



IV560 - September 2021

Loss of legitimacy for established politics, heavy defeat for Die Linke

30 September 2021, by **Manuel Kellner**

So, 75% of the electorate will not have voted for the leading party in the next government, whoever it may be. The 1.6 million or so votes that the CDU/CSU lost to the SPD are also quite strongly linked to the conservative political profile of Olaf Scholz, a moderate from the generation of social democratic leaders who had fabricated the crude counter-reforms of agenda 2010.

With a turnout of 76% and 8.7% voting for the smaller parties that will not be represented in the Bundestag, the German parliament will only represent about a third of the electorate. The resulting loss of democratic legitimacy reflects a process that has been under way for years and is becoming increasingly pronounced.

On the far right of the parties in the Bundestag, the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) cannot be satisfied with its losses, which bring it down to 10.3% and mean it has lost its rank as largest opposition party. In addition, it is torn by internal quarrels, some of its members and leaders wanting to support the Corona-deniers and march together with neo-Nazi formations and others showing a more serious attitude to the milieu of official bourgeois politics. Nevertheless, this party remains a formidable enemy which in many parts of eastern Germany has surpassed the CDU and

has even become the strongest party.

The two winners are the Green party with 14.8% (a few weeks ago it had surpassed the CDU/CSU and become the strongest party in the polls), its best result ever, and the liberal FDP (Free Democratic Party) with 11.5%, which is quite spectacular. Until further notice, no one is thinking of a revival of the "grand coalition" with the CDU/CSU as a junior partner of the SPD. What will be discussed and negotiated in the coming weeks (or months) are two options: either an SPD coalition with the Greens and the FDP, or the CDU/CSU with these same two parties, which will therefore in any case play an important role in the next government. Even if it is not easy to imagine the compromises to be made (with the FDP being against more taxes on big incomes and wealth while wanting to prevent any new public debt, it is difficult to see how to finance the investments promised by the SPD and the Greens in infrastructure, renewable energy and electronic communications), as the CDU/CSU and its Chancellor candidate Armin Laschet are seen as the losers in the election, a "red-green-yellow" coalition may seem likely.

Die Linke, the "Left Party", could not even reach the 5% of the proportional vote normally needed for

representation in the Bundestag, with only 4.9% of the vote. However German electoral law also allows proportional representation to parties that win at least three local direct mandates and Die Linke did so (in Berlin constituencies). With this very bad result, Die Linke seems to have consumed all its credit acquired during its foundation. In 2009, it had won 11.9% of the vote, and this seemed to be a "good start".

Who is to blame? Revolutionaries and the radical anti-capitalist left tend to attribute it to opportunism and adaptation to parliamentarism (which are real problems). With its participation in regional governments applying a fairly "normal" pro-capitalist policy, this party could no longer pass as a force of revolt against the rule of capital. But it's not that simple.

The majority of people more or less ready to vote for Die Linke are rather inclined to desire the participation of this party in the government, even at the federal level, to achieve even a small part of its social and ecological demands. They even find the party's positions against NATO (quite Platonic, in truth) and against any international intervention by the Bundeswehr (in this case, quite practical, because its deputies have always voted in accordance with this

principle) a little too radical.

So, it's not easy to find a recipe. It would not be honest to say that we would always know how we can win more votes. Sometimes you have to say unpopular things out loud, against the current. Or take the example of the 600,000 votes Die Linke lost to the SPD. It was a "useful vote" or "tactical vote" to prevent Armin Laschet from beating the SPD, which seemed possible in the very last days before the elections. Even in circles very close to us there were people who found it extremely difficult to choose: the risk that the CDU/CSU would win and the risk that Die Linke would not

meet the 5% barrier both seemed real. And against a "useful vote" for the "lesser evil" in the broader milieu, it is not easy to invent a counter-poison.

That said, it is time to debate in Die Linke and in the left in general how, in the medium term, we can build a stronger political left, more rooted in the workplaces, in the neighbourhoods, in schools, active and inspiring in the social movements, the bearer of concrete mobilization and action projects that fit into a perspective of radical social change, to break the power of big capital and its political servants

Because we can't wait until 2025! The next government, if we only take into account the fight against the climate disaster, will be lost for another four years. And the window of time we have left is beginning to close. Either the victory of the principles of solidarity and ecological responsibility, or the end of all that has remained civilized on the planet.

The victory in Berlin, on the very day of the elections, of the popular initiative for the expropriation of big real estate companies (starting from 3,000 apartments) after a formidable campaign on the ground shows the way forward.

The coalition's "Housing for all " strategy

29 September 2021, by John McNulty

Long on aspiration, short on detail, it preserves the centrality of the private housing sector and the guarantees to vulture funds. Cries of rage and disappointment from those excluded from the housing market and with much of their income absorbed by punitive rents were heard as the details of the plan emerged.

In reality no section of the coalition government can imagine a housing policy based on human need. The main purpose of the scheme is to present the appearance of progress and thus to save the bacon of the parties as the next election draws near.

The party suffering most is Fianna Fail, with a large section of its base moving towards Sinn Féin. Both main parties actually benefit from property speculation, but the Fine Gael base benefits most. This has led to sharp tensions. The plan was delayed for months and there was a last minute delay of over 30 minutes as it launched. The parties contradicted each other immediately, with Leo Varadkar (FG) lauding the continuation of a "property owning democracy" while FF Taoiseach Micheál Martin blathered about affordable and social housing. The

third leg of the coalition, Eamon Ryan of the Greens, spoke but said nothing beyond; "me too".

The only ray of light for the three stooges was the weakness of the opposition. The press had no serious questions. Sinn Féin criticised details without presenting a clear alternative. Housing protests, largely organised by the Trade Union leadership, have been off the streets since 2019 and the revamping of the failed Rebuilding Ireland strategy.

The task now is to reorient the opposition around a demand for public housing based on need rather than the current model where housing is a financial asset traded in the market.

So what of the detail?

The plan promises an investment of €4 billion per year until 2030 to deliver 300,000 homes.

Thus will involve 90,000 social homes, 36,000 affordable purchase homes, 18,000 cost rental homes at least 25% below market value. The other 50% of the target is presumed to be provided by private developers.

A major plank of the scheme will be the role of the Land Development Agency. State land will be transferred to the agency and used for housing. Alongside this will go a relaxation of planning laws and a greater role for local authorities.

Developers are required to use 10% of zoned land for social and affordable homes. This will rise to 20% and will include cost-rental housing.

The state will subsidise home buying to make up the difference between the cost of a house and the maximum available mortgage.

Private tenants are promised security of tenure subject to legal advice and offered better oversight of landlords.

A National Homelessness Action committee will be established at the end of 2021, with plans to eradicate homelessness by 2030.

There will be new taxes, on rezoned land, and on sites that haven't been developed

The main criticism of the plan centres on the 50% provision to come from the private sector. The critics note that

the government has no control of the sector and therefore have no control over the timetable they propose.

That's to miss the point. Clearly the government does have control of private investment. All they have to do is ensure a sizable and safe return on investment and the money will pour in. In fact that's what they have been doing, and that's why the various tax breaks and sweeteners for the financiers have pushed the price of housing through the roof.

Even today NAMA holds large amounts of public property purchased from the bondholders. There is no suggestion of repurposing this stock.

The dominance of transnational capital is so extreme that in essence there is no public sector housebuilding. Much activity revolves around Part V measures. The big idea is that the requirement on developers to leave aside 10% for social and affordable housing be increased to 20%. There are also proposals to reserve housing for individual purchase. None of this will apply until 2026, and yet again apartments are excluded, leaving the honeypot open for the vulture funds.

When affordable housing is referenced it frequently refers to smaller units in a larger development or to housing where the local authority pays part of the cost. Public housing is leased from private developers and the lease paid by the council. Developers are paid to build the house, get a mortgage payment for a fixed term, and then ownership is returned to the company.

There is no definition of affordable housing or proposals for reducing housing prices. The process appears to be pouring petrol into an already overheated system.

If there are no proposals to provide cheap mortgages, another route could stop the bubble. Cheap rents would eventually push down house prices.

There is one proposal that points in that direction, the proposal for a cost rental model with security of tenure. However at the moment is an aspiration and will apply to just 5% of current need and 2% of overall

requirement for young people.

If rents were fixed and a charter of tenant rights and security of tenure established this would be a major blow to the speculators. As it is, tenant rights are almost non-existent.

A Commission will consider the issue of a referendum on housing including the right to a home in the constitution. In fact Irish citizens have lots of rights in the constitution that are invisible in everyday life, but some reformers believe it would provide a legal framework to challenge the government.

Behind the rhetoric lies the same failed model. Keep house prices and rents high in order to ensure inward investment of capital. This model is all the more attractive to Irish politicians given that they are themselves feeding from the housing bubble through Real estate investment trusts (REITs).

There are other pressures. The Irish Fiscal Advisory Council (IFAC) has warned the government that current borrowing levels are unsustainable. They have survived Covid on cheap money from the ECB. Any sudden rise in interest rates would cause trouble, so they will have to compensate for throwing money at speculators by sharp austerity aimed at the working class.

Luckily for the government, there is little opposition.

The statement from THE Irish Congress of Trade Unions read;

Congress notes the publication of the comprehensive new plan and will give it full and serious consideration, over the coming days. (Of course ICTU had a copy of the policy in advance, as did all the other stakeholders)

On initial reading, the plan does appear to contain positive commitments in respect of ending homelessness....

Sinn Féin were much harsher, but on closer examination there was little

qualitative political difference with the government. They claimed that the government had "dithered", that the plan was insufficient in scope and that money was being double counted,

Sinn Féin spokesperson on Housing Eoin Ó Broin said;

It is clear that there will be little, if any, increase in direct capital investment by Government in social and affordable homes between now and 2025...

"There is nothing in this plan to tackle rising rents, however there is plenty for developers including the controversial shared equity loan scheme, which will inflate house prices further.

The TD also stressed the call for a constitutional amendment on the right to a home.

People before Profit correctly noted:

Housing for All is reinforcing the government's policy of allowing housing to be dominated by the market, with supply to be determined by the profit requirements of developers and builders.

People Before Profit would establish a public home building agency to give certainty in the delivery of large volumes of social and genuinely affordable homes...

However there are a number of contradictions. They continue to use the meaningless phrase social and affordable housing when the chief call must be for public housing. The ICTU statement is an indication of on-going partnership with the government. Will they break with the bureaucracy? Their current strategy is for a left government led by Sinn Féin. Do they support the Sinn Féin housing policy? Especially given that the relationship of that party with vulture capital in the Northern administration is not

significantly different from that of the coalition.

Fine Gael have an upfront Ideology that they are happy to explain, private developers have the capital to supply housing. They need a profit, as do the builders, so house prices are high. Luckily the law of supply and demand applies. As more houses are built the price will fall

This is absolute nonsense. In the era of late capitalism the supply and demand process applies, not to housing, but to finance. When house prices are high profits are high and capital flows in. If house prices fell then the inflow of capital would also fall. The nirvana of cheap affordable housing will never arrive. The financialisation of housing and the movement of capital to asset trading is happening across the world, but in

Ireland we have a mass experiment where the vast majority of housing provision is through the trading of housing as an asset.

This ideology has a material base. The Irish economy is built around support for transnational capital. Not only do local capitalists support this strategy, they join in as landlords themselves and by investing in Retail Estate Investment Trusts.

So the policy Housing for All is not a way to solve the housing crisis or a mistaken policy put forward in good faith. It is a massive attack by Irish capitalism on Irish workers. Value is drained from workers by absorbing wages in paying for basic elements of everyday life.

Socialists need to unite to oppose this

attack. The central demand must be for public housing supplied by the state.

This movement cannot be polite and parliamentary. We need to be willing to follow the model of the Apollo House movement and occupy properties held in reserve by speculators and public properties that should be available to the homeless.

The housing crisis is a metaphor for Irish society as a whole. Every aspect of public life is being auctioned off to the vulture capitalists. We need to build a mass party of the working class that will shift control of the Irish economy from the asset traders to the working class.

4 September 2021

Source [Socialist Democracy](#).

PSOL, a necessary party under construction

28 September 2021, by **Roberto Robaina**

At this congress there were almost 50,000 participants. Its result is contradictory. On the one hand, the party is growing. On the other hand, it is still far from being an instrument of intense politicization. Debates are weak, if they exist at all. About 5,000 people participated in the virtual debates. The party manages to be a parliamentary expression of progressive social demands and supports social movements, but it has not, as a rule, been an operator of workers' and popular struggles.

The Congress had a fundamental merit: the unity of the party in defending the mobilization for the overthrow of Bolsonaro. The unity of action with all those who want impeachment is a common point of the whole party. This is expressed in the willingness to turn all forces to the call for the national day of struggles on 2 October. This unity must be emphasized. It was also expressed in a unanimous position in the electoral field, that, in the case of a second

round, the PSOL, in advance, makes it clear that it will support any candidacy that faces Bolsonaro, which concretely means stating support for Lula's candidacy.

But this is also where the main controversy of the Congress took place: 44 per cent of the delegates argued that the party should have its own candidacy to present in the first round. The name of Glauber Braga was proposed. This need was defended by the fact that Lula and the PT have already made it clear that they intend to make an alliance with sectors of the bourgeoisie to govern Brazil. The PSOL was founded to build an anti-capitalist and socialist project, not to participate in a government with the capitalists. Nevertheless, the pressures to adapt were clearly present in the Congress.

In general, the bourgeois political regime in crisis continues to look for leaders from other social classes and forged in opposition parties to defend

its continuation. Its mechanisms of power open up more spaces and guarantee the visibility of new leaderships, as long as they agree to be integrated into a logic of defence of the political regime. The PSOL has experienced these pressures directly, as we saw in the case of Randolfe Rodrigues and Marcelo Freixo (the former left the party to join Marina Silva's party and Freixo left to join the Brazilian Socialist Party, a party in the style of European social democracy). From militants of the PSOL, whose central founding programmatic thesis defends the expropriation of the big capitalists and the revolutionary mobilization of the mass movement, they have become politicians whose programme is the defence of liberal democracy. This has occurred in the last 5 years, Freixo quite recently. However, the pressures of the political regime are exerted more strongly on the PSOL indirectly through the PT. And at this congress, once again, that pressure was evident.

This pressure was seen in the decision of a 56% majority not to launch its own candidacy. This sector proposed a conference in April to decide whether the party should launch its own candidate or support Lula in the first round. The predominant tendency in this part of the leadership has been to support Lula, even if the PT leader defends a bourgeois liberal programme and builds a ticket with direct representation of the big capitalists.

The main pressure from the political regime on the PSOL is that a section of the party leadership wants to be in this campaign from the first round precisely in order to negotiate, under better conditions, participation in an eventual new government. Our position has been to denounce this policy as opportunism. Forty-four percent of the delegates have already perceived the opportunism behind this policy of waiting and then joining. In a party like the PSOL, a well-organized 44 per cent is a strong current. This strength will be organized in a national leadership for the defence of class independence and building a PSOL whose axis is defeating Bolsonaro, but which also stands with its own banners and independent organization. The organization of this 44 per cent in a bloc, whose firmness was seen in the Congress, may even mean that the position of support for Lula's campaign could be in the minority. After all, among the 56 per cent who opted for postponement, there are many sectors who do not accept the defence of and participation in a list that defends a bourgeois programme in the presidential elections, nor, logically, do they accept participating in a bourgeois government. For this reason, the PSOL Congress was inconclusive, and the class struggle

will continue to influence strongly the course of the party.

Another fundamental point of unity in the PSOL was support for the campaign for the freedom of Claudemir and José Rainha. They are both leaders of the National Front of Struggles FNL, a landless movement which is the second most important force behind the MST. For our tendency, MES, Movimento de Esquerda Socialista, (supported by more than 20 per cent of the delegates and participating in the left opposition), this campaign is fundamental. We have a strategic alliance with the National Front of Struggle (FNL), which brings together historic social fighters who continue to organise the poor and landless sectors of our people. And the persecution of these leaders is not new today. Zé Rainha was persecuted by the Cardoso government in 1997, when the PT launched the campaign "Zé Rainha is innocent, the crime is not carrying out agrarian reform". Years later, unfortunately, the persecution continued under the Lula and Dilma governments. The so-called radical deputies, starting with Luciana Genro, led the campaign with the same slogan as the PT from its opposition period. Now, in Bolsonaro's government, the weight of the landowners has increased even more and Claudemir and Zé Rainha are threatened with imprisonment. These two leaders, historic fighters for the right to bread, land, housing and freedom, are leaders of the people and of the struggle for agrarian reform. That is why the decision of the Congress was so important. In defence of these causes, from October, in the wake of the demonstration on 2 October, we will have the march of the National Front of Struggle, which will leave Sorocaba for the capital of São Paulo.

The election of the party leadership reflected the Congress.

The list defended by Boulos and other militants received 228 votes. The list defended by Sâmia Bonfim and the comrades who formed the left opposition bloc received 173 votes. There was one abstention. The party treasurer was nominated by the list that came second, with precisely 43 per cent support. The steadfastness of the treasurer, Mariana Riscali, who has been in this job since the last Congress, is a guarantee that the PSOL apparatus is transparent, built in a unitary way, not bureaucratic, let alone unbalanced in the service of opportunistic politics.

President Juliano Medeiros was also re-elected. His re-election is also a recognition that the party leadership will remain a place of contradictions that do not allow for a stable leadership with a single line. Juliano is not a public leader, acting centrally behind the scenes and trying to organise not the whole party or the whole leadership, but his own tendency, Primavera, which won just over 25% of the Congress. Elected on a balance of power, it is also to his credit, as to the credit of all the main party leaders so far, that the party remains united, despite strong and strategic divergences.

Our optimism in this respect is also a vote of confidence in the PSOL itself. After all, it is currently one of the few parties in Brazil whose leadership is determined by its militants. So, however many limits and problems there may be in this construction, it is a party whose democratic nature is being maintained, come hell or high water.

27 September 2021

Reaction, not Revolution

27 September 2021, by Au Loong-Yu

He argued that Xi's recent attack on the private big business from digital giants to movie stars and his calls for narrowing the gap between rich and poor in order to realise "common prosperity" "marks a return from 'capitalist cliques' to the People, a shift from 'capital-centered' to 'people-centered.'.....This profound transformation also marks a return tothe essence of socialism", he said.

It is obvious that Xi has tried to imitate Chairman Mao in many aspects, first and foremost to emulate his personal cult to the extent that even movie star fans and kids playing online games are now treated as harming the state religion of "Xi's Thought". But the resemblance of the two invoked as infallible leaders does not go beyond this point.

Mao's China never advanced to "socialism" or "communism". It was definitely anti-capitalist, or even anti-market to the extent that even small and sole proprietors were banned. What has Xi said and done about capitalism? What does he mean by "common prosperity"? Xi means "three distributions", a concept about the distribution of national income. Taken from the neo-liberal economist Li Yining, "the first distribution is the market based on the principle of efficiency; the second is the government's emphasis on the principle of fairness, through taxation and social security expenditures.... The third time is the distribution through voluntary donations under the influence of moral force." It is the third redistribution that is foremost in Xi's mind, only flavored with a Chinese characteristic - forcing the giant corporations to donate monies to philanthropic projects. Xi's message sent a shiver down the tycoons' spines. Despite this seemingly radical act this is not socialism but capitalism.

Xi believes in the typically capitalist idea of market distribution of income into profit, rent, and wages. Although Xi also proclaims an updated and philanthropic version philanthropy is

the privileges of the rich. It is the first distribution of income between employers and employees that makes the owners wealthy in the first place. Xi is a capitalist roader who might make Chairman Mao turns in his grave.

As an article at the business media Bloomberg has this to say about Xi's supposed crack down on the capitalist class:

The evidence.... suggests that on economic matters Xi is not Mao, in the sense that he wants to redirect the energies of entrepreneurs, not eliminate them as a class..... Nor does Xi fully embrace Mao's egalitarianism. On welfare, his top lieutenants are closer to neo-liberals than socialists; in their view, handouts to the poor only promote indolence. [1]

People like Li Guangman may argue that the benefit of having a top leader making the final decision is a wise leader unrestrained by anyone, including his own previously pronounced values and programs. He makes changes as he see fit. Chairman Mao was a good example. Therefore one cannot exclude the possibility that President Xi could march towards more "socialist" measures in the future. The crux of the matter, however, is that while Mao was a charisma, Xi is only a dwarf.

Mao's idea and praxis of "revolution" contained strong doses of the classical Chinese idea of *Yixing geming*, or "a revolution whose sole purpose is to replace an old dynasty with a new one". This was why he was obsessed with grasping absolute personal power. Still he was a revolutionary with great vision and talent, and he enjoyed great popularity because of his achievement. Xi, on the other hand, is merely a head of the state bureaucracy, and one who is unimaginative. Reading his works is

torturously boring. This huge difference in talent and temperament also reveals a wide gap in their respective actions. While Mao was confident that when he called upon the young people to make a "revolution" on his own Party in the second half of the 1960s, the latter would not turn on him. Xi would never dare to even try such a maneuver. The state apparatus is the only force which Xi feels comfortable with. Demonstrations in the street is the last thing he wants. With this stark contrast, any comparison between Xi's policy with Mao's Cultural Revolution seems absurd.

Fundamentally, the two have very different historical roles in relation to the Party. While Xi was as keen to preserve the Party's monopoly on power and his own personal power, there is a different agenda at work. The supposed economic "egalitarianism" of Mao's era is a half-truth, as the middle and top ranking officials enjoyed enormous privileges. In term of political egalitarianism it is entirely false. Still Mao's China was anti-capitalist. It was Deng who reversed Mao's program. It is Xi who happily succeeds Deng's policy. These capitalist roaders have enriched the Party officials. The more so the more they live in constant fear of losing control, especially so after their crackdown on the 1989 democratic movement. Hence the Party under Xi are always in a preemptive strike mode to kill off any movement for democracy and equality in its infancy. This, is a conservative reaction to the potential danger of a plebian revolt from below. It is reactionary through and through, sometimes quite comical.

This reminds me of what Marx had once said, that "Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce."

Source [Borderless Movement](#).

15 September 2021

Unions need to crush the anti-vax movement

26 September 2021, by **Louise O'Shea**

The protests have attracted thousands of people, mostly men, largely from construction and other blue-collar industries. Small construction operators, workers—some union and others non-union—and far-right activists have united to give the impression that their movement is a rank-and-file upsurge of workers against authority.

But at the same time—and in some cases a mere stone's throw away—thousands of workers in hospital wards, supermarkets and distribution centres across the city were working to keep people alive in the face of a deadly pandemic. Thousands more were staying at home, foregoing income, to protect others from the virus. In their overwhelming majority, these and other workers have complied with health orders and queued up to get vaccinated, rightly recognising it as a basic act of social solidarity.

