



IV563 - December 2021

Russia in Africa: mercenaries and predatoriness

31 December 2021, by **Paul Martial**

For the Kremlin, it was out of the question for world powers to establish themselves in Africa and for Russia to remain on the sidelines. Putin championed a multipolar conception of world order and respect for the independence of states. In cruder terms, it can be said that human rights violations by African governments are not an obstacle to economic or military agreements. Russia's economic weight in Africa is small. It ranks sixth after Turkey. However, it is a major supplier of arms. Indeed, almost a third of the arms on the continent are supplied by the Russian state agency Rosoboronexport.

Arms sales are often accompanied by military agreements. Thus, at least half of the African countries are bound by these types of agreements, which can range from training a few officers in Moscow to direct intervention in the country, as in the Central African Republic (CAR).

Wagner, the turning point?

The use of the mercenary company Wagner in Russia's African diplomacy is a new element that can be credited to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs... of France. Indeed, in order to lift the veto maintained by Russia on the sale

of arms to the Central African Republic, the Quai d'Orsay [French Foreign Ministry] advised Faustin-Archange Touadéra, newly elected president of the Central African Republic, to approach Russia to obtain arms.

Sergei Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister, took advantage of this unexpected gift from French diplomacy by proposing the replacement of French troops by mercenaries from the Wagner company. Faustin-Archange Touadéra, who was not France's favourite candidate, seized this opportunity as a way to consolidate his power threatened by armed opposition.

A militia like any other

Wagner is present in CAR through two companies, Lobaye Invest Ltd, a mining company, and Sewa Security Services. The latter is in charge of presidential security and fights, alongside the Central African Army, the various rebel groups from the Séléka that took power in March 2013.

The actions of the Russian mercenaries are extremely violent, particularly against the civilian

population. Although a sort of omerta has been created around these crimes, tongues are starting to loosen. A recent United Nations report of March 2021 points to these massive human rights violations: summary executions, arrests and torture, rape, and the transformation of schools and public buildings into barracks. The mercenaries are paying for themselves on civilians by looting the reconquered towns. In addition, the Central African government has granted them permits to exploit diamond and gold mines.

Political versus military solution

With the deepening of the crisis in the Sahel countries, part of the population wants the Russians to come. They consider that this would be a guarantee of effectiveness, which Barkhane lacks, against the jihadists.

This illusion is obviously maintained by the Kremlin, which welcomes the idea of replacing French troops in the heart of the French-African preserve. This would only strengthen Russia on the international scene. In fact, Wagner would be no more, if not less, effective than Barkhane, as it does not have the heavy equipment of the French army - especially air power. Nor would it benefit from US

intelligence support. Moreover, the myth of Wagner's "super warriors" has been largely dented by their stinging failure against Islamist fighters in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique.

The solution to conflicts on the

continent, whether in the Sahel, Cameroon, or East Africa, will not come from armed interventions by Western troops or mercenary companies of any kind. Their interventions only aggravate the situation with a heavy price paid by

the civilian populations. It is important to reaffirm a principle, which is sometimes forgotten: Africa has nothing to gain from being a military playground for the predatory powers of Russia, China or the NATO countries.

Hong Kong "patriots" poll results

30 December 2021, by **Selina Cheng**

Around 1.3 million voters cast ballots on Sunday 19 December for a 30.2 per cent voter turnout – 5.6 percentage points less than the last historic low in the 1995 legislative election under British colonial rule.

Chief Executive Carrie Lam said in a statement on Sunday night that the [new legislature would bring an era of "good governance"](#) to the city.

With ballot counting for all constituencies completed by Monday at around 11am, pro-establishment candidates swept the seats in the new 90-person legislature, which will have just one member not from the pro-establishment bloc.

In the 10 geographic constituencies which each elected two members, all 11 candidates who identified as pro-democracy, independent or just non-establishment lost by wide margins as turnout slumped.

In Hong Kong Island East, Jason Poon, a construction engineer who blew the whistle on the MTR's Shatin-Central Link scandal in 2018, nabbed 14,435 votes compared to more than 64,000 for the most popular, pro-Beijing, candidate.

Former District Councillor [Adrian Lau Cheuk-yu](#) won the second largest number of votes among the democrats with 12,828 – compared to over 83,000 for the most popular candidate in New Territories South West. Other self proclaimed pro-democracy candidates received votes only in the thousands, including Fong Lung-fei, Wong Sing-chi, Choi Ming-hei and

Mandy Tam Heung-man.

In the Election Committee sector, 11 candidates were rejected by voters including Lan Kwai Fong Group Chairman Allan Zeman, Michael Rowse, a former civil servant and head of InvestHK, and [electrician Vincent Diu, who was heralded by Beijing as an example of the diversity and competition in the "patriots" polls.](#)

Many who won the most votes from the city's 1,448 Election Committee members – charged with selecting 40 LegCo members from 51 candidates – were incumbent lawmakers who had switched from running in the direct district polls. Among them were Michael Luk of the pro-Beijing Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions; the pro-Beijing DAB's Elizabeth Quat and Horace Cheung; Eunice Yung of the New People's Party which is also pro-Beijing; and Ma Fung-kwok and Paul Tse.

Reverend Canon Peter Koon Ho-ming, the provincial secretary general of Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui, meanwhile, becomes Hong Kong's first religious leader to join the legislature as a member of the election committee constituency.

The only "non-pro-establishment" candidate elected was Tik Chi-yuen. The founder of the self-declared centrist party Third Side won in the social welfare functional constituency, with about 1,400 votes. His competitors Chu Lai-ling representing the DAB and Yip Cham-kai who ran independently had 872 and 196 votes respectively.

By 9:30 a.m. on Monday, the city's Convention and Exhibition Centre was largely empty as final results from the functional constituencies came in. Only a handful of election hopefuls or supporters were present.

The last result in the election was the one for the labour functional constituency, where four candidates were running for three seats.

Kwok Wai-keung and Dennis Leung of the pro-Beijing HKFTU, together with Chau Siu-chung of the pro-establishment Federation of Hong Kong and Kowloon Unions were elected.

The four labour candidates and their campaign staffers, including losing candidate Lee Kwong-yu, chanted "Unity in the labour sector, sure win!" on stage after the winners were declared.

In March, 2021, Beijing passed legislation to [ensure "patriots" govern Hong Kong](#). The move [reduced democratic representation](#) in the legislature, tightened control of elections and introduced a pro-Beijing vetting panel to select candidates. The Hong Kong government said the [overhaul would ensure the city's stability and prosperity](#). But the changes also prompted international condemnation, as it makes it near-impossible for pro-democracy [candidates](#) to stand.

The turnout slumped despite a vigorous campaign by Beijing and Hong Kong authorities encouraging people to vote, including an

advertising blitz and last-minute SMS appeals to electors. Even Beijing's top man on Hong Kong affairs Xia Baolong broke with tradition to urge Hongkongers to vote.

Candidates from major pro-establishment parties canvassed late into the evening but the crowds stayed away – in contrast to the city's last elections, for district councils in November 2019, when turnout topped 71 per cent as voters expressed overwhelming support for pro-democracy candidates.

Full cooperation with government

Chief Executive Carrie Lam played down the low public support, saying Monday she had had no expectations for the turnout. Her only goals would be to ensure that the system would from now on be run by “patriots” only after an election race which was fair, efficient, and “humane.”

“If the high voting rate is based on political deterioration, or based on some candidates who are fighting for authority to endanger national security, this is not a high voting rate we agree with,” Lam said. Similarly, if the high voting rate is based on extreme divisions in society, like in 2019 the ‘blue’ and ‘yellow’ division, this is also not something we should be happy with.”

“When the 7th Legislative Council commences, we will cooperate fully with them to boost the economy... and improve livelihoods. We hope to have reasonable, practical interaction on how to fix deep-rooted problems in Hong Kong,” she said before leaving on her annual duty visit to Beijing.

Geographical constituencies (20 seats)

- Hong Kong Island East: Ng Chau-pei from the HKFTU and Edward Leung from the DAB won

with 64,509 and 26,799 votes, beating New People's Party's Liu Tin Shing and self-proclaimed non-pro-establishment candidate Jason Poon.

- Hong Kong Island West: Veteran lawmaker Regina Ip from the New People's Party won another term with 65,694 votes, along with DAB's Chan Hok-fung, who received 36,628 votes, beating “pro-democracy independent” candidate Fong Lung-fei.
- Kowloon East: Bill Tang from the HKFTU and Frankie Ngan from the DAB were elected with 65,036 and 64,275 votes, defeating three other “independent” or “non-pro-establishment” candidates, Chan Chun-hung, Wu Kin-wa, and Ellen Li.
- Kowloon West: With 64,353 and 36,840 votes, Vincent Cheng from the DAB, and former member of the pro-establishment group, the Business and Professionals Alliance for Hong Kong, Scott Leung, beat veteran politician Frederick Fung.
- Kowloon Central: DAB Chairperson Starry Lee won the most votes among all elected lawmakers in the geographical constituency with 95,976, and won along with Kitson Yang of the Kowloon Federation of Associations, who received 35,702. The pair

defeated “non-pro-establishment” candidate Mandy Tam.

- New Territories South East: Stanley Li from the DAB and Connie Lam from Professional Power Limited won with 82,595 and 38,214 votes, beating “democrat” Daryl Choi, who received 6,718 votes.
- New Territories North: Law Kwok-fan from the DAB and Gary Zhang from New Prospect for Hong Kong defeated independent candidate Wilson Shum and Judy Tzeng by winning 70,584 and 28,986 votes.
- New Territories North West: Incumbent lawmakers, Holden Chow from the DAB and Michael Tien from Roundtable, won another term with 93,195 and 40,009 votes, beating Third Side candidate Casper Wong.
- New Territories South West: Ben Chan from the DAB and Joephy Chan from the HKFTU beat self-proclaimed democrat Adrian Lau by winning 83,303 and 62,690 votes.
- New Territories North East: DAB's Gary Chan and New People's Party's Dominic Lee defeated Path of Democracy candidate Allan Wong and “democrat” Nelson Wong, and won 62,855 and 61,253 votes.

20 December 2021

Source (including many graphics)
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Starbucks Workers Organize at a Store in New York State—Is It Just the Beginning?

29 December 2021, by **Dan La Botz**

The workers voted to join the Starbucks Workers United, an independent affiliate of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), one of the largest unions in the country. “It feels surreal and incredibly exciting,” said Casey Moore, a barista at one of the Buffalo Starbucks stores. “I’m so excited to see other baristas at Starbucks and across the service industry say ‘if they can do it, we can do it here too.’ We can change the service industry.”

Could this small victory be a turning point for Starbucks and other coffee shop and fast-food workers? Maybe, but there are many obstacles.

Starbucks workers are taking on a monster. Starbucks net worth is almost \$20 billion, with some 33,833 stores worldwide employing 349,000 people. In the United States there are 9,000 stores with 235,000 employees. The company promotes itself as a part of the community, promises inclusion of all employees regardless of race and gender, claims to be environmentally friendly. It calls its employees “partners,” but the average pay of just \$12.27 an hour or about \$21,750 a year is not a living wage. Those who work more than 20 hours a week are eligible for health insurance benefits for themselves and their families, but employees themselves

have to pay for the expensive insurance.

Who are the Starbucks workers? Just over 50 percent of the workers are white, while 8% are Black and 27.5% Latino. Starbucks workers are overwhelmingly female: 70 percent women. And the workforce is young, with an average age of 27.

What are the obstacles to organizing? U.S. workers can win legal recognition for their union through government supervised elections, as the Starbucks workers did. Since the union has now been recognized, the law requires Starbucks to bargain in good faith. But will it really? Back in 1985, workers in two facilities successfully organized at Starbucks, but the company stalled negotiations, meanwhile organized a decertification campaign and by 1987 the company had succeeded in ridding itself of the union. Or Starbucks could simply close the unionized store.

Today, many Starbucks workers are just passing through while going to college or figuring out what to do with their lives. The company has an annual turnover rate of 65 percent, compared to 12 to 15% for all U.S. workers. Most have no commitment to the company or the job, plan to leave and so may not have an interest in a union. While 75 percent of people ages 18-29 favor unions, nevertheless

in the United States, only 6% of private sector workers are organized and only 1.3% in the restaurant industry.

