical necessity for the long-term survival of a post-capitalist country.

This is not the first time that imperialism has sought to strangle emancipatory processes. It has been trying since 1917 and we saw the toxic effects of the military efforts the Sandinista Revolution was forced to deploy to deal with Contra aggression. These efforts bled resources away from the satisfaction of people's needs, leading to the failure of the revolutionary project and the ascendancy of the despotic Ortega-Murillo clique. Imperialism is quite happy to create a humanitarian crisis to wear down the Cuban people and limit the government's margin for manoeuvre, and Biden has not kept his election promises in this regard. In such a context, it's hardly surprising that there should be popular discontent, especially among the most

impoverished sectors. In the extreme circumstances that Russia itself faced in the early days of the revolution and soviet democracy, Lenin warned that the worst error the Bolsheviks could make would be to ignore the realities faced by the masses.

Rebooting internationalism

That's why it's so important to build anti-imperialist solidarity rooted in the people - especially in the working classes. Governments who see themselves as progressive or even just as democratic should also be condemning and calling for an end to the illegal and inhuman blockade to which the Cuban people have been subjected, and demanding that Biden take Cuba off the list of state sponsors of terrorism. That would provide real economic relief. What's more, and this is essential, internationalist solidarity should help to overcome shortages by bolstering campaigns to gather and ship basic supplies to the island. It's baffling that Mexican president Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador and Argentinian president Alberto Fernandez haven't backed their words with deeds; while they don't have unlimited resources, they certainly are in a position to provide meaningful assistance. It's also unacceptable that Left parties, trade unions and social-movement organizations the world over, especially in OECD countries, are not organizing active campaigns to promote and gather people-to-people material aid.

Anti-imperialism is essential in the Cuban labyrinth, but it isn't enough. And reducing Cuba's complex situation to regional or global geopolitics is also patently inadequate. While not diminishing these factors as part of the problem and any solution, we also have to look at the socio-economic facts on the ground in the country and the moribund state of Cuba's political system. Marxism sees social conflict as part of reality itself in all circumstances, and it can take many forms. To forget this, and to limit oneself to the discursive framework of geopolitics, is to stray some distance from the ABCs of Marxism. There are those on the Left

who adopt a stance of uncritical defence toward whatever "friendly" governments may be saying at any given time in response to the imperialist foe. They display a crude and antiquated campism that lumps together and defends regimes and leaders in different parts of the world and of wildly differing character. Such an approach is inimical to a genuine defense of Cuba against the attacks that it faces.

A rather smarter and more useful approach is to consider the issue of Cuba solely or mainly within the framework of the interplay of centres of power and counterweights to that power, checks and balances, shifting equilibria and measures, between the states and governments of the Latin American region in relation to their all-powerful norther neighbour. The relationship of forces of course also plays out on that level - but not only. It also depends on the relationship of forces between classes in each country's social conflicts, which themselves have a bearing on the situation in the other countries of the region - and on the political and economic policies adopted by their governments. And this applies to Cuba as well. How the Cuban people resolve the problems they currently face and embark upon their future will also affect the final outcome in all of Latin America - because while the island's future depends greatly on what happens in the region, the region's future also depends on Cuba's.

Things don't happen by coincidence

There is growing unease on the island for objective, material reasons, but also political ones. The new leadership of the Cuban CP does not enjoy the legitimacy of its elders - this isn't something one can inherit. Nor has it fulfilled the promises and hopes sparked by the Constitution of 2019 proclaiming a "socialist State of law", which to date hasn't been given any practical material substance. Solutions can't be reduced merely to intelligent "management" of the country's ills; rather, there are structural problems

in the actually existing system that require more far-reaching solutions.

July 11th was a wake-up call. It serves no purpose to diminish its scope by referring only to the few thousand people who took to the streets. These thousands potentially represented many more people and we know that social dynamics can take big leaps in short periods of time - in one direction or the other. It is utterly pointless to view the protests as the result of imperialist, right-wing conspiracy and incitement. Such conspiracies and incitements exist, but there's no getting around a fundamental problem: socialism can't succeed in a single country, much less on a small island. For Cuba's transition to socialism to succeed, the socialist revolution has to deepen and spread, at least into the surrounding countries of Latin America.

That's why, in addition to denouncing the blockade and imperialism, the Latin American Left must also champion emancipatory processes in each country - as much in the interests of their respective peoples as in defense of Cuba. In this respect, the Puebla Group's statements on the recent Cuban events are an expression of the political short-sightedness of Latin American progressivism. [12] While very good at condemning imperialist manoeuvring and the impact of the blockade and pandemic, they are hopeless at offering ways to eliminate capitalism once in office in the countries of the region. Their progressivism ends when it's a matter of initiating a transitional process growing over to the goal of a socialist society.

No doubt the imperialist blockade and right-wing conspiracies were factors in the Cuban protests. But they were dipping into a larger tide, and it would be stupid to think otherwise. Above all, though, an approach based on seeing the intervention of foreign powers and manipulative forces as the sole drivers of social conflict is a double-edged sword. Just imagine reacting the same way to people in other countries when they mobilize in defense of their interests, reducing the causes to some sort of left-wing conspiracy. Popular protests do not necessarily start on the basis of fully-

formed class consciousness, nor do they come with a clear socialist program. They are the expression of subjective awareness rooted in objective conditions. As a result, they are a space fighting for hegemony over leadership of the movement, in which different lines clash with one another.

To see all discontented people in Cuba as counter-revolutionaries is foolishness of the same calibre as seeing them as the bearers of revolutionary solutions. Above all, though, it's extremely serious that repression was carried out by the state apparatus against a segment of the population whose behaviour was overwhelmingly peaceful and in no way involved the use of arms against the regime. This repressive conduct involved the use of force, arrests - including of some communist activists who were involved - and a total lack of transparency regarding the people detained and their whereabouts. It also involved a shutdown of the Internet and calls to close ranks. All of this is incomprehensible in a country where the population has a high level of anti-imperialist consciousness, where there is widespread social awareness and community interaction, and where the Cuban Communist Party itself remains strong and continues to have deep popular roots. Truncheons and network blackouts are no way to deal with pressing socio-economic problems and popular demands and aspirations.

Hegemony in the transition to socialism

Cuba is not a socialist country; it's a country that has embarked upon a long transition to socialism, in a capitalist world, in which capital exerts constant pressure from within the island as well. As such, it's naïve to believe that economic and social crises of the sort the rest of the world-system experiences will not affect Cuba. Can there be crises and mobilizations for the same fundamental reasons as in other countries on the planet? Protests that are neither reactionary nor

progressive per se, but which express malaise in a context of crisis? The answer is yes. Once we've accepted that, the debate becomes a political one: what is the way out or the proposed response when these kinds of protests take place?

We should be clear that the problem comes from the notion that from the moment the Communist Party comes to power, the question of legitimacy and hegemony in the period following the revolution has been settled once and for all time. For better or for worse, though, that just isn't the case. Politics never stops. New demands, contradictions and dilemmas arise, even new social protagonists. Societies are increasingly more complex and diverse and solutions require permanent public discussion. The infamous hegemony everyone's always talking about has to be constantly renewed in the transition to socialism; the legitimacy of origin isn't enough. Such regeneration can only succeed through the active participation of the popular masses. Otherwise, sooner or later, and whatever its might, the Party will end up alone.

Every organization, trade union and group committed to fighting the blockade and imperialist bullying should have complete freedom to operate and express its views. Thus far I've only referred to the heroic dimension of the revolution, the dimension of resistance. But in recent years, the Communist Party of Cuba has made a major policy shift toward pro-market reforms. Its cadres speak openly of the Vietnamese model. To be sure, this is described as a way to break the country out of its economic isolation, which has also been deepened by the Venezuelan disaster and the crises of other progressive governments. But it shouldn't be ruled out that a sector of the bureaucracy might be open to moving from the NEP to a new economic model, in which the Communist Party retains its power in a state capitalist economy. This is already the case in China. There are even greater dangers to ward off, though, so it's useful to recall that it wasn't American imperialism that restored capitalism in the USSR. Rather, it was a section of the bureaucracy - among them Putin -

that went over holus-bolus to capitalism, leading a vast process of privatization and appropriation of the choicest morsels of the productive apparatus.

Debating all these problems and options, and making conscious and informed choices, is what socialist democracy is about. And this just doesn't exist in Cuba today. Even the letter of the Constitution, let alone its spirit, has no impact on actual practice. While problems of material scarcity can certainly be blamed on the blockade, the dearth of socialist freedoms can only be understood as a consequence of the Communist Party's monopolistic conception of power. This is something more reminiscent of Stalinism than of Che Guevara, who Cuban leaders continue to claim as their own.

Socialism means more, better and complete democracy

Neither in Marx nor in Lenin nor in 26th of July Movement-era Castro can we find any strategic theorization whereby socialism should be built over the long term solely and exclusively

under the leadership of a single party monopolizing political power. To be sure, the state plays an active role in the transition to socialism, until such time as it becomes possible to echo Marx and speak of the true realm of freedom. However, the best safeguard for partial gains, and progress towards socialism, is an organized people that neither depends upon the state nor is yet another of its many tributaries.

Socialist democracy has several components. One is the socialization of the means of production under different (and not solely state-centred) forms of social and collective property, under the active control of the working class. Another is the freedom to form political parties, trade unions and social-movement organizations be they feminist, environmentalist, neighbourhood-based, or of whatever sort. Yet another is the establishment of democratic planning with active popular participation in all spheres and at all levels. All of this necessarily involves freedom of expression across the board, with full press freedoms. None of this is new, it goes back to the beginnings of the communist movement a century ago.

It's worthwhile extensively quoting Rosa Luxemburg here:

...It is a well-known and indisputable fact that without a free and untrammelled press, without the unlimited right of association and assemblage, the rule of the broad masses of the people is entirely unthinkable. [...] Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party - however numerous they may be - is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently. Not because of any fanatical concept of 'justice' but because all that is instructive, wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on this essential characteristic, and its effectiveness vanishes when 'freedom' becomes a special privilege.

The deepening of democracy is not a threat to the revolutionary process and socialist project. On the contrary, it is a necessary pre-condition for their fulfillment where true emancipation is the goal.

This is a slightly revised version of an article that originally appeared on the [Viento Sur website](#) on 18 July 2021. Translation from Spanish: Nathan Rao.

Incel Terrorism

17 August 2021, by **Rowan Fortune**

In YouTube videos the man complained of being too 'fat and ugly' to have access to sex, and compared himself with the sci-fi killer robot the Terminator. The incel (an abbreviation of 'involuntary celibate') movement is an umbrella for various men who believe that they have a right to sex from the women they consider attractive. They develop a pessimistic philosophy about the contemporary world to explain why they are deprived of this alleged right.

Incels are a subset of the broader misogynistic manosphere that also includes MRAs (men's rights activists), MGTOWs (Men Going Their Own Way), PUAs (pickup artists), and some extremist fathers' rights groups. They have sometimes been linked more generally to the far right, including to racist and violent neo-Nazi organisations. Their worldview is heavily dependent on ideas associated with biological determinism and evolutionary psychology. Although he does not describe himself as an incel

or as supportive of the movement, the pseudo-intellectual self-help charlatan Jordan Peterson is a major point of reference for incels.

Becoming an incel is sometimes referred to internally as taking the red pill. This is a reference to the Wachowski sisters' film *The Matrix* in which characters wake from an illusory computer simulated world via taking a red pill. Ironically, given the manosphere's deep hatred of trans people, the film has later been

revealed as an allegory for transgender transition experiences. The red pill is a reference to estrogen pills as part of hormone replacement therapy. Incels also developed the idea of the black pill, which refers to awakening to a state of complete futility, in which the incel renounces all hope of finding a sexual partner. In reality, almost all incels regard themselves as black-pilled.

The terms red pill and black pill have also been taken up by the far-right, alt-right and even, sometimes, by some on the reactionary left as denoting a growing awareness of supposed reactionary truths about society. The incel lexicon is as vast as it is influential. They draw on the pseudo-scientific idea of human female hypergamy (that is, the incorrect notion that women use their sexuality primarily to increase their social status if given the freedom to do so, such that lower status men are then barred from finding a partner in a sexually liberal society).

Incels dehumanise women frequently in their language. Women are sometimes described as 'femoids' or 'foids' or even worse, with language that associates women with the alleged attractiveness of their genitals. Some transphobic groups have taken to using the incel-derived word 'moid' to refer to trans women. Sexually active women are called either 'stacys' or 'beckys' depending on their alleged attractiveness, while sexually active men are called 'chads' or 'normies' depending on their attractiveness. There are also different types of incel: 'volcels' are voluntarily celibate; 'fakecels' and 'truecels' are fake or real incels respectively. And various racist terms are used to describe incels from different ethnic backgrounds.

This is not the first time that this ideology has been involved in such an act of mass violence. The machete attack against a Toronto spa on 24 February 2020; the 2014 Isla Vista murders, the 2009 Collier Township shooting and the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting were all linked to incel ideas. The unique mixture of hate and nihilism makes this movement especially dangerous when it comes to inspiring such acts of violence, and

the media's choice to name the perpetrators helps online incel groups to find in these attacks further inspiration for fresh violence. Attackers become martyrs and saints in the strange online anonymous boards and online chat groups that seek to radicalise more young men dissatisfied with their lives.

The ultimate root of incel violence must be understood socially and theoretically. In her book *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, Kate Manne wrote that:

'[A]t the most general level of description, misogyny should be understood as the "law enforcement" branch of a patriarchal order, which has the overall function of policing and enforcing its governing ideology.'

Incels emerge not at random, but from a society where social reproduction is dependent on women's unpaid labour, and therefore on a patriarchy that constantly reinforces in its ideology violent ideas about women's 'natural' social role.

Manne understands misogyny, then, as an 'inherently political phenomenon' that is 'dependent on there being norms and expectations of a patriarchal nature.' Politicians, the media and other figures of the establishment will rightly condemn this butchery, but they will perpetuate the rhetorical and political systems that reinforce incel ideas. Even some incels will condemn violence, but we should understand that their ideas have an internal logic and that logic ends in horrific explosions of violence.

The other side of this is the internet. Social media algorithms reward clicks. The more clicks a video or post attracts, the more attention will be directed to it in the future. A sensational video, with a sensational title and opening and cover image, attracts clicks. YouTube (like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) are reactionary platforms. They operate an internal attention economy that depends on controversial, sensational, contrarian content.

While none of those criteria necessarily mean that this content must be reactionary, it is biased in

favour of the reactionary. Worse, such media elevates individuals over fans as petty bourgeois (small business owning) micro celebrities. It gives micro celebrities a stake in a capitalistic platform, and therefore in capitalism, even if precariously. This is an inherently reactionary social strata, whose material interests are neither with workers nor the bourgeoisie, who are atomised even from one another by intense competition, who dream of being bourgeois and fear being workers. The mainstay of fascism and hate movements.

Writing *System Crash* alongside Neil Faulkner, Phil Hearse, Nina Fortune, and Simon Hannah, I helped to advance the concept of the internet's 'fast-fixity' to partially explain how it gives rise to reactionary and fascist movements. This notion clarifies a feature of how the internet is experienced by users, which causes it to be alienating and disorientating especially to those who spend long periods of time dwelling only in online spaces.

"The internet has its own temporality too, which is both fast-moving (giddyingly frictionless) and, counterintuitively, a perfect time capsule (preserving all it touches). The strangeness of such a fast fixity adds to an impression that 'virtual' cyberspace is immaterial, less real than the world. Everything is throwaway, but online-time's detritus proves timelessly recoverable."

Because the internet is experienced as both fast and timeless, it creates the impression for users that they are operating in a different reality. This experience of unreality compounds pre-existing atomisation (the alienation we experience from each other) when we interact with others online. The fastness creates a sense of a world without consequences (minimising empathy), while the fixity returns to haunt us with our online past selves (making us all victims of ourselves). The internet is a place of constant anxiety, where the stakes are lowered to bring out our worst selves, then raised again when we are attacked, condemned and ostracised by others with whom we have only the most tenuous relationships. The mix of despair and self-pity obvious in the

incel movement is the form of consciousness that emerges organically from being online.

How can any of this be changed? The socialist left desperately needs to further theorise the internet as a site of intense ideological struggle with the capacity to spill into acts of violence. The internet was a cornerstone for the political strategies of Donald Trump, Jeremy Corbyn and Boris Johnson, but of these only the outright reactionaries were able to deploy online tools with any success. Johnson and Trump most closely followed the strategies of one-time libertarian presidential hopeful Ron Paul, who pioneered the politicisation of the internet and helped coalesce many of the subcultures that would become the base of the manosphere and alt-right. Trump and Johnson did not aim to further cultivate these online spheres, but their reactionary

interventions both served to embolden such groups.

Thursday's attack, as much as Paul, Trump, and Johnson's electoral campaigns (and Corbyn's electoral failure) all point to the same base reality: the internet has fundamentally changed how reactionary and progressive forces vie for power, and this process is far from bloodless. That is, the internet is not a sideshow, it is inspiring far right terrorism directed at the oppressed and (as we see in the example of Anders Behring Breivik) the left itself.

But this is a weird space, full of obscenity and trolls. The consolidated left has become comfortable only aiming to interpret those parts of society that are clear and rational. Arguments over the workings of the economy, over the nature of dead

revolutions and the state of our organisations are important, but they can also be safe distractions from looking at our contemporary monsters in the face. Incels are no joke, they are a violent expression of our age, our technology and our historical impasse.

We live at a weird moment of history, where a moribund capitalism faces no clear revolutionary rival, and has even perversely created a technological apparatus to augment its own despair. Incel despair must be answered by revolutionary optimism, violent misogyny (and all forms of hate) with social solidarity, and reactionaries with the self-defence of the exploited and the oppressed. But while these old strategies of revolution, solidarity and self-defence must be retained, a new diagnosis is needed. It was needed yesterday.

Source: [Anti Capitalist Resistance](#)

The US occupation took only human lives: Taliban victory is not a sign of peace

16 August 2021, by **Farooq Tariq**

According to the Cost of War Project, the United States poured \$ 2226 billion into Afghanistan. This money could have provided basic education and health care all over the world. According to a 2020 report by the US Department of Defense, the United States spent \$ 815.7 billion on war expenses. Pakistan's total foreign debt is currently \$ 116 billion, it is 7 times more than Pakistan's total foreign debt. Despite doing so much, the Americans hasty pull out from Afghanistan and the collapse of Ashraf Ghani's government implies that all the US investment is now being handed over to the Taliban, without a single bullet fired.

The casualties in this war can be estimated from the fact that by April 2021, 47,235 civilians, 72 journalists and 444 aid workers had been killed in this war. 66,000 Afghan soldiers also

fell victim to this war.

The United States lost 2,442 troops and 20,666 were wounded. In addition, 3,800 private security personnel were killed. Soldiers from 40 countries were taking part in NATO's Afghan forces. Of these, 1,144 soldiers were killed.

The number of people who sought refuge outside the country is 2.7 million, while 4 million have been internally displaced. The US imperialism lavishly borrowed to fund this war. It paid an estimated \$ 536 billion in interest alone. In addition, it spent \$ 296 billion on medical and other expenses for returning combat troops.

The \$ 88 billion spent on training the 300,000 Afghan soldiers who are surrendering without a fight, and the

\$ 36 billion spent on reconstruction projects such as dams, highways, etc., \$ 9 billion was spent as compensation so the Afghans should not cultivate poppy and sell heroine.

The Americans thought that Development would persuade Afghans not to side with the Taliban. But this did not happen (though Taliban popularity was also questionable) and nor it eradicated poverty. At present, the unemployment rate in Afghanistan is 25 percent and the poverty ratio is 47 percent. These are World Bank estimates.

Although some human progress has been made. For example, the average age has risen from 56 to 64 years, and the number of children who die before the age of 5 has halved. The literacy increased from 8% to 43%. 89% have access to safe drinking water in the

cities. It was only 16% before.

Now whatever the Americans has spent will fall into the hands of the Taliban. Afghan soldiers are leaving their weapons and fleeing, those weapons have fallen into the hands of the Taliban. The Taliban are no longer occupying 1996 Afghanistan but the Afghanistan of 2021, where trillions of dollars have been invested.

This defeat of the Americans cannot be compared to the Soviet Union's withdrawal from Afghanistan after the 1986 Geneva Accords. The USSR trained forces and men survived in government another 3 years after their departure. Here Ashraf Ghani & Co. has fallen within days once the Taliban offensive started after the withdrawal of American and NATO forces.

The historical lesson of Afghanistan is that the forces created by the direct military intervention of foreign forces cannot defend the country.

Soviet forces stay lasted 10 years and failed. For 20 years, the US and NATO forces remained stationed in Afghanistan, their trained Afghan army dispersed without a fight.

The reason is clear: the Afghan people and soldiers had no ideological basis to fight.

Ashraf Ghani & Co. were involved in mega corruption. The class divide was sharp. Afghans did not fight for the Americans, how could they fight for their agents.

Ashraf Ghani & Co. represents the worst form of capitalism. The Taliban, on the other hand, who, despite all

their brutality, were able to cleverly exploit religion. They had an idea of a religious state. Ashraf Ghani could never make it clear which state he wanted.

The Taliban's victory is bad news for the progressives around the world. Criticism of American agents is not intended a support of the Taliban. Opposition to both will continue. Only the victory of a truly democratic socialist ideology can stop the future bloodshed in Afghanistan.

The Taliban's victory is not a sign of peace but a message of perpetual civil war. The establishment of another religious fanatic state in South Asia will promote religious sectarianism throughout the region and anti-peace measures will continue.