The protesters have only contempt for such solidarity and the actual working class. They deride those who respect health measures as “sheeple”. They view life-saving health measures as an unbearable incursion on their personal freedom. They smashed up the offices of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, which they blame, along with the state government, for the introduction of a vaccine mandate in the construction industry. Opposition to vaccination, mandated or otherwise, has been the key uniting theme of their actions, but it's not limited to this. They are hostile to the COVID-19 control effort in general, seeing it as a manifestation of tyrannical government power akin to communism.

On this, they take cues from the mainstream and far right. Their protest was attended by Liberal Democrat state MP David Limbrick, a far-right free-marketeer who thinks COVID-19 should be treated like the

flu and describes efforts to keep it out of Victoria as “absurd”. These anti-human views are shared by the likes of far-right politicians Pauline Hanson and George Christensen, as well as much of the mainstream Liberal Party.

While Morrison and his parliamentary and business allies are happy to champion vaccination as their ticket to returning to unfettered business as usual, others are unable to break from the hostility to far-reaching public health measures that has been the political instinct of Liberal governments throughout the pandemic, even if they haven't always been able to act on it. The sense of collective responsibility and the social solidarity health measures depend on for their success are simply too much for those who prioritise above all else their individual liberties and the rights of small businesses owners.

For its part, the far-right outside of parliament have recognised an opportunity in the COVID-19 crisis, first in opposing lockdowns and more recently in stoking suspicion towards vaccines and vaccine mandates. They have attempted to connect paranoid, conspiracy-style politics with individualist anti-authoritarianism and distrust of bosses and government, with some success. Despite attracting very little mainstream support—even the Murdoch press has kept a distance since the anti-vax message has come to the fore—the right-wing rallies against COVID-19 measures have been well attended and determined. The current round represents a serious upping of the ante and is an ominous sign for the future.

Insofar as unionised workers are involved and influenced by this madness, some blame must be directed at the leadership of the construction union. It has both capitulated to existing anti-vax sentiment inside the union and created room for it to take hold where

it didn't already exist. The union's failure to endorse the vaccine mandate, and its tendency to apologise for vaccine refusers, have contributed to construction workers having the highest rates of vaccine hesitancy in the country. The Melbourne Institute's “Taking the Pulse of the Nation” survey from the second week of September found that one in three construction workers were unwilling or unsure about getting vaccinated—the highest level of hesitancy of any industry.

This is not a recent development. From the very beginning of the pandemic, the union's priority has been to keep the industry open, which has inevitably fostered a certain hostility to health measures. As early as March 2020, four of the union's most senior officials met with the Master Builders Association to discuss how the industry could remain open while other inessential activities were being curtailed. This collaboration resulted in a joint submission to the state government outlining a plan for the industry to operate through the pandemic.

In contrast to the union's usual prioritisation of safety on the job, this involved risking the health of its own members, and of the broader community, for the sake of the construction industry's profits and its members' weekly pay cheques. This stance encouraged an attitude in construction that COVID-19 measures were an unacceptable threat to livelihoods that should be treated with scepticism, an attitude which, in some quarters at least, has hardened over time.

It has been the same story of class collaboration and anti-social recklessness in subsequent lockdowns. Talking to journalist Ben Schneiders, Master Builders Association CEO Rebecca Casson summed up the pandemic-era relationship: “Fair play

to John [Setka, the construction union state secretary], it was the first time in history we've got that level of trust, and it enabled us to be agile and to do things that no other industry was able to"—that is, maintain operations at all costs.

The message this sent to construction workers was: your pay comes first, not the collective good. It's no wonder then that the far right, with its COVID-scepticism and hostility to public health measures, could get more of a hearing here than in other industries.

This also reflects the erosion of left-wing political traditions in one of the country's most militant unions. Genuine class consciousness is not about defending an industry or individual pay cheques above all else. It is about standing up for the interests of the class as a whole, which requires an appreciation of the broader social context.

If this means staying home to keep everyone safe, then necessary measures to facilitate this, like full pandemic leave pay, are what workers

should fight for. Allying themselves with the boss to ensure the profits keep rolling in is not anti-authoritarian, it is backward, reckless sectionalism. And it is an insult to the thousands of health workers and other essential workers who bear the brunt of such recklessness.

And while Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews has not held back from condemning the fascist mob, his government has capitulated to construction industry exceptionalism too. It was reluctant to act when construction bosses openly defied restrictions during the current Delta lockdown, causing construction sites to become significant sites of COVID-19 spread. In a recent blitz, authorised WorkSafe officers have reported finding more than 70 percent of sites to be non-compliant with health orders. And this was in the context of weaker restrictions, which themselves were the result of Andrews' unwillingness to stand up to the bosses' anti-lockdown ire, even in the face of a more infectious strain of the virus.

All of this means that the government

is now facing concerted opposition to its vaccine mandate. This opposition needs to be smashed and the mandate upheld. For the fascist mob to establish their selfish, anti-social positions as legitimate would be a disaster. The fascist right has had a show of strength in Melbourne and demonstrated a capacity to use the pandemic to draw support. While it represents a tiny minority of the overall population, as well as of the 300,000-strong construction workforce, the protesters nevertheless are a force that needs to be countered.

It is positive that other unions, particularly health workers, have condemned the protests and that there has been widespread derision towards participants. [2] When and where possible, these sentiments must be turned into action as a matter of urgency and the full power of the union movement mobilised to uphold the principles of solidarity and respect for human life.

23 September 2021

Source [Red Flag](#).

Filipino Women's Strategies Against Violence, Killings, and Eviction

25 September 2021, by [Jean Enriquez](#)

We have to remind ourselves of the current context for women and for the various basic sectors where women are as well. We already know that Duterte's administration violated women's rights not only through remarks, but also through policies of oppression of farmers, workers, urban poor, indigenous peoples, and other marginalized sectors. Duterte's administration institutionalized a patriarchal, autocratic, militarist and criminally neglectful governance with no accountability to the people. The police continues to kill, and women are primarily target also as sex objects and commodities.

Our organization has cases of women who have been raped by the police. Women have been sexually exploited in exchange for crossing lockdown borders. Especially since women have been hoping to gain livelihood during the lockdown and the pandemic. Before crossing the lockdown borders, they are raped by the police. There are also the aggravating harms brought about by extra-judicial killings, which is another form of violence against women. Duterte's war on drugs mobilized the police in urban poor communities and more than 20,000 have been killed. Duterte's ineffectual health governance has also

aggravated women's healthcare burden and exposed them to greater risks.

There are laws that legitimize forced eviction and demolition of poor communities. Since March 2020, at the height of the pandemic, demolition of houses beset communities. 120 families were forcibly removed from their neighborhood in Pasay in March. In July of the same year, in another province called Laguna, 300 families had their houses demolished. In September, 800 families were evicted to give space to local government projects.

Besides that, Indigenous communities are victims of repression, abuse and violence brought by the militarized war on drugs, the war against the pandemic, and the war against poverty. Duterte calls the aggressive infrastructure building policy as 'Build, Build, Build'. It's a track of economic growth that has violated and abused the rights of Indigenous peoples. The laws implemented under his administration effectively harassed and killed Indigenous leaders who decided to resist development aggression brought by mining, plantations, dams, energy projects, land conversion, and others.

Indigenous peoples have been targeted as terrorists. These attacks caused a chilling effect to resist, especially in the rural areas. The Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA) has recorded 76 indigenous leaders as victims of extrajudicial killings. The government commission on indigenous peoples has failed to perform its mandate and to represent their interests, particularly in the Cordillera, in the island groups and in the Muslim religion. The same commission has become the spokesperson of Duterte's government against Indigenous peoples.

Young women face specific challenges. The online classes and the need for employment in the face of hunger have forced young people to leave communities and fall victim to human trafficking. Meanwhile, women, still in the stereotypical role of nurturers of the family and community, confront health problems and restrictions brought by destructive extracting projects and by the pandemic.

The working class are suffering from the climate of impunity. The trade union killings, terrorist-tagging, and criminalization of trade unionists and other forms of union-busting make illusory any claim of freedom of association in the Philippines. No wonder, the country has been considered to be one of the top 10 worst countries for the working class, according to the Global Rights Index, an annual report of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). The Duterte regime has failed the working people in terms of ending contractualization.

Workers are faced with more brutal forms of work arrangements where employers are able to completely pass on to them the risks that they used to take on, from providing the needed equipment to do the job, to cover social protection. Like other sectors, workers have been largely left to fend for themselves during the pandemic. It's particularly harder for the migrants (called Overseas Filipino Workers), for whom the government has no alternative. They have been forced to come home from abroad.

Farmers face similar problems, such as terrorist-tagging, and their land is converted and taken away from them. Because of international trade agreements within the World Trade Organization, there has been a flood of imported rice and other food products that cause a massive loss of income for local food producers, who are mostly women.

We have been talking about strategies in the media given the electoral campaigns that are happening in the Philippines. In the immediate, we push for: adequate economic subsidies, especially for the most marginalized such as the survivors of gender-based violence, persons with disability, the LGBT, Indigenous, Muslims and others; to take into consideration women's distinct health needs such as sexual and reproductive health; to make president Duterte and his government accountable for violations of human rights; to ensure comprehensive survivor-centered programs for all victims-survivors of violence, including ensuring economic programs.

We are also pushing for the scrapping of the anti-terrorism act legislated last year that endangers women human rights defenders. We want to ensure women's rights laws that we pushed for work for women and to support jobs and adequate livelihood during the pandemic. For the Indigenous communities, we want a governance that recognizes self-determination and a development that is fit to the needs of the people and not of corporations, one that cares for nature and the environment.

We want a government with human, inclusive and equitable social

protection policy to ensure that Indigenous communities and everyone within it, including women and young people, live with dignity. Education, health and livelihood should be supported because, without these, Indigenous peoples' capacities to contribute are affected or weakened.

There are pushes for law changes and to protect the exercise of the workers' rights to self-organization. We must fight to end all forms of discrimination, sexual harassment and outright sexual assault against women workers. We want the end of all forms of contractualization and also to ensure that our legislative bodies provide sufficient aid to formal and informal workers.

The neoliberal systems in society deepened the despair and dissatisfaction among the people. Far-right forces took advantage of such dissatisfaction and appropriated the language of progressive movements with populist governments presenting themselves as alternatives. Corporate capitalism gained from the killings and the massive repression of resistance across social movements. China is rising with its indirect contributions to Duterte's administration. The Chinese and Philippine-based capitalists continue to fund Duterte's upcoming elections, including social media troll farms that are creating a chilling effect also among young people.

Even under the Biden Administration, the United States has been cementing its relationship with Duterte by negotiating the stay of the military agreement for the visiting forces in the Philippines. We have been resisting and filing cases against Duterte's administration. We won in the Commission on Human Rights, but the president has immunity as we know. We continue to pursue cases to the International Criminal Court. Our case was not just about killings, but also the rape of women by the state forces authorized by Duterte.

We continue to rebuild solidarity in the communities. The women have been organizing community pantries with organic products and distributing food among the people. Among the widows and the orphans of extrajudicial killing, we conducted Tit

for Tat, for communication. We are pursuing and charging every violation that Duterte and his leaders commit.

We also continue to grow our alliances across women's groups and to go to the streets expressing women's

resistance!

Source: [Capire](#).

Elections in Russia: Outcome and Perspectives

24 September 2021, by **Leonid Krieger**

What changes, albeit insignificant at this stage, did the elections bring? And what should we do now? To answer these questions, let's go back to the beginning of the campaign.

On 6 June an important event took place in Moscow, the nomination of Mikhail Lobanov, a candidate for the elections to the State Duma in 2021. Mikhail Lobanov is a democratic socialist and trade union leader. His main agenda is protecting parks and forests from the construction business, building a high-quality and affordable education and healthcare system, increasing pensions and the minimum wage, lowering the retirement age, and defending civil rights and freedoms.

The Russian Socialist Movement, which includes a group of members of the Fourth International, actively supported Lobanov's nomination. We agitated residents of the district where Mikhail was nominated, put stickers, and distributed our newspapers and leaflets. All the money that had to be spent for the purposes of this campaign was donated to Lobanov by ordinary voters.

Despite the fact that Lobanov is not a member of any party, he was nominated by the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF). Mikhail agreed to this for several reasons. Firstly, self-nomination would require him to collect about 15,000 signatures from voters in his constituency, which was practically impossible for a number of bureaucratic reasons. Secondly, the election from the CPRF made it easier

for Mikhail to appeal to people who pin their hopes on this party. These were both people who supported the Communists for their socio-economic program and people who voted for the Communist Party because they represented the most effective alternative to "United Russia".

In the absence of developed parliamentarism in Russia, voters had to vote not for the most politically suitable candidate, but for the one who could defeat the candidate from "United Russia". The flagship of this method was so-called "Smart Voting", invented by political prisoner Alexei Navalny and his team. A few days before the elections, "Smart Voting" web-site and application published a list of recommended candidates, including Mikhail Lobanov. Despite the fact that Alexei Navalny is a former right populist, most of the recommended candidates came from the CP. That is why a paradoxical situation has developed in Russia, when people positioning themselves as liberals voted for the communists in these elections.

In 2019, thanks to "Smart Voting" by the Moscow City Duma for 25 deputies, supported by "United Russia", 20 opposition deputies were elected. Therefore, focusing on the opposition mood, the authorities resorted to falsifications through the electronic voting system.

"United Russia" members, striving to stay in power, have done everything possible to retain the majority of votes in parliament. More than 5,000 violations were recorded, but I am going to describe in detail only one

example of the shameless policy of the authorities.

In St. Petersburg, a candidate for the city's Legislative Assembly was Boris Vishnevsky, a member of the liberal "Yabloko" party. Two more candidates have registered as candidates in his constituency. Their names were ... Boris Vishnevsky and ... Boris Vishnevsky. These were two pro-Kremlin candidates, Aleksey Shmelev and Viktor Bykov, who changed their names and appearance shortly before the elections. Distinguishing the opposition candidate from his "spoilers" was almost impossible. And after the elections, on September 22, when the real Boris Vishnevsky went to complain about numerous violations, he was beaten right near the city district administration, and among the attackers were other candidates.

During the voting there were attacks on observers, there were pens with disappearing ink given to voters, and at some polling stations the observation cameras were "suddenly" shut down. In the city of Cheboksary, the chairman of the commission even ate the list of voters to cover up his violation.

And even in such conditions, "United Russia" lost 19 seats in parliament, and the Communist Party won 15 more seats than in the previous elections. You can even notice small changes in people's moods, they are slowly shifting to the left. Thus, the far-right populist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia lost 18 seats in the State Duma, and the center-left "A Just Russia — For Truth" received 4

additional mandates.

It is also obvious that people can turn not only to the left as an alternative, but also to liberal ideas. At the same time, they see that the old liberal parties do not help them in solving social problems, and are looking for new formations to express their opinions. Thus, it became a sensation that for the first time since 2007, not four, but five parties passed to the State Duma - the new party was the "New People" (which, however, was accused of having an obvious connection with the Kremlin). However, the success of the party can be attributed not so much to affiliation with the authorities, as to the abundance of street agitation. But the old liberal "Yabloko" party won only 1.34% of the vote, due to the fact that party leader Grigory Yavlinsky urged supporters of the "Smart Voting" not to vote for "Yabloko".

For the first time since 2003, "United Russia" won not all regions of Russia. In the Khabarovsk Area, Sakha-Yakutia, Mari El and the Nenets Autonomous Area, more people voted for the CP than for Putin's party. In most of these regions, there were people's discontent and bright leaders who became points of attraction for the dissatisfied. This means that there is a prospect for the growth of organized protest not only in the large cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg, but also in the "periphery".

In order to achieve the victory of Mikhail Lobanov and prevent numerous violations, observers of the candidate were present at most polling stations. This allowed Lobanov to win by 10,851 votes!

But, unfortunately, none of the grassroots activists could influence the electronic voting, which was organized in 6 regions of Russia. If you live, for example, in Moscow and you have a right to vote, then you can choose how to do it, traditionally or electronically. Many workers in state

and municipal enterprises complained that their directors forced them, under a threat of firing, to write a statement of their "desire" to vote electronically. It seems that no one was forced to vote for specific candidates. However, there is no independent way to verify the results of electronic voting. The authorities simply announce the result to us.

On 19 September opposition candidates, including Mikhail Lobanov, won in 9 out of 15 Moscow districts by the results of traditional voting. However, on 20 September the authorities announced the results of the electronic voting. It "turned out" that the elections in Moscow were won exclusively by the candidates from the authorities! Mikhail Lobanov and 8 other opposition candidates "lost", but they "lost" because the authorities apparently rigged the results of the electronic voting.

On the same day, 20 September, in the center of Moscow, the Communist Party organized a rally, which was attended by several hundred people. This is a lot, given that the event was announced several hours in advance, it was a working day and it was raining. At this rally, the CPRF announced that it does not recognize the results of electronic voting and is fighting for those candidates who honestly won the elections to become deputies.

When Mikhail Lobanov spoke, the crowd chanted: "Lobanov! Lobanov!" Our candidate announced: "During these months we have proven that we were capable of many things. A movement arose that destroyed the expectations of the Russian authorities. We have seen people vote against the egregious inequality that is tearing our country apart. They voted against inequality, in which a pitiful handful of rich people have everything."

Lobanov did not forget to mention the

need to build a grassroots movement: "Real politics is not only about elections. Real politics is about a struggle in our universities, in our neighborhoods, in our districts. This is a struggle in our enterprises for our common interests. And we will continue this struggle. We have become stronger, and, therefore, we are able to achieve more."

Not all of those present at the rally supported the communists with all their hearts, so Mikhail announced from the stage: "I believe that it is my duty as a candidate, for whom people with different views and positions voted, to defend what unites us. The first is the struggle against political and economic inequality. The second is the fight against political and other repressions. I urge all candidates to unite and come up with common demands."

On social networks, rallies have already been announced on 23 and 25 September, where people can gather and demand the abolition of electronic voting. Frightened by a possible increase in popular discontent, the authorities have already announced that they will revise the results of electronic voting (albeit, having warned that this revision will not have legal force).

It should be borne in mind that e-voting is only one of the myriad ways to rig elections. Independent analysts point that the authorities could have faked more than 13 million votes, which is 30 per cent of the total number of voters. The Central Election Commission will announce the final results of the elections on 24 September. However, the real outcome of events depends on whether opposition candidates, grassroots activists and ordinary Russians will be able to take to the streets and demand that the real, and not fake, election results be recognized.

22 September 2021

GKN closes plants and sacks workers in Birmingham and in Florence

23 September 2021, by **Dave Kellaway**

At the same time, the GKN management in Birmingham has also decided to shut the plant down and relocate the work. GKN is involved in the automotive industry, making parts. What is revealing is the fact that all these companies talk the talk about the transition to cleaner transport but are quite prepared to sack as many workers as they can along the way. The Unite union in Birmingham has drawn up a transition plan that would save their jobs – perhaps the first since the famous Lucas Aerospace plan decades ago. An all-out strike was called to begin on 27 September but has since been postponed to 18 October pending the outcome of negotiations of ‘all the stakeholders’.

Here is Frank Duffy the Unite convenor at the plant giving some more detail.

More than 500 workers, myself included, at the GKN Automotive factory in Birmingham have voted for strike action to save both our plant and British manufacturing. It's the last thing we ever wanted to do, but we feel we have been left with no choice.

(...)In 2019, 90% of GKN's components went into traditional combustion engines, but that may halve by 2025, with electric vehicles (EVs) taking 15% of components and hybrids about 40%. The move to electric will only continue, as UK factories unveil their new vehicle plans before purely internal combustion engines are banned in 2030.

In order to future-proof our jobs and the British automotive industry, we need to transition to producing components for EVs, including new propulsion systems

and e-drives. GKN has developed a new e-drive with UK government funding at its Oxfordshire research facility, but sadly we won't see this innovation creating new green jobs for British workers. Melrose, the owners of GKN, have decided to close our plant in 2022 and move jobs overseas.

We realised that if we want to see a green future for the UK car industry and save our skilled jobs, we couldn't leave it to our bosses and had to take matters into our own hands. We put together a 90-page alternative plan detailing how we could reorganise production to save money and make these new components.

Ours is the first transition plan for an automotive plant proposed by union stewards in the UK, and an echo of the 1976 Lucas Plan, when shop stewards at Lucas Aerospace, also in Birmingham, proposed converting their plant to socially useful products.

(...) If that isn't what's meant by the phrase “just transition”, I don't know what is. However, Melrose declined to take our plan forward.

Melrose, an investment firm that specialises in buying up and reselling manufacturing businesses, acquired GKN after a hostile takeover in 2018. Our union, Unite, was critical of the takeover at the time, arguing that the company's track record of seeking to restructure companies that it acquires and sell them on after three to five years meant that it was not a suitable long-term owner.

(...) Five of the 10 constituencies with the highest jobless rates anywhere in the UK can be found

in Birmingham. Erdington, the home of our plant, has an unemployment rate of 12.5%, significantly higher than the national average.

Birmingham has been here before. When the massive Rover factory at Longbridge closed in 2005 the impact was felt for years. Unite's predecessor union, Amicus, supported research which showed that despite 90% of the workers finding alternative employment, 66% were financially worse off, average incomes fell by more than £6,000 and 25% reported being in debt or being reliant on savings to get by.

Every automotive company in the world is gearing up for the transition. The future can't be built on outsourced or offshored jobs, where workers in different countries are pitted against each other in a race to the bottom.

If we all want to see British manufacturing transition to new environmentally friendly technologies so that there are employment opportunities in the future, we need to retain jobs and skills like ours to make that happen. Support us. We're fighting for your future too.

Once again we can see that the British state will finance research to help car companies innovate and engage with the transition but there are no guarantees for the people actually building the components. At the same time investment companies like Melrose can buy their way in, often by leveraging debt, and then look to make a quick profit by closing plants and relocating them to countries with cheaper costs. Both in Italy and

Britain production is being socially dumped in other countries. Johnson boasts about levelling up and a green transition but the government is standing by and people are being levelled down through redundancy.

The battle in Italy started in July when the bosses there thought they were pulling off a big manoeuvre by proposing a temporary one day closure because of a cancelled customer order. The unions were kept in the dark about a meeting the day before of the board of directors that decided on closure. They hoped the workers could be kept away from the plant, to never come back. The local union leadership did not give up the workplace and mobilised locally and nationally. Although the Draghi government in Italy is as brutally pro-capitalist as the Johnson one here, the political relationship of forces in a 'national coalition' and Italy's remaining labour regulations has allowed the workers there to win the first victory. [3]

The CGIL/Fiom union sent in their lawyers and the local judge agreed with them that the company had broken nationally laid down rules for making redundancies. You have to engage in a series of procedures that explain the reasons and justifications for sacking people. The unions have to be involved at all stages. GKN have to pay all the unions' legal costs and pay for advertisements in 5 national papers explaining their acceptance of the ruling and their willingness to start new negotiations. Obviously, they cannot rely on the courts to finally save their jobs, that will depend

on the strength of the mobilisation locally and nationally. The legal ruling has not banned the sackings but it has been a morale boost and given the factory leadership more time to extend the battle.

