



IV562 - November 2021

Victorious mobilizations in Greece against the backdrop of the police state

30 November 2021, by [Andreas Sartzekis](#)

Although last year the extreme right-wing government of Mitsotakis used the pandemic as a pretext to ban the demonstrations - which nevertheless took place! - the pretext would have been too big this year. The Prime Minister's policies are starting to be massively disavowed, despite the efforts of the media (to which the government has generously distributed 40 million euros).

On 17 November, the demonstrations were massive everywhere, and of course in Athens (30,000 demonstrators), with an impressive presence of the youth, and even if Mitsotakis didn't dare to push the provocation (while deploying 6,000 policemen), the repression was strong in Thessaloniki, with also intimidations to prevent young people from going to the demonstrations.

A promising social autumn?

What has changed in recent months is above all the social climate. While the government is adopting laws made to measure for the employers, massive mobilisations have taken place recently. The mobilizations in the delivery and catering sector

culminated in September, with an exemplary strike by the delivery workers of the efood company, supported by many customers who cancelled their subscriptions.

The result: more than 2,000 employees were given permanent contracts, with their seniority taken into account. The mobilization in the sector continued against the precarious working conditions: another successful strike for safety equipment on 9 November... And against the refusal of their union leadership to mobilize further against evaluation, many teachers continue the battle against a minister who may be worse than Blanquer!

Right-wing flight to safety

Faced with this growing anger, the right is visibly worried and there are some signs of division. Mitsotakis chooses to reinforce the "Orbanesque" course, supported by the far-right current in his party and in government. Thus, while international surveys indicate that Greece has the highest level of antisemitism in Europe, this summer he appointed a former fascist lawyer (son of the

Greek ideologue of Nazism) as Health Minister, known for his antisemitic declarations, provoking the concern of the Jewish community, and perceived as a provocation in the face of a very serious health situation (about 80 to 90 deaths from the virus every day), with the right refusing to strengthen the public health service.

A series of laws reminiscent of the dark ages have been passed, such as a penal code repressing freedom of expression... The intelligence services, under the sole control of Mitsotakis, are harassing journalists, lawyers and activists. The police seem to be able to do whatever they want: recently, a young Roma man was killed (36 bullets were fired) by police officers who disobeyed orders to stop the pursuit... and who were supported by the (ex-fascist) Minister of Development and by the Minister of Police!

This climate of intimidation linked to a catastrophic ultra-liberal policy, far from provoking the desired submission, reinforces an obvious combativeness in everyday life. The next step is how to amplify and organize this combativity in the coming period, in the face of recent laws against the right to strike and the fighting unions.

Critique of “Leftwing” Antivax Disinformation: Antivaxxers of All Stripes Pose a Serious Threat to Public Health.

29 November 2021, by Clifford D. Conner

Unfortunately, they have “leftwing” ideological allies who devise rationales designed to appeal to progressive-minded people. A blog post entitled [“The Snake-Oil Salesmen and the COVID-Zero Con: A Classic Bait-And-Switch for a Lifetime of Booster Shots \(Immunity as a Service\)”](#) provides a prime example.

It is a relatively slick piece of virulent antivax propaganda. The bulk of it consists of mansplaining the ABCs of immunology, much of which is not controversial. As its author, Julius Ruechel, says: “What I have laid out here in this essay is pretty basic virology and immunology knowledge.” But every point is embellished with an ideological antivax twist. To deconstruct it in its entirety would be an oppressive chore, but I will try to briefly expose its essence.

Its “leftwing” antivax arguments for the most part boil down to this syllogism:

Big Pharma produces the Covid vaccines.

Big Pharma is absolutely corrupted by its profit motive.

Therefore the vaccines are fraudulent and worthless.

Here is a small sample of how the blog piece in question expresses this position:

“To the eyes of profit-hungry pharmaceuticals and funding-hungry national and international public health institutions, this virus must look like manna from heaven.

“So, what if COVID-Zero and the vaccine exit strategy is merely the global state-sanctioned equivalent of a drug dealer creating dependency among its customers to keep pushing more drugs?

“The holy trinity of pharmaceutical

companies, public health, and international health organizations, all egging each other on in their hunger for a reliable flow of cash: shareholder profits, larger budgets, and governmental donations.”

The anti-public health message it seeks to spread is summed up as follows:

“The con is clear. It’s time to focus all our might on stopping this runaway train before it takes us over the cliff into a police state of no return. Stand up. Speak out. Refuse to play along. Stopping this requires millions of voices with the courage to say NO—at work, at home, at school, at church, and out on the street.”

And it buttresses that clarion call by cynically quoting Martin Luther King on the need to confront authority with civil disobedience.

Now, what’s wrong with that argument? I have steadfastly condemned Big Pharma corporations and the deep corruption of their profit-motivated scientific practice. I have damned it, in my recent book *The Tragedy of American Science* (Haymarket Books, 2020), as “science in the private corporate interest” as opposed to the ideal of “science in the public interest.” So how can it be that private corporate laboratories have created not one, not two, but a number of safe and effective vaccines with the potential to bring the nightmare contagion under control?

The syllogism’s premise that Big Pharma is corrupted by the profit motive does not justify the conclusion that its products must be fraudulent. The multinational industry has demonstrated the capacity to accomplish remarkable scientific feats when it wants to. But there’s the rub: it has to want to. And the only thing that can make it want to is the

prospect of material rewards in the form of supersized profits.

That was the point of the Trump administration’s Operation Warp Speed. Billions of dollars were paid out to elite Big Pharma firms like Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson as well as to venture capital startups like Moderna, Vaxart, and Novavax that had never previously brought any vaccine to market. The program was hyped as a scientific “race for a vaccine” among competing research laboratories, but in fact it was a speculative frenzy among competing hedge funds.

It took a massive infusion of taxpayer dollars—public funding, not private capital—to incentivize the research and development of several viable vaccines. But private investors who bore no financial risk were allowed to reap the financial rewards, the extent of which has been deliberately hidden from public view by allowing the Warp Speed profiteers to bypass traditional federal contracting rules and regulatory oversight. Even a partial accounting, however, reveals that Moderna and Pfizer locked in guaranteed Covid vaccine sales of more than \$60 billion for 2021 and 2022. Furthermore, analysts forecast a future annual market of \$5 billion or more.

The point is that *despite all that*, the profit-grubbing of the pharma firms does not invalidate the fruits of their science.

The essential lesson of Op Warp Speed was not that the vaccines and the associated public-health programs were fraudulent, but that there was no material reason for funneling all that money through private corporations. The Trump and Biden administrations have allowed private investors to organize and control the vaccine

research and production, and to become fabulously wealthy by taking all of the profits for themselves. The rational and equitable approach would be to cut private investment out of the picture entirely by nationalizing Big Pharma and creating the vaccines in publicly-funded laboratories.

The remarkable achievements of Cuban biomedical science demonstrate how even a relatively poor country could—in the absence of the profit motive—mobilize its scientific and financial resources to create and produce a suite of safe, effective Covid-19 vaccines. Cuba was the first country to immunize its population against Covid-19 with its own vaccines. And in sharp contrast to Big Pharma's relative neglect of poorer countries, Cuba plans to share its vaccines with Argentina, Venezuela, Mexico, Jamaica, Vietnam, Iran, and others.

The blog piece under consideration here seeks to terrorize its readers by positing a grand conspiracy of "all vaccine makers and public health authorities" and alleges that "the media" is in on it, too, due to the "billions of vaccine advertising dollars floating around." And not to be

neglected is the ever-popular "Bill Gates, his fawning public health bootlickers, and the pharmaceutical companies that whisper sweet-nothings in his ear."

Author Ruechel lambastes "our health authorities" in these words: "You'd have to be a completely reckless and utterly incompetent idiot, or a cynical bastard with an agenda" to "force us to submit to medical tyranny based on mandatory vaccines, never-ending booster shots, and vaccine passports." And after all that, he has the chutzpah to accuse "our health authorities" of "shamelessly hyperventilating"!

As I have demonstrated, there are valid, serious criticisms to be made of Big Pharma and U.S. public health agencies, but the essential value of the worldwide Covid vaccine programs is challenged only by scoundrels and demagogues. As for his critique of "the media," our ersatz contrarian completely leaves out of account the many legitimate investigative journalists who relentlessly scrutinize the activities of Big Pharma and public officials on a daily basis.

Although I have characterized this blog piece as an example of leftwing antivax propaganda, a qualification is

necessary. The erroneous critique of Big Pharma is counterfeit leftism; its underlying ideological inspiration is of solid rightwing provenance. Here is how Ruechel expounds his fundamental principles:

"Freedom of speech, individual rights, private property, individual ownership, competition, good faith debate, small government, minimal taxes, limited regulation, and free markets (the opposite of the crony capitalism we now suffer under), these are the checks and balances that bullet-proof a society against the soulless charlatans that fail upwards into positions of power in bloated government institutions and against the parasitic fraudsters that seek to attach themselves to the government's teat."

As a colleague of mine, Bob Schwarz, astutely observed, "Whatever the partial merits of one or another pseudo-scientific argument in the article, at the end of the day this is just Ayn Rand dressed up in a lab coat."

November 21, 2021

Source [Against the Current](#).

First setback for Sudan's isolated junta

28 November 2021, by [Paul Martial](#)

At the time of his coup, General al-Burhane had counted on a weak mobilization with a rapid loss of momentum. This is far from being the case and his support inside the country is very limited.

Supported by warlords and fundamentalists

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Abdallah Hamdok, the transitional government that emerged from the revolution negotiated a peace agreement with armed groups in Juba. As a result, Mini Minawi, leader of a

faction of the Sudan Liberation Army, was appointed governor of Darfur and Djibril Ibrahim, leader of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), took over the Finance Ministry. These two warlords have chosen to ally themselves with their former enemies, the military, against the civilians.

The peace agreement and the integration of the rebels into the transitional structures, led by Hamdok, have thus weakened his position. However, the support of these two leaders for the putsch does not reflect the position of the people of Darfur, as shown by the large demonstrations in el-Fasher, the capital of North Darfur state, or in Zalinge in Central Darfur.

Finally, the junta's military could only rely on former Islamist supporters of the National Congress, al-Bashir's party, many of whom have returned to their posts after being ousted during the transition period. The generals have failed to broaden their social base by integrating political parties or personalities.

... and by Egypt and Israel

Internationally, condemnation of the coup and the subsequent repression was unanimous in the West, the African Union and the Arab League. The main supporters of the Sudanese

generals, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, have officially declared themselves in favour of a return to a dual transition between the military and civilians. These two countries have strong economic leverage over Sudan.

Only Egypt appears openly as the main supporter of the coup. The *Wall Street Journal* revealed that the day before the coup, al-Burhane was visiting Cairo. The Sudanese dossier is directly managed by the Egyptian security services who prefer a dictatorship that is supposed to stabilize the country. Moreover, Sudan and Egypt are opposed to Ethiopia over the management of the Nile with the Renaissance Dam.

Finally, the Western press is more discreet about the Israeli position and for good reason. Its Foreign Minister refused to condemn the putsch. A few days after the coup, an Israeli delegation went to Khartoum. The

reason was given by an Israeli officer:

The military is the largest force in the country and Burhan is its commander-in-chief. The events of Monday [25 October] therefore increase the likelihood of stability in Sudan [...] while increasing the chances of stronger ties with the US, the West, and Israel in particular. [1]

But contrary to Egypt's and Israel's analysis, the junta's coup has not brought the desired stability to the country.

A new manoeuvre

The junta has had to resign itself to accepting the proposal of Western capitals for a return to the previous

status quo. This was negotiated by a group of Sudanese mediators. Hamdok has just regained his post as Prime Minister. The Internet, which had been cut off for weeks, has been restored and some of the political prisoners have been released. This new situation reflects a balance of power unfavourable to the junta. The resistance that has been organized throughout the country has borne fruit. However, to return to the previous situation is to maintain the junta's domination over the country. This is precisely what the demonstrators refuse when they demand: "No dialogue, no negotiation, no partnership with the army".

Footnotes

[1] *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 4 November 2021 "[Israël-Soudan : la normalisation à l'épreuve du coup d'État militaire](#)".

Xi Jinping sings his praises to the CCP Central Committee

27 November 2021, by [Pierre Rousset](#) [1]

According to the resolution adopted by a central committee under orders, the present times represent "the most magnificent epic in the history of the Chinese nation for thousands of years", "socialism with Chinese characteristics [having] entered a new era" since 2012 (the accession to power of Xi Jinping) whose "thought is the quintessence of Chinese culture and soul" and whose presence at the "heart" of the party "is of decisive importance (...) to promote the historical process of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. [1]

Unprecedented concentration of power

Xi holds the positions of General Secretary of the CCP, President of the

Republic, and Chairman of the Central Military Commission. He amended the Constitution so that he could remain in office for life if he so wished. He imposed a homogeneous leadership team composed of members of his own clique, something which goes against any collegial functioning. At the Nineteenth Congress of the CCP (in 2017), he had changed the mode of governance of the country, which was previously shared between the party, the government administration and the army. Even though the party, at the heart of the state, retained the monopoly of political control, this system ensured a certain flexibility in the running of current affairs in a country-continent. His cult of personality is armed with all the means of social control that modern techniques make possible (which China is not alone in using).

To avoid such a concentration of

power by one man, Deng Xiaoping had set up a method of appointing the political bureau that allowed several fractions and generations to be associated within it, so as to ensure the renewal of the leading bodies every five to ten years. This is no longer the case with Xi.

Xi Jinping's grip on power has not been consolidated without violent settling of scores, purges and liquidations. It was accompanied by an ideological campaign with feudal connotations that refers to pre-imperial China. One cannot accede to the highest functions without belonging to a great family lineage, without being of "red blood", the son of a "red prince", one of the historical leaders of the Chinese revolution. The vast majority of the party's cadres thus see themselves removed from power from the outset.

In doing so, Xi Jinping has made many enemies that he has not been able to eliminate or neutralize in a party that has some 80 million members. He is condemned to a perpetual headlong rush to prevent his opponents from regrouping and to cut them off from the population. Thus, he is apparently considering recreating at the Twentieth Congress the post of president of the party, which had been abolished.

Xi, a new Mao?

Xi Jinping compares himself to Mao Zedong (in the sense of being better than him) and the media generally validates the analogy, forgetting that between the reigns of the two men, history has passed by, with its succession of revolutions and social or political counter-revolutions. [2] Yet they belong to two different eras: the long revolutionary wave initiated by the Russian Revolution of 1917 and ending in Asia at the end of the 1970s, which culminated in the Chinese (1949) and Vietnamese (1975) victories; and then the long counter-revolutionary wave, which became generalized in the 1980s and whose price we are still paying today, culminating in Asia in the Sino-Vietnamese conflict (1979) and, for China, the crushing of popular movements in 1989 (massacres occurring in many cities of the country and not only in Beijing, around Tiananmen Square).

As Au Loongyu points out [3]:

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", and his "Cultural Revolution" was destruction of culture. His regime by then was, however, definitely

anti-capitalist, or even anti-market to the extent that even small and sole proprietors were banned. [...] Xi is a capitalist roader who might make Chairman Mao turns in his grave.

An article at the business media Bloomberg has this to say about Xi's supposed crack down on the capitalist class [4]:

"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."

[...] The crux of the matter, however, is that while Mao was a charisma, Xi is only a dwarf.

Xi is just 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.

One can use the term clique to refer to

the Xi Jinping leadership, because it is made up of yes-men. This was not the case for the new Maoist leadership when it gained ascendancy over the party during the Long March (1934-1935). Mao was the dominant figure, but he was able to surround himself with strong personalities with very varied political backgrounds within the CCP (some of them had previously opposed him) and with diverse experience: Chen Yi, Chen Yun, Deng Xiaoping, Dong Biwu, Lin Biao, Liu Bochong, Liu Shaoqi, Peng Dehuai, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De (all men). [5]

If such a grouping of key cadres occurred, it was because it responded to a central issue: to break the CCP's subordination to Moscow - a subordination that had led to disaster in 1927 and the following years. The Communist International had become the channel of Moscow and the cult of Stalin the ideological cement. Within the CCP, the Wang Ming faction was its agent. At the origin of what became Mao Zedong's cult of personality, there was the desire to counterpose an authority of Chinese thought and action to the Soviet "big brother". This cult eventually took on "delusional" aspects when, in the mid-sixties, the party leadership shattered and Mao called on the youth to mobilize against his opponents.

Instability factor

The Xi Jinping clique represents only a fraction of the ruling classes in China. Its reign is fragile. It is likely that it will not be called into question as long as the standard of living of the population increases, as long as parents think that their children will live better. There is no guarantee, however, that the country will escape a recession for much longer. The real estate crisis is at an all-time high, with a threatening general debt crisis in the background. The pilot-state of the economy has so far managed to avoid the bursting of the debt bubble, but will it always be so?

While distributing good points to deserving citizens and making Great Power nationalism one of the main cements of the regime, the CPC is waging campaigns of repression

against targets that are sometimes more symbolic than dangerous: LGBT+, feminist figures, so-called traitors to the homeland, who have allowed themselves too much irony on social networks ... Under Xi, the party is thus in a perpetual mode of pre-emptive strike, in order to nip in the bud any movement for democracy and equality. This is an extreme conservative reaction, for fear of a plebeian revolt from below.

As the political bureau preceding the CC plenum had announced, the rewriting of official history voted by the Central Committee had a single purpose: to strengthen the position of the regime's strongman: "[it is] necessary to support the central position of General Secretary Xi Jinping. (...) The whole party should try to understand the reasons for the CCP's success over the past hundred years and how it can ensure success in the future, following the principle of historical materialism and through a correct perspective of the CCP's history." [6]

For Chloé Froissart, "The challenge is to rally 'the people, the party and the army' behind the national myth, erected to the rank of a religion. The resolution is part of the CCP's ongoing efforts to establish an orthodoxy that

has been based since 2013 on denouncing any alternative interpretation of history, referred to as 'historical nihilism'." [7]

Xi Jinping's position, however, does not yet seem to be consolidated. Chloé Froissart notes that this resolution does not appear "to be received with as much enthusiasm as expected within the party: it has not yet been published four days after the end of the plenum". Moreover, although "Xi Jinping's stature is clearly enhanced and singled out, this plenum does not make him Mao's equal. The statement said the first party secretary "has made a new leap into the Sinicization of Marxism," undermining his ambition to be recognized as the theoretical equal of the regime's founder. In fact, his thinking is still referred to by the convoluted phrase "Xi Jinping Thought for a Chinese Style Socialism with in a New Era." The fact that it has not been abbreviated to "Xi Jinping Thought" indicates that it has not yet attained the legitimacy of "Mao Zedong Thought".[...] The absence of the abbreviation of the president's thinking and delays in the release of the final text of the resolution most certainly indicate that Xi still faces some reticence at the top to fully impose his power."

Footnotes

[1] Quotes from an AFP dispatch.

[2] See Pierre Rousset, 13 November 2021 "[China: a new imperialism emerges](#)".

[3] Au Loongyu, 22 September 2021, "[China and Xi Jinping : Reaction, not Revolution](#)", Borderless Movements. 22 9 月, 2021:

[4] Andrew Browne, Bloomberg, 4 September 2021 "[Could China's Crackdown Be a Second Cultural Revolution?](#)".

[5] Pierre Rousset, ESSF, 18 August 2008, "[La Chine du XXe siècle en révolution - III - Annexe 1 : six coups de projecteur](#)".

[6] Quoted by Frédéric Lemaître, *Le Monde*, 8 November 2021.

[7] Chloé Froissart, *The Conversation*, 16 November 2021, "[Parti communiste chinois: une nouvelle ère?](#)".

Fascist wins first round of presidential elections in Chile


26 November 2021, by [Dave Kellaway](#)

In 2019 the transition was challenged by a student rebellion which later spread to the whole population. The police and army responded violently, dozens were killed and a number of people lost an eye or were blinded by rubber bullets. An agreement to hold a referendum on writing a new constitution and the COVID pandemic meant the uprising subsided. The people voted overwhelming for a new Constitutional convention and then in 2021 elected a majority of progressive, feminist and indigenous representatives to that assembly.

The 21 November presidential elections confirmed a continued marginalization of the mainstream Concertacion parties and an affirmation of the left and progressive forces which have a majority in the convention. However the new element is the success of a Pinochet defender, Jose Kast, as the winner of the first round. Boric, who was a student leader in 2019 and subsequently became an MP, is only two points behind. However, the polls had him ahead before the vote and in all the elections since 1990 the winner in the first round was confirmed in the

second. Nevertheless, it is still all to play for since none of the usual mainstream parties made it to the second round and only 44 per cent voted, less than in previous presidential elections. Although it is assumed that the USA based candidate, Parisi, will support Kast, his votes given the lack of definition of his politics, might not all transfer to the fascist.

It is worth getting a flavour of the threat posed by Kast. Here is his post vote declaration:



(EL PAIS 22.11.21, MY TRANSLATION)

Kast stands full square behind the neo-liberal policies of the so-called Chilean “miracle” which have resulted in massive inequality, low wages, privatised pensions, welfare and education. He is ultra-Catholic, against abortion rights, gay marriage, indigenous rights for the Mapuche and wants to set up a physical barrier in the north (think Trump’s wall) to stop migrants. Unsurprisingly he is a fan of the previous US President Donald Trump, President Bolsonaro in Brazil and the Vox fascist group in the Spanish state. He hopes to negotiate an agreement with Sichel before the second round. The latter has already said he cannot vote for the far-left Boric and is willing to discuss with Kast.

Clearly both the state’s repressive response to the 2019 mobilizations and the way capitalist extreme inequality breeds crime, provides Kast with a basis for portraying himself as the defender of security and law and order. Racism against the indigenous minority also can win over less radicalised voters. As with other hard right populists Kast wins votes outside the metropolitan areas in the rural areas and small towns. The rich and the better off middle class also fear the redistributive policies of Boric. All those years of the Pinochet regime and then the tepid changes of the transition have meant that those social layers who gained in those years are willing to support Kast’s politics - particularly if the traditional right of centre parties no longer seem able to see off the left.

We should not let Kast’s success blind us to the breakthrough represented by Boric “s votes. His policies to increase

state intervention in the economy such as ending privatised pensions or his defence of women’s, gay and indigenous rights are more radical than the left of centre parties’ traditional positions.

Although Kast represents another example of creeping fascism we also see like Boric’s candidacy a number of progressive, left counter tendencies developing in various countries with different degrees of radicalism. Just across the border in Argentina the Trotskyist-led Workers Left Front (FIT) just won a million votes and four MPs. It is now the third national political tendency. In Bolivia we saw the return of a pro-Morales government team and Lula is looking a good bet to replace Bolsanaro. The victory of these new hard right or fascist currents is not inevitable. In Chile, Boric represents a radical riposte to the rise of the fascist right.

Boric is faced with some difficult tactical choices if he is to extend his support sufficiently to win the second round. He has already acknowledged that he has to listen and respond to public concerns on violence and insecurity. Winning votes outside the metropolitan areas has to be one area to work on. How far should he negotiate with Provoste, the Christian Democrat, who said she cannot vote for Kast? Are there concessions that could be made? It is difficult to judge these issues from here. A fascist led Kast government would make it even more difficult to develop a socialist political alternative. As long as certain lines were not crossed some adjustment of policy may well be a price worth paying to stop Kast and get a government that can begin to roll back the privatised economy and protect people “s living standards.