15 August 2021

South Africa's never-ending crisis

15 August 2021, by **Busi Sibeko**

After almost three decades of democracy, South Africa faces multiple crises. The country has world-leading level of inequality, with a Gini coefficient for income distribution of 0.7. Wealth is even more unequally distributed with the wealthiest 1 per cent of the population owning half of all wealth, while the top 10 per cent own at least 90–95 per cent.

The outcome of a decade of recession

The consequence of a lack of structural transformation in South Africa meant that the country was in a precarious economic position even before the pandemic. Stubbornly high levels of unemployment were already at 29.1 per cent in the end of 2019. Poverty remains unconscionably high. In 2015, over half of the population —

30.4 million people — lived below the official poverty line, higher for female-headed households than male-headed households (49.9 per cent versus 33.0 per cent). A quarter — 13.8 million people — lived in 'extreme poverty', unable to afford enough food to meet their basic physical needs.

South Africa's growth has trended downwards since 2010, averaging just 1.7 per cent between 2011 and 2018. In 2019, South Africa was plunged into its third recession since 1994. Precipitating factors included: the global downswing following the global financial crisis, declining commodity prices, deindustrialisation, 'state capture' (that is, systemic corruption), budgetary cuts, restrictive macroeconomic policies, slowed investment as a result of economic stagnation, and insufficient electricity supply and resultant blackouts, amongst others.

Economic crises have enabled and fuelled our political crises. Growing

numbers of people are perceiving the state as a vehicle for predatory accumulation, aided by corrupt actors in the private and public sector. This reality underlies the acute crisis of governance and state capture in South Africa, marked by looting and the undermining of public institutions. Taken together, these economic and political crises are eroding confidence in the constitutional dispensation.

The pandemic

The Covid-19 crisis came at a time when South Africa was already in a recession. In April 2020, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced South Africa's 500bn Rand rescue package aimed at supporting workers, businesses, and households through the pandemic. The package offered a glimmer of hope for the country; however, this was short lived. The programme saw numerous problems in implementation. As of July 2021, less than half of the budget has been

materialised.

The problem was that there were no 500bn Rand to begin with. The 2020 supplementary budget presented a net increase to non-interest spending of just 36bn Rand, or less than 1 per cent of GDP. Most of the rescue package therefore came from existing funds or off-budget expenditure. The deliberate misleading of citizens into believing that hard cash was pumped into the economy is one of the factors fuelling the violent protests. The public sentiment is that the 'stimulus' was largely looted.

South Africa is now in its third wave of Covid-19 infections. Most of the relief measures have expired. At the same time, Covid-19 infections continue to rise as the government rolls out its vaccination programme.

A third wave of the pandemic, and lockdowns, in South Africa comes at a time when most vulnerable groups have lost income and are living under immense hardship. According to a recent survey, 39 per cent of households ran out of money to buy food in January 2021 and 17 per cent of households experienced weekly household hunger. The special Covid-19 'Social Relief of Distress' (SRD) grant — a cash distribution to unemployed adults not receiving other social security — introduced in the initial relief package has been terminated. Food price inflation has increased. School feeding programmes which many children rely on are closed. And now, with the current violence, some areas are plagued with food shortages.

As this third wave progresses, economic activity is expected to contract — even more now with the current violent protests — with the

likely fallout for workers, businesses, and communities. After a 7 per cent economic contraction in GDP in 2020, the economy continues to shed jobs as the unemployment rate reaches a record high of 32.6 per cent. The current protests will only exacerbate the crises that have partly led to the popular element of the protests themselves, creating a vicious cycle.

Austerity at all costs

Despite the threat of multiple socio-economic crises, South Africa's National Treasury has remained committed to its austerity programme — the cutting of expenditure to address debt during economic downturns — endorsed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and much of the business press.

Since 2014, the South African government has introduced austerity measures in an attempt to reduce debt levels and to appease credit rating agencies. This has severely undermined the provision of essential social service and the realisation of socio-economic rights. Even in the midst of the civil unrest this policy is being reinforced.

It is likely that the government of South Africa will press on with its plans to consolidate non-interest expenditure (spend on everything but debt) by an annual real average rate of 5.2 per cent, as announced in February 2021. Cuts to the budget entail a fall in spending per person and leads to real reductions in health, learning and culture, and general public services. The president recently indicated that any new emergency relief measures would be provisioned within the existing budget limits.

Given the pressing social needs, enormously exacerbated by Covid-19 and now the violent protests, this is deeply irresponsible.

What needs to be done?

The South African government has largely gone from crisis to crisis without fundamentally dealing with the political and economic root causes of the crises themselves.

The political party factionalism within the ruling African National Congress needs to be resolved decisively. The factionalism is a liability to the nation. This must be coupled with a recommitment to the 1955 Freedom Charter and the Constitution of South Africa, which foresee a fairer economic dispensation as a critical component of political liberation.

In the immediate term the South African government needs to protect livelihoods and sustain the economy. Previously terminated relief measures to support business, workers and households must be renewed and adapted to respond to the Covid-19 crisis as well as the current crisis the country faces.

Such measures are not possible with the current austerity agenda that has been adopted. The austerity course must be abandoned and socio-economic rights prioritised. This approach must be coupled with meaningful economic transformation that serves the majority. For all we have now, is not even a shadow of political liberation.

29 July 2021

Source IPS.

Palestinian Labour, Unconquered

14 August 2021, by Salvage Editorial Collective

The pogromists were intoxicated by their violence, but so were the Israeli troops who attacked worshippers in the Al-Aqsa Mosque with stun grenades, rubber-coated steel bullets and tear gas, hospitalising hundreds. When Palestinian protests in solidarity with Sheikh Jarrah erupted from Haifa and Nazareth in the north, to Ramla, Yafa and Lydd in the middle of the country, to the Naqab desert in the south, Jewish Israelis took up arms. In Lydd, a Palestinian protester was shot dead. When a suspect was arrested, it was Israel's Minister for Public Security, Amir Ohana who took to Twitter to denounce the arrest. Declaring that the killing had been self-defence, he argued that 'law-abiding citizens carrying weapons are a force-multiplier for the authorities'.

In the aftermath of the murder, thousands of Israeli Jews applied for gun licenses, at seven times the usual rate, adding to the 145,000 existing licensed gun owners. The following month, the Israeli government authorised the 'Flag March' of the Israeli far right through Palestinian communities in East Jerusalem. Clearing the way for the marchers, Israeli troops advanced through the streets, driving Palestinians out of the way at gunpoint. Those who didn't comply were beaten. Pogromism has very much become a mainstream political force in Israel, complementing state terror and representing one bloodied edge of a 'transferist' ideology that has been constitutive of the Zionist project since its inception, and has been ratified by the Israeli courts for decades.

Since the ethnic cleansing of approximately 700,000 Palestinians in the Nakba of 1948, the state of Israel has legally discriminated against the remaining Palestinian population, and has used those laws to drive out Palestinian families. In the immediate aftermath of the Nakba, Israel appealed to British colonial-era laws, the Defence Regulations of 1945, which permitted the army to uproot and transfer whole communities at will, to impose indefinite curfews, to seize land and requisition any property, to search any home, to arrest any man, to expel him from the country without explanation or

restraint. Israeli military courts were the only recourse that Palestinians subject to these laws had, which invariably found against them. The Palestinians could be driven off their land, thanks to laws deeming them 'present-absentees'. While the Nakba had decimated Palestinian land ownership to just 5 per cent of the total, the expropriations of the ensuing years saw it driven down to just 1 per cent.

It wasn't until 1966 that martial law was abandoned within 1948 Israel, largely because it disrupted the absorption of Palestinian labourers into the lowest ranks of the Israeli economy. But this hardly stopped the land grab, with its twinned secular and theocratic mandates in Zionist ideology. The following year, the so-called 'Israel Defence Forces' (IDF) occupied Gaza and the West Bank, where most of the refugees of the Nakba lived. The logic of martial law, and legal expropriation, resumed.

A crucial juridical step in the ensuing pattern of expulsions was the Legal and Administrative Matters Law of 1970, which allowed Israeli Jews, and only Israeli Jews, to pursue ownership claims in occupied East Jerusalem based on allegations that the property had been Jewish-owned before 1948. Combined with existing legislation, this ensured that Israeli courts repeatedly issued expulsion orders forcing out Palestinian families who have resided in these homes for decades. The majority of the cases have been brought by settler-colonial organisations, their settlement programmes aggressively supported by Israeli governments, whether representing Labour or Likud.

Nor are the settler-colonists isolated globally. UN spokespersons, B'Tselem, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch may protest until their voices are hoarse that these expropriations violate international humanitarian law. Israel, the occupying power, has no right to seize property, they say. Yet they are not Israel's major funders, arms suppliers or diplomatic allies. If pushed, most US presidents or British Prime Ministers might disapprove of Israel's settlement programme, but this has yet to prevent them from supplying

arms or, in the US case, \$3.8bn a year to purchase them. The settlers also benefit from a strong alliance with Israeli capital - but not only Israeli capital. Among 112 firms charged by the UN with assisting the settlements, including by construction, financing, maintenance and expansion, as well as demolition of Palestinian properties, are AirBnB, JCB, TripAdvisor and Motorola. The constellations of arms, capital and legal violence directed against Palestinians are as global and overdetermined as racial capitalism itself.

II. This was the issue that exploded in Sheikh Jarrah, and swiftly spread, this May. For the first time since the First Intifada beginning in 1987, Palestinian resistance was united across Gaza, the West Bank and 1948 Israel. The street movement erupting within Israel was pivotal, and so rattled the administration that it immediately deployed thousands of troops to 'mixed' cities for the first time in decades. This so inspires because it offers a needed break with an established pattern. The coloniser seeks to remove from the colonised the coherence of their identity, to obliterate the possibility of resistance by bombing away the memory of their ethnic cleansing and the truth of their indigeneity.

Black South Africans became the mock citizens of a diffuse collection of different Bantustans, a bid by the settler to rule out even the possibility of his antagonist: to remake the landscape as the white man's land with pockets of guest accommodation for the tolerated natives. Palestinians, whose land was turned into someone else's property, are themselves turned into Gazans isolated under siege; West Bank residents in cantons with a mock government of their own; 'Israeli Arabs' permitted as guests in other people's land; refugees told they are Jordanians or Syrians now, and should move on and stop harping on about a past called 'Palestine'.

May 2021's 'Unity Intifada' resisted that fragmentation which is so crucial to the mental and material violence of colonialism. The very claim to be Palestinian, from the river to the sea and well beyond both, marks a refusal to accept defeat as final and colonial

architecture as inevitable. As the land was set on fire and lampposts in Lydd flew the Palestinian flag, refugees rushed to the borders in Syria and Jordan and Lebanon to insist on their unforgotten right to return home.

In Gaza, pressure from Palestinians compelled Hamas to offer a token of resistance and solidarity with Sheikh Jarrah by firing Qassam rockets into Israel for the first time in years. These rockets, though synonymous with Hamas in the moral bestiary of imperialism, had first been used by Gazans against the Gush Katif colonies before Israel's 'withdrawal' in 2005. The vast majority of the casualties that can be attributed to them dates to this period, when Israeli forces were bulldozing homes, blitzing ambulances and turning parts of Gaza into Grozny.

Since then, every Israeli offensive has precipitated largely demonstrative retaliatory fire. The rockets remain a weak, ineffectual weapon against an occupier with overwhelming firepower, air power and nuclear warheads. The minor dangers primarily inflicted on the southern city of Sderot are, one would think, little deterrent to Israel. However, in this war, Qassam rockets reached Israel's large cities, causing major disruption and forcing Israel to expend far more money and effort on interception and avoiding significant property damage than it cost to make and fire them. They are, in other words, weapons which exploit the asymmetry between occupier and occupied.

A few miles and half a world away, in the West Bank, Israeli troops gunned down protestors - killing eleven in one day, including teenagers, and injuring five hundred. Unlike in Gaza, there Israel has a pliant Palestinian apparatus to aid it; under the terms of Oslo's peace accords, Israel got a Palestinian Authority (PA) without real sovereignty but locked into 'security cooperation', which PA President Mahmoud Abbas calls 'sacred'. Without it, the international donor support on which the PA relies would dry up. The money makes clear the function: for most of its existence, the PA has spent significantly more on security than on health or education. Palestinian police officers are tasked, in areas A and B of the mutilated West

Bank, with enforcing the military rule of the occupier. It is worth stressing how central is that obstacle to the progress of a unified liberation struggle.

Without the PA, Israel would have to rule directly to maintain its power over almost three million Palestinians in the West Bank and so resistance could target its military infrastructure unimpeded. As illegal settlements multiply, the confrontation would be open, as it cannot be in Gaza where Israel has withdrawn to the skies and the sea to besiege the Strip from outside. With the PA as a native subcontractor - bribed away from the interests of national liberation and into an aristocracy of the colonised - the settler state achieves one degree of insulation and a buffer. In polling after May's uprisings, carried out by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, fully 75 per cent of Palestinians rated Hamas 'outstanding' for its role in the events, but only 8 per cent said the same of Abbas. The stalled Palestinian revolution appeared locked into its splinters; Gazans assailing Israel and punished violently for it, abandoned by settlers in a prison for natives, while the larger, slightly more populous West Bank was kept tame by a compound of direct and devolved Israeli sovereignty. So far, so familiar.

Surprisingly important in terms of power and leverage, however, was the 'dignity strike' by Palestinians. Such withdrawal of labour across the whole of historic Palestine, involving hundreds of thousands of Palestinian citizens of Israel as well as Palestinians in the West Bank, had not been seen since the First Intifada. The success of the strike in overcoming traditional Israeli patterns of divide-and-rule - often echoed in Palestinian institutions - recalls the spirit of the general strike of 1936, precipitating the Great Arab Uprising, and the 'Land Day' strike of 1976, against the ongoing Israeli expropriation of Palestinian land. As Ha'aretz reported, the strike illustrated 'Israel's dependency on Palestinian workers'. This dependence is concentrated in menial sectors like construction, garbage disposal, cleaning, and taxi driving, as the absorption of Palestinian labour has tended to follow

the upward mobility of Jewish workers in the occupational structure. However, the strike also involved Palestinian doctors and high-tech workers within 1948 Israel. As such, by exposing a dependency, the strike demonstrated a potential transformative power that is generally occluded by one of the Left's characteristic lines of analysis. In contrast to apartheid South Africa, we have long argued, the Israeli ruling class has no inherent need to exploit the labour of those it oppresses. The existence of Israel in its current form depends on the non-existence of Palestine, and the historical obliteration of its memory. Of the 530 villages entirely depopulated during the Nakba, the majority were either wholly or partially razed, their existence reduced to rubble. Some were covered over with forests, or new buildings. As one of the protest signs during the May general strike said, 'Every Israeli city was once Sheikh Jarrah'. When Israel conquered Gaza and the West Bank in 1967, one of their first moves was to ban the Palestinian flag and to ban books evoking Palestine's existence. The attempted eradication of historical memory is part of a process that Israeli historian Baruch Kimmerling once called 'politicide'. To destroy the idea of Palestine need not entail the physical destruction of the Palestinians. However, as the increasingly overt calls for genocide from Israeli politicians suggest, it need not entail their survival either.

III. That Palestinians should therefore retain any class leverage within Israel is counterintuitive, and even more so given the conscious effort to found the Jewish state on the exclusion of Arab labour. The vox pop response of many Jewish residents of East Jerusalem to the May general strike - fire the strikers and employ only Jewish workers instead - is rooted in a longstanding, but thus far unavailing, fantasy of Zionism. And nor was this specifically a fantasy of its right-wing: Zionism was the first colonial nationalist movement led by parties nominally committed to building a 'socialist' society, and it was the labour movement and Zionist socialism that pioneered the exclusion of Arab labour. The 'conquest of labour' policy entailed that, to create

an economy that would attract Jewish migration on a scale necessary to build a state, Palestinian Arabs would have to be prevented from competing with Jewish workers. More than that, because it was to be a Jewish state, won against the inevitable resistance of Palestinians, cooperation between Jewish and Arab workers had to be thwarted. The main Jewish labour organisation, the Histadrut, was far more a state-building tool than a class organisation. Its policy of excluding Arab labour contributed to the lower state of organisation and earning power among Palestinian workers across all sectors, compared to Jewish workers.

The policy of exclusion wasn't always as fixed as it can appear in retrospect. In the early years of Histadrut's existence, from 1920 to 1927, the divisions among Palestinian Jewish workers as to how to relate to Arab workers, the need to win the support of the British Labour Party, and the fact that Jewish railway workers relied on their Arab counterparts, necessitated some degree of class cooperation. Ben Gurion felt obliged to say: 'Together we will rise and together we will fall. The Hebrew worker will not work eight hours a day if the Arab workers will be forced to work ten or twelve.' Yet, precisely because of the overridingly ethno-national aspirations of Histadrut, it was at best conflicted and hesitant when Arab workers organised themselves and - not perceiving the exclusionary implications of Histadrut's commitment to 'Hebrew Labour' - asked to join. When they were at first formally permitted to join, they were excluded from central or leadership positions, and Histadrut's main contribution was to restrain Arab workers' militancy.

By 1927, the organisation resolved to deny Arab workers admittance to Histadrut, and to ensure they organised separately from Jewish workers while actively working to exclude them from key sectors of the economy. The tactics of exclusion included lobbying employers and picketing workplaces, not in support of the workers against their bosses, but to drive out Arab workers. Solel Boneh, the construction firm created by Histadrut to bid for public

contracts, divided workers along ethno-national lines, offering an 'unskilled' wage scale to Palestinian workers, and a 'skilled' wage scale to Jewish workers. The point of these methods was to create a caste system among workers, and to create a closed Jewish economy in which money and capital would not bleed into the wider Palestinian economy. It was a corollary of another principle of the Zionist movement, upheld by the Jewish Agency, that Jewish property - largely acquired from absentee landlords - was inalienable and could not be sold on to any non-Jewish buyer.

This did not prevent Arab workers from organising. The formation of the Palestinian Arab Workers Society (PAWS) in 1925 allowed Arab railway workers to organise autonomously, began the process of establishing class unity, and challenged the exclusionary politics of Histadrut. Likewise, one of the earliest attempts to organise Arab workers on an anti-Zionist and anti-imperialist basis came from the Palestine Communist Party (PCP), launched in 1923. However, though the PCP allied with PAWS and blocked with Arab nationalists against Poale Zion at the League Against Imperialism in 1927, it remained overwhelmingly Jewish. It failed dismally in its efforts to organise the incipient Arab working class, and it failed no less dismally when during the Comintern's 'ultra-left' turn in 1928, it followed Moscow's instructions to denounce Arab nationalism.

The promise shown by PAWS, as it gained from a nationwide radicalisation against Zionism in 1929, was thwarted by the strength of a traditionalist social structure, and by the efforts of the British-appointed Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Amin Husseini to block communist influence by setting up rival unions. Meanwhile, the success of Histadrut in keeping Arab workers out of certain workplaces would prove decisive during the 1936 general strike against British rule and Zionist colonisation.

The strike was called in April 1936 as part of a wider campaign of disobedience, including tax resistance, and a boycott of Jewish products

intended to stop the growth of an incipient national economy in which Arabs were deliberately excluded and subordinated. The brutal British response, including sweeping arrests of suspected organisers, was facilitated by the fact that Arabs had been driven out of many workplaces, while the Zionist movement - threatened by Arab nationalist demands, and keen to establish the dominance of Jewish labour in new sectors of the economy - supplied strikebreakers. Not for the last time, however, it was the failings of the Palestinian leadership that killed the strike. The formation of the Arab Higher Committee (AHC), led by the Mufti and a cluster of Arab notables detached from the labour movement, took the initiative away from local strike committees. By November, arguing that the British were ready to fulfil their demands, the AHC leadership called off the strike. Instead, the British imposed martial law, banned the AHC and for the first time proposed a partition of Palestine that would lead to the transfer of land and the displacement of a quarter of a million Palestinians.

This miscalculation, squandering an incipient working-class unity among Palestinian Arabs, weakened the movement just as it was forced into a military confrontation with the British. It expedited the further exclusion of Arab workers from the economy. And, as the reactionary leadership failed to make any strategic distinction between the Yishuv and the Zionist movement, failed to create or exploit schisms among Jewish workers to the advantage of the Arab working class, while consolidating the alliance between the British authorities and Zionism. This collaboration would be repeated during Britain's counterinsurgency against the Great Arab Uprising, as Zionist paramilitaries like Irgun and Lehi waged a campaign of terror attacks on Arab civil society.

By the end of the uprising in 1939, when the British state sued for peace in preparation for war in Europe, promising to limit Jewish migration and deliver an independent Palestinian state within a decade, the Palestinian leadership had been broken and scattered. The PCP and its

offshoot, the National Liberation League, experienced some growth during the forties, and laid the foundations for post-war labour organising. However, the broader political desolation would leave Palestinian society decisively weakened when Zionist parties and paramilitaries launched their insurrection and ethnic cleansing campaign in December 1947.

IV. While the majority of Palestinians were turned into stateless refugees by the Nakba, with most Arab workers left under the control of the Jordanian dictatorship in the West Bank, between 80,000 and 160,000 Palestinians remained within the boundaries of the newly created state of Israel.

Representing about 15 per cent of the population, and subject to martial law, they were subject to routine arrests, torture, murders, disappearances and expulsions. They had little ability to organise politically in defence of their civil rights, let alone organise as workers. Their marginal status as workers was directly linked to the structure of colonialism and the legal expropriation of their land. The Emergency Land Regulation Law of 1949 established that Israel had a right to seize Arab urban property, while the Basic Law of 1960 institutionalised the inalienability of Jewish-owned property. These laws were compounded by the 1950 Law of Return and the 1952 Israeli Nationality Act, which ensured that while Palestinian citizens of Israel were subject to regular expulsions, Jewish migrants from anywhere in the world had a right to claim Israeli citizenship.