A national law is being discussed that will place restrictions on companies moving their production to other countries. The Labour Minister from the moderate PD (Democratic Party), Orlando, visited the occupied GKN factory yesterday. Whilst not having illusions in such ministers the local union leadership has understood the importance of a political approach. During the Covid lockdown, there was a formal national ban on redundancies. It has been recently removed, although some left MPs have called for a new ban given the large number of pending plant closures in which unions, management and government are involved.

Reports in the leftwing newspaper *Il Manifesto* remarked on the size of the demonstration and its mostly working-class composition. It may herald the beginnings of a fightback around the terms of any Covid recovery. Both the green transition and the Covid recovery plans are prominent in European government's policies at the present time. Opinion surveys here and in Europe suggest that more people are prepared to consider higher taxes, greater public spending and even a fairer transition than for some time. Scandinavia is back in Social Democratic hands and we could see a victory for the SPD (similar to Labour) in Germany with a possibility of an SPD/Green Government. Surveys

by the right-wing Institute of Economic Affairs found as many as 8 in 10 of 18 to 24-year-olds expressing anti-capitalist sentiments. Their anger is driven particularly by housing and the environment.

Even the Johnson government, despite its continued opinion poll lead, is facing potentially greater opposition. The attacks on living standards shown by the cut in Universal Credit, the end of furlough, the increase in National Insurance contributions, the continued cuts in Government grants to Local Authority budgets and the huge increases in heating costs could all spark mobilisations.

Will Johnson's bluster about Brexit, global Britain and culture wars, alongside pork-barrel spending in former Labour seats, be enough to keep majority support? The question is whether the leadership of the unions or Labour Party are willing or capable of mobilising people in action like the Florentine workers have or draw up realistic green transition plans like the Birmingham union.

Starmer's rejection of a progressive motion on the green new deal, his focus on buying British or a verbal opposition to hire/rehire or zero-hours contracts will not mobilise a mass opposition. Continuing the war against Corbynism and driving left people out of the party takes him even further away from building any sort of fightback.

22 September 2021

Source [Anti*Capitalist Resistance](#).

GKN redundancies blocked by court

23 September 2021, by **Andrea Tundo**

The Labour Court of Florence upheld the rights of the workers and outlined the duties of the company so it revoked the company's decision to open a procedure for mass redundancies. The Fiom CGIL union,

which had challenged the redundancy measures initiated against the 422 employees, was right. The multinational company, controlled by the Melrose investment fund, had violated Article 28 of the Workers'

Statute by engaging in anti-union behaviour. After the ruling, the company announced that it had "immediately implemented" the judge's decision, revoking the procedure "without this being

considered acquiescence” and “with all reservations of appeal”.

The case of GKN had opened in July when workers were informed by email that they had lost their jobs, without any prior discussion with the union, a *modus operandi* laid down not only by the national collective agreement but also by a specific agreement of June 2020 between the unions and the company. GKN's intention, established at a board meeting convened the previous day, was to relocate the production of axle shafts to Poland, closing the site that had been owned by Fiat until 1994.

The order signed by Judge Anita Maria Brigida Davia, seen by *Ilfattoquotidiano.it*, is very harsh. The text states that in “partial acceptance of the appeal, having ascertained the anti-union conduct” of GKN in dismissing 422 employees via email, she has “revoked the letter of opening of the procedure under L.233/91” and “put in place the procedures for consultation and dialogue in Article 9, first part of the National Collective Labour Agreement and in the company agreement of 9 July 2020”. GKN moreover, will have to publish “the full text” of the ruling in five newspapers and pay the legal costs to Fiom, which had promoted the appeal through the lawyers Andrea Stramaccia and Franco Focareta.

The judge went over in detail the whole genesis of the dismissal procedure opened by Gkn, censuring at several points the attitude of the multinational, from a formal and substantial point of view. The court considers “unquestionable” that the union “had notice of the intention” to dismiss “only after the letter of initiation” of the procedure was sent. But the employer's obligation, writes Davia, “is not limited to the communication of the decision taken, but extends to the phase of formation of the decision itself”. And that's not all: in July last year, in a company agreement, GKN had ‘expressly committed’ to discussions with trade union representatives ‘in the event of changes in the current context and market conditions’. In short, the multinational company, reads the ruling, was “required to inform” the union “not only of the data relating to

the performance of the company, but also the fact that the framework outlined by the data was leading the company management to question the future” of the plant. And all the documentation produced, the court also stressed, “violated the information obligations incumbent on it”.

It is the same letter of opening of the procedure, writes the judge, that should “demonstrate” that “the decision to close” the site of Campi Bisenzio “was the result of a complex analysis initiated” by the group: “The issue had been evident for some months,” reads the judge's ruling. Despite this, “no information appears to have been provided to the union about the alarming nature of the data relating to the company in relation to the directives received from the group management and the possible fallout” on “employment dynamics”.

Not even in the days leading up to the closure of the plant, despite the fact that the union had asked for a discussion after GKN had explained on 8 June that there would be possible redundancies in 2022, with a maximum of 29 workers, had the company acted correctly. The workers' representatives had proposed solutions to avoid these redundancies on 29 June, without receiving answers. So on 6 July, “facing a closed door”, the unions returned to urge GKN “to expressly request a meeting”. The company agreed, but “omitted any reference” to the board of directors meeting that was to be held just two days later ‘with the decision to close the plant and lay off all staff on the agenda’.

In the judge's opinion, this behaviour constituted a “clear violation of the rights” of the trade union, which was “faced with a *fait accompli*” and “deprived of the right to intervene in the decision-making process”. This is not the only *modus operandi* censured by the judge: “The intent to delegitimize the union with initiatives aimed at eliminating or in any case reducing the possibility of reaction is also found in the manner in which the cessation of activity was implemented and ordered,” the ruling states. On 29 June, in fact, the company had agreed with the union a day of closure on the

9 July, justifying the decision with the reduction of an order from a customer. The date is not accidental, the judge suggests, because on 8 July the board of directors had been convened to decide on the cessation of activities. Thus, the site “closed at the end of the shift” on the 8 July and “never started working again” as all employees were put on paid leave from the following day. Although there was no question of rejecting the right of a company to make “discretionary” business decisions, the court pointed out that “business decisions must be made in a manner that respects the principles of good faith and contractual fairness, as well as the role and prerogatives of trade unions”.

Instead, GKN, in “deciding the immediate cessation” of production, has “simultaneously decided to eliminate the labour” of the 422 employees “without giving a specific reason or any other appropriate explanation. Behaviour, reflected the judge, that is contrary to good faith and makes plausible the intention to limit the activities of the union. On “respect for the role” of trade union representatives, it adds, “the 24 hour closure does appear significant since the “motivation was subsequently revealed as specious and artfully scheduled for the following day that set to decide on the closure”, so as to communicate it “with the plant already closed”.

For all these reasons, the judge concluded, the anti-union behaviour was “clear”, since the workers' representatives were prevented from “speaking” as they were entitled to do “in the delicate phase of deciding to proceed with the total cessation of business activity”. Hence, the need to revoke the letter of initiation of the collective dismissal procedure and to “put in place the procedures for consultation and confrontation” with the trade union provided for by both the national collective agreement and the company agreements of 2020. The multinational, if it really wants to pursue its objective, will have to do so starting from scratch and respecting the law. In other words, first of all by starting a real and preventive dialogue with its employees.

Translated by International

Millions Lose Government Assistance and Protection; Biden Mandates Vaccination

22 September 2021, by **Dan La Botz**

This month millions of Americans lost government unemployment benefits and millions more are losing protection from eviction. The end of temporary federal programs is taking place in a slowly improving economy, still 7.5 million Americans will lose supplemental unemployment benefits of \$300 per month (earlier they were \$600 monthly). Most of those receiving these benefits have already exhausted the typical 26 weeks of state unemployment assistance, though others may be eligible for state benefits. Republicans argue that such benefits have been higher than wages, thus keeping workers from returning to their jobs. Democrats are concentrating on passing trillion-dollar programs that will rebuild the country's infrastructure, tackle climate change, and provide social programs such as child care. So, there is little chance that Congress will pass a new supplemental unemployment benefit law.

At the same time, the U.S. Supreme Court this month stopped President Joseph Biden's administration from continuing its eviction moratorium. Congress has provided \$46.5 billion in funds to assist landlords and tenants, but only about \$5.1 billion has been distributed, largely because of bureaucratic obstacles such as complicated application forms and

slow processing. Many tenants remain unaware of the program and how to apply and landlords also resist tenants' attempts to use the system. Some five to ten million households are in arrears and many, having lost jobs during the pandemic, owe thousands of dollars in mortgages or rent. Hundreds demonstrated in Brooklyn against the end of the moratorium, one of them, Fabien Rogers said, "How can they let evictions start when so little money has gotten into people's hands?"

Meanwhile the COVID crisis continues with about 1,500 dying each day, bringing the total deaths to more than 660,000 Americans. Recent deaths are from the COVID-Delta variant and occur among the unvaccinated, yet 13 percent say they will never get vaccinated. So far in the United States only 69 percent of those eligible have been fully vaccinated, and in some states, it is as low as 40 percent. The unvaccinated are concentrated in rural areas and Republican states in the South and West.

Hoping to end the pandemic and thus to continue to revive the economy, Biden has mandated vaccination for about 100 million workers in both the public and the private sector. Under his plan workers must either be vaccinated or tested weekly. He has the support of Democrats, including

progressives, and most corporations—including businesses that supported Trump. Some labor unions support vaccination and masks; others demand the right to negotiate how the mandate is implemented. Unions represent 11 percent of U.S. workers, only 6 percent in the private sector and 35 percent in the public sector, but there is little struggle at the moment; so, their influence on the mandate is limited. Republican governors oppose mandates and have blocked local governments, school districts, and private businesses from imposing them in their states. Schools are reopening, but there is no common policy on vaccination or masks, which are decided by states and local school districts. The essential step now is approving vaccines for 5- to 12-year-olds. There have been some small, sporadic protests at workplaces around the country, generally led by Trump followers, Q-Anon cultists, and anti-vaxxers.

The U.S. Left with few exceptions has surprisingly taken no position on mandates requiring vaccination, testing, and masking. The far left is missing from the nation's most important debate of the moment.

15 September 2021

Source: [New Politics](#).

Health crisis continues in Italy, reactionaries

on the offensive

21 September 2021, by **Franco Turigliatto**

On the pandemic, the balance sheet of the two governments (Conte and Draghi) of the last two years is totally negative, because the “red zones” were not set up in time, or lockdowns were abandoned too early and all productive activities were gradually put back into service to guarantee the recovery of profits, but also because the necessary measures have not been taken to restore health, school and transport, which had been largely destroyed by the budget cuts of previous years.

The government leads on “No Vax”

Now, the establishment and management of the “Green Pass” is being used by the government to try to offload individual responsibility to each of us for the disaster produced by its policies and allow the capitalists new means of blackmail against workers.

The rhetoric of the government and the media on “safety” is pure hypocrisy because due to precariousness, the uninterrupted increase in work rhythms and the suppression by the bosses of safety measures, workers are losing their lives, every day, in the workplace.

The leader of the “No Vax” movement is the government and its contradictory actions, with the impossibility for a million migrants of obtaining the vaccine, and the choice shared with other European governments to save the profits of Big Pharma by preventing the lifting of patents and therefore access to vaccines for the majority of the world’s population. Meanwhile, almost all health and education personnel have been vaccinated and the percentage of the entire population who have already received the second dose is very high.

Reactionaries in the streets

In this situation, there must be no equivocation with regard to the “No Vax” demonstrations: they are demonstrations in which reactionary ideologies are expressed, defending false individual freedoms, while collective freedoms and a vision of solidarity of society are radically denied, including, therefore, individual rights and, first of all, the right to life; they are organized by far-right or directly fascist forces, with the more or less masked support of other right-wing forces; the participants come mainly from the social sectors of the small or middle bourgeoisie, in particular the trade and catering sector, characterized by a deep individualism. The presence of far-left forces deluding themselves about the benefits they could derive from these protests is quite marginal.

On the contrary, the main forces of the radical left are leading both a campaign to denounce government policies and a campaign to guarantee access to vaccines for all, including migrants; they are also actively participating in the European campaign “No profit on the pandemic” which calls for the lifting of patents on vaccines.

Struggles in the workplace

Let us come to our second point: on 30 June, the government ended the freeze on redundancies (which had not prevented a million people from losing their jobs), shamefully accepted by the leaderships of the major trade union federations, and we are witnessing a strengthening of the employers’ offensive against labour: many companies have decided to close and

relocate their production. Among them, GKN Florence – which employs more than 500 workers in car components and whose productions supply the Stellantis group (created from the merger of the PSA Group and Fiat Chrysler Automobiles.)

This company is owned by Melrose, a British investment fund that has decided to close it even though it is technologically advanced and is absolutely not in crisis. The workers, demonstrating an exceptionally high level of union consciousness, did not give in, demanded social guarantees and occupied the factory calling for the holding of a permanent general assembly; they demanded the reopening of the establishment – saying immediately that they were able to restart production – the rejection of any dismissals and the maintenance of all acquired rights. By confronting the government and the employers’ organisation Confindustria, they are fighting for a genuine law against relocations and have drafted their own bill. They have been able to attract strong solidarity throughout Tuscany, and also at the national level. Their call, “Insorgiamo!” (“Let’s rebel!”) which takes up the slogan of the insurrection of the Florence Resistance, is addressed to all the workers of Italy: let us all rebel, to defend the rights of labour, to recover the rights they are taking away from us. This struggle has become a national political fact and on Saturday 18 September, it will experience a new decisive moment with the national demonstration in Florence.

The rank and file trade unions are preparing a national strike for 11 October on a platform of defence of employment, wages and social rights. The hoped-for victory at GKN and success on 11 October could make a positive change in the relationship of forces between the classes, in a situation which, overall, remains very difficult for the working classes.

Political boredom, social awakening in Germany?

20 September 2021, by **Dima Rüger**

A worn-out political campaign

From the beginning, the campaign's sole theme has been the ability of the main candidates to step into the shoes of the great Merkel. Not a word about hospitals, a few snippets about unemployment and ecology... And some small, almost comical, scandals.

Annalena Baerbock, the Green candidate, was leading in the polls in March, acclaimed by industrialists rallying to the ecological transition (and the subsidies that go with it). Six months later, after the revelation of a few embellished lines on her CV and accusations of plagiarism, the Greens dropped to third place. They made themselves look ridiculous by depriving themselves of lists in Hesse, following a procedural error. Even the deadly floods in July, which brutally brought to the fore the consequences of climate change and uncontrolled urbanization, did not reverse the momentum.

Another of the three "big" candidates suffered as a result of this disaster: Armin Laschet, Merkel's designated successor chosen by the conservative CDU and Prime Minister of North Rhine-Westphalia, one of the most affected regions. His management was widely criticized, and he was filmed playing on his mobile phone and laughing at a commemoration for the victims. So, it is now Olaf Scholz – of

the SPD – who is leading the way. As Merkel's vice-chancellor, his main success is to have avoided this kind of blunder.

At the end of the vote, it will probably be necessary to play the game of multicoloured coalitions: a new "grand coalition" government (SPD/CDU)? Or "red-red-green" (left-wing, SPD and Green party)? Or green-black (Greens-CDU)? Or a red-yellow-green "traffic light" coalition (Green, SPD, liberal FDP)? The predictions are rife, and all the colours of the rainbow are involved, despite the dull greyness of this campaign.

A more colourful social campaign

Fortunately, there has been more encouraging news! Since July, repeated strikes have paralysed German trains. Against a backdrop of rivalries between unions and attacks on union plurality that allows outbidding, the minority GDL union twice called for two days of strike action, then six days which received strong support.

The demands of the union leadership are timid: a Covid bonus revised downwards, and wage increases that barely compensate for inflation. But the determination of the strikers is strong. Above all, they are fighting for better working conditions and the maintenance of their supplementary pension. While they have been

working through the pandemic, Deutsch Bahn has nothing planned for them... while it rewards its directors handsomely! It is likely that new strikes will be announced in the coming days.

At the same time, there have been many dynamic demonstrations by caregivers in Berlin, for hiring and a collective agreement common to all. A strike was initially banned by the courts, but a new call for an unlimited strike has been launched in recent days by the two largest hospital bodies (Vivantes and Charité). And on Thursday, 10 September, there was a day of strike action by commercial workers, as well as mobilizations against rising rents in Berlin and major demonstrations against a new security law in the Ruhr region.

The leader of the GDL, Claus Weselsky, himself a member of the CDU, insinuates that it would be necessary to vote Green to develop the railways... but we do not really expect a "supreme saviour", whoever it is. And for good reason: in Berlin, it is a government coalition bringing together social democrats, ecologists and the so-called radical left that currently bans strikes by hospital workers and is dismantling public hospitals. Asked about Marx a few months before the railway workers' strike, Weselsky said: "That smacks of class struggle, we don't do that here". But on the contrary, it seems we do...

16 September 2021

Anti-pass demonstrations in the run up to the

French presidential election

19 September 2021, by John Barzman

New Politics - What are the recent demonstrations in France all about? Who is taking part in them? What do they want?

John Barzman - The present Saturday afternoon city center demonstrations in France began on July 17, in response to President Macron's televised announcement on July 12 that the COVID epidemic continued to be a problem and his proposal to institute a «sanitary pass». This followed overly optimistic predictions that the end of the pandemic was in sight. The protests tried to influence votes on the law in the National Assembly and Senate until the measure was adopted July 24. They then shifted to encourage disobedience and resistance. Growing numbers of people attended until about August 14: hundreds of thousands in over two hundred cities, with larger turnouts in southeastern France where the far-right gets more votes. After that date, a slight decline was observed, possibly linked to the steady increase in vaccinations.

The initiators included dissident leftists from the CGT (France's largest labor federation), France Insoumise (Jean-Luc Mélenchon supporters), SUD (a radical union federation), as well as the Gilets Jaunes, (Yellow Jackets), antivax conspiracy networks like Reinfocovid, New Age «self-development» gurus, and undercover far-right militants posing as apolitical citizens. Their immediate success was due both to growing discontent with the «anti-social» policies of the Macron government (retirement, downsizing public hospitals, unemployment compensation), authoritarian measures as well as his mishandling of the pandemic. They were also able to tap into pre-existing protests : surviving Gilets Jaunes groups, antivax actions visible on May Day for example, police and health workers' actions, those who had participated in the «Nuit Debout»

(Stay all Night) protests of 2016.

The Saturday rallies have few picket signs and banners; they rely mainly on social network interactions. They are officially «single issue»: only against the health pass, uniting non-vaccinated and vaccinated people, pro-vax and antivax. In fact they are overwhelmingly antivax and the most obvious target of hatred is President Macron. Under the influence of antivax and far-right groups, the slogans have sometimes added: «against obligatory vaccination», «freedom of choice» or simply «Freedom».

NP - What is the “pass sanitaire,” the health pass, at the center of these protests?

John Barzman - The sanitary pass is an electronic document (which can be printed on paper) to be shown by individuals (usually with their mobile phones) to controllers. It was to be used first, in July and August, in museums, restaurants, long-distance transport and the like, then, beginning on September 15, to verify vaccination or alternatively a recent negative test in «front-line» professions (health workers and others in contact with the public), under penalty of suspension from their job.

All parties of the left represented in parliament (France Insoumise, the Communist Party, PCF; EELV Greens, Socialist Party, SP; and their satellites) voted against the pass, but did not plan any action against it, either because they were on summer holidays, or more likely because they were almost totally absorbed by promotion of their candidates for the presidential elections scheduled for April 10 and 24, 2022. Trade union federations were also relatively quiet, leaving the field open to «bottom up» citizen initiatives and the far right.

Focusing on the sanitary pass allows

several sources of discontent to converge and produce an extremely heterogeneous movement. Here are some currents that caught my attention.

1) Small business owners, sometimes economically vulnerable, such as owners of restaurants and bars, theaters and clubs, personal care establishments, some of whom had benefited from the generous compensations distributed by the government during the early phase of the pandemic, feared that their recovery would be jeopardized by the pass.

2) A minority of health workers, overworked, underpaid, disoriented by the zigzags of government policy on the epidemic and lack of recognition of their efforts in underequipped and understaffed hospitals, also decided to refuse to comply.

3) Transit workers and some teachers wondered how they would be affected.

4) Followers of non-traditional medicine (naturopathic, homeopathic, yoga), opponents of over-reliance on medication and «Big Pharma», admirers of dissident medical researcher Didier Raoult, all of which already had a preexisting infrastructure (Internet and street spectacles).

5) Some left militants claimed that the pass increased discrimination because of the lower rate of vaccination in underprivileged neighborhoods, due in reality to underinformation, undereducation, closure of health and other public service antennas, poor transit facilities, unemployment, and poverty.

6) In my opinion, police trade unions have not received the attention of the media in this series of events that they deserved. Just before, they were prominent in a May 19 protest in front

of the National Assembly supported by all parties (left and right, except Mélenchon). The demonstration initiated by Alliance (a right-wing police trade union) asked for more funding, more freedom of action, less control of the police by the judiciary. The police claimed that photographers and journalists as well as reinforced state control of their day-to-day work (cameras, review boards) were an attack on «freedom». In July in the anti-pass movement, while police unions were preparing to bargain with the government on new improvements for the police force and rejection of massive demands for citizen oversight after incidents of police brutality, the police avoided the limelight. Nevertheless, they let it be known that the pass was unnecessary additional work for the police and the first month of demonstrations was free of any police interference. The predominance of the slogan «Freedom» in the abstract allows the unholy alliance of Gilets Jaunes who were brutalized by the police, and policemen who want to be liberated from burdensome citizen control.

7) Anti-authoritarian movements concerned with growing big business and state control over the media, used the internet to play a role, particularly on the social networks. They reject facial identification techniques, denounce public medical record leaks to private health insurance and pharmaceutical companies, and oppose state control over medical practices. This current was the most open to conspiracy theories and neo-fascist influences: they claim Macron is a dictator comparable to Hitler and Pétain, that they are the «Resistance», and that «international finance» is behind the vaccine, with the implication that Jews control the whole process.

NP - What is the role of the right in these demonstrations? Who makes up these rightwing groups?

John Barzman - Beyond the broad social and semi-political layers described above, two organized categories should be distinguished: issue-oriented groups and clearly identified ideologies and organizations.