At the same time there are 56 per cent of voters who did not turn out in the first round. Abstention rates were even higher - as much as 64 per cent - in the working-class areas of Santiago. The traditional left parties like the CP and Socialist Party failed to mobilise these people. Continuing a radical, dynamic, popular campaign could win enough of those votes to make a difference. Another dilemma is how far do you focus your electioneering on pinning the pro-Pinochet label on

Kast and how far do you emphasise the positive social changes you want to bring about? Clearly Kast has the advantage that whole sections of the capitalist mass media will amplify his own accusations that Boric is pro-communist and pro-violence.

Many of the commentators in the Spanish language press have highlighted the polarization of Chilean society reflected in these elections. It is a conflict over the very direction and model of our societies today. If Kast were to win there would be a material and constitutional conflict between the President and the probable outcome of the constitutional convention. The left in Chile needs to build the broadest possible front both electorally and in the workplaces and communities for Boric and against Kast.

If Boric wins he will have the additional problem of a congress and upper house where the right-wing parties and the Kast current have reinforced their support in elections that took place alongside the presidential first round. Furthermore, the scale of the social and Covid crisis also weighs on the capacity of the Boric campaign to mobilise people against the fascist threat. The degree of social disaggregation and crisis can also favour the law and order narrative of Kast.

Pinochet tried to physically eliminate the left and the labour movement. The moderate parties of the democratic transitions tried to paper over the contradictions of Chilean society. Eventually the struggle of working people - including in all their diversity as women, gays, indigenous - against a capitalist system that makes them poorer, unhealthier and is destroying the planet, will always re-ignite. Let us hope they can win a victory on 19 December.

Chilean

Presidential Election results first round (second round on 19 December between top two)

JOSE ANTONIO KAST: PARTIDO REPUBLICANO DE CHILE
27.9 per cent 1939198 votes (Fascist sympathiser of Pinochet)

GABRIEL BORIC : CONVERGENCIA SOCIAL
25.8 per cent 1792006 votes (Left

wing former student leader of the 2019 mass protests)

FRANCO PARISI: PARTIDO DE LA GENTE
12.8 per cent 891566 votes (Political independent business man right of centre, campaigned from the USA!)

SEBASTIAN SICHEL : EVOLUCION POLITICA
12.8 per cent 885337 votes (supporter of current right fo centre president Pinera -traditional right of center party)

YASNA PROVOSTE: PARTIDO DEMOCRATA CRISTIANO
11.6 per cent 807377 votes (traditional centre party, like Pinera "s party part of the Concertacion bloc governing

the post 1990 managed democratic transition)

MARCO ENRIQUEZ-OMINAMI
PARTIDO PROGRESISTA DE CHILE
7.6 per cent 528839 votes (emerged from Socialist party which was part of the Concertacion)

EDUARDO ARTES: UNION PATRIOTICA
1.5 per cent 102069 votes (Communist party of Chile which also is supportive of Boric)

Abstention rate: 56 per cent

25 November 2021

*A first version was published in [Anti*Capitalist Resistance](#)*

The Argentine government loses its majority and the far left improves its position

25 November 2021, by [Sylvain Chardon](#)

Half of the deputies, 1/3 of the senators and several regional chambers were renewed. The party "Frente de Todos" ("Front of All") of the centre-left Peronist president Alberto Fernandez (34 per cent of the vote) is largely outnumbered by the 42 per cent of the right-wing opposition ("Juntos por el Cambio") in the majority of provinces and loses its absolute majority in the Senate and relative majority in Parliament. The world's media only picked up on this fact. A real analysis shows something else, which worries the power circles of imperialism.

Historic breakthrough for the far left

The central fact of this election, in a country where voting is compulsory, is the abstention. The Fernandez government lost 3 million votes due to the disappointment and abstention of the working classes. The right-wing opposition winners also lose 500,000 votes from the 2019 elections to the

libertarian with "bolsonist" tendencies Javier Milei. Milei's supporters are almost wiped off the electoral map outside the capital. Despite this good news, no one on the left in Argentina, a country where one of the most bloodthirsty military dictatorships reigned, underestimates or should underestimate the breakthrough of this "fascist" in the heart of the "portena" petty-bourgeoisie (inhabitants of the capital Buenos Aires), especially when the far left only recovers a third of the missing votes from the centre-left.

However, the breakthrough of the extreme left is historic as it affects all the provinces of the country with a national average of more than 6% of the vote and scores of up to 25% in the poorest territories. The FIT-U (Front of the Left and Workers' Unity) became by far the third largest electoral force in the country.

With more than 6% and 1.4 million votes, this vote took on an unprecedented qualitative importance thanks to the entry of far-left elected representatives in all the bastions of Peronism in urban areas. The dikes of

the old Argentine populist movement that had framed the working class for decades have finally begun to break. Hundreds of thousands of young people, of workers who can no longer stand the conditions of hunger and misery that the Peronist government of the All Front has imposed on the country, have broken free. They no longer want to pay the fraudulent foreign debt (most of which was inherited from Macri's previous right-wing government,) and to fatten the profits of the big businessmen and extractivist firms that pollute the "Pacha Mama" (the earth).

A vote of resistance that affected the most exploited: the Amerindians!

Far from the epinal images of travel agencies that present a white country, Argentina has thirty nations of first peoples on its territory, and the

"negros" of the "villas" (shanty towns), victims of the racism of the white aristocracy, are rarely black Africans but mainly Indians or mestizos. Throughout history, they have been massacred, culturally humiliated, stripped of their property and land, but they still exist and, like their Chilean neighbours, they have been resisting for years. Whether it is the Mapuche, to recover their ancestral lands privatized for the sole benefit of the big Western corporations such as Benetton and Lewis, or the Kollas, Quechua and other Toba who are resisting against the Canadian or Chinese extractivist firms that are polluting the land, the water and the cultural sites. In 2017, Macri's gendarmerie and prefectural forces murdered Santiago Maldonado and Rafael Nahuel, launching a racist campaign to demonize the first peoples. They went so far as to invent

terrorist groups to legitimize the repression that Fernandez continued.

This is why the heavily populated Mapuche areas in the provinces of Neuquen or Chubut voted more than 15% for the FIT-U and the Andean people of Jujuy more than 25%. When the most disadvantaged people take over politics, as Lenin and the Argentine Che said, the situation can change very quickly.

Simple electoral agreement or mass democratic movement?

To consolidate these electoral results and move towards eco-socialist solutions, would take much more than

a simple electoral agreement (which is better than nothing, let's admit it). It would require a broad, unified and democratic movement of all the forces of the far left that addresses much larger fringes of the working population and the youth and that brings together many independents and referents of the class struggle. We are far from this and each of the components of the FIT-U is organizing its own assemblies and victory demonstrations.

However, in order to massively reject the new agreement in gestation with the IMF, to progress in the organisation of working class neighbourhoods and youth and to energize the workers', environmental and gender oppression struggles, the construction of a large unitary movement is essential.

25 November 2021

Workers' mobilization in Cadiz for power translated into rights

24 November 2021, by [David de la Cruz](#) , [José María González](#)

To understand the workers' mobilizations in the Bay of Cádiz that are today shaking the city of Cádiz we need to go back in time. And not a week, with the last announcement of the closure of the Airbus Puerto Real plant. Nor to 2013, with the ten arrested at the shipyards. Not even to 2007, with the closure of Delphi. [1] To understand these mobilizations, we must go much further back. Specifically, to the late 1970s and early 1980s.

If we had to choose a photo to illustrate the conflict, it would be the one with graffiti on the industrial highway. It's the same scenario where today traffic is blocked at the entrance to the Navantia factory; the same one where they light the fire that so surprises Madrid and makes them finally focus on the south; the same one where the façade was painted with two words: "Felipe cabrón" ("Felipe the bastard"). That Felipe was González. [2] That bastard really meant traitor. Because it was in those

years that the industrial reconversion of our bay was carried out which still, to this day, drags us down and makes us suffer. Because it was at that moment that they tip-toed around our land and condemned it to a fate of precariousness, job instability and an economy based on a sector as seasonal and as fragile as tourism, one basket in which they placed all the eggs.

The industrial reconversion that the PSOE began and that the PP later continued and deepened has slowly brought with it the dismantling of a large part of heavy industry. Although many think that it was a clean cut, it was not like that. It was a wound that, little by little, with the passage of time, continues to bleed us even now. When we assert that fire and smoke was needed for them to take notice of us, we mean this: this is a conflict that has been smouldering for more than forty years. A summer and a few months in which peaceful demonstrations have occurred, in

which we have repeatedly asked for a meeting with the Ministers of Labor, Industry and Economy without even receiving a response. Now, precisely now, is when Nadia Calviño [3] has finally come to the conflict in Cádiz and precisely not to support the workers.

During these past months, Airbus announced the dismantling of the Puerto Real factory. It is, strangely, the only factory that is going to close in the whole of Europe, despite the 2,635 million euros of profits that the multinational made in the last year. This even though it has been a model factory, with the lowest rates of absenteeism in the world at just 1 per cent. The only real reason is that they will move production to Getafe, where 400 million of public money has been invested. Future orders and work exist but what does not is an equitable distribution between different parts of the country.

For this reason, the fight that is

currently taking place cannot be limited to the negotiation of a new labor agreement, it is also a fight against the systematic precariousness to which they condemned this land. It is about the present and the future of the Bay. It is about not losing what little we have left and of regaining hope. It is about the decades shackled by lost working conditions. The new agreement which they want to the workforce to submit to not only does not include a minimum salary increase, but, on the contrary, proposes the loss of purchasing power, and attacks the dignity of workers as it aims to legitimise and legalise a situation that borders on a regime of semi-slavery.

In a short video made in support of his colleagues, a metal worker said that the objective of the mobilizations is to “obtain power”, a power translated into rights. The power and the right to a vacation without fear of losing your job, the power and the right to seek compensation after a work accident, the power and the right to help a sick relative.

By the way, the video by the metal worker we mentioned was recorded hundreds of kilometers from his home, because to be able to put bread on his family’s table he had to emigrate. Do you understand now?

And these conditions of semi-slavery or of the closure of a factory in Puerto Real are political issues. Because in the case of Airbus, for example, there is direct involvement by the Government, which through SEPI [4] sits on the Airbus board of directors and has committed public assistance to the same company that closes a model plant in the heart of the Bay of Cádiz. And in the case of Navantia, we are talking about a public company that, by perpetuating subcontracting

and outsourcing contracts, has atomized workers at all levels and has cut their rights—which proves that violence is, at times, white-collar and systematic.

Having to lie in the emergency department after a work accident and claim that it was a domestic mishap is violence. Not being able to accompany a sick family member to the hospital is violence. A salary that does not allow you to make ends meet while your company takes huge amounts of public money is violence. Rises in costs of electricity, gas, the CPI while they freeze your income is violence. Having to travel hundreds and thousands of kilometres from your home on a regular basis is violence. As a rule, the working class of this province has suffered this violence for decades. And we say the working class in its totality without exemptions. Because these mobilizations have brought together the entire working class of the Bay. From the shipyards to aerospace. From the Navantia staff to that of the support staff. And I tell you, all the workers cannot be wrong. They all have a reason.

The shipbuilding and aerospace industries hang by a thread in the Bay, the sector is dying. We urgently need to change the model of production and really go for reindustrialization. It is about choosing between depending solely on tourism, which means having to subject new generations to the constant blackmail of precariousness or emigration, or betting on a future of fair ecological reconversion, science, innovation, added value and quality jobs. That is what we risk. And it is urgent.

In that decade of the 1980s, the working-class neighborhoods became bastions of support, neighbors applauded from their balconies and

the city turned upside down knowing that the fate of an entire bay was at stake. On Thursday, the marches of the working people were supported once more from the windows above. Fortunately, there are things, such as the loyalty of the people of Cadiz that do not change either. They erased the graffiti on the industrial highway, but they did not erase the feeling of identity and community with our workers because “the causes for which we fight are difficult, but they are so just that that one day we will win them”, as Diamantino García said. [5]

19 November 2021

Translated from *ctxt* and annotated by David Fagan.

Footnotes

[1] In 2007 multinational Delphi Automotive Systems Holding Inc. announced the closure of its plant in Puerto Real, Cádiz, with a loss of 1600 direct jobs and more than 2500 indirect jobs.

[2] Felipe González Márquez, leader of the Spanish social-democracy and Prime Minister of Spain from 1982 to 1996.

[3] Minister for Economic Affairs and Digital Transformation

[4] Sociedad Estatal de Participaciones Industriales /State Company for Industrial Holdings

[5] Diamantino García Acosta (1943 - 1995), known as *El cura de los pobres*, was a Spanish worker priest and trade unionist, founding member of the Sindicato de Obreros del Campo.

Afghanistan and Its Challenge to Feminism

23 November 2021, by Frieda Afary'

It is true that world powers often close their eyes to atrocities against women, including most recently the rape and mass incarceration of Uyghur Muslim

women in Xinjiang by the Chinese government, the rape and ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslim women by the Myanmar government, and the

rape and assault on women in Congo and Ethiopia’s Tigray Region by government forces.

What is different about the case of Afghanistan, however, is that the U.S. government and other occupying NATO allies practically handed over power to the Taliban, a misogynist, racist, and jihadist army that they claimed the occupation had originally sought to uproot. The Taliban is an army that is in many ways similar to ISIS and to the Ku Klux Klan in its extremism and brutality (Achcar 2021, Cole 2021).

Since their takeover, the Taliban have assaulted women's protests, beaten and censored reporters, stopped girls over the age of 12 from attending school or university, forced girls and women to marry Taliban fighters, forced most employed women to stay home, reinstated complete gender segregation, and replaced the department of women's affairs with their morality police (the Department of Promotion of Virtue and Prohibition of Vice; Nebehay and Farge 2021, Pal 2021, Engelbrecht and Hassan 2021).

In the words of Malalai Joya, an Afghan feminist and former member of the parliament who has survived four assassination attempts and is in hiding inside Afghanistan,

The Americans replaced the barbaric regime of the Taliban with brutal warlords and then began to negotiate with the Taliban, even though the nature of the Taliban has never changed. The Americans have thrown bombs, polluted the environment, made the system even more corrupt. They have never been interested in the Afghan people (Joya 2021).

In an interview with Los Angeles-based journalist Sonali Kolhatkar, the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) stated that the Afghan National Army and the U.S.-backed Afghan government fell apart so quickly just before the U.S. withdrawal because:

[t]he U.S. government negotiating with Pakistan and other regional players had an agreement to form a government 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.

RAWA also emphasized that:

[i]t is human nature to resist, and history bears witness. We have the glorious examples of U.S. struggles [such as] "Occupy Wall Street" and "Black Lives Matter" movements. We have seen that no amount of oppression, tyranny, and violence can stop resistance. ... 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. ... Now our fear is that the world may forget Afghanistan and Afghan women, like under the Taliban bloody rule in late 90s. Therefore, the U.S. progressive people and institutions should not forget Afghan women (Kolhatkar 2021).

Indeed some progressives and feminists around the world have issued statements. Activists from Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and India to Europe, Canada, the United States, and Hong Kong have organized protest gatherings and meetings in solidarity with Afghan women. Many are actively helping Afghan refugees. A Los Angeles organization of Black women activists for reproductive justice organized a discussion in which they brought together the plight of women in Haiti and Haitian refugees with the plight of women in Afghanistan and Afghan refugees (Black Women for Wellness 2021).

Here I would like to take up three of the attitudes expressed by feminists:

- The concern for and solidarity with Afghan women expressed by liberals who also accept the U.S. deal with the Taliban and seem to think that the only solution for now is to use economic pressure to make the Taliban more inclusive.
- The claim by leftists that for the people of Afghanistan, the Taliban are the lesser of the two evils after 20

years of U.S. occupation and should thus be recognized or engaged.

- Opposition by progressives and socialist feminists to both U.S. imperialism and the Taliban, and support for the struggles of Afghan women against religious fundamentalism and imperialism.

Liberals Who Justify U.S. Imperialism's Deal with the Taliban

Many liberal feminists, like Michelle Goldberg, columnist for the New York Times, support the U.S. withdrawal and admit that the U.S. occupation was a corrupt effort that led to the deaths and suffering of tens of thousands of Afghan civilians. However, they argue that U.S. President Joseph Biden could not renege on the deal that former President Donald Trump made with the Taliban (Goldberg 2021, Goodwin 2021). They ignore the fact that Biden was not obliged to carry out the deal in order to withdraw U.S. forces. They also ignore the fact that it was the Obama administration that started negotiating with the Taliban. The Obama administration asked the Qatari government to open a diplomatic office for the Taliban in Doha in 2013; the purpose was to facilitate negotiations behind the backs of Washington's own puppet Afghan government (Whitlock 2021, Tankel 2018).

Another liberal feminist, Farah Stockman, a member of the New York Times editorial board, argues that the U.S. government should "leverage money and international recognition to incentivize the Taliban to establish the most inclusive and moderate government possible." In her view, "even a deeply flawed government in Kabul is preferable to no government at all" (Stockman 2021).

Leftists Who Call

for Recognizing or Engaging with the Taliban

Nancy Lindisfarne, co-author of *Afghan Village Voices* and co-editor of *Dislocating Masculinity and Masculinities Under Neoliberalism*, and Jonathan Neale, former abortion and HIV counselor and author of *A People's History of the Vietnam War*, argue that the Taliban should be viewed as the will of the Afghan people (Lindisfarne and Neale 2021). They emphasize that the Taliban, although “deeply misogynist” and “sometimes racist and sectarian,” have popular support inside Afghanistan because of the cruelty and corruption of the American occupation. “The Taliban have offered two things across the country: ...They are not corrupt ... [and] are willing to rule for the poor.” They are not the Taliban of 2001 but have now become more inclusive and also have “concerns for the rights of women.” They are “an army of poor peasants.” They are “anti-imperialist.” They “want peace.”

Lindisfarne and Neale make a distinction between Afghan women and Afghan feminists. They claim that most Afghan women do not oppose the Taliban. Thus, they suggest that those progressives who want to help Afghan feminists can “organize to buy them airplane tickets and give them refuge in Europe and North America.”

While most leftists do not back the above crude and shameful defense of the Taliban, the view of the Taliban as a popular anti-imperialist force with support from women is not uncommon within the left.

Anand Gopal's moving article, “The Other Afghan Women,” which tells the life story of a rural Afghan woman named Shakira from her childhood during the Soviet Union's occupation up to now, shows that even when some rural women say they prefer the Taliban forces to the Karzai and Ghani governments and the U.S. occupation, that is not because they admire the Taliban but because they have experienced bombings under U.S.

occupation. In fact, rural women too say that they support women's rights and want rights for all women and not only urban women (Gopal 2021).

However, even Gopal, author of *No Good Men Among the Living*, a Pulitzer prize-winning book on the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan, calls for engaging with the Taliban. He does not advocate the immediate recognition of the Taliban government, but he does argue that “given that there are different currents within the Taliban, the extent to which the international community tries to engage with the pragmatic current, that could empower that pragmatic current against the hardliners” (Remnick 2021).

Principled Feminist Solidarity

As part of an effort to articulate a principled collective position, a group of Iranian feminist organizations in exile has issued a statement, in which they write,

We condemn the recognition of the Taliban government by any country under the claim that “the Taliban have changed and have become more moderate.” We stand with the women of Afghanistan against the Taliban, who, after reconquering power, have turned women and girls into sexual slaves for their soldiers (Collective Action 2021).

A coalition of Indian women's groups issued a call for Afghan solidarity demonstrations throughout India on August 23. Their demands included the following:

The UN, the international community, and all countries including India [must] refuse to recognize the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, and instead support the demand raised by Afghan civil society and women's groups that “any change of political order or the constitution must happen through elections and by the will of the people of Afghanistan, not through the threat of violence, or through war and military intervention,” and “drafting, legislating, and implementing the civil and penal laws shall be based on the

Constitution of Afghanistan, the national parliament shall be the sole legislating body, and the creation of any non-elected body, including the Supreme Theological Council of the Taliban, and the practicing of any unconstitutional power shall be outlawed.”

An international tribunal [must be] set up to ensure justice for the war crimes committed by the United States and NATO in the course of the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan.

The UN Human Rights Council must initiate a fact-finding mission to identify and bring to justice all perpetrators of atrocities and violence against Afghan civilians—including the occupying armed forces as well as the Taliban and other armed groups. Taliban leaders must also be brought to justice for every atrocity they inflicted on women and minorities in the past.

United Nations Secretary General, the UN Human Rights Council, international human rights organizations, and the international community must act to ensure that Afghan women's rights groups are the center of any negotiations and other processes to ensure a just peace and secure the rights of all Afghan people (All India Progressive Women's Association, et al. 2021).

Furthermore, Indian American scholar and activist Deepa Kumar, author of *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire*, has warned against the vilification of Muslims. She has urged those who draw connections between the Taliban and the extreme right in the United States to be nuanced in their discourse. She pinpoints the native roots of racism and misogyny in the United States that arose from several hundred years of de jure and de facto slavery preceding Islamic fundamentalism:

While the Taliban are indeed a retrograde force, it is important to look more deeply at the role the U.S. played in Afghanistan. Indeed, the U.S.'s failure to ‘liberate’ women is not so much the product of the backward ‘culture’ of Afghan people, but rather its choice of allies: the very same misogynistic warlords who

began the attacks on women's rights in the early 1990s (Kumar 2021).

Perspectives for Socialist Feminist International Solidarity

Given all the above, what conclusions can socialist feminist activists draw as the basis for our solidarity with the Afghan people and Afghan women in particular?

It is critically important not to separate opposition to U.S. imperialism from opposition to the Taliban and solidarity with Afghan women, oppressed minorities, and refugees. Any talk of legitimizing the Taliban as the so-called "will of the Afghan people" should be rejected. If we allow for the legitimization of the Taliban government, we have betrayed Afghan women and we have emboldened the extreme-right racists and misogynists around the world, like those taking away voting rights and abortion rights in the United States. Instead we need to give voice to Afghan women who oppose the Taliban.

We need to continue to put pressure on our governments and the United Nations to deliver humanitarian aid to Afghanistan through reputable humanitarian organizations and independent channels that can be held accountable (Egeland, 2021). Those who wish to send donations to the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan can go to this website.

While the effort of Chilean feminist Michele Bachelet, the UN high commissioner for human rights, to install a UN official to monitor human rights in Afghanistan is a step forward, we cannot have any illusions about the United Nations. Among the 47 members of the UN Human Rights Council, 19—including China, Russia, and Pakistan—failed to support Bachelet's proposal to have a human rights watchdog for Afghanistan. Two months earlier, the members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation

blocked Bachelet's call for a fact-finding mission (Cumming-Bruce 2021). Furthermore, the permanent members of the UN Security Council (the United States, China, Russia, France, and the United Kingdom) each have the power to veto any UN effort—whether resolution or tribunal—to put themselves on trial and hold them accountable for committing war crimes in Afghanistan or elsewhere.

Thus, instead of putting our focus on creating a "feminist foreign policy" within the context of capitalism (Chattopadhyay, 2021), socialist feminists need to challenge the very logic of capitalism that leads to militarism and war. This means recognizing that the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan cannot be celebrated as the end of U.S. imperialism. Trump's and then Biden's eagerness to withdraw from Afghanistan is rooted not only in the failure of the twenty-year U.S. occupation but also in U.S. aims to concentrate its military forces in the Pacific to confront China in a potentially much larger and far more destructive war for capitalist single-world domination (Buckley and Myers 2021).