In the new Israeli economy, while Jewish workers were overwhelmingly urban, Arab workers overwhelmingly rural. However, being progressively deprived of their land and lacking the means to make a satisfactory living from agriculture, Palestinian Arabs were converted into a proletarianised migrant reserve workforce.

And as Jewish workers moved up the occupational strata, Arab workers were absorbed more completely into the lowest wage jobs in construction, mining, quarrying, crafts, transport

and services. These former redoubts of 'Hebrew Labour' became 'Arab work', and saw a dramatic decline in their prestige, wages and conditions. The salience of Palestinians in construction is particularly important. As the sociologist Andrew Ross points out in *Stone Men*, despite the Zionist myth of the pioneer ('*halutz*'), much of modern Israel was actually built by the Arab workers disparaged in Israel as uneducated fellaheen.

The caste system, indeed, ensured that Israel could be built on the hyper-exploitation of Palestinian labour. In the first two decades of Israel's existence, Arab wages ranged between 35 per cent and 70 per cent of Jewish wages for similar work. Arab workers were also more exposed to the cycles of the capitalist economy: during periods of recession, unemployment among Arab workers was double the rate among Jewish workers. They were also crammed into smaller accommodations, with Arabs living in homes with on average two people to a room, and enjoyed far less of the leisure and culture available in the Israeli economy, as the vast majority of their income was taken up with food and shelter.

However, the fact is that the Arab working class was both growing and increasingly included within the Israeli economy, giving them a potential disruptive capacity that tended to be overlooked and even disparaged by the Palestinian national leadership organising among the refugee communities. As overwhelmingly migrant workers subject to despotic emergency laws, their bargaining power was limited. However, a crucial breakthrough came when in 1966 the Israeli state abandoned martial law. This step was not a measure of Israel's liberalisation, but rather reflected the dilemmas facing a capitalist economy in which both a growing share of surplus extraction and of the realisation of surplus value through consumption, depended on Palestinian workers with Israeli citizenship. Though these workers never ceased to constitute an internal colony for Israel (an 'enclave economy', in the idiom of dependency theory) and the labour market remained strongly segregated, the modalities of emergency rule with

its restrictions on movement impeded the efficient allocation of labour.

In the West Bank, the crushing military defeat of the Arab forces in 1967 and the IDF's occupation had led the trade union leaders to 'freeze the class struggle', in the words of Adel Ghanern, future leader of the General Federation of Trade Unions. As Ghanern put it, they surmised that 'the danger from the occupation was greater than that from the capitalists', and opted to 'help the national industries' as a way to resist Zionism. The danger from the occupation was real and obviously more lethal. Palestinian businesses exploited the nation's workers, but it was Israeli troops that harassed, administratively detained, and deported union leaders, just as it was Israeli forces that seized Palestinian land and homes for a new generation of settler-colonists from the religious right. Israeli colonial capital, reinforced by the arsenals of occupation and segregation, could also exploit Palestinian labour more brutally. In the long-run, however, the strategy of shoring up Palestinian capital only incubated a weak national bourgeoisie dependent on the Israeli capitalist class.

Just as Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza were pushed into the role of reserve army for the Israeli economy, Palestinian workers in Israel were becoming a regularised low-wage workforce. From being insecure migrant workers forced to supplement their incomes with agricultural work in a dwindling area of land, they became vital workers. As their leverage improved, the workers became more militant, asserting themselves in a series of strikes against discrimination and unfair taxes.

In the Occupied Territories, meanwhile, the failure of the 'freeze' on class struggle led to political radicalisation. Leftist factions of the PLO, which by 1974 the UN recognised as the 'sole legitimate representative' of the Palestinian people, organised alongside the PCP in the workers' movement, among students and in the women's movement to build infrastructures of resistance.

These trends culminated in 1976 with a collective uprising against the Israeli authorities. The Israeli appropriation of 5 million acres of Palestinian land, in an effort to 'judaise' the territory, deprived the incipient nation of space for construction and agriculture. The further theft of 21,000 acres of land in the Galilee region of northern Israel, accompanied by curfews across Palestinian villages, precipitated a general strike by Palestinian workers. The 'Land Day' strike was brutally suppressed with live bullets by Israeli forces. Four thousand Israeli police were deployed in Galilee, and demonstrations were fired upon. However, the unprecedented unity of force across all of historic Palestine, supported by student walk-outs, solidarity strikes and marches in towns throughout Israel, Gaza, the West Bank and Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, succeeded in reversing the theft of land in Galilee. 'Land Day', 30 March, subsequently became an annual commemoration in Palestine.

V. The next major class uprising by Palestinians, heralding the First Intifada in 1987, followed another interim of defeats and growing pessimism in the PLO leadership. In December 1987, an IDF truck killed four Palestinians in the Jabilia refugee camp, triggering protests that would become the Intifada. By then, Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza alone made up 7 per cent of the Israeli workforce (about a third of the West Bank/Gaza workforce). They had also become a major consumer market for Israeli goods. While this bolstered support for the occupation within Israel, among those who benefited from Palestinians doing the undignified work and supporting Israeli markets, this gave workers in the Occupied Territories in tandem with Palestinian citizens of Israel the potential to disrupt the apartheid economy.

Before the uprising began, however, the PLO was becoming desperate about its chances. A growing number of Israeli politicians, above all government ministers, had been talking about another 'transfer': this time to force the Palestinian population out of Gaza and the West Bank. The disavowed fascist Rabbi

Kahane explicated the racist premise of this: one could not have a Jewish state extending across the entirety of Eretz Israel with a large, growing and potentially majority Arab population. The Palestinians were a 'demographic problem'. And the Reagan administration had given full support and sympathy to Israel as it dehumanised Palestinians, the better to destroy them. The PLO leadership, fearing destruction, was drawing the conclusion that it had to act urgently to establish the material foundations of a Palestinian state, even if only within the limited framework of UN resolutions and the 1967 armistice line. As such, it had to concretise its ambitions in Gaza and the West Bank. This meant it had little to say to Palestinians living in Israel, and increasingly little to offer the refugee population. The shift toward 'statehood' as opposed to 'liberation', which was resisted by the left-wing faction led by George Habash, came just as the Intifada was about to break out.

When the Intifada began, it was not under the impetus of the PLO. While the constituent parties of the PLO fully participated in the uprising, the political lead was given by the Popular Committees and community organisations. It was their leaflets stopped by Israeli troops, their leaders rounded up and deported. Some of the most effective tactics, reflecting Israel's dependence on Palestinians as workers and consumers, included strikes, boycotts and the withholding of taxes.

When Israel suppressed protests with live fire, killing dozens in what the anglophone press invariably described as 'clashes', hundreds of thousands of Palestinian workers in Israel joined strikers in the Occupied Territories. The strikes and boycotts alone cost the Israeli economy \$1bn in the first year. It was precisely because of the efficacy of this combined offensive that Israel started to implement a new institutional architecture preventing West Bank and Gaza residents from moving freely between the territories, and imposing new restrictions on workers from Gaza entering Israel. It was for the same reason that the Israeli government and employers shifted toward the use of migrant

workers from Thailand, the Philippines and Romania. Though the latter were technically more expensive due to the cost of housing and transporting them, they were more politically manageable.

The effect of the Intifada on the PLO's internal struggle over the 'peace offensive', as suggested by Edward Said's account, seems to have been to sharpen the urgency of its strategic swerve to negotiations. Here was a Palestinian revolution and, at the end of it, there had to be an independent Palestinian state to show for it. Of course, as Said would later lament bitterly, the result of this shift was ultimately to canalise Intifada energies into the unavailing Oslo process. The Palestinian leadership accepted, ostensibly as a transitional settlement toward a Palestinian state, a tripartite occupation structure in the West Bank. Of the total territory, the Palestinian Authority (PA) would control 3 per cent (Area A), the Israelis would control 70 per cent (Area C), and the remainder would be jointly ruled by the PA and the Israelis. Israel also controlled all underground resources, meaning it was at their discretion whether Palestinians would have water or energy. Obviously, the number of settlers more than doubled in the first decade of Oslo. The first thing the Israeli government did after signing Oslo was to start a new settlement-building programme.

The effect of this was to further entrench the Israeli architecture of segmentation and division of the Palestinian population. Not only were the West Bank and Gaza separated, while crossing the Green Line became ever more difficult, but even within the West Bank the Israeli authorities could shut down travel between different areas at a moment's notice. Everything that has happened since then, from the carving up of the West Bank with settler roads, to the brutal suppression of the Second Intifada, to the 'withdrawal' from the Gaza strip, to the Israeli-supported civil war between Fatah and Hamas, to the blockade on Gaza, to the repeated pulverisations of Gaza, to the perpetually expanding settlement programme, has tended to further entrench the partitioning and

fragmentation of the Palestinian people.

Throughout, the PA has enabled the fracturing of resistance by morphing rapidly into a corrupt, conservative force, dependent on the state of Israel and willing to punish those who protest Israeli policies. Mahmoud Abbas' leadership of the PA has been increasingly characterised by petty despotism, as in the recent murder of the regime critic Nizar Banat, which followed years of PA security forces terrorising Banat and his family with live bullets fired at his home and regular assaults.

It is fitting, in this story of resistance against fragmentation, that May's Unity Intifada became June's resistance to the PA. After Banat's murder - even the official autopsy admitted he was beaten on the head, chest, neck, legs and hands: dead within an hour of his arrest - initial protests lasted for five days straight. Journalists and NGO workers at the protests were beaten up by plain clothes PA security forces. Some journalists tore up their press cards in protest at the lack of protection. The Palestinian People's Party pulled out of the apparatus, so the PA lost its Minister of Labour. Increasingly the fiefdom not simply of Fatah but of a small clique within it who live by the blessing of the settler state, the PA elections in which Banat had declared his intention to stand have been repeatedly postponed. Abbas now waves the flag of freedom to say that elections would be unconscionable without Jerusalemites able to vote, while Israel does his bidding (such strange inversions are necessary to the maintenance of Israeli power) by refusing them the vote so that he has his excuse to rule for Israel without democratic accountability sweeping him away. One form of domination makes fertile soil for others. Apartheid and autocracy need each other.

This is, with plenty of villains overseas too, the alliance of interests against which Palestinian labour is pitted. Palestinian scholars like Adam Hanieh, Toufic Haddad and Kareem

Rabie paint a powerful picture. A rentier class of West Bank capitalists, trading heavily on debt since the creation of a national mortgage market in 1996, builds alliances with Gulf investors and Israeli capital to plan new cities like Rawabi and 'Qualifying Industrial Zones' (QIZ) like the one in Jenin, where unions and corporate taxes are both stripped away. In the PA's 2009 programme 'Ending the Occupation, Establishing the State', this trajectory is represented in terms that perfectly capture the tragic shift from the age of Bandung to the age of global neoliberalism: the revolutionary march to victory is a future past, a horizon closed, and now the creation of a national economy with a strong domestic capitalist class offers the only route out of unending degradation.

It is a false route, since even capital flows utterly on the terms of the coloniser. It articulates national and class struggles together, since the smartest corner of Ramallah is inhabited by state and semi-private Palestinian capitalists whose prosperity is bought by Israel's bid to normalise and eternalise the military status quo: Palestinian prosperity to quell demands for freedom - and checkpoints to harass and discipline the labour force in every QIZ too, so this is not a flat Palestinian prosperity, to be experienced equally by all. When in the West Bank, as in the Israeli state, this parasitic setup breeds government corruption and critics like Nizar Banat. The outpouring of anger over his murder thus holds a necessary class and anti-colonial content.

VI. Israel's divide-and-rule practices were supported in recent years by the Trump administration's support for the most revanchist wing of Zionism, and by the Arab states' abandonment of their increasingly nominal commitment to the Palestinians. There is no sign that Biden is going to depart significantly from the Trump administration's posture. However, Palestinian national consciousness continues to operate as a material

infrastructure apart from Israel and its dependent subordinates in the West Bank, in no small part because of its underestimated class capacities. Capacities distinctively formed in and against the specifically colonial contours of Palestine's class structure. One of the factors driving the formation of a new class consciousness, breaking out of the cantonisation imposed by Israel and policed by the PA, has been the growing remoteness of the PA and loyal union leaderships from the base. The PA's dependence on Israeli funding and Israeli capital has left it subject to the patterns of austerity and financialisation that prevail across Israel, as it has struggled to meet its fiscal obligations while supporting a national bourgeoisie.

Since 2012, teachers have engaged in a series of wildcat strikes, coordinated on social media, against the Palestinian Authorities over low wages and the financialisation of pensions. Nor has the Hamas-led enclave in Gaza been spared the same militancy, as teachers struck in 2018 against the systematic underpayment of salaries. Another factor is Israel's radicalisation to the right. In October 2018, workers across the West Bank, Gaza and Israel struck and demonstrated together against the racist Nation-State Law and the migration of the US embassy to Jerusalem, anticipating the solidarity witnessed after the repression in Sheikh Jarrah.

The infrastructure of Palestinian national resistance - now transversally cutting across existing bunkered structures of authority and communication, opening up previously closed sources of opposition - survives because Zionism, in spite of itself, undermining its drive to eliminationism, has not ceased to be produce and reproduce itself through the coerced, terrorised labour of the Palestinian working class.

Source *Salvage*.

*This is the editorial essay from **Salvage 10: The Disorder of the Future**.*

International Energy Agency sets traps for “net zero emissions”

13 August 2021, by **Daniel Tanuro**

Now, however, the Agency has released a [special report](#) calling for a severe and very rapid reduction in the combustion of coal, oil and natural gas. As part of the Paris Agreement, the IEA calls for a “radical turn” in favour of an energy system largely dominated by renewables. This is the only way, it suddenly admits, to bridge the gap between government commitments and the trajectory to follow to achieve “net zero emissions” by 2050, with a one in two chance of not exceeding 1.5 C warming.

A turning point is confirmed

The turning point is indisputable, and it will have an impact, because the IEA greatly influences national energy policies. How can we explain it? This report is a further and particularly significant sign of the fact that the dominant circles of big capital and its political leaders can no longer deny the seriousness of the ongoing climate change, its boomerang effects on profits and... the major risk of loss of systemic legitimacy which would result, primarily among young people. The reorientation symbolized by Joe Biden’s rallying to the COP21 agreement is therefore not an isolated phenomenon.

The crisis opened by the pandemic is accelerating the movement by putting those responsible before the choice: how to relaunch the economy? In the coming months, in particular at COP26, we will see them bring out “ambitious” promises aimed at greening the economy through the laws of the market.

The IEA gives them ammunition. Its scenario, it claims, would save the climate (without temporarily

exceeding 1.5 C, says the IEA), revive GDP growth (4 per cent per year, according to the IEA), reduce consumption energy level (by 8 per cent), create twenty-five million net jobs and reduce poverty (universal access to energy in 2030), etc., etc.

Governments will draw from this enough to impress us, it will be a real festival of greenwashing and recycling. With the implicit message: we have understood you, fear not, the situation is under control.

In truth, the situation is less than ever under control, as evidenced in particular - examples among others, alas! - by a new study which estimates that the Greenland ice cap is on the verge of disintegration [13], the scramble for fossil resources in the Arctic [14] and the continuous increase in global emissions, driven in particular by those of China [15]. In this context, it is up to social movements to denounce soothing discourses and vigorously deconfine the fight for the climate. The responsibility of trade unions, in particular, is great, because the promises of massive job creation through the “just transition” cooked up by the IEA aim to chain them to “green capitalism”.

A radical timeline

There is no denying the radical nature of the IEA’s proposals with regard to reducing the use of fossils. It is quite clear from the schedule of measures put on the table:

- 2021: ban on further developing new oil and gas fields, opening new coal mines, expanding existing coal mines, authorizing the construction of new coal-fired power stations;
- 2025: ban on the further sale of

fossil fuel boilers;

- 2030: abandonment of coal in “advanced” economies; install 1,020 GW of solar and wind power each year; reach 60 per cent of electric vehicles in new car sales; achieve carbon neutrality for all new buildings;

- 2035: 100 per cent zero-emission electricity production in all “advanced” economies; end of the sale of cars with internal combustion engines; 50 per cent of new trucks are electric;

- 2040: worldwide, closure of all coal- and oil-fired power stations; achieve totally zero-net-emission electricity production; in aviation, achieve 50 per cent low-emission fuels;

- 2045: 50 per cent of heat needs are met by heat pumps;

- 2050: reach 70 per cent of electricity from solar and wind power; 85 per cent of buildings are adapted to zero-carbon; over 90 per cent of heavy industrial production (cement, steel, petrochemicals) is low-emission.

We will fully appreciate the turning point in the IEA’s discourse by noting that its “net zero-emissions” (NZE) scenario is more ambitious than most of the scenarios compiled by the IPCC in its special report 1.5 °C (2018).

With regard to the energy and industrial sectors, for example, the emissions projected in 2040 by the NZE are lower than the emissions projected at that date in the majority of the IPCC scenarios.

The same goes for the amount of energy that would still be produced from fossils in 2050: in the IPCC scenarios without exceeding (or very slightly exceeding) the 1.5 C of

warming, it was about 184 exajoules [16]; the IEA's NZE is significantly below - 120 exajoules of fossil fuel. *Carbon Brief* compared this figure to the one that Shell advanced in its "Sky1.5 C" scenario (another greenwashing exercise): the multinational was betting on the possibility, in 2050, of producing another 375 exajoules (EJ) of energy from fossils (including 115 exajoules from natural gas). This is three times more than in the NZE scenario of the IEA [17].

Oil and other fossil companies seem somewhat surprised that the IEA, for once, does not quite dance to the tune they whistle. On this subject, the *Financial Times* quotes Dave Jones, analyst at the climate thinktank Ember. According to him, the IEA's call to immediately halt any further exploration for oil or gas is "extremely surprising given the history of the agency. I don't think anyone expected this from the IEA. This is a huge turning point for them. They've always been very pro-fossil, so coming up with something like that is just amazing. It really is a stab in the back for the fossil fuel industry". Talking about a "stabbing" may be overstated, but the fact that the IEA's timeline is focused primarily on production restrictions and bans does not please the energy giants. The big boss of Shell, Ben van Beurden, did not hide it. At the very recent annual meeting of shareholders, he said that in order to reduce emissions, we would do better to "focus on consumption, not production". For its part, he said, Shell will continue to drill in areas where it is installed, like the Gulf of Mexico. "To meet demand" ... of course [18]. Thanks, boss!

"Carbon neutrality" means "profit before the climate"

That said, the climate movement would be making a monumental mistake if it decided to applaud the IEA's net zero-emissions scenario, or to see it as "a step in the right direction".

Why? Because it is a "net zero emissions" scenario, precisely, and "zero net emissions" does not mean "zero emissions".

"Net zero emissions" - we also say "carbon neutrality" - is the formulation that governments adopted in the Paris agreements, in order to hide a huge sleight of hand. This consists quite simply in not respecting the trajectory of emission reductions necessary to stay below 1.5 C (or even below 2 C), by reducing emissions only to the extent that it is compatible with capitalist profit (thus with the sacrosanct growth of GDP), and... sweeping the difference under the carpet by a series of subterfuges. If we put aside Bolsonaro and a few other fascist climate-denialists, most governments on the planet are trying to deceive people by giving them this "carbon neutrality" discourse, whereas this so-called neutrality actually means "hands off my growth", "profit before the climate".

Joe Biden has taken the lead in organizing "his" climate summit and solemnly announcing that the United States will be "carbon neutral" in 2050. Almost all the others are following suit. [19] Why? Because it is about saving the faltering legitimacy of capitalism, and therefore its social stability, on the one hand. And, on the other hand, because there is a colossal economic perspective at stake: the market for "clean" or "low carbon" technologies called upon to replace fossils very largely (very largely but not at all completely, I will come back to this).

In the spirit of these governments and the capitalist groups they represent, the COP26 will be the grand assembly during which they will try to reach agreement on this policy - an agreement between bandits, in which every one of them will try to do as little as possible... while giving the impression that they are doing more than the others.

The subterfuges of green capitalism

The subterfuges of green capitalism designed to "sweep under the carpet"

the difference between what needs to be done to stop the catastrophe and what can be done to limit it within the capitalist framework are of several types. We should remember that the main ones are as follows: [20]

- Deploy "negative emission technologies" (NET): machines and devices that remove carbon from the atmosphere to store it underground (with no guarantee that it will not re-emerge en masse one day or another). This is called carbon capture and sequestration (CCS);

- Combining these NET and CCS, e.g., using bioenergy with carbon-capture and sequestration (BECCS): instead of burning coal, they burn biomass that grows by absorbing CO₂, capture the CO₂ and store it underground. Over time, the atmospheric CO₂ concentration should drop. Problem: the enormous areas required for the cultivation of biomass;

- Diversify the discourse by speaking not only of carbon-free energy but also of "low carbon" or "low emissions" energies. It has been several years since the IPCC bowed to the nucleocrats: suddenly, atomic energy is now officially classified as "low carbon". The same process is underway for "blue" hydrogen, in other words hydrogen obtained from natural gas (therefore emitting CO₂);

- Increase the natural absorption of CO₂ through photosynthesis (large quantities of trees are planted... without considering the impact on biodiversity, or the fact that absorption will necessarily last only a few decades... and without counting emissions in the event of a forest fire!);

- Buy so-called "emission rights" coming from so-called "clean" investments, or grabbing forests in southern countries (to the detriment of local populations, especially indigenous peoples)... while many studies have shown that the majority of these rights do not correspond to actual emission reductions;

- Orbit particles that will reflect solar radiation back to space ("geo-engineering"). It is the worst of all these "sorcerer's apprentice"

solutions”, because it can be put to the service of the geostrategy of the great powers; moreover, it does not reduce the quantity of CO₂ in the atmosphere (the acidification of the oceans therefore continues). It seems ruled out for the moment, but will come back on to the table when it is found that the other subterfuges above do not stop the disaster.