The first category is best represented by Reinfocovid. It has appeared at various moments as denying the gravity of the pandemic, opposed to masks, or vaccinations, and now to the «pass» and to any «vaccinal obligation». It includes dissident embittered nurses, medical doctors, researchers, whose scientific credentials are often unclear. There are also parents concerned with the ability of their children to flirt. And internet influencers too. They tend to support Didier Raoult and his various proposals for alternatives to the best-known remedies, as well as guru Louis Fouché. After July 12, these networks encouraged the formation of Facebook pages titled «Anti pass sanitaire» followed by the name of a city or region, which immediately recruited hundreds of thousands of subscribers. They have equipment : sound systems, musical instruments, disguises (all-white uniforms), speakers and a hierarchy of influencers. They often admire the Trumpist movements of various kinds in the US and imitate their tactics.

The second category encompasses organized far-right groups, generally acting undercover or combining open interventions and quiet infiltration. The context is the decision of the main far right leader, Marine Le Pen, to present her party, Rassemblement national, as conventional republicans («banalisation») uninvolved in violence, and capable of uniting the French people («apaisement», «union nationale»). Her acceptance of the euro caused a split. Her number two leader, Florian Philippot, split and formed the Parti des patriotes with a more «sovereigniste» (nationalist) message. As Philippot was stagnating, he seized the opportunity of widespread social discontent, police demonstrations and the anti-pass moment to organize demonstrations in his own name, or in alliance with sections of the Gilets Jaunes. Other far-right groups known as «identitaires» have engaged in similar work. They combine this with infiltration of the broader movement promoting the actions called by their leaders, as well as the slogan «Freedom», and a ban on «corrupt» political organizations and trade unions. All of this is quite compatible with a future sudden call for unity

behind the far right candidate, be it Marine Le Pen, Eric Zemmour, François Asselineau, or Nicolas Dupont Aignan, in exchange for prominent positions on the Marine Le Pen team. Or a far-right and right coalition, as advocated by Marion Maréchal Le Pen (Marine Le Pen's niece).

Another strong far right current is the Catholic fundamentalist («intégrisme catholique») group Civitas. Most recently, this organization acquired a mass audience and experience with organizing demonstrations and tactical relations with middle-of-the-road allies, in demonstrations against the law extending the rights of homosexual couples to marry (the «Mariage pour tous» law) in 2012-2013, actions which were dubbed «Manif pour tous» (the demonstration for everybody). There has been a constant resistance since then to each new measure going in that direction, in the name of protecting children, a theme which reemerges today as «protect our children against the evil vaccine».

NP - What has been the position of the unions and the left in general on this movement?

John Barzman - As I mentioned earlier, all parties of the left voted against the «sanitary pass» in Parliament. Their arguments were that it was decided without consultation of opposition parties and social forces, it was counterproductive, inapplicable, resorting to repression instead of persuasion, in line with the authoritarian measures against social movements (law on security) and democratic rights. But none took any action ; their candidates or potential candidates for presidential contender or for leader of a united left-green opposition in the subsequent legislative elections, all feared alienating some key voters. Mélenchon tried to straddle the fence but his statements were attacked either by the pro-vaccine establishment or by the anti-vaccine street bullies.

The trade union federations, CGT, CFDT, FO, FSU, SUD, also did not approve the pass, but took almost no

action against it. Some rank-and-file militants joined the anti-pass movement individually. Sometimes they were able to win the approval of local trade unions in some cities or sectors (health, education, transit). This exercised pressure on the confederations which seem to believe they had better not alienate militants or potential voters in the forthcoming union elections (2022 also), adding to their paralysis. They have united (except for the CFDT) in calling for a major united mobilization and strike on October 5 around a number of social issues (wage levels, pensions, unemployment compensation, democratic rights). It remains to be seen whether this will be the beginning of a series of actions which marginalizes the anti-pass protest.

NP - What is the group Ensemble that you work with? What is it's position?

John Barzman - Ensemble! is an organization founded in 2013 to be the third pole in the Front de Gauche alliance of Mélenchon (Parti de Gauche), the PCF and others. It regrouped various tendencies coming from the Revolutionary Communist League - New Anti-Capitalist Party (LCR-NPA), self-management left (ex-Unified Socialist Party, PSU, members) and solidarity movements (ATTAC). It experienced a crisis in 2017 when Mélenchon broke with the PCF and Front de Gauche. Two public tendencies emerged from Ensemble!, the one joining France Insoumise and calling itself Ensemble Insoumis and the other remaining independent and working with France Insoumise as well as other movements (left greens, PCF dissidents, grassroots organizations). These two tendencies were able to preserve certain common structures of Ensemble!

From the beginning of the pandemic, Ensemble! organized a COVID group to analyse the issues, make periodic statements, and encourage initiatives. Both wings of Ensemble! participated. As it were, Ensemble! included renowned researchers, public hospital directors, as well as experienced trade unionists in the health sector (SUD and CGT), as well as elected officials

experienced with health issues and many rank-and-file health workers. This group immediately chose to disprove the arguments of the conspiracy theorists against vaccination in general, or against the breakthroughs in anti-COVID vaccinations. It put forward slogans such as (but not precisely):

- generalize vaccination with public services easily accessible in neighborhoods and workplaces
- against the sanitary pass; due process for employees threatened with punitive measures for not presenting the pass or not being vaccinated
- eliminate industrial patents for vaccines! create a public pharmaceutical industry! solidarity with poor countries unable to obtain the vaccine
- for a broad public health policy increasing proximity services, public hospitals, health training, wages and working conditions of health workers, for European and international coordination of public health policies
- the struggle for public health is part of the struggle for social progress and the environment: improve public education, public health, pensions, wages, democratic rights.

Some debate existed on whether employees subject to disciplinary measures should be supported by defending due process, or should also be vigorously encouraged to get vaccinated.

NP - Where do you see all of this going?

John Barzman - I am not optimistic. The fragmentation of the left has led to an almost certain second-round dual between Macron and Le Pen in 2022, with grave implications for the future of an explicitly left mass movement in France (the specter of Italy—where the left has been practically eradicated—is present). It has also weakened the left's ability to take initiatives on the social front: national strikes, days of action, junction with non-union movements

such as the Gilets Jaunes under pro-union conditions.

Perhaps the increased influence of the confusionist, conspiracy movements and far-right parties and action groups, will provoke a more vigorous search for different forms of united action in defense of democratic rights and social justice. Something like the anti-fascist movement of the 1930s. There is also a need for constant exchange between anti-neoliberal groups in a sort of federation, and a pole of clear-sighted activists inspired by past experience and active in grassroots movements. There are unfortunately no clear signs of this happening on a sufficiently large scale. Of course, there is always the hope of sudden large events and a rapid maturation of class-consciousness; but after forty years of retreat and defeat, that «rapid maturation» will have a long road to travel before constructing a movement capable of radically changing the system in the near future. Before the unforeseen May 1968 social explosion, there were signs in 1967 which experienced militant observers had detected, and which do not exist today.

Of course, I think that those who project a just-over-the-edge electoral victory of the left (Mélenchon, Green or Socialist) against a divided right and far-right as the solution, are heading for disillusionment as the state apparatus will resist and the social movement will not suddenly unfold its powerful wings. Likewise, those who exaggerate the consciousness, or potential consciousness of the existing Gilets Jaunes and anti-pass movements, and predict an explosion of anger that will discredit the winner of the French 2022 presidential elections, and pave the way for the election of radical reconstructionists (who want a Constituent Assembly to found a new government) in the ensuing legislative elections, have little evidence to bolster their argument. Nevertheless, I remain optimistic that a new left can emerge.

16 September 2021

Source : [New Politics](#).

“Health care is dying, either you finish it or you save it”

18 September 2021, by Jan Malewski

This is the first time that such a massive mobilization has united the various medical and paramedical categories - nurses and midwives (whose union OZZPiP was at the origin of the movement) but also doctors, interns, paramedics, physiotherapists, diagnosticists... Even hospital directors have given their support.

The National Committee for the Strike and Mobilization of Health Workers has formulated eight demands, including:

- immediate modification of the law on the minimum wage of employees of medical structures,
- immediate increase of 30 per cent in the reimbursement of medical services
- immediate increase of 80 per cent in the reimbursement of ambulance drivers,
- a new evaluation of all services,
- hiring of additional staff,
- guarantee of the status of public civil servant to the medical professions,
- special leave after 15 years of work.

The pandemic has highlighted the effects of the destruction of the public

health system in Poland. Underpaid, the medical staff is aging: an average nurse is 53 years old, a hospital doctor 51. There are on average 5.2 nurses per 1000 inhabitants, while the EU average is 8.4. Working hours are exploding: 300 to 400 hours per month in hospitals, more than 500 hours in ambulances. "Can patients accept a tired caregiver who can make a mistake at any time? We are responsible for their health and their lives.

The strikers demand a health budget of 6.8 per cent of GDP (the draft national budget for 2022 proposes 5.75 per cent). The nurses are demanding a gross monthly salary equivalent to €1756 - it is currently €768.

"Mr. Prime Minister, nurses are on the brink and the state of emergency has been going on for a very long time as far as we are concerned," says nurse Dorota Gardias, who chairs the third trade union center FZZ, referring to the government's decision to impose a state of emergency at the Belarusian

border to prevent the arrival of asylum seekers. "I would not be surprised if you deploy barbed wire around the hospitals while thanking in the media the caregivers for their hard work." The strike committee refused the invitation to "dialogue" from the Minister of Health and will only negotiate in the presence of the Prime Minister.

Wojciech Szafraniec, head of the interns' union, explains: "Recently, doctors couldn't even manage to issue death certificates. Many people thought it was the fault of the caregivers. Society has been confused for a long time. When the government urges them to vaccinate, people don't want to listen anymore, they don't understand these messages."

In order to confront this situation, health care workers in Poland have joined together in the struggle. An example to follow, because the destruction-privatization of the public health service is underway throughout the European Union.

15 September 2021

Washington Is Shedding Crocodile Tears for Afghan Women

17 September 2021, by Gilbert Achcar

The entire US political class is shedding warm tears for Afghan women's fate under renewed Taliban rule. These tears are consistent with a twenty-year-old discourse that presented the desire to liberate

Afghan women from Taliban yoke as a key motivation of the US-led invasion of Afghanistan, second only to the immediate goal of extirpating al-Qaeda in response to the 9/11 attacks.

This pretense is very hypocritical

indeed. The insincerity is especially transparent in light of the Cold War, when the US supported patriarchal fundamentalists against a party dedicated to advancing the cause of Afghan women.

The claim of acting on behalf of Afghan women could have been used likewise, if not more convincingly, to justify the ten-year-long Soviet occupation of their poor country. After all, under the Soviet-sponsored government of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), crucial measures were taken in trying to emancipate Afghan women from traditional patriarchal shackles. A 2003 report by the NATO advisory International Crisis Group (ICG) detailed these measures enforced by the PDPA regime and the harsh regression in women's condition that prevailed after its fall. [4] As summarized ten years later in a 2013 report by the same ICG:

Ousting Daud in a military coup, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) promised women equal rights, compulsory education and protection against forced, arranged and child marriage. Successive PDPA regimes also encouraged female employment. By the time the Taliban took over in the mid-1990s, 70 per cent of teachers, about half of all civil servants and 40 per cent of doctors in Afghanistan were women. [5]

To be sure, the ICG did criticize the PDPA regime and the Soviet occupation for their brutality and the heavy-handed imposition of measures such as ending segregation in schools, but there's no question that the PDPA years saw a major effort toward improving the condition of Afghan women in the areas (especially urban) under regime control. Meanwhile, the Islamic opposition to the PDPA regime, dominated by hardline fundamentalists, was heavily anti-women: the difference between the mujahidin of the 1980s and early 1990s and the Taliban is one of shades on the same end of the color spectrum — not a qualitative difference. As the 2013 ICG report noted:

The mujahidin used their control

over camps in Pakistan to impose their idiosyncratic interpretation of the role of women on the refugee population, supported by General Zia-ul-Haq's regime, which shared their puritanical version of Islam.

In addition to the Pakistani military dictatorship, the mujahidin were supported by the oldest and closest US Muslim ally, the Saudi kingdom, likewise known for its appalling treatment of women. And yet it was this arc of forces that Washington chose to support in their fight against the PDPA regime and its Soviet backers.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, Jimmy Carter's National Security Advisor from 1977 to 1981, made a lot of noise with the interview he gave to a French magazine in 1998, two years after the Taliban seized power in Kabul. After boasting that his administration had given the USSR "its Vietnam war" that "brought about the breakup of the Soviet empire," he was asked if he regretted "having supported Islamic fundamentalism, having given arms and advice to future terrorists." Brzezinski cynically replied: "What is most important to the history of the world? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some stirred-up Moslems or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the cold war?"

Brzezinski at least did not attempt to excuse the Taliban — unlike Zalmay Khalilzad, who, after having served in the State and Defense departments in the Reagan and Bush Sr administrations, became US ambassador to Iraq and then to Afghanistan under George W. Bush. He was later put in charge of US negotiation with the Taliban by Donald Trump and played that role until the completion of the US withdrawal last August. In 1996, Khalilzad argued the following in the *Washington Post*: "Based on recent conversations with Afghans, including the various Taliban factions, and Pakistanis, I am confident that they would welcome an American reengagement. The Taliban does not practice the anti-U.S. style of fundamentalism practiced by Iran — it is closer to the Saudi model."

Feminists will appreciate Khalilzad's high concern for women's rights, which is but a sample of Washington's long-standing double standard in bashing Iran's Islamic fundamentalism while excusing the Saudis' — even though, compared to the latter, the former looks like a beacon of democracy and women's emancipation. What prevented the reengagement that Khalilzad had recommended from taking place wasn't the fate of Afghan women in the least. It was solely the increase in Al-Qaeda's attacks on US targets, which led Bill Clinton to order a missile strike on Osama bin Laden's bases in Afghanistan in 1997. The rest of the story is well known: 9/11 and the twenty-year US involvement in that war-torn country, ending in the catastrophic outcome that the whole world has witnessed in August.

Whether the condition of women was overall more advanced under the US-sponsored Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2004-2021) than it was under the PDPA regime is debatable. Unlike the latter, however, the US-sponsored regime had to accommodate the patriarchal tradition embodied by Washington's old Afghan allies, the mujahidin who had fought the PDPA and the Soviet occupation and maintained their dominance over the new regime (see the sections on women's and girls' rights in the successive annual Human Rights Watch reports on Afghanistan). [6]

Moreover, women in rural areas, where the vast majority of Afghans live, have borne the brunt of the US-led war and endured huge suffering as a result of it. [7] The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) has denounced this situation in strong terms. [8] And despite pleas for the inclusion of women in the peace process that Washington conducted with the Taliban under Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden, women's participation remained marginal. [9] The claim that the US obtained promises of moderation from the Taliban has already proven to be a joke — which would have been risible had the situation not been so tragic.

Elections to renew the façade of despotism: building a workers' and popular relationship of forces that liberates our people

16 September 2021, by **Al Mounadil-a**

For 60 years, the majority of Moroccans have lived under a regime of disguised political oppression, a multifaceted suffering resulting from the nature of the social economic system imposed, the system of capitalism dependent on imperialism.

And here we are today reliving the same political process, with various elections, local and national, which will be followed by the formation of a façade government, with crumbs of power on paper that will be taken away from it de facto, thus continuing the same despotic regime.

This political process, falsely called democracy, takes place within the framework of the 2011 constitution, which enshrines the individual character of power (Title III on royalty, Articles 41 to 59).

The 20 February Movement described it as the constitution of despotism, which is the same as the 1962 constitution of absolute power, with updated language according to the internationally recognized dictionary, while being fraudulently imposed like its predecessors.

The policy applied in Morocco, detrimental to the majority of its population, is not set by "elected institutions" or by "the government emanating from parliament" which instead have the role of masking the real regime with these two local and foreign components and serving as a shield protecting this regime from popular anger by placing responsibility on government and parliament (and all institutions) for policies decided by others: the monarchy, the bosses and the institutions of foreign capital.

With the 8 September elections, the state is repeating the same process of domestication, renewing the mask that deceives the working classes on the possibility of improving their living conditions.

The context in which the elections are taking place is the culmination of the process of the defeat of the liberal bourgeois opposition, the capitulation of the trade union leaderships, and the recuperation of the majority of civil society organizations. It also heralds the acceleration of the pace of capital's offensive to invest in all areas and expand its profits by relying on public finances, "structuring" the public sector and reforming the "administration" to remove all obstacles to its growth. This is what is included in the so-called "development model report". This class offensive will take place in the name of the "national development pact", which consolidates the "national consensus" with the participation of the trade union leadership which is immersed in conscious cooperation to pass plans against the interest of the working class without resistance, and at the same time by the development of a huge arsenal of repressive laws and a massive modernization of the entire apparatus of repression of democratic freedoms.

Experience confirms that the struggle for democracy presupposes the mobilization of the working class, and its leadership of all oppressed popular layers. However, the political consciousness of workers and their class organizations in Morocco is today at its lowest level, because of the history of the political domination of non-working class forces, and the impact of this on attempts to build a workers' party.

The forces now affiliated with the working class, from a reformist or radical position, are divided into two categories when it comes to elections:

- Those that call for participation in elections on the basis of the realisation of democracy and the improvement of living conditions by working in existing "democratic" institutions. It is the same line that has dominated for decades and has ended in manifest bankruptcy without any lessons being learned. This perspective corrupts the consciousness of workers by sowing the illusion that it is possible to achieve democracy and improve the social situation without eliminating despotism and the structure of capitalist society.

- Supporters of a boycott on the grounds that the "parliament" and other "elected institutions" have no real authority, and the laws that frame the electoral process that are tainted by manipulation... As for this perspective, it makes the vanguard of the working class miss the opportunity to exploit these bourgeois institutions for widespread agitation and the mobilization of the strength of its backward layers who still believe in the illusions of changing their situation using the institutions of the regime.

If a workers' party faithful to the interests of its class existed, it would follow the approach of using elections as a platform to confront the lies of the bourgeoisie and to educate the backward layers of workers with a political consciousness. And if it manages to enter an institution through elections, it will engage in the struggle within it alongside the workers' and popular struggle in the streets in order to build a relationship

of forces that will lead to democracy and resolve the social question.

Be that as it may, workers' and popular struggles in the workplace and in the streets remain the main lever of any real struggle for political emancipation and social justice.

The real state of the organizations of workers' struggles today, the very weak political consciousness of the organized part of the working class, the intervention of forces with a bourgeois project and their control of the existing organizations of struggle isolates the working class from the effective practice of class politics. Former UMT general secretary Mahjoub ben Seddik once said: "The workers have nothing to do with politics, they fight for bread". [10]

This situation requires a work of

political consciousness raising, on a class basis, which confronts the domination of the ideas of the ruling class and raises the consciousness of workers and their organizations of struggle, mainly their own party, to the level of the ability to effectively boycott the institutions of bourgeois democracy, even if they are complete, that is, to replace them with the democracy of workers' and popular councils.

On this path, we must fight for an elected Constituent Assembly with full powers to draft a democratic constitution to rebuild the country on the basis of the interests of the majority, not the interests of the despotic minority that owns the economy. A completed democracy is in profound contradiction with the interests of the bosses. It gives the

working class the power to decide what it deems appropriate for its subsistence: it will choose permanent work instead of fixed-term work and subcontracting enterprises, wages that guarantee dignity rather than wages that change with the falling productivity of the worker, and a system of free and high quality public services (health and education) instead of paid services, that is, as a last resort, a democracy in the interest of labour and not favouring capital.

The Al Mounadil-a current works with this vision, to contribute to the achievement of the objectives of national sovereignty (freedom from dependence on neo-colonial forces), popular sovereignty (the realization of democracy) and social justice (the overthrow of capitalism).

7 September 2021

Why Do Socialists Oppose Zionism?

15 September 2021, by David Finkel

1) Zionism is often called, by its proponents, "the national liberation movement of the Jewish people." That claim is not only false, but nonsense. Jews of the world constitute partially overlapping communities loosely connected by historical experience, culture and what used to be common religious practices — or memories of common practices. There is certainly such a thing as Jewish identity (or identities), but nothing like global nationality: the Jewish people of the world aren't a nation or any kind of collective political entity.

Additionally, the Zionist movement didn't aim to organize the Jewish population against its oppressors, but to transplant Jews to a different place (often in fact with the assistance of those same oppressors). Out of this plan came another absurd ideological claim that Palestine was "a land without a people for a people without land."

Zionist leaders themselves knew

perfectly well that Palestine was inhabited — but in the ethos of 19th and early 20th century colonialism, they considered its population to be so "backward" and without culture as to be of no importance. In the same spirit, the European Zionist leadership also looked down on the Mizrahi (Middle Eastern and North African) Jews, who from the early period of Zionist settlement through the establishment of the state were recruited as a source of labor, in preference to hiring Palestinian Arabs.

2) Although Zionism isn't and never was a "national liberation movement," it WAS very much an outgrowth of 19th century European nationalism. In eastern and central Europe, rising nationalist movements both set an example, and often made life increasingly difficult, for Jewish populations. In particular, there was a Jewish nationality in 19th century eastern Europe, oppressed and economically distressed and periodically subjected to violent

attacks. (This disaster developed for complex historical reasons from the middle of the 17th century, particularly following the disintegration of the medieval Polish kingdom where Jews had been protected and lived reasonably comfortably.)

Under the Russian Tsarist regime, Jewish life also deteriorated disastrously in the late 19th century. This crisis created a fertile ground for nationalist as well as socialist, anarchist and liberal ferment.

In this context, Zionism arose as a nationalism of a peculiar type, aiming to transplant a population rather than liberate it on its own soil. It was bitterly opposed by the progressive Jewish nationalist movement in eastern Europe, the Bund, which envisioned Jewish liberation as part of an overall social transformation; by Jews in the broader Russian revolutionary movement; and by Jewish liberal currents and by

rabbinical authorities.

3) Although a minority movement, political Zionism — the quest for an “independent Jewish state” in Palestine — from its inception was attached to the search for colonial sponsorship. It was able to supersede other Zionist visions such as a Jewish spiritual homeland or binational state. (When we say “Zionism” today it means statist political Zionism unless otherwise specified.)

This dominant Zionist movement was also, inevitably, what we now call a colonial-settler enterprise. Its historic leaders — from Theodore Herzl to the “leftist” Ben-Gurion and militant rightwinger Vladimir Jabotinsky — were neither ashamed of this, nor shy about it. Zionist settlement and the incremental takeover of Palestinian land was enabled and protected by British colonialism under the post-WWI “mandate” period (the 1920s up to 1939) — always against Palestinian protest and resistance.