Facing this ominous reality demands that socialist feminists develop a global view that expresses awareness of women's struggles and anti-racist, labor, prison abolitionist, and LGBT struggles in the Middle East region, in South and Southeast Asia, and globally and helps to bring them in contact with each other. For instance while Iran, which is ruled by a religious fundamentalist, misogynist regime, is helping the Taliban, it also has a women's movement for reproductive rights and against rape, femicide, and Shari'a law. The most prominent symbols of Iran's feminist struggles are Nasrin Sotoudeh, a human rights attorney, and Narges Mohammadi, a children's rights activist, both of whom are currently imprisoned. They are both against the prison system and the death penalty. Iranian women are reaching out to Afghan women in solidarity and recently had a demonstration to express that solidarity, after which most of the participants were arrested. Palestinian women are

fighting against both Israel's colonial rule and the misogyny of the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, the latter of which congratulated the Taliban after its takeover of Kabul. Women in Myanmar have been involved in a popular uprising since February and have been raising feminist demands as more and more are being imprisoned by a brutal military regime.

All of these developments are taking place in the midst of the deadly Covid-19 pandemic that is taking tens of thousands of lives every day due to poverty, lack of sanitary conditions, and lack of personal protective equipment and safe vaccines. The demand of people in Afghanistan and Iran, Myanmar, Haiti, and elsewhere for free and safe vaccines and PPE should be part of the demands of any solidarity movement.

A global socialist feminist view also demands supporting the plight of Afghan refugees and confronting racist forces in our countries who use refugees as scapegoats for the problems caused by capitalism and imperialism.

Ultimately, these challenges cannot be addressed without a new international type of socialist feminist organizing that offers a humanist alternative to capitalism-racism-sexism-heterosexism and alienation. It is toward this aim that we need a deep rethinking and further development of the contributions of socialist feminism.

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Posted Afghanistan, Anti-imperialism, Gender & Gender Politics, Human rights, Islamophobia, U.S. Foreign Policy, War and peace

Source *New Politics*.

The "Striketober" Debate in America

22 November 2021, by [Dan La Botz](#)

Today in the United States we have an uneven economic recovery. Employment is improving, theoretically giving workers great leverage. An extraordinary 4.4 million workers quit their jobs in September in what is called "the great Resignation." Employers are having trouble filling positions, so they are raising wages. Yet unions represent only 6.3 percent of private sector workers, while only 10.8 percent of workers overall are unionized.

In this context, there have been some strikes. Some 1,000 miners struck in Alabama seven months ago, and they are still out. The bakery workers union led 1,000 Nabisco workers out on a strike in several states; that contract is now settled. The same union also took 1,400 Kellogg's cereal workers out on strike, a strike now several weeks long. At John Deere, which manufactures tractors, 10,000 workers in the United Auto Workers walked off the job, an ongoing strike. But also in October and November

65,000 members of IATSE, the union of theater and movie workers, and the 30,000 workers in Kaiser Permanente hospitals renewed contracts, but without a strike.

The Guardian newspaper wrote of a "surprising burst of worker militancy and strikes" in what it called "striketober." Joe Allen, a writer for the revolutionary socialist journal *Tempest*, wrote of a "strike wave," though Nelson Lichtenstein in the social democratic journal *Dissent*,

declared “this isn’t a strike wave” though “we sorely need one.” In fact, unlike the teachers strikes of 2018-19, a genuine strike wave that spread among 110,000 workers in the same industry, the recent strikes are fewer in number and divided among various industries and unions. We’ve seen a number of strikes, but not a wave.

Why do we socialists focus on strikes? First, often a vote on a proposed contract or a vote to strike is the first and perhaps the only time that workers participate in the life of the union. Many workers don’t vote for their local or national officers, so the contract or strike vote may be the workers’ sole democratic experience in the union.

Second, while union officials carry out the contract negotiations and put the strike vote before the members, if the members vote to strike, a shift within the union may begin to occur. The

organization of the strike—sending pickets to plants, setting up picketing shifts, organizing strike rallies, dispatching delegations to visit other unions or community groups—begins to draw workers into action, giving them an opportunity to make decisions and perhaps for the first time to see themselves as the union.

Third, once the strike begins, with pickets confronting managers or scabs on the picket line and blocking trucks, the character of the strike as a real conflict between the bosses and the workers, becomes clear. Workers see that they are sacrificing their paychecks, while the distant stockholders, the corporate directors, and the plant managers continue to receive their salaries and dividends. Workers, sacrificing together, walking the picket line together, and fighting together against the boss, develop a sense of solidarity.

Finally, finding themselves in a conflict with the boss and often facing the police, workers become more open to thinking critically about both big business and politics. When that happens, socialist activists in the labor movement can offer strategic ideas and can raise the socialist critique of capitalism and propose a revolutionary socialist alternative, the idea that workers should take power and collectively own and run the economy. All of this makes strikes, but especially mass strikes that involve tens or hundreds of thousands, very significant events.

So far, we have had few large or militant strikes that could begin to create a more radical working-class consciousness. No doubt we will, but we are not there yet.

18 November 2021

Source [New Politics](#).

Disconnecting the employers

21 November 2021, by [José Soeiro](#)

In Portugal, this debate started in 2017. In June that year, Bloco [the Left Bloc] presented, for the first time, a project aiming at enshrining in the Labour Law the enterprises’ duty to disconnect. The idea was that the law would be a strong signal against an ongoing dynamic of intensification of work rhythms and informal extension of working times through some sort of permanent request to workers. In addition to invading rest time and colonizing free time, this professional hyper-connectivity exacerbates burnout phenomena and disturbs private and family life.

In October 2017, other proposed bill accompanied Bloco’s, but none of them provided for this disconnection duty. Rather, these bills provided for the “right to disconnect” that, besides putting the onus on the worker, either limited to stating an evidence that already draws from the current law (obviously the worker has the right to turn off their email and not answer calls during rest time), or created a regime much worse than the one that

existed. Why? Because by wanting to regulate a specific worker’s right, which the law in force already covers, these projects (proposed by PAN and PS) had a perverse effect: what was already established by the law as a time of freedom of the worker (rest time, non-work period and period of non-subordination to the employer), would become a time of conditional freedom, with the enterprises (according to the PS proposal) being able to define by internal regulation (i.e. through an instrument that can be unilaterally imposed) the situations in which the worker could be legitimately contacted beyond their working period. In practice, this would end up legalizing such an incursion by employers into workers’ rest time.

At that time, these two proposals were not approved (and just as well!) nor was Bloco’s proposal, rejected by the votes of PS, PSD and CDS-PP. Everything remained unchanged, but the idea of the “duty to disconnect” started making its way. It is true that workers have always had the right not

to answer a employer’s email or a phone call during their rest period, and it is true that exceptional situations, of *force majeure*, may exist and are covered by law (for example, in the case of fire at the company’s premises, or a cyber-attack and only the worker has the key!). Yet, the fact that workers do repeatedly receive contacts, outside their working hours, from their company is a coercive action and a form of pressure, that transfers to workers the onus of not answering or forces workers to read e-mails and occupy their mind, even if it only to understand the reason why they are being contacted. Therefore, it is important to look at the “disconnection” issue from this perspective: the employers’ duty not to connect.

And this is what happened now, in the wake of the legislation on remote working (through which good remote working regulation is now in force, with more protection and rights for those who work).

The new rule on disconnection, which will be inscribed in the Labour Law, enshrines the duty of employers to refrain from contacting workers. And it applies to all workers, regardless of working in micro or large enterprises, and not only to those in remote working. In the debate, once again, opinions were divided. In the original drafts, PS, CDS and PAN insisted (once again) on a dangerous formulation about a so-called “workers’ right to disconnect”. Bloco insisted on the employers’ duty to disconnect, applicable to all work regimes. In the context of negotiations

with the Socialist Party, and then in the so-called “debate on details”, the ambiguous proposals on the “right to disconnect” were dropped and the employer’s duty to disconnect prevailed. It was worth it!

It is well known that law does not automatically change social practices nor, by itself, does it put an end to a work culture of “permanently connected”.

There is still much to be done to guarantee more respect for working time and to win more time for

ourselves. Working hours abuses have many dimensions, from unpaid overtime to abusive interpretations of the legal figures of “working hours exemption” or the “hours bank”, for example. But the fact that the law now in force stresses this matter, which is maybe internationally unprecedented, is of great political and legal significance. And means that workers have one more weapon to use in the struggle for the right to live beyond work.

This is an edited version of an article from [Esquerda Net \(English\)](#).

How the Farmers’ Movement Brought the Modi Government to its Knees

20 November 2021, by [Ajoy Ashirwad Mahaprashasta](#)

The farmers, however, remained unwavering in their commitment to their call for a complete repeal of the farm laws, which they believed were “pro-corporate” and “anti-farmer”. Contrary to the Union government’s claims that farmers were consulted before the laws were passed, the protesting groups reminded people that the laws were first brought in through Ordinances in June 2020, akin to what they believed was a backdoor imposition of the news laws on them.

At every stage of the agitations, the BJP-led government attempted to crush the farmers’ movement, the most ghastly episode being the way agitating farmers were mowed down in Lakhimpur Kheri, Uttar Pradesh, by a convoy of cars allegedly involving junior home minister Ajay Mishra’s son. [1]

More than 600 protesting farmers died during the agitations. Several were booked under harsh laws. The government used its police machinery to disrupt the movement. The Singhu and Tikri borders of Delhi, where the farmers had been staging demonstrations, were practically turned into open prisons. Following the Republic Day march by farmers early this year, the police came down heavily on some of the farmers’

leaders. Yet, the farmers remained steadfast in their resolve to continue with the protests. Such was their determination that the crackdown on Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait after the Republic Day march at Ghazipur border of Delhi gave a fresh lease of life to protests, taking the demonstrations across poll-bound Uttar Pradesh.

The prime minister’s decision to repeal the laws indicates that the farmers’ agitations brought the Union government to its knees. Over the last seven years, the Modi government has earned the reputation of being dismissive towards people’s agitations. Even an acknowledgement of demands by agitating groups was seen with contempt, or as a sign of weakness for the government obsessed about projecting itself as strong and decisive. Such a tone-deaf approach has often led the Modi government to gravitate towards taking authoritarian stances.

On the other hand, the farmers’ movement evolved dynamically ever since it began. From a protest that took roots only in Punjab, it grew into a country-wide movement in which farmers’ groups set aside their differences and collaborated to take on the powerful government. Slowly

and gradually, different leaders from various states came together and mounted a united front, in the process blurring multiple caste and community contradictions. Each time the movement had to suffer a setback, it came out stronger. The slogan “Kisan Ekta, Zindabaad” that hung in the air at all protest sites also became the call for many farmers who didn’t get a chance to actively participate in the agitations.

In the last few months, the farmers’ agitation progressed into becoming a political movement against BJP’s polarising tactics. It helped heal the tensions between Jats and Muslims – the two communities torn apart in the aftermath of 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots – in western UP. The movement became the platform for bringing together many communities. Earlier, the farmers’ leaders campaigned extensively in West Bengal as an anti-BJP force, and contributed crucially to the humiliating defeat of the fledgling saffron party in the state. There were several instances in which people did not even let the BJP leaders campaign in their villages. The movement also triggered an exodus of lower-rung BJP leaders to other parties in several states.

In every aspect, the movement set an

example and showed a way forward to offset attempts by political parties to polarise society on communal lines. In the aftermath of Muzaffarnagar riots, the BJP was the sole beneficiary of the hostility between Jats and Muslims. In Haryana, the saffron party pitched dominant Jats against other smaller communities, following a cynical method of polarisation for electoral wins in most states.

After being contemptuous about the farmers' movement in every way, Modi's announcement to repeal the farm laws sounded similarly cynical. Despite attempting to crush the movement, the prime minister spoke about doing "everything possible" to help the farmers. He spoke about his government's commitment to farmers' welfare but while withdrawing the farm laws also made it a point to talk about his inability to "explain the truth" to the farmers.

His decision has come only a few months ahead of the crucial assembly elections in India's most-populous

state, Uttar Pradesh, where the BJP is eyeing another term in power, and Punjab, where it has lost its most-dependable ally - the Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal) - in the course of the farmers' movement. With grim prospects in both the states, Modi's decision to repeal the farm laws appears to be one that has been taken with only electoral considerations in mind.

The opposition in both the states have consolidated their position, riding on a wave of anger against the BJP among farming communities. Multiple surveys have pointed out that the BJP may face heavy losses in western UP, its strongest bastion in the state. Similarly, in Punjab, Modi's move opens up the possibility of a BJP-SAD (Badal) alliance once again, or a partnership with former Congress chief minister Amarinder Singh, who had declared that he was open to a pre-poll alliance with the BJP if the Union resolves farmers' issues.

Modi's decision gives the BJP some

play in the upcoming elections. It is intended to prevent any further damage to the party. He may have projected his move as a gift to agitating farmers on the occasion of Guru Nanak Jayanti, but it is hard to miss that the farmers' movement brought him to a point from where he could not have taken any other decision.

The victory of the farmers' movement also marks the Modi government's first real defeat in the last seven years. In that sense, it is a momentous occasion in India's political history.

19 November 2021

Source [The Wire](#).

Footnotes

[1] [The Wire](#) "UP: 8 Dead, Tensions High in Lakhimpur Kheri, FIR Against Minister's Son; Priyanka, Akhilesh Detained".

On the Polish border: "A policy that simply lets people die"

19 November 2021, by [Marta Górczynska](#)

Pro Asyl: The situation on the Polish-Belarusian border is getting worse by the day. Do you see any signs of de-escalation, are there any politicians in Poland who call for moderation and a humanistic attitude?

Marta Górczynska: Unfortunately not. It is a humanitarian catastrophe on all levels that is happening here in the middle of Europe. Politicians are only concerned about defending the borders; nobody even mentions humanitarian aid, which the refugees desperately need. It is getting colder and colder, temperatures are dropping below zero. People have no roof over their heads, nothing to eat, no warm clothes. There are women having miscarriages. Poland refuses to provide any medical or humanitarian aid to people seeking protection,

despite requests from the European Court of Human Rights. People are dying. Not because we don't have the means to save them. But because we, because Europe, have let them die. It is a nightmare.

Poland recently extended the state of emergency by 60 days. What does this mean?

The military is allowed to enter the "red zone", the three-kilometre security zone along the border. No one else, no doctors, no journalists, no humanitarian workers. This situation is dramatic in several ways. First of all, we have almost no journalistic information or pictures of what is happening in the forest. It is not just a forest where the refugees are staying, but a real jungle: the oldest primeval forest in Europe, an area criss-crossed by swamps and rivers. Bison live

there, and wolves howl at night. But the situation is most dramatic because the refugees are not being cared for. The only people who have access, apart from the security forces, are the local people. They do what they can, but the people who live there are completely overwhelmed by the responsibility.

Tell us about it.

Ordinary citizens become rescuers, but they don't have the experience of such situations or the right equipment. They bring sleeping bags, tea in thermos flasks and hot soup to refugees in the forest. But it is not so easy to reach them - because of the swamps, but also because many are hiding for fear of the Polish security forces. Often even ambulances do not come when called. And who has a stretcher at home? The locals recently

carried someone [an elderly, sick woman] in a makeshift hammock. They pulled a two-year-old child out of the swamp who almost drowned. They said that a 14-year-old boy was wandering around alone because the Polish security forces had sent his father back to Belarus and forgotten him. At first, the residents would inform the Polish authorities when they encountered refugees, as they assumed that they would then be taken to refugee centres and cared for. But they discovered that Polish security forces were instead putting people on military trucks and taking them back to Belarus.

Such refoulements are illegal under European and international law. But now the Polish government has *de facto* legalized these deportations.

Indeed, in mid-October, the Polish Parliament approved an amendment to the law that allows border guards to immediately turn back migrants. They can also be banned from entering Poland and the Schengen area for between six months and three years. If a person applies for asylum, they are still officially allowed to do so. The problem is, however, that in practice the asylum application is often "registered" by the border guards and people are always turned back. We know of one case where a person applied for asylum in the presence of a lawyer, a journalist and a border guard - but the application was simply ignored and the man was forcibly returned to Belarus. Even in Polish hospitals, which only a few people seeking protection eventually get to, they are deported to Belarus.

Are refugees registered in Poland?

Some people are, but the criteria used here are not at all clear. At first we thought that Poland could take in families or people in particular need of protection. But it turned out that this was also wrong. This is pure arbitrariness. The law no longer plays any role. It's like Russian roulette: sometimes the Polish authorities allow people to apply for asylum, and sometimes not.

What is the situation in the refugee shelters in Poland?

They are completely overcrowded because the Polish government has not provided more staff or more space. Those who end up there are safe for the moment, but the food is insufficient and people have less space than in a prison cell. And most of those who seek protection don't even get there, they are sent back. They have marks, wounds, bruises from being beaten by Belarusian security forces and turned away by Poles. The Belarusian soldiers force them through the sharp barbed wire fences at the Polish border or through individual holes in the fences, and the Polish soldiers force them back into Belarus through exactly the same routes.

And what does the EU say about this?

Nothing! It is unbelievable. From Brussels, one hears tones of condemnation of Lukashenko, but no criticism of the Polish government, despite the flagrant violation of the law in force. Things cannot go on like this! The EU must finally ensure that journalists, medical personnel and NGOs have access to the security zone. The Red Cross and similar organizations have trained staff and know how to deal with such situations. The Poles at the border can't take it anymore. They are traumatized, as are the activists in our organization. I myself am exhausted, I have never experienced anything like this in my life. Even some of the Polish border guards are crying and getting drunk because they can't take the psychological pressure anymore. One of them told me that he had pushed a child across the border - after all, that was the order - and that he was now having nightmares.

Saxony's Minister-President Michael Kretschmer (CDU) said: "We need fences, but we also need walls... Of course, no one is interested in walls, but it is now a matter of the European Union proving its credibility." What do you expect from Germany?

I expect Germany not to support the Polish government, which is breaking the law, but to support the migrants. But I keep hearing German politicians praising and supporting the Polish

security forces and attacking Lukashenko. Of course he is to blame, but we are talking about a few thousand refugees! Some of them have relatives in Germany.

Can you give a concrete example?

Among the refugees at the border, for example, there is a Syrian woman whose parents have been granted asylum in Germany. She is ill and had gone to Belarus without her parents' knowledge in order to continue her journey to Germany. She lost her shoes in the mud of the jungle and walked in the forest for days in sub-zero temperatures. Then she had a severe epileptic fit. She was one of the few people who managed to reach a Polish hospital. She was admitted in an extremely critical condition. Her parents came from Germany to Poland, but at first they were not even allowed to see her because of anti-pandemic rules, and then only for fifteen minutes. This is the first time in years that they have seen their daughter, who is lying in a hospital bed with tubes. And there is always the risk that she will be sent back to Belarus. Please, Germany, loosen the bureaucratic hurdles and welcome such people!

What are the possibilities for action for the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, what can you do now?

We, a team of lawyers, refugee aid officers and human rights activists, provide support wherever we can. We provide legal representation for asylum seekers and, at present, we are also the contact for Polish citizens who live on the border and help there. Together with other aid organizations, we collect donations of money and goods, and then we go to the border with sleeping bags, warm jackets, shoes, etc. There we hand them over to the local population, who distribute them to people in need of protection. There is no shortage of help, the problem is that it has to reach the migrants. Since everything has to be improvised and, as I said, there is no professional support from the state, the EU or experienced aid organizations, it is difficult. How come the government leaves us alone to do this

One can see the frustration and exhaustion on your face...

And I'm not the only one who feels this helplessness. The jungle on the border used to be a paradise, many city dwellers used to settle there because it was so beautiful. Now it is hell. But in the midst of this hell, there is humanism and help. Only it is politically criminalized. Many people who have lived there for a long time

remember the darkest times. They used to hide Jews in their houses in the region. Today they hide refugees in their houses, but they don't dare to tell their neighbours because the legal situation has become so confusing that they have to fear being put behind bars. For it is not only those who help, but also right-wing nationalists who call those who help refugees traitors and denounce them to the authorities. Recently, Polish human rights activists put an Iraqi refugee in their car. They

now face eight years in prison for alleged human trafficking. In Poland! In the middle of Europe! In the 21st century! These are conditions I would not have thought possible. We are at war. It's like a damned war.

Article published on the German website [Pro Asyl](#), 12 November 2021; translation from the French at [A l'Encontre](#) by [International Viewpoint](#).)

Stop the social and liberticidal regression in Senegal

18 November 2021, by [Paul Martial](#)

In many respects, the situation in Senegal has deteriorated. Economic growth is negative (-0.7 per cent) whereas traditionally this rate was above per cent. Indeed, the pandemic has hit important sectors of the economy such as tourism, which accounts for nearly 8 per cent of GDP. The crisis has led to an increase in the cost of transport for industry and increased difficulties for the sale of agricultural products. According to trade union sources, job losses number in the tens of thousands. Informal economy activities have also been undermined without any social safety net. At the same time, the attacks on land ownership continue with their share of expropriations, as shown by the case of the 18 hectares of Nianning.

Third term and authoritarianism

It is perhaps in the area of liberties that the situation is most worrying. We remember the terrible repression of demonstrators at the beginning of March. They were protesting against the arrest of the main opponent Ousmane Sonko on charges of rape. A dozen people were killed, the first time this has happened in the country for decades.

President Macky Sall is trying to use

the terrorist threats to initiate two liberticidal laws. They allow the punishment of anyone who encourages acts of terrorism. A vague formula that opens the way to arbitrariness. Wasn't it Abdoulaye Diome, Minister of the Interior, who considered the demonstrations in favour of Ousmane Sonko as "acts of a terrorist nature"? They also allow leaders to be tried criminally for crimes committed by their party. Penalties can go as far as the confiscation of their private property. Not to mention the possibility for the police to monitor any citizen suspected of terrorism without any control by the judicial authority.

On 23 January 2022, there will be municipal elections. These will be a test for all political forces and particularly the presidential majority.

Macky Sall is creating suspense on his intentions to run for a third term in spite of the Constitution, which he could change in his favour. However, he must have the political possibility to do so. Abdoulaye Wade's attempt to impose a third term on the nation ended in a resounding failure in favour of a certain... Macky Sall.

An opposition that

is reorganizing

The country is seeing a multitude of social mobilizations with the emergence of organizations such as the "Frapp-France Dégage" movement (Front pour une révolution anti-impérialiste populaire et panafricaine - Front for a People's Anti-Imperialist and Pan-African Revolution). Its activists highlight the submission of the Senegalese elites to French companies, whether in the retail sector with the Auchan company, in the agro-industry with the Mimran group, in telecommunications with Orange, etc.

These struggles must find a political expression, and this is in any case the will of fourteen organizations, some of which come from the radical left. They have decided to join PASTEF (Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité - African patriots of Senegal for work, ethics and fraternity), the organization of Ousmane Sonko. This party fights against corruption and for Senegal's independence from France.

It is to be hoped that the arrival of experienced radical left-wing activists in this organization will enable it to take better account of certain themes that seemed to be neglected, such as pan-Africanism, the fight against sexism, for social justice and ecology.

An electoral coalition for the municipal elections, Yewwi Askan Wi, has been built around PASTEF, but it is encountering difficulties with the administration in registering their lists.

Last week the authorities summoned

Barthélémy Dias, Yewwi Askan Wi's candidate for mayor of Dakar, for a case dating from 2011. This led to clashes with the police and the imprisonment for a few hours of the coalition's leaders.

The strategy of the government aims to weaken the opposition by using the justice system. The main rivals Karim Wade, Khalifa Sall, Barthélémy Dias and Ousmane Sonko all have legal proceedings against them.