The devil is in the details

The IEA’s NZE plan is a systematic concretization of this policy, linked to an implementation agenda. The fact that this plan disturbs certain vested interests of fossil capital does not make it an acceptable alternative to mankind. This is very clear when we look at the various concrete implications of the scenario. As they say, the devil is in the details:

- The share of nuclear power in the global energy mix must more than double by 2050 (from 29 EJ in 2020 to 61 EJ in 2050), mainly in the countries of the South; nuclear power will then be the second most important source of electricity after renewables (around 10 per cent of the energy mix); according to the IEA, “nations must (sic) act quickly to extend the life of existing nuclear power plants or develop new ones”;
- The IEA strongly emphasizes the fact that renewables will become the primary source of energy in 2035... But this fact tends to conjure away another: in 2050, according to NZE, just over a fifth of global energy will still be of fossil origin, in particular to supply the cement, steel and petrochemical industries.
- One fifth of fossils is obviously better than four fifths (this is the current share). This brings the annual global CO₂ emissions from 36 Gt to 7.6 Gt. But, to meet “net zero emissions”, these 7.6 Gt must be captured to be injected underground (in reservoirs of which the imperviousness cannot be guaranteed, let us repeat).
- The use of biomass will be multiplied by six by 2050: it will produce 102 exajoules of energy (by the way: this

figure is higher than the sustainability limit for this use of biomass, set by the IPCC at 100 exajoules.). A significant part of the electricity produced by combustion of coal will be produced by combustion of biomass with carbon capture and sequestration (this is the BECCS); 1.3 Gt of CO₂ will thus be added each year to the 7.6 Gt to be injected underground due to the use of CCS in industry.

- This increase in the share of biomass will require an increase in the areas allocated to energy crops (the IEA in particular advocates short-rotation industrial crops, such as willows and miscanthus). It would be necessary to go from 330 million hectares (Mha) to 410 Mha (an increase of 25 per cent). This is equivalent to nearly a third of agricultural land in permanent cultivation (1,500 Mha). The pressure will therefore seriously increase on biodiversity, on water resources and on land use. Socially, the weakest (peasant communities and pastoral peoples, in particular) will pay the price [21].
- Wind and solar energy will be the pillars of renewables, through the construction of giant parks (because the concentration and capitalist appropriation of these free natural resources conditions the surplus profits of multinationals!). The objective, for solar energy, would be to install the equivalent of the current overall supply every day in 2030, and even more in the following years. That is not all: the share of hydroelectricity will double by 2050. The IEA does not specify it, but we can assume that it relies mainly on the construction of large dams. However, these do not constitute a renewable source (they fill up with sediment over time). Never mind: if nuclear power can be said to be “low carbon”, why couldn’t we say that giant dams are “renewable”?
- The share of “low carbon” hydrogen must be multiplied by 16 in 2030 and by 57 in 2050 (!) To reach 13 per cent of final energy in 2050. According to the IEA plan, half of this hydrogen, in 2030, should be “green”, that is to say produced by electrolysis of water (or from other sources - algae for example - which do not emit CO₂). The proportion of “green” hydrogen should amount to 62 per cent in 2050. To

assume that these goals are achievable (it is unlikely, I will come back to that), it follows that 38 per cent of the “low carbon” hydrogen would be produced with CO₂ emissions. But we know the IEA solution: capture-sequestration, hop!

Dress up the exceeding of 1.5 C

Even by deploying to the maximum the subterfuge of “net zero emissions” thanks to the “miracles of technology”, the realization of the scenario of the IEA is far from being evident... in particular from a technological point of view. In this regard, the Agency distinguishes between two phases. Until 2030, it says, the technologies needed for the NZE exist. But beyond 2030, while a key role must be played by CCS and “green” hydrogen, 55 per cent of the cumulative emission reductions attributed respectively to these technologies only exist today at the demonstration stage, or even only as a prototype. In short: we have no certainty that it will work.

In addition, as we have seen, the objectives to be achieved in terms of the deployment of solar power, wind power and the insulation-renovation of buildings, in particular, are extremely restrictive. Even without departing from capitalist logic, it would be rational, in order to reach them, to put the emphasis on public planning, on public investments, on the development of the public sector, on public research and on genuine citizen participation.

But that is out of the question for the IEA. For the Agency “citizen participation” means that governments are taking incentives and constraints to guide “the consumer”. As for the capitalists, they don’t have to worry too much because the NZE scenario is based in particular on two neoliberal principles, which are “technological neutrality” (technologies are implemented according to costs, according to the laws of the market, the costs of research are for the community, the profits for the private sector), on the one hand, and the “orderly transition”

(which avoids as much as possible the destruction of capital before depreciation) [22] on the other hand.

It is high time to deconfine our struggles

We are typically in the culpabilization/repression logic of authoritarian neoliberalism, as it has accelerated in the response to the pandemic. In the IEA scenario, this logic is coupled with counting, in a way characteristic of capitalism, on the providential arrival of a *deus ex technological machina*.

But, this time around, it is very unlikely that the *deus ex machina* will arrive in time. It is very clear in the debate on hydrogen: its production by electrolysis of water would indeed be a “green” solution, but the costs are extremely high. In fact, “technological neutrality” requires that the capitalists will therefore have recourse to “blue” hydrogen [23].

In other words: the “net zero emissions” of the IEA is not a scenario avoiding the “temporary overshoot” of 1.5 C. It is rather an attempt to hide the fact that:

1. This “overshoot” is inevitable if humanity does not break both with the neoliberal market and with capitalist productivism;

2. This overshoot, far from being only “temporary”, has on the contrary a great chance of plunging mankind into a disaster of unimaginable magnitude.

Yes, it is high time to deconfine our struggles! For example, in Belgium, by responding to the call of “Komité Centrales,” the coalition (of which the Anti-capitalist Left, Belgian section of the Fourth International, is part) that refuses to choose between the plague of nuclear power plants and the cholera of gas-fired power stations. [24]

21 May 2021

Translated from *Gauche Anticapitaliste*.

Letter to comrades in solidarity with Nicaragua

12 August 2021, by **Articulación de Movimientos Sociales**

Dear comrades in solidarity with the struggle of our people, fraternal greetings from those who are part of the Articulación de Movimientos Sociales (Articulation of Social Movements) in Nicaragua: a meeting place where different resistance groups converge - collectives of feminists, LGTBIQ+, ecologists, Caribbean peoples, peasants, anti-extractivist movements, student organizations and self-proclaimed groups.

We address you once again, amidst a new escalation of political violence, by which the Ortega-Murillo dictatorship has destroyed the possibility of a way out of the socio-political crisis, this time the electoral route.

In the AMS, we have already pointed out that there are no real signs that genuine elections can take place. The police state remains unwavering, sowing terror by besieging,

sequestering, monitoring and opposing a violent response to anyone demonstrating. There are still 124 political prisoners. In peasant territories and those of indigenous peoples, far from the cameras and the media, political violence has resulted, as before April 2018, in assassinations and expropriations of land to recover common property and grant it to mining extractivism, agribusiness in African palm, wood and livestock.

Reforms allowing a fair electoral process have not taken place; on the contrary, a counter-electoral reform has been voted through, obedient magistrates in tune with the dictatorship have been elected with the blessing of the traditional parties; all with the aim of ensuring control and establishing the necessary mechanisms for electoral fraud. Thus, any possibility of forming a list independent of that of the collaborationist parties or of the

electoral option linked to the big employers allied to Ortega has been eliminated, de facto marginalizing the independent and emerging sectors.

In addition, the dictatorship has increased repression. It isolates and stigmatizes those who oppose the proposed “soft landing”, put forward by big business in order to make pacts with the dictatorship, in order to save the corporatist model of “dialogue and consensus”, implemented during the first eleven years of Ortega’s government. All this in exchange for maintaining shared economic benefits, impunity for crimes against humanity committed in 2018 and for corruption. In other words: agreeing to hold elections without any conditions, in particular the most important requirement: the liberation of political prisoners and the lifting of the police state.

We are therefore faced with the worst-

case scenario, that of open electoral fraud and the continuity of the regime, with an entrepreneurial sector that does not care about the democratic functioning of the institutions. This sector has contented itself with an appearance of democracy with empty votes and negotiations for stability and governance that give priority to its particular interests, which in recent years have coincided with those of Ortega.

And as is usually the case in any fascist state such as Nicaragua, no one escapes its violence. Yesterday they attacked the popular sectors and social movements, protagonists of the insurgency of April 2018; today, they are attacking those who thought that it was possible to negotiate with a fascist government, that there could be a dignified way out and cohabitation, and even pre-candidates compatible with an Orteguismo without Ortega.

We note today that the international community is moved by this new repressive escalation. [25] This international community that pushed

for participation in elections without conditions, that needed to “see” fraud to understand that Nicaragua lives under a dictatorship, even though the documented evidence of the massacre of April 2018, of the “cleansing operation” - which, with arms, destroyed hundreds of lives - was sufficient evidence to understand that we were facing an illegitimate and violent government, which did not hesitate to murder, torture, kidnap and rape prisoners. This community, which is more concerned with maintaining trade agreements than with strengthening human rights.

Today, we are asking you to call on your governments, to put pressure on them to take positions against the dictatorship. We ask you to denounce the fact that the partnership agreements with the Central American countries do not protect human rights, as those who promoted their signature claimed, but rather promote an extractivist, unequal and brutal model of growth that affects not only Nicaragua, but also the entire region, as demonstrated by the succession of

various ecological, social and political crises.

Demand the release of the 134 political prisoners, the lifting of the police state, the return of human rights organisations, a way out without impunity, a transformative justice, a Republic which has never existed in Nicaragua, where social justice, fairness, inclusiveness, freedom and a true democracy based on the sovereignty of the people, not on aspiring monarchs and on elites, reign.

We conclude this message to our sisters and brothers in France with the hope of continuing to weave this bridge of solidarity between peoples, between social movements, who aspire to another possible world.

We maintain the firm conviction that we will emerge from this socio-political crisis thanks to the strength of the people and of those who, at international level, continue to support our demands, because **only the people save the people!**

18 June 2021

Neither Covid nor Macron

11 August 2021, by **Léon Crémieux**

The demonstrations triggered by the diktats concerning the compulsory health pass and denouncing the police state methods of President Macron and education minister Blanquer, the blackmail of dismissal or suspension of wages, are justified. However, the contradictory aspects of these demonstrations obviously make it necessary to put forward a global logic regarding the action to be taken against the pandemic.

This requires two complementary priorities:

- a public health policy and general vaccination of the population to fight Covid 19 and protect against it. A health policy that does not only set itself the goal of avoiding

hospitalizations and the saturation of resuscitation services, but a policy of zero Covid that aims to eradicate the pandemic in France and around the world (as has practically been the case for other pandemics). Hence the link with the campaign for the lifting of patents, while the countries of Europe and North America have monopolized the bulk of the doses, protecting the big pharma trusts and blocking free access to vaccines for other continents - rejection of Macron's policy and the health pass, of a vaccination made indirectly mandatory in a hypocritical and guilty way, for care workers, high school students and those in places of leisure, with the threat of the suspension of the employment contract and the dismissal of

employees. A criminalising policy which makes health control a matter of public order and which turns its back on a genuine vaccination and public health policy, which must reach out to those who are the least vaccinated and, often, most at risk. Worse still, the policy of health passes and paid PCR tests creates a dynamic of avoidance, leading patients to hide their disease, others to look for false health passes, others finally to cease testing or treatment, including for other diseases.

These two demands are presented as contradictory both by the government and by the antivax campaigners, the supporters of general vaccination having to support the obligatory health pass while its opponents ignore

the imperative of vaccination in the name of "individual freedom".

We must reject this binary schema and be at the same time

- for public health and social protection services organising a general vaccination against Covid (including the youngest)
- and for the rejection of the government's authoritarian methods which strengthen the policing and security system developed by Macron and serve as a substitute for an organised vaccination campaign.

We cannot be vague on either of these positions. We must manage them, including in the demonstrations, while trying to give a progressive political dynamic to the current reactions and mobilizations against the health pass and government measures, demonstrations that will continue in the coming weeks (despite the month of August and the entry into force of the pass), relying in particular on the unitary appeal against the government's measures.

Not to beat around the bush, we must clearly say that we are in favour of implementing, through a systematic campaign, the collective vaccination of the entire population against Covid (and certainly that this campaign should be extended by the necessary boosters this autumn), in order to make infection as marginal as possible. This presupposes a systematic organisation of vaccination (whereas today it is essentially based on an individual approach, in particular by making appointments via the Internet on Doctolib), by an active policy of the health services and social security, aimed at unvaccinated people, the people and generations who have remained the most excluded from vaccination, by organising campaigns, not of guilt and threats, but of the necessary transparency, information and conviction. This is not a question of policing or blackmail in employment or education. A large majority of the population is in favour of vaccination and France's delay, compared to the EU average, in the number of people vaccinated is due more to lack of organisation and resources than to the reluctance of the population. There is no need to revisit

the history of the government's vacillations, seeking to constantly hide, by false pretexts, the absence of masks, tests, vaccines and the organisation of mass vaccination. It is, for example, only since early April that 35 major vaccination centres have been opened (previously denounced as "vaccinodromes" by the government), since 16 April that those under 70 without comorbidity factor can make an appointment to be vaccinated (!!!!), since 15 June that 12-17 years can be vaccinated. Similarly, we remember the insistence for months that young people were not at risk, justifying the absence of real health protocols in middle and high schools. Over the months, the government itself has floated complacently about the reluctance to vaccinate the population generally, instead of clearly saying that it should organize global vaccination to combat the virus.

We are not agnostic about the place of vaccinations in health policies. It is not an individual choice, an opinion left to the freedom and choice of each individual. It is a public health issue. This has always been the case (in the absence of medical contra-indication to vaccination) and childhood vaccinations have only ever received marginal refusals (even the introduction of 11 compulsory vaccines four years ago which was done in an equally authoritarian way with total complacency for the pharmaceutical trusts and without any democracy on the usefulness of new vaccines and the use of adjuvants). But during 18 months of the Covid pandemic, treatments and vaccines have, especially in France with Macron's mistakes, fed scepticism, conspiracy theories and the antivax movement. If these go beyond the usual circles, it is because the conspiracy theories (very much present among employees, and even in our trade union circles) have been reinforced by all the errors of government communication, the contradictory statements and decisions of president Macron, prime minister Castex and co. But it is also the boomerang effect of the lack of transparency and association of the people in every aspect in relation to Covid, the profit seeking of the pharmaceutical trusts, often at the expense of patients' health, scandals

created by the marketing or misuse of various medicines (such as Mediator, Levothyrox new formula or Distilbene), and the lack of action by the public authorities in these cases. The same is true of the Chlordecone scandal in the West Indies, which has fuelled the reluctance of part of the population to vaccinate. All this has largely eroded the credibility of government communications in the medical field, linked to the lack of transparency and a policy truly independent of the pharmaceutical trusts. Finally, the cacophony of scientific communication has allowed some social networks and channels such as CNews and BFM to create a fog and a lack of rational benchmarks for part of the population, with no voice and no information being more credible than another. In general, the loss of credibility of political leaders, the disorganization and lack of resources of health and social security services, their increasing physical distancing from the population, linked to the weakness of a social and workers' movement with an audible voice, have accentuated this phenomenon.

It is therefore vital that a clear and audible voice is heard on public health issues. It must make the link between the requirements in this area and the fight for a society based on common goods, public and transparent management of all production and services vital to the population. This applies equally to the fields of health, transport and energy. Similarly, the pandemic highlights the living conditions of the working classes, concentrating several factors that aggravate vulnerability to viruses and diseases in general (housing, food, work conditions, domestic violence). This vulnerability is indeed the consequence of an economic and political system. All these issues are linked and make it even more necessary to refuse to blame the exploited and oppressed who are made responsible for having weaker vaccine protection than the dominant or wealthy classes. Today, if the demonstrations bring together many people hostile to the idea of being vaccinated, with attempts at hegemonization by antivax forces and the far right, they also bring together layers, often militant, of people either

already vaccinated or who will be vaccinated but who reject Macron's diktats and fight the government and its authoritarian policy.

It is indeed a question of public health, of protecting the entire population against this virus. It is a collective issue that concerns the whole of society, like the global issue of the fight against deadly epidemics. It was the discovery of vaccination by the English doctor Jenner at the end of the eighteenth century that made it possible to eradicate smallpox. Poliomyelitis, diphtheria, measles, tetanus and tuberculosis are no longer scourges thanks to vaccines. We have always spoken out in favour of health and prophylaxis policies organised to protect the population. Childhood vaccinations are part of these policies. We therefore do not share the antivax logic, we are fighting it and, on the contrary, we are in favour of the entire population of the planet having rapid and free access to the doses necessary to protect themselves, with, of course, public and transparent control of the products marketed. In the current state of available knowledge, covid vaccines represent a real massive efficacy and do not present any particular risks compared to other vaccines. Of course, we must not deny that there are possible mild or more serious side effects, but unrelated to the catastrophic figures announced on social networks by the antivax movement, which highlight these risks to refuse vaccines - and some of them are antivax in absolute terms. Identical polemics have existed and exist on all other vaccines, smallpox, hepatitis B, BCG, with vaccination campaigns that have encountered real problems, limited but real. As is the case with many drugs, medical procedures or hospitalization itself with nosocomial diseases. This reinforces the need to control and limit these side effects, a solid and well equipped public health system, a socialization of pharmaceutical trusts, a public pharmacovigilance independent of Big Pharma and so on. But this should not make us join the camp of vaccine sceptics.

Moreover, all the reports by epidemiologists warn (and already warned before 2020) that with the ease of international transport of

humans and goods, the consequences of urbanization, deforestation and climate change, and the health and housing situation of the popular classes in many countries, we must expect further health disasters, including zoonoses, like that of Covid 19. So, we might as well try to be clear and consistent. In this, the fight against pandemics and the fight against climate change and the evils of capitalist globalisation are directly and sustainably linked.

The government's hypocrisy hides the need for a genuine public health policy, with the necessary resources, and for general vaccination by placing the responsibility for stopping the fourth wave on care workers and young people, and it is therefore conducting an "emergency" campaign, to bring down the curves, against these categories of the population. However, for months, the situation has been requiring, not police checks, threats of fines, wage suspensions and dismissals, but collective vaccination, in our country and throughout the world, with a public health campaign, especially among the most precarious: organizing tours of health and social service personnel in popular neighbourhoods and among the elderly to bring information and vaccines to those who have the least access to them, making use of the social security service (with the necessary staff and resources) and guaranteeing in a sustainable way a health system that protects the population from new epidemics, with beds and staff in hospitals and in all social protection services.

The question of collective vaccination immediately relates to evils generated or aggravated by the capitalist system: the deterioration of hospital coverage with the lack of beds and health personnel, the lack of social service staff in local authorities, the precarious situation of nursing homes, half of which are private, the retention of pharmaceutical production in the private sector. In departments such as Seine-Saint-Denis, the shortage of social services is evident in the absence of resources to give access to vaccination to vulnerable populations. Finally, the question of the practical and financial management of isolation is still open. The housing conditions

for a large part of the families in the popular classes make any isolation at home inoperative and there is no overall financial coverage of the costs of hotels or dedicated residences.

Macron decreed compulsory vaccination for "certain" professions, stigmatizing "irresponsible" care workers and imposing the health pass for leisure (bars, restaurants, train/plane trips) and shopping centres, customers and traders. Teachers, police officers, soldiers, SNCF agents and airlines (except hostesses and stewards) and postal workers are not yet affected by compulsory vaccination. Health unions have rightly protested against this stigma, a measure that came from a government that, a few months ago, forced health workers who tested positive but were asymptomatic to keep coming to work. Similarly, SUD Santé and the CGT, while refusing the stigmatization of care workers, are multiplying their demands for a public health policy, able to fight against this pandemic and other zoonoses to come!

Immediately and for the coming weeks, we must obviously move towards collective vaccination in France and ensure the lifting of patents, the production and free use of vaccines so that all regions of the world that do not have access to vaccines have them quickly. Sufficient staff, beds and services. A public health policy reversing all cuts made to health services by local authorities.

Fighting for collective vaccination against Covid, as a public health measure and not as "free individual choice" does not mean now imposing mandatory vaccination against Covid which, by taking a legal approach, would also take a penal and repressive reproach! We must therefore fight Macron's hypocritical compulsory vaccination, turning his back on a collective vaccination campaign.

We cannot escape the question of being for or against collective vaccination against Covid as a public health measure aimed at protecting the entire population. Similarly, that, in general, we cannot escape a position for or against childhood vaccinations as they exist today (even if we should be able to debate the

usefulness of the famous 11 mandatory vaccinations), while understanding that vaccination against Covid will probably also become a global imperative in the coming years, this makes it even more necessary to make vaccines free of charge and patents to be lifted.