4) Prior to WWII Zionism remained very much a minority movement among Jews in Europe and globally. The Nazi genocide, and the post-WWII re-division of the world, changed everything — and not only in Palestine, of course. In the war’s aftermath, hundreds of thousands of stateless Jewish refugees from Europe ended up in Palestine, some by choice but many because all other options were closed to them. The chaotic end of the British Mandate, along with a hasty and ill-conceived United Nations “partition” plan, resulted in the unilateral declaration of the State of Israel, war, and the ethnic cleansing of 750,000 Palestinians between 1947-49. Large-scale immigration of Jews from Arab countries also followed in the 1950s in the context of nationalist upheavals there.

The victory of Israel in the 1948 war was not “a miracle against all odds” but rather a result of superior military and political organization, effective mobilization of the Yishuv (Jewish population), superior weaponry after an arms shipment from Czechoslovakia early in the fighting — and detailed advance planning for the destruction of hundreds of Palestinian villages and expulsion of their

inhabitants.

5) From 1948 to 1967 to the present, a series of wars, further ethnic cleansing, and after 1967, settlements in the West Bank (and until the early 2000s, Gaza) shaped the further evolution of the Israeli state. Israel’s overwhelming military superiority, fully backed and guaranteed by the United States, has been an established fact for over half a century. Until 1977, its politics were dominated by the Labor Zionist establishment; since the mid-1980s, Israel has followed the model of unabashed neoliberal capitalism, leaving behind its early “socialist” pretensions and becoming a hugely unequal society.

Israel’s 1948 declaration of independence had promised a democratic society without communal or religious discrimination. Reality has made that promise increasingly a dead letter, culminating in the “nation-state of the Jewish people” law, passed as a “basic law” with the equivalent of constitutional status. (Israel has never adopted an actual Constitution, partly because it claims to represent Jews of the whole world, not only its own citizenry.)

There are hundreds of discriminatory laws and practices that make a mockery of the idea of the “Jewish and democratic state” that Israeli hasbara (propaganda) claims it to be. The present ethnic cleansing of East Jerusalem Palestinian Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighborhoods is among the latest examples.

In short, it’s impossible to hide the reality that Israel today is an overtly Jewish-supremacist state, with many features of apartheid although of course it’s not identical to the South African example. This is the product of what Professor Rashid Khalidi calls “the hundred years’ war on Palestine.” Whether the Zionist enterprise might have produced a different outcome is a matter of speculation, but that can’t distract today’s social justice and solidarity movements from facing the actually existing “facts on the ground.”

That’s why an increasing proportion of the U.S. population, particularly younger folks including Jewish

Americans, have become critical of unquestioning U.S. military and political support of Israel, and why the BDS (boycott/divestment/sanctions) movement in support of Palestinian rights has grown dramatically in the United States and internationally. And it’s why the Israeli government is trying to use U.S. courts and Congress to criminalize the movement.

6) It’s also a matter of speculation whether a “two-state solution” might once have provided at least a partial resolution of the tragedy. Israel’s de facto absorption of the post-1967 Occupied Palestinian Territories, aided and abetted by U.S. policies, has wiped out that possibility although it remains a staple of time-wasting diplomatic rhetoric. The real-life situation is a single colonial-apartheid state with two nationalities, an Israeli-Jewish oppressor nation and the oppressed Palestinian nation

It’s absolutely necessary to support all struggles that point toward equal rights for Israelis and Palestinians within the Israeli state, including BDS, and all struggles against what Human Rights Watch accurately calls Israel’s “crimes of apartheid and persecution.” From a socialist perspective, however, there is no short-term “solution” especially within the borders of this small territory.

We believe that a socialist transformation will be needed in order to tear down the state structures of oppression and racism that political Zionism has created — which are now inextricably intertwined with Israeli and regional capitalism — and to open a future of national equality, democracy and freedom from oppression for Arab Palestinians, Jewish Israelis and minority communities in historic Palestine. We offer no “blueprint” for how those peoples will freely construct their own future.

We do believe that it will require a revolutionary democratic transformation of the Middle East region, no matter how permanent the forces of imperialism and reaction may appear today.

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Source: September-October 2021, ATC 214.

Letter from the Philippines

14 September 2021, by Delia Matos

The proposed budget, currently under legislative discussion, does not include any financial measures for health workers, who have paid a heavy price in their frontline fight against Covid-19. Many have died, fallen ill and, exhausted, resigned or emigrated. In many provinces, caregivers have taken to the streets to demand, among other things, hazard pay and allowances to cover their travel, housing and transportation costs.

I would like to testify to what this means where I live, the Central Mindanao Region, in the south of the Philippine archipelago. The administration is impotent, the army harasses the associations rather than helping the population, no coherent health policy is implemented. While some hospitals operate efficiently, the cost of private hospitals is prohibitive. The public health system is in crisis, often in a crumbling state. To the extent that networks and grassroots communities are too often forced to take the place of the supposedly competent authorities.

We live in a territory where humanitarian crises are frequent: earthquakes, devastating hurricanes and floods, multiple armed conflicts causing endless population displacements... Our associations are therefore used to intervening in crisis situations and they have real know-

how in this field.

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have been informing ourselves and informing others about the protective measures to be taken; and yet, we have been overwhelmed by the Delta variant because of its high contagiousness. The vaccination rate here is very low. A number of us have been infected and, despite the emergency measures we have taken, one of our co-workers has just died. This is a huge blow for all of us.

What measures have we taken, in conjunction with our grassroots communities? We are asking everyone to test themselves. We are reinforcing protective measures. We are creating isolation centers for people who test positive by rt-pcr (these tests are paid for). Those who test negative are tasked with providing them with food and medication, and helping them stay connected.

We buy oxygen supplies and station them wherever we can. To monitor their health, we also need oximeters, blood pressure monitors, blood sugar tests. We teach previously learned breathing methods to cope with high stress situations, such as humanitarian crises. We track down contacts that infected people may have had, asking them to test themselves and isolate themselves. We continue to monitor those who are

hospitalized.

We want to continue to carry out our usual associative activities, but we need to protect ourselves and our communities from the epidemic. This has become a prerequisite.

We have set up a regional Covid emergency fund, but the costs are very high. To cope, we need international financial support.

Of course, we know that we are not the only ones in a critical situation, that in South-East Asia in particular the new wave of epidemics is wreaking havoc and we want to share international solidarity with our neighbors. This is not an empty word, but an active commitment.

In solidarity,

Delia Matos

To send donations

Cheques

cheques to ESSF in euros only, payable in France, to be sent to:
ESSF
2, rue Richard-Lenoir
93100 Montreuil
France

Bank Account:

Crédit lyonnais
Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux
(00525)
10 boulevard Chanzy
93100 Montreuil
France
ESSF, account number 445757C

International bank account details

:
IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044
5757 C12
BIC / SWIFT : CRLYFRPP
Account holder : ESSF

Through PayPal

You can send money through Paypal

[here](#)

Through HelloAsso

You can also send money through the association HelloAsso [here](#)

We keep you regularly informed of the situation and use of the solidarity fund.

Food: an act of the most basic solidarity

13 September 2021, by **Amandla!**

Since the murder of the Chair of Amadiba Crisis Committee (ACC) in March 2016, there has been a relationship of solidarity visits and contacts between Abahlali and ACC. Both organisations have a history of having members murdered and of being harassed by the state and the police. In May, a delegation of ACC participated in Abahlali's protests outside the court in Durban. Abahlali's Deputy President, Mqapheli Bonono, was facing trumped-up charges, together with Siniko Miya. The case was finally thrown out by the court in the middle of July.

ACC and Abahlali have another major link - their struggles are over land. The Abahlali communities demand land for proper houses and subsistence farming. In the case of ACC, the struggle is about the control and use of ancestral land on the coast of Amadiba in Mbizana, Eastern Cape. The coastal villages have defended their land against mining for two decades. Today this struggle is also about moving the N2 freeway away from the coast. Sanral's plans for an 80m wide and fenced high way toll road on the coast threatens the livelihood of the coastal villages and would cut them in half.

Solidarity not "tribalism"

In response to the fire in the Briandene settlement, the ACC

mobilised the villages of the coast. For three days, surpluses from a bumper harvest were collected in five villages. This act of collective solidarity was in striking contrast to individual, divisive responses on social media, where there were calls to block all cars with KZN number plates from entering Eastern Cape. There was even news of instances where people were actually stopped. In village discussion, these were branded as very dangerous, and also stupid: "Look at everything we get from KZN!".

This sentiment was also expressed in ACC's public statements and interviews when explaining the campaign for Briandene: "Solidarity crosses borders. We stand together, in defence of land and in demand for land and food security. There is no place for tribalism or racism in the situation that our country finds itself in." The Amadiba community is a part of the Pondo people. Many families have or have had a member working in Durban. Some of them have been victims of attacks for being amaMpondo.

A 24th July statement by Abahlali echoed the warnings about provocations by people saying they are "100% Zulu, calling amaMpondo and amaXhosa terrible names". "People in and close to the ANC in KwaZulu-Natal have a long history of open prejudice to amaMpondo. They have often tried to blame amaMpondo and other isiXhosa speaking people for poverty in the province". The statement commended the

Humanitarian Development Alliance SA, Muslims for Humanity, Doctors without Borders and the Amadiba Crisis Committee for the support to Briandene.

Material solidarity

On Friday 23rd July, a bakkie loaded with sweet potatoes, amadumbe, beans and even oranges that some families can grow on the coast, arrived in Briandene. It was met with hugs, solemn speeches and jubilation by the Abahlali community committee leaders. To the public, the ACC described the campaign as a payback: "As ACC, we finally could give back for the solidarity that the brave shack dweller movement Abahlali baseMjondolo have given to us for many years in our struggle. Our answer was long overdue. Long live the AbM! Long live the comrades of Briandene!"

But another major lesson pointed out by ACC has also circulated widely. There has been no hunger on the Amadiba coast, even during the devastating lockdowns: "The solidarity in action from Amadiba was only possible because for two decades we have defended our ancestral land from mining. Our ancestors defended this land during the Pondo Revolt. Their decision, courage and resolve benefit us now. We continue to feed ourselves and our neighbours from this land. This is 'the economy', no matter if the elite speak of something else. Our community can and will never rest in

Brazil: Bolsonaro attempts show of strength

12 September 2021, by **Aline Schmidt and Luc Mineto**

A show of force to mask weakness

The Bolsonaro clan chose this date of 7 September to make a show of force, prepared for a long time, with a lot of money, from the state budget and also dirty money (the Bolsonarist mayor of a small town in southern Brazil was intercepted last Thursday with more than 80,000 euros hidden in his briefs!) Not being over reckless, the Bolsonarists had decided to concentrate most of these demonstrations in Brasilia in the morning, and São Paulo in the afternoon.

Bolsonaro certainly needs this show of force! He is down in all the polls, harassed by the progress of the ICC (Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry) on the Pandemic which demonstrates a little more every day not only his disastrous, negationist and criminal management of the pandemic but also the involvement of his entourage in the corruption that reigns in the health ministry. His two sons Flavio and Carlos are the subject of police investigations into the practices of *rachadinha* (cutting the pear in half) by which they have, for years, taxed for their benefit a share of the salaries of the employees of their cabinet as deputy (Flavio) or Rio city councillor (Carlos). Finally, his repeated verbal excesses against the STF (Federal High Court), against democracy and the Brazilian constitution reinforce his isolation; the financial sector and the agribusiness export sector for example have publicly distanced themselves. Bolsonaro's great fear is that he will be impeached and that his sons will be imprisoned.

Bolsonaro still has a majority in parliament. It protects him from

impeachment, but not beyond that. And it is a mercenary majority, made up of these deputies from the soft centre of Brazilian political life. Their loyalty must be constantly maintained by positions in the administration and money for their constituency. They will also be the first to leave the ship at the first headwind signal.

A mixed balance sheet

Visibly, the yellow and green tide (the colours of Brazil) desired by the Bolsonarists did not take place. In Brasilia, on the morning of 7 September, there were 50,000, perhaps 60,000. Some members of the clan even let their disappointment shine through. In his speech Bolsonaro repeated the eternal attacks on the judicial and legislative powers and announced the convening of the Council of the Republic, a consultative body with ill-defined contours. Finally, the highlight in this part of Brasilia were the riots impelled by the president's supporters the night before in a grotesque attempt to dismantle the security barriers installed to protect the parliament and the STF.

Many more people were in São Paulo in the afternoon. 120,000 people filled Paulista Avenue. Bolsonaro, even more aggressive, this time attacking STF judge Alexandre Moraes (his *bête noire* of the moment) by name. He returned to criticism of the electronic voting system used in Brazil to defend the printing of the vote by a printer linked to the ballot box, questioning in advance the result of the upcoming elections (he already sees himself losing) which will not use this system.

In the other capitals of Brazil (Rio de

Janeiro, Belo Horizonte and) demonstrations took place. As the Bolsonarists had chosen to favour Brasilia and São Paulo, they were neither a scathing failure nor a great success.

The response of the left

A part of the left (the PT and even part of the PSOL) is betting everything on an electoral strategy to elect Lula in 2022 and did not really want to tackle the task of calling counter-demonstrations. As Roberto Robaina anticipated on 6 September in the magazine *Movimento*, in the absence of a systematic mobilization effort, it could not be expected that the counter-demonstrations of the left would be larger than those of the fascist right. In many cities the left forces had chosen to join the procession of the “Grito dos excluídos” (“the cry of those left behind”), which since 1995 traditionally brings together all those, women, black people, the poor, the inhabitants of the favelas that Independence and later the Republic have left aside.

This led to significant processions in Rio, Porto Alegre, Belo Horizonte and especially in São Paulo where the left gathered 15,000 participants in a vibrant meeting. In Brasilia, protesters joined delegations of indigenous peoples who have been camping for more than a week near the STF to oppose a restriction of their rights to their historic lands.

In all these demonstrations, young people, women, inhabitants of favelas and peripheral neighbourhoods, and some trade union delegations were present. And more generally, in all neighbourhoods, Bolsonaro's speeches

were punctuated by “panelaços”, the now traditional concerts of pots and pans.

And now? Unity in the streets to oust Bolsonaro

7 September was therefore a day when, according to Roberto Robaina, Bolsonaro showed his strength and let his weakness shine through. In fact, no effective large-scale action against the bourgeois-dominated democratic institutions has been attempted; Bolsonaro and his people did not dare to go beyond words. But the appearance of this force should of course not be underestimated. The far right has raised its head and is in government. The executive branch has a force of attraction and assets. The coup is a policy of the government itself. It turns out that Bolsonaro has

failed to use executive power to hegemonize the ruling class. Its orientations have produced an irreversible division. A significant part of the bourgeoisie decided, after many attempts at conciliation and cohabitation, to confront him. Hence the sympathy that the actions of Supreme Court judges, for example, arouse in millions of people of democratic consciousness.

The Bolsonaroists' demonstration did not reverse the government's dynamic of erosion. After 7 September, it is the scenario of pandemic, unemployment, prices rising generally and for energy in particular, the possibility of rationing, which returns to the scene. As will accusations of government corruption and social discontent against Bolsonaro. None of this is going to change. Weakness will always be the hallmark of the government and the possibility of overthrowing it remains on the agenda.

An optical effect can momentarily give the impression that the forces of the government and the extreme right taking to the streets are superior to those of the opposition in the streets. This is not the case: the demonstrations of 19 June and especially 24 July against Bolsonaro did not have the support of the state apparatus but they gathered more people, in more cities than the Bolsonaroists today. That is why we must reject any policy that does not rely on the strength of the workers and the currents and parties that claim to be left in the streets, with determination and in an organized way. We refuse to depend solely on the reaction of bourgeois democratic institutions. We are stronger, more conscious, even if this day of 7 September saw us on the defensive. And we must prepare for new actions and argue within the political forces of the “Bolsonaro out” campaign for this battle to be won on the streets and in unity.

9/11: how the United States' - and UK's - hubris met its Nemesis

11 September 2021, by Gilbert Achcar

For decades, the US government had intrigued in the Middle East, supporting despotic regimes and fostering Islamic fundamentalism as an antidote to anything deemed to be left-wing. In 1990, the USSR's agony seemed to usher in a 'new world order' dominated by Washington - what an American columnist aptly dubbed the 'unipolar moment'. The US empire, which hitherto was still reeling from its 'Vietnam syndrome', managed to overcome it - or so Bush Sr believed - in launching a devastating attack on Iraq in 1991. Bush had been prompted by Margaret Thatcher to push Iraqi troops out of neighbouring Kuwait, which they had invaded in August 1990. Iraq was then strangled by a cruel embargo that caused 90,000 excess deaths every year, according to UN figures.

That was the first time ever that the United States conducted a fully-fledged war in the Middle East. It had hitherto waged wars by proxy, especially through its Israeli ally. The 9/11 attacks were the direct result of this shift: a spectacular 'asymmetric' response on US soil to US massive deployment in the Middle East. And yet, far from stepping back and reconsidering an involvement that had blown back so dramatically, George W. Bush and the neoconservative wild bunch that populated his administration saw in 9/11 their Pearl Harbor. It was another opportunity to further US expansionism in what they called the Greater Middle East, a vast area stretching from Western Asia to Central Asia and 'AfPak' with no common feature other than Islam.

Bush and his team brought post-Cold War American hubris to its peak. They went into Afghanistan, along with NATO and other allies, with a view to turning the country into a platform for US penetration in a region strategically located between Russia's heartland and China, the two potential challengers to Washington's unipolar hegemony. Eighteen months later, they invaded Iraq, their most coveted prize due to its oil reserves and location in the Gulf, a vital region for oil-related strategic and economic reasons. This neo-colonial expedition was much more contested worldwide than the Afghan one, despite Tony Blair's enthusiastic support and the UK's inglorious participation.

The invasion of Iraq had been the leitmotiv of the Project for the New

American Century, the think tank whose name epitomised American hubris and of which key figures of George W. Bush's administration had been members. They held the self-delusory belief that the United States could remake Iraq in its image, and that the Iraqis would overwhelmingly espouse this prospect. They had much less illusion about Afghanistan, judging by the number of US troops deployed there -far less than in Iraq. But there too, they engaged in a foolish project of state-building, after realising that there were actually more willing collaborators of the US-led occupation in Afghanistan than in Iraq itself.

They thus discarded the cardinal lesson of Vietnam of never getting bogged down in a protracted military adventure whose success is uncertain. Iraq quickly turned into a quagmire. By 2006, the occupation had clearly become a mess. While US troops were busy fighting an Arab Sunni insurgency led by the same Al-Qaeda that Washington had extirpated from Afghanistan, Iran secured its control of Iraq by way of allied Arab Shia forces enabled by the US-UK occupation itself. The US ruling class blew the whistle and forced the occupation's main architect, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, to resign. A bipartisan commission of Congress devised an exit strategy, involving a temporary 'surge' in US troops along with buying the allegiance of Arab Sunni tribes to overcome the insurgency. Bush then concluded an agreement with the Iran-backed Baghdad government for the withdrawal of US troops by the end of

2011. His successor, Barack Obama, oversaw the withdrawal's completion.

Obama tried to repeat the 'surge' in Afghanistan. It failed miserably, as US-allied corrupt warlords never had much credit (the Taliban had taken over in 1996 after defeating them). Obama then initiated an exit programme, which his successor Donald Trump suspended for a while to try a new 'surge' - not against the Taliban alone, but also against Al-Qaeda's new avatar, the Islamic State (IS). The latter had moved from Iraq into Syria in 2012, built up its forces there taking advantage of the civil war, then gone back into Iraq in a sweeping invasion of the Arab Sunni areas in the summer of 2014. This provoked an ignominious debacle of Iraq's governmental forces set up, trained, and armed by Washington.

The United States fought back against IS by massive bombing in support of local fighters on the ground, who paradoxically included left-wing Kurdish forces in Syria and pro-Iran militias in Iraq. IS was reduced back to an underground guerrilla force - except that it had already started spreading globally, especially in Africa and Asia. Taliban hard-line dissidents created a local branch of IS. By getting rid of Osama bin Laden in 2011, Obama had finalised Al-Qaeda's defeat, only to witness soon after the emergence of its yet more violent avatar.

Trump eventually threw in the towel. He reduced the number of US troops to the bare minimum and concluded an agreement with the Taliban for the

withdrawal of remaining foreign troops in 2021. This was overseen by Joe Biden, in the tragically botched manner that the whole world witnessed in August. The Kabul government's army collapsed in a debacle identical to that of the Baghdad government's troops. As in Greek mythology, the United States' (and UK's) hubris had once again inflamed the ire of the goddess Nemesis and been punished consequently.

The defeats in Iraq and Afghanistan have caused a relapse of the United States into the 'Vietnam syndrome'. This doesn't mean though that Washington will refrain from imperial aggression: it only means that it won't engage anytime soon in protracted large-scale deployments in other countries with a view to rebuild their state. Washington will rather use more intensively its 'over-the-horizon capabilities', as Joe Biden pledged in his 31st August allocution. Obama, who had opposed in the Senate the 2003 invasion of Iraq, resorted much more intensively to drone strikes than his predecessor. This pattern was continued by Trump, along with missile strikes, and likewise with Biden.

It will no doubt further intensify. Such strikes are war in small doses, no less lethal over time than occasional massive injections, and more pernicious in that they escape public scrutiny. They must be stopped.

10/9/2021

Source:[Labour Hub](#)

The July unrest: confluence of ANC implosion and the deepening social crisis

10 September 2021, by Gunnnett Kaaf

But what is clear is that it was a violent explosion rooted in the implosion of the ruling African National Congress (ANC), triggered by

the arrest of Zuma. The dangerous right-wing elements of the ANC committed sabotage (destruction of strategic infrastructure) and incited

violence. This coincided with the melting social crisis stemming from widespread poverty, massive unemployment and acute wealth

inequalities.

This post-94 social crisis has added to apartheid legacies that continue to perpetuate since they were never addressed. There was no meaningful social transformation in the interest of the majority after the official fall of apartheid in 1994.

Colonialisation and apartheid established inferior and harmful social relations for the black majority in South Africa, through land disposessions, forced cheap labour, economic deprivation, underdevelopment, impoverishment, cultural humiliation, racial exclusion and discrimination.

This accumulated social crisis has been made worse by government's inadequate Covid-19 response, that meant limited social support for the poor. With deep hunger and feeling left to the margins, it was entirely rational for some people to use the unfolding chaos as a means to procure food and basic commodities at the supermarkets.

The unrest has died down for now and calm is returning. As the dust settles, revealing information is surfacing. The looting of shopping malls took a form not dissimilar to food riots, where the poor masses were mainly appropriating food and other basic commodities for household consumption from the supermarkets.

However, it was not as simple as this, as middle classes also opportunistically joined to appropriate luxury commodities such as big TV screens, microwaves etc. Nevertheless, this does not detract from the fact that the food appropriation by many denotes deep desperation due to high levels of hunger, poverty and unemployment.