18 November 2021

“Let us rise up”: GKN, an exemplary battle

17 November 2021, by [Eliana Como](#)

This freeze, which was gradually extended, was only lifted on 30 June 2021. From that moment, companies were “finally” free to lay off workers, without the unions, for their part, having obtained either the reform of social protection nets, or the lowering of the retirement age, or the reduction of working hours. The period of the layoff freeze ended with a problematic union agreement: union representatives limited themselves to asking for 13 weeks of benefits for economically-motivated redundancy in the event of lay-offs, without any obligation for the companies. A few days later, as could be expected, the collective redundancies began. On 9 July workers at GKN received, by email, the announcement of the total closure of the plant.

GKN is a factory with 422 workers - around 500 if we add the subcontracting companies for canteen and maintenance - the vast majority of them men. GKN produces transmission shafts for the automotive sector, mainly for Stellantis (ex-Fiat and FCA). [1] The factory is located in the province of Florence and it was bought a few years ago by an English investment fund, Melrose. It is not a company in crisis, on the contrary, it is at the forefront in technological innovation; it also produces transmission shafts for Ferrari, of a very high technological and qualitative level, which explains why until the last moment, just before the announcement of the closure, the company continued to invest, including with public aid allocated each year by the various levels of government.

The only reason for the closure is to move production in order to speculate elsewhere

GKN is just one example among many, but which, this time, caused a social explosion: it has become the most important trade-union conflict in the country and the signal for a salutary awakening of the working class as a whole, rendered dormant by decades of defeats, resignations and trade-union moderation.

The trade-union history of GKN, whose workers are overwhelmingly members of the FIOM and have been historically linked to the most militant internal current of the CGIL, *Riconquistiamo tutto* (“Reconquer all”), has always been an example of radicalism. [2] This is explained by years of advantageous company agreements, by a great political coherence and above all by a methodical construction of the balance of power, inside and outside the factory. For years, GKN workers obtained better working conditions, winning back on the factory level much of what the unions had conceded on the national level (such as retaining Article 18 against individual dismissals) and also succeeding in opposing the most detestable elements of the 2016 national metallurgy convention (flexibility and overtime, variability of premiums, payment of sick leave, etc.).

A mass movement

When the company announced its closure on 9 July, workers occupied the plant. From the start, the Factory Collective led the struggle. This collective has existed for years at GKN and is made up of factory delegates (recognized by national union agreements) and a group of elected workers, representing the different production sectors, in direct contact with the workers.

The factory was immediately supported and carried by the strength of the solidarity of the whole region and beyond. A local support committee was formed, made up mainly of other workers and solidarity activists. Very quickly, too, the coordination of women was created, especially comprising the wives and companions of male workers and women workers of subcontracting companies, which played an essential role in the development and defence of this struggle. The mayor of the commune where the plant is located supported it from the start, immediately issuing a municipal by-law preventing trucks from approaching the plant to try to empty it. The FIOM and the Factory Collective broadened the front of the conflict to the legal field by denouncing the anti-union behaviour of the company. On 19 July, the CGIL in Florence called for a territorial general strike (a call joined by the other unions) and filled one of the city's central squares. The following Saturday, 24 July, the Factory Collective called for a demonstration and the factory was surrounded, physically this time, by a huge human

tide made up largely of solidarity workers, some of whom had come from afar. The Factory Collective once again took to the streets, with the ANPI (National Association of Italian Partisans), on 11 August, the day of the commemoration of the Partisan Resistance of Florence 5 , a demonstration which again filled the city. , although we are in the middle of summer.

At the same time, this struggle filled the pages of daily newspapers and received the support of the university, culture and entertainment milieus. No one in the country can ignore its determination or its ability to build a very broad agreement around slogans that are very radical, but far from being in the minority. Regional and national institutions have been forced to show solidarity with the workers, by making promises that they know they will not be able to keep if the laws they have approved for years are not changed.

To try to cover itself, the government, in the middle of the summer, began to evoke a proposed anti-delocalization law on the French model, without making it clear whether, on the other side of the Alps, it had really been effective. The proposed text is really very limited and, rather than preventing delocalization, it simply sets out the procedure to be followed by companies which relocate, without mentioning possible sanctions. In short: slightly longer deadlines for announcing layoffs and generic undertakings to find other jobs for the workers concerned and finance their dismissal. Exactly what the workers of GKN - correctly - do not want.

Although this proposal is very limited, Bonomi, the head of the Italian employers' organization, immediately cried scandal: "free enterprise is being called into question". But the confederal union leaderships were not so combative: instead of asking for a more incisive text and launching a major mobilization in the country against delocalization and company crises, especially in the automotive sector and related industries, which are increasingly likely to be weakened by the industrial and professional choices of Stellantis, they have remained almost silent.

Alone in the struggle, the workers of GKN, at the end of August, invited, in front of the gates of the occupied factory, the greatest democratic jurists of the country and asked them to rewrite a bill, presented to Parliament a few weeks ago, which can really prevent the delocalization of companies which are not in crisis and which, until the last moment, received money from the State.

On 18 September, a few days before the end of the procedure which was to lead to letters of dismissal (Italian law, in the event of collective dismissal, provides for a special 75-day procedure, during which the company and the union must try to find an agreement before the layoffs become final), the Factory Collective called for a national demonstration in Florence, prepared in other cities (Rome, Naples, Turin, Milan, Bergamo and many others), by a series of assemblies addressed by delegates from GKN, then also from the CGIL and the FIOM.

40,000 people from all over Italy invaded Florence

This demonstration was one of the most radical and the most successful of recent years. For the first time in decades, the working class found itself in the streets, going beyond all political and union divisions, with a single slogan launched by the Factory Collective, borrowed from the anti-fascist resistance of Florence during the war: #let us rebel [3].

Two days later, the Tribunal made its ruling on the FIOM's charge of anti-union behaviour, ruling against the management of the company and blocking the 75 days provided for by the dismissal procedure. The company which, on the announcement of the sentence lost 4 per cent on the stock market in one day, must launch a new procedure and wait at least 75 more days before being able to make further lay-offs, this time in correctly informing the syndicate. Even if this will not be enough to prevent the closure of the factory, it is a first victory, which can be explained by an

extraordinary level of mobilization. In other conflicts, where such mobilization was insufficient, the judges unfortunately took the opposite decision by upholding the dismissals and rejecting the charge of anti-union behaviour.

For GKN, a month after the court's sentence, the collective dismissal procedure has not yet been relaunched. To the ministry, the management of the company declared that it was considering the establishment of a new production site. This does not mean that it is giving up on abandoning the plant which will be put into liquidation anyway, but for the first time it has declared itself ready to find a new owner. But what exactly it is willing to sell is unclear: the building, the land, the machines, the orders ? Or, more likely, the rubble ?

The risk is that this is an expedient to gain time and weaken the struggle. It would help Confindustria (the Italian employers' organization) to be able to say that the lay-offs at GKN, in fact, were blocked only because "we cannot lay off by mail". This would be the end of the country's most important struggle, silencing other conflicts and especially the battle for the anti-delocalization law.

Build on this first victory

This is why the workers remain on the defensive and have declared with great lucidity that they do not intend to demobilize: they have not been fooled by the vague promise of a hypothetical new owner (dozens of other struggles have ended in recent years with the closure of the company after a promise of this kind) and instead want the government to play a decisive role in ensuring the continuity of production in the plant and approving the law they have proposed.

It is more than ever necessary that the unions, in particular the FIOM and the CGIL, call for a national mobilization, going as far as a general strike against lay-offs, but also for the lowering of the retirement age. (which on the

contrary will increase again in January 2022) and for safety at work (in Italy, the number of deaths in the workplace is more and more worrying). This is all the more necessary since it is necessary to respond to the scandalous attacks that the CGIL has suffered in recent days from the fascists, but also to respond to the immediate needs of workers, by occupying the terrain of a social crisis which otherwise will end up being completely colonized by the right and by the delusional positions of the No Vaxers. Unfortunately, we are not about to have such a mobilization and the unions are content to propose a social pact (which is, besides, improbable) between the companies and the government and show no sign of taking any action.

The GKN conflict, going completely against the stream, is exemplary for many reasons, and above all for the autonomy of its union leadership and the role of its Factory Collective, in direct and daily relation with the workers' assembly. The positive outcome of this conflict is not guaranteed, we are aware of that, but the strength, even symbolic, that it has acquired is such it will not be easy

for anyone to normalize or marginalize it.

This struggle is also exemplary because it has shown that the workers do not resign themselves to their fate, despite decades of defeats and regressions, which can also be explained by the moderation of ineffective union choices, based solely on consultation. Before the gates of GKN, the stereotype of the worker defeated before even having started the struggle, fizzled out. The moral and social force of this conflict is such that it can only give hope and put into action many of those who no longer believed that to be possible

Finally, this conflict is exemplary because it has shown that a radical struggle - and even a very radical one - is not necessarily in the minority and that it can even be massive, if those who lead it have the intelligence not to stay isolated and build consensus without sectarianism.

Being radical means taking things at the root. This is what this combat has the merit of doing.

The struggle continues.

Translated by **International Viewpoint** from *L'Anticapitaliste* n° 130 (November 2021).

Footnotes

[1] Stellantis is a multinational automobile group established on 16 January 2021 as a result of the merger of the PSA group and Fiat Chrysler Automobiles.

[2] FIOM - Federation of engineering workers. Part of the CGIL, General Confederation of Italian Workers. This was close, historically, to the Communist Party.

[3] On 11 April 2021, the day when Florence celebrated the 77th anniversary of its liberation from Nazism-fascism, the workers of GKN and the regional Partisans' Association demonstrated together on the main square of the city. The slogan of the partisans was: "Insorgiamo» - "Let us rise up!" as in the title of this article.

Benin's groundbreaking new abortion law will save the lives of many women

16 November 2021, by [Ramatou Ouedraogo](#)

Moina Spooner, from *The Conversation Africa*, asked reproductive health expert, Ramatou Ouedraogo, to unpack the significance of this ruling.

What does Benin's new abortion law say?

Benin's new abortion law, which amends a previous one, now states that:

woman, voluntary termination of pregnancy can be allowed when the pregnancy is likely to aggravate or cause a situation of material, educational, professional or moral distress incompatible with the interest of the woman and/or the unborn child... [1]

The voluntary termination of the pregnancy is not to happen after 12 weeks of amenorrhea, the absence of a period.

Before this amendment, a woman could get her pregnancy terminated if the pregnancy would threaten her health or life, in case of foetal

malformation, or when the pregnancy was a result of incest or rape. The new law expands this to protect a woman's education or career.

In 2017, only six out of 53 African countries, permitted abortion at the woman's request during the first trimester of pregnancy. [2] They were Cape Verde, South Africa, Tunisia, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Angola up to 10 weeks of gestation.

Zambia, like Benin, includes socioeconomic reasons in its abortion laws. [3]

Benin's new law will provide more women with access to safe abortion in

upon the request of the pregnant

instances that they may not want, or be able, to continue with a pregnancy.

For instance, a student who gets pregnant and fears dropping out of school as result, can request for her pregnancy to be terminated to give her chance to complete her studies. Previous studies have shown that continuation of studies is a common reason among girls and young women terminating pregnancy. [4]

The same applies to a woman who already has three or four children that she is struggling to feed, and feels her current financial and material conditions cannot accommodate another child.

The new law opens the door for such women to access safe abortion, instead of resorting to unsafe methods and risking their lives. [5]

Why has this stance been taken in Benin?

I will say that Benin took this stance mainly to protect and save the lives of women, and the long-term advocacy around this.

As seen across the world, laws don't necessarily prevent women from seeking abortion services. [6] Rather, they'll find a clandestine, and possibly deadly, alternative. This is especially the case for women who lack resources and are economically vulnerable. This is because women with more wealth, a higher education level and strong network are more likely to access safe abortion than those with less resources.

Although there's not been a nationwide survey of abortion in the country - assessing the rate, cost and consequences of unsafe abortions - a few studies were able to show the burden and consequences of unsafe abortion in the country. The Ministry of Health estimates that 15% of maternal deaths in the country result from unsafe abortion. And data on complications associated with clandestine abortions and practices related to family planning use show that unsafe abortions are a growing

trend. [7]

The ongoing ethnographic study that the [African Population and Health Research Center](#) (where I work) is conducting in Benin in collaboration with Rutgers as part of the '[She makes her safe choice programme](#)' concurs with such findings. It shows that women and girls are desperate, and so transgress the law.

They risk death and stigma, to get rid of pregnancy that threatens their lives and livelihoods. For instance, casual labourers - such as domestic workers and sexworkers - reported that unwanted pregnancies could be detrimental to their jobs. They would have to stop working, thereby having no means of subsistence for themselves, and the new child.

Through our work we've seen how civil society organisations, health workers - such as gynaecologists and midwives (who are often encounter women who seek medical attention after unsafe abortions go wrong) - and international and national NGOs such as the [Beninese Association for the Promotion of the Family](#) engaged in long-term, and sometimes quiet, advocacy.

They used their experience to convince parliamentarians of the fact that pro-choice abortion laws will not encourage women to go for abortion. Rather, they will save the lives of those who will seek abortion regardless of the restrictions in place.

How does this approach compare with other countries in the region?

The Benin approach is somewhat groundbreaking in the Africa region. Benin goes beyond the Maputo Protocol, which has been the policy goal in the region for all the states, to:

protect the reproductive rights of women by authorising medical

abortion in cases of sexual assault, rape, incest, and where the continued pregnancy endangers the mental and physical health of the mother or the life of the mother or the fetus. [8]

The Democratic Republic of Congo has been the most progressive country in the francophone region, as they gazetted the Maputo Protocol in 2018. [9] Apart from that, all the countries are still in the advocacy process for enforcing at least the Maputo protocol.

This development in Benin demonstrates that African policy makers are capable and willing to make laws that take into consideration women's reproductive health and rights.

What will be the implications of this ruling?

This is a progressive step with regards to a woman's reproductive health and rights. Making the decision to have an abortion has always been a hard decision for women. From my experience, women usually consider abortion as a last resort. It is a very difficult and emotional experience, which has been worsened by legal restrictions.

The implication of this ruling is that it brings relief for women in their decision making process. It will provide access to safe medical pregnancy termination from public and private health facilities. By accessing I mean cost and availability. Clandestine procedures are known to be expensive. On the other hand the services will be moving from hidden to publicly available in health facilities. In some cases, access to safe abortion ensures that serious consequences of unsafe abortion are averted.

However, it is important to note that the ruling of the law on its own is not enough for women to access the medical abortion services. There is a lot to do including developing policies for the implementation of the law,

working with health professionals to reduce the number of those who are likely to refuse to offer such services using conscientious objection.

Source [The Conversation](#).

Footnotes

[1] Republic of Benin Government, 21 October 2021 “Encadrement de l’avortement au Bénin : Le Parlement a adopté la loi modificative”. Previous law “47 2.2 LOI N° 2003-04 DU 03 MARS 2003 RELATIVE A LA SANTE SEXUELLE ET A LA REPRODUCTION ”.

[2] Cairn Info International, Population Volume 73, Issue 2,

2018 “Abortion around the world. An overview of legislation, measures, trends, and consequences”.

[3] Guttmacher Institute, May 2016 [Fact Sheet Abortion in Africa](#).

[4] Springer Link, 9 April 2020 ““I wasn’t ready”: abortion decision-making pathways in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso”.

[5] Anthropologie et Santé, 2018 “Gestion des grossesses non désirées au Bénin et au Burkina Faso”.

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[7] National Library of Medicine;

June 2001 “Complications of induced abortion and miscarriage in three African countries: a hospital-based study among WHO collaborating centers ” and Planification familiale, 1 February 2019 “Grossesses non désirées et avortements: Des taux alarmants chez les femmes et filles au Bénin”.

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[9] African Population and Health Research Center, “Introduction Policy Change for Women’s Rights: A CASE STUDY OF THE DOMESTICATION OF THE MAPUTO PROTOCOL IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO”.

School Board Meetings Become Violent as Republicans Fight Over Health and Race

15 November 2021, by [Dan La Botz](#)

This wave of fighting began when schools opened in late August or early September as rightwing parents mobilized against vaccine mandates, mask requirements, and the teaching of critical race theory. In some cases, police had to be called to restore order. In late September, the National School Boards Association asked that President Joseph Biden intervene to protect school board members, and Biden’s Attorney General has said he will use the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and other agencies to prevent violence.

Where Republican governors have issued orders prohibiting mask mandates, progressive parents have gone to the school board meetings to advocate for vaccination, masks, or in other cases to keep education about race and racism in the curriculum. Republican and those on the far right—who are responsible for most of the violence—oppose those policies and use the meetings to promote a rightwing agenda and to mobilize with an eye toward the next national

election in November 2022 when 34 Senate seats and all 435 House seats will be up for reelection. The rightwing activists, often behaving riotously, shouting and disrupting, create chaos as some parents come to blows.

School board meetings have in the past usually been rather quiet affairs. The United States does not have a national educational system; rather, each of the 50 states is responsible for its own educational policies. Within the states some 13,800 local school district boards implement state policies and administer the schools and have a great deal of power vis-à-vis teachers and students. Most school boards are dominated by local business with members who come from a major corporation with its headquarters in the city, a small business owner, a local dentist or lawyer, and sometimes the teachers unions run or back candidates. Within that context school board meetings have historically been pretty democratic, with board members,

teachers, and parents debating important issues of finances and policies.

Now, school boards are battlefields. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control recommended that masks be worn by teachers, staff and students in all schools. But Republican governors like Greg Abbott of Texas and Ron DeSantis of Florida, have issued orders forbidding school districts from issuing mask mandates. The Republican argument is that parents should have the freedom to decide whether or not they want their children to be vaccinated or wear a mask. Among of the Republican parents are also Q-Anon supporters, who believe that the Democrats, the deep state, and global elites are satanic pedophiles whose call for COVID vaccine is a diabolical plot that is poisoning the American people. Others believe that Microsoft founder and billionaire Bill Gates put microchips in the vaccine to control people’s behavior. Q-Anon has called upon Republicans to take control of

local school boards as part of a broader political strategy to fight the Satanists.

The Republicans have also mobilized white parents to demand that teachers be prohibited from teaching critical race theory (an analysis of structural racism) or teaching about race at all, arguing that teachers are accusing all

whites of being racist. Eight states have already banned the teaching of critical race theory, while another dozen state legislatures are considering such a ban. Many black parents and progressives have argued that the teaching of the history of race and racism, and role of structural racism in society is an essential part of education.

The school board battles could play a role in determining the 2022 congressional elections and the possible return of Donald Trump to the presidency in 2024.

27 October 2021

Source [New Politics](#).

Reproductive Justice on the Line

14 November 2021, by [Dianne Feeley](#)

The Texas anti-abortion law bans abortions beyond the sixth week of pregnancy. Anyone aiding or abetting an abortion beyond that period could be sued: a doctor, a clerical worker at the clinic or a person who provided money, transportation or even childcare. Written to prevent legal challenge, it bypasses enforcement by the state and deputizes bounty hunters, rewarding them with \$10,000 payoffs.

When the Texas clinics appealed to the U.S. District Court, the case was inexplicably postponed and sent to the U.S. Supreme Court. As the September date approached and the Court was still on summer recess, a truncated process resulted in a 5-4 ruling with the majority smugly justifying its position given the "complex and novel antecedent procedural questions."

Justice Sonia Sotomayor called the emergency ruling "stunning," given that the law is so clearly unconstitutional.

Known as Texas Senate Bill 8 (SB8), the law was designed to shut down the state's two dozen remaining clinics. An earlier Texas law, overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2016, required doctors who performed abortions to have admitting privileges at hospitals within a 30-mile radius and mandated that abortion facilities must meet costly and unnecessary specifications for their buildings.

The majority opinion in *Whole Women's Health vs. Hellerstedt* struck down these requirements, noting that

"Each [provision] places a substantial obstacle in the path of women seeking a previability abortion, each constitutes an undue burden on abortion access, and each violates the federal Constitution."

The 2013 law was a test to see how many clinics would be forced to close through onerous regulations. Once closed, it's difficult for clinics to find the resources and to reopen. Despite a favorable ruling, 40 clinics were whittled down to a mere two dozen. SB8 goes further by intimidating anyone willing to help end their pregnancy.

When SB8 went into effect last September, Texas clinics complied with the new law. Those beyond their six weeks were referred to out-of-state clinics.

Of course, that route involves more complex arrangements and higher costs for those already under the considerable stress of terminating a pregnancy. The appointments at the nearest clinic in Oklahoma skyrocketed, leading to additional wait times.

The Response

In response to SB8, a coalition of over 100 organizations under the banner of the Women's March called a demonstration for reproductive justice on October 2 in Washington DC. Local initiatives, often organized by young women on social media, sprang up and linked to the Women's March map. While the level of organization

differed around the country, determination filled the air.

Five days after the successful actions, U.S. District Court Judge Robert Pitman issued an emergency injunction against SB8 at the request of the U.S. Department of Justice. In his 113-page ruling he stated, "From the moment S.B. 8 went into effect, women have been unlawfully prevented from exercising control over their lives in ways that are protected by the Constitution."

The following day, six of the 24 clinics began to schedule patients although staff were frightened to resume services. They realize that if the law is ultimately upheld, SB8 allows bounty hunters to retroactively sue all who aided and abetted.

True to form, the Texas attorney general immediately appealed the case to the very conservative Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, which quickly overturned Pitman's injunction. Other state legislatures, most notably Florida, have threatened to pass their version of SB8 over the next few months. Since three of Trump's appointees have been added to the U.S. Supreme Court, right-wing legislators have felt emboldened to move ahead and challenge *Roe v. Wade* on several fronts.

In 2018 Kentucky outlawed a surgical procedure used for second-trimester abortion. A federal court has ruled that law unconstitutional, issued a permanent injunction and denied an appeal.

The state's secretary of health accepted the decision, yet the state's attorney general demands to continue the litigation. The Court's decision to hear oral arguments on what is a procedural motion indicates the majority's interest in laws that outlaw abortion before there's any possibility of viability outside the body of the pregnant person.

A Mississippi law that outlaws abortion at 15 weeks is on the Court's docket. The hearing is scheduled for December 1 with a decision expected next spring.

Right-Wing Attacks

For 50 years the right wing has attempted to overturn the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision. They have won partial victories by passing a number of supposedly necessary requirements which result in infantilizing women.

Over the years anti-abortion fanatics have picketed and terrorized clinics, killed doctors who perform abortions, lied about the safety of abortion, and passed laws that set requirements unrelated to the safety of the pregnancy. These include parental consent for teenagers, requiring a waiting period between a first visit and the procedure, distributing unscientific "facts" to patients as well as mandating ultrasounds that are unnecessary early in a pregnancy. They also police sex education classes, and set up phony women's health clinics to attract and then intimidate those seeking abortion.

The most important right-wing attack on abortion came in 1979 with the passage of the Hyde Amendment, which denies the poor Medicaid funding for most abortions. (During the seven years before the amendment was implemented, 300,000 were able to obtain abortion under Medicaid.) This is an amendment tied to the yearly budget and has been renewed by both Democrats and Republicans over the years.

Although President Biden eliminated the amendment with the \$3.5 trillion reconciliation bill that would expand

Medicaid, Senator Joseph Manchin (WV-D) announced at the end of September that he will not vote for that bill unless the Hyde Amendment is included. The attack on the poor, which disproportionately affects people of color, continues.