Second, Starbucks opposes unions, so from the beginning, workers may feel intimidated; and the company has been willing to engage in anti-union and even illegal actions to defeat unions. Dispersed across the country in small stores with an average of twenty employees turning over rapidly, it can be difficult to establish a sense of solidarity and power—though as the Buffalo workers have shown, it can be done.

The SEIU, with 1.1 million members, has the size and resources to support a unionization campaign. Will the workers be able to make use of SEIU, a leader of the fight for \$15 movement, yet is also a bureaucratic and sometimes quite undemocratic union?

If workers can succeed in organizing at Starbucks, then they can begin to organize the other 500,000 coffee shop workers and the nearly 5 million fast food industry workers. It will be done by one worker talking to another and convincing them that we all need a union at work.

15 December 2021

Italian general strike on 16 December: difficult but indicating some valuable potential for mobilization

28 December 2021, by **Franco Turigliatto**

It was a very difficult strike, with a very limited preparation time, being launched on 6 December, and on the eve of the Christmas holidays. The risks of major failure were many.

The five street demonstrations organized – in Rome for the central regions, in Milan for the north, in Bari for the southern regions, and in Palermo and Cagliari for Sicily and Sardinia respectively – were well attended, with a strong presence of factory workers: non-attendance at the workplace was strongest among metalworkers, those in transport and agri-food but lower in other sectors, including public administration.

Italian panorama

After two years of pandemic, with nearly 140,000 victims, a devastated health system, five million people in absolute poverty, millions of unemployed and precarious workers, hopes and illusions were great among certain social sectors that, with the budget law for 2022 and with the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) – already launched by the government – significant available resources (for the PNRR nearly 200 billion euros, for the finance law 33 billion euros) would be used for a vast plan of public investment and massive hiring of staff to guarantee the school system, health, transport, adequate social services and the famous ecological transition. In other words, that social “compensation” would be granted to the working and popular classes that have suffered so much and are still suffering from the socio-economic and pandemic crisis.

The reality of the choices of the ruling class and the government – which fully guarantees the interests of those who dominate under the Bonapartist leadership of Mario Draghi, with a composite and broad government majority, and with a purely cosmetic opposition from the far right of the FdI [Giorgia Meloni’s Fratelli d’Italia] – has been quite different. [1] The

bourgeoisie’s objective is large scale processes of industrial restructuring and further precariousness, subordination and exploitation of functional labour power in order to ensure the revival of Italian and European capitalism. There is a great risk of a serious new defeat of the workers’ and trade union movement and of a deep and dramatic social and political regression. In addition, the processes of closures of workplaces, relocation and mass redundancies are in full swing, involving hundreds of thousands of workers. They involve hundreds of factories, some of whom have engaged in extremely hard and prolonged struggles, including GKN [automotive components] in Florence and Whirlpool [household appliances] in Naples.

The PNRR drawn up by Draghi allocates more than one hundred billion euros of European money [Next Generation EU plan] to capitalist companies without any constraint on use, in addition to the 170 billion that have been transferred from the state to companies over the last 10 years and the 40 billion in total that the current budget law gives to bosses for the next three years. The government has also removed the freeze on evictions and dismissals. It had drafted a competition law that pushes for the privatization of public services. It has confirmed the shameful Monti-Fornero law on pensions. It has attacked the so-called “citizenship income” which, for better or worse, guaranteed the bare survival of millions of people, especially in the South. It continues the so-called “differentiated autonomy” which, in fact, divides the country by always favouring the richest regions at the expense of the poorest. It introduces a tax “reform” that reduces progressive taxation and promotes middle and high incomes, allocating a few crumbs to the lowest. It abolishes IRAP [Imposta regionale sulle attività produttive], the tax that finances health for small and medium-sized enterprises; this is seen as a first step to abolishing it also for big companies,

according to the wishes of Confindustria, the Italian employers’ organization. In addition, the government has been careful not to return the €37 billion withdrawn from the health system in 10 years and the €30 billion withdrawn from schools; while blocking of the renewal of the three-year contract (the last was for 2019-2021) for public sector employees. On the other hand, it increases military spending by 5.4% (26 billion per year).

The leaderships of the majority trade unions, which for many years were completely subordinated to the choices of the bourgeoisie, supported Mario Draghi’s government from the beginning, in the vain hope that, given the resources available, the former head of the European Central Bank would respond to some of their limited demands. These can be summarized as follows: a partial reform of the pensions law; more resources for social safety nets that would provide some additional guarantees to those who lose their jobs; a tax reform that would meet the needs of employees who are alone in Europe in having seen their wages fall over the last thirty years (and what has the bureaucratic leadership done to prevent this?); an amendment to the laws on precariousness with a unified employment contract in all sectors of work; a comprehensive demand for more resources to be allocated to health and education.

Negotiations continued slowly for months without the CGIL, ICFTU and UIL getting anything, not least because all the main trade union leaders categorically ruled out any prospect of strike and struggle. In the end, they were reduced to demanding that at least the €8 billion still available in the finance bill be used to improve employees’ wages through tax breaks. The government parties have responded with tax changes that go in the opposite direction: reducing tax rates and thus progressive taxation and granting improvements in favour of middle and high incomes,

including those of the independent private sector. A few crumbs have been allocated to lower incomes. Even Draghi's promise to postpone tax cuts on the highest incomes for a year in order to allocate a few hundred million more to workers has been swept away by the majority of political forces supporting the government.

As a result, the union leaderships found themselves with their backs to the wall; not only have their demands in no way been met, but they have been denied any mediation and consultation role. The CISL, which has always been the confederation most closely linked to the various governments, has encountered no "difficulty" in accepting the government's measures. The leaderships of the CGIL and UIL, for their part, had to try to free themselves from the grip of the government and, therefore, they declared a general strike for 16 December.

The situation for the apparatuses of these two confederations had become too critical both for their credibility with their members and the working class in general, and for maintaining a minimum of room for manoeuvre vis-à-vis the government. Indeed, it is clear that the decision of Maurizio Landini and Pierpaolo Bombardieri to go on strike was provoked not so much by their awareness of the serious condition of the working classes and their deep malaise – a malaise that they have experienced for a long time and which was expressed in particular, during the autumn, by mobilizations in many factories to defend employment – but by a fact: their role as a consultative apparatus was questioned by the Draghi government and the parties that supported it. Increasingly, their relationship with part of their base was fraying.

During this period, these apparatuses wasted entire months where instead of subordinating themselves to Draghi, they could have built the most explicit and strong initiatives possible in the workplaces and, in the process, promoted a general struggle to wrest economic, social and essential rights for working people.

The declaration of a "general strike" thus came late, without adequate preparation and without the leaders of the CGIL and the UIL seriously indicating that they wanted to embark on a new path, with the risk that action which was poorly implemented without the necessary determination would further encourage the demoralization of sectors of the working class.

But all these considerations did not prevent the most radical and conscious sectors of trade union activists – starting with the opposition current in the CGIL (Il sindacato è un'altra cosa. Opposizione CGIL) – fully engaging in building the strike, conceiving it as an initial stage of a broader social mobilization. The initiatives of the rank-and-file unions had been generous and even significant, but totally insufficient. And it was precisely the GKN collective in Florence that had demanded and indicated, over all these months, the need to build a general and generalized strike. [2]

Carrying through a general strike (even if some important sectors such as schools, health and part of the postal service were absent) was a difficult challenge not only for the two trade union confederations that had declared it, but also and above all for the working class as a whole, because a strike potentially has a significant impact on the political balance of power between the social classes in our country. Years and years of political and ideological social offensive, unopposed by the majority trade union organizations, have led to confusion and demoralization, with an impact on the political consciousness and unity of the working class, making the implementation of a general strike more difficult than ever.

The rank-and-file trade unions chose not to join, on the basis of their demands, the 16 December strike, contrary to what the GKN workers had asked them to do.

What emerged

from the strike?

The first element, a positive one, is that there are still significant sectors of the working class ready to mobilize and take to the streets: the five demonstrations were big, more than 30,000 in Piazza del Popolo in Rome, not much less in Milan all'Arco della Pace, the one in Bari was more limited, as of course were those in the two islands. In Milan, but also in Rome, there was a strong working class composition (especially metalworkers), not only factories that are struggling to defend their jobs, but also many others that are on the contrary, especially in Lombardy, in full productive recovery. Moreover, this potential for mobilization had already been expressed in recent months in certain struggles such as those in logistics (with a strong presence of migrants), among the workers of Alitalia, then at GKN in Florence.

In the squares, it was possible to perceive the satisfaction of workers at having emerged from the demoralizing immobility, to finally participate in a broad mobilization, to go out to the workplaces, to get on the buses, to walk in the demonstration discussing and even joking with comrades, to be able to socialize their condition and their state of mind by joining other sectors of workers, by reconnecting with the historical features and combativeness that are expressed in these demonstrations, to affirm their opposition to the government and the bosses. It is worth noting the presence not only of retirees, but also of many students who, in some cities (Rome in particular), occupied schools, as well as young people.

But all this was not taken for granted. If only because the anti-strike offensive of the employers' forces was conducted with maximum firepower. In the form of a very violent unified reaction of all components, both economic (the employers' organization Confindustria and its partners) and political, including the Democratic Party (PD), and their media tools that covered the protagonists of the strike with insults and completely obscured the event. There has been a great unity of the bourgeois class against

the working class, which has dared to speak out to express its own condition of exploitation and oppression.

And here we can detect a second positive element: the simple declaration of the strike has broken the ideological and political narrative of the presumed unity of intent of the whole country built around the figure of the infallible Bonaparte, Mario Draghi, a vulgar mystification to hide his economic and social choices which are violently anti-popular. The strike highlighted the deception and injustice of the government actions, the dramatic condition of the workers and the desire to make known and assert their interests as well as their rights, breaking a framework of political debate in which there is only the nauseating and simulated confrontation between the different bourgeois political factions (all united against the workers) and putting back on the agenda the effective content of social confrontation.

The leaderships and apparatuses of the CGIL and the UIL have, in turn, won a small victory, the demonstration that they are alive and “essential” for the maintenance of the so-called social peace. They hope that this will push the government and the bosses to recognize again the place they occupy and their role and therefore, also, be ready to make some concessions to the workers. Hopes that may be disappointed because the intention of the bourgeoisie is all too clear. It wants a complete victory. Only very tough struggles can break this project.

The limits and difficulties of the strike

All this leads us to examine the shortcomings and difficulties of the strike of 16 December. It was not a strike capable of paralyzing the country as a general strike should. Not only because certain categories were exempted from the strike [because having done it before, some sectors did not have the right to renew it, according to the standards established between the “social partners” and the institutions], but also because the

abstention from work, the cessation of production activities, transport and services were partial and unequal; certainly with very important peaks, but also with very low levels in the offices, in public administration, as had already happened during the school strike, a few days before (10 December).

The CGIL and UIL announced extremely high percentages among metalworkers as well as in transport, agro-industry and construction. However, some of these percentages appear questionable or partial. A much more precise examination will be necessary in order to check the strengths, but also the many weaknesses. This situation was quite inevitable: given the general conditions of the working classes, it would have taken a long preparation time and suitable behaviour from the trade unions during all these months to raise expectations and awareness. It would have taken at least a few weeks with workplace meetings and discussions, and a platform with less generic objectives, immediately identifiable for employees. It would also have required trade union apparatuses – which are now dormant in their conservative routines – capable of being sufficiently active in building a difficult strike. If we want to joke, we can say that some union leaders had to watch vintage videos of past struggles in order to find a language capable of arousing passions and being credible in a combat role.

The struggle must continue

In any case, a breach has been opened. There is potential that can be exploited, provided that 16 December is conceived as a stage of a prolonged, difficult and hard mobilization, capable of broadening consensus and gradually polarizing broader forces.

Speaking from their podium, Maurizio Landini and Pierpaolo Bombardieri were aware that the credibility of their remarks (no one could seriously hope that the strike could now change the content of the finance law about to be voted on in parliament) was linked to what they would do in the coming

weeks. [3] So, they had to say that this day was only a first moment, that they intended to build a path of sustainable mobilization to assert certain points of their platform of demands.