The hypocritical and restrictive method used to achieve vaccination (the compulsory pass) obviously leads to a great deal of anger never

generated by other compulsory vaccinations. The shortage of hospitals, the opacity of controls on the large pharmaceutical industrial groups, the successive lies and negligence of the government, the frequent lies and the profit seeking of the pharmaceutical trusts, the autocratic and authoritarian methods of the government lead, for some, to a jumbled rejection of vaccination and the health pass, with widespread

discontent and popular demonstrations reminiscent of the beginning of the mobilizations of the *Gilets jaunes*. However, they are essentially motivated by the obligation to introduce the health pass immediately and compulsory vaccination on pain of dismissal or suspension of pay. Supporting this movement must not prevent us from combating ambiguities or, worse still, the positions of the antivax movement on the very need for vaccination.

An open scenario, with nothing decided in Ecuador

10 August 2021, by **Mario Unda**

- Lasso reached the second round with less than 20% of the vote in the first round and with a minimal advantage over Yaku Pérez, Pachakutik's candidate - even if we leave aside the refusal to count the votes, agreed between the CREO movement (Creando Oportunidades), founded by Lasso for the 2013 elections, and the Partido Social Cristiano (Christian Social Party - PSC);

- More than 60% of his votes in the election came from people for whom he was not the first choice - it was not an endorsement of his proposals, but a rejection of Correa's candidacy. It cannot therefore be taken for granted that his voters will support every measure taken by Lasso's government. - And also, a certain parliamentary weakness. The legislative bloc of his CREO party has only 12 MPs out of 137.

To overcome this difficulty, he first set up a surprise alliance including the PSC and the Unión por la Esperanza (UNES), the name adopted by the Correista alliance for the 2021 elections. But the government broke the agreement on the very day the Assembly was installed to form another alliance, this time with the so-called "independents", but also Pachakutik and Izquierda Democrática, which narrowly

managed to win the leadership of the Assembly, after no force was able to obtain a majority on the first day.

This episode also shows that the government has taken the political initiative and seems ready to challenge the hegemony of the right of the Christian Social Party, which the latter has held it since the "return to democracy" in 1979. A dispute whose outcome we will have to wait to see.

Thanks to the clientelist power of attraction that governments have (even more so in a scenario of political fragmentation like that we are experiencing), Lasso co-opted first the deputies of the small local parties and then those who disaffiliated from other political parties, forming with them the parliamentary group *Bancada del Acuerdo (BAN)*, with four former Social-Christians, two former members of ID of social democratic leanings tendencies and a former Pachakutik supporter. With 26 members, it is currently the second largest group, but it is still far from the majority, even if we might think that the disaffiliations are not over and that they could continue throughout the period.

The agreement by which the Assembly authorities were appointed is also

precarious: now the ID has 16 MPs and Pachakutik has 26. As together with the BAN they have just enough to get a majority, each vote could put them on the brink of defeat.

When it comes to passing laws, the government will have to turn to other parliamentary groups: there will always be a doubt whether or not it will be successful in obtaining a majority, with whom and at what cost.

For the time being, this alliance has been maintained, despite some setbacks, such as the loss of the chairing of the strategic economic committee, which went to a member of parliament from Pachakutik, in agreement with the PSC and the UNES. But the real test of its stability will come with bills that are genuinely relevant to the government's neoliberal agenda and that have not yet been sent to the Assembly.

Economic policy

Lasso's economic policy offers nothing new. It is based on the application of the letter of intent that the Moreno government (2017-2021) signed with the IMF and whose application - although partial - was the trigger for the massive demonstrations of

October 2019.

This includes maintaining the mechanism of monthly increases in gasoline prices, introduced by the regime taking advantage of the situation created by the pandemic. A planned employment reform aims to extend the precarious employment already initiated with the hypocritical "law on humanitarian aid" approved by Moreno: extend part-time contracts, facilitate temporary contracts and make dismissals less expensive, which will generally reduce employment costs.

It is also proposed to step up trade opening, starting with an agreement with Mexico as a gateway to the Pacific Alliance and having agreements on the agenda with the United States, China and South Korea, among others.

Privatization, through which the new government hopes to attract foreign investment, is also at the top of the list: the privatization of refineries, a port for fuel distribution, highways, the state telephone company (one of the Ecuadorian companies with the highest annual turnover), the country's second largest bank, currently in public hands, and probably hydroelectric power stations.

If privatisation make it possible to increase resources initially, in the medium term they will lead to a significant reduction, eliminating companies that have a high profitability. The government will therefore need sources of funding. Perhaps the planned tax reform will bring something, depending on the increase in the census of taxpayers: there is talk of an increase in VAT and the finance minister has already said that those who earn more than \$500 a month will have to make a greater effort - in a country where the minimum wage is \$400 and where the cost of the basic food basket exceeds \$700 per month. Larger amounts are expected to come from an aggressive deepening of oil and mining extractivism and a new foreign debt, accentuating the dependent nature of the Ecuadorian economy.

With such an economic policy, social conflict can break out at any time. To

prevent this, the government is targeting in three directions: a renegotiation with the IMF (which has already said it will not change the measures, but only the pace of their implementation, with the aim of postponing foreseeable social protests), social policies and "governability".

Social policies

With its social policies, the government hopes to counter popular discontent. The social inclusion minister has announced the creation of the so-called "Bono Prospera" voucher - in addition to those maintained by the previous government, which affect 1,400,000 families, but for which there would only be funding until October. The new voucher would cover 400,000 families, but neither its amount nor its operation have yet been announced.

It also proposed to provide 200,000 housing units free of charge in the countryside and to "promote the construction" of another 500,000 in urban areas; this would mean the construction of 175,000 housing units per year, with the idea of harmonizing "profitability and social solidarity". In the same vein, Lasso has publicly asked the Association of Ecuadorian Banks (Asobancos) to engage in a microcredit line at an interest rate of 1% and with longer maturities. Savings and credit cooperatives and popular financing institutions have expressed their willingness to do so, but a response is still awaited from Asobancos which has remained cautiously silent. However, a former bank chief executive added his voice to the idea, noting that all that is needed is for the finance minister to meet with bank owners. For the time being, the agriculture minister has reaffirmed that small farmers will receive loans at an interest rate of 1% for a period of 30 years and Lasso himself has declared that for this purpose "at least one billion dollars" will be allocated.

Perhaps the most publicized social policy measure was the offer to vaccinate 9 million people in the first 100 days of the government. According to official data, 2.7 million

people [out of a population of 17 million] have already received at least one dose, and the health minister has announced that 6 million doses of China's new CanSino vaccine are expected. Meanwhile, the situation in hospitals remains dramatic, with no supplies or medicines to treat Covid patients... or other inpatients.

As far as wages are concerned, the employment minister has said that the offer made during the electoral campaign to increase the minimum wage to 500 dollars per month will be carried out... while specifying that this will be done gradually over the four years of government.

It remains to be seen which of these policies will be implemented, but it is clear that they depend on the money the government is able to mobilise and on the social impact of economic policies. As has already been observed under the Moreno government, neoliberal economic policies can liquidate the claims of social policy because of the disastrous effects they have on the living conditions of the majority of the population. But, on the other hand, it is clear that they will also depend on another factor: the existence of political agreements between economic power groups, which have generally been very reticent about any measures, even slightly redistributive. This aspect will have a lot of weight, especially in the offers of microcredit and wage increases.

"Governability" and the armed forces

The relative weakness with which the government began its term of office highlights concerns about "governability" and social legitimacy. The government has adopted a discourse that aims to win the acceptance of a majority of the population, taking advantage of the enormous consensus it has achieved among the dominant classes and in large sectors of the middle classes, as well as the spirit of expectation that usually prevails among the population during the first months.

On the one hand, it seeks to legitimize itself within the anti-Correa environment that allowed it to triumph in the second round: it has decreed an “ethical code” as a supposed remedy for corruption, but which seems above all intended to preserve “state secrets”; it has announced that it would sell the public media that had been in the hands of the state since the banking crisis of 1999-2000 and says it is giving up control of the media, which would henceforth be “self-regulated”, and that from now on the national channels would no longer be under its command.

On the other hand, it promotes a discourse on rights and inclusion, promising to end gender violence: “The fight for gender equality is not just about women. It is a national problem. An Ecuadorian problem that needs to be addressed by the government,” Lasso said in his inaugural speech on 24 May. Previously, he had already promised to respect the ruling of the Constitutional Court which decriminalized abortion in the event of pregnancy caused by rape. The new Human Rights Secretary announced the creation of an undersecretariat serving the LGBTIQ+ population, including in the areas of health, education and judicial services, as well as 24/7 health centres to provide comprehensive care to female victims of gender-based violence. The government is committed, she said, to “eradicating all forms of discrimination and violence.”

A nod has also been made to ecology: Lasso announced that the name of the environment and water ministry will be changed to the environment, water and ecological transition ministry. “The ecological transition is not a brake on development,” he said. “Going towards circular, inexhaustible, even regenerating forms of production means growth thanks to clean industries, connected to new technologies”. “Green capitalism” is beginning to make its way and will surely clash with the resistance to extractivism.

The same objective is pursued by the announcements mentioned concerning vaccination, housing and microcredit. The first is aimed at the general

population, who have had enough of the Moreno government’s mishandling of the pandemic. The other two are aimed at a large sector of the lower classes, composed of small landowners, usually despoiled by big capital, and now subject to the risks of the pandemic.

The focus on the countryside is surely dictated by the high level of conflict that manifested itself openly in October 2019. It is complemented by the creation of the Secretariat for the Management and Development of Peoples and Nationalities, whose leadership was entrusted to Luis Pachala, an indigenous person who was already a deputy from the province of Bolivar for the CREO movement in the period 2017-2021, but who failed to get re-elected in these last elections. He is no novice in this field: in 2003, under the government of Lucio Gutiérrez, he founded the Fedepicne, an organization that sought to “break the monopoly of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) and Pachakutik”. He will have the rank of minister. Meanwhile, sectors linked to the Federación Ecuatoriana de Indígenas Evangélicos (Federation of Evangelical Indigenous Peoples and Organizations of Ecuador - FEINE) presented Lasso with the baton of command, at a ceremony held in Colta, in the province of Chimborazo, an act that was repeated almost immediately in Tamboloma, a province of Tungurahuae.

The new employment reform aims to create the conditions to “normalize” the overexploitation of labour, but also to fragment the working class and widen the gap between stable employees and the most precarious sector. Since “nothing is more precarious than not having a job” offering precarious jobs may seem acceptable to those who are unemployed or underemployed. And it will surely be in tune with the mentality of the middle classes who have adhered to the neoliberal discourse.

Discussions with hauliers are an important part of this same strategy, especially after the events of 2019. In the initial negotiations, hauliers indicated that they were prepared to

accept that gasoline would continue to increase each month in exchange for a targeted subsidy and increased fares.

All this is aimed at pre-emptively disabling social protests and creating the conditions for dividing the possible popular bloc fighting against the IMF’s policies.

But in case this does not happen, repression is already being prepared. Lasso has announced that he will strengthen the armed forces to act in the field of internal control, on the pretext of the presence of micro-drug trafficking mafias. And at the military high command renewal ceremony, he stated unequivocally: “There will be no tolerance for groups that act outside the institutional framework and seek to destabilize the country through anarchy. We are committed to social peace and tranquillity for citizens.” He also called the savage crackdown unleashed in October 2019, which left a dozen people dead, more than a thousand injured, more than a thousand arrests and several criminal trials against protesters and social leaders, a “heroic performance.”

What about the left?

In this context, the left has not started off well. The conflict over the political representation of the people was evident in the elections in February and April. *Correismo* can no longer claim to be the exclusive representative of the popular sectors – it has been losing votes from 2013 until today. Moreover, the behaviour of the parliamentary left in recent weeks is far from the image it wants to give of itself: having the largest parliamentary group (but far from guaranteeing it a majority as it had during the ten years of *Correismo*), it has chosen to ally with the right to capture leadership positions in the National Assembly. But the alliance failed because CREO withdrew. So far, the UNES and PSC benches continue to act in agreement; it remains to be seen whether they will do so when the legislative work has to address central political issues. *Correismo* intends to present itself as the only opposition to

the neoliberal measures to be taken by the new government and, from there, to recover political positions. But it knows that, in order to do so, it will have to get rid of Pachakutik and the social movements, in particular CONAIE and the Frente Unitario de Trabajadores (FUT - United Workers' Front), which explains the deluge of attacks it has directed against them.

A significant sector of the lower classes has indicated that it is looking for a new political representation. This explains the support for Pachakutik, while the latter does not seem to have been sufficiently prepared to respond to it. It began by establishing an agreement with the ID but does not seem to have had a well-defined strategy of action and alliances, under pressure from local and particular interests. Finally, together with the ID, it chose to establish an agreement with CREO and its satellite BAN. They thus took an important symbolic step by electing Guadalupe Llori, an

Amazonian woman persecuted since the beginning of *Correismo*, as President of the Assembly; but Llori and other members of the Assembly were at various times carried away by the discourse of "governability". It is too early to draw any conclusions from this, because so far only the Assembly's directive and the composition of the legislative committees have been discussed. In any case, the test will come for Pachakutik with the bills that Lasso will introduce to render the implementation of his neoliberal proposal viable.

At the moment, social organizations seem to be in a wait-and-see period. CONAIE organized some mobilizations in the provinces of Imbabura and Cotopaxi which, although they did not involve a very large number of participants, were important in establishing their predisposition to mobilize. The same goes for the actions undertaken by the FUT. In

addition, CONAIE is about to hold its congress, at which its governing council is to be renewed.

Under these conditions, future tasks continue to revolve around the strengthening of social organizations, the search for concrete spaces of unity between the main organizations of the popular movement and between them and the political representations. It is necessary to maintain contact between social and political organizations and this important segment of the people which is looking for new forms of representation, beyond *Correismo* and the right. That is why there is an urgent need to take formal measures in the construction of a political and programmatic space that does not stop at the polarisation between populism and neoliberalism.

It is an open scenario, and perhaps not the best one, but nothing has been decided and everything will depend on what is done from now on.

The single party system faced with the crisis

9 August 2021, by **Alina Bárbara López Hernández**

Not having to negotiate power, taking it for granted that it will not be disputed, leads politically to a harmful attitude that assumes any hint of social pressure is unacceptable. When it occurs, the consequent reaction shows absolute ineptitude covered with recklessness.

This authoritarian perspective is also strengthened by the teleological, mechanistic and anti-Marxist approach to history which assumes that the socialist revolution, once victorious, cannot go backwards. This extreme optimism closes off the possibility of any process of successful improvement or reform.

The collapse of the socialist camp shattered many constitutions that declared it irreversible. It is not the text in a legal treaty that counts, but the involvement of the people who find in that system the embodiment of their

aspirations and who can modify it with that objective in mind.

The pressure of the majorities from below is what has made political systems evolve from ancient times until today. In the one-party model of bureaucratic socialism, the real and spontaneous participation of the citizenry in political activity is not allowed. This discriminatory condition explains why, faced with the July 11 social protests, the Party reacted with brutality, in an authoritarian way rather than politically.

The lesson of thirty years ago was not learned in Cuba. In 2002, more than ten years after the disintegration of the USSR, a constitutional article declared socialism was irreversible, while the 2019 Constitution established that the Party is the "superior leading force of society and the State (...)". From the top of that

kind of watchtower, the Party should have been in a better position to see that the conditions for a social explosion existed in Cuba. But not only was it not, but it has also demonstrated its incapacity to interpret the true causes of the conflict and to act according

The real causes of 11-J

The internal contradictions of social processes are the fundamental and determining factors. This principle of materialist dialectics is not applied by the Party in spite of its declared Marxist affiliation. Therefore, in the face of the social unrest, it has preferred to stick to a narrative that explains the facts based solely on external factors, real but not determinant: the pressures of the US

blockade on Cuba, a soft coup, a fourth generation war.

Up to now, there has not been a deep and self-critical analysis by the Party and its responsibility for the crisis. If there were, they would have accepted that none of the key proposals that in recent times created hope for changes to transform socialism from above came to very much. They were:

1. A reform process announced in 2007, fourteen years ago now, which promised - clarifying that it would do so "without haste" - "structural and conceptual changes" that we are still waiting for in the Cuban economy. And I say in the economy because the reform process never included the political dimension.

2. A Constitution approved in 2019 that, despite the debate it raised and the level of expectations for the inclusion of the concept of a Socialist State of Law, did not allow any approach aimed at the transformation of the political system.

3. Three Party Congresses: the 6th, 7th and 8th, which during three decades, actually engaged less and less with the idea of reforming the model. In the last one, a little more than three months ago, a bucket of cold water was basically poured over the people, by perpetuating the thesis of immobility and not addressing the serious social and political problems that had generated concern, not only among the youth but also in society as a whole.

A socialist system that cannot be influenced from below is an impossibility, and ours is trapped in a flagrant contradiction: we have approved a Constitution that is not viable. One part of it tends to sustain a situation of violation of liberties - especially in its Article 5 which declares the superiority of the single Party- while another part recognizes such rights and liberties in a Socialist State of Law.

No exclusively economic reformist process is feasible, because when the citizenry is not actively involved in controlling the direction, results and speed of the transformations. So changes run the risk of being

dismantled or slowed down. Cuba has been no exception. The bureaucracy has become a "class for itself" within society and hinders changes and reforms that, although it accepts on paper, it has slowed down in practice.

A great unresolved conflict wherever bureaucratic socialism was established, is that of converting state property into true social property. This aspiration has been utopian due to the lack of democratization, the failures of citizen participation in economic decisions and the fact that the unions are no longer organizations that defend the interests of workers.

The arrogant attitude of the Party is typical of a political model that failed. In February 1989, the Soviet magazine Sputnik devoted an issue to the stasis or inertia that characterized the period of Leonid Brezhnev, there they asked these questions:

"Should the Party leadership become a special organ of power, which is above all other organs? If the Central Committee is a special organ of power, how do we control it? Can its decisions be protested as unconstitutional? Who is responsible in the event of failure of a decreed measure? If this superior organ in fact directs the country, should not then all the people elect it?"

In this political model the Party is selective, a "vanguard", and not a popular party open to all, so that if it declares itself as a force Superior to society it also sets itself above the people. For this not to be so, the people should be able to elect those who head the Party, and this is not allowed. If it is over and above everybody, and it is not "an electoral party", it is out of the people's control. That political model is the one that must be changed.

The younger sectors have no memory of the initial and most successful stages of social policy brought about by the revolutionary process. To them, the revolutionary epic, the evident transformations and the benefits of the first decades have little impact.

They have known the last thirty years, with its legacy of poverty, a sustained increase in inequality, failed life

prospects and the anticipation of emigration at ever-younger ages. The arrival of the Internet has coordinated them as a generation, allowing them to contrast opinions, build virtual spaces for participation, which the political model denies them, and generate actions.

So we must recognize that the main contradictions that led to the 11th July protests are eminently political. The demands were not only for food and medicine or against the power cuts. These may have been the catalyst, but the "freedom" slogans that swept the island indicate the demand of the citizens to be recognized in a political process that has ignored them up to now

The party was totally disorientated by the 11th July events. This was shown by:

- the brutal scenes of repression against the demonstrators;
- the declarations calling for violence by the newly appointed first secretary of the Party - later toned down;
- an urgent meeting of the Political Bureau the day after the events -of which nothing has been revealed;
- and the usual organised acts of revolutionary reaffirmation almost a week later.

However, although it never acknowledges or apologizes, it knows that it made a very costly mistake.

Voices have been raised from sectors of the left and some prestigious figures and organizations, demanding respect for the political rights of peaceful demonstration and for freedom of expression in Cuba. Several governments, and the European Union as a bloc, have criticized the violent repression, which is certainly unconstitutional.

Palliative measures to alleviate the dramatic situation of shortages are already beginning to be taken: an increase, from this month until December, of rice, a staple food in the standard food basket; free distribution of products donated to Cuba (grains, pasta, sugar, and in some cases oil and meat products); a price reduction of some services of Etecsa, the communications monopoly.

In addition, long-standing requests have now been approved that would

have served to mitigate the crisis much earlier: import of food and medicines without restrictions and free of customs charges; credit sales in stores. Others may be announced in the coming days.

There is no doubt that the situation will be somewhat alleviated, but the Party must be very aware that none of these decisions will solve the Cuban dilemma which is, as I have already stated, of a political nature.

Perhaps they believe that by applying these palliatives they are discovering a new politics. They are wrong. Thousands of years ago, the Latin poet Juvenal, in his Satire X, eternalized a phrase that designated the practice of the rulers of his time: "Bread and circuses". It was the plan of Roman politicians to win over the urban plebs in exchange for wheat and entertainments so that they would lose their critical spirit, feeling satisfied by the false generosity of the rulers...

In Cuba we need bread and circuses, we are a suffering people, but - above

all - we need to govern from below. We need to be the Senate, since our Senate has disappeared from the political scene. There is not a single statement from any member of the National Assembly of People's Power as such, in spite of the seriousness of the violent acts against a part of the people they are supposed to represent.

They have violated the legislative schedule saying it is impossible to meet in the middle of a pandemic. However, under the same conditions, the Party held its 8th congress and, after July 11, massive activities were organised in support of the government in all the provinces.

There has not yet been an official pronouncement from the Party leadership analyzing the facts, offering exact figures of the cities and towns involved, participants in the protests, people arrested and prosecuted. It was of no use to the single Party to have analyzed in the Political Bureau, a few days before the

8th Congress, a report entitled: "Study of the socio-political climate of Cuban society". They understood nothing of that climate, or those who wrote the report did not portray reality.

Single Party bureaucratic socialism creates a kind of political demon that escapes the rule of law, since it places itself above it, accentuates political extremism and separates itself from the citizenry. So far all models with these characteristics, far from leading to a socialist society, have disguised a state capitalism with features of corruption and elitism.