Despite the aggressiveness of the right-wing base in evangelical and Catholic churches, a nearly 60% majority public opinion opposes banning abortion. Yet the right wing wants to eliminate abortion and declare "fetal rights" beginning at the moment of conception. It has been successful in restricting abortion because we live in a society that judges women and poor people. For example, the right wing paints those who don't have the resources to pay for the abortion procedure as sexually irresponsible. Those who seek abortion in the second or third trimester are particularly vilified.

Is our response strong enough?

The reality is that those wanting to end a pregnancy want to do so as quickly as they can. That's why 89% of all abortions occur within the first twelve weeks. Yet this requires knowing where to access such services and having the money, time, and resources to get to a clinic. Those unable to do so were blocked by either a medical, financial or personal reason.

Reproductive procedures for women are judged differently than all other medical procedures. Why accept that the state should have a say about who will have, or when to have, or not to have, children?

Abortion (before "quickening") and birth control were outlawed in the United States only in the 19th century and birth control became an issue with the rise of feminism in the early 20th century. But the challenge stalled out under the repression unleashed as the United States entered World War I. Without a feminist movement to shape it, birth control re-emerged in the 1930s. By the 1960s the right to abortion was key to the new movement. We initiated petitions and class-action lawsuits, testified at legislative hearings, and even picketed medical conventions, urging doctors

and nurses to join us in demanding a repeal of these laws.

A Brief History of the Fight

By the 1960s it was estimated that at least a million U.S. women each year were undergoing illegal abortions, often under unsafe conditions. We organized speakouts where women testified about our experiences. In April 1971 the manifesto signed by 343 French actresses and cultural workers was published, declaring they had had abortions and demanding the law's repeal. It shocked the world by revealing the reality for even many "successful" women.

This occurred within a burgeoning and international movement. Two years before, a group of undergraduates at McGill University in Montreal published the first edition of a scientifically informative Birth Control Handbook. It described and diagrammed women's anatomy and the reproductive cycle.

The first edition of *Our Bodies, Our Selves*, published in 1971, raised a wide range of women's health issues. While there had long been a phone number one could give to a friend "in trouble," in Chicago the Jane Collective organized an underground clinic and carried out 11,000 safe and inexpensive abortions between 1969-73.

Feminist health centers flourished during this period, as women flocked to learn about our bodies. On the West Coast Carol Downer was arrested for teaching women to use yogurt to treat vaginal infections; the yogurt in the clinic's refrigerator was confiscated as evidence.

After abortion became legal these clinics added abortion to their list of services. Since hospitals were never very interested in offering abortions, these feminist clinics, along with Planned Parenthood, became the infrastructure for abortion services.

By the end of the 1960s states such as Colorado and California had reformed their laws to allow for "therapeutic"

abortions. Women who had “serious” health or mental health problems could obtain them when certified by a hospital committee. Mostly available to wealthier women, it was a humiliating process that was accessible to a relative few.

Also during this time, middle-class women who wanted to be sterilized had to jump through hoops in order to qualify while poor women, usually African Americans and Latinas —but also women considered mentally or physically deficient — were forcibly sterilized. Mexican American women, who had been sterilized without their knowledge during their delivery, learned of the procedure when they inquired about birth control. Nearly one-third of Puerto Rican women were sterilized.

The more radical element of the feminist movement saw how race and class were used to implement decisions about women’s bodies. We realized that the best way of advancing women’s rights was to defend the most vulnerable. We linked the demand to repeal abortion laws with one that exposed and opposed forced sterilization.

By the 1970s it was clear that the demand raised by the women’s movement was not to reform abortion laws, but to repeal them. Class-action suits were winding their way through several state courts.

Realizing that the New York state law was about to be struck down, the state legislators crafted an extremely progressive law: it had no residency requirement and allowed abortion through the 12th week of pregnancy. Legal abortion had become a reality! At the end of the first year, statistics revealed how safe abortions were. In essence, the New York law became the test case that would lead to the Roe v. Wade decision.

It’s true that Ruth Bader Ginsburg criticized the decision because it rests on the Supreme Court’s interpretation of privacy as a Constitutional right — a shaky edifice — rather than on the 14th Amendment’s due process and

equal protection clauses.

Ginsburg also questioned the trimester framework established by the 1973 decision. By dividing a pregnancy into three stages, the ruling gave the state more say as the pregnancy progressed.

Before the fetus could survive outside the woman, that is, during the first two trimesters, legislation should concern only her health and safety. Only with fetal viability does the state have an interest. Yet late abortions are usually necessary when the woman’s life is in danger, or the fetus is malformed and unlikely to survive.

Nonetheless, we have a federal law against third trimester abortions. Here again the assumption is that politicians are better able to make an informed judgment than the pregnant individual. While defending the right to abortion outlined in Roe v. Wade, it’s now time to call for its extension.

Currently about 870,000 abortions are performed each year, with 30% carried out through a medical, not surgical, procedure (i.e. by pills — mifepristone and misoprostol). Given the growing percentage of medical abortion since the FDA approve these drugs in 2000, right-wing legislators have effectively prohibited telemedicine for abortion by mandating that the physician must be in the same room as the patient.

One in four women will have an abortion before the age of 45. That was the reality before abortion was legal, and while the number of abortions has decreased with greater access to birth control, it remains so.

Nearly half of those seeking abortion are poor (living below the federal poverty level) and another 26% low income. Almost 60% already have at least one child. People of color have approximately 60% of all the abortions while whites represent nearly 40%.

According to the Guttmacher Institute, by 2019 nearly 40 million women of reproductive age live in states considered hostile to abortion rights. The National Advocates for Pregnant

Women note that in this hostile environment women are being increasingly arrested and sometimes convicted for miscarriages. They have been arrested for falling down stairs, drinking alcohol, giving birth at home, being in a “dangerous” location, having HIV, experiencing a drug dependency problem, or attempting suicide.

Beyond Texas

SB8 is an attempt to circumvent a derivative constitutional right through vigilante action that will render it meaningless. In essence, the Texas legislature is mirroring the approach of the former slaveholders after the Civil War.

Passage of the post-Civil War 13th, 14th and 15th 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.

With this tragedy in mind, we can look at social movements that have forced public officials to take positions they’d rather not. Today’s crisis opens up an opportunity to assert the right to a full program of reproductive justice. We should end the onerous restrictions on abortion, offer sex education based on science not superstition, provide universal and free contraception, along with an accessible public health system and creating a healthy environment in which to raise children.

And given the right-wing’s generalized attack, it seems obvious to ally with other social justice movements that face the same bullying enemies, from Black Lives Matter and Indigenous rights to environmental justice, rational gun control and voting rights.

Source November-December 2021, ATC 215.

After Bogus Nicaraguan Election, Daniel Ortega Remains Dictator

13 November 2021, by [Dan La Botz](#)

Nicaragua exiles in coordinated protests last weekend held in cities in the United States, Latin America and Europe condemned the elections as “a fraud,” demanded “freedom for political prisoners,” and called for an end to “the Ortega-Murillo dictatorship,” referring to Ortega’s wife and vice-president Rosario Murillo. The European Union unanimously condemned Ortega’s “systematic incarceration, harassment and intimidation” of opponents, journalists and activists. The authoritarian rulers of Cuba, Venezuela and Russia sent their congratulations.

Ortega claims Nicaragua held fair elections despite domestic traitors and foreign interference. “They didn’t want us to be able to hold these elections,” he said, referring to his opposition candidates and their alleged foreign puppet-masters. “They are demons who don’t want peace for our people and instead opt for slander and disqualifications. Why? So that Nicaragua is embroiled in violence.”

But former leaders of Ortega’s own party called the election a charade. Luis Carrión, a former comandante in the 1979 Revolution, a former cabinet minister, and a leader of the opposition party Unamos, stated shortly before the election: “There will be voting, but no elections, because the people don’t have the freedom to choose a candidate or a party different than Ortega and the FSLN. This is practically a one-party election with foregone results....There will be no surprises because everything has been arranged so that there can be none.”

Rigging the Election

Beginning in June, Ortega’s government eliminated 10 presidential candidates: seven were arrested, two went into exile to avoid arrest, and

one had his legal status as a candidate suspended. Those events led another to resign his candidacy in protest. Only Ortega, the candidate of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), and a few small, satellite parties that represent no threat to him and are willing to cooperate with the electoral farse appeared on the ballot.

The candidates who were arrested span the political spectrum from right to left. Among the candidates arrested is the conservative Cristisana Chamorro, vice-president of *La Prensa*, the country’s largest newspaper, and daughter of Violeta Chamorro who defeated Daniel Ortega in the 1990 presidential election. One of the party leaders who was jailed is Dora María Tellez, a former FSLN leader, hero of the revolution of 1979, and former minister of health. She was a founder of the left opposition party Unamos. Then on October 21, Ortega arrested two leaders of COSEP, the Nicaraguan business council, president Michael Healey and vice-president Álvaro Vargas. All together 35 opposition political figures had been imprisoned before the election and dozens more were arrested on election day.

Given these circumstances, many Nicaraguans abstained. The country has 4,478,334 eligible voters, of whom, the Nicaraguan government reports, only 1,791,344 voted, while the non-government group Urnas Unidas claims that there were only 828,492 voters; that is, the government says that 60 percent of voters abstained, while Urnas Unidas claims 82% abstained.

Many foreign governments and international organizations denounced the elections before they took place. U.S. President Joe Biden stated before results were announced that Ortega and Murillo were “no different from the Somoza family,” the former dictators who ruled Nicaragua for decades. Biden said that Ortega had

orchestrated a “pantomime election that was neither free nor fair, and most certainly not democratic.”

Following the election Biden signed a new law providing for more sanctions on Nicaragua. Already existing U.S. sanctions imposed by former President Donald Trump’s administration affect Ortega, Murillo, and other high-ranking officials, while U.S. Treasury officials have blocked loans to Nicaragua from the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and other international financial institutions, measures that contribute to impoverishing the Nicaraguan people. Nevertheless, despairing of the possibility of changing the dictatorship, some in the opposition have called for an expansion of U.S. sanctions, though the left opposition, knowing the history of U.S. imperialism in their country, generally does not.

In December, the Nicaraguan National Assembly passed the Law in Defense of the Rights of the People to Independence, Sovereignty and Self-Determination for Peace to exclude from the election people who financed attempts to oust Ortega or who supported sanctions against Nicaraguan government officials. That law and others were used to bring charges against the presidential candidates and parties. Some of those who were arrested have been put under house arrest, others have been put in prison, where their supporters allege that they are being tortured.

“Our opposition was completely beheaded,” says Leonor Zúniga Gutiérrez, a Nicaraguan sociologist and filmmaker. “Our political leaders, all of them, are in prison right now. And we are concerned that our entire leadership might die in jail.”

While Ortega’s government has been authoritarian since he returned to power in 2007, it has now assumed all

of the characteristics of a dictatorship. "We are living under a new regime," says Zuñiga. "New because we no longer have the right to free elections. The right to vote for our leaders has been completely suppressed. Freedom of expression and the freedom of the press don't exist as a right anymore. And they don't hide this. They declare this is a new regime, only Sandinista—and nothing else."

The 2018 National Civic Uprising

How did conditions in Nicaragua deteriorate so rapidly and completely? Under pressure from the International Monetary Fund, in mid-April, 2018, Ortega decreed a reform of the social security pension system, raising taxes and cutting benefits by 5 percent. Some pensioners began to protest at social security offices where they were beaten by police. Students joined the protests in solidarity, but the police then shot several students and some died. Shocked and enraged at the murder of the students, protests quickly grew to hundreds of thousands. Then, on Mother's Day, May 30, 2018, as many as half a million Nicaraguans marched in Managua, led by the mothers whose sons and daughters had been killed by the police—but the march itself was attacked by paramilitary fighters, killing 15 and wounding hundreds. The Mother's Day Massacre, transformed the protests into a sustained national civic uprising with barricades in the cities and roadblocks paralyzing the country.

In response, Ortega mobilized the police and FSLN paramilitary fighters to violently crush the uprising. In all, at least 320 were killed, hundreds were wounded, 800 people arrested initially, and 150 continue to be held in prison where they are allegedly tortured. Over 100,000 Nicaraguans went into exile in Costa Rica, the United States, Panama, Spain and other countries.

In response to the uprising, Ortega's government outlawed all protests, expelled foreign nongovernmental organizations and closed domestic NGOs. Ortega and his family own

many radio and TV stations but to gain complete control of the media the government arrested some journalists, shut down critical TV shows, and in general intimidated the media. The free press ceased to exist. Within a couple of months, Ortega had crushed the uprising.

Ortega and his wife and vice-president Rosario Murillo, who actually runs the government day-to-day, claimed that the U.S. government organized and financed the 2018 uprising, aided by the Catholic Bishops and priests who they describe as "satanic criminals." While the United States did intervene in Nicaraguan politics in the past, it had little reason to want to oust Ortega. His government worked throughout the 2000s with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and with the U.S. Military Southern Command, as well as with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Central American Bank of Economic Integration and encouraged U.S. business to invest.

Ortega-Murillo's Conservative Government

Ortega, a leader of the Sandinista Revolution of 1979, claims that he is a socialist and an anti-imperialist. But the truth is otherwise. "Ortega's government is capitalist, free market, and extremely conservative on social issues," says Luis Carrión of Unamos. "Ortega has pursued neoliberal economic policies since he came back to power and created the most favorable conditions for foreign capital to come to Nicaragua, particularly for the production of energy and mining. Transnational and other foreign companies have opened businesses, including the highly exploitative maquilas, lured by tax exemptions, low wages, and controlled labor unions. His government was such a good practitioner of the Washington Consensus that it has received praise from the IMF and the World Bank for his free market and capitalist policies."

In terms of social policies, Ortega-Murillo's government had adopted the

most restrictive abortion law in the world: All abortions are illegal. Murillo attacks Nicaraguan feminist organizations as representing imperialist powers, while her government has repealed progressive laws that protected women's political and economic equality. Feminist NGOs have been shut down and the government is also planning on closing the Fundación Xochiquetzal, an LGBT center that works on HIV/AIDs. Indigenous groups claim that the Ortega government ignores them.

Daniel Ortega has won the sham November 7 election and remains president, but his may only tighten the lid on the Nicaraguan political pressure cooker that is bound to explode in the future. Nicaraguans dissatisfied with the government are legion: women, students, peasants, workers, parish priests, intellectuals, some business groups, and the indigenous and black people on the Caribbean Coast. Another arbitrary act by the dictator may detonate another rebellion in the future, just as it did in 2018.

The Nicaraguan Revolution of 1979, led by the Sandinista Front for National Liberation, that overthrew the decades long dictatorship of the Somoza family, was at the time a beacon for the left. Thousands of people from the United States, Europe, and Latin America, motivated by religious sentiment or radical politics went to Nicaragua to offer their support in the 1980s, I among them. The struggle of Nicaraguans today against the Ortega family dictatorship should inspire us to create a new solidarity movement, particularly with the working people of the country. Under Ortega, the FSLN which once fought for socialism, degenerated, becoming authoritarian and corrupt, and giving socialism a bad name. Yet among the opposition there are some democratic socialists and we should attempt to work in solidarity with them. Nicaraguans should be able to look for help not to the U.S. government, but to the international solidarity movement.

As one of the protestors speaking at the demonstration in New York City on Sunday said, "No dictatorship lasts

forever. The Ortega-Murillo dictatorship must go. Nicaragua wants freedom and democracy.”

Note: Quotations from Luis Carrión

and Leonor Zúniga Gutiérrez come from a panel discussion titled “The Nicaraguan Crisis: A Left Perspective” presented by NACLA on October. 7,

2021 and can be found [here](#).

11 November 2021

Source [New Politics](#).

What future for Hong Kong?

12 November 2021, by [Au Loong-Yu](#), [Ben Hillier](#)

It is indicative of the level of political repression that has engulfed the city since the Communist Party-imposed national security law became operational last year. More than 100,000 people have left the city, activists continue to be jailed, some independent media organisations have folded, and the main liberal opposition groups, along with many free trade unions, have disbanded as the crackdown on civil and democratic rights has intensified.

The contrast with the situation in 2019 could not be starker. At that time, the streets felt like an urban canvas upon which the slogans of the democratic movement were sprayed for mile after mile along the main roads, up side streets and on building frontages. Spaces devoid of demands often conveyed in other ways the depth of the radicalisation: burned signal boxes and trashed traffic lights, metal pedestrian barriers stripped bare for weaponry, smashed ATMs, formerly paved footpaths now resembling sandpits, the bricks having been given new lives as projectiles against police.

The street fighting was just a scrap compared to the battle for the universities. And of all of those occupied, the Polytechnic, in the heart of the city, stood out. Could more Molotov cocktails have been produced and stored in one spot by any student movement in history? Is there a record of college archery club members joining a political rebellion and shooting arrows into rows of cops to keep them at bay? Could more tear gas ever have been deployed by a city police force in the course of 48 hours?

The Polytechnic siege, two years ago this month, was as intense as it was exhausting, and it proved in some ways to be the movement’s last stand.

At the time, Au Loong Yu, author of the definitive *Hong Kong in Revolt* and one of the city’s few veteran activists—and one of its only Marxists—was saying as much. It was a valiant fight, but the balance of forces had become all too clear. In retrospect, he was, unfortunately, all too right.

“To have a sense of proportion, the scale of repression is still far, far away from Tiananmen Square in 1989. And if you compare with Burma/Myanmar, we are still far from that”, he says via Zoom from a London flat—like others, he has fled the city as the authorities continue to turn the screws on the resistance movement to the ever encroaching dictatorship of Beijing.

“For Hong Kong people, they never imagined that it could be as bad as it is now. Never. But we need to have a sober mind. For the Chinese Communist Party, it is still very moderate repression. They have been targeting the potentially most dangerous players. There are not yet killings. There are of course very dirty tricks. They threaten people’s families, threaten their life through middlemen. For now, the people targeted are the opposition parties, the trade unions with huge membership and so on. And there are also across the board purges targeting teachers, civil servants, academics, certain media. But as a whole, the whole of the civil society organisation has not been targeted yet. Maybe they don’t need to because the fear has already gripped many people in Hong Kong.”

One thing often missed in the coverage of the conflict is that it is not only a territorial dispute or a question of democracy and autonomy in the city. The Communist Party has an eye on resistance or potential resistance

to its rule on the mainland as well. More than half a dozen groups based in Hong Kong have been dedicated to labour solidarity and educational work in China—often in the crucial Pearl River Delta industrial zone, comprising the cities of Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Foshan, Dongguan, Zhongshan and Jiangmen.

The region was a hotbed of industrial activity and solidarity work prior to the ultra-authoritarian Xi Jinping’s ascent to the position of general secretary of the Communist Party. Most labour organisations historically kept a low profile, but have now either ceased operations or significantly reduced their work due to the increased repression, Au says.

By annihilating political liberties and the political opposition in Hong Kong, Beijing is also destroying the potential threat of Hong Kong and China labour solidarity. And beyond the labour organisations, there are hundreds more groups dedicated to campaigning and forging political links on the mainland: gender equality groups, human rights groups, environmental groups, community groups and so on. “They will all be wiped out maybe in a few years’ time”, Au says. “So this is a terrible loss for China’s long march for freedom as well.”

After the territory was handed back from British colonial rule in 1997 (it should be remembered that it was hardly a bastion of democracy at that time either), increasing numbers of mainlanders came to Hong Kong as tourists or for work and took note of the less restrictive political atmosphere: the bookshops selling literature otherwise prohibited in their own cities, the public events discussing political issues, the free

trade unions and the street protests.

In particular, every year on 4 June—the anniversary of Tiananmen Square—mass demonstrations were held in the territory to commemorate the victims of the Communist Party’s suppression of the democratic movement. “We never knew the numbers, but there were always mainlanders who came to Hong Kong to attend the memorial. Of course, this is gone now”, Au says; as of this year, the memorial is banned.

It must be quite difficult for someone in their twilight years to make a new life in a foreign country, but staying put would have been even more difficult. For that reason, when Au speaks of the weaknesses and mistakes of the movement in the last period, he is not unduly critical, particularly of those who chose to stay in the city. But there are important evaluations and lessons that are relevant not only for those in Hong Kong but also for people in socialist, democratic or workers’ movements elsewhere.

“I do not wish to be harsh”, Au says, pausing for the right words. “I have long argued that we didn’t do our best in 2019. But even if we’d made no mistakes, I don’t think that we could win this battle. Now, we are definitely in a retreat. Some organisations have done better. But for some, it has been the worst kind of retreat. You may say a capitulation—and very undemocratic.”

He singles out the teachers’ union, which dissolved itself after China’s state-run People’s Daily labelled it a “poisonous tumour” and the city Education Bureau said it would no longer be recognised. With a membership of nearly 100,000, it is one of at least 29 unions to have disbanded since the start of the year, according to a tally by Reuters. Even the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions, the umbrella organisation for dozens of pro-democracy unions, disbanded after its members and leaders were threatened.

“I’m not going to condemn the teachers’ union dissolving themselves as such, but the way they did it. The leadership, before turning to the

membership for consent, already decided that the union must be disbanded. Their own charter says that they must go to the membership and let them vote on such a proposal. But they don’t want that. They don’t want the members to decide. So they manoeuvred to convene a convention with ‘representatives’ of members, I think less than 150, and revised the charter so that a very small congregation of representatives could decide whether to disband or not.

“We know that when we retreat, we need damage control. Yes, when retreating you have to give up some of your operation. That I can understand. But the way they did it was to ensure the membership had no say on the matter. This gave no chance to those who opposed it. This is very shameful.”

A different example, Au notes, was that of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements in China, which organised the 4 June memorials and was a crucial pillar of the Hong Kong democratic movement for a generation. According to the Hong Kong Free Press, the Alliance had 100 affiliate organisations and nearly 150,000 members. It was also disbanded after receiving threats and being branded “an agent of foreign influence” by the government. But there were differences of opinion within the leadership from the beginning, and at least there was an open fight.

“Most of the leaders have already been imprisoned. There were only something like seven left in the committee, and it was a four to three vote to disband. It still had to take the vote to the members as well, and the opposition lost”, Au says.

One of the most strident oppositionists is the former vice-chair, Chow Hang-tung. She and some others refused to cooperate with the authorities, who demanded information about the group’s membership and activities. In September, she publicly urged people to continue the resistance. “Don’t surrender to the unreasonable power quickly and easily”, she told a media scrum.

Chow, along with other Alliance leaders Lee Cheuk-yan and Albert Ho, has been charged with “incitement to subversion” under the national security law. “I greatly appreciate her courage”, Au says. “I would say that she alone has saved the honour of the 2019 resistance. She almost alone stood up against this wave of capitulation.”

Despite the best efforts of some, there is no serious organised resistance left in the city. Yet in Au’s estimation, this is not all due to the repression. “There was already a fatal weakness. Because of the ‘down with organisation’ ideas [among the radicalised young people in 2019], we were always going to be left with atomisation. This is exactly what we are facing. Especially when the pan democrats, these mass organisations, disappeared. When they have gone, there is nothing really left.”

This was certainly evident the last time I visited the city, in February 2020. Although the pandemic was then a significant factor generating caution among the democratic movement, it was also clear that the youth movement had retreated and that its general leaderlessness, now that it could muster only small numbers, was incapable of dealing with the new disorganisation tactics of the police. As the continuing arrests attest, there is still oppositional activity. But it appears to be discrete and shut down quickly.