Continuing the struggle is certainly possible and above all necessary if we want to have the strength – as demanded by the currents of class trades unionism – to affirm a platform of struggle with a clear and strong content: repeal of the rules on pensions; imposition of radical changes in laws that penalize precarious work and relocations; reduction of working hours for equal wages; a real progressive tax reform that makes the bosses pay; defence and validation of the “citizenship income”; rejection of differentiated autonomy that will further divide the country and the workers; adequate measures to combat global warming and preserve the environment and finally a comprehensive plan to revive schools and public health.

It is possible to move forward if we offer organizational tools of participation and political and trade union leadership to those “vanguard” sectors that have taken to the streets in a somewhat confused way, but which are fundamental to organizing and leading workers’ meetings, as well as rebuilding a broad and unitary fabric of participation and will to struggle. Much will certainly depend on what the leadership of the CGIL (about which we have few illusions) will or will not do. And what will move internally, the spaces that the left opposition in the CGIL will be able to conquer, the weight that will be given to the most combative delegates and cadres who support a coherent class position.

The rank and file trade unions also have a role to play. They need to stimulate unitary action not only among themselves, but also with regard to all workers and, in particular, to those who found a point of reference in the strike of 16 December; without neglecting the sectors that hope more or less illusorily that Landini will show the necessary determination to face the bosses to the end. On the contrary, we know how much more tactical and contingent the action of the CGIL is

than it should be. But the window that has opened means that we must know how to act in a contradictory context to move forward in the construction of a class trades unionism.

The forces of the radical left that supported and actively participated in the strike also have a key role to play in contributing fully to a process of consolidation and development of the

resistance of the working classes against the government and the bosses.

19 December 2021

Inegalitarian growth or just degrowth: the IPCC has opened the debate

27 December 2021, by Daniel Tanuro

In the face of the climate catastrophe, many specialists no longer believe in the possibility of reconciling a reduction in CO₂ emissions with an increase in GDP. According to them, the climate cannot be stabilised without reducing global energy consumption so drastically that it will inevitably lead to a reduction in the production of goods and services. This thesis obviously has implications in terms of societal choices - these specialists all insist on the need for a socially just degrowth - but its basis is scientific, not ideological.

Growth and the environment are incompatible

Let us begin by recalling the facts of the problem. In order not to exceed 1.5°C of warming, net CO₂ emissions must be reduced by at least 50% by 2030 and by at least 100% by 2100. The authors of the IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report (AR5, 2014, which served as the basis for the Paris Agreement) believed that this reduction would be compatible with economic growth: increased energy efficiency and the breakthrough of renewables should make it possible to decouple the evolution of GDP from that of CO₂ emissions. Six years on, a relative decoupling has indeed begun in some developed countries. But absolute decoupling is impossible.

Indeed, increasing efficiency and deploying renewables requires huge

energy-intensive investments and more than 80% of this energy is from fossil fuels. Consequently, the energy transition in a context of growth inevitably leads to more CO₂ emissions. As these emissions must be reduced - not relatively but in absolute terms - the conclusion is unavoidable: the increase in GDP is in contradiction with the stabilisation of warming below 1.5°C.

Many specialists wanted to believe that this contradiction could be overcome by removing CO₂ from the atmosphere, to compensate for the emissions. Two avenues have been put forward for doing this: 1) maximising natural CO₂ uptake by planting trees; 2) inventing "negative emission technologies" (NETs) to remove carbon from the atmosphere and store it underground. Criticism of this strategy is not new, but so far the IPCC has not taken it into account. For example, all the scenarios tested in the 1.5°C Special Report (2019) relied on the possibility of "carbon offsetting". But the tide seems to be turning. The voices of researchers who argue that this productivist option is contrary to the precautionary principle can no longer be ignored.

Very strong arguments

Their arguments are extremely robust. To reconcile GDP growth with respect for the 1.5°C target, some scenarios foresee removing up to 1,000 gigatonnes of carbon from the

atmosphere by 2150. Twenty-five times the annual emissions! Tree plantations could only make a very modest contribution (the surface areas are limited) and above all a temporary one (trees absorb CO₂ during growth and then emit it - and warming encourages fires). We should therefore rely mainly on TENs, in particular on "bioenergy with carbon capture and storage". The principle of this is simple: burn biomass instead of fossil fuels, capture the CO₂ released and bury it underground; as biomass grows by absorbing CO₂, in theory, the atmospheric concentration of CO₂ should drop... But in practice 1) we don't know if it will work, the technology only exists in prototype form; 2) biomass would have to be planted over gigantic areas; 3) there will be competition with human food, biodiversity and fresh water supplies; 4) we are not sure that the CO₂ would not leak out from underground.

A leading scientist officially told delegates at COP26 that beyond 1.5°C, the Earth risks becoming a "steaming planet", with sea levels rising by thirteen metres or more [1]. It is foolish to bet on sorcerer's tricks to avoid this cataclysm. But, as a result, a drastic and very rapid reduction in final energy consumption is the only alternative. At the same time, this economic decrease is obviously impossible without social and climate justice, i.e. without a radical reduction in inequalities and a radical improvement in the living conditions of the poorest 50% of humanity, in poor countries, but also in rich countries. This, in short, is the

reasoning that is leading more and more scientists to advocate what might be called “just degrowth”.

Overconsumption by the rich, overproduction for the rich

The dominant idea in our societies is that growth and increased energy consumption are essential for employment and income - in short, for well-being. However, this idea is increasingly challenged scientifically. Beyond the satisfaction of basic needs (good food, good housing, comfortable clothing, an efficient health system, adequate mobility infrastructures), the utility of consuming more energy is actually decreasing very quickly. As a result, “high-income countries could reduce their biophysical impact (and their GDP), while maintaining or even increasing their social performance and achieving greater equity between countries,” write two researchers. The challenge, they argue, is to achieve “an equitable reduction in the flow of energy and resources through the economy, coupled with a concomitant securing of welfare.” [4]

Could human needs be better met by using much less energy overall, and by distributing it better? That’s the question. One element of the answer lies in the gap between the CO₂ emissions of the richest 1% and those of the poorest 50% and the 40% of ‘average’ income earners. Not only is this gap widening, but it will widen even more by 2030 as a result of government climate policies! Emissions reduction efforts will be inversely proportional to income! [5]

Governments keep saying that “we” must change our behaviour. But who is this “we”? “Consumption by the world’s richest households is by far the strongest determinant and accelerator of increased environmental and social impacts,” write researchers. [6] We must therefore ban this overconsumption of luxury: private jets, superyachts, luxury homes, SUVs, etc. And, as all consumption presupposes production,

we must also stop economic activities that aim above all at capitalist profit: weapons, advertising, obsolescence...

A good and comfortable life for all is possible

Other researchers start from the maximum amount of energy that each individual on Earth can use to respect the 1.5°C warming limit, and ask what needs can be met on this basis, and under what social conditions. [7] The great interest of their approach is to show that the satisfaction of needs does not only depend on the amount of energy consumed but also on various socio-economic factors that determine the correlation between energy and needs. “Beneficial” factors better satisfy human needs while using less energy. These factors are: good public services, good democracy, less income disparity, guaranteed access to electricity and clean energy, a public health system and good trade and transport infrastructure. Growth and extractivism, on the other hand, are “detrimental” factors: more energy is spent to meet needs less well. For example, good public services increase life expectancy by reducing final energy consumption; extractivism reduces the former and increases the latter.

All such studies converge: comfortable living standards can be achieved across the globe with much lower per capita energy consumption than the rich and wealthy countries. The drivers of excessive energy consumption in these countries are: “a spiral of energy-intensive needs maintained by the logic of detrimental factors; luxury consumption and consumption inequalities; programmed obsolescence; overproduction/overconsumption; the race for profit; the expansion of necessary production due to the pressures of the financial system and extractive rents”. The problem is that the “detrimental factors are actively pursued” under the current regime, which is global. The solution must therefore be “systemic” and global as well: “a broader transformation (is) required to prioritise the satisfaction

of human needs with little energy.” [8]

“Just degrowth” breaks through in the IPCC

The 5th IPCC report displayed an unwavering loyalty to the capitalist dogma of the market and competition, and therefore of growth: “Climate models assume fully functioning markets and competitive market behaviour”. This dogma is no longer tenable, as it is leading us to the abyss. The parts of the 6th report dealing with adaptation to global warming and emission reductions will be released in early 2022. The draft summary for policymakers of the emissions reduction report has leaked. It says: “In scenarios that consider a reduction in energy demand, the challenges of reducing emissions are significantly reduced, with less reliance on removing CO₂ from the atmosphere, less pressure on land and lower carbon prices. These scenarios do not imply a decrease in welfare, but rather a provision of better services.” [9]

To infer that the 6th IPCC report will take a stand against the market economy would be naive. The draft summary simply reflects the strength of the scientific arguments about the impossibility of reconciling GDP growth with limiting warming below 1.5°C. The IPCC does not make recommendations, it makes findings based on the best available science. Researchers working on “just degrowth” are now recognised by their peers. This is a victory against the hold of the capitalist ideology of “always more” on science. But it is the governments that decide the way forward. The summary of the report must be validated by them. You can be sure that they will do everything in their power to ensure that the above sentence is removed from the summary. Will they get satisfaction? We shall see. But in any case, the sentence will remain in the report, which belongs to the scientists alone!

No jobs on a dead planet

The recognition by the IPCC of "just degrowth" as an alternative to the capitalist competition-profit-growth dogma is a point of support in the struggle for another society. This should be of particular concern to the trade union movement. Until now, its leaderships have been banking on growth in the name of employment. They delude themselves about the possibility of a "just transition" to a "green capitalism". In reality, there is no more green capitalism than there is social capitalism, and the "transition" is an illusion. Inequality is growing

along with GDP. The bill for the ecological crisis will be high, and the owners intend to make the working classes pay for it. Faced with the growing threat of an ecological catastrophe that will also be an unprecedented social catastrophe, only struggles and the convergence of struggles can save us.

It is urgent that the world of labour engage much more actively with the youth, women, indigenous peoples and small farmers who are in the front line of the fight for the planet. This should involve a deep strategic reflection aimed at developing a programme of anti-capitalist and anti-productivist structural reforms. Such a programme

would allow trade unionism to fertilise the idea of "just degrowth" with its own priorities, its own demands and its own aspirations. In particular, the public and collective retraining of workers in ecologically and socially useful activities (without loss of pay) and the massive and collective reduction of working hours.

Work less, work all, live better! There are no jobs on a dead planet. Losing one's life to earn it by destroying our children's planet is less than ever an acceptable option.

*Translated by **International Viewpoint**. In French on [ESSF](#). To be published on the site [Gauche Anticapitaliste](#).*

One year after: Joe Biden, president of the United States

26 December 2021, by **Éric Toussaint**

In both cases, the election occurred when the US was going through a major crisis that might have led the government to take strong measures and depart from decades of neo-liberal policies.

The Barack Obama administration could have applied measures to contain big capital, including big banks and big investment funds, largely responsible for the enormous crisis which had exploded in 2007-2008. Moreover, Barack Obama had promised a profound reform of the health system, social security, pensions and the implementation of a tax reform targetting the most affluent, starting with the richest 1%, pay a little more tax. This did not happen.

Joe Biden had announced that he would request big corporations and the richest to pay more taxes, he had promised progressive measures around health coverage and social protection as well as statutory minimum wages of 15 dollars per

hour...

Such promises made it possible for him to mobilize part of the voters who no longer cared to vote and a large section of the youth. At the beginning of his mandate, he nominated Bernie Sanders chairman of the Senate budget committee, which some perceived [as a token of his determination to actually implement progressive measures](#) while others, including me, saw in this move, a way of cornering Bernie Sanders.

Empty promises

After almost a year of mandate, we can definitely assert that the promises of a progressive turn towards more social justice have not been kept.

The minimum hourly wage of 15 dollars was soon abandoned, it is still fixed at 7.25 dollars.