Poverty played a big part

The growing levels of unemployment, poverty and inequality are a product of a religious pursuit of neoliberal policies. This has been coupled with a culture of rapacious corruption, with impunity for the elites, which has

made matters worse. This is why, even though the unrest was not a revolt per se, it did contain some elements of protest and daring by the masses.

The large numbers of mostly poor South Africans looting the shopping malls, for three days nonstop, was daring. It constituted a protest against poverty and expressed a grievance about the failure of post-94 South Africa and the looting of elites in government and in business. This elite looting has amounted to a process of accumulation by dispossessing the masses. The tendency by some, including Cyril Ramaphosa, to criminalise poverty and condemn the poor masses as pure criminals is not helpful, as it borders on reactionary moralism.

In his speech on 25th July 2021, President Ramaphosa reinstated the monthly R350 Covid special grant to the unemployed until next year March. Though this is way too little, it is acknowledgement from government that poverty had a big role in the riots. It is clear the acts of sabotage are dangerous and threatening to national security.

But government has not spoken with a coherent voice on the character of these acts of sabotage. President Cyril Ramaphosa initially said this was an insurrection, but he was contradicted by his defence minister, who denied that there was evidence of an insurrection. She was supported by the minister of intelligence.

Threat from the Right

There were potential progressive impulses in the daring and protesting spirit displayed by the masses, which should be mobilised for a constructive revolutionary project. But the unrest mostly underscores a possibility, which is not remote. That is the rise of extreme right-wing forces to the political centre stage, through violent means and forms of dangerous populist mobilisation that include racism, ethnicity and xenophobia.

This unrest found a fertile ground in the melting pot of social crisis of

unemployment, poverty, inequality, climate change crisis, poor governance and the erosion of the legitimacy of the ruling elites. There was a marked difference in how the unrest unfolded in the two provinces.

KZN was more violent than Gauteng, and was more racially polarised. We saw this with the racial fights between Indians and Africans in Phoenix. KZN is a Zuma stronghold. The demand for his release is even formally expressed by the ANC provincial leadership.

The social crisis is deepening to a point of no return if audacious measures for a meaningful social change that benefits the majority are not implemented. We are no longer far from a situation where we will face two stark choices: of either a descent into barbarism or audacious measures for a meaningful social transformation and a sovereign development project that benefits the majority.

ANC imploding like an empire of chaos

The ANC looms large in these riots that happened in the context of the deepening social crisis. The Zuma reactionary phenomenon on the one hand, and Ramaphosa's sworn neoliberalism on the other, are two sides of the same ANC implosion that is threatening to trap South Africa in a tragic impasse.

Zuma is the personification of the deepening crisis and the decline of the ANC, which unfolds in all manner of reactionary manifestations: tribalism, corruption, neoliberalism, backward nationalism. The ANC's national liberation project has gotten exhausted. It is sad that it is taking an extreme rightward turn in its decline and implosion.

The ANC implosion makes it possible for the rise of dangerous right-wing groups into mainstream politics. Add together the weak left, plus the rightwing Zuma politics, that have found allies in Julius Malema's Economic Freedom Fighters, plus the dead end of neoliberal policies that

Ramaphosa's ANC so religiously pursues.

And it pursues them even when state intervention in the economy has become a necessity, amid a Covid-19 pandemic which found our economy already in a deep structural crisis. Let it be clear that it's the whole ANC, and not just the Zuma group, that looms large in this mayhem and the deepening social crisis of post-1994.

The entire ANC alliance has become the harbinger of backward politics, corruption, division, ethnicity, racism, xenophobia and all forms of polarisation in our society. So the calls by some on the Left to support Ramaphosa in his fight against Zuma's "Radical Economic Transformation" (RET) faction are not helpful at all.

Again, the two commonly cited fighting factions, the Cyril Ramaphosa (CR) group and the RET group, are not really two solid distinct factions as they are always presented in the media: the rogue and corrupt RET on one hand, and the constitutionalists, the clean, corruption-fighting CR group on the other. Far from it.

There is a lot of vacillation and overlapping of membership between the two groups. Both so-called factions have implemented neoliberal policies. And Zuma is a common factor in the dynamic relations of both groups. Zuma established a far reaching hegemony in the ANC after the 2007 Polokwane conference. He was uncontested until late at the end of the second term of his ANC presidency, in the period leading up to the Nasrec 2017 conference. Members of both groups (RET and CR) have had close ties with Zuma in the period since the Polokwane conference

Cyril himself was catapulted into the position of prominence as deputy president by Zuma in 2012, having languished in political obscurity. He was building his multi billion rand business empire for most of the time since he left the ANC Secretary General office in 1997. He openly defended Zuma's rotten and backward practices until 2017, when he launched his presidential campaign.

The ANC can't kick out Zuma, who is

clearly a dangerous criminal, because, as evidence coming out of the Zondo Sate Capture Commission clearly shows, in many respects the ANC itself has become a criminal network. It is a network for organising political power and pursuing accumulation by ruling elites and sections of capital, both the established big business and the black business class.

Even though the ANC remains the biggest political mass movement, the mass of the ANC members don't play a meaningful role in setting the direction of the organisation. The ruling factions have appropriated all the power to themselves.

The ANC is rotten to the core, and the masses have generally given up on it as a legitimate political force to advance their social demands. It is a hollow mass movement without a mass political programme. The ANC crisis is mainly a show of the elites, and these elites don't necessarily control the ANC masses. That's why its electoral support is seriously declining (from 69.6% in 2004 down to 57% in 2019, and seems headed to get below 50% during this decade).

The ANC largely benefits from the weak state of mass movements among the masses who therefore can't organisationally express their social agency with autonomy. That's why the rotten and crisis-ridden ANC and its factions can still succeed to put up a semblance of a mass movement.

Transcend the ANC or get trapped in a tragic impasse

There is an amount of desperation in characterising this unrest as an attempted insurrection, without evidence of public mobilisation for the overthrow of government. Yes, the unrest was a threat to national security and stability, but an insurrection should be noticeable.

The arguments by Cyril Ramaphosa calling this an insurrection could be more than just a poor characterisation. It is possibly not an

innocent fault in analysis, but rather convenient for political purposes:

● Is it made to justify a possible authoritarian turn and the use of state brutal force through the army and the police as the legitimacy of the ANC government is eroding faster with the deepening social crisis?

● Is it made to crush with brute force Ramaphosa's enemies?

● Could it be that the war of ANC factions is now reaching the ultimate dangerous point of "kill or be killed"?

Something serious is definitely cooking! But then ultimately this shows how the ANC has become a threat to national security, peace and stability, democracy and social progress. If the ANC is not transcended as a dominant political force, they will trap the country in a tragic impasse.

The main social demands of the popular classes for organising, mobilising, movement building and pursuing a mass-based Left renewal in the present situation should include:

1. An anti-austerity campaign against budget cuts on social services and public sector wages.
2. A basic income grant set at R1300 per month, as per the upper-bound poverty line as determined by Statistics South Africa.
3. An active sovereign industrial policy for the creation of jobs on a large scale, that also includes an agriculture policy that promotes food sovereignty and food security, instead of relying on alienated markets of shopping malls for the supply of food.
4. Community safety work to, among other things, counter the deployment of the army in our communities.
5. Support for the Constitution without siding with the CR faction of the ANC. Defending human rights, and the checks and balances for curbing the abuse of public power.

The South African Left and progressive forces must organise social forces. We must rebuild political forces capable of posing a revolutionary transformation agenda that can save South Africa from a dangerous rightist drift and the senile neoliberal capitalist path. South Africa must consolidate a sovereign development project that buttresses the social demands of the majority, or

Facing the Long J6 Riot

9 September 2021, by [Against the Current](#) Editors

The United States' slide toward a potential massive political and constitutional crisis makes a looming backdrop to the present terrible unfolding season of uncontrolled wildfires, floods and a coming catastrophe of housing evictions — by the hundreds of thousands — amidst the resurgent COVID-19 pandemic.

January 6 was a lavishly televised and videoed coming-out party for the likes of the Proud Boys, Bougaloo Movement, Oath Keepers, Three Percenters and the rest of the far-right militia network, ranging from comic-opera types to seriously dangerous armed and organized groupings. Some of those who stormed the Capitol thought they were truly “insurrectionists” in a mythical patriotic cause. We know from the account of General Milley of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that Trump was fantasizing about, if not operationally planning, a military coup and “emergency” to stay in office.

Information emerges by the week of Trump's criminal moves to manipulate and corrupt the Justice Department and Supreme Court, state election officials and his own vice-president to cancel his election loss. But as reactionary as many of those players are in their own right, most aren't unconditional Trump-cult loyalists, and no way were the institutions of state going down in his bunker. Yes, January 6 was a vicious, violent and potentially murderous white-nationalist riot that might have gotten even worse, but hardly a proper coup. Ask the people of Burma (Myanmar), or Chile (1973) or Haiti (1991, 2004) or Honduras (2009) to tell you what a real coup looks and feels like.

To what extent the plotters and/or patsies of January 6 will be seriously prosecuted — and their enablers in

medium-and-high political places exposed — remain open questions. But we're seeing now that January 6 wasn't a one-day thing but a long riot, which has continued in gerrymandered, rightwing-controlled state legislatures by other, frankly more effective means.

These of course are the voter restriction, suppression and intimidation laws cascading through dozens of states not by conspiracy but essentially in the glare of daylight, even if some of them are passed and signed into law in the dead of night. Meanwhile the six-person rightwing Supreme Court majority, which we'll now call WSCOTUS for White Supremacy Court of the United States, has signaled in the Arizona case that it's prepared to uphold the destruction of the Voting Rights Act. (For some discussion see “America's Political Crisis: Dead Center Can't Hold” posted at <https://solidarity-us.org/>, June 29, 2021.)

The Threat within the System

What's actually at stake here? President Joe Biden laid it on a bit thick in his July 13 speech calling these laws “the biggest threat to our democracy since the Civil War.” That conflagration was a contest between rival social systems, which ultimately couldn't be resolved by compromise (despite decades of attempts) because of the slave system's threat of westward expansion.

Nothing of that sort of conflict is happening in today's free-market capitalist America, obviously. But African-American legislators and civil rights activists are quite right in calling out the threat of “Jim Crow

2.0,” recalling the era following the end of post-Civil War Reconstruction in an infamous post-election “compromise” in 1876 that destroyed most of freed people's social, political and economic gains in the South.

But Biden's overheated “Civil War” rhetoric contrasts with his complacent assurance that heroic voter registration and turnout activism will overcome state voter-suppression laws — so no urgency to remove the filibuster on federal voting rights legislation. Angry activists have accurately warned that it's not feasible to “out-organize” voter-suppression once it's entrenched in law.

In fact, voting rights in the United States were more or less assured only in the relatively brief historical period from the passage of the historic 1965 law until 2013, when Chief WSCOTUS Justice Roberts began dismantling it on the pretext that the election of Barack Obama meant that “America has moved on,” and hence federal pre-clearance of voting rules changes in southern states was antiquated.

Now the emboldened WSCOTUS majority, through Justice Alito, decrees that Arizona's law making it harder for rural Indigenous voters is perfectly OK because it doesn't actually “prohibit” them. That's the whole point, of course: a more sophisticated Jim Crow 2.0 doesn't require making it impossible for African-American or Latinx or poor communities to vote, only harder, more inconvenient and potentially nastier (with rightwing “poll observers” in Texas menacing them, for example).

In a closely divided and polarized two-party setup both at state and national levels, with tiny majorities in both

houses of Congress and with the anachronistic Electoral College's ability to install a president who's lost the national election by millions of votes, strategically placed vote suppression can turn the party of an electoral minority into semi-permanent ruling status — with potentially disastrous results for democracy, for basic rights, even for the stability of the system itself.

Here's why: the longtime traditional preferred political organ of U.S. big business, the Republican Party, has morphed into a peculiar amalgam of plutocracy, white supremacy and Christian nationalism. With amazing cynicism, its leadership has embraced, enabled or passively accepted the mythos of the Trump cult. In the process this party has become a virulent mutant somewhat along the lines of the militantly racist German AfD or French "Rally," which in those countries are considered too toxic to be allowed into national government.

On the legislative level, today's Republican Party has replaced traditional "bipartisan" negotiation with near-total obstructionism when it doesn't hold the levers of power and raging-bull-in-a-China-shop methods when it does — huge tax cuts for corporations and the rich putting the country on the path to bankruptcy, vicious attacks on abortion rights, destruction of unions, packing the courts with reactionary cadres, ecocidal deregulation, and now of course wiping out the protections of the Voting Rights Act.

But in a decreasingly white-majority country, it's a party whose ability to govern nationally increasingly depends on restriction and suppression of nonwhite voters.

The Democratic Party, on the other hand, by now is at least tentatively supported by most of the "mainstream" of the ruling class. Corporate America on the whole recognizes at least the desperate need for serious infrastructure (both material and human) investment and at least some efforts at things like climate-change mitigation and immigration reform. But how actively this politically indolent ruling class, having become so fattened by its

wealth, is prepared to intervene to preserve the system's longer-term stability is a complex question that will require deeper future discussion.

The Democratic Party of course, whatever its "progressive wing" might want, remains firmly committed to maintaining — and handsomely profiting from — the U.S. imperial mission to rule the world. The latter is an obvious remaining pillar of "bipartisanship," but the elites generally recognize that Trump's America-First antics and romances with Russia's President-for-life Putin and North Korea's Kim Jong-un damaged Washington's global standing.

As the Democratic voting base increasingly depends on communities of color — while the much-discussed "suburban vote" remains a hotly contested arena — Democrats need voter access and turnout to expand, just as desperately as Republicans need to curtail it. In this sense, the January 6 riot wasn't a one-day incident but a point of transition from the Trump presidency and the 2020 election to a chaotic new political dispensation with an outcome very much in the balance.

What's at Stake

The left and socialists in particular obviously can't be indifferent to the outcome of this political war. We advocate the expansion of democracy, not only in guaranteed rights and ease of voting but abolishing the overwhelming difficulties of ballot access for third parties, the truly antiquated slave-relic Electoral College, lifetime Supreme Court appointments and so much more beyond the scope of the present brief discussion.

Many of these anti-democratic institutions and procedures, including the Supreme Court, were established precisely to protect the wealthy and privileged from the threat that democracy posed to their power. Together with the entrenched two-party system, which has played a big role in hampering the emergence of independent working class politics, these measures greatly enforced the

"stability" of a setup that's powerfully served the elites through wars, depressions and social upheavals including militant labor upsurges and the Civil Rights revolution.

Today from within the system itself, these very institutions, e.g. the anti-democratic filibuster in the U.S. Senate — itself the most unrepresentative elected body in the more-or-less democratic world — are ironically but ominously becoming weapons of a far-right party threatening that stability.

The uncontained wildfire of voter-suppression state legislation, protected by the Republican Senate filibuster against federal voter protection and by WSCOTUS against constitutional challenge, raises the specter of minority-party Republican "state capture" of both houses of Congress in the 2022 midterms — crippling the Biden administration's hope for any legislative agenda — and the White House in 2024. That could happen even if the Republican candidate massively loses the national vote, and regardless of whether the aspiring fuhrer Trump is that candidate.

Even without such an extreme outcome, the necessity of serious infrastructure investment — and climate change prevention and mitigation, inadequate as the Biden program is in that regard — is blunted by the filibuster-induced coma of the U.S. Senate. We discussed this in our previous editorial statement ("Infrastructure: Who Needs It?" in ATC 213). As we go to press, the smaller "bipartisan" bill has cleared procedural Senate obstacles while complicated maneuvers continue over the ten-year \$3.5 trillion Democratic package.

On the face of it, the fate of voting rights seems to depend on West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin. But deeper forces are at work. It's possible for those of us on the left to welcome the truly heroic defiance by the Texas Democratic legislators who left the state to deprive their state legislature of the quorum for enacting massive vote suppression, while we insist that the capitalist and imperialist Democratic Party itself is

very much part of the problem.

The left needs to point to the underlying factors that brought about this political crisis long before it crystallized in the insanity of the Trump presidency and the “long January 6 riot” in its aftermath. These developments are the fruits of decades of mainly bipartisan neoliberal and “free-trade” policies that have eviscerated workers’ rights, made the corporate ruling class obscenely rich, spawned a new sector of plutocrats capable of financing extreme rightwing initiatives, and exposed large sectors of the U.S. population to massive insecurity and impoverishment.

No wonder that a considerable sector

of white workers as well as middle-class people have been attracted to the racist lies that are now the core of the Republican appeal. The political crisis cannot be resolved in a progressive direction unless the U.S. labor movement is rebuilt on the basis of a popular social justice program and above all, rank- and-file energy and democratic power.

Above all, that goal is where the energy and strategic thinking of today’s socialist left must be, whether in our unions or communities or anti-racist mobilizations. Let’s remember that this is not only a time of rightwing menace, but also a moment when popular resistance movements and anti-dictatorship struggles are exploding globally. In the United

States there’s a revival of interest in socialism, even if organizations of the revolutionary left coming from the struggles of the 20th and early 21st centuries are at low ebb.

Both the viciously reactionary Trump phenomenon and the Bernie Sanders upsurge; both the emboldened rightwing militias and the magnificent movements spearheaded by Black Lives Matter, Water Protector activists and immigrant rights fighters; these are all products of the long-developing crisis of a deeply unequal, exploitative and racially unjust society. Grasping that dual reality is the beginning of confronting a dangerous moment

Source: September-October 2021, ATC 214.

Texas Anti-Abortion Law Authorizes Vigilantes

8 September 2021, by Dianne Feeley

What’s the innovation? Simply that the law empowers any private individual to bring lawsuits against all who might aid a woman seeking an abortion beyond her sixth week of pregnancy. Texas Right to Life has already set up tip lines to activate those interested in pursuing such abettors, be they the woman’s family, staff at an abortion clinic or the taxi driver who took her to a clinic.

Since the Texas law, SB8, also provides any vigilante who proves the charge in court with a \$10,000 reward plus legal fees, the law intimidates those who might help a woman who does not want to continue her pregnancy. Texas clinics have already announced that they have no choice but to comply with this deliberately unconstitutional law by ending their abortion practices.

The anti-choice justices on the Court used the excuse that because SB8 empowers vigilantes rather than public officials, it is an

“unprecedented” approach that should be tested in decisions by the lower courts. While the law winds its way through the system, Texas clinics will be forced to close. Even if the Supreme Court eventually overturns it, much damage will have been done.

For almost fifty years the right wing has attempted to overturn the Roe v. Wade decision. They have won partial victories through allowing laws that imposed demeaning rules on abortion procedures and demonized women, particularly those who needed late-term abortions. Over the years anti-abortion fanatics have picketed clinics, set up phony clinics to attract and then intimidate women seeking abortion, lied about the safety of abortion, and written those untruths into propaganda providers must distribute before the medical procedure is performed.

The Texas law sets abortion at a six-week limit and builds a network of bounty hunters. Written to circumvent

constitutional challenge, it has an immediate impact on millions of Texan women. Although Texans seeking to obtain an abortion can journey across state lines, this raises the cost of the procedure in terms of both time and money. Given that African American women seek abortion at a higher rate than white women, SB8 has a greater impact on more vulnerable women.

SB8 penalizes anyone who performs or induces abortion. Medical abortion had been allowed in Texas following the FDA protocol that it may be used up to 10 weeks of pregnancy. However, a previous state law banning Telemedicine for doctors to prescribe the abortion medications, already limited access for people who do not live near an abortion provider. A new law, SB4, explicitly limiting medication abortion to 49 days into the pregnancy is on its way to the Governor’s desk. As a way to circumvent this new restriction on medication abortion in Texas, pregnant people could access the

medications through Telemedicine with providers in other states. Attempting to cut off this avenue, SB4 bans the delivery of abortifacients through the mail in Texas. It is unclear how this can be enforced; but it does represent another barrier to access.

Beyond Texas

SB8 will affect not just women in Texas but will be copied by other rightwing state legislatures. Florida Senate President Wilton Sampson has already indicated this law will be on their agenda in 2021.

In practice, SB8 provides a rightwing model on how to deal with progressive laws by circumventing legal challenges until vigilante action has rendered them meaningless. In fact, U.S. history offers a model for how this can be carried out! Passage of the 14th, 15th and 16th amendments abolished slavery as a legal institution and guaranteed the rights of citizenship to those who had been dehumanized. Yet within a dozen

years a relentless counterattack resulted in "redeeming" the white elites, smashing what multi-racial democracy had been built and reducing the rights of former slaves through vigilante murder and intimidation.

Can this happen now? Of course. We should be aware of the danger SB8 represents not just for Texas women, but for everyone. And laws empowering vigilantes around limiting voting rights are already in the pipeline.

The Supreme Court decision is one more nail in the coffin of this supposedly public institution, as it flaunts the needs and aspirations of women and those who support us. Why should nine individuals have such power? It's absurd.

What can we do? Take a lesson from past movements in U.S. history that have forced public officials to take positions they'd rather not. Our

immediate demand is that Congress guarantee reproductive rights through emergency legislation and not permit the Senate to block it by filibuster. Second, do not allow federal courts to duck their obligation to rule SB8 unconstitutional on the absurd procedural pretext that it establishes vigilantes as law enforcers instead of public officials.

Today's crisis opens up an opportunity to assert the right to a full program of reproductive justice. This begins with sex education based on science not superstition, an accessible public health system and a healthy environment to raise children. Such a program commits us to building a movement that draws on our strength, creativity and determination. It commits us to ally with other social justice movements that face the same bullying enemies, from Black Lives Matter and Indigenous rights to environmental justice.

Source [Solidarity](#).

The Sixth IPCC report confirmed by the calamities of the summer

7 September 2021, by **NPA Ecology Commission**

The Group 1 Of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued its report this summer (1400 pages which provide a synthesis of 14,000 scientific articles): 234 authors from 66 nationalities worked on it. Also published is a "Summary for Policy Makers", aimed at a wide audience [11] For the first time, the IPCC has taken a close look at the extreme events whose number is escalating. We now know that there will be "tipping points", in particular a possible rise in water levels of 5 metres. The consensus is increasingly solid: "unequivocally", it is human activities that have warmed the atmosphere, land and oceans since 1750, "Each of the last four decades has been successively hotter than any decade since 1850".

Torrential rains and fires across the planet

Summer after summer, we could get used to it. And yet we are surprised by the scale of the phenomena: in Cologne, in mid-July, there fell in a few hours as much rain as in July-August in a normal year; 200 people were killed in this region of Germany and political life has been very strongly shaken up. The dispute over the climate issue rages on.