“If we come from a historical perspective, Hong Kong has been lucky for several decades, but the luck has come to an end. We are only meeting the same fate of several waves of China democratic movements in the past 70 years. Every time that there is a democratic wave, it doesn’t last; it is repressed and there is no memory left.

“Every generation has to restart everything from scratch; there is no continuity, no accumulations of cadres, no accumulation of experience. So every time it is ‘new hands’, new generations involved. If we do not do something, in five years’ time perhaps all the memory will be lost again.

"I hope it's not that bad. But the Communist Party's moves are very clear. First, they change the electoral system. Then, they finish off the opposition parties. Then, sooner or

later, even smaller organisations won't be spared if it goes on like that. There are still spaces that we can at least develop some networks, some new

organisation—it is still possible. But if we cannot do this in a few years' time, then the future will be very bleak."

Source *Red Flag*.

"Not one more!" - mass protests in Poland

11 November 2021, by [Jan Malewski](#)

Her waters having broken, Izabela went to the hospital on 21 September. Doctors noted the absence of amniotic fluid and confirmed the congenital malformations of the foetus previously observed, deciding to hospitalize her and... to wait. The SMS exchanges between her and her mother, made public on the TVN channel on 3 November are horrible: "The embryo weighs 485 grams. For the moment thanks to the anti-abortion law, I have to stay in bed. And there is nothing they can do. They will wait for him to die or for something [miscarriage] to begin and otherwise I can expect septic shock," Izabela wrote to her mother on the morning of her hospitalization. And when asked if they gave her anything to induce childbirth, she replied, "They can't. They have to wait for it to start naturally. Or if not, wait for the heart to stop beating." In the evening, in a text message to her mother: "They gave me an infusion because I was shaking because of fever. I was at 39.9°C." "Tragedy. My life is in danger. And I have to wait." On 22 September at 7.39 a.m. Izabela was pronounced dead of septic shock

Jolanta Budzynska, a lawyer for the family who made the scandal public on 29 October, explained in an interview that the medical error "cannot be considered in isolation from the decision taken by the Constitutional Court" that further restricted abortion opportunities in Poland in October 2020. "Ms. Iza and all the other women in her situation would have been safer if doctors had had at their disposal, without legal restrictions, more methods of treatment in line with current medical knowledge. Today... doctors can refrain from taking such a measure for fear of their criminal liability."

Since Izabela's death became known, other similar tragedies have been made public by the families. "Waiting for the death of the embryo in the uterus when we know in advance that it will not survive is now a common practice in hospitals. I've experienced it myself," one journalist wrote.

Mobilizations for women's rights, which last year mobilized more than a million people in this country of thirty-six million inhabitants, have resumed. "Not one more!" "I think, I feel, I

decide!" "Abortion is life!" - chanted the demonstrators.

The fundamentalist right wing government has decided to act as if nothing had happened. "People die, it's biology... unfortunately women sometimes die during childbirth," the new head of programming of the official radio dared to say. Her correspondent commented on the protests, saying, "People will not allow themselves to be manipulated as the leaders of the Women's Strike would like, among others. These issues have nothing to do with politics or with the decision of the Constitutional Court."

And the Polish Parliament has decided to continue considering a bill presented by Catholic fundamentalists that defines human beings from the moment of conception and thus makes the termination of pregnancy a murder, punishable by a sentence of 5-25 years of imprisonment, and even life imprisonment, both for women and for those who help them, even by providing them with the pills for a medical abortion.

9 November 2021

The Rising Price of Insanity

10 November 2021, by [Against the Current Editors](#)

Before the delta variant of the coronavirus took over, achieving the elusive population "herd immunity" in the United States would have required probably 75% of the U.S. population age 12 and over to be fully vaccinated. It was clear, well before the hoped-for July 4 target date, that this requirement wouldn't be met, and that many state governments wouldn't

enact or enforce vaccine mandates.

While case loads are declining in the country as a whole, hospitals in states with rightwing mandate-refusal regimes are in desperate crisis. Notoriously, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis issued an executive order barring county school boards from enacting mask mandates in public

schools. Fortunately for him and everyone else, a court order said he couldn't enforce it — sparing the governor from direct responsibility for mass infections — but he then blocked funding for the salaries of defiant school board officials.

Similar battles are raging in states and school districts around the

country, in defiance of all medical science and common sense. With the super-contagious delta, to say nothing of potential new variants, the necessary vaccination level for herd immunity is probably 90% if not higher. There is no realistic prospect of achieving that in the United States, let alone in the global population — for so many of whom no vaccines are even available — while booster shots are rolled out in the United States and other rich countries.

A year after then-president Trump was pimping hydrochloroquine, bleach or ultraviolet light exposure as COVID treatments, people deluded by anti-vaccine drivel were injecting themselves or even drinking Ivermectin, a drug for treating parasites (particularly in farm livestock) — not viral infections. Insanity!

System Insanity

All this was before the Texas anti-abortion law was enabled to take effect by the Supreme Court. We'll discuss its specific consequences below. The larger context is that this law represents the escalation of a yawning crisis of the political system, one that mainstream media and pundits finally realize threatens the stability of the U.S. "Constitutional" order.

Among Trump's other obscenities, of course, was the mass deportation of Central American asylum seekers under "Title 42" on the pretext of preventing COVID spread. The Biden administration, in a move as criminal as it is cynical, has kept this measure in place to carry out the forced return of desperate Haitians from the U.S.-Mexican border back to the country they'd fled a decade ago.

Like Democratic presidents Clinton and "deporter-in-chief" Obama before him, Biden calculates that the way to blunt Republican attacks on immigration is to outflank them. It's a tactic that doesn't work, of course, combining moral bankruptcy with political futility as the purveyors of white nationalism continue spewing their "replacement theory" fictions without letup.

What might have once seemed like fringe phenomena, stolen-election conspiracy theories and vaccine-mandate refusal are entrenched manifestations of irrationalism running wild. They're ghastly but not terribly surprising phenomena — in today's circumstances where at least a third of the U.S. population still believes that Trump won the 2020 election.

Driven by a major political party taken over (willingly) by Trumpism and an ecosystem of far-right media platforms, the consequences are unfolding toward a massive crisis of regime legitimacy. Alarm bells are ringing along a spectrum from neoconservative ideologue Robert Kagan to liberal historian Timothy Snyder ([Washington Post](#), September 23, 2021, and [New York Times Magazine](#), June 29, 2021 respectively).

Deeper systemic irrationality is embedded in capitalist production's dependence on fossil fuel. Hurricane Ida, a relatively routine Category 1 storm that intensified in just over a day over super-warmed Gulf of Mexico waters to a monster Category 4, made landfall on August 30. It slammed directly into Port Fouchon, Louisiana, a hub for refinery and transport of 15% of the United States' crude oil and five percent of its natural gas.

Thus thousands of livelihoods in southeast Louisiana, the economy of the state and a substantial part of the whole country (e.g. fuel prices) depend urgently on the most rapid recovery and resumption of the very same fossil fuel oil extraction that made Ida, and will make coming climate-change events, such massive disasters. And this even as areas of the Louisiana coast become indefensible against future storms and probably best left uninhabited.

That so-called "recovery" depends on a certain level of climate-change denial, or willful blindness to its consequences. The same is true of the drive to extend the Enbridge Line 3 and 5 pipelines in Minnesota and Wisconsin, discussed by activist Rebecca Kemble in this issue of *Against the Current*.

This system insanity is no one's

"fault," least of all the workers and dislocated folks whose jobs or homes, or both, are in shambles, although developers who overbuild along vulnerable coastlines bear part of the responsibility. The real point is not who's to blame; it's that we just can't go on this way if human civilization is to survive this century.

Far Right Running Riot

The Ida catastrophe happened to be sandwiched between two manifestations of growing political insanity, in the wake of the 2020 election and the January 6 Capitol riot, driving the United States toward a potential existential crisis of government legitimacy. They are continuations of what we called in our previous editorial (ATC 214) "the long J6 riot." First, the gerrymandered Texas legislature rammed through the long-delayed voter suppression bill that makes the voting process more onerous for Black and brown and poor voters and allows blatant intimidation by partisan thugs called "poll watchers" at the ballot box.

Texas Democratic legislators had fled the state to deny the governor's special session a quorum, but their intense lobbying efforts in Washington DC failed to elicit serious action from the Congressional Democratic leadership, which is consumed by the tangle over social infrastructure legislation (a topic for another discussion in itself).

Republican right-wingers were further emboldened by a white-supremacist 6-3 majority Supreme Court ruling that upheld a voter-suppression Arizona law. As the Court majority signals its intent to leave the Voting Rights Act a hollow shell, other assaults will follow. For example, the gerrymandered Michigan legislature is employing a petition drive to empower itself to enact, against popular opposition, restrictions on voting that (due to an arcane procedural rule) can't be vetoed by the governor.

Mainstream media have belatedly awakened to the scale of the menace. The editorial pages of *The New York*

Times and Washington Post, the CNN and MSNBC commentariat, and other outlets are now consumed with “the attack on our democracy.” They seem to be hoping that the Department of Justice or Congressional investigations will turn it back, while Robert Kagan places his hopes in the dwindling bands of “traditional conservatives.” Lots of luck with any of those forces.

Then, just as Hurricane Ida left the eastern USA soaked and flooded, in a lightning offensive Christian-fundamentalists seized Texas, outlawed abortion and deputized their army to be vigilante bounty-hunting terrorists, an innovation that the Supreme Court majority said was too “novel” to be halted without further litigation. Consequently of course, this atrocity too is metastasizing to other states.

The Texas law is not only the most blatantly unconstitutional statute, both in its substance and its implementation, ever passed by a state legislature in modern U.S. history. More than that, it is deliberately and intentionally unconstitutional, as every single Texas legislator knows. And so does everyone from first-year law students to the Supreme Court, which is why its 5-4 ruling allowing the law to take effect was described by Justice Sotomayor as “stunning.” Judicial INSANITY!

The Texas atrocity has spurred strong popular outrage, shown by pro-choice mobilizations on October 2 when tens of thousands of people rallied and marched in over 500 cities. Support networks are emerging to assist women who need to go out of state for abortion services. Other forms of defiance will develop as more and more people grasp the reality that women’s rights, like African-American civil and voting rights, can be rolled back if not constantly defended.

In public opinion, abortion rights are more widely supported today than in 1973 when *Roe v. Wade* was decided. That makes the present Court ruling

an even more outrageous overreach. Pending further litigation over the Texas law and its replicators in other states, it’s important to note Chief Justice Roberts’ vote with the minority, not because he’s pro-choice but, we suspect, because Roberts may be fearing the monster he’s helped to create. It might destroy the sacred legitimacy of the Court itself — as it should.

Rules? What Rules?

Challenging the legitimacy of the Court is exactly what the leadership of the Democratic Party should be saying, then overriding the filibuster on voting rights and reproductive freedom. Don’t hold your breath — the neoliberal Democratic leadership plays by rules that no longer exist, which means playing to lose. In its own way, expecting a different result is also — insanity!

In the wake of all this, what then is the mounting price of insanity? In essence, what used to be rules of U.S. bourgeois politics are vanishing in the midst of escalating crises. The right wing is aggressive, emboldened and unconstrained by rationality, science, public opinion or even considerations of the longer-term health of the political system itself, let alone the survival of humanity.

We have to face the reality of our condition in a system careening out of what, until recently, was considered normality. There is no escape now from the new COVID-19 wave — thanks to the Florida and Texas governors and their fellow Republican crazies in other state houses.

The U.S. Constitution itself is hollowed out with no meaningful “equal protection under law,” reproductive rights for women or voting rights that the Texas Christian-fundamentalist zealots or other state legislatures are bound to respect. You may have a right to carry a semi-automatic loaded rifle into a Texas polling place to terrorize Black and Latino voters, but not to have your

school board protect your kids from unmasked and unvaccinated super-spreaders.

The coronavirus plays by its own rules, making up new ones with each mutation. Meanwhile Hurricane Ida, the California Caldor fire, and a dozen other disasters including spreading wildfires in Arctic forests from Alaska to Siberia, have shown that they don’t play by old rules either. The environmental catastrophe makes up its own rules as it goes along.

That’s a bit like the right wing running amok - except that the forces of nature are a lot stronger, more permanent and even deadlier.

Who will meet the challenge? We fully recognize that today’s small and fractured radical left is not capable of doing so on our own. Whether the zombie-like remnant of “moderate” or establishment Republicans, or “enlightened elites” of corporate capital, will wake up to their political order’s drive toward self-destruction, is an open question, and current signs are hardly encouraging.

There is, however, an important role for left and socialist activism. This isn’t a moment for despair in the face of the social, political and natural emergencies confronting our society and our world, but a time to help build movements that will create their own new rules, not play by those of a dying order. The October 2 mobilizations for reproductive justice must be just a beginning. [1] The fight not only to restore sanity but for democracy, social justice and survival must be won by insurgent movements, or not at all.

Source: November-December 2021, ATC 125.

Footnotes

[1] See “[October 2 reproductive rights actions: reports from the field](#)”.

The deadlocks of the left: health, pensions and employment

9 November 2021, by [Adriano Campos](#)

Under the leadership of then-president Cavaco Silva, the right-wing formed a government, before having to face a vote of no confidence soon after, paving the way for a Socialist Party government led by António Costa. Thus was the “geringonça” born. [1]

2015-2019: retreating from austerity policies

For four years (2015-2019), the Socialist Party ruled with the parliamentary support of the Left Bloc and the PCP, without these two parties participating in the government. Even during the electoral campaign, the national coordinator of the Left Bloc, Catarina Martins, challenged António Costa, who was campaigning on the most right-wing programme in the history of the PS. The Socialists renounced the easing of layoffs, a reduction in employers' social contributions and a 1.6 billion-euro reduction in pensions: this could pave the way for dialogue between the two parties. [2] Forced by the million votes on his left, the right being in the minority, António Costa signed two separate agreements, with the Bloco and the PCP, which provided for a vast list of measures, ranging from the blocking of new privatizations to the restitution of the income reduced under the Troika, through an increase in the minimum wage and the strengthening of social benefits. The PCP always rejected three-party negotiations, which gave the PS government a strong negotiating position, because to form a parliamentary majority both the Left Bloc and the PCP were needed.

Over the course of those four years, after conflicting and incomplete application of the agreed measures, annual negotiations on state budgets succeeded one another, leading to

additional gains for the left, as was the case with the PREVPAP [3], social protection for “self-employed” workers, reduction of university tuition fees, a new fundamental health law in a progressive direction and the process of decriminalization of assisted death - the latter is still underway.

Although the reversal of the austerity measures served as a common benchmark of the agreement, the existing blockages quickly appeared, in particular with regard to the dictates of the European treaties, the search for parasitic rent of the financial system and the labour laws. imposed by the Troika [4]. In none of these areas did the PS government show itself open to structural changes to negotiate with the left.

2019: the end of written agreements

In 2019, the popular vote in the legislative elections defined a new minority to the right of the PS, with the PSD (28 per cent), the CDS-PP (4.2 per cent), the Liberal Initiative (1.3 per cent) [5] and CHEGA (1.3 per cent) [6] totaling 86 seats. The Socialist Party strengthened its position with 36.3 per cent and 108 mandates, the Left Bloc maintained its 19 seats, with 9.5 per cent, and the PCP lost some of its support, with 6.3 per cent of the vote and 12 seats. In this new scenario, the PS could limit itself to forming a parliamentary majority with the Left Bloc or with the PCP, no longer needing elected representatives from both parties at the same time. Once a significant part of the income restitution program was carried out, the Left Bloc presented to the PS its readiness for a new legislature deal, but with a precondition: the elimination of the regressions introduced by the troika in

labour legislation (depreciation of overtime, reduction of the number of vacation days, reduction of the basis for calculating severance pay from 30 to 12 days per year worked).

The PS government formally rejected this precondition and the possibility of a new agreement, building on the position of the PCP, which rejected the methodology of written agreements, affirming its preference for a simple annual negotiation of budgets. Three elements make it possible to understand this refusal of the PS to access a new agreement. First of all, António Costa's alignment with Macron's tactics, betting on a centrism that expels the left from decisions in the fields of the economy and working conditions, betting on blackmail at the threat of a return of the right in power, erecting the PS as a pivotal party of the regime. Second, the submission to the pressure organized by the employers' camp to perpetuate the restrictive rules of the Troika in the field of labour law. The search for an absolute majority, a necessary step for a future repositioning of the PS against the left, is the third reason and the strategic orientation of António Costa since 2015.

2020: the pandemic and structural difficulties

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the weaknesses and structural inequalities of the economy and the welfare state in Portugal. Hundreds of thousands of precarious workers lost their jobs in the first wave of the pandemic, especially those whose working relations were informal or depended on the number of clients - such as domestic workers or workers in culture and tourism .

The lack of decent housing endangers the protection of the public health of part of the population and of migrant workers. Utilities have reached unprecedented levels of demand. In 2020, the poverty rate increased by 25 per cent, while the number of millionaires increased by 16 per cent. Despite the implementation by the government of a set of relevant measures (taking charge of victims of layoffs, extraordinary aid, suspension of water and energy cuts), Portugal was well below the European average in its response to the crisis, devoting the equivalent of only 5.6 per cent of GDP to extraordinary measures.

The weakness of the budgetary response and the widening of inequalities have brought back to the centre of the political debate the measures recommended by the Left Bloc. The effort to which the National Health Service was subjected made evident the shortage of health workers, who had been diverted to the private sector in search of better wages. The Troika's labour laws have facilitated mass redundancy processes in large companies, fueling a precarious regime. The financial hole created by Novo Banco [7] continued to drain public money. Extraordinary Income Assistance (AER) [8] has left thousands of workers behind. On all these points, the PS government rejected the proposals of the Left Bloc, which voted against the budget. The approval of the budget for the year 2021 was made possible by the favourable votes of the PS deputies as well as by the abstentions of the PCP, PEV, PAN deputies and the independents Cristiana Rodrigues and Joacine Katar Moreira. [9]

2021: the deadlock on the left

In 2021, the Socialist Party continued to apply its tactics of containing the progress of the left. The victory of the conservative candidate for the presidency, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, was favoured by an orientation towards the centre, with the support of Rui Rio (leader of the PSD) and António Costa, who mobilized most of the electorate. The PS leadership wanted Marcelo's victory to be seen as

a strengthening of their centre orientation. And it had this victory. By choosing to navigate on sight, without written agreements, António Costa was able to consolidate his choice of having the budgets approved by the left, while each month the PS voted in parliament alongside the right on essential subjects.

After the local elections of September 2021, during which the PS attempted, without success, a triumphalist discourse based on the distribution of funds from the Recovery and Resilience Plan, the draft budget for 2022, presented in October, confirmed the orientation towards the centre and a policy of budgetary restriction. [10] Refusing the economic margin available due to the suspension of the rules of the budgetary treaty, the government was not up to the task in terms of public investment, response to the energy crisis, the fight against inequalities and an increase in wages. But it is above all in the areas of health, pensions and labour law that the left's dead ends are to be found.

The Left Bloc presented nine measures to be negotiated, all of which were rejected in whole or in part, but on crucial aspects. In the field of health - *dedicação plena* [11], creation of the career of auxiliary health technician; in the field of pensions - repeal of the "reduction factor" and recalculation of pensions to eliminate the reductions concerning beneficiaries who have contributed for a long time and who had worked in exhausting jobs, review of retirement age [12]; in the area of labour law - re-establishment of pre-Troika rules on overtime, holidays, severance pay and collective bargaining. In practically all these areas, when it was in opposition the Socialist Party had defended similar positions. As for the PCP, it focused its demands on increasing the minimum wage and pensions as well as free childcare services. For the first time, it included labour laws in state budget negotiations.

As soon as the draft budget was presented, the President of the Republic, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, publicly threatened the parties with the dissolution of the Assembly of the Republic in the event of a vote against the project, maneuvering within his

party, the PSD, to strengthen the position of the new leadership contestant, Paulo Rangel. Without a constitutional basis (non-approval of the budget does not require the dissolution of parliament), the president's threat fostered António Costa's tactical inflexibility in the negotiations, allowing him to use the political crisis to appeal once again for an absolute majority, without even excluding from his speech a possible return to concessions to the left, thus seeking to put pressure on the Bloco and the PCP on both counts.

The state budget proposal presented by the government of António Costa was rejected on 27 October 2021, obtaining only the votes of the PS deputies and the abstention of the PAN and the two non-independent deputies. On 4 November, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa announced the dissolution of Parliament and early parliamentary elections, which are due to take place on 30 January 2022.

2022: the left fights for its programme and its popular mandate

The calling of early elections comes in a diffuse climate of popular mistrust and media pressure on the left. After clearly setting out its negotiation proposals and demonstrating the government's inflexibility, the Left Bloc has not given up on dialogue with the popular sectors of the left which leaned towards budget sustainability. The right is setting out for these elections with three congresses planned and two internal conflict processes (in the PSD and the CDS), and in the campaign it will calibrate its discourse on the possibility of future alliances with the far-right CHEGA. It is very unlikely (and no poll indicates it) that this right wing will be able to obtain a majority of the votes. As for the absolute majority of the PS, it still only exists in António Costa's calculations.

Elections should not be a settling of scores. Giving strength to the Left Bloc is the key to a new impetus for

negotiations on the left, so it is essential.

2 November 2021

Footnotes

[1] The term "geringonça" can be translated as "contraption" ... It was launched by the right-wing former right, Paulo Portas, who announced in 2015 that the coalition would collapse very quickly.

[2] The Socialist Party had proposed in its electoral programme and in its public documents to devise a legal formula which would give more power to employers in dismissal procedures; guarantee a freeze on pensions; move forward in reducing the Single Social Tax - the social security contribution paid by workers and employers.

[3] A result of the negotiations between the Bloco and the government, the PREVPAP was a programme of extraordinary regularization of precarious contracts in the public administration, which made it possible to regularize and perpetuate thousands of precarious contracts. The "Precarious State" platform was

launched in December 2016, with the aim of fighting for the integration of all precarious workers in the state sector, by mobilizing numerous collectives to fight against precariousness.

[4] Between 2011 and 2014, the right-wing government implemented the Troika's plan on labour law: reduction in the number of holidays and public holidays; reduction in overtime pay; restriction of collective bargaining; reduction in severance pay; casualization of temporary work and subcontracting.

[5] Ultraliberal Party, affiliated to the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE).

[6] Proto-fascist party, led by André Ventura (former leader of the PSD), affiliated with Identity and Democracy (ID, which brings together the Italian League, the French National Rally, the Alternative for Germany, Vlaams Belang from Belgium, etc. .).

[7] Formerly Banco Espírito Santo, a major post-April 25 economic group in Portugal, with unbridled political influence in all governments, which went bankrupt in 2014, resulting in a loss of around seven billion euros for the public finances.

[8] Benefits for people who lost

income from work or access to social benefits during the pandemic.

[9] PAN is the Animalist Party, affiliated to Animal Politics EU (APEU), formerly Euro Animal 7, which brings together 11 European animalist parties. Cristiana Rodrigues is a former PAN deputy, who broke with this party. Joacine Katar Moreira is a former member of the LIVRE party, led by Rui Tavares, affiliated to DiEM25.

[10] Despite being the party which won the most votes, with the largest number of municipal councils, the PS lost the capital. Carlos Moedas, former minister of Pedro Passos Coelho and one of the main people responsible for the implementation of the austerity plans, defeated by a short head the socialist candidate, Fernando Medina, to become the new mayor of Lisbon.