No measure was taken to levy new taxes on corporations and on the

richest. Even worse, the Biden administration has introduced an additional measure that is favourable to wealthy households, which made it possible for Republican delegates to expose the measure's injustice and deviousness. [10] It increases from \$10,000 to \$80,000, the amount taxpayers can deduct from their federal taxes for the payment of local taxes (either municipal or state taxes).

According to an analysis by both the non-partisan Tax Policy Center and the fiscally hawkish Center for a Responsible Federal Budget think-tank, 94 per cent of the benefits of increasing the SALT cap to \$80,000 would go to the top quintile of earners nationwide — who make at least \$175,000 a year — with 70 per cent going to the top five per cent." [11]

The loss of revenues for the Treasury would amount to \$275 billion per year.

The military budget was increased to \$720 billion, with the support of the Republicans. This is the highest military budget since the Second World War (in spite of the disengagement in Afghanistan).

In terms of public works, the Biden administration, with the Republicans' support, voted a budget, conducive to big construction companies.

Let us not forget that the coronavirus pandemic has resulted in the highest number of dead in absolute figures in the US: over 834,000 dead on 23 December 2021.

Yet in spite of the gravity of the crisis, Joe Biden has so far not taken any measure that could run against the interests of pharmaceutical corporations. While the government holds the main patent for the production of RNa vaccines, it is not inclined to use it or allow the public sector in the US or elsewhere to use it too (see the box "Biden protects the interests of Big Pharma at the expense of people's health, in the North as in the South"). All the production is left to Big Pharma and the patents held by private companies are not lifted. The Biden administration has not offered the patent it holds to countries that might have benefited from it and are able to produce vaccines if allowed either. Whereas in May 2021, Joe Biden claimed that his administration wanted the WTO to lift patents as requested by over 100 countries of the South, he has not done anything to support this measure.

Box

Biden protects the interests of Big Pharma at the expense of people's health, in

the North as in the South [12]

The mRNA vaccines sold by Pfizer (US) - BioNTech (Germany) and by Moderna (US), which were released within less than a year, partly rely on former patents, among which a 2005 patent for a technology devised by the University of Pennsylvania to produce a mRNA that is harmless to the organism.

The innovative technique of stabilizing the spike protein is also a product of publicly financed research. Indeed, the specific patent filed by the US government - patent number 10,960,070, better known as the '070' patent - relates to the way in which the spike protein is stabilized in the vaccine, a technique that was developed by the vaccine research centre of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), a US government agency.

According to Public Citizen in Washington, thanks to owning patent '070' the US could and can if it wanted to produce its own mRNA vaccines. It could also allow other countries to produce and use the patent to protect their own populations and as a goodwill gesture extend the facility to other populations in need. See this extract from a Public Citizen press release in mid-November 2020 concerning the announcement that mRNA-1273 will be produced by Moderna: Statement: Moderna vaccine is produced by the people "This is the people's vaccine. The NIH's vaccine. It is not merely Moderna's vaccine. Federal scientists helped invent it and taxpayers are funding its development. We have all played a role. It should belong to humanity.

Both the current administration and President-elect Biden have the opportunity to make this vaccine a public good that is free and available to all and help scale up global manufacturing, in order to prevent medical rationing that could become a form of global vaccine apartheid."¹ In this case the patent would not be infringed and the technology would be generally available. In not complying

with this request that comes from numerous organizations like Public Citizen, Joe Biden demonstrates his support for Big Pharma.

"According to Public Citizen, public authorities, starting with the governments of the richest countries could easily produce billions of doses of vaccines at a much lower cost than the payments that are being made to Big Pharma"

According to a very serious study published in May 2021 by Public Citizen, public authorities, starting with the governments of the richest countries could easily produce billions of doses of vaccines at a much lower cost than the payments that are being made to Big Pharma. The study, based on research by the Imperial College London convincingly shows that "the global community could set up regional hubs capable of producing eight billion mRNA vaccine doses by May 2022. This would be enough to cover 80% of the population". How much would it cost? \$9.4 billion for a Pfizer - BioNTech vaccine, 5 plants, 17 production lines and 1386 employees. A figure to be compared with the dozens and dozens of billions of tax dollars handed out to Big Pharma by the States resulting only in vaccinating affluent country's populations... and paying out to shareholders.¹

A third vaccine dose in the North and vaccinal apartheid

Like the West European countries, the US is organizing massive injections of a third vaccine dose (a fourth one is even on its way, as in the State of Israel) and the vaccination of children whereas the WHO demands that priority be given to the vaccination of the populations in countries of the South that have so far had limited access to vaccines.

Nothing has been done either regarding the financial regulation aiming at enforcing some discipline upon big banks and other big financial companies. On the contrary, laxity has increased. To clearly signal his orientation towards financial markets and Big Capital, Biden nominated Trump appointed Jerome Powell for a second term as Fed chair. He also appointed former Fed chair Janet Yellen as United States secretary of the treasury. These are clear signs in favour of Capital. In early December 2021, Saule Omarova was supposed to take over banking regulation at the head of the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency. She had to resign after a destabilization campaign launched by Wall Street and the Republicans. We read in the Financial Times: "She faced a backlash from Republicans and the banking industry, with critics focusing on her upbringing and her career as an academic with proposals including a state-run bank account system."... "What Wall Street banks worry about is that I am going to be an independent, strong-minded regulator who is not one of them, who is not beholden to them," she told the FT. Actually, next to predictable attacks from Republicans, she was also battered by some Democrat delegates, who are just as closely tied to Capital as their colleagues. [13]

Biden had promised to have an ambitious programme of expenditure adopted towards more social justice and the protection of the environment. Called Build Back Better (or BBB), the programme should have been adopted along with the big plan for spending in public works, big Capital is fond of. But eventually, Biden and Nancy Pelosi, speaker of the US House of Representatives, let the two votes be dissociated, a separation that was not accepted by the left-wing of the Democratic Party. The public works plan was adopted with the support of the Republicans and in spite of the opposition of six left-wing democrats including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. On the other hand, the Build Back Better programme has been sabotaged by the right-wing of the Democratic Party and will most likely be abandoned.

This jilting of the "Build Back Better" programme shows the true nature of

the Biden administration's policy, which is at large, in economic and social terms, a continuation of that of Republican presidents, whether G. W. Bush or D. Trump. Back in 1891, Friedrich Engels in his postscript to Karl Marx's texts on the Paris Commune de Paris had accurately described the political system in the US as dominated by the Democratic and Republican Parties that take turns in power and stand up for the capitalist order (see box below).

Friedrich Engels on the political system in the US

Nowhere do "politicians" form a more separate and powerful section of the nation than precisely in North America. There, each of the two major parties which alternately succeed each other in power is itself in turn controlled by people who make a business of politics, who speculate on seats in the legislative assemblies of the Union as well as of the separate states, or who make a living by carrying on agitation for their party and on its victory are rewarded with positions.

It is well known how the Americans have been trying for thirty years to shake off this yoke, which has become intolerable, and how in spite of it all they continue to sink ever deeper in this swamp of corruption. It is precisely in America that we see best how there takes place this process of the state power making itself independent in relation to society, whose mere instrument it was originally intended to be. Here there exists no dynasty, no nobility, no standing army, beyond the few men keeping watch on the Indians, no bureaucracy with permanent posts or the right to pensions. And nevertheless, we find here two great gangs of political speculators, who alternately take possession of the state power, and exploit it by the most corrupt means and for the most

corrupt ends - and the nation is powerless against these two great cartels of politicians, who are ostensibly its servants, but in reality dominate and plunder it.

Source: [Postscript to Karl Marx The Civil War in France 1871 \(1891\)](#).

In spite of all its well-intentioned discourse, the Biden administration has not taken any real measure to [control access to firearms](#) either while the number of homicides is rising sharply (30% increase by 2021). 400 million firearms are in circulation in the US.

The Biden Administration has not taken any measure to defend the federal legislation that decriminalizes abortion in spite of States like Texas adopting [very repressive laws](#) against abortion; it merely expressed its disagreement.

While some States, including once again, Texas, decided to change election laws to limit the exercise of voting rights by the working classes and especially their racialized layers, the Biden Administration did nothing.

The Biden Administration does not fare any better than that of Donald Trump as far as migrants' rights and the reception of refugees are concerned. In September 2021, Daniel Foote, the US envoy for Haiti, resigned to protest against "inhuman" deportations by the United States of thousands of Haitian migrants. His resignation was a hard blow for Joe Biden: his policy of massive extradition of Haitian migrants back to their country is publicly exposed by his own envoy. [14]

In terms of international politics, the current administration continues and confirms Trump's policies on central issues such as total support of the Israeli government and an aggressive stance towards Cuba and Venezuela. A New York Times report recently revealed that the use of drones in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan had [officially killed over 1,400 civilians](#). The actual figure is likely to be much

higher. In this respect, the Biden Administration merely continues Trump's policy. At the end of August 2021, 10 civilians were killed in Kabul by a drone strike but it had been decided in [December 2021 that no military personnel would be punished-<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-59647065>]. The bombing "did not violate the laws of war and was not caused by the misconduct or criminal negligence," Defense Department Chief Spokesman John F. Kirby explained. The Biden Administration also supports [Marshall al-Sisi's military regime](#) as it provides around \$1.3 billion in foreign assistance annually. Similarly, Biden maintains [friendly relationships with the Saudi ultra-reactionary regime](#).

The US re-joining the Paris Climate Agreement and resuming negotiations about nuclear production in Iran do not pen on to strong measures. On the contrary, Biden recently increased subsidies for oil and gas mining in the US to ensure higher volumes of extraction. As the US does not concede anything substantial to Iran, the situation can only deteriorate.

How can the absence of a Keynesian turn be accounted for?

The key to any significant turn is the state of the class struggle. Popular classes, and salaried workers, in particular, have failed to increase their level of organization and their capacity to act. This is a major difference with the 1930s when the workers' movement was expanding with a wave of strikes and factory occupations, especially in the car industry. Radical unions and socialist ideas enjoyed wide support. The USSR was a pole of attraction since its planning and public control of the means of production was perceived as a better solution than laissez-faire capitalism.

To complete the picture, it should be added that in 2020-2021 the government (whether Trump's or Biden's) has massively oiled the

wheels by paying large indemnities to the working classes and by deferring the payment of a significant part of the debts (mortgage debts, student debts, rent debts...). Poverty has regressed in 2020 and in 2021, thanks to various kinds of social aids. This has played a real role as a social buffer. The working classes have not been forced into action. Certainly, some sectors have mobilized and in some cases have won, but this is far from representing a groundswell.

The "social" measures taken by Trump and then, by Biden are not structural, they do not offer new rights and they are not long-term measures. The adoption of Build Back Better programme could have generated the impression of some social progress but clearly, even in the best of cases, it would be very limited. This shows that we have not entered a new Keynesian cycle in which the government and the capitalist class would be forced to make significant concessions to the popular classes, who in turn would register an improvement in their social rights and a significant increase in their salaries.

The capitalist class is still getting richer even if the rate of profit has seen better days and if a large part of the accumulated capital is fictive and could collapse like a house of cards in case of another financial crisis.

Inequalities further increase with a greater concentration of wealth in the hands of the top 1%.

The debt issue

In the third term of 2021, the US public debt was \$28,000 billion or 125% of the country's GDP. Whether post-2008, in order to face the financial crisis or from 2020 faced with the crisis resulting from the coronavirus pandemic, the US leaders resorted to adding on to their public debt. There was no crisis tax levied on big capital. So far, the increase in public debt has not really been noticed because interest rates are close to zero. The current interest rate on public debt is actually even negative since inflation is over 5%. The Fed will gradually increase interest rates but there will be no serious problems in

the short or medium term. In the US, the volume of public debt will further increase without resulting in any strong disturbance.

Household debts among the popular classes have increased over the last ten years but social aids in the form of cheques sent by the government in 2020-2021 have temporarily relieved the burden of repayment. Moreover, both the Trump and the Biden administrations temporarily suspended the repayment of a number of debts: some mortgages, student debts, some rent debts too, not forgetting the debts owed by small enterprises. But these measures will come to an end and the situation will become tense. Some deadlines are known: May 2022 for student debts, which amount to more than \$1,600 billion. Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez [demand total cancellation](#). Movements [claiming cancellation](#) are currently multiplying.