It is time to debate this and organize ourselves to change it. It is possible now. As the president of the People's Supreme Court declared to the international press, in Cuba the Constitution guarantees the right to peaceful demonstration.

30 July 2021

Translated from *La Joven Cuba*.

European Union, Libya: violence against migrants

8 August 2021, by **Editors l'Anticapitaliste**

Here are some excerpts:

The report found that since late 2020 Libya's Directorate for Combatting Illegal Migration (DCIM), a department of the interior ministry, had legitimized abuse by integrating two new detention centres (Al-Mabani and al-Zawiya) under its structure where hundreds of refugees and migrants had been forcibly disappeared in previous years by militias. At one recently rebranded centre, survivors said guards raped women and subjected them to sexual violence including by coercing them into sex in exchange for food or their freedom.

The report also highlights the ongoing complicity of European states that have shamefully continued to enable and assist Libyan coastguards in capturing people at sea and forcibly returning them to the hellscape of detention in Libya, despite knowing full well the horrors they will endure.

In the first half of 2021, more than 7,000 people intercepted at sea were forcibly returned to Al-Mabani.

Detainees held there told Amnesty International they faced torture and other ill-treatment, cruel and inhuman detention conditions, extortion and forced labour. Some also reported being subjected to invasive,

humiliating and violent strip-searches.

Tripoli's Shara' al-Zawiya centre is a facility which was also previously run by non-affiliated militias and was recently integrated under DCIM and designated for people in vulnerable situations. [...] Three women also said that two babies detained with their mothers after an attempted sea crossing had died in early 2021 after guards refused to transfer them to hospital for critical medical treatment.

Between January and June 2021, the EU-backed Libyan coastguards intercepted around 15,000 people at sea and returned them to Libya - more than in all of 2020 - during what they

describe as “rescue” missions.

People interviewed by Amnesty International consistently described Libyan coastguards’ conduct as negligent and abusive. Survivors described how Libyan coastguards deliberately damaged their boats, in some cases causing them to capsize, leading refugees and migrants to drown on at least two occasions. One eyewitness said after Libyan

coastguards caused a dinghy to capsize, they filmed the incident with their phones instead of instead of rescuing all survivors.

Refugees and migrants told Amnesty International that as they attempted sea crossings, they frequently saw aircraft overhead or ships nearby that did not offer them assistance before the Libyan coastguards’ arrival.

Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard agency, has carried out aerial surveillance over the Mediterranean to identify refugee and migrants’ boats at sea and has operated a drone over this route since May 2021. European navies have largely abandoned the central Mediterranean to avoid having to rescue refugee and migrants’ boats in distress.

The Earth is Burning

7 August 2021, by Phil Hearse

At the end of January this year, mainstream pro-capitalist politicians probably felt a sigh of relief. Donald Trump had been evicted from the White House and a vaccine to combat the corona virus had been discovered —indeed three of them together. Normal service for world capitalism could be resumed.

Alas, it was not to be. Despite high levels of vaccination in a few rich countries, vaccine nationalism and the fast-spreading Delta variant have combined to ensure a rapid increase in the levels of infection. At the same time extreme weather events have sounded an ominous warning note. Scientists are warning that super high temperatures and disastrous weather events are going to be the new normal. Why?

Let’s start with the high pressure heat ‘dome’ that has caused disaster for farming and rural communities in Oregon, and as far north as Vancouver in Canada. The immediate cause of this is high sea temperatures causing storms off Japan in the North Pacific. These have combined to create a ‘Rossby wave’ of high temperatures stretching hundreds of miles into the atmosphere and dragged eastwards by the Jet Stream, ending up as the heat dome over the North West US coast and part of Canada. But the root cause is high sea temperatures.

The US-Canada heat dome is

worsened by ground level factors, namely long-term drought conditions and tinder-dry woodland and grassland. The US West is facing a systemic water crisis as the giant aquifer under the Rockies dries out and Lake Mead, created in Boulder Canyon by the Hoover Dam, sinks to record lows. [26] If this decline continues, water supplies to Arizona and Nevada are under immediate threat. In the longer term California also faces a water crisis.

Massively high temperatures are hitting the eastern Mediterranean and causing catastrophic fires in Turkey’s star tourist resorts like Bodrum and Antalya. Right-wing Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was quick to blame the Kurdish rebels of the PKK (Kurdish Workers’ Party) for starting the fires, an absurdity given the geographical scope of the inferno. The Turkish fires are part of the East Mediterranean high temperature process affecting Greece and Italy as well as Turkey, and extending northwards into Lebanon, Syria, Iran and Iraq. Wildfires have threatened the outskirts of Catania, second city of Sicily, and the northern suburbs of Athens, and stretched into Bosnia and Croatia.

Obviously, the tourist industry in many of these countries, already battered by the pandemic, is now facing major losses. The southern coastal resorts of Turkey, centre of a hugely profitable

industry, have always been known for high temperatures —the message has been only to go on holiday there if you can cope with regular temperatures of 35°. But now it’s more like 40°+, impossible temperatures for many tourists. The same is true for many parts of the Mediterranean, as far West as Portugal. This time round, Sardinia, far to the West, has also been badly affected by wildfires.

But inland in many countries of the Med and the Middle East, and especially in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and southern Iran, the heat and water crisis are causing massive hardship for ordinary people. Little covered in the mainstream media, there has been a revolt among the ethnically Arab people in Khuzestan, the southern Iranian region bordering Iraq. They accuse the Iranian government of corruption and incompetence in water management. The government has responded to protests with its usual brutality. [27]

On a much larger scale, the cities of Iraq, especially in the south, are suffering drastic heat levels and water shortages. While the country has seen its water supply reduced because of Turkey and Syria taking more water from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers that supply Iraq, government corruption and infrastructure collapse mean that ordinary people are struggling to get water needed for washing and cooking. Climate change

also plays a big role. As one Chatham House commentator puts it:

Historically, Iraq lay claim to one of the most abundant water supplies in the Middle East. But the flow of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers has reduced by up to 40% since the 1970s, due in part to the actions of neighbouring countries, in particular Turkey, upstream.

Rising temperatures and reduced rainfall due to climate change are also negatively impacting Iraq's water reserves. [28]

While the water crisis and firestorms developed globally in July, in China massive floods inundated Zhengzhou, the major city of Henan province, killing dozens on the swamped metro system. However, it is not simply a matter of wildfires in Oregon and the Mediterranean while there are floods in China. The Zhengzhou floods were immediately preceded by days of temperatures in the high 30s that created the atmospheric conditions for a huge downpour and flooding. [29] The China Meteorological Administration blamed the storm on strong and sustained subtropical high-pressure systems that, along with Typhoon In-fa approaching South China, pushed water vapour from the sea to Henan. Global heating causing rising sea temperatures once again played a deadly role.

Business websites unsurprisingly raised the alarm that Zhengzhou is a major centre for the manufacture of iPhones, as well as being a centre of general manufacturing and food production. As in China, Western commentators are beginning to wonder if China's flood and emergency rescue systems are up to the job. The emphasis is on managing the disasters caused by climate change, not on taking decisive action to reduce its impact and extent. 'Learn to live with it' is becoming the right-wing mantra for climate change and Covid-19.

If all this were not enough, huge

wildfires in the Yakutsk region of Siberia have created the worst pollution crisis ever in a major city, with chemicals like ozone, benzene and hydrogen cyanide being released. The exact source of this poisonous mixture is not known. What is clear is that this area has the reputation of being one of the coldest in the world and is now involved in its own heating crisis, making the area doubly unliveable.

And finally there is the flooding in India from an exceptionally intense monsoon season, and the sudden dramatic storms in Germany that have washed away small towns and killed more than 150 people.

What does all this mean for the world's climate? This is summed up by veteran environmental campaigner Fred Pearce:

"Some of the most alarming science surrounding climate change is the discovery that it may not happen incrementally — as a steadily rising line on a graph — but in a series of lurches as various 'tipping points' are passed. And now comes a new concern: These tipping points can form a cascade, with each one triggering others, creating an irreversible shift to a hotter world. A new study suggests that changes to ocean circulation could be the driver of such a cascade. The potential tipping points come in three forms: runaway loss of ice sheets that accelerate sea level rise; forests and other natural carbon stores such as permafrost releasing those stores into the atmosphere as carbon dioxide (CO₂), accelerating warming; and the disabling of the ocean circulation system." [30]

Briefly summed up, potential tipping points that were once considered independent of one another are now seen as part of a world system. Global heating, melting ice sheets and glaciers, and rising temperatures on land and sea could be pushing a catastrophic rise in sea levels and an average temperature rise of 3°, way in excess of the Paris target of 1.5°, leading to a global catastrophe.

Certainly large parts of the world are set for routine summer temperatures

of 40°—including Britain. A study in published in the Royal Meteorological Society's International Journal of Climatology, found that Britain's climate is becoming hotter and wetter, and that summer temperatures are likely to reach 40° by 2040 if present trends continue.

That of course is the key question—what will be done to combat global heating and its disastrous effects. When the flooding disaster struck Germany and Belgium in July, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, due to leave office within weeks, emotionally stated her grief and said that Germany would have to 'do more'. These mealy-mouthed words are the typical response of mainstream capitalist politicians who have failed to meet even the inadequate targets set by the Paris Climate Agreement in 2015.

The Guardian's acute analyst Aditya Chakroborty predicts a change of tack among right wing politicians. Climate change denial is out, and the new line will be that climate change is inevitable and we will 'just have to live with it'. Just like we are being told we will just have to live with the Covid-19 pandemic. 'We' is in this context a slippery term. In the near and medium future those sections of the world's populations who have abundant water supplies, secure food, working electricity and air conditioning, and the resources to move where they live, will 'live with' climate change much more easily than the poor—the poor in the Global South and the poor also in the advanced countries, much more likely to be the victims of fire and flood.

In his excellent new book *Fight the Fire*, Jonathan Neale outlined a plan to cut CO₂ emissions by 90% and other harmful emissions by 50-75%, through a conversion of heating and other domestic energy, transport and industry to sustainable electricity sources, especially through wind and solar power. This involves substantial changes to the energy grid, says Neale

What stands in the way of this plan? The answer is basically fossil fuel capitalism, whose companies make up a significant percentage of international stock markets. This of

course involves both oil and coal, and the countries that have vast reserves of these resources, like Australia, China, India and Saudi Arabia. But it's more than that. It's also the structure of production that is skewed towards wasteful, unnecessary and especially luxury, goods. The transformation away from fossil fuel capitalism means a major social and political transformation.

The big issues of climate change will be debated at the November COP environment conference in Glasgow.

But whatever is agreed there, humanity for the moment can only be in the process of mitigating climate change, not stopping it. Climate change is already underway. The fact that the UK is predicted to have average summer temperatures of 40% by 2040 does not mean we will have mild temperatures until then. On the contrary, the recent report by the independent Climate Change Committee warns of rising temperatures and more storms and floods in the short and medium term. The results of this report are summed

up on the [UK Greenpeace site](#).

The disastrous fires in the Mediterranean, Siberia and North America this year are not something just affecting Other People. Britain and Northern Europe are integrated into world weather systems and will suffer the results of global heating too. Without major political change on the climate, the future is grim.

6 August 2021

Source *Anti*Capitalist Resistance*.

A Multitude in Precarious Conditions - On the Colombian Strikes

6 August 2021, by **Leopoldo Múnera Ruiz**

Tragic Action

The proposed tax reform, like Llorente's flower vase, [31] offered the opportunity for multiple social uprisings to converge, explosions that had neither a unitary nor a central orientation. A multitude, made up of individuals who had been forced to scrounge enough resources for their nuclear families' subsistence, saw through the cynicism of the government, which wanted to increase its tax revenue by sacrificing workers' salaries to benefit big capital. Cynicism, in this context, means "the shameless practice and defense of reprehensible actions and practices." To have named the tax reform "The Law of Sustainable Solidarity" (Ley de la solidaridad sostenible), was an obscene way of mocking people who depended either on their own efforts or on the real solidarity of their closest friends and family members, and in many cases, on public and private charity, to survive. Thus, the decision to strike was first motivated by a rather broad and complex assemblage of affects and feelings, primarily those of anger and indignation.

Those who have actively led the strike

and joined the mobilization in the streets have suffered and endured the effects of the pandemic. Under a stratified and hierarchized health system, most people do not have proper access to health care, nor do they have the slightest chance of flying to Florida to be vaccinated in the U.S. Most have been waiting for weeks to even be tested for Covid-19 if they were so lucky. Everyone has a mother, or an uncle, or a sister, or a comrade, who has been sent back home from the hospital, only to end up days later in overcrowded intensive care units. Everyone has friends who got infected and then died because they were forced to go to the streets to have something to eat, or grandparents who are still waiting for the first dose of the vaccine, even though they were scheduled to have been fully vaccinated already. The "demonstrators" ("manifestantes"), as they have been called by mainstream social media, clearly and rationally understand the dangers to which they are exposed under a general strike that requires their collective presence in the streets. And they continue to participate in public and collective actions that are repressed by the state, both legally and illegally. Doing so, they expose themselves to the

dangers of Covid-19 and to the bullets fired by the agents of an order they wish to endure no more.

The so-called "great thinkers" ("mentes lúcidas") and "talking heads" ("voces limpias") who criticize the protesters from intellectual positions they regard as "unpolluted" are wrong to characterize them as irrational and irresponsible, as their protests have a rather clear rationale behind them. The protesters are choosing the dangers of the pandemic because they do not want to be subjected any longer to a social order that condemns them to poverty and misery, the same order that transforms them into cheap labor while making them complicit in their own exploitation—as in the case of "self-entrepreneurs on bicycles" (empreendedores en bicicleta). [32]

The 2021 strike has all the characteristics of a tragic action, as in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. Agamemnon had to sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia, to save the Achaean warriors who were fighting alongside him against Troy; he did so, even as he knew of his dreadful destiny of suffering at the hands of Clytemnestra on his way back to Mycenae. Colombian protesters face the same

tragic fate in the streets, as they are forced to choose, during the worst peak of the pandemic, what they consider to be the lesser of two evils. Knowing full well that they might be putting their lives at risk, they nevertheless consider the strengthening of the economic, political, and social order that has governed Colombia since the end of the twentieth century to be the greater evil.

First Sidenote

Last week (May 17-23, 2021) I gave a lecture on violence and social movements at an event organized by a collective from the Department of Law and Political Science at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia. In that lecture I argued that violence has a structuring dimension that precludes reducing it to pure instrumentality. Violence structures subjectivities, social relations, territories, forms of life and collective actions. Consequently, violence can distort the meaning of a protest, especially when agents who are external to the protest take advantage of it. Two days ago (May 25th) I was contacted by three young activists from Cali's "points of resistance" (puntos de resistencia); one of them studied at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia and is currently finishing his degree at the Universidad del Valle, the other two, a woman and a man, survive through taking on odd jobs (rebusque). They told me: "although we did not understand everything that you said, we think that we are partially in agreement, but we would like to clarify one thing. We are the children of violence. We have grown up amid violence. We are not only talking about the violence of hunger, which is also violence, but the violence of the gangs, the paramilitaries, the guerrilla, the police, the military, the robbers, the thieves, the violence that you all call micro-traffic, and the violence that our mothers and sisters face in our houses. We are neither 'good law-abiding' citizens (personas 'de bien'), nor 'respectful' persons (gente 'sana') wearing white shirts. [33] We know that violence has 'marked' us, we are migrants from the countryside, forcefully displaced; but we are not 'cats' who have suddenly discovered violence. [34] There is desperate

'strife' ('cólicos') in our communities. Because of that, we do not want to return to the violence into which the government and the ruling class of this country want to confine us. The points of resistance are the safest places in our cities. We try to control the violence during the strike, but when they shoot at us, torture, and rape us too, violence sprouts from even the most peaceful bodies. We are trying to justify nothing. We are only trying to tell you that we are made of violence and yet, that we continue to resist and want to overcome that violence, but it is very hard to do so in this shitty society."

The New Proletariat, or the Multitude in Precarious Conditions

The 2021 protests share a common element that distinguish them from other prior protests, except perhaps the ones that took place in 2019. Groups participate in these protests that are so heterogeneous that they have defied sociologists' ability to characterize them by some shared element, for example as salaried workers, or by a social or cultural *habitus*. The general strike has brought together social and political actors as different and as heterogeneous as unemployed young people, students, wage-workers, neighbors, women who take active part in all aspects of the protest (not just in tasks related to care), professors, teachers, artists of all kinds, peasants, indigenous peoples, informal workers, political activists, NGO officials, doctors, nurses, and so on. Amidst such heterogeneity, what brings them together is a negation.

Such a negation refers to the social damage or pathology that condemns most Colombians to a condition of mere survival so that a small minority can build their well-being on the discontent and labor of the majority. The perception of those who protest in the street is clear: they are not protesting against a single reform or

policy; they are protesting because for decades they have been enduring unbearable conditions; because the horizons of livability for the youth continue to shrink; because unremunerated labor will force them to work into old age, or depend on their families for survival; because a mother whose child is on the *front line* (*primera línea*) of the protest must pick up odd jobs in order to survive; [35] because poorly paid domestic labor is not even enough for these workers to feed their families, thus forcing them to go into informal work as well; because in the face of an already inadequate wage that barely covers the costs of living, workers wince at how the tax reform will increase their grocery bill; because the new generation of workers see that they must save more and more money to pay taxes to a state plagued by corruption and impunity.

As Andrés Felipe Parra says in his analysis of Karl Marx's "Contributions to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction" (1843) and *The German Ideology* (1846), from the limited perspective of productive relations of material life, this rather diverse set of human beings condemned to mere survival would be the proletariat. [36] That is to say, "a class that is not a class," a social group that is only defined by a negation, as it represents a form of life based on survival, upon which the rest of society organizes itself. Looking beyond productive relations, today we could also think of this group as a multitude living under precarious conditions. Current social relations and the corresponding forms of political organization lead many to confront—intellectually and affectively—imminent death as an everyday reality. Life itself is permanently exposed, vulnerable to loss, and today many consider the pandemic a lesser risk compared to the social pathology that throws them into a struggle for mere survival.

Second Sidenote

An activist in one of the points of resistance says the following: "before, we were nobodies; now, for the first time we are somebodies beside each other in the streets, where we even sleep undisturbed—except for when

we are attacked by the police or by armed 'good law-abiding citizens.' Behind the barricades, you'll find the popular assemblies and the communal potlucks, thanks to which some have access to three meals a day (los tres golpes) for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic." [37] Another shares the following reflection with students from my Theories of Power undergraduate course: "the country exploded in their faces. They have not yet realized that we have no hope and that because of that, we will continue to take to the streets."

A Counter-Insurgent Apparatus

Feeling and thinking about the limits of survival, as is happening today in Colombia, generates the singular and collective desire for a life worth living. The heterogeneous struggles for other forms of life, from such a diversity of actors, have also broken the accepted logics of action within the existing social order in the country. In reaction, the state has adopted a new approach to counter-insurgency, based in the thought of Chilean entomologist and publicist Alexis López. López was plucked from obscurity when the ex-president, Álvaro Uribe Vélez, mentioned him approvingly, after he was invited to the Universidad Militar of Colombia (Military University). [38] The contradictory and theoretically inconsistent doctrine referred to as "molecular dissipated revolution" ("revolución molecular disipada"), would have been irrelevant, a mere curious object of Latin American neo-Nazi thought, had it not been used as the springboard for the counter-insurgency apparatus employed against the general strike. It has already accumulated a staggering number of human rights violations. According to INDEPAZ (Institute for the Study of Development and Peace) and the NGO *Temblor* (*Earthquakes*), by May 7th more than 50 extra-judicial killings, 12 rapes, and 548 enforced disappearances had already been reported.

"Molecular dissipated revolution," presumably inspired in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, assumes the existence of a great insurgent movement against the normality of Colombian institutions. According to this doctrine, a vanguard has organized this movement from the shadows, successfully giving it an anarchic façade when it is, in reality, a horizontal, molecular and dissipated civil war whose main objective is to overthrow the legitimately elected government in order to replace it with a socialist or communist dictatorship. This interpretative apparatus is not only inconsistent but also contradictory. López and his Colombian followers are unable to understand the ways in which the vertical organization they envision in response to the strike, entirely contradicts the kind of molecular revolution theorized by Deleuze and Guattari who, they otherwise claim, inspired the doctrine. By reducing the molecular to the micro-political, the doctrine erases Deleuze and Guattari's materialist understanding of desire as a productive drive, which is the *conatus*, the immanent force of a subversive power that articulates itself around diversity and multiplicity, rather than in an organization established on a prior and shared identity.

However, the internal coherence of this approach has little significance when compared to the 2021 strike. What matters is the new counter-insurgency apparatus articulated by means of this doctrine into a new war machine. Through this ideological device, constitutionally protected public protests are transformed into bellicose acts, protesters into enemies who must be eliminated either physically or symbolically, and repression into an instrument that allows the state to perform lethal micro-surgeries in the streets of Colombia. The ideological blindness caused by this machine does not allow it to understand that the more the people are reduced to a condition of mere survival, the more decided, prolonged, and perhaps even violent the resistance will be. But it is also possible that this ideology works as a pair of blinders, making the state see the state of exception as the sole political solution to the crisis of

legitimacy that grows ever-more acute.

Third Sidenote

When she heard me talk about this doctrine, an environmental militant wrote back to me: "the tragedy is worse than what you describe, because state-sanctioned violence feeds on the violence of those who are desperate." In fact, physical violences are getting mixed in conflicting ways, and that mixture is used, by the state and mainstream social media alike, to construct the narrative that we are under a generalized state of war, which then creates the conditions to adopt more authoritarian and dictatorial measures.