Once again, fires have set the planet ablaze. In Greece, events took on the character of a national disaster as the heat wave that preceded the mega-

fires, social destruction, land speculation and the destruction of public services made everything worse. Everything is intertwined: hundreds of animal species have been reported to be endangered by fires, such as the red deer in Greece and Hermann's turtle in the Var.

What to do ?

Group 1 of the IPCC was mandated to establish a finding on solid scientific bases, with the task of making recommendations going to groups 2 and 3 who will submit their reports in 2022. This sixth report is not satisfied with a single scenario; it examines several "possible climate futures" with differentiated reductions of CO2

emissions. But by not daring to consider a change of course as radical as that initiated in the eighteenth century by entry into the hard core of industrial capitalism, by not daring to emphasize the need for a change in civilization, the trajectories in response that are examined are all technical, capital-compatible : "negative emission technologies, TEN" (capture and sequestration of gigantic quantities of CO2 underground) which are only so far at the stage of prototypes t, with formidably dangerous consequences on the social and ecological level; or "Low carbon technologies" , nuclear power to put it bluntly. [12]

Need for

radicalism ...

Some writers, such as the Frenchman Christophe Cassou, however, express this absolute urgency for radical measures: "Without an immediate, strong, sustained and large-scale reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, we will not be able to limit global warming to less than 2 °C. We have to move to that without detour or procrastination". [13] Knowing that this will challenge productivism, consumerism and private ownership by big groups. As Daniel Tanuro says: "The alternative is dramatically simple: either humanity will liquidate capitalism, or capitalism will liquidate millions of innocent people in order to continue its barbaric course on a

mutilated and perhaps unlivable planet. "

... And broad action!

Sixty days before COP26 in Glasgow, let us already point out the global mobilization on Saturday 6 November. May this deadline be an opportunity for us to advance our proposals, which aim to take care of people and ecosystems, to make social questions ecological and ecology social. The contours of another society, ecosocialism, will then emerge .

Translated from the weekly L'Anticapitaliste-number 580, 2 September 2021.

The US Lost in Afghanistan. But US Imperialism Isn't Going Anywhere.

6 September 2021, by **Gilbert Achcar**

The antiwar movement should be under no illusion that the era of US imperialist warfare has come to an end with the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. What is taking place is no more than a reload and update of the lessons that were drawn from Vietnam, with a view to achieve smarter management and higher cost-effectiveness of US military engagements — not back away from the global dominance of US imperial power.

The United States' defeat in Vietnam, concluded by the withdrawal of US troops in 1973, led to a major revision in military strategy that prepared the United States for the wars of the digital age. The domestic impact of Vietnam was enormous, especially the massive aversion to war that developed among the US population, particularly the youth. Imperialist warmongers called it "Vietnam syndrome," seeing a disease in what was actually a very healthy public

wariness toward the power elite's inclination to launch imperial expeditions.

After Vietnam, it became imperative to avoid another protracted war ending in failure against a backdrop of antiwar mobilization at home. The United States' post-Vietnam strategy was honed during the Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush years, but it was largely disregarded in the era after 9/11, with the result that the United States repeated many of the same mistakes in George W. Bush's "war on terror."

Now Joe Biden is signaling a return to the post-Vietnam strategy. It may mean fewer ground troops, but don't mistake that for the end of US imperial aggression.

A Revolution in

Military Affairs

Post-Vietnam military strategy was framed by two factors: the termination of the draft in 1973, and the "revolution in military affairs" during the Reagan and Bush Sr years.

The end of conscription and the shift to an all-volunteer professional army meant a massive reduction in personnel. In proportion to the American population, active-duty personnel are today less than half what they were in 1973 (though they are still the fourth-largest body of troops in the world, after China, India, and North Korea). Ronald Reagan tried to compensate for the military's reduction in size with the most impressive surge in military expenditure in the absence of war that the United States ever witnessed. Military spending peaked at 7 percent of the GDP during Reagan's second mandate. The strategic aim of this

massive expenditure was to research, develop, and produce a new generation of sophisticated weapons that would highly increase the “destructivity” of US weaponry to compensate for the reduction in US personnel.

This “revolution in military affairs” went along with a new military doctrine elaborated during those years. Its main designers included Dick Cheney and Colin Powell, two officials in the Reagan and Bush Sr administrations who would later play a leading role in the advent of the post-9/11 wars. The core of the new doctrine was that the United States should avoid the kind of gradual engagement, called “escalation,” that had gotten it bogged down in a politically costly, protracted war in Vietnam. Instead, it should only wage time-limited wars from a position of “overwhelming superiority” after having built up the necessary force near the theater of operations. In doing so, it should aim at zero deaths among US personnel by minimizing the involvement of troops in clashes on the ground and resorting instead to remote warfare, accompanied with light-footprint ground operations when necessary.

The 1991 war against Iraq in reaction to its invasion of neighboring Kuwait was the United States’ first large-scale war since Vietnam, and it was a textbook illustration of the post-Vietnam doctrine. The United States waited several months until it built up an impressive military force in the proximity of Iraq and Kuwait. It then launched a devastating bombing campaign that targeted not only Iraqi troops but also Iraq’s civilian infrastructure — a fact that, combined with the severe embargo inflicted upon Iraq for twelve years after the war, led to a death toll of genocidal proportions (an excess mortality of ninety thousand per year, according to UN figures). The fighting itself lasted less than six weeks.

It is amusing to read in hindsight Colin Powell’s praise of the 1991 Iraq war, knowing the ignominious role he was later to play, as George W. Bush’s secretary of state, in justifying the occupation of Iraq:

The Gulf War was a limited-objective war. If it had not been, we would be ruling Baghdad today — at unpardonable expense in terms of money, lives lost and ruined regional relationships. . . . [W]e can examine the assertion of those who have asked why President Bush did not order our forces on to Baghdad after we had driven the Iraqi army out of Kuwait. . . . Would it have been worth the inevitable follow-up: major occupation forces in Iraq for years to come and a very expensive and complex American proconsulship in Baghdad? Fortunately for America, reasonable people at the time thought not.

Lessons Learned and Unlearned

The strategic legacy of the Reagan and Bush Sr era was completely disregarded and overturned under George W. Bush, with the paradoxical participation of two of its designers: Powell himself and Cheney.

The new administration, until the middle of George W. Bush’s second term, acted in the neoconservative-infused spirit of the Project for the New American Century, the warmongering think tank to which most of the administration’s prominent members belonged. The September 11, 2001, attacks provided a golden opportunity for this group to unleash their hubris.

Their primary target was Iraq, which Donald Rumsfeld, as secretary of defense, wanted to invade straightaway after the attacks. The option of starting with Afghanistan, defended by Powell for the obvious political reason that it was Al-Qaeda’s base, eventually prevailed.

The rationale for the bulk of the war effort launched in the wake of 9/11 had little to do with even the “war on terror” that it used as a banner. It was a war for a new American century, a war for the expansion and consolidation of US imperial reach.

Beyond the suppression of Al-Qaeda’s base there, Afghanistan was, above all, an opportunity to get hold of a strategic military position in Central Asia. Extended by way of military facilities in neighboring former Soviet Republics, it was a position conveniently located between Russia’s European mainland and China, the two potential “peer competitors” against whom US post-Cold War military planning had been designed.

For Iraq, the interests were much more obvious: a country with huge oil reserves located in the heart of the highly prized Gulf region. Domination of the region had been a post-Cold War priority of Washington for both the strategic importance of controlling access to its hydrocarbon resources and the economic importance of securing the flow of its petrodollars in purchasing US weaponry as well as US Treasury bonds.

The difference between the strategic interests in Afghanistan and Iraq determined two quite different types of war. The war in Afghanistan started in a way that seemed to be still in conformity with post-Vietnam lessons: in 2002, the first year of the US war in Afghanistan, only 9,700 US troops were deployed in that country (as well as 4,800 other foreign allied troops). Washington secured base sites and mostly relied on local anti-Taliban fighters of the Northern Alliance to fight the Taliban on the ground.

The United States disregarded one key post-Vietnam lesson, however, by pursuing a goal of state-building. This inevitably involved an “escalation” in trying to secure control of the country by the puppet government that the United States installed in Kabul. Still, the number of US troops deployed in Afghanistan was less than twenty-five thousand in 2007, six years after the beginning of operations.

Compare this to the number of troops deployed in Iraq from the onset: close to 142,000 in 2003, a level that was maintained more or less until Barack Obama’s first year as president, after which the numbers decreased over the next two years in order to complete the withdrawal scheduled for the end of 2011.

Washington was in fact hardly capable of sending significantly more troops into Iraq: the Pentagon had warned Rumsfeld that controlling Iraq would require no less than double the numbers that were sent there in 2003 — an effort that would have dangerously stretched US military capabilities and been unsustainable beyond a short period. But the Bush administration's tenors stubbornly stuck to the view that US troops were going to be "greeted as liberators" by most Iraqis.

This extreme level of self-delusion and wishful thinking led them to conduct the occupation of Iraq in full violation of the post-Vietnam lessons: Powell's 1992 description of "major occupation forces in Iraq for years to come and a very expensive and complex American proconsulship in Baghdad" reads like an accurate description of what happened after the 2003 invasion.

Iraq quickly turned into a quagmire for US troops. Insurgents resorted extensively to suicide attacks and acted mainly among a sympathetic Arab Sunni population. The quagmire morphed into a disaster in 2006, when US occupation troops found themselves involved in a sectarian civil war.

The failure in Iraq had become blatant, and the US ruling class blew the whistle. A bipartisan commission of Congress devised an exit strategy based on a radical change of tactics, and Rumsfeld was forced to resign.

The "surge," as it was called, consisted of a temporary sharp increase in US troops (up to 157,800 in 2008) to deal Al-Qaeda a heavy blow in tandem with Arab Sunni tribes, whose allegiance was bought for this purpose. Since this coincided with the sectarian strife, the perception of US troops as acting in favor of the Arab Shia majority gave way to a view of them as a shield for the Arab Sunni minority. This only increased pressure by the dominant Iran-backed Shia forces to bring the presence of US troops to an end. Thus, although the "surge" proved successful in defeating and marginalizing Al-Qaeda (meanwhile renamed Islamic State of Iraq), it was no longer possible for Washington to

maintain its combat presence in that country.

In 2008, Bush made an agreement with Iraq's pro-Iran government (itself the result of elections imposed upon the occupier by a massive Shia mobilization in the second year of occupation): US troops would evacuate Iraq's cities the year after and evacuate the whole country by the end of 2011. Proud of his opposition to the occupation of Iraq in 2003, Obama gladly fulfilled that commitment. But there was no mistaking it: the United States had suffered a new heavy defeat.

Twin Debacles in Afghanistan and Iraq

The US defeat in Iraq had huge consequences. It powerfully revived the "Vietnam syndrome" and hugely affected Washington's "credibility." Rather than deterring its opponents, the United States had actually emboldened them, especially in the Middle East: Iran vastly expanded its regional military involvement after 2011; the Islamic State of Iraq, turned Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), rebuilt itself in Syria and from there invaded a huge part of Iraq's territory in 2014; and Russia intervened massively in Syria starting in 2015.

Compared to that, the defeat in Afghanistan is much less important, despite being much more spectacular. Obama thought that he could extricate the United States from that country with a remake of the Iraqi "surge." He more than doubled the number of US troops in his first year as president to 68,000, bringing it to a peak of 90,000 in 2010–2011. He then brought it down from 60,000 in 2013 to 29,000 in 2014, after having decided in 2013 that US troops would no longer engage in combat operations and would restrict themselves to assisting the US-fostered Afghan governmental forces.

In parallel, his administration started talks with the Taliban in Doha, Qatar's capital. The next year, Obama announced a timetable for the

withdrawal of most US troops by the end of 2016. In 2015 and 2016, there were no more than 7,000 US troops left in Afghanistan.

The factor that brought the US military back to Iraq and into Syria in 2014 is the same that prolonged the US involvement in Afghanistan beyond 2016: the Islamic State, whose Central Asian franchise, the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-K), emerged in Afghanistan. In the killing of Osama bin Laden in 2011, Obama had seen the war on terror's "mission accomplished," permitting a withdrawal from Afghanistan without losing face. The surge of IS-K canceled that pretense.

This explains the otherwise incomprehensible decision of Donald Trump to increase again the number of US troops in Afghanistan, doubling it to 14,000 during the first two years of his mandate, despite his "isolationist" rhetoric and repeated pledges to end ongoing US wars. That was Trump's "surge" after Obama's, with the aim of securing conditions for a final troop withdrawal. He then reduced the number of US troops back to 8,500 in 2019, while intensifying the Doha talks with the Taliban.

After concluding an agreement with the latter in February 2020, Trump brought the number of US troops further down with a pledge to complete their withdrawal by May 1, 2021. As part of this agreement, he forced the Kabul puppet government to release 5,000 prisoners, as demanded by the Taliban — a major boost to them. In November, the outgoing Trump administration decided to further reduce the number of US troops in Afghanistan to the bare minimum of only 2,500 on the eve of ceding the White House to Biden in January 2021.

Meanwhile, IS-K had increasingly become a major focus of US attention in Afghanistan. When Trump, three months after his inauguration, dropped "the mother of all bombs" (the United States' most powerful non-nuclear bomb) in Afghanistan, it wasn't against the Taliban but against IS-K. Afghanistan had developed into a Hobbesian war-of-all-against-all involving three camps: the Kabul

government backed by US forces, the Taliban, and IS-K. In this catch-22 situation, the United States even executed strikes in support of the Taliban's fight against IS-K. This was reflected in the recent allusion of the Trump-nominated chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Mark Milley, to future coordination between the United States and the Taliban for strikes in Afghanistan against IS-K or similar groups.

On the other hand, the gradual retreat of US troops from Afghanistan proved that the US-fostered Afghan forces were no match for the Taliban. As in 1996 when they first took over, it wasn't difficult for the Taliban to contrast their puritanism with their rivals' corruption. Between 1992 and 1996, Afghanistan had been ruled by mostly corrupt warlords busy fighting among themselves. The Kabul government that the Bush administration entrusted Hamid Karzai to form was likewise highly corrupt, and under a foreign thumb, moreover. A government with such little credit can't motivate troops to risk their lives enough to keep it in power.

The situation created in Kabul by the collapse of the Afghan government was compared to Saigon in 1975, with its infamous images of the evacuation from the US embassy by helicopter. But the South Vietnamese puppet regime actually had more roots of its own than the Kabul government, as it was the continuation of a regime whose existence preceded the 1965 US intervention. The South Vietnam regime resisted for two years after the US withdrawal from Vietnam in 1973 against a formidable people's army that the United States had not been able to subdue with more than half a million troops — an enemy that had, at that point, more foreign official and popular support than the Taliban ever did.

The closest situation to the debacle of the Kabul government forces was the debacle of the US-built, -trained, and -armed Iraqi governmental forces in the face of ISIS's offensive in the summer of 2014. The Nouri al-Maliki government in post-Saddam Hussein Iraq was as corrupt as Kabul's in

addition to its sectarian Shia character: not only were Arab Sunni soldiers not willing to risk their lives fighting against the anti-Shia ISIS, but Shia soldiers, too, were not willing to risk theirs under a corrupt leadership and in defense of the Sunni-majority areas targeted by ISIS. Nothing resembles the Taliban's recent parade with US equipment seized from the Kabul government's forces more than ISIS's parade with similar equipment seized from routed Iraqi troops in 2014.

The Follies of US Empire, Repeated

This is the background against which Joe Biden decided to respect the agreement concluded by his predecessor, only extending its deadline by four months until the end of August. He couldn't hide his contempt for Washington's Afghan allies, putting all the blame on them, as well as his implicit contempt for Afghans in general and his reluctance at the prospect of allowing more of them to seek refuge in the United States. From the start, Afghan women, once hypocritically used as a convenient pretext to justify the perpetuation of US intervention in Afghanistan, have actually been victims of the Taliban as much as of the US government.

But Biden spoke the truth when he said, in his August 31 allocution, "We faced one of two choices: Follow the agreement of the previous administration and extend it to have . . . more time for people to get out; or send in thousands of more troops and escalate the war." His use of the Vietnam-related term "escalate" was no accident. Biden's whole speech was based on the post-Vietnam strategic lessons. The follies of the George W. Bush administration in both Iraq and Afghanistan cruelly showed the US empire how costly it was to ignore them.

This brings us to a final and crucial point: the post-Vietnam strategic revision was not meant to inaugurate a pacifist new era in US global policy. It was only meant to adjust US

imperialist expeditions to what is militarily most effective and politically least costly.

Barack Obama conformed to post-Vietnam rules in his very extensive resort (much more than George W. Bush) to remote warfare in the form of drones. Trump treaded the same path, and, on top of it, he made the use of drones more unaccountable. Remarkably, both Trump and Biden inaugurated their presidency with long-distance missile strikes in Syria to show their willingness to engage in remote uses of force.

This is, indeed, what Biden pledged in his above-quoted allocution:

We will maintain the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan and other countries. We just don't need to fight a ground war to do it. We have what's called over-the-horizon capabilities, which means we can strike terrorists and targets without American boots on the ground — or very few, if needed.

More than ever, this is what US imperial actions will consist of in the future: strikes on various scales, from drone individual assassinations to pinpoint missile or air strikes, as a regular pattern, along with a permanent readiness to exert "overwhelming superiority" in destroying a country as Iraq was destroyed in 1991 — without getting involved in state-building.

With the "Vietnam syndrome" reloaded, there is a strong mistrust against large-scale foreign expeditions among the US public, including the US military. But there is much less attention and action on the part of the antiwar movement when it comes to the rampant massacres perpetrated by the United States through drones and pinpoint strikes. The antiwar movement must consider such actions for what they plainly are: acts of war — and mobilize against their continuation as well as against more massive imperialist expeditions.

Source: 4 September 2021 [Jacobin](#).

Confronting Voter Suppression

5 September 2021, by **Malik Miah**

However, the Biden Administration does not. President Biden in a July 13 speech in Philadelphia attacked the Republican effort to overturn the will of the voters but laid out no action plan to stop it.

He then began a national tour to promote an infrastructure deal with Republicans that does not include defense of voting rights.

To civil rights and Black Lives Matter (BLM) leaders and other on the ground activists, this was a slap in the face. Immediately Black women took the lead in organizing protests at the Capitol and Supreme Court to demand protections for the right to vote.

The actions included Black elected officials and leaders of major civil rights groups. More than 150 civil rights groups sent a letter to the White House and Congress to “do whatever means necessary” to defend voting rights.

Acts of civil disobedience have led to arrests; more are planned until federal laws are passed and enforced.

The arrest of these African American leaders stands in contrast to how Trump backers were treated after the January 6 insurrection, allowed to walk out of the Capitol building without handcuffs or even their names taken down by the National Guard and police.

Missing Allies

All-Black actions, however, are not enough to stop the coordinated voter suppression efforts of right-wing state legislatures. What’s missing so far at these direct-action protests are movement allies.

The 1964 Civil Rights Act, which ended legal segregation in the South, did not only impact Blacks. The

movements of Latinos, women, gay people and the disabled have all used that law to advance their rights.

These allies need to step up and participate at civil disobedience protests, as occurred last year during the anti-police violence marches after the police murder of George Floyd.

Not waiting for the Biden government, more marches and rallies are planned. These include rallies and marches on August 28, the anniversary of the March on Washington in 1963 led by Martin Luther King Jr. His son, Martin Luther King III, is one of the organizers.

Fleeing Texas

In a dramatic and well-planned action, 50 elected Democratic state legislators in Texas took the unusual step to leave their state and travel to Washington, D.C, to push Congress and the Biden government to act.

Texas Democrats argue that without federal laws, hard-right Republicans will win elections with a minority of voters. Republicans will use their unchecked political power on a range of issues that harm the vast majority of working people.

Many Texas Republican officials openly say their goal is to limit the number of Democratic Party voters, especially urban Black people. In the 2020 elections, 11 million people voted and the Republican Secretary of State said only 44 voters had possibly voted in error. That person has since been removed from office.

The Texas Tribune, widely read across the state, described why the Democrats left the state:

“On July 12, Texas House Democrats packed their bags and headed for the nation’s capital in a high-profile effort

to block passage of GOP-backed voting restrictions.

“Democrats hoped their exodus would break what’s called a quorum — the minimum number of lawmakers needed to conduct business — so Republicans couldn’t pass legislation that could ban drive-thru and 24-hour voting, among other sweeping restrictions” (July 14)

Texas Republican Governor Greg Abbott said the legislators, when they return, will be apprehended and brought back to the legislative body to get a quorum. Texas does not have authority to do so in Washington, D.C. where they intend to stay for a month until the “special” state legislative session closes.

Meanwhile in Arizona an ongoing fake “audit” by a Trump-allied firm continues. Trump told a rally in Phoenix on July 24 that stopping ballot fraud is the top issue for his supporters.

An Associated Press review of the Arizona ballots of the 2020 election showed only 182 “possible” ballots with issues. That’s out of three million votes cast. Only four ballots were found with a problem — two from Republicans, two from Democrats.

Crisis of the System

There is a crisis of U.S. bourgeois democracy. Because of former President Donald Trump’s big lie that he won the 2020 presidential election, 47% of Republicans say President Biden is not legitimate. Seventy-seven percent of Republicans say voting is not a right but a privilege.

The United States tells the world it’s the essence of democratic rule, calling itself a 245-year experiment. Yet for

most of that history, Black, Latino, Asian and especially Indigenous peoples were excluded from the “democracy” except as super-exploited labor.

Democrats and those who disagree with Trump are seen as enemies. That’s why the January 6 insurrection occurred even though it failed. Trump is behind the effort to restrict voting.

Without effective resistance, voting rights can be restricted. After the slaveholders lost the Civil War, the country was at a crossroads. It could become a new democracy based on ideals of equality and freedom, or one based on skin color and national oppression of nonwhites.

The decision chosen was not inevitable. It could have built a society based in the original words of the Declaration of Independence authors that “all men are created equal.”

That course was rejected, because most whites did not see Black people as their equals. Racism ran deep.

The rulers decided that the newly freed citizens would not be treated like white citizens. Effective power was restored to the defeated Confederacy.

A colorblind society was never a goal before or after the Civil War. Black super-exploited labor, yes; voting rights, no.

Under the principle of “state rights” the bankers and manufacturers of the North allowed white terrorism to flourish. It was a brutal process as racist “Black codes” and then Jim Crow laws were imposed that turned citizenship hollow for former slaves.

Martin Luther King Jr expressed the hopes of African Americans: “I look to a day when people will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.” (From the “I have a dream” speech)

Role of Supreme Court

The Supreme Court’s role has been central in the recent undermining of

voting rights. The Court is an unelected body with nine members, appointed by presidents, approved by the Senate, and holding lifetime seats.

Historically the court has lagged popular will and been used by the rulers to slow down or reverse changes supported by society. Typically it responds to big events before modifying positions.