The unfair claim of debts from the popular classes will become more significant in the coming years

With regard to students' debts, Barack Obama had achieved some partial cancellations (the cost of which was borne by taxpayers and not by creditors); it is possible that Biden will do as much. It will depend on mobilizations. The developments need to be followed...

The debt owed by big private companies sharply increased over the past years. In case of an increase in interest rates, some might go bankrupt and another financial crisis might break out.

Conclusions

Beyond its announcements and unfulfilled promises, the policy of the Biden administration mostly extends the offensive of capital against the working classes. No social turn has actually started which could break with 40 years of neo-liberal policies. No left-minded citizen will ever regret Trump but we should not entertain illusions about Biden either, there are serious limitations.

Biden and the Democratic party have

disappointed the members of the popular classes who had supported them against Trump and the Republican candidates in the fall of 2020. In the course of 2021, in several by-elections, this disenchantment was expressed at the ballot boxes and the Republicans strengthened their position. The October 2022 mid-term elections are likely to result in the Democrats losing their majority in parliament and the Senate, which will

strengthen the trend making possible a [Republican victory](#) in the 2024 presidential election.

Will the left-wing of the Democratic Party and the Left outside of it be able to find the way to get stronger and break away from the bipartisan system described by Engels 130 years ago? This is a big historical question. Will the popular movement in the US, which has experienced strong moments such as Black Lives Matter

or feminist mobilizations, be able to consolidate? Will Labour counter Capital? Will the youth fight in other struggles after Black Lives Matter, on the environment, debts... Answers to such questions are wide open and of the utmost significance for the world.

24 December 2021

Translated by Christine Pagnoulle for [CADTM](#).

Increased U.S. Military Spending Means More Militarism, Imperialism, and War

25 December 2021, by Dan La Botz

Last week the U.S. Congress passed and President Joseph Biden signed the military spending bill for 2022 at a cost of \$768 billion, \$24 billion more than requested. The bill pays for ship, submarines, aircraft, and all sorts of weapons, as well as the pay for military personnel. The House passed it earlier in December by a vote of 363-70 and it clear the Senate 89-10. The no-votes came from more progressive Democrats who generally wish to limit military spending.



Among specific provisions of the bill are \$28 billion for nuclear weapons programs, \$7.1 billion to strengthen positions against China, and \$4 billion for the European Deterrence Initiative to resist Russia, which at the moment seems prepared to invade Ukraine.

The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) also contained some element of reform. For example, calling upon the military to root out extremism after 38 of the 250 people charged for the January 6 insurrection turned out to have served in the military. It also made some reforms in the system of military justice because of the 20,500 cases of "unwanted sexual assault" (including anything

from groping to rape) reported in 2018. The act did not, however, repeal the Iraq War resolution of 2002, used by Trump to assassinate Qasem Soleimani in January of 2020.

In general, the NDAA budgets are driven by the military commanders and by military contractors who stand to profit from the manufacture of war matériel. These military contractors contribute generously to the political campaigns of the politicians, a total of \$47,149,042 in 2020. The biggest contributor, Lockheed Martin, which manufactures aircraft, gave \$5,983,592, 47 percent to Democrats and 53 percent to Republicans. Only the banks contribute more to politicians.

Senator Bernie Sanders declared, "Many of my colleagues tell the American people, day after day, how deeply concerned they are about the deficit and the national debt. They tell us that we just don't have enough money to expand Medicare, guarantee paid family and medical leave, and address the climate crisis to the degree that we should if we want to protect the well-being of future generations. Yet, tomorrow, the U.S. Senate will be voting on an annual defense budget that costs \$778 billion - \$37 billion more than President

Trump's last defense budget and \$25 billion more than what President Biden requested.... As a nation, we need to get our priorities right. I will vote 'NO' on the National Defense Authorization Act."

Before the bill passed, Congresswoman Alexandra Ocasio Cortez made a number of specific amendments to deny funds to various governments: the specific Saudi unit that murdered Jamal Khashoggi, to a specific weapons contract for Israel, to countries that engaged in genocide or war crimes, to Colombia's unit that suppresses civilian protests. Her amendments failed, and she voted no on the bill.

Shortly after the latest U.S. military budget was adopted, the New York Times published a study of military records regarding civilian casualties in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. While the military claims to engage in "pin-point bombing" with "surgical precision," many civilians, including children has been killed. The times wrote, "According to the military's count, 1,417 civilians have died in airstrikes in the campaign against ISIS in Iraq and Syria; since 2018 in Afghanistan, U.S. air operations have killed at least 188 civilians. But The Times found that the civilian death toll was

significantly higher.” Thousands more civilians than the military has accounted for may have been killed.

Still in Congress, no representative takes the historic socialist position of

not a penny for militarism and war.

Source [New Politics](#).

Burkina Faso: a country under pressure

24 December 2021, by **Paul Martial**

On Wednesday 8 December, Prime Minister Christophe Joseph-Marie Dabiré resigned, leading to the resignation of the entire government. This was a way for Roch Kaboré, the president of Burkina Faso, to respond to the exasperation of the population.

Advance of the jihadists

The attack on the [Inata barracks](#) sent shock waves through the country. It cost the lives of 53 gendarmes. The information received and widely reported by the media is that the barracks, located in one of the most dangerous areas of the country, was abandoned because of the unavailability of a helicopter for refuelling. This tragic event is indicative of the disorganization of the Defence and Security Forces (FDS) in Burkina. From now on, every week, radios and newspapers will report the number of victims of the jihadist commandos.

The first jihadist attacks date from 2015. They were carried out by Ansarul Islam, which gave way to the two main groups operating throughout the Sahel, the GSIM, affiliated to al-Qaeda, and EIGS, linked to the Islamic State. These groups are gaining ground against an under-equipped and inefficient Burkinabe army.

The consequences in humanitarian terms are dramatic. According to UN figures, more than one million people have been displaced, fleeing the violence, and 3.5 million are in need of humanitarian assistance.

A society in crisis

Jihadist groups are trying to infiltrate conflicts between different communities whose economic activities used to complement each other thanks to regulation and mediation processes recognised by all. For several years, particularly in the Soum region, conflicts between the Mossi and Kurumba, who are mainly farmers, and the Peul, who are mainly herders, have been over water resources and grazing areas. In addition, there are acts of banditry, particularly cattle theft. The circulation of weapons of war increases the number of victims during clashes. Jihadists thrive on these latent conflicts where poverty and idleness are the lot of a large part of the youth.

As in Mali and Niger, Burkina Faso's neighbours, the Peuhl community is wrongly considered to be a supporter of fundamentalist forces. It is the victim of numerous human rights violations perpetrated by the FDS and the various community self-defence militias. The violence is encouraged by the total impunity that reigns in the country.

Burkina Faso, one of the poorest countries in the world, has tripled its military budget. However, the effects are hardly palpable on the ground. These are the consequences of widespread corruption and a division within the army dating back to the 2011 mutinies.

A cure worse than

the disease

In January 2020, two months after the killing of workers at the Canadian company SEMAFO, which left 38 dead and 60 injured, Christian Kaboré launched the establishment of the Volunteers for the Defence of the Fatherland (VDP). The aim was to set up auxiliary forces for the Burkinabe army. The role of the VDPs is twofold: to be a source of information and intelligence for the military and to defend the villages while waiting for reinforcements from the FDS. These volunteers receive a short two-week training course and a Kalashnikov.

This measure raises concerns. Firstly, these VDPs are the prerogative of the Mossi and Kurumba, since Fulani volunteers are most of the time refused because they are suspected of being in league with the enemy. Secondly, arming civilians runs the risk of increasing inter-community conflicts. Finally, these WTPs have now become the target of choice for jihadists, leading to an increase in civilian casualties during village attacks.

The crisis in the Sahel is primarily a political and social crisis. African and Western leaders have chosen to respond by force, not out of stupidity, but to preserve the stability of post-colonial systems at the expense of the people. Millions of euros are being spent on war instead of on schools, health centres and other public services.

15 December 2021

Boric's victory. What challenges for what government?

23 December 2021, by **A l'Encontre editorial**

The Chilean website Resumen wrote on the evening of 19 December:

The president-elect [Boric] has imposed himself according to the characteristics of Chilean politics, managing to attract the support of the former Concertación coalition [PDC, PS, PPD, PRSD] and the left, even the Communist Party, all thanks to a characterization of his policy that constantly refers to the consensus of the 1990s. This is evidenced by the formation of a political team with many names from this current [Concertación], which will most likely have representatives in the cabinet. [15] It must be said that the Apruebo Dignidad project has tried to present itself as social democratic. In reality, it tends to develop social-liberal policies, that is, a state that acts as a powerful regulator of the market and protects civil liberties. It is highly unlikely that the state entity will be given economic power to act in concert with private enterprise or by itself, as was the case in European social democratic proposals. The link with Bacheletism [referring to Michelle Bachelet's two governments from March 2006 to March 2010 and March 2014 to March 2018] is therefore deeper than just communicative support [Bachelet met with Boric and supported his candidacy]. An exchange with supporters of this orientation is envisaged.

Moreover, the forces supporting Boric will be faced with a very divided Congress in both Houses (Senate, Chamber of Deputies), which will give importance to negotiation and rapprochement

with sectors of the right that are closer to liberalism. In the face of this, a possible social and popular movement could soon take to the streets, called by a social and economic crisis that has no chance of being overcome in the immediate future. In this respect, a social agenda that responds to the most felt demands of the Chilean people will be essential: guarantee of social rights and economic assistance.

The Constituent Convention process is being strengthened by the new government [which will take office in March] and will surely see its process accelerated, since in September the so-called exit plebiscite to register and approve the new constitution is expected to take place. The Boric government will be an important element in favour of the constituent process, and therefore the Boric administration will have to devote great attention to the constituent process and its finalisation, both in form and substance. Indeed, the outcome of the Constituent Convention will determine the framework within which the government's progressive project will unfold from March 2022 to March 2026.

Finally, a question will arise: will Gabriel Boric take advantage of the constitutional change to call for new elections and immediately consolidate the change of political regime. This would make it possible to unblock the situation [of the political balance of power] in Congress and thus bring about the necessary transformations for a new path for Chile. This challenge remains a big question mark.

At the very large demonstration held on Avenida de la Alameda, in the centre of Santiago, according to *The Clinic* (20 December), Boric:

gave a speech very similar in tone to the one he had given three days earlier, from Almagro Park, at the close of his campaign on Thursday 16 December. As on that occasion, he bluntly attacked the AFP [private administrations of individual capitalized pension funds]: We do not want the AFP to continue doing business with our pensions. The AFP, which today earn absurd amounts of money at the expense of the work of Chilean men and women, are part of the problem. And we are going to defend an autonomous, non-profit public system, without AFP.

Another similarity between the two speeches is that Boric made no mention in favour of a pardon for those in pre-trial detention in the [October 2019] social rebellion, although the audience at the Alameda spoke out strongly in their favour: "We are not all here, the prisoners are not present." President-elect Boric simply mentioned that he had "already spoken to the prisoners' families."

However, Giorgio Jackson, a close associate of Boric, beyond the differences, stressed that Gabriel Boric's government would withdraw all charges under the State Security Law against those imprisoned in connection with the October uprising. The question remains: will the pardon for the prisoners be the result of a "case by case" review - with all possible "exceptions" given the

A world of growing inequality

22 December 2021, by **Henri Wilno**

Since the 1980s, income and wealth inequality has been increasing almost everywhere, as a result of deregulation and liberalization programmes. This trend accelerated during the Covid epidemic.

Currently, the richest 10% of the world's population earns 52% of global income, while the poorest half earns only 8%. Wealth inequality is even more pronounced than income inequality. The poorest half of the world's population has virtually no wealth, owning only 2% of the total. In contrast, the richest 10% of the world's population own 76% of the world's wealth. The share of wealth held by the richest 0.01% increased from 7% to 11% between 1995 and 2021

At the top, the richest 0.001% represent 55,200 adults in 2021 globally, and own just over 6% of the world's wealth, meaning that their wealth is more than 6,000 times greater than the average. To put this into perspective, the total wealth of the poorest 50% of the world's population, a group that is 50,000 times larger than the richest 0.001%, is three times smaller (2%).