Interregnum and Anti-Interregnum

During fascism and while imprisoned, Antonio Gramsci wrote about the "crisis in authority" and of the interregnum that such crisis opened. Amidst a harrowing situation, while incarcerated, he scribbled on a notebook: "if the hegemonic class loses its consensus, that is to say, when it no longer 'governs' but only 'dominates,' as it relies exclusively on its pure coercive force, this means that the masses have separated themselves from the traditional ideologies, that they no longer believe in what they used to, etc. The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old dies but the new cannot be born: in this interregnum, the most varied morbid phenomena are verified." [39] If we are optimistic, in Colombia we are witnessing an interregnum in which the new must be born, and we must aid with the delivery. But we could also be experiencing an anti-interregnum, one in which, as I argued in the preface to the publication in Colombia of Boaventura de Souza Santos' *Izquierdas del mundo iuníos!* (2019), "this is a regressive mutation, in which rather than a crisis in authority we have its metamorphosis, one that can strengthen itself under new ideological bases, capable of giving new form to such morbid manifestations such as today's neo-authoritarianisms and neo-

fascisms.” [40] Up until now, the strike has been focused on what Guattari would call the de-instituting moment. This is a moment capable of making visible the cracks in the current social order. But it is not yet a constituent moment. The strike has not yet found a way to enable a different kind of articulation from below—one able to assemble other alternatives so that Colombian society can transition from a micro to a macro-politics of desire. The uncertainty to which we have been subjected makes it difficult to anticipate what path we are going to follow.

Authoritarian rule threatens to

truncate once again the invention of forms of life that go beyond mere survival. As does, too, the rush of some to try and organize the multiple explosions of protests from the top, by means of the guiding voice of the leader, or the intellectual light of the Universities, when faced with dispersed social conflicts of all kinds. If the protests are forced under a single political and programmatic logic, all of this could result in a new collective frustration.

Last Sidenote

When I asked another activist from the points of resistance what alternative they proposed when faced with the

impossibility of sustaining the strike indefinitely, they answered me: “During the organization of popular assemblies we have gained a knowledge that we are never going to lose. Right now, we are neither negotiating nor recognizing any actor as negotiating on our behalf, but if something good happens we are willing to retreat and come back only if they breach the agreements or want to insist on the normality that we no longer accept.” Will a new reality be born, or will we sink in the old one that is willing to drag us all into its authoritarian abyss?

Translated by Andrés Fabián Henao Castro [41] for Spectre Journal.

A new political moment

5 August 2021, by Anahí Durand Guevara

We knew that the results would be tight; they had already been in 2016, when Kuczynski [42] defeated Fujimori by 42,000 votes. But unlike at that time when two right-wing projects clashed, it was the very survival of the regime that was at stake, and the elites were not ready easily to accept a victory of Pedro Castillo.

On 15 June, after 100 per cent of the ballots had been counted, the National Office for Electoral Processes (ONPE) announced that Pedro Castillo had won the election with 50.12 per cent of the vote against 49.87 per cent for Keiko Fujimori, a difference of more than 44,000 votes. Pedro Castillo could have been proclaimed president by now, but the challenge of thousands of votes by Fujimorism and the manoeuvres of the national elections jury of elections have delayed the proclamation. Fujimorism and its allies are trying to prevent the inevitable: the end of the neoliberal political cycle and the opening of a new cycle favourable to the majorities in the country.

Neoliberal Peru and the cycle that is ending (or should end)

At the beginning of 1990, Peru was in a situation of generalized crisis, laminated by hyperinflation, subversive violence and political crisis. The cycle of democratization that began in the 1960s, marked by the model of import substitution and the expansion of social and political rights enshrined in the 1979 Constitution, was disintegrating at a dizzying pace. On April 5, 1992, Fujimori’s coup, with the support of the armed forces and the powerful economic groups, put an end to this cycle by authoritarian means. As in Chile in 1973, neoliberalism was imposed without any form of democracy, with strong discretionary power to nullify rights and enshrine the primacy of the market. In order to ensure the permanence of the changes, the model was constitutionalized: a new political Constitution was approved in 1993.

The neoliberal cycle took hold, taking advantage of the decline of the trade unions, popular organisations and left-wing parties, hit hard by the armed conflict and the economic crisis. This regime was consolidated, guaranteeing technocratic governance at the political level, advancing economically by liberalizing strategic sectors and, on the social level, imposing new norms exalting individualism. There was a Peruvian particularity: under the leadership of Fujimori and Montesinos [43], a corrupt mafia was set up to control the powers of the state, guaranteeing continuity and impunity.

In 2000, in view of the scale of the corruption scandals, Alberto Fujimori was dismissed from his post. But far from being weakened by the political crisis, neoliberalism took on a new lease of life, encouraged by high commodity prices on the world market. Democratically elected governments have not changed the regime or dismantled the corrupt networks of Fujimorism; on the contrary, they have strengthened the primary export model, administering the state with the same

entrepreneurial logic that brought them profits.

At the same time, challenges to neoliberalism were expressed both in the socio-environmental conflicts of peasant communities and indigenous territories faced with the advance of big capital and in the electoral field, where critical choices gained ground – such as Humala in 2011 [44], even though he quickly betrayed his platform for change, and Verónica Mendoza in 2016. [45]

The hegemony of the neoliberal regime further deteriorated in 2018 with the complaints for corruption complaints related to the Odebrecht case [46]. The involvement of the entire political class in bribes, misappropriated public procurement and other crimes has led to the downfall of former presidents and local and judicial authorities, causing outrage among citizens. The resignation Kuczynski, the reorganization of the National Council of Justice, and the subsequent dissolution of Congress led to a large-scale crisis in which almost all of the state's powers collapsed.

But neoliberalism has survived, supported by two fundamental pillars: the presidential institution and social acceptance. It was the pandemic that gave the final blow on these two levels. To begin with, the impeachment of President Vizcarra in November 2020 [47] by a Congress dominated by private interests generated a massive popular response in the streets, which prevented the consolidation of a coup, while making Sagasti a precarious transitional president.

Second, the health tragedy of the pandemic (with its correlation in the economic sphere) revealed a devastated society. The disengagement of the state, the profits accumulated by clinics, the monopoly of oxygen, the bankruptcy of small businesses and the millions of informal workers who could not survive with the lockdowns, increased hunger and poverty, liquefying the social hegemony that the model maintained. The neoliberal regime imposed in 1992 has collapsed all along the line. The results of the 2021 presidential

elections have confirmed this exhaustion.

What can start: a government for the majorities

Pedro Castillo won mainly thanks to the votes of Peruvians who are waiting for a change. It was also an identity vote, less ideological and more vindictive, identifying with the teacher who earns two minimum wages, who is rejected when he protests and is considered inept or dangerous. He won against economic power groups, against the media, and also against the decaying intelligentsia led by Mario Vargas Llosa, Fujimori's former enemy.

Although Castillo expanded his framework of alliances by signing an agreement with Verónica Mendoza, summoning recognized professionals, and articulating an "anti-Fujimorist" liberal sector, nothing reassured the elites, who persisted in an anti-communist crusade with fake news, racist insults, and affabulations about the catastrophe that his government would mean. Worse still, once the ONPE's vote count was over, Fujimorism and its allies deployed a coup d'état strategy that ignored the results and sought to prevent Castillo's inauguration.

While the right's despair at the imminent end of the cycle is obvious, the question now is what this new political moment will look like. One could say that another period is already emerging, marked by Castillo's trajectory, by his environment and his entourage. Unlike Humala, Castillo has a popular background, trade union experience, and left-wing sensibility, but he is also a small farmer and entrepreneur, which influences the pragmatism, negotiating skills, and sense of opportunity with which he developed and won the election campaign.

This plebeian and pragmatic profile is also evident in the circles that accompany him and could foreshadow a new cabinet. On the one hand, there is the circle of the left: Perú Libre [48], a regional left-wing party

that has brought him to the presidency and which, together with Nuevo Perú [49] and other forces, will have to act in coordination to promote the implementation of the promised changes, particularly in the economy and concerning the constituent process. But there are also groups – and especially people – of various political tendencies who have approached the schoolteacher opportunistically, taking advantage of kinship or territorial networks. They aspire, together with the sectors of the politico-business right, to neutralize the achievement of substantial changes and to take advantage of a presidential administration similar to the previous ones.

The question revolves around what actions Castillo could take to start opening a new cycle, under pressure as at the moment from a putschist right, the absence of a parliamentary majority and the centrist temptation. First of all, he will have to make sure he stays in government, by convincing those who did not vote for him as well as those who did. This implies the strengthening of a first socio-political circle of the left and progressives, open to the centre, which will also help to change the correlation of the opposing forces in Congress. [See Reuters 28 July 2021 ["Peru's Castillo, in first speech as president, pledges to heal colonial wounds"] and AS/COA 3 August 2021 "Who's Who in Pedro Castillo's Inaugural Cabinet".]

Similarly, he can strengthen himself by implementing concrete changes to improve the living conditions of the population, giving priority to health and economic reactivation with job creation. For this, it is essential to increase fiscal resources with measures such as the nationalization of gas and the tax on mining profits, which at the same time would be relevant in terms of recovering sovereignty and the national project.

It will also be essential to initiate the constituent process, involving the citizens in an initiative to collect signatures in order to consult by referendum whether or not they agree with a new Constitution resulting from a constitutional assembly. The constituent process would promote a

major national debate and the discussion and approval of this new Constitution, which would hopefully be the expression of multi-national and equal representation. Moreover, it would allow the affirmation of a new cycle, with a state that guarantees rights, redistribution and social justice.

Épilogue: an interlude of monsters

Gramsci said that "the crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born", and that in this interregnum, monsters emerge. Precisely, today, in Peru, dangerous "monstrosities" are parading. The rise of a reactionary, racist and violent far right, similar to that of Bolsonaro in Brazil or that of Vox in Spain, should thus be taken notice of.

Although, for the second round, the (neo)liberals and the ultra-rightists joined together in their support for Fujimorism, they are once again distancing themselves. Keiko Fujimori is worn out, her links with Vladimiro Montesinos - who reappeared by giving instructions by phone from prison to change the election result - further complicates her situation. In the face of the dismay of the (neo)liberals who had linked their fate

to Fujimorism, the strongest sector is the farright led by Rafael López Aliaga [50], which is developing in the upper classes and in the urban popular sectors of Lima by feeding on conservatism and anti-leftist harassment, exacerbated during the campaign.

On the other hand, there is the stressed population and an asphyxiating environment, fanned by Fujimorism and its allies. In parallel with the massive mobilizations of Castillo's supporters and of Fujimorism that took place for three consecutive weeks, there were violent actions of harassment against the electoral authorities, letters calling for a coup d'État by former soldiers, attacks on ronderos and teachers and finally the physical attack on the head of the ONPE.

In all this, the media played a disastrous role: this is the case of the *El Comercio* group, which has completely subordinated its editorial line to Fujimorism, and the Willax television channel, with its machinery of fake news, rigging and defamation. Social networks also functioned as a bastion of disinformation, conducive to opinion matrices imposed by power groups in order to delegitimize Castillo's triumph.

Paving the way for a process of transformation is a difficult task. Success will depend to a large extent on the will and articulation of the

political actors in government, managing alliances and counterweights with other democratic sectors, but above all aiming to consolidate a political and social base to support and defend these changes.

In a society like Peru's, with weak political parties, a fragmented social fabric, and mafias rooted in the public apparatus, state actions will be fundamental to dismantling neoliberal structures (for example, in the management of natural resources, tax reform, or the pension system run by pension funds). But state action will be insufficient if it is done at the expense of those who voted for change. It will therefore be essential to involve citizens and their various organisations - be they peasant communities, indigenous peoples, neighbourhood organisations, professional associations or others - so that they are committed to defending their rights.

This new moment is one of controversy, it is open to all eventualities. What we hope for is possible, although it may also not happen. But as Alberto Flores Galindo would say, "there is room for hope". [51].

Lima, 29 June 2021

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The new civil war in Mozambique

4 August 2021, by **Joseph Hanlon**

The greed and corruption of the leaders of the ruling party, Frelimo, play a central role in the conflict in Cabo Delgado. But this role would not be possible without the support and encouragement of the international community, foreign institutions, and banks.

Frelimo established itself in the post-independence period as a multiracial

government claiming to be socialist and representing a threat to the United States of America and apartheid South Africa. [52] When Ronald Reagan became president of the United States, he intensified the Cold War and started proxy wars. One of these wars took place in Mozambique. The United States used South Africa to attack the country, creating Renamo and so on. [53]

With the end of the Cold War, the proxy war came to an end. The damage was enormous. At least one million people died in this war. Infrastructure has been severely affected, as Renamo destroyed all economic activities in rural areas. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) came in and said, "We're going to save you". And they demanded the same thing they

imposed in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: “shock therapy”, essentially trying to quickly convert “Communists” into capitalists. And to create oligarchs and massive corruption, which happened in Mozambique.

Thus, since 1995, new capitalists have been created in Mozambique. [54] They were given privatised companies, granted loans from the World Bank, without having to worry about repaying them. And their companies depend entirely on contracts with the state. The fact that they are the elite of the state is therefore the way to get into business. The construction of capitalist Mozambique requires a merger of party and business.

It is important to mention that in 1995 Mozambique was an extremely poor country. At the time, natural resources were not yet exploited. All connections for making money involved foreign capital. Over the next twenty years, a system was developed that I call “comprador oligarchs”. [55] The biggest oligarch is Armando Guebuza, possibly already the richest man in the country when he became president of Mozambique. [56] What is important about Armando Guebuza is that he had been commander of Frelimo during the War of National Liberation. [57]

Under Guebuza’s presidency, a very complex system of clientelism was created. [58] The IMF and the World Bank have taught Mozambicans that you have to pay for everything, even for the services that should be guaranteed by the state. This was capitalism.

In this clientelist system, everyone below you does what you tell them to do. And you do what everyone above you tells you to do. And the person in the middle earns money from their position. This system is known locally as “cabritismo”, after the saying “the goat (“cabrito”) eats where it is tied”. At the district level, at some point, the local official receives a phone call from a minister or governor telling them to hand over land to a certain person. The whole system works in this way, to the point that education is captured by the electoral machine. Teachers must satisfy the principal of

the school by working actively [for Frelimo] during elections and, in return, they can ask for bribes from students and parents, and they are not required to attend classes. [59] Teachers who support the opposition, meanwhile, are transferred to a bush school. [60]

When did the wave of privatization start in Mozambique?

During the war. Mozambique privatized literally thousands of companies. This was a condition of the “shock therapy” imposed by the IMF and the World Bank, which also demanded the privatization of the state-owned commercial banks (Banco Comercial de Moçambique and Banco Popular de Desenvolvimento). The most profitable companies were entrusted to foreign multinationals. And everything else went to the Mozambican elite. Frelimo itself wanted to buy the generals for the war, giving them companies, land and so on.

One of the things we now know, officially, is that the World Bank insisted that loans be given to Mozambicans to acquire the privatised companies. This process was carried out with a fund from the World Bank. Mozambican banks have warned that these companies will not be able to repay the loans. An official internal evaluation report indicates that the World Bank has instructed them to continue to grant them.

In the meantime, mineral resources appeared...

Starting in 2005, several resources were discovered, and we realized that Cabo Delgado was rich in minerals. [61] There is graphite, rubies, oil sands and so on. The ruby mine is controlled by the oligarch Raimundo Pachinuapa, who was a guerrilla fighter in the national liberation struggle. [62]

He became a general...

A general and member of the political committee of Frelimo. Almost sixty years later, the same people are leading the party. And the greatest oligarch of Cabo Delgado is Alberto Chipande, who is supposed to have

fired the first shot during the war. [63] Chipande also always remained a member of the political committee of Frelimo as the “godfather” of Cabo Delgado.

Pachinuapa allied with the British mining company Gemfields...

He used his position to seize the land where the mine is located, drove out thousands of people and entrusted Gemfields with 75% of the company on the condition that he did nothing and kept 25% of the money raised.

The director of Gemfields in Mozambique is Samora Machel Júnior, Samito. [64] It’s all in the family. These people control the economy of Cabo Delgado, whether legal or illegal. And what is legal or illegal changes. The inhabitants of the coast had been trading in these products - ivory, timber and so on - for generations. It has become, technically, illegal, but no one initially took this ban very seriously. In the meantime, the oligarchs have come to control all these transactions, in association with the families of Asian traders established in the province. In southern Italy, there are a group of mafia families who control the territory. In Cabo Delgado, there is a group of oligarchs who control the economy. Thus, investments in Cabo Delgado have not benefited and still do not benefit the people because the oligarchs keep all the money.

Oligarchs and foreign multinationals...

I’m talking here about the period before natural gas. At this time, we have the timber trade going to China, the drug trade coming from Afghanistan. When the gas was discovered, around 2010, the scale became different. It is the second largest gas field in Africa. And this comes at a time when liquefied natural gas (LNG) is being transported around the world. A gas which, twenty years ago, would have had no commercial viability, can now be transported as LNG.

Suddenly, people started talking about huge sums of money: 100 billion euros of investments, income for Mozambique in twenty-five years of 95

billion euros. The political and economic elite believed that Mozambique would be “El Dorado”, just like Abu Dhabi, Qatar and Kuwait.

And then Credit Suisse came on the scene...

Credit Suisse established links with Guebuza, or at least with Guebuza’s family. And they proposed a wonderful agreement: a loan of 2 billion dollars which would not have to be repaid, because the money from gas would cover it, and a system of coastal protection. In addition, the bribes received could amount to \$300 million or \$400 million. All for free. And the Mozambicans said yes, it seemed like a good deal to them. The Swiss Government, however, warned that the agreement should remain secret because it violated IMF rules. We are talking about one of the biggest banks in the world saying: “Don’t worry, everything is fine, the gas will repay the loan”. The bank therefore wanted to increase the size of the debt, to increase the amount of the loan. The secret proposal provided for the creation of a tuna fishing fleet, a maritime safety company and a ship repair and maintenance company.

When the loan to Ematum - Empresa de Atum de Moçambique - was made public in 2013, the Mozambican government guaranteed that there were no more debts, and the IMF only requested that the loan be included in the state budget. [The loan of 850 million euros was for a tuna fishing and maritime safety fleet of vessels, 33% owned by IGEPE (a state holding company), 33% by Emopesca (state fishing company) and 33% by SISE (State Information and Security Service, the all-powerful secret police whose budget often exceeds that of the Ministry of Agriculture). The order was placed at the Cherbourg shipyards and the inauguration of the shipyard was made in the presence of the then French president François Hollande in 2013.] However, in April 2016, the *Wall Street Journal* revealed a hidden debt of \$622 million to ProIndicus and another of \$535 million to MAM, both with guarantees from the Mozambican state. [65] Once again, the Mozambican government asserted in the face of Christine Lagarde that the secret agreement

had not taken place, that there was no hidden debt. [66]

The loans to the three companies - Ematum, ProIndicus, and MAM - included major purchases of ships, aircraft, communications equipment, and other equipment from France, Germany, Portugal, Turkey, China, India, Israel, Sweden, Austria, Romania and the United States. Two other secret supplier credits of \$221 million contracted by the Ministry of the Interior between 2009 and 2014, including armoured cars to respond to the threat of riots in Maputo in April 2016, have also been made public. In total, the government secretly guaranteed \$2,228 million in debt.

Christine Lagarde considered it a personal offence to be deceived by ministers of the government of Mozambique. The IMF then cancelled the lines of credit, and the donors of budgetary aid stopped their payments. But they continued to finance projects. [67] Frelimo has managed to survive this situation, by ceasing to pay its bills, by abandoning projects...

A recent study by the Center for Public Integrity reveals that the real cost of hidden debts to Mozambicans amounts to \$11 billion, mainly due to the damage that donors have caused to the economy, to punish the government. And sanctions rarely work, because they penalize people, not governments.

What happened with the advance of gas exploration?

The gas project advanced initially with the US oil company Anadarko and the Italian company Eni. At that time, several foreigners and people from the South began to come to Cabo Delgado. [68] The local population realized that they would not benefit from gas exploration. Anadarko told bankers that 15,000 workers, mostly Filipinos, would be brought in from abroad.

The \$14.9 billion loan agreement, signed in July 2020 to finance the gas project, provided that UK Export Finance would guarantee \$1 billion, supporting the creation of 2,000 jobs in the United Kingdom, and that US Export-Import Bank would contribute

\$4.7 billion, which would guarantee 16,700 jobs in the United States. The construction project itself would provide only 2,500 jobs for Mozambicans. In addition, most Mozambican jobs are reportedly not filled by people from Cabo Delgado, which has fuelled feelings of marginalization and injustice.

And this sense of exclusion has been ultimately exploited by the insurgents, known locally as “machababos”.

Yes. There is a global phenomenon of fundamentalists, Christians as well as Muslims. In northern Mozambique and Tanzania, we have both at the same time. The Mwani coastal region is Muslim. [69] And there are fundamentalist preachers there who tell the children and young people of the region that Sharia law will bring equality, guaranteeing everyone a share of this wealth. Their message is very simple: Sharia is socialist. This was the message that the national liberation movements were spreading in the late 1960s: that of independence and that socialism would guarantee a fair redistribution of wealth. More than fifty years later, the message is the same, but instead of independence, it is Sharia law.

There is another phenomenon that is also at the origin of the war in Cabo Delgado: violence along the coast. The inhabitants are convinced that the elites not only want to exploit them, but also to kill them. [70] And so, they believe that they have to fight and maybe kill the elites. There is total mistrust. Because they are used to having to pay to access health services, if someone comes to tell them that they are going to put chlorine in the water and do not ask them for money, they think they are going to put cholera in the water and want to poison them. Health workers and elites have been killed with machetes.