[11] A mechanism which provides resources to health administrations and enables health workers to devote themselves exclusively and full time to the national health service.

[12] Cf. José Soeiro, "O fator de sustentabilidade, o Governo et a política razoável", *Expresso*, 20 October 2021,

Nicaragua, as Elections Approach

8 November 2021, by [Margaret Randall](#)

THE SITUATION IN Nicaragua is complex. Sectors of the U.S. left remain in solidarity with president Daniel Ortega and vice president Rosario Murillo. People from those sectors have countered my declarations, some in a spirit of healthy exchange and others confrontationally. As I understand them, their reasons fall into the following three categories:

- Ortega and Murillo were part of the original Sandinista movement that

ousted Somoza in 1979. The Sandinistas are revolutionaries, therefore Ortega and Murillo are revolutionaries. Ortega's win in a succession of presidential elections shows that the majority of the Nicaraguan people support him.

- Successful programs in education and infrastructure place the country above others in the region.

- The United States is critical of the Nicaraguan government, and when Washington is against a government,

we should be for it. Those parts of the U.S. left that defend the dictatorship argue that we must defend any government that the U.S. government opposes.

I argue the following:

1. Ortega and Murillo were indeed involved in the anti-Somoza struggle of the 1970s and held prominent positions in the Sandinista government that came to power in 1979. However, subsequent years

brought rifts and divisions among the Sandinistas, with Ortega and Murillo consistently coming down on the side of authoritarianism and greed. Other Sandinistas — all imprisoned or exiled today — formed more democratic movements.

2. I myself worked with Murillo for almost a year at the Sandinista Cultural Workers Association (ASTC) in the early 1980s. I personally witnessed her harassment and humiliation of coworkers, along with her petty jealousies and voracious attempts to grab power. Once Ortega regained the presidency in 2006 election by aligning himself with the extreme right, he systematically eliminated all opposition, both within and outside his party. Today, all viable presidential candidates are either imprisoned or in exile. The results of the upcoming November 7th electoral farce are a foregone conclusion.

3. Since the people's protests of April 2018, state terrorism under Ortega and Murillo has included more than 300 deaths, 150 political prisoners, the forced exile of tens of thousands, censorship of the media, the shutting down of more than 50 non-governmental organizations, and the elimination of all political opposition.

The most important human rights organizations — Amnesty

International, Human Rights Watch, the InterAmerican Human Rights Commission, and the UN Human Rights Commission—have all denounced the current regime's flagrant human rights abuses. These are indisputable facts.

4. In a country where Ortega has eliminated every potential opponent, an "overwhelming" vote for him cannot be seen as legitimate.

5. There is one issue that I find particularly repugnant, and that is Daniel Ortega's sexual assault against his stepdaughter over a period of 19 years, beginning at age 11. At the time of Zoilamerica Narváez Murillo's 1998 press conference, I wrote a public letter condemning Ortega.

I do not believe that a rapist should hold public office. I have been appalled that U.S. leftists who call themselves feminists overlook this criminal behavior. Rosario Murillo defended her husband, abandoning her daughter. While this may not constitute a crime, it is not a position I can respect.

6. Nicaragua is a nation whose people endure poverty, repression, and an out-of-control COVID pandemic. I understand that sanctions by other countries and international

organizations may hurt the Nicaraguan people. The egregious history of the 60-plus year-old U.S. blockade against Cuba has been unable to defeat the Cuban revolution but has meant ongoing hardship for that country's people. So, it's clear that sanctions can punish ordinary citizens rather than a regime.

However, I don't believe there is an either/or solution to the issue of governmental power in Nicaragua. I believe we should denounce the United States whenever and wherever it interferes in the affairs of a sovereign nation at the same time as we must call out the state terrorism orchestrated by the Ortega/Murillo regime.

These include Ortega's extra-military thugs, the fact that all governmental branches including the judiciary are controlled by him, the murders, torture, kidnappings, imprisonment without trials or access to legal defense, the complete electoral takeover and passage of arbitrary statutes used to justify such atrocities. We need to look to the country's own civic organizations for leadership regarding how we, on the outside, may best help the Nicaraguan people achieve peace and equality.

Source [November-December 2021, ATC 215](#).

Kanaky: who's causing trouble?

7 November 2021, by [Daniel Guerrier](#)

After eighteen months of a "covid-free" situation throughout the Territory at the cost of extremely strict measures accepted by all (isolation of Grande Terre and the islands, restriction of inter-island movement and entries, mandatory fourteen day quarantine and so on), the Delta variant of the pandemic has recently and surreptitiously arrived, triggering a terrible wave of infection. To date, more than 260 deaths in a few weeks (which would be equivalent to several tens of thousands of deaths in France!) with more than 50% concerning the Kanak community and more than 25% the Oceanian

community, against a background of fairly widespread comorbidities (obesity, diabetes, precarious living conditions).

Pandemic wave, health measures and mourning customs

Faced with this disaster which affects the different peoples of the Territory very unevenly, the current

government led by Louis Mapou, an important figure in the UNI-Palika tendency of the FLNKS ("Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste", a pro-independence alliance of political parties) has taken measures that are both reasoned and very firm (protective measures, mask wearing, health passes, targeted containment measures, obligatory vaccination in the near future and so on) showing a full sense of responsibility on the part of the separatist leaders, and obtaining almost unanimous agreement from all political currents, including the opposition, in the Congress of New

Caledonia. In addition, the Melanesian and Polynesian communities in mourning are also demonstrating perfect obedience to the restrictions on burials, in particular by accepting temporary burials near Noumea without being able to accompany their relatives to their mound and/or island of origin, and being temporarily unable to respect their long and complicated customary mourning rituals requiring the displacement of entire tribes, impossible in these times of restriction of movement and protective measures. As a result, it is almost impossible to have the time and energy to organize a referendum election campaign; hence the unanimity of the pro-independence camp (all tendencies of the FLNKS, as well as all the other components - MNSK, PT, USTKE, Dynamic Sud) demanding a postponement of the referendum to 2022, the deadline provided by the Nouméa Accords being before October 2022.

At the same time, the forces supporting maintenance of the Territory in the French Republic, gathered in "Les Voix du Non," are almost unanimously (except Calédonie Ensemble which has agreed to consider a possible postponement in the event of an uncontrolled pandemic) in favour of sticking to the date initially planned. They realise that, for them, the referendum campaign will simply focus on all the exceptional health measures that the French government is implementing locally to deal with the pandemic and its consequences (massive health resources coming from metropolitan France, transfer of patients, aid to companies and staff) showing the benefits of remaining "in France" for the future. And some of their leaders add the need to finally "purge" the Nouméa Accords which have lasted too long, like Senator Pierre Frogier, who supports a proposal to give increased autonomy to the three current Provinces in the event of a victory of the anti-independence vote, a dangerous partition project that would result with a Southern Province with 75% of the population of the Territory (and the largest Kanak population too!) as well as 75% of the local economy! And Pierre Brétegnier, one of the signatories of the Matignon Accords of 1988 under the RPCR, one

of the main thinkers of the colonial right, said, when it had just lost the majority in Congress in April 2021: "On the road to Kanak independence? It is natural to discuss with the independence leaders, but they are gaining ground every time. Systematically, each of their demands concerning the institutional future of the country or the nickel mining policy begins under the violent pressure of the FLNKS and, in the end, when they have not obtained everything - which the loyalist negotiators announce as a victory - they have, every time, advanced New Caledonia one step towards Kanak and socialist independence... Hence Caledonia emerges each time a little less French. One day we will have to give ourselves the means to stop this process, if not to reverse it." This sums up the current revanchist state of mind of the "loyalists"!

And does the French government, guarantor of past agreements, stick to neutrality? While claiming to be neutral in the strict application of the Nouméa Accords of 1998, following the Matignon Accords of 1988, the French government in fact clearly asserts itself in favour of remaining in France: "France would be less beautiful without New Caledonia!", said Macron; while prime minister Castex recently said in the National Assembly: "We reaffirmed our strong wish that the choice of Caledonians be that of France." That makes this referendum campaign totally unfair and distorted, especially since he recently produced the totally unbalanced document on the "Consequences of Yes and No", Moreover in the great Indo-Pacific Axis project dear to Macron since 2017, recently ridiculed by the Australian choice of US nuclear submarines, New Caledonia is a centrepiece; which can also be understood - without accepting it - against the backdrop of China's progress in many of the newly independent states of the Pacific.

Paul Néaoutyne, signatory of the Nouméa Accords, former right-hand man of Jean-Marie Tjibaou and current president of the Northern Province, is right to invoke respect for the word given because, during the last Committee of Signatories with

Edouard Philippe in 2019, the latter had also proposed a referendum in September 2022, after the national presidential and legislative deadlines to avoid any collusion. Let us remember the attack on the Ouvéa cave in 1988 as part of a Chirac-Mitterrand standoff between the two rounds of the presidential election! But the Castex government has changed the situation, preferring to ask its Overseas Minister, Sébastien Lecornu, to organize "Léprédour meetings" (named after a Caledonian islet opposite Boulouparis, property of the High Commission), in a vacuum with selected guests rather than remain faithful to the Committees of the regular signatories in Matignon. While it is the government's prerogative to set the date of the referendum, the pro-independence camp has made known its preference for 2022 for months and well before the viral wave. And today, twenty-five separatist municipalities have already refused to organize the vote of 12 December.

In addition, internationalizing the problem, Papua New Guinea's ambassador to the UN has on behalf of the Spearhead Group bringing together the Melanesian States of the Pacific and the FLNKS as a full member, solemnly asked the French government for a postponement in the name of the current emergency health situation in the Territory.

Who are the troublemakers?

Yes, the old boycotts decided by the Kanaks recall painful moments, but each time, did they have any choice in the face of successive betrayals of promises given and authentically neo-colonial projects? The "loyalists" are trying to scaremonger with the evocation of these boycotts, while already predicting a disastrous future in case of results distorted by Kanak "non-participation" (the current unitary slogan), going so far as to ask for the application of the results of the second referendum because of the impossibility of holding the third through the fault of the Kanaks! But what were the situations that pushed the Kanaks to boycott; who was

originally responsible for them?

So those who risk provoking future unrest are those, including the French government, who refuse to postpone the referendum to 2022, if only out of respect for the mourning customs of the Kanak people hit so hard by the pandemic (with the death of many

cadres of the independence movement in the prime of their life, not forgetting all the anonymous of all ages).

May humanity and reason take precedence over lowly political calculations; the common destiny of the country is at stake! Let us support the Kanak people, still today in a new

and terrible ordeal, in their demand for a sovereign and independent Kanaky - New Caledonia with respect for all components of its population!

1 November 2021

Translated by *International Viewpoint* from *l'Anticapitaliste*.

“You are the illness, We are the cure”

6 November 2021, by [Dave Kellaway](#)

Workers fighting to save their jobs at Alitalia, Whirlpool, Piaggio, Genovese dockers and GKN were all there alongside the rank and file Cobas trade unions. Campaigns like the one for justice for the victims of the explosion of Viareggio were also present. A lively component was made up of thousands of young students mobilised by Fridays for the Future as well as the university Student left network. This group had organised some school occupations this week. Radical left groups like Potere al Popolo (Power to the People), Rifondazione Comunista (Communist Refoundation). Sinistra Anticapitalista (Anticapitalist Left) and Communia (Commons) were present. The small Partito Comunista (Communist Party) organised their own sit-in. “Voi la malattia, noi la cura”, “Voi il G20, noi il future.” These were the key slogans heard in Rome yesterday. “You are the illness, We are the cure. You are the G20. We are the future.” Militant eco-activists joined with class struggle trade unionists and the radical left to protest the G20 meeting of world leaders, Saturday 30th October. About 10,000 people were reported by Il Manifesto, the daily left paper, to have turned out.

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The Italian press is a bit less exclusionary of any activity on the left and several ran live video feeds of the demonstrations. You could see there were a lot of creative, musical colourful actions. One group of young people put on a football game of world leaders kicking the globe around.

Prior to the demonstration, a three-hour mass meeting of activists was held in the Puccini theatre. Speakers were heard from the ongoing workers and ecological struggles. Workplace safety is a particularly important issue in Italy with deaths well above the EU average. Daniela Rombi, the mother of Emanuela, spoke about how lax, criminal standards had led to the loss of her daughter at work. As Riccardo Chiari, Manifesto journalist commented in his article of 30th October:

This terrible loss shows the ever greater distance between the lives of people everyday going to work to earn enough to get by and the cold competence of a government ‘of the best minds you can find’. Those politicians and technocrats don’t worry or do not understand

how much working conditions, dignity and wages need to be looked after properly. They talk about labour creating ‘value-added’ for the country but the reality is quite different.

A woman married to one of the GKN workers said how the strike has meant she has had to go back to work in another factory to help them survive. She reported how she had to take a temporary contract, renewed on a 3 monthly basis. Her co-workers were in an even worst position because as migrants they were subject to rough treatment including sexual abuse but were constrained to try and hold their jobs to send vital money home. When she finished speaking a women eco-activist got up and went up onto the stage and embraced her.

All these struggles are of brave, resilient minorities receiving little or no support from the unions or the party that historically claims to speak for working people - the PD (Democratic Party), who is happy in government with Draghi, the banker. They decide together on the share out of recovery funds mostly to businesses and corporations. Saturday’s action at least allows these fragments of struggle to come together and point towards the possibility of forging a fighting alternative that can mobilise on a bigger level.

Elsewhere in Italy on Saturday, there were other protests. The Brazilian president, Bolsonaro, has distant family links with a small town of 4000

people in the Padova area near Venice. The local right-wing mayor from Salvini's Lega (League) had invited him on the occasion of the G20 meeting to come 'home' so the town could honour him. Fortunately, some other local people had other ideas and the town hall and surrounding area were smothered with slogans saying Fora Bolsonaro (Bolsonaro Out) before his arrival. The local Franciscan monks had a much better position than the Lega on the Bolsonaro question. He wanted to pray in their famous church in Padova. They let him but said on no account would they be giving him any sort of recognition or official welcome.

In Milan, there was a demonstration condemning the dumping of the

proposed Zan law (named after a gay PD senator) outlawing discrimination against gay or trans people. It had passed the lower house but lost by a few dozen votes in the Senate. Some PD senators whose party officially supported it actually voted against it in a secret ballot, as well as ex-premier Renzi's group. The latter likes to pose as an alternative to the right-wing. Renzi and the right had used the false argument that the bill would allow propaganda in favour of trans or gay lifestyles - similar to the Polish or Hungarian narrative. A side effect of this is that it gives hope to the right that they could capture the presidency in the vote in a few months time.

At least the efforts of the demonstrators have meant the media has not just spent hours admiring the

security or relaying a series of photo opportunities with the G20 leaders: meeting the Pope, throwing coins in the Trevi fountain, going to a sumptuous banquet with Matterella in the Quirinale palace or posing demagogically with essential workers.

Let's hope the Cop 26 demonstrators [1] take up the baton from their Rome comrades and bring even more people together.

31 October 2021

Source [Anti*Capitalist Resistance](#).

Footnotes

[1] 6 November is an international day of action for climate justice.

Behind the coup in Sudan

5 November 2021, by [Paul Martial](#)

The generals do not want a democratic transition in Sudan. They have too much to lose. Indeed, the military hierarchy has taken over most of the country's wealth and businesses. The military top brass was not happy with the civilian government's interference in their affairs. Already, bank boards have been dissolved. The Sudanese Commission for the Dismantling of the Ingaz Regime (that is al-Bashir's regime) was beginning to expose major misappropriations of funds.

As for Mohamed Hamdan Dogolo, known as Hemid, one of Sudan's strongmen, he was opposed to the integration of his paramilitary structure, the Rapid Support Forces, into the army, as proposed by the civilian authorities. With 60,000 men, this militia is financed from human trafficking rackets, the control of gold mines, or mercenaries in Yemen for Saudi Arabia.

In addition, there was concern in the army that justice, whether national or the International Criminal Court, would catch up with senior officers who were guilty of war crimes in different parts of Sudan - notably

Darfur.

Finally, the signing of a peace agreement in 2020 with the two leaders of the armed rebellion, Mini Minawi and Djibril Ibrahim, allowed an alliance between them and the army. Thus, their militias now participate in the repression.

Disappointing civilian government

To justify their putsch, the generals are trying to capitalize on the very real popular discontent. Indeed, Prime Minister Abdallah Hamdok, under the injunctions of the IMF, has pursued a policy of austerity in order to pay the arrears of debt and thus benefit from the "[Heavily Indebted Poor Countries \(HIPC\) Initiative](#)".

The measures taken, such as the abolition of energy subsidies and the reduction of budgetary expenditure, have increased the precariousness of the majority of Sudanese and eroded the popularity of the Prime Minister

and his team.

The economic situation worsened considerably with the month-long blockade of Port Sudan, the country's main source of supply, organized by Mohammed el-Amin Tirik, leader of the Beja tribe. Many consider that he was instrumentalized by the army leadership. It is certainly no coincidence that Amin Tirik has just given his support to the generals.

The irony is that this tribe has suffered for decades, like many others, from the marginalization orchestrated by the very people who made the coup.

General Abdel Fattah al-Burhane thus managed to strengthen his position by allying himself with Hemid and winning over the rebel leaders Mini Minawi and Djibril Ibrahim. Their departure from the civilian government is not a surprise. For several months they had been demanding better representation in government structures.

Western hypocrisy and popular mobilization

Although the leaders of Western countries have condemned the coup, they are partly responsible for it by supporting the IMF policy. The IMF's

policy has only worsened the economic conditions of the majority of Sudanese and has favoured Abdel Fattah al-Burhane's takeover. It should be noted that he was supported by Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, loyal allies of the US in the region.

The coup d'état will be defeated above

all by popular resistance. The general strike is being massively followed and despite the repression, the participation in the demonstrations is strong as shown by the hundreds of thousands of Sudanese who took to the streets last Saturday to demand a 100% civilian government.

4 November 2021

When health is reduced to an individual choice

4 November 2021, by [Gaara](#)

Voices are beginning to be raised against this certificate. A demonstration was held in Lausanne on 22 September. Starting with student groups, it brought together activists from more or less institutionalised extreme right-wing groups - in particular young people from the hard wing of the UDC -, anti-vax activists, but also individuals critical of certain bans. Note the absence of traditional student associations, trade unions or majority political parties, as these actors either did not take a position or welcomed the Covid Certificate. On 1 October in Geneva, a day of mobilisation was organised, this time on the initiative of actors from the alternative cultural milieu. They pointed out the pitfalls of generalised digital surveillance and defended a firm position against the extreme right.

In this context, it is necessary to avoid the sterile categorisation between those who are vaccinated, necessarily

in favour of the Certificate, and those who are irresponsible, ill-informed or conspiratorial. In the perspective of a collective health policy based on solidarity, it is important that the left-wing movements make their positions heard, which have so far been terribly absent from the public debate.

According to the Federal Council, all that is needed for the pandemic to be defeated is for individuals to decide to be vaccinated. However, while vaccination remains the best short-term means of combating the pandemic, it is not accessible to everyone. This is particularly true for people whose access to health care is already poor or for whom economic constraints make it difficult to free up time to go to a centre. With the introduction of the Covid Certificate, these people suffer a double penalty by risking contracting a serious form of the disease and being excluded from places of leisure, socialisation and training.

In our view, it is not the responsibility of individuals but of the Confederation to implement an effective vaccination strategy, taking into account the specificities and needs of the different populations living in Switzerland. But also by reinforcing the means of the public hospital to face this crisis and those to come. Moreover, there is still no lifting of patents, while the countries of the global South have access to less than 2% of the vaccines produced. It is difficult to imagine stopping the spread of the virus if three quarters of the world is deprived of vaccine doses.

The Covid Certificate embodies a conception of health not as a collective good but as an individual and national capital. With such a rut, it will remain impossible to see an end to the health crisis for all.

10 October 2021

Source: [SolidaritéS](#).

Blocking an Ecocidal Pipeline

3 November 2021, by [Dianne Feeley](#), [Rebecca Kemble](#)

Dianne Feeley: Tell us about the struggle against Enbridge's plan to replace the old Line 3 in Northern Minnesota in what seems to be a remote area.

Rebecca Kemble: Line 3 goes right

through the center of Anishinaabe territory. To them, it's the center of the world.

Enbridge, a Canadian multinational tar sands company, is using Northern Minnesota, Northern Wisconsin, and

Northern Michigan as a sacrifice zone to pipe their tar sands from Northern Alberta through Anishinaabe territory, then back to Canada and out to the east coast for export.

None of that oil goes to U.S. markets,

so presidents Biden, Obama and Trump's arguments about energy independence are off when it comes to Enbridge. It's just a giant disaster waiting to happen.

And disasters happen all the time. Every 20 days there is a pipeline spill. And as a Michigander, Dianne, you know very well, about the 2010 Enbridge Line 6B tar sands pipeline spill on the Kalamazoo River.

Tar sands are thick because they contain bitumen, so the oil just sinks to the bottom of waterways and kills everything. Enbridge spent over \$1.3 billion in the cleanup, but unless they drain the river it can't be completely remediated.

Enbridge started construction last winter on Line 3 and they are going at warp speed to finish. The capacity of the line is 844,000 barrels per day; they want to have oil flowing by this November.

There was no comprehensive environmental impact statement from either the feds or the state, yet there are 22 river crossings and over 200 water crossings.

Just in drilling under the rivers there were 28 spills of drilling fluid whose contents are proprietary, so we don't really know what's in it.

Line 3 opponents have used several different tools to stop Line 3: demanding environmental impact reports, bringing legal challenges, protesting and direct action as well as pressuring Enbridge's funding sources.

Enbridge has dozens and dozens of crews working every day and night throughout the week to get this thing done. They claim to have employed 4000 people in what is the largest construction project in Minnesota.

They want to beat the lawsuits that are piling up and prevent Jaime Pinkham, Acting Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, from ordering an environmental impact statement as the Army Corps of Engineers did earlier this year for Line 5.

We want to build enough pressure to

slow things down. If there's no oil in those pipes, it's not a done deal.

There are legal challenges, particularly from the Red Lake Nation, the White Earth Band of Ojibwe, and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe. Another important legal front was initiated by the White Earth Band of Ojibwe, asserting that under their 1855 treaty rights Minnesota has the legal obligation to protect Manoomin (wild rice) and fresh water resources.

Based on this treaty they initiated a suit in tribal court against the Minnesota DNR for improperly permitting Line 3. The Minnesota DNR challenged the jurisdiction in federal court, but on September 3 Judge Wilhelmina Wright denied their motion for a preliminary injunction and dismissed the case "for lack of subject-matter jurisdiction."

This precedent-setting case has the potential to put Indigenous Nations on a stronger footing as they seek to defend their sovereignty, land and water rights.

There have been several creative direct actions and protests including activists locking themselves inside sections of pipe, tree sits, blockading excavators and other methods that shut down construction.

Since constructing this pipeline requires massive financing, pressuring banks and financial institutions is critical. People have worked hard to pressure banks not to refinance the company's maturing loan, a \$3 billion revolving credit facility that came due at the end of March.

Three more credit facilities worth more than \$7 billion came due in July but apparently those loans were all renewed. More than 20 banks were involved, including, Chase, Citigroup, Bank of America, JP Morgan and Wells Fargo.

There is a diabolical aspect to all this hurry, because what they are doing is hastening climate catastrophe. Line 3 will produce the equivalent emissions of 50 coal-generated power plants. It's insane, totally insane.

It's all just for profit — we have the capacity to invest in clean energy, but

not have the political will to do it.