The issue of climate change

One of the most interesting points in the report concerns the contribution to climate change. The authors highlight the link between income and wealth inequality and unequal contributions to climate change. On average, humans emit 6.6 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂) per capita per year, with large disparities

within the global population.

The poorest 50% emit on average 1.6 tonnes per year and contribute 12% of the total. The middle 40% emit 6.6 tonnes on average, or 40.4% of the total. The richest 10% emit 31 tonnes (47.6% of the total). The richest 1% emit 110 tonnes (16.8% of the total). Nearly half of all emissions are therefore caused by one tenth of the world's population, and one hundredth of the world's population (77 million people) emits more than the entire poor half of the population (3.8 billion people).

The report highlights a fundamental issue: contrary to how it is commonly presented, this inequality is not simply a matter of rich and poor countries. There are large emitters in low- and middle-income countries, and small emitters in rich countries. According to the authors, in 1990, the bulk of global carbon inequality (63%) was due to differences between countries: at that time, the average citizen of a rich country unequivocally polluted more than the rest of the world's citizens.

This situation has been almost entirely reversed in 30 years. Inequalities within countries now account for almost two-thirds of global inequalities in emissions. This does not mean that there are no significant (often huge) emissions inequalities between countries and regions of the world. In fact, it means that in addition to the great inequality in carbon emissions between countries, there are even greater inequalities between individuals and social groups.

In Europe, the poorest half of the population emits about five tonnes per

year per person; in East Asia, they emit about three tonnes and in North America about ten. This is in stark contrast to the emissions of the top 10% of these regions (29 tonnes in Europe, 39 in East Asia and 73 in North America).

No way out without challenging competition

The report therefore concludes that the scale of transformation needed to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions in rich countries cannot be achieved unless environmental and social inequalities are integrated into the very design of environmental policies.

The authors criticize taxes such as the carbon tax, which hit the rich and poor indiscriminately. But is it enough to limit wealth inequalities? In capitalism, the richest 1% are first and foremost those who have power because they own the means of production. They are the ones who determine investments and the direction of production, and influence the policies of states. They are the dominant class. It is this power that must be challenged.

As our comrade Daniel Tanuro, author of several books on the ecological crisis, points out in a recent text based on similar data, reducing inequalities is necessary but not sufficient: "There is no way out without questioning the competition for profit, the motor of productivism based on capitalist property rights." [16]

Verdict in Rittenhouse Vigilante Trial Leads to Protest by Left and Jubilation on Right

21 December 2021, by **Dan La Botz**

The events began on August 23 when Kenosha police, arresting Jacob Blake on charges of sexual assault, tased him and then shot him seven times, leaving him paralyzed. His shooting led to Black Lives Matter protests, some peaceful, some involving window-breaking, arson, and confrontations with the police. A rightwing militia group, called the Kenosha Guard, then put out a call widely circulated on social media for people to come to defend Kenosha from BLM. White men, among them the fascist Boogaloo Boys, started showing up in Kenosha carrying hatchets, baseball bats, and guns.

Rittenhouse, a 17-year-old boy who had previously participated in police cadet programs, responded to the Kenosha Guard by taking an AR-47 assault rifle and going to Kenosha. He took his gun and began to walk the street where he was confronted by white activists from the anti-racist protests. When the men caught up with Rittenhouse, he shot them, killing two unarmed men, Joseph Rosenbaum and Anthony Huber, and wounding Gaige Grosskreutz, who had a pistol. Having shot the men Rittenhouse walked through the streets, his gun across his chest, and though several people told the police that he had shot someone, the police did not arrest him.

Later arrested in Illinois, Rittenhouse was extradited to Wisconsin where he was charged with two counts of homicide, one count of attempted homicide, two counts of reckless endangerment, one count of unlawful possession of a firearm, and one count of curfew violation. He was released on \$2 million bail was provided by rightwing lawyer.

The judge prejudiced the case in Rittenhouse's favor. The judge's phone, which rang during the trial, had a ring-tone that played "God Bless America," a song played at rallies of former president Donald Trump. During the trial, the judge dropped the lesser charges of illegal possession of a firearm and violation of the curfew. He also refused to admit prosecution evidence that Rittenhouse had spent time with the fascist Proud Boys.

The defense argued that Rittenhouse had only defended himself against injury or death by his assailants. Rittenhouse claimed that Rosenbaum, the first man he killed, had threatened to kill him, the second man was videotaped hitting Rittenhouse with his skate board, and the third man turned out to have a pistol. The jury believe Rittenhouse's self-defense plea and found him innocent of all charges.

Fox News praised the verdict, which they called was a victory for the U.S. Constitution's Second Amendment that gives people the right to bear arms. Republican Representatives offered Rittenhouse congressional internships. Rightwing militias have been energized by this verdict. There is also a surge in anti-Semitism, since right-wingers argue that Jews control the media which they say worked to convict Rittenhouse.

Black and Progressive organizations and politicians criticized the verdict. Black activists and leftists such as the Democratic Socialists of America and small Trotskyist groups held demonstrations of hundreds in Portland, Chicago, and New York condemning the verdict. In New York where I joined the protest, one woman carried a sign reading simply, "You know it's wrong." Another had photos of the two unarmed men killed reading, "It's now open season on civil disobedience and protests."

The Rittenhouse verdict has encouraged and emboldened America's fascists—and they are taking advantage of it. We need a more effective response than we have at present. We need a militant, mass anti-fascist movement.

24 November 2021

Source [New Politics](#).

Emergency: Defend Our Rights!

20 December 2021, by **Dianne Feeley**

MY FIRST DEMONSTRATION in support of reproductive rights was in

1968, when I marched with others in support of "Free Abortion on

Demand." That was what the women's movement at that time called for, a

demand that has never been implemented.

Next May or June, when the U.S. Supreme Court decides the Mississippi anti-abortion case, they will either place more restrictions on reproductive rights — or overthrow the already flawed *Roe v. Wade*. If you count them up, the stacked reactionary majority of the Supreme Court justices oppose abortion, while the majority of Americans support abortion under many circumstances.

What do greater restrictions mean? It means it becomes harder and more expensive to end a pregnancy. The greater the distance, the harder it is. This means that institutions — whether hospitals or police and courts — have the right to judge one's personal medical decisions.

It also creates an environment where women who miscarry are in danger of being hauled into court and prosecuted for murder, manslaughter or child abuse. This is particularly true if they are poor or a person of color.

Pregnant individuals have been arrested for falling down stairs, drinking alcohol, being in a "dangerous" location, having a stillbirth, being drug dependent, having HIV. Over the last 15 years, as more state restrictions have passed, about 85 women each year are

arrested, prosecuted and convicted. (See the National Advocates for Pregnant Women's website)

* In January 2020 Brittany Poolaw, aged 19, had a miscarriage when she was 21 weeks pregnant. She was charged with first-degree manslaughter. Unable to pay the \$20,000 bond, she was imprisoned more than 18 months before her trial in October 2021 when a jury convicted her after three hours of deliberation. A member of the Comanche Nation, she was sentenced to four years. (Oklahoma)

* In 2018, Adora Perez delivered a stillborn baby; the DA claimed this was caused by drug use. She is serving an 11-year sentence for manslaughter. (California)

If *Roe v. Wade* is overturned, most Southern and Midwestern states either have trigger laws or pre-1973 anti-abortion laws that would ban abortion. Even in the case of a "medical exception," as is written into the Texas SB8's case, it creates a chilling environment where hospitals and doctors are afraid to they will be sued.

Since the Texas law went into effect September 1st, a woman with an ectopic pregnancy from a rural part of South Texas was turned away by both

her doctor and the hospital. Had the fertilized egg caused her fallopian tube to burst, she could have died. Fortunately, she was able to drive 12 hours to a hospital in New Mexico — but that kind of delay can cost one's life.

Some laws only allow intervention after the malformed fetus has no heartbeat. By then the woman may die from septic shock or organ failure. In Ireland, Savita Halappanavar (31), a dentist from India, had a miscarriage in her 17th week but spent days in the hospital waiting for the non-viable fetus to die.

By then her own life couldn't be saved. In October 2021 a Polish woman Izabela (30), 22 weeks pregnant, died. In both cases people marched in the street and demanded change. In fact, Ireland changed their law after the massive outrage triggered by Savita's death.

The only way we can have control over our own reproductive lives is to stand together. No restrictive abortion laws, scientific sex education, opposition to forced sterilization; an end to high maternal and infant mortality, health care for all, and the right to bring children into a healthy and safe environment. Nothing less is acceptable.

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

Covid and Anti-vaxx

19 December 2021, by Neil Faulkner

Twenty-two Labour MPs have just voted with the Tory Right against mandatory Covid vaccination for NHS staff. They reflect the anti-vaxx position of some unions. They have support from some others on the Left. But they are wrong. Here's why.

The anti-vaxx movement is rooted in far-right conspiracy theory. It is supported by many on the Authoritarian Right, like the 61 Tory MPs who also voted against

mandatory vaccination. The Tory Right argues the case on the basis of individual liberties. Some especially moronic Tories have likened current pandemic precautions to events in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Gulags.

The anti-vaxx movement is a bridge to fascism. It is fuelled by a torrent of internet bullshit, and is part of a global wave of irrationalism that is facilitating the rise of the Authoritarian Right and, under its

umbrella, harder forms of fascism.

More broadly, neoliberalism has created a socially fragmented world of atomised, alienated, anomic people, and, with its relentless emphasis on competition, materialism, and personal advancement, has fostered an epidemic of extreme narcissistic individualism. An ideology of right-wing selfishness - 'libertarianism' - of which anti-vaxx sentiment is one expression - has grown in this seed-

bed.

The Left should make no concessions of any kind to this reactionary rubbish. We are a society, we are dependent on each other, and we have obligations of care towards one another.

A duty of care

We are not entitled to endanger the lives of others by speeding or shooting the lights, to sexually abuse women or children or anyone else, or to physically assault people because of their ethnicity or religion. Laws against these things are not reflections of a 'repressive state' or 'capitalist interests', they are not violations of 'individual freedom' or 'civil liberties' – they are the universal protections of a civilised society.

Nor, in the socialist movement, do we recognise a right to refuse to join a trade union in a fully unionised workplace or to cross a picket-line during a strike. Both of these may involve sacrifice (payment of union dues or loss of income). But they are

nonetheless, as far as we are concerned, binding moral obligations. We describe those who violate them as 'scabs'.

By the same token, in a pandemic, in the face of a highly contagious and deadly disease, we do not have a right to refuse to be vaccinated and to go around infecting others. We have a duty of care to ourselves (to avoid becoming hospitalised and an additional burden on the NHS), and to others – our families, friends, colleagues, and strangers we meet as we go about our daily business.

The Covid infection rate in Britain has just broken all previous records. That is thanks to the irresponsibility, incompetence, and corruption of the Tory regime. It is thanks to Johnson's greenlighting of virus-spreading behaviour. And it is thanks to the fascists behind the anti-vaxx conspiracy theories that have conned millions of people. But that does not absolve us – not any of us – of responsibility towards others. It does not entitle us to behave like Tories.

Those in close contact with others, especially vulnerable others, have a particular responsibility. I have been exceptionally dependent on the NHS over the last six months for medical treatment for a life-threatening condition. I am currently immunocompromised and therefore vulnerable, shielding, and housebound. I would expect everyone coming into contact with me when I visit hospital to be vaccinated. I would be shocked to learn that any had not been.

There are millions of us: people for whom Covid is a potential killer. That means every one of us has a social obligation to maximise the protection we can give to others. Vaccination is not a matter of personal choice. Socialists (and trade unionists) who make concessions to right-wing conspiracy theory and libertarian ideology are wrong.

15 Dec 2021

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Change, no change in German elections

18 December 2021, by **Ingo Schmidt**

During the 2021 campaign, Germany was pervaded by a widespread sense that things are changing, politics need to adapt, but that it won't be pleasant. Amongst the three candidates running for chancellorship, Olaf Scholz was the one best suited to cater to this mood. With 25.7 percent of the total vote, his Social Democrats emerged as the strongest party in the election.