If we look at the Mozambican peasants, they have only two tools: hoes and machetes. It is an agricultural tool. When the *machababos* began to make the first incursions, with a dozen people, they had only one or two weapons. [71] The attacks were done with machetes.

When the attack on Mocímboa da Praia took place, recruitment began among the local inhabitants. [72] The war has spread. Since then, we have seen the use of guerrilla tactics. If we look at the Renamo war, we find several similarities. And this has nothing to do with fundamentalist Islamism. That is what the guerrillas are doing. It is possible that they receive external training. Cabo Delgado became an anchor, and certainly jihadists with no prior organizational ties were lured into the province. [73]

The 2020 attack on Mocímboa da Praia was probably better coordinated. All weapons, with the possible exception of mortars, had been stolen from the police. But in Mocímboa da Praia, someone sank a boat with an RPG grenade launcher. I think that suggests that this person has been trained and had learned to handle it.

The *machababos* do not convey an Islamic message, but an anti-government message. In Palma, they told the people [of the village] that they did not want to touch them, nor the peasants. [74] The target was the district administration. They have not even touched international interests. It was government soldiers who spent ten days sacking Palma. [75]

...and looting banks.

That's right.

Meanwhile, the war is intensifying...

When the government used mercenaries, the insurgents sought support to balance the forces. And it seems that they were able to defeat the Russians [Wagner Group] very easily. But they could not defeat the DAG [Dyck Advisory Group, from South Africa].

What is the best way to fight this war?

The best way to resolve this war is to create jobs. Most of the insurgents are fighting because they want a job, a wage. If 10,000 jobs were created, the war would be over, because there would be no one left to fight. And it's easy to do, we know how to do it.

I always give the example of Franklin D. Roosevelt in the United States, president during the Great Depression of the 1930s. The fear was that the unemployed would become Communists and overthrow the government. Roosevelt instituted the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which very quickly created millions of jobs and provided education and vocational training for workers. If we wanted to, we could stop the war, but it seems that no one is interested in doing so.

At the moment, several countries want to participate in the action.

Everyone wants to play. Everyone wants to send their soldiers to Mozambique, for different reasons.

What do these countries want?

If they send troops, even if only for training, they can't say they're sending the army to help the oligarchs kill starving peasants. They must say that they are fighting the "Empire of Evil". And who is the new "Empire of Evil"? Islam. The version must therefore be that this whole situation is linked to Islamic terrorism and comes from outside.

The United States of America is taking the lead in this process. The country has long wanted to have a base in Mozambique, in Nacala. It's a pretty deep place for submarines, and there's a big airport. [76] Therefore, the United States wants to make Mozambique the new Afghanistan.

Portugal and South Africa both lost wars in Mozambique. South Africa lost the Renamo War, and Portugal lost the War of Independence. They absolutely want to have troops on the ground for psychological reasons. [77] And the armies of these countries need support. South Africa is reducing its military budget. If the European Union were to pay South Africa to send its soldiers, that would be wonderful. Portugal still has a hangover after being beaten by Frelimo.

France and South Africa also wanted to continue to control the Mozambique Channel, and France was very interested in sending the Foreign Legion to the country. It is interesting

to note that none of the countries that want to send military personnel to Mozambique has ever won a guerrilla war. They are sending a bunch of losers to help Mozambique.

It's a good perspective...

All the losers want to try again. France has yet another problem. The country really wants to defend Total and secure gas exploration. There remains Rwanda, which has a very professional army. They are one of the major contributors to peacekeeping forces in Africa. They can create the security zone that Total needs if France or the European Union pays. Several negotiations are still under way. [78]

But the future of gas is also conditioned by the climate crisis.

When gas was discovered ten years ago, it was the miracle fuel. It contains half as much carbon as coal, is excellent for the environment and so on. Two different global warming targets are used - an increase in temperature from pre-industrial levels of 1.5°C or 2°C. The difference seemed minimal until science and business looked at things more closely.

For Mozambique, a warming of 2 °C would lead to much more violent cyclones and more severe droughts than a warming of 1.5°C. BP last year and, very recently, the International Energy Agency (IEA) have made models on what energy consumption would be at 1.5°C and 2°C. At 1.5°C, the gas peak has already been reached. The IEA has pointed out that in this case there is no longer a market for the new gas.

Basically, it says that there is no future for the development of gas projects in Mozambique?

If the world agrees on a target of 1.5°C, there is no market. But the gas companies are hoping for a 2°C target, as this will mean a huge market for gas, including Mozambique. Mozambique was asked to accept gas money in exchange for worsening cyclones and droughts. Once again, it is the people who will

suffer.

But the environment is changing. In recent weeks, Exxon Mobil has come under enormous pressure from its shareholders, who claim that the company will become more profitable if it stops using fossil fuels. It seems unlikely that Exxon Mobil will move

forward with its share of gas at Cabo Delgado.

Total's decision will have to take into account safety and the market. It must be understood that the only function of the CEOs of these companies is to increase the price of shares. Total's CEO will be gone long before the

project starts producing gas.

In this context, what are the best and worst scenarios?

The best scenario is to create 10,000 jobs and end the war. The worst-case scenario is that Mozambique turns into a new Afghanistan.

2021, the year of Israeli apartheid

3 August 2021, by Ahmed Abbes, Jonathan Rosenhead

When in a few years historians look at the year 2021 in Israel, it's a safe bet that the salient theme will not be COVID-19 or the exit of Netanyahu but apartheid. The year began on January 12 with the publication of B'Tselem's report "[A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is apartheid](#)". Three months later, on April 27, Human Rights Watch drove the point home by publishing its report "[A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution](#)". Just two months later, on July 6, more than 600 academics, artists and intellectuals from more than 45 countries issued a [Declaration](#) calling for the dismantling of the apartheid regime in historic Palestine. Since then, the number of [signatories](#) has grown steadily and has now reached 1,000, including Nobel Prize winners, prominent academics and artists.

Apartheid is a crime. It has been internationally recognized as such since November 30, 1973, when the UN General Assembly adopted the "[International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid](#)". In the [Rome Statute](#) of 2002 which established the international criminal court, apartheid is specified as a crime against humanity "committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that

regime."

The fit with Israel's discriminatory laws and policies against Palestinians is manifest, and yet remained for decades virtually impossible to acknowledge publicly. When President Jimmy Carter in 2006 dared to publish a book about Israel with 'apartheid' in its title there was uproar. When more than a decade later a UN study came to the same conclusion ("[Israeli Practices towards the Palestinian People and the Question of Apartheid](#)", United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), 2017) the reaction was convulsive. Outrage by Israel-supporting bodies and countries at the use of the 'A' word led to a directive from the UN Secretary General that the report be withdrawn; and ESCWA Executive Director Rima Khalaf [resigned](#) rather than implement this instruction.

In 2021, the year of Israeli apartheid, that log jam has broken. This year, the [world's civil societies have had enough](#). Across countries and continents, across age groups and ethnicities, the manifestos, the marches, the manifestos, the opeds, the motions passed overwhelmingly have swelled into a torrent. And Israel's practice of apartheid now adds to its violations of international law in the compelling pressure for international action.

The "[Declaration on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid in Historic Palestine](#)", now with an impressive weight of [one](#)

[thousand prominent endorsers](#), will add to that pressure. Its signatories include the former ESCWA Executive Director Rima Khalaf and the ESCWA report's authors Richard Falk and Virginia Tilley, as well as Nobel Peace Prize laureates Adolfo Pérez Esquivel and Mairead Maguire, the Nobel Chemistry Laureate George Smith, academics with legal expertise Monique Chemillier-Gendreau and John Dugard, scholars Bertrand Badie, Étienne Balibar, Hagit Borer, Ivar Ekeland, Suad Joseph, Edgar Morin, Nurit Peled-Elhanan, Jacques Rancière, Roshdi Rashed and Gayatri Spivak, health researcher Sir Iain Chalmers, composer Brian Eno, musician Roger Waters, author Ahdaf Soueif, economist and former Assistant Secretary-General of the UN Sir Richard Jolly, former Vice President of the European Parliament Luisa Morgantini, South African politician and veteran anti-apartheid leader Ronnie Kasrils and Canadian peace activist and former national leader of the Green Party of Canada Joan Russow.

The endorsers declare their categorical rejection of the apartheid regime set up on the territory of historic Palestine and imposed on the Palestinian people as a whole, including refugees and exiles wherever they might be in the world.

They call for the immediate dismantling of this apartheid regime and the establishment of a democratic constitutional arrangement that gives all its inhabitants equal rights and

duties, regardless of their racial, ethnic and religious identities, or gender preferences, and which respects and enforces international law and human conventions, and in particular gives priority to the long deferred right of return of Palestinian refugees expelled from their towns and villages during the creation of the State of Israel, and subsequently.

They urge their governments:

- to cease immediately

their complicity with Israel's apartheid regime;

- to join in calling for the dismantling of apartheid structures and their replacement by an egalitarian democratic governance that treats everyone subject to its authority in accordance with their rights and with full respect for their

humanity; and

- to support this necessary transition in a manner sensitive to the right of self-determination enjoyed by both peoples presently inhabiting historic Palestine.

27 July 2021

Source [Mondoweiss](#).

A New Wave of Mass Protests and Strikes

2 August 2021, by **Frieda Afary'**

Petrochemical Strikes, Protests Against Water Shortage

A new wave of mass protests over severe water shortage in the mainly ethnic Arab province of Khuzestan began on July 15. Protesters' slogans have included: "Down with Dictatorship.", "Down With Khamenei", "We Don't Want An Islamic Republic", "The People Want the Regime to Fall." Government security forces have shot and killed at least 8 protesters and injured and arrested many others. However, solidarity protests have started in Azarbaijan, Kurdistan, Isfahan, Sistan & Baluchistan and Tehran. Iranian filmmakers, teachers and writers' groups have co-signed a joint statement in [support of the protests](#).

In the words of a [statement of solidarity](#) by the Tehran Bus Workers' Syndicate: "The lack of water in Khuzestan today is rooted in the unprofessional, rapacious and profit-centered policies of the prior decades of capitalism in oil extraction and use of water for the steel industry, the income from which does not go to the

people. These insatiable policies have deprived the people of Khuzestan of safe drinking water. Water is shut off for long hours and it is lacking for basic needs. Farmers and cattle growers have also been damaged and lost their livelihoods."

The latest protests have followed a series of nationwide strikes of temporary contract workers in Iran's oil and gas industry which is also heavily based in Khuzestan. The strikes which began on June 19 and have spread to a hundred production sites, are demanding permanent employment status, a \$500 monthly wage, safe working conditions and the right to organize and be free of police surveillance. Haft Tapeh sugar cane workers on strike in Khuzestan are also asking for COVID vaccination and expressing solidarity with protests against the lack of water.

Economic Crisis and COVID Pandemic

Iran continues to suffer from a massive economic crisis brought about by the costs of its regional imperialist interventions in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, its nuclear and missile

programs and the effects of U.S. economic sanctions. The official minimum wage is approximately \$120 per month in a country where the cost of bare necessities for a family of 4 is \$500 per month. Electricity is shut off for several hours on a daily basis. Access to the internet is becoming more limited or impossible for many because of the cost and government repression.

In this situation the COVID pandemic has been wreaking havoc on the population. The Delta variant of COVID continues to spread widely. [Over 95% of the population is not vaccinated](#) and has no access to any vaccines, much less safe ones. The [official number of deaths](#) is approximately 88,000, but the real numbers are much higher. A large part of the population of 83 million has been infected. However, no accurate figures exist because of government repression.

COVID is spreading rapidly in Iran's prisons, which have an official population of 190,000. Women prisoners are also suffering from and dying from COVID. They include journalists, teachers, feminist and labor activists, students, environmentalists, Kurdish and Arab civil right activists, as well as Baha'i and Sufi women.

Women Prisoners and Afghan Refugees

Nasrin Sotoudeh, imprisoned feminist human rights attorney and defender of the “Girls of Revolution Avenue” is suffering from a variety of health problems in addition to COVID. Narges Mohammadi, feminist activist against the death penalty who has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, was released last year after a long prison sentence, only to receive another prison sentence which also includes 80 lashes for continuing to oppose the death penalty and “endangering national security.” She has been fighting this sentence, and has attended protests in solidarity with the people of Khuzestan, striking workers and the families of political prisoners. In a recent [interview](#), she called Iranian women’s struggles “the Achilles heel of the Iranian regime”. Sepideh Gholyan, feminist labor activist, imprisoned in Khuzestan, continues to write about the plight of ethnic Arab women prisoners. She has been savagely beaten in prison and is now on hunger strike.

Afghan migrants and refugees who number approximately 3 million in Iran continue to be expelled (450,000 expelled since 2020). The Iranian regime has been holding [negotiations](#) between the Taliban and the Afghan government under the direction of Iranian foreign minister, Javad Zarif and is helping the Taliban strengthen their power even though the Taliban have been killing members of the Shi’a Hazara population in Afghanistan.

Iran’s Continuing Regional Ambitions and U.S.

Imperialism’s “Solutions”

In the midst of all these crises and protests, the Iranian government maintains its regional imperialist interventions in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon. It promotes its plots to [kidnap and assassinate opposition activists in exile](#). It continues to develop its nuclear and missile programs and has stopped its negotiation with the U.S. Biden administration on returning to the JCPOA nuclear agreement.

The “election” of Ebrahim Raisi as Iran’s next president had the lowest rate of mass participation even by Iran’s standards which were very low to begin with. Raisi was previously the head of Iran’s judiciary and immediately prior to that, the head of GHORB, the construction conglomerate of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). He is infamously known as a member of the “Death Commission” which ordered the executions of thousands of political prisoners in 1988. Under his watch, approximately [1500 people were killed by government forces](#) during the November 2019 uprising. [Amnesty International](#) has condemned him for committing crimes against humanity.

New York Times columnist, Thomas Friedman reveals imperialist inhumanity in his [recent column](#) on Iran where he offers a “solution” that is “the best anyone can hope for with Iran.” He argues that the U.S. with the help of Gulf states should give more financial aid to the Assad regime to kick Iran out of Syria, maintain Russia and Turkey as dominant powers and assure the continuation of the Assad regime. This he says would reduce Iran’s danger and satisfy the U.S. and Israel. To him, the people of the region, the Syrian Arabs and Kurds

and the Iranian population, are mere pawns on the U.S. and global Imperialist chessboard.

Needed Progressive Solidarity with Struggles inside Iran

No less cynical are those leftists and so-called socialists around the world who support the Iranian regime as “anti-imperialist” or refuse to criticize it.

Those who limit their solidarity to calling for the removal of U.S. sanctions, refuse to recognize the complexity of the problems in Iran. They do not address the fact that these problems are rooted both in the external imperialism of the U.S., Russia, China and internal capitalist militarism and religious fundamentalism.

Any effort to engage in solidarity with the struggles inside Iran begins not only with calling for the removal of U.S. sanctions and an end to Israel’s attacks, but also simultaneously holding the Iranian regime accountable for its repression and exploitation of the people and environment of the region. That recognition demands calling for the immediate release of political prisoners, expressing solidarity with striking workers, feminist and environmental struggles, oppressed ethnic, sexual and religious minorities, and demanding Iran’s withdrawal from Syria, Iraq and an end to its interventions in Afghanistan, Lebanon and Yemen.

Source: [Iranian Progressives in Translation](#).

Have you seen the Olympics?

1 August 2021, by **Dave Kellaway**

Why is it being held in the first place given the risks of Covid? Financial considerations certainly overruled any health issues. The games were given the go-ahead in the face of a global pandemic and against the wishes of the majority of the Japanese people. Money always talks, there are huge amounts of commercial sponsorship which flow into the bloated coffers of the International Olympic Committee. Leading up to the venue selection there is a great amount of blatant and more subtle backhanders given by countries keen to stage the games. The blazers - mostly men - who run international sport do not want to pass up on the junkets and freebies connected with venue selection or at the Games themselves. Despite Toyota pulling out as a sponsor because of Japanese opinion the big corporations - often selling distinctly unhealthy products - relish an event that pulls in a global audience of 206 countries.

Compared to football the Games are more international and more inclusive. 11,000 athletes take part and despite the death of amateur status across all sports, there are still many competitors who have the experience of a lifetime without much chance of a podium or of any financial reward. No money is given with the medals even if some national federations provide incentive payments as part of athletes' contracts. There are commercial rewards for the very top field athletes - Usain Bolt is a prime example - and some medallists may extend their sponsorship income but these are a small minority. To an extent some core values connected to sports still exist at the Olympics - trying to improve on your personal best, connecting with people across the world, executing movement and skills in often spectacularly beautiful ways, working in a team and just enjoying something you are good at and love doing.

Of course, life in our unequal and exploitative society is never that simple and the pressure to win at all costs - which capitalist ideology fuels on a daily basis - leads athletes, often

pushed by their coaches, to take performance-enhancing drugs. Who can forget one of the fastest 100-metre races ever run in Seoul (1988) 'won' by Ben Johnson who was disqualified for using performance-enhancing drugs. Another five of the eight finalists were later proved to have used similar substances. Only three out of the ten fastest 100 metres runners of all time have been tested as 'clean' - Usain Bolt was one of them. Long before the restoration of capitalism in Russia and Eastern Europe the athletes there were just as much, if not more reliant, on taking drugs to enhance their performance. East German women particularly were given testosterone to improve their speed and strength. Non-capitalist, publicly controlled sport aligned itself with the prevailing global ideology but also with the notion that sporting success somehow proved the superiority of those post-capitalist societies.

Some coaches have also used their power over younger athletes to abuse them sexually. National federations have in the past been reluctant to open up about such cases. Thankfully due to the courageous stand taken by some gymnasts in the US and elsewhere this is now harder to conceal. Young athletes fully committed to performing at their best are vulnerable to the demands of the top coaches that can make a difference to their chances of success.

The Olympic ruling bodies have always pretended that politics can be separated from the sport. Hence the accommodation to the Nazi regime in the 1936 Olympics or the non-condemnation of the Mexico City massacre of students in 1968. When John Carlos and Tommie Smith raised a clenched fist in a black power salute on the winners' podium during the US national anthem the International Olympic Committee (IOC) did not raise a finger in their defence and collaborated with the US Olympic body's decision to send them home. Their future careers and earnings

were destroyed and they experienced a lot of racist harassment. During the closing episodes of the Cold War, the US and some allies (ironically not Thatcher) boycotted the Moscow 1980 games and the USSR, Eastern Europe and Cuba retaliated in kind for Los Angeles in 1984.

Coverage of the Tokyo games this year has been limited by the commercial deal the IOC did with Discovery/Eurosport which means the BBC, instead of having 3500 hours of coverage, will only have about 350. Apparently, the Tories' continued squeeze on the BBC finances has meant they could not outbid their competitors for the TV deal. Free-to-air coverage is essential if everyone, irrespective of income, is to have a chance to follow the sports they practice or enjoy watching. All the waffle about the legacy of big sporting events resulting in increased take-up of healthy activity is nipped in the bud if those who often suffer most from obesity - the poorest - cannot even watch the games. Gradually more and more sports will be on subscription channels and then only available to those that can afford the high monthly charges. The Labour Party could have taken up the issue of free to air sport much more strongly and with the new cricket tournament the 'Hundred' on BBC and Sky attracting viewers it shows there is an appetite for top quality sport on terrestrial TV, and it would be a vote winner in my opinion.

Two highlights of the first few days - from a home country perspective - have been Adam Peatty's win in the 100 metres breaststroke and Tom Daley finally winning gold in the synchronised diving at his third Olympic games. Their reactions afterwards differed a great deal. Peatty, who is now unbeaten in over seven years in this event, went on and on about how his winning gold in a swimming event is going to help change the 'British mindset' after all the travails of the Covid pandemic and lockdown. This is just tabloid hyperbole. On the other hand, Daley,

sat between the Chinese and Russian silver and bronze winners and their attendant press corps talked about his role as an openly gay competitor with a husband and child. China and Russia do not allow gay marriage. I think Tom Daley knew perfectly well what he was doing so hats off to him.

The medals table is always prominent in all the press coverage. But really it tells you more about the global economic order. Sometimes there have been alternative medal tables based on population or Gross Domestic Product. Here you get a different sort of league table where countries like Cuba, Jamaica or New Zealand do very well. If you look at it from a comparison between the advanced capitalist countries and the global south then it is clear that the

former has an inbuilt advantage in a number of sports where training facilities, equipment and technical support are key. So along with equestrian we could list cycling, rowing, sailing, kayaking, fencing, tennis, golf, shooting as just a few sports where the global south never really gets a look in. Unsurprisingly this is where Britain does quite well because of its position in the capitalist global order. Put another way Britain does well in sports where you are sitting down! The Global South scores better where the initial costs of training and doing the sport is relatively low so African and Caribbean athletes dominate much of the track athletics.

With the reduced coverage this year the fun of finding out about new or

unfamiliar sports is diminished. No longer will you be dragged into working out how they score in fencing, judo or dressage. Nor can you become the pub bore as the new specialist of such sports. How many of us also work out how much better or quicker they are than you are at a particular sport. I worked out that the swimmers were at least nearly 3 times faster!

Despite all the politics I am still moved by the beauty of a gymnastic sailing through the air and get a kick out of someone overjoyed because they have come sixth in a race but have managed to achieve a personal best. Like art, the best sport has a transcendent quality not quite reducible to anything else.

Source *Anti*Capitalist Resistance*.