Shut Them Down for Survival

The Keystone XL pipeline got nixed by the Biden administration. Biden was so proud of himself for doing that, but he's not doing anything about Line 3. The KXL was going to go to New Orleans; Line 3 is going to the east coast of Canada but it's the same tar sands.

And this is in a time when we need to be thinking very, very seriously about halting production, mining and transporting of all fossil fuel and quickly transitioning to renewable energy. So that's why people have been really struggling against the construction of Line 3.

Line 3 ends in Superior, Wisconsin, where different pipelines begin. Line 61 goes the length of Wisconsin down to Illinois and from there to New Orleans. Line 5 and 6B start in Superior too.

But there are also "twin" pipelines because for every one that carries oil, ones in the opposite direction carry dilutant up to Alberta. Tar sands oil is so thick it can't be moved through pipelines unless dilutants are added. So there must be a pipeline to pipe all that crap up in order to process the tar sands and then transport the oil down.

I don't know if anyone's done the calculation on the amount of energy and money it takes to get tar sands out of the ground and moving. I'd be willing to bet it's a lot more than the price they get for the oil itself. The only way this operation works is through massive government subsidies from both the United States and Canada.

So we're using our tax money to subsidize multinational corporations to carry out extraction that damages the planet. All this so they can make a profit! It's really about profit because we don't need tar sand oil. Nobody needs tar sands — it should stay in the ground.

DF: I notice that activists pair

opposition to Enbridge's Line 5 with stopping Line 3 as well.

RK: While Enbridge's Line 3 was first built in the 1960s and is corroding so much that it's not been able to operate at full capacity, Line 5 was constructed even earlier, in 1953. The pipeline is outdated, it's leaking, and land is eroding around it.

Line 5 has had 29 spills that released over a million gallons of toxic oil into the environment. Yet most of the spills were not discovered by Enbridge's detection systems.

Line 5 goes across Northern Wisconsin, right through the Bad River Reservation and over to the Upper Michigan peninsula. It runs for five miles under the Straits of Mackinac, between Lake Michigan and Lake Huron, and on to the refineries in Sarnia, Ontario.

As Line 5 crosses these waters, it splits into two pipelines that run along the bottom, completely uncovered. At the Straits of Mackinac, the currents are strong and constantly shifting, so any oil spill would be catastrophic.

It's such a super dangerous and antiquated pipeline that Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer ordered Enbridge to decommission the line by May 2021. Enbridge went to the U.S. federal court to get an injunction and the oil continues to flow.

The corporation had signed a deal with the previous governor (Rick Snyder, who poisoned Flint's water — ed.) to replace Line 5 with a new pipeline that would be encased in a tunnel beneath the bedrock of the straits.

However, Enbridge needs several permits before beginning what would be a 10-year process. Importantly, last summer the Army Corps of Engineers ordered an environmental impact statement.

In 2013, the Bad River Band of the Lake Superior Tribe of Chippewa Indians in Northern Wisconsin did not renew Enbridge's leases on the Line 5 easement through 12 miles of their reservation.

Seeing the impact of climate change,

more intense storms and increasing erosion of their land, the Bad River Band tried to negotiate with Enbridge. But when that failed, they took legal action.

But if Enbridge is known for anything, it's consistently acting above the law. They just keep doing what they're doing. They have billions of dollars to pay for attorneys in court and they'll just keep fighting.

Now Enbridge has proposed a Line 5 reroute that goes around the reservation, but a spill would still contaminate the watershed, its wetlands and wildlife. Most importantly, 43% of wild rice beds on Lake Superior are right at the mouth of the Bad River.

Those wild rice beds are the cultural foundation of the people who live there. It's their spiritual food, it's their physical food. It's really the center of their lifeways and their culture. And if that's threatened, they consider it genocide.

Wisconsin's DNR is currently conducting an environmental impact statement. It's probably another year or so before anything happens, although we hear that Enbridge is working on flipping a couple of votes on the Bad River tribal council. That way they can put a replacement pipeline through the reservation, which would be much shorter than a 41-mile reroute.

Enbridge is a dirty, nasty multinational oil company that is just bullying its way through Anishinaabe territory and creating all kinds of havoc.

DF: So both Line 3 and Line 5 are older pipelines that Enbridge is upgrading?

RK: Yes. Line 3 is the older pipeline. It's being not just upgraded but built along a new corridor. They're not going along the same route and its potential capacity is much larger — three quarters of a million barrels a day.

The pumping stations were expanded to be able to handle 1.2 million barrels a day in Wisconsin. Once they put in the pipe, they can upgrade the

pumping station, increase the capacity, and just ram the oil through.

DF: Enbridge of course it claims that it puts "safety first." They brag about how safe Line 5 has been through all the years, and they have even agreed to encase the new Line 3 in a tunnel. They say that the alternative — of shipping the oil by rail — is more hazardous. What's the response to these arguments?

RK: The safest alternative is just to shut it all down, shut the tar sands down. We need to do that for a number of different reasons — not just for transportation safety, but for the climate.

We've had a hell of a summer, with the hottest summer ever recorded. For some, it is the fourth year in the row there have been wildfires and storms. We need to keep oil in the ground. The way to keep Lines 3 and 5 safe is to decommission them along with all the other pipelines.

We don't need tar sands. Enbridge is one of the wealthiest corporations on the planet. They could be part of the solution, but they're not, they're just not, they're worsening the problem.

Police State "Peace"

DF: Tell us about the role the Northern Lights Task Force is playing in helping Enbridge construct its pipeline.

RK: After the Standing Rock (Dakota Access Pipe Line) protests, where over 400 law enforcement jurisdictions were present to suppress protesters, they made the decision to put together a multi-agency, multi-state task force in anticipation of pipeline protests.

My local sheriff, David Mahoney from Dane county in Wisconsin, was one of the program's architects. When I went to Standing Rock to bring a resolution that our city council passed unanimously in support of Indigenous rights, I was arrested.

As I'm getting arrested, I notice Dane county deputies. It turns out our county sheriff sent 13 cops there without informing even the county executive. No one in our community

knew about it.

As soon as I got back home, I met with the sheriff and asked him about it. Because I made such a big stink about the participation of Dane county deputies and because other people in our community made such a big stink, he was forced to withdraw his deputies at the end of that week.

In my interview with him, he admitted he had been going out to Standing Rock. As soon as Sacred Stone Camp got started in the spring, he began consulting with the local sheriff's office about how to respond to the mass protests.

At the time Mahoney was vice president of the National Sheriff's Association. He went on to become the president and even met with Trump. He told me that their operation at Standing Rock was really a practice run for all the other upcoming pipeline struggles they were anticipating.

Enbridge was well aware of the opposition to their pipelines and had even been forced in 2016 to withdraw their application for an underground pipeline that would travel more than 600 miles from North Dakota through Minnesota and end in Superior, Wisconsin.

The Sandpiper pipeline was to transport fracked oil and would cross 28 rivers including the Mississippi. Having lost that battle, they were eager to have a mercenary force composed of sheriff departments in the area and linked to Homeland Security fusion centers. These exist all over the country and function as centers for law enforcement from various jurisdictions.

Those fusion centers were used as sort of a home base not just for public law enforcement, but for TigerSwan, a security firm contracted by Enbridge and previously used by Energy Transfer during the Dakota Access Pipe Line (DAPL) struggle. The information they shared was surveillance on water protectors. [TigerSwan has not been identified as working for Enbridge on Line 3.]

When the state of Minnesota authorized the construction of Line 3,

they mandated that Enbridge put money into escrow to reimburse law enforcement for their costs. There is a direct relationship to Enbridge paying for public law enforcement services in order to protect their property — this is something brand new.

Sheriffs will say, "We're here to keep the peace," right? Yet near the end of the drilling under the headwaters of the Mississippi there were some arrests, really violent ones.

Jill Ferguson, AKA Bad-ass Grandma, was injured in her head, shoulders and neck as she was arrested by an officer who used multiple "pain compliance" techniques. Others have been shot with teargas canisters and rubber bullets.

Dozens of officers are there to keep water protectors away from the pipeline property. So here we have our taxpayer-funded law enforcement agencies for hire by a multinational corporation.

That deal was facilitated by the state of Minnesota and by Governor Tim Walz who, when he was campaigning for the office he now holds, said any pipeline through treaty territory is a non-starter.

He chose Peggy Flangan, a member of the White Earth Band of Ojibwe, as his running mate. He got out the Native vote to win that election and totally turned his back on them. He won't even talk to any of the water protectors.

When five frack-outs happened as Enbridge drilled under the headwaters of the Mississippi, violent arrests took place. At that point the water protectors decided they would walk 256 miles to the state Capitol and publicize what was happening.

They walked for two-plus weeks down to St. Paul, but prior to their arrival, Walz shut down the roads around the Capitol, barricading the building with concrete barriers and high fencing. That's how unwilling he is to listen.

There were over 200 cops from this Northern Lights Task Force guarding the Capitol because these marchers are supposed to be such a threat. Governor Walz has a lot to answer for.

By now there have been more than 800 arrests, surpassing the number of arrests at Standing Rock. The construction on Line 3 is almost complete and none of the "decision makers" are listening. Once again, this country is using Indigenous territory as a sacrifice zone for profiteers.

DF: How much money has Enbridge put into Northern Light Task Force?

RK: According to Canada's National Observer, as of this April 2021 Enbridge had put \$1,250,000 in the escrow account. They are using it for overtime pay and to buy new toys, new weapons and surveillance equipment including drones.

Sometimes when people are arrested, they have been detained in cages. ("Canadian pipeline giant accused of paying U.S. police to harass activists," Timothy E. Wilson, 4/19/21) Enbridge's legacy will be the even further militarization of law enforcement agencies in rural Minnesota.

Another aspect of how this area is a sacrifice zone is the scandal of the "man camps" and the missing and murdered indigenous women. Early in the summer there were several arrests of Enbridge workers involved in the sex trafficking.

In fact, this is typical of the pattern that develops when these construction camps are set up. It becomes yet another layer in the wholesale exploitation of people, land, food and water.

Solidarity and Outreach

DF: You were at Standing Rock. [See Rebecca's report "Eyewitness at Standing Rock," [Against the Current 186, January-February 2017](#) Could you compare the two mobilizations? What have activists learned from the DAPL struggle that informed the fight around Line 3?

RK: One of the differences is that the DAPL fight was focused on one river

crossing, at the Missouri river. The Line 3 struggle is dispersed and distributed throughout the whole territory of Northern and north central Minnesota.

There are at least five autonomous camps, but of course they talk with each other. There are treaty camps, culture camps, direct action camps. Each has a role to play, but they're all united in defense of the water, the land, the wild rice, and the territory.

This means there aren't 10,000 people in one place. Instead, there is an unknowable number of people all throughout the territory, monitoring Enbridge and initiating direct actions. This makes it a bit harder for the police because folks could be anywhere.

One of the lessons we learned at Standing Rock was the role of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in approving projects, and the role of the banks in financing them. From the get-go, Line 3 activists have directed concerted action on those two fronts.

Stop the Money Pipeline is a place where there is specific information about Wall Street's funding of fossil fuels, with a specific section on Line 3.

What happened at Standing Rock was historically unprecedented because it was a gathering of Indigenous peoples, not just from Turtle Island, but from all over the world. Kinship relationships and relationships of solidarity were made there. So much happened at Standing Rock to plant the seeds for other people to launch their struggles in their own territories.

For the Line 3 struggle, solidarity relationships are already there. In one three-day period while I was in Northern Minnesota, we had water walkers walking Line 3 from east to west, from Superior, Wisconsin over to North Dakota. At the same time there were youth running from west to east, from Standing Rock and the Cheyenne River reservation to Superior. At one point the walkers met the runners and since they weren't aware of each other's plan, their meeting was joyful.

That same weekend the House of Tears carvers from the Lummi Nation

brought their totem pole and performed a ceremony as they made their cross-country journey. That night we held a feast. As the carvers say, the sacredness is not in the totem pole but in the gathering.

There's so much indigenous solidarity and awareness around these pipelines. Folks from the camp in northern Nevada, who are protesting the proposed lithium mine at Thacker Pass, site of sacred land, came through. Indian Country is connected especially around these struggles for treaty rights, for the land and waters.

DF: Has it been possible to build a relationship with any of the workers on these pipelines? You talked about the man camp.

RK: When direct actions happen, sometimes there is the opportunity to talk to workers. People ask: "Don't you want to work to build the future, build a future new green economy? There are jobs for you in a new economy. You don't have to be building this machine of death for the whole planet. You can use your skills in other ways."

Those are the kind of conversations happening. The same thing with the police. When arrests are taking place, water protectors say: "When you took your oath to protect and serve, did you think you'd be hired out to a foreign multinational corporation to protect their project, one that will hurt your people?"

DF: You helped pass a resolution in the Madison City Council to support the shut down Line 3. What's possible to project following the adoption of the resolution? What impact can it have on the population in Madison?

RK: I was asked to help write that resolution in support of clean water and treaty rights for several reasons. Number one, just to raise awareness, Second, to draw the connections between Lines 3 and 5 and Line 61 that runs right through our backyard here in Dane county. We need to raise awareness about fossil fuel pipelines and the threats they pose to clean water.

Third, we need to learn about treaty rights. In Northern Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan there are several treaties between the U.S. government and tribal entities. These reserve the right to use land for hunting, fishing, gathering, and maintaining their lifeways in exchange for their ancestors having "sold" the title to settlers.

These were peace treaties initiated by the U.S. government as a less costly alternative to the military campaigns the government was waging in Indian Country.

The federal government was attempting to conquer and take the land. Those Nations who signed the treaties did so while reserving the right to live and maintain their way of life.

Article VI of the U.S. Constitution states that treaties are the supreme law of the land. So our resolution was raising consciousness that those treaties exist in our state as well as in Canada. They need to be respected.

The resolution passed our Common Council unanimously and the mayor signed on as a sponsor, Dane county passed a similar one. The resolution does ask the Wisconsin DNR to decommission Line 5.

We also ordered our chief of police to reject any law enforcement request for Lines 3 or 5. Our new police chief rankled at that and said, "Well, I wouldn't do that. You should just trust me."

We replied, "Well, no, this is a public document and a public statement that tells our community that the council and the mayor actually do have authority over police. We are ordering you to not participate. Whether or not you would not do it yourself doesn't matter. This document says that the elected people of this city are ordering the police chief not to participate."

Earlier in the summer, Minneapolis was the first city to pass such a resolution. Hopefully other communities will pass resolutions like this too.

The Indigenous people's assertion of their sovereignty seems to me a

counterforce to the capitalist economy that is destroying the planet. Their

struggle is not only a struggle for their justice, but a fight for humanity's very future.

Source: [Against the Current](#)

French trade unions after 5 October

2 November 2021, by [Christian Mahieux](#)

Does our problem really come from a supposed apathy of leaders Philippe Martinez, Yves Veyrier, Benoit Teste, Simon Duteil, Murielle Guilbert? [1] We fear not. Certainly, we could have hoped that the inter-union meeting organised on the evening of 11 October would have produced a new united appeal. But if this had been the case, would it have been enough to make it carry more weight than 5 October in the balance of power?

This date of 5 October had been discussed in militant circles since July; it was made public on 30 August: during all these weeks, how many trade union tours, trade union offices, trade union information meetings in workplaces, preparatory general assemblies in the trade unions, etc.? Where were attempts made to bring the trade union unity of the national appeal to life, through inter-union initiatives on the ground? In how many companies did the trade union sections take care to make the national day of 5 October known to the staff of the company, to colleagues in subcontracting companies, to employees of surrounding companies? Asking these questions is not a criticism of the grassroots union teams: it is simply an attempt to point out the elements that made the day an average success. If these shortcomings explain, in part, our difficulties, then we need to get on with the job, to see how we can do better in the future. This will be more useful than radicalism in words.

There are Social Struggles!

In all professional sectors and all regions, there are struggles, strikes, walkouts, rallies. Including in the private sector, contrary to what trade unionists, not necessarily trade

unionists, often say. Aldi in Burgundy, Bergams in Essonne, Knorr in Alsace, Arc en ciel in Paris-Jussieu, Transdev in Seine-et-Marne... This last one is significant: it has been going on since the beginning of September, it concerns working conditions and wages, denounces the system of calls for tender which organises, for the bosses, ever more exploitation of employees during each contract renewal. You can support the strikers financially:

www.cotizup.com/mec-grevistes

Building local and national unitary campaigns?

The last CGT Confederal Executive Committee, like the recent national congress of the Union Syndicale Solidaires, decided on two priority campaigns: for the reduction of working time to 32 hours a week and for an increase in wages and pensions. This is the basis for common claims, by professional sector and at the inter-professional level; but also to vivify trade union campaigns on the ground and see them succeed. Company by company, department by department, site by site, how many jobs does the 32 hours mean? What contacts and claims initiatives should be taken with the organizations and collectives of the unemployed? Isn't it time to abandon the symbolic "hiring desks" and return to the requisitioning of jobs through the direct collective action of workers, those who have a job together with those who don't? On wages, the annual compulsory negotiations are a good time for trade union action on the subject, but without doubt we need to go beyond that, to take up the offensive to recover a greater share of what the capitalists are stealing from us,

whether it be wages, retirement pensions or unemployment benefits.

What prospects?

For a part of the social forces, including trade unions, we take refuge behind the traditional "necessary political outlet". As if the actors in the struggles were not themselves constructing this outlet, in the light of the emancipatory collective struggles they have waged! For these comrades, the "political outlet" can only come from the Party, from their party, not from others, or from institutional elections. In any case, it is only approached in the form of the seizure of state power, by delegating it to the parties. From the perspective of a self-managing society, this deserves another look.

On the occasion of 5 October, the secretary general of the FSU (union of teachers) summed up very well what these political currents carry: "The workers remain convinced of the importance of mobilising in the present period but lack political perspectives. This means that many have passed on their turn today". As far as perspectives are concerned, this hardly offers any!

Trade unionism is political. It brings together those who decide to organise themselves on the sole basis of belonging to the same social class. Together, they act to defend their immediate demands and work for a radical transformation of society. The oppression linked to the capitalist system, the economic oppression resulting from the relations of production and the right of ownership, is common to all those "from below". This is where the class confrontation is played out: if that isn't political! This does not prevent us from considering that there are other forms

of oppression, which should not be ranked in order of importance, neither among themselves nor in relation to economic oppression. Feminist struggles, anti-racist struggles, struggles against oppression and for equality, freedom, against police violence, environmentalist struggles, etc., are also political.

The division of roles that says that the party is in charge of politics and trade unionism is in charge of social issues is a dead end. While the unions are, or at least should be, the tool for autonomous organisation of the working class, it confines them to a minor function, denying them the capacity to act to change society. Conversely, it pushes political organisations to consider that this task is their exclusive one and therefore disconnected from social movements.

Redefining the Trade Union Space

A large number of associations play a considerable role in the social

movement. Almost all of them were set up because trade unionism abandoned fields of struggle or ignored them and, in fact, they do "trade unionism" as defined here: associations for the unemployed, for the right to housing, for the defence of undocumented workers, coordination of precarious workers, etc. Others intervene on subjects that are fully within the trade union field: they are feminist, anti-racist, and have a strong social dimension. Others intervene on issues that are fully within the trade union field: they are feminist, anti-racist, environmentalist, anti-fascist, anti-sexist, etc. There is also the question of the link with the workers of the land. There are also anti-colonialist movements, claiming the right of peoples to self-determination, anti-militarist, pacifist, etc. All of this concerns the interests and the future of our social class and it is from this point of view that we must deal with them.

If we highlight the social movements, it is because they are the ones who organize the struggles, the direct action of the workers. Among these movements, trade unionism has an

essential particularity: as we said earlier, it brings people together on the sole basis of belonging to the same social class. This is fundamental. A trade unionism of struggle of course, but also a trade unionism that dares to break with what exists in order to move forward. The question of unity, even unification, is important. It is also a question of redefining the contours of the trade union organization, so that it takes into account the diversities described here. But all this should be neither reflections of "experts" from outside the trade union and social movement, nor treated independently of the concrete issues mentioned, more in terms of trade union campaigning, presence where the workers are more than the bosses, trade union priorities decided and implemented collectively.

Source *New Politics*.

Footnotes

- [1] Respectively general secretaries of the CGT, FO, FSU and co-spokesperson of Solidaires.

The trial concerning the murder of Sankara and his comrades begins

1 November 2021, by [Paul Martial](#)

It was after large-scale popular struggles in Burkina Faso that Thomas Sankara took over the destiny of the nation. He was trying to pursue a policy that at least partially broke with the liberal world order. Measures were taken to promote food sovereignty, protection of resources, promotion of women's rights, and popular participation in the running of the country.

A credible political alternative for the continent

On the international level, he took a

position of solidarity with national liberation struggles, in particular that of the Palestinian people, denounced apartheid in South Africa and supported Kanaky's demand for independence at the UN in December 1986. This provoked the resentment of the French right and of Chirac, who had returned to power in the framework of cohabitation. In addition, Sankara's policy was in frontal opposition to Western countries on the question of the legitimacy of the debt of African countries.

The Sankarist experience also represented a danger for the African dictatorships, corrupt and subjugated to the rulers of the West, because it

outlined a credible political alternative for the continent. In other words, the African leader was creating a lot of enemies, who would more or less contribute to his assassination. It took place on October 15, 1987. A commando led by Blaise Compaoré's aide-de-camp, Gilbert Diendjéré, executed Thomas Sankara and a dozen of his companions. Thirty-five years later, the trial has opened, but it may not answer all the questions.

A truncated trial

Indeed, the main accused, ex-president Compaoré, suspected of being the instigator of this murderous operation, will not be present. He was

exfiltrated by France to Ivory Coast during the insurrection of 2014. And Ivorian President Ouattara is not about to extradite him, because Compaoré armed and financed militias that enabled him to gain power against Gbagbo. The consideration of the international implications in the assassination of Sankara seems compromised by the actions of French leaders.

During his speech in Ouagadougou in November 2017, Emmanuel Macron pledged to deliver France's confidential documents concerning this affair. Although the first two batches were sent successfully, the third batch was delayed. The investigating judge therefore called for the dissociation of the case between the Burkinabé side, in order to be able to launch the trial, and the international side. Four days after the official confirmation of this separation, quite opportunely, the third batch arrived. Consequently, France's actions cannot be raised during the

discussions.

The Legion of Honour for the assassin of Sankara

This manoeuvre by Macron aims to protect the reputation of France (already badly damaged) and its political class. Consensus was in order between Socialist and right-wing politicians against Sankara and in support of the Compaoré regime. Mitterrand declared: "He takes too many decisions. In my opinion, he goes further than necessary." As for his Africa adviser, Guy Penne, he organised a smear press campaign a few days before the assassination of the African leader and subsequently became the president of the France-Burkina Faso Friendship Association. He did not hesitate to declare that under the Compaoré regime, Burkina

Faso was "an exemplary democracy and a well-run country".

General Emmanuel Beth, director of military cooperation at the foreign ministry headed by Kouchner, awarded the Legion of Honour in 2008 to Sankara's assassin, Gilbert Diendjéré. As for Claude Bartolone, Socialist President of the National Assembly, in 2012 he refused the establishment of a parliamentary commission of inquiry requested by the EELV deputies and the Left Party on the involvement of France in this crime. The trial began on 11 October and was postponed for a month. A new battle is to have it broadcast and recorded. A [petition](#) has been launched so that this event can remain accessible and contribute to the history of the country, and more generally of Africa.

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