Having served as finance minister under Merkel since 2018, Scholz represents continuity. As a Social Democrat, he also represented change as his party had quietly dropped its former Third Way orientation and moved towards something resembling a Green New Deal Lite. The Greens ran on a similar platform. However, most of the media portrayed their

candidate, Annalena Baerbock, as unfit for office as she hadn't held government positions before. Following a minor scandal about a padded CV and plagiarism charges, she also faced a media backlash, marked by more or less open hostility to the prospect of another woman chancellor.

Problems of a different kind weighed on Armin Laschet's candidacy. He was Merkel's chosen successor, but, lacking her stature, was unable to bring her increasingly vocal critics in line. Often, he came across as a lone candidate disconnected from his party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). Throughout the campaign, Markus Söder, leader of the CSU, the Bavarian wing of the CDU, and one-

time contender for the CDU candidate for chancellor, made disparaging remarks about Laschet, who went on to lead the CDU/CSU to a historic low: 24.1 percent of the total vote.

Hoping to win enough votes to form a government with the liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP), which didn't run its own candidate for chancellor, but also open to including the Greens in a coalition government, the conservative CDU embroiled itself in struggles over new leadership and strategy just days after its defeat at the ballot box. Instead of the CDU, which sees itself as Germany's "naturally governing party," it is the SPD that is negotiating a coalition government with the Greens and the FDP.

However, whereas the SPD and the Greens demand publicly-funded investment programs to rebuild infrastructure and move beyond a fossil-fuel based economy, the FDP is mostly interested in lower taxes and balanced budgets. Even when spending cuts and privatization were part of the equation, governments hardly ever managed to lower taxes and balance their budgets at the same time. Aiming to achieve both, in addition to increasing public investments, is an economic impossibility and a recipe for political gridlock. Social Democrats, Greens and Liberals want to form a government but are unable to come up with a program that would at least point in the direction of fixing the most pressing social and ecological issues. They are heading towards a lame-duck government that will reinforce the strange brew of widespread recognition of urgently needed change and a fear of change that was reflected in the outgoing Merkel government.

Merkel: Unlikely leader, superstar, elder stateswoman

During her 16-year tenure, Merkel went from unlikely leader to unpretentious superstar—lovingly called “Angie” and sometimes hailed as “Mutti”—to elder stateswoman, presiding over her political heritage without being able, or even trying, to open pathways to the future. As a Protestant woman from East Germany, holding a PhD in physics, she didn’t fit into CDU circles made up of chamber of commerce types, judges, university executives and media tycoons; all West German men, mostly Catholics. Without the mentorship of former chancellor and CDU leader Helmut Kohl, Merkel would probably not have achieved leadership positions. Without committing patricide—she called Kohl a key player in an illegal party financing scheme—she couldn’t have gone her own way without interference from the party’s inner circles.

This early estrangement between old party establishment and new leader (besides being chancellor since 2005, Merkel was CDU general secretary from 1998 until 2000 and then chairwoman until 2018) was reinforced by some of her decisions as

head of government. Abolishing military conscription in 2010 met the demands of leading military and foreign policy circles to have a professional army ready to be deployed and fire on short notice, but many seasoned Conservatives had a hard time digesting it. Agreeing to a minimum wage in 2014 earned her a reputation for selling out to the Social Democrats; opening the borders, if only temporarily, to Syrian refugees a year later was even worse.

However, it was precisely this kind of estrangement between her and her party that allowed Merkel to gain respect from all political quarters, apart from the hard right that gained significant ground after the opening of the borders to refugees. Critics inside and to the right of her own party, as much as liberal and left supporters, widely misunderstood this decision as a genuine humanitarian act. Few noticed the galling difference with which refugees from Africa and crossing the Mediterranean Sea and Syrians using the so-called Balkan route were treated. Unlike their African counterparts, Syrian refugees could be portrayed as victims of the Putin-supported Assad-regime in the early stages of the New Cold War. Moreover, Greece, already wrecked by the Euro-crisis and austerity measures imposed by the EU troika, with strong backing from the German government, was the last place where Merkel wanted a backlog of refugees causing further destabilization. The successor states of Yugoslavia that, following civil wars and NATO-bombings in the 1990s, have always been fragile, didn’t need more disruptions either.

The temporary opening of borders, complemented by a deal in which Erdogan agreed to block the departure of refugee boats from the Turkish coast, helped to resolve the refugee crisis. But, despite earning her respect in some corners, it also marked the turn from Merkel superstar to a chancellor who had only one thing going for her: compared to any conceivable successor, she was seen as the best available option. She could still draw on the political capital that she had earned during her superstar days. Ironically enough, her stardom began when the rest of the world went into crisis.

In the midst of the Great Recession of 2008, she and then finance-minister Peer Steinbrück, like Scholz a Social Democrat, announced a government guarantee for private savings. The Merkel cabinet also bailed out banks and provided some fiscal stimulus as well as wage-subsidies for workers whose hours were cut while they stayed on payroll. The domestic policy response was aided by sharply rising current-account surpluses. Years of wage restraint and cuts to the welfare state, most drastically under Merkel’s predecessor Social Democrat Gerhard Schröder, had lowered unit labour costs to a point where slight increases in foreign demand would generate massive export growth. Moreover, China’s “super stimulus” created growing demand for investment goods, exactly the kind of goods many German firms manufacture. Rising current-account surpluses played an important role in keeping employment rates high. In fact, they exported unemployment to other countries. They also fueled a widespread sense among Germans, across classes, of being more productive and better at handling crises than people in other countries. Welfare state cuts during the Schröder-years, 1998 to 2005, had been accompanied by massive propaganda bemoaning the loss of competitiveness of the German economy. Cuts and propaganda had caused a widespread sense of insecurity and fear of the future. Rather unexpectedly, this sense gave way to renewed self-confidence during the Great Recession. The Euro-crisis that followed on its heels, revealed the nationalist side of the new German confidence. Calls by the German government for austerity in the Mediterranean countries as the only way out of the crisis resonated widely amongst Germans, again across classes.

The nationalist core of Germany’s reinvigorated export-über-allies-consensus was most explicitly spelled out by the right-wing of the Conservatives. Seeking to combine German nationalism with strict neoliberalism, they founded Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in 2013. A rather exclusive club at the time, headed by economics professor Bernd Lucke, the AfD didn’t gain much popular support until the

refugee-crisis of 2015/6. At that point, the recently professed pride in the strength of the German economy turned into fears of drowning in global competition. Desperate refugees from the Middle East and Africa reminded many Germans of their imperial privileges, no matter how large or small these are depending on class position. Rising support for the AfD—the party tallied 12.6 percent of the vote in 2017 and 10.3 percent in this year’s election—relied on a shift in hard-right discourse: the survival-of-the-fittest message, which made so many fear not being fit enough, was retained but wrapped in a sense of national and racial entitlement, according to which ‘old-stock Germans’ have a right to imperial privilege. The shift of message was accompanied by a shift of leadership as an upcoming brand of populists squeezed out the economics professors who founded the AfD.

The rise of a new right signalled the end of Merkel as superstar. A number of Conservatives were involved in establishing the AfD, a few others defected later. Others organized a hard-right current inside the CDU. The rest of the political spectrum, from moderate Conservatives to the left-wing Die Linke were left in stunned shock. Mostly affirming liberal principles against the AfD, sometimes pandering to right-wing tropes, these parties, including the CDU with its own hard-right current, came across as an insecure bloc against the emerging new right, which allowed the AfD to present itself as the only alternative to the ‘state-party-media’ system.

Paradoxically, the rise of the new right also led to the stabilization of the neoliberal centre that had been shaken by a series of economic and political crises since the end of the New Economy boom. Unable to restore the glitz and glamour that computers and stock markets generated around neoliberal globalization in the 1990s, not even able to restore the export-pride that marked Germany since the Great Recession and throughout the Euro-crisis, the neoliberal centre could at least present itself as a lesser evil. Compared to the hate and hooliganism coming from the right, Merkel,

unpretentious and modest throughout her political career, became the last representative of decency. After Merkel, things could only get worse. Nobody else in her party could play the same role. Becoming the ersatz Merkel was left to her Social Democratic finance minister Scholz. Like her, he could say: “you know me.”

Olaf Scholz and Angela Merkel at the signing of the coalition agreement for the 19th election period of the Bundestag, March 12, 2018. Photo from Wikimedia Commons.

Conservative hegemony, social democratic junior partnership

The CDU (CSU in Bavaria) has been the political centre of the ruling capitalist block throughout Germany’s post-war history. Built around a core of capitalists, large and small, and state functionaries, the party also attracted significant support from the petite bourgeoisie and the working class, notably through its ideological commitment to Catholicism and, to a lesser degree, Protestantism. After German unification in 1990, the CDU could even claim to be the true workers’ party as it attracted far more working class voters in the former communist East than either the Social Democrats or the SPD, the successor of the Socialist Unity Party which ruled the German Democratic Republic (GDR) throughout its existence from 1949 to 1990. However, working class enthusiasm for the CDU in post-communist East Germany cooled considerably as hopes for the kind of long boom that West Germany had already experienced from the 1950s to the 1970s were betrayed by unexpected and drastic economic decline. Despite that, the CDU remained pretty strong in the East, but never sank roots into post-communist society. Which was not a surprise as the economy was mostly dominated by West German or other Western companies, leaving only a few low-profit niches to East German entrepreneurs.

In the East, the Conservatives attracted voters but didn’t have the social basis to become a hegemonic force. The Social Democrats, on the other hand, had some of their

historical heartlands in the East. During the era of the 2nd International, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia had been key bastions of social democratic organizing. Back in those days, the party, unions, cultural and sports clubs were part of a counter-hegemonic bloc aspiring to replace bourgeois rule. The Nazis destroyed the organizations of that emerging bloc but not its ‘socialist civil society’ underpinnings. However, the founding of the communist-dominated Socialist Unity Party in 1948 and, a year later, the establishment of the GDR, brought this ‘society’ under tight communist control. Organizations founded and run by Social Democrats in the 19th century had been re-established very quickly after the defeat of the Nazis. The Communists didn’t destroy them, but incorporated them into their own organizational world. When Communist rule collapsed, Social Democrats hoped to reclaim their organizational heritage and become representatives of the working classes in their Eastern heartlands. It didn’t happen. After 40 years of ‘socialism from above,’ workers in the East had enough of anything that could possibly be seen as somehow socialist.

This was a bitter lesson for the Social Democrats, whose organizations in the East had been taken over by the Communists in the late 1940s while in the West they had sought to rid themselves of their socialist past. During the early years of the West German federal republic, while the Conservatives were establishing themselves as the natural ruling party, the Social Democrats dropped their commitments to the working class and presented themselves as a catch-all “people’s party.” In this regard they resembled the CDU which, in contrast with older conservative formations, no longer presented itself as the representative of the propertied classes. However, whereas the Conservatives were able to build their hegemony around core circles of capitalists and state functionaries, the Social Democrats were still rooted in working class organizations, notably unions, and integrated in the expanding welfare state as junior partners. Beyond their basis in the industrial working class, they also gained significant support from the

growing ranks of public sector workers.

In the early 1970s, it looked like an alliance of private and public sector workers, partially aligned with women's and student movements, could shift the balance of power in favour of the popular classes and push Social Democrats from being junior partners in managing the welfare state compromise to reformist socialism. This threat to capitalist class power, which coincided with the end of the post-war boom and accelerated inflation, triggered the neoliberal turn within the German bourgeoisie.

In 1975, responding to calls for austerity, the then governing SPD imposed the first welfare state cuts in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany. Modest in scope and short-lived, these cuts weren't the kind of principled austerity policy the Liberals wanted. For that, they had to quit the coalition government with the Social Democrats and elect the Conservative Chancellor Kohl. After a non-confidence vote brought him into office in 1982, Kohl won four consecutive elections and stayed in office until 1998.