The issue of voting rights has been no different. Before the Civil War, the Court ruled in 1857 in the infamous Dred Scott case that Black people could not be citizens. The Constitution’s rights only applied to whites.

“The Freedom Amendments” for example, which said Black people were citizens, were never fully implemented. The 13th Amendment, adopted in 1865, that ended slavery still allowed forced labor in prisons and thus a new form of slavery.

The 15th Amendment, adopted in 1868, said the right to vote applied to all. But, again, it allowed its implementation by state governments. The Supreme Court rejected federal oversight as a violation of “state rights” until the 1965 Voting Rights Act was enacted.

The Supreme Court in 2013 saw its role to return to the pre-1965 regulations. The Chief Justice John Roberts, a longtime opponent of the Voting Rights Act, wrote the decision that declared the law was outdated since Black people can vote in all states.

Roberts’ majority ruling gutted the key Section 5 that allowed the Justice Department to stop new state laws before they went into effect. Not anymore.

The 2021 court voted 6-3 in its Arizona case to overturn Section 2 that allowed the Justice Department and lower courts to overturn new laws that discriminate in practice. The decision effectively nullifies the 1965 law.

The key paragraphs in the Supreme Court’s Arizona decision written by Samuel Alito makes clear that ostensibly small-scale minor

discrimination is legal:

“The size of any disparities in a rule’s impact on members of different racial or ethnic groups is a crucial factor to consider. Even neutral regulations may well result in disparities in rates of voting and noncompliance with voting rules. The mere fact that there is some disparity in impact does not necessarily mean that a system is not equally open or that it does not give everyone an equal opportunity to vote. And small disparities should not be artificially magnified.” (https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/20pdf/19-1257_g204.pdf)

During the period of American apartheid, called Jim Crow, the laws rarely if ever mentioned specific discrimination directed at Blacks. Yet few Black people could register and vote throughout the South.

What’s Needed

The movement against voting rights is serious. Liberals and the Biden government have spoken loudly but have no effective strategy to stop the right wing.

Kamala Harris told Black women activists that they must get out the vote even though the restrictions can stop the results. She said the government will spend \$25 million. At least 20 times that is needed.

The historic legislation of 1965, which President Johnson signed into law, outlawed literacy tests and provided for the appointment of federal examiners (with the power to register qualified citizens to vote) in those jurisdictions that were “covered” according to a formula provided in the statute.

To give one example of the impact of the 1965 law for Black people, in the state of Mississippi only 6.7% of African Americans were registered in 1964. After the law was passed, registration jumped to 58%.

Segregationists and defenders of the Confederate legacy never supported the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Attempted state rollbacks began immediately. Waiting for the Senate to pass a new

federal law would be to allow the right wing to win at the state level.

A new stage of the counter revolution is ongoing. Will it be Jim Crow 2.0?

Road Ahead

President Biden continues to defend a Jim Crow relic, the filibuster. It is an arcane Senate rule that requires a super majority, 60 out of 100 votes, to bring legislation to a vote.

He continues to call on his "Republican friends in the Senate" to support voting rights. Biden and

Harris see the effort as getting people to vote around and through obstacles, even though Republicans can use the laws to overturn the voters' will.

The White House continues to see the issue as secondary to other concerns such as foreign policy and domestic bipartisan support for infrastructure.

African Americans do not see it that way. But until all U.S. citizens and residents see the right to vote as essential to bring about change, little legislation for change is possible.

The end of 19th century slavery and 20th century Jim Crow legal segregation were not fueled by

legislation or courts. The first took a revolutionary civil war and the second required mass civil disobedience led by the Black community.

What Texas Democrats have done by stopping for now a quorum and coming to the Capital is an important form of resistance. It is a call to action.

More must be done now. The people of all ethnic groups need to hit the streets, as the Black Lives Matter movement did in 2020.

Source: September-October 2021, [ATC 214](#).

On 7 September: "Take to the streets to defeat the coup"

4 September 2021, by [Esquerda Online](#)

Weakened and increasingly rejected by the people, Bolsonaro is radicalizing in an attempt to survive. His method is that of fascism: mobilize the extremist base, use the intimidation of militias to impose terror. It is time to put an end to the coup threat. Let's take to the streets on 7 September - in a peaceful and organized way - to show that the majority of the Brazilian people do not accept authoritarian threats and want to end this criminal government. We are the majority: Bolsonaro out!

Bolsonaro's strategy

One of Bolsonaro's main goals is to frighten the opposition with coup threats and actions. The intention is to ensure that the democratic majority submits to the fascist minority through blackmail and intimidation. Giving in to the coup, leaving him the protagonism of the street, is the worst mistake that the left and the defenders of democracy can make right now.

Bolsonaro knows that it is very likely that he will lose the 2022 elections. He is also aware that his next destination and that of his sons could be prison. Terrified, he is appealing to the last resource he has: the ability to mobilize his far-right base. And for this, he counts on the support of the army, the police and the business community.

Passively waiting for the elections at the end of next year, as if Bolsonaro were going to respect the democratic-electoral process, would represent a huge and unforgivable mistake. First of all, because it would be tantamount to underestimating the danger of fascism, which, although weakened, retains a considerable base of followers in the country and elements infiltrated in various institutions, including the army and the police.

Second, because it would create the possibility of a possible recovery in Bolsonaro's popularity until the end of 2022. We must take advantage of the time of the greatest attrition of the government to defeat it now, if

possible by overthrowing Bolsonaro even before the elections. Moreover, the fall of the militiaman would be likely to paralyze the neoliberal counter-reforms and privatizations underway in Congress that are sponsored by the government and the centre parties.

The left must go into battle

The measures taken by the STF against Bolsonaro's criminal actions and coup attempts must be fully supported. No freedom for the enemies of freedom. It is necessary to demand from state institutions firm action against these threats and the deliberately anti-democratic actions of Bolsonaro and his allies, especially with regard to the organization of the fascist demonstrations of 7 September. Silence in the face of "golpismo" - by governors, deputies, senators, judges, political parties, prosecutors, army and police commanders, business people and so

on - must be understood as complicity, open or veiled, with Bolsonaro's criminal actions.

Against Bolsonarismo, the struggle in the streets is decisive. Our enemy has its main point of support in fascist direct action. It is fundamental to counter the mobilization of the extreme right with the strength of the popular masses in the streets. Therefore, leaving September 7 free for the fascist parade would be a grave mistake. "Golpismo" would be strengthened, gaining confidence and the power of intimidation.

The Fora Bolsonaro ("Bolsanaro out") campaign has already built four major national demonstrations this year, bringing hundreds of thousands of people to the streets in demonstrations far larger than those of Bolsonarismo. It's time to repeat "the injection". With a firm and unitary appeal from the leaderships

and organizations of the left, social movements and all democratic sectors eager to fight, it is likely that the Fora Bolsonaro mobilization will be bigger in the streets than the pro-coup initiatives. This would have enormous political value, as it would represent an effective and symbolic defeat of Bolsonaro.

In this sense, the position of Lula, who is leading the polls for the presidential election, is of great importance. While Bolsonaro openly calls for the "golpe" that threatens the country, will Lula continue to prepare his candidacy for the presidency through negotiations and election speeches? Is it not time for Lula to call on the people to take to the streets, in peaceful and organised demonstrations, to defend democracy and threatened social and labour rights? Lula has a considerable historical responsibility at this critical moment for Brazil.

From today until 7 September, the most important task is the construction of large popular mobilizations on the occasion of National Independence Day. In ensuring security and the organization of democratic demonstrations, courage and firmness are needed to defeat fascism. Let's go to battle, because it is in struggle that we will win!

- **Beat "Golpismo", Bolsonaro out!**
- **Food, jobs, vaccines and a basic income for the people!**
- **Down with neoliberal counter-reforms and privatizations!**
- **For a Left Front in the struggles and in the elections!**
- **For a government of the hard-working and oppressed people, without an alliance with the right!**

3 September 2021

Original publication [*Esquerda Online*](#).

The legacy of Hissène Habré in Chad

3 September 2021, by **Correspondents l'Anticapitaliste**

And for good reason! Hissène Habré had been in prison since 2015, sentenced to life imprisonment for crimes against humanity by a court specially created by the African Union for the occasion. A judicial sanction that had nothing to do with any French diplomatic pressure, though never stingy with lessons on human rights, nor with any moral concern of the African Union, that syndicate of dictators: it owed everything to the energy of the victims' associations that have fought relentlessly for years against the impunity organized with large bribes to Senegalese politicians and journalists.

A huge open-air hospital

Unfortunately, in order to avoid too much unpacking, the trial focused on Habré alone, leaving in the shadows

the system he had built and bequeathed to the Déby family (father and son). Yet there was no lack of material. Hissène Habré's short dictatorship far exceeded that of his successor in ferocity. For eight years, the country was transformed into an immense open-air morgue, swarming with mass graves, prisons where all kinds of torture were practised, where people were killed with impunity, in a deliberately organized concentration camp: a single party, a single women's organisation, a single youth organization, all framed by a police system built on the model of the continent's most hideous dictatorships, such as that of Mobutu. All dissent was banned and the ban on strikes was even written into the constitution. This despicable regime justified its existence by a crude state lie according to which the Libya of the dictator Gaddafi, an underdeveloped country, also dominated by the

imperialist powers despite its petrodollars, simply wanted to "colonize", "annex" or more trivially, "eat" Chad. No less than that!

From Habré to Déby

It was precisely in the name of the anti-Gaddafi struggle that France and the United States supported and armed the Habré regime, deploying (already) troops in the north of the country [14] and complacently turning a blind eye to the ethnic massacres [15], the violence, the corruption and the embezzlement of public funds by those close to the government, while the popular masses were being bled dry by the increasing contributions to the "war effort".

On 1 December 1990, the dictator finally had to flee his capital (after

having raided the treasury and the coffers of public enterprises) in the face of the advance of the troops of Idriss Déby Ito, his former lieutenant. This episode was closer to a palace revolution than to a radical break with the deposed regime. The French DGSE reproached Habré for being too soft on the US ally and pushed Déby, who was then in a state of crisis, to

revolt! For the rest, nothing had changed: from the generals to the prison guards, the ministers, the deputies, the prefects, the judges, the directors-general and other torturers, the entire Habré system remained in place. It is true that some formal changes had to be conceded to the times, such as the introduction of a multi-party system or the right to

strike, but for the rest, the Chad of the Débys remains in the same vein as Habré: assassinations, ethnicism, regionalism, nepotism, clientelism, shameless exploitation of human and natural resources for the benefit of a minority of parasites, plundering of public funds, and nauseating religious rigorism! All this with the blessing of French imperialism.

Life Under the Heat Dome

2 September 2021, by Sally Moore Goldman

Fires this year started in May, the earliest ever recorded. By early July, temperatures were in the nineties or triple digits for several days in towns across the state.

The Bootleg Fire, classified by InciWeb as this year's largest national wildfire began on July 6th. Located near Bly, in south central Oregon, it bulldozed through 413,717 acres of forests, grazing and farm land.

The fire burned some 70 homes, mostly cabins. Over 2000 homes were ordered evacuated and an additional 5000 threatened. Sparked by lightning and pushed by strong winds and critically dry weather, the fire expanded up to four miles a day.

By July 18, the Medford National Weather Service Forecast Office reported that "extreme fire behavior, dry fuels and unstable atmosphere" formed a tornado in the Bootleg Fire, ripping trees from their roots. Smoke output that day generated pyrocumulus clouds rising as high as 30,000 or 40,000 feet, where commercial airplanes fly. "Prior to last year, there had been only two well-documented tornado strength vortices generated by fires," according to Neil Lareau, from the National Science Foundation.

Strong winds carried the smoke all the way to New York City. The Big Apple looked like a smog day in the 1970s where the sun was orange.

Haze hung over New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Some areas recommended that people remain inside because of the air quality. The smoke covered a large portion of the U.S. east coast.

Back in Oregon, as the inferno got closer to farms and grazing land, most ranchers released their livestock from pastures and pens with the hope that they could find safety. One rancher tracked down and recovered 95 of their animals, but an additional 45 cows and 81 calves were still missing.

Area ranchers and landowners have been euthanizing injured and dying animals. Around half of recovered animals have burned feet or eyes and one cow had died of smoke inhalation. To understand the toll the fire takes on people and animals, one rancher remarked "Apparently, if their (the cows) feet are burnt (where hooves are coming away) they don't heal. You can't bring them home to doctor them, so you have to put them out of their misery."

Another rancher commented "I have been here 20 years. And I've fought eight fires, maybe this one is the ninth...." he said. "But nothing to this magnitude has threatened livestock before."

The Bootleg Fire is now 100% contained after 39 days of 2400 firefighters combating the blazes. Local crews including our small community of Lincoln County who sent

14 members and the National Guard had been deployed. Teams from Utah and California were also put into action. The fire commander confronting Oregon's third largest fire had to utilize a historic amount of resources, and deal with a coronavirus outbreak of at least nine firefighters who tested positive with mild symptoms.

Don't think that the coast line of the state is immune to fires. Last year the Echo Mountain Complex fire reached to Otis, Oregon, an area only five miles from the ocean. The fire covered 2500 square feet in the town and destroyed half of its structures — 298 houses and 339 other structures.

The flames from this fire also jumped over Highway 101 where smoke lingered from the previous night. As a result, we had to evacuate — and we only live two-and-a-half blocks from the ocean. Luckily we were able to return the next day.

But now, many Oregonians don't view summer as a consistently pleasant event. Instead we must be prepared to leave "as if we may never come back."

My husband and I have our suitcases filled with necessary clothes, items for daily living like toothpaste, soap, important papers like banking information and passports. I have a list on the refrigerator to remind me what to take — our medicine pills, purse, eyeglasses, lab tops and special photos. Our car is equipped for such

an emergency with water, dry food, blankets and an extra gas can.

As of August 17, eleven fires have burned 206,440 more acres.

Source: September-October 2021, [ATC 214](#).

RAWA on the Taliban takeover

1 September 2021, by RAWA

Sonali Kolhatkar: For years RAWA spoke out against the U.S. occupation and now that it has ended, the Taliban are back. Could President Biden have withdrawn U.S. forces in a manner that would have left Afghanistan in a safer situation than currently? Could he have done more to ensure the Taliban were not so quickly able to take over?

RAWA: In the past 20 years, one of our demands was an end to the US/NATO occupation and even better if they take their Islamic fundamentalists and technocrats with them and let our people decide their own fate. This occupation only resulted in bloodshed, destruction and chaos. They turned our country into the most corrupt, insecure, drug-mafia and dangerous place especially for women.

From the very beginning we could predict such an outcome. On the first days of the US occupation of Afghanistan, RAWA declared on October 11, 2001:

“The continuation of US attacks and the increase in the number of innocent civilian victims not only gives an excuse to the Taliban, but also will cause the empowerment of the fundamentalist forces in the region and even in the world.”

The main reason we were against this occupation was their backing of terrorism under the nice banner of “war on terror”. From the very first days when the Northern Alliance looters and killers were installed back into power in 2002 to the last so-called peace talks, deals and agreements in Doha and release of 5000 terrorists from prisons in 2020/21, it was very obvious that even the withdrawal won't have a good end.

The Pentagon proves that none of the theory invasion or meddling ended up in safe condition. All imperialist powers invade countries for their own strategic, political and financial interests but through lies and the powerful corporate media try to hide their real motive and agenda.

It is a joke to say values like “women's rights”, “democracy”, “nation-building” etc. were part of the US/NATO aims in Afghanistan! US was in Afghanistan to turn region into instability and terrorism to encircling the rival powers especially China and Russia and undermining their economies via regional wars. But of course the US government did not want such a disastrous, disgraceful and embarrassing exit that left behind such a commotion that they were forced to send troops again in 48 hours to control the airport and safely evacuate its diplomats and staff.

We believe the US left Afghanistan out of its own weaknesses not defeated by its creatures (Taliban). There are two significant reasons for this withdrawal.

The main reason is the multifold internal crisis in the US. The signs of the US system decline was seen in the weak response to Covid-19 pandemic, attack on Capitol Hill and the great protests of the US public in the past few years. The policy-makers were forced to withdraw troops to focus on internal burning issues.

The second reason is that the Afghan war was an exceptionally expensive war whose cost has gone into trillions, all taken from taxpayer money. This put such a heavy dent on the US financially that it had to leave Afghanistan.

The war-mongering policies prove that their aim was never to make Afghanistan safer, let alone now when they are leaving. Furthermore, they also knew that the withdrawal would be chaotic yet they still went ahead and did it. Now Afghanistan is in the limelight again due to the Taliban being in power but this has been the situation for the past 20 years and everyday hundreds of our people were killed and our country destroyed, it just was rarely reported in the media.

Sonali Kolhatkar: The Taliban leadership are saying they will respect women's rights as long as it complies with Islamic law. Some Western media are painting this in a positive light. Didn't the Taliban say the same thing 20 years ago? Do you think there is any change in their attitude toward human rights and women's rights?

RAWA: The corporate media is only trying to put salt on our devastated people's wounds; they should be ashamed of themselves the way they try to sugarcoat brutal Taliban. The Taliban spokesperson declared that there is no difference between their ideology of 1996 and today. And what they say about women's rights is the exact phrases used during their previous dark rule: implementing Sharia law.

These days the Taliban have declared an amnesty in all parts of Afghanistan and their slogan is ‘what the joy of amnesty can bring, revenge cannot’. But in reality they are killing people every day. Just yesterday a boy was shot dead in Nangarhar only for carrying the tricolored Afghan national flag instead of the white flag of Taliban. They executed four former army officials in Kandahar, arrested a

young Afghan poet Mehran Popal in Herat province for writing anti-Taliban posts on Facebook and his whereabouts is unknown to his family. These are just a few examples of their violent actions despite the “nice” and polished words of their spokespersons.

But we believe their claims may be one of the dramas being played by the Taliban and they are just trying to buy more time till they can organize themselves. Things happened so fast and they are trying to build-up their government structure, create their intelligence and make the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, which is responsible for controlling the little details of people’s daily lives like the length of the beard, the dress code and having a Mahram (male companion, only father, brother or husband) for a woman. Taliban claim that we are not against women’s rights but then it should be within the framework Islamic/Sharia laws.

Islamic/Sharia law is vague and construed in different ways by Islamic regimes to benefit their own political agendas and rules. Furthermore, the Taliban would also like the West to acknowledge them and take them seriously, and all these claims are part of painting a whitewashed image for themselves. Maybe after a few months they would say that we will hold elections since we believe in justice and democracy! These pretences will never change their true nature, and will still be Islamic fundamentalists: misogynist, inhuman, barbaric, reactionary, anti-democracy and anti-progressive. In a word, the Taliban mentality has not changed and will never change!

Sonali Kolhatkar: Why did the Afghan National Army and the U.S. backed Afghan government fall apart so quickly?

RAWA: Some major reasons out of many are:

1) Everything was done according to a deal to handover Afghanistan to Taliban. The US govt. negotiating with Pakistan and other regional players had agreement to form a govt. mainly composed of Taliban. So the soldiers were not ready to be killed in a war

that they knew there was no benefit of the Afghan people in it because finally it is set behind closed doors to bring Taliban to power. Zalmay Khalilzad is highly hated among Afghan people due to his treacherous role in bringing the Taliban back to power.

2) Most Afghans understand well that the war going on in Afghanistan is not the war of Afghans and for the benefit of the country, but waged by foreign powers for their own strategic interests and Afghans are just fuels of the war. Majority of the young people are joining the forces because of severe poverty and unemployment so they have no commitment and morals to fight. It is worth mentioning that the United States and the West have tried for 20 years to keep Afghanistan a consumer country and have hindered the growth of industry. This situation created a wave of unemployment and poverty, paving the way for the recruitments of the puppet government, the Taliban and growth of opium production.

3) Afghan forces were not so weak to defeat in the course of a week, but they were receiving orders from the presidential palace not to fight back Taliban and should surrender. Most provinces were peacefully handed over to the Taliban.

4) The puppet regime of Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani were calling Taliban “dissatisfied brothers” for years, and released many of their most ruthless commanders and leaders from prisons. Asking Afghan soldiers to fight a force that is not called “enemy” but “brother”, emboldened the Taliban and hit the morale of the Afghan armed forces.

5) The armed forces were unprecedentedly plagued by corruption. The large number of generals (mostly former brutal warlords of the Northern Alliance) sitting in Kabul grabbed millions of \$, they cut even from food and salary of soldiers fighting in the frontlines. “Ghost soldiers” was a phenomenon exposed by SIGAR. High-ranking officials were busy filling their own pockets; they channelled salary and ration of tens of thousands of non-existing soldiers into their own bank accounts.

6) Whenever forces were besieged by Taliban in the hard fight, their call for help was ignored by Kabul. In numerous cases tens of soldiers were massacred by Taliban when they were deserted without ammunition and food for weeks. Therefore the rate of casualties among armed forces was very high. In the World Economic Forum (Davos 2019), Ashraf Ghani confessed that since 2014 over 45,000 Afghan security personnel have been killed, while in the same period only 72 personnel of US/NATO were killed.

7) Overall in society growing corruption, injustice, unemployment, insecurity, uncertainty, fraud, vast poverty, drug and smuggling, etc. provided a ground for reemergence of Taliban.

Sonali Kolhatkar: What is the best way for Americans to help RAWA and Afghan people and women right now?

RAWA: We feel very lucky and happy to have the freedom-loving people of the US with us during all these years. We need Americans to raise their voice and protest against their government’s war-mongering policies and support the strengthening of the people’s struggle in Afghanistan against these barbarians.

It is human nature to resist and the history bears witness. We have the glorious examples of US struggle “Occupy Wall Street” and “Black Lives Matter” movements. We have seen that no amount of oppression, tyranny and violence can stop resistance. Women will not be shackled anymore! Just the next morning after the Taliban entered the capital, a group of our young brave women painted graffiti on the walls of Kabul with the slogan: Down with Taliban! Our women are now politically conscious and no longer want to live under the Burqa, something they easily did 20 years ago. We will continue our struggles while finding smart ways to stay safe.

We think the inhuman US military empire is not only the enemy of the Afghan people but the biggest threat to world peace and stability. Now that the system is on the verge of decline, it is the duty of all peace-loving,

progressive, leftist and justice-loving individuals and groups to intensify their fight against the brutal war-mongers in the White House, the Pentagon and the Capitol Hill. Replacing the rotten system with a just and humane one will not only liberate millions of poor and

oppressed American people but will have a lasting effect on every corner of the world.

Now our fear is that the world may forget Afghanistan and Afghan women like under the Taliban bloody rule in late 90s. Therefore, the US progressive people and institutions

should not forget Afghan women.

We will raise our voice louder and continue our resistance and fight for secular democracy and women's rights!

Source [RAWA](#).