His first election victory benefitted greatly from market populism, propagated by his own CDU, the FDP and corporate media, which successfully pinned responsibility for the turn from long boom to stagnation, accelerating inflation and mass unemployment on excessive state intervention and union meddling in business affairs. A key reason the neoliberal narrative gained so much traction—not least among working class voters who would later suffer the consequences of neoliberal practices—was that the left offered a cacophony of alternative stories. A small but vocal hard left called for revolutionary struggle in the face of capitalism's final hour. The Social Democrats were divided between a left-wing rallying troops for a gradual transition to socialism and a right-wing willing to accommodate calls for austerity to avoid the more drastic measures that could be expected from a Conservative government. Moreover, none of the left currents coming out of the socialist workers

movement really knew what to do with demands coming from women, students and environmentalists. Though some in these new social movements and some on the old left sought common ground, the relations between the old labour left and new social movements were strained. The more ground the right-wing gained inside the SPD, the more new social movement activists and a fair number of hard leftists were convinced that it was time to start something new, which led to the founding of the Green Party in 1980.

Schröder and Scholz: On and off the Third Way

Back in opposition, the Social Democrats eventually engaged more seriously with the equity and environmental concerns articulated by new social movements and the Greens. Towards the end of the 1980s, as hopes for a neoliberal trickle-down were fading, the time for a SPD-Green alliance seemed to be approaching. But it was delayed by the democracy movements, inspired by the last Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, triggering the fast, and unexpected unravelling of Soviet Communism—starting with the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and ending with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991.

Ideologically, German unification led to a nationalist backlash that saw West Germans taking pride in the economic achievements so enthusiastically embraced by their East German brothers and sisters as role model for their own future. East Germans were glad to escape their former 'big brother Soviet Union' and eager to show how productive they would be if party and state bureaucracies didn't hold them back. What Easterners and Westerners shared was a nationalist version of neoliberalism: a desire to show the world that Germany's is the most competitive economy. The nationalism in this version of neoliberalism was at odds with designs of neoliberal globalization, which, in their most radical versions, heralded the withering away of the state.

As significant parts of global manufacturing were relocated to Eastern Europe and, on a much larger scale, China, management techniques,

finance and ideology came from the West. Posing as master of a new world order, the US offered blueprints for a New Economy powered by computers and stock markets that would generate eternal prosperity.

Deindustrialization and unemployment rates reached 20 percent in East Germany during the first years after unification, leading to disillusionment. Paired with slow growth across the country, the decline of the East German economy also led to a massive increase in government debt. Kohl, the self-appointed liberator of market forces, looked increasingly like a lame duck big government depriving Germans of the opportunity to conquer the world market.

This was a welcome opportunity for the SPD, now firmly committed to an alliance with the Greens, to present themselves as innovators who would bring the American-style New Economy to Germany, blended with a modernized version of the European welfare-state and cautious steps towards more sustainable production. This strange brew, lumped together under the label "Third Way," sufficed to win the 1998 elections. However, hopes for Third Way prosperity were as short-lived as the excitement earlier in the decade about a made-in-unified-Germany prosperity. The end of the New Economy boom in the US made clear that the slight uptick of economic growth in late-1990s Germany was mainly driven by exports to the US. Once these slowed down, Germany entered a period of stagnation that was accompanied, as in the 1970s, by the bourgeoisie's calls for austerity.

If Helmut Schmidt introduced austerity to post-war Germany's policy toolbox in the late 1970s, the next SPD chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, was responsible for the most drastic cuts in post-war Germany. Echoing Margaret Thatcher's 1980s claim that "there is no alternative," Schröder enforced the cuts that his conservative predecessor, Kohl, had always called for but was smart enough to avoid. Schröder replaced Kohl's long-standing practice of death-by-a-thousand-cuts by a short series of massive cuts. It turned out that many voters had not voted SPD for its Third

Way rhetoric or New Economy fantasies but to put an end to 16 years of cuts. Instead they got more and deeper cuts. Feeling bitterly betrayed, voters left the party along with large numbers of members and party activists. In this situation, it was easy for Merkel to gain popularity simply by ending the Schröder cuts.

While a decline in voter support and membership didn't keep the SPD out of office, it did suffer a long-term loss of trust, as did the CDU. The founding of the Greens in 1980, the Party of Democratic Socialism in 1990, which joined with SPD-dissidents to form Die Linke in 2007, and the creation of the AfD in 2013 are the political expression of long brewing crises of representation and legitimacy. The fragmentation of the party system made it increasingly difficult to obtain government majorities. The CDU and the SPD didn't enter coalition governments out of conviction, nor were they elected with that mandate, but because it was the easiest, sometimes only, option. Since the last election a different option is on the table, although the new party mix will probably not bring about much change in policies.

Die Linke, commonly referred to as the Left Party, proposed tax-increases for the rich and deficit spending to pay for a social-ecological transition. Photo courtesy B5 Aktuell Radio.

Still no alternatives?

The far-right AfD certainly represents an alternative in terms of style. Apart from openly neo-Nazi formations, which have remained on the fringes of post-war Germany's political system, no other party ever spewed out racist and sexist hate-speech as openly and loudly as the AfD, which now also hurls insults against environmentalists. However, the policies promoted by the party are just another variety of neoliberalism. Where Kohl, and sometimes Merkel, propagated nationalist neoliberalism, and Schröder sought to reconcile neoliberal globalization with a watered-down version of welfare statism, the AfD offers 'neoliberalism in one country.' Schröder openly embraced globalization but even the Conservatives were very careful to

secure world market access for German companies. They wanted Germany to conquer the world market, not run away from it like the AfD. If there is one constant in the history of the Federal Republic, it is its export-oriented policies. Unless the world market disintegrates entirely, as it did in the 1930s, the German bourgeoisie has no interest in a party advocating a closed economy, even if it is consistent with the rest of the party's program.

To be sure, bourgeois endorsement, or lack thereof, is only one factor affecting electoral success. For the time being, the AfD thrives on its image as sole opposition party. This role relies on its use of hate and fear as readily available expressions of hurt feelings of justice, disappointment, insecurity and fear. Serving up scapegoats in a dystopian world reflects these sentiments, but also locks them in. There is no escape from the hate around which the AfD mobilizes and no way out of the conditions that produce discontent in the first place. The party relies so much on psychological appeal that its actual policies are virtually unknown to its voters. Lockdowns, mask-mandates and vaccination campaigns during the COVID-19 pandemic offered more opportunities for scapegoating, but this was only appealing to a hard core of people who gravitated to new right politics before the crisis. Claims to defend individual freedom against an authoritarian state led to a radicalization within this group. However, they alienated others who may welcome calls for fewer immigrants, feminists and environmentalists but don't identify with the increasingly rowdy style of the AfD and the mob around it, and don't object to wearing masks and getting vaccinated.

Unlike the AfD, Die Linke does indeed offer policy alternatives. Although they overlap with SPD and Green election platforms, the policies put forward by Die Linke are more coherent and far-reaching. If applied, they would have the effect of reducing social inequality and shifting environmental policy from e-car hype to reducing solo automobile use and other energy-intensive activities. In

contrast with the incoherent balance-the-budget-while-boosting-public-investment policies enshrined in the coalition agreement of the new government, Die Linke proposed tax-increases for the rich and deficit spending to pay for a social-ecological transition.

If a Green New Deal were to emerge, it would have to come from a coalition that includes Die Linke, not the Liberals. During the election campaign, the very prospect of such a coalition was met with hysterical warnings of a socialist takeover of Germany by the CDU and the AfD. Cornering the Social Democrats by likening them to the East German communists was standard fare in Conservative election campaigns throughout the Cold War. But rehashing anti-communist tropes more than 30 years later didn't prevent the Conservatives from being defeated at the ballot-box. And it probably didn't hurt Die Linke either. No one who feared a return of the Bolsheviks in Die Linke's clothing considered voting for Die Linke in the first place and anyone who might have considered it wasn't scared off by the warnings coming from CDU and hard-right quarters.

The reasons for the defeat of Die Linke, whose vote share fell from 9.2 percent in 2017 to 4.9 percent in this year's election, lie elsewhere. First, the very possibility that the SPD might pursue something akin to social democratic policies persuaded many former Die Linke voters to return to the SPD. Second, the Greens, who were more committed to neoliberal economic policies than even the Third Way-SPD for a while, embraced social policies more than ever before. Moreover, despite proposing more moderate environmental policies than Die Linke, the Greens successfully claimed ownership of environmental issues. In short, anyone seeking 'something social' votes SPD, while anyone seeking 'something green' votes Green; anyone seeking both is happy to see Social Democrats and Greens aligned. The third reason for Die Linke's defeat is that much of its original voter base in East Germany, which comprises people who either entirely opposed German unification or objected to the terms under which

the West German state and capital pushed it through, has died in the meantime. After all, the GDR ceased to exist over 30 years ago.

There might have been other reasons as well for the defeat of Die Linke. The paradox facing the party is that while

the policies it proposes score high in opinion polls, few people associate the policies they like with the party that advances them. More often than not, people vote for parties advancing policies that they don't like, as in the case of CDU and the AfD, or parties

like the SPD and the Greens whose willingness to cater to voter preferences exceeds their readiness to act.

17 December 2021

Source *Canadian Dimension*.

Help Afghan Women. Do Not Recognize the Taliban Government.

17 December 2021, by **Frieda Afary**

What is the current situation of masses of women in Afghanistan both in the cities and in the rural areas? There are reports that some parents are selling their infant daughters to pay for food. How common is this and what happens to the infant girls who are sold?

The situation of urban and rural Afghan masses and women is not so different. Both are suffering from war, fundamentalism, feudalism, poverty, and rape. The Taliban have banned high school, university, and work for all women, and women are not allowed to appear in media. Recently, the Taliban have assassinated some women such as Arzu, Frozan, Safi, and Nigar. They are brutally crushing all the women's protests and try to suppress women's voices. Although the Taliban are trying to present a "moderate" face to fool the world, so they can be diplomatically recognized, in reality, they haven't changed. They are the same creatures from the Stone Age.

Yes, there are many incidents, where parents are forced to sell one of their children to feed the rest. It is solely done due to poverty and it is not a common practice. Mostly, the buyer pays half the money, and once the child gets a little older, the remaining amount is paid, and the child is moved to the new house.

What types of expressions of solidarity has RAWA received from

women in other countries, both in the area and globally?

RAWA always calls on freedom-loving women and men around the world to express their solidarity with the oppressed and tormented people of Afghanistan. We repeatedly say that you are our voices on the world stage, especially in this period, when the Taliban savages are trying to suppress the voice of every opponent, especially of women.

And thanks to the progressive organizations and individuals who are always expressing their support and solidarity with us. They have even arranged for protests and campaigns in solidarity with Afghan women and in particular RAWA. They arrange for fund raising events for us. Every day, we receive warm and encouraging messages of solidarity and support from around the world: Latin America, USA, Europe, Kurdistan, Turkey, Iran, India, Australia, etc. When the Taliban took over the country, we received hundreds of messages from around the world including from Hong Kong.

What do you think about the efforts of China, Russia, Pakistan, and some representatives of the U.S. and European governments to justify diplomatic recognition for the Taliban in the name of promoting humanitarian assistance for the Afghan people?

Afghanistan is like a cake and every

big power and regional country wants to have its share/slice from this war-torn country. They are struggling for their own geopolitical gains and to have an upper hand over the country to take advantage of its strategic location, natural resources, and opium.

The claims of governments to defending women's rights, human rights, and civil freedoms are just lies. They are making these excuses against their rivals. The roles which the U.S, Europe, China, Russia, and Pakistan have played in Afghanistan have been very destructive and militaristic. China, Russia, and their allies are also competing with the United States and do not care about the plight of the Afghan people. They are advocating diplomatic recognition for the Taliban to provide a cover for their support for this terrorist organization and to promote their own imperialist plans in Afghanistan.

The U.S. used the slogan of democracy and "war on terror" to promote an imperialist occupation and a corrupt U.S.-backed government for 20 years and to force this government on the Afghan people. The U.S. has shown that it can make peace with the Taliban when it is in its interest. All these governments use the very real need for humanitarian aid to justify diplomatic recognition of the Taliban.

So far, the only large amounts of aid sent to the Taliban have been from

China and Pakistan. It is clear that the criminal Taliban government is not concerned about the abject poverty of the masses. Taliban leaders have proclaimed that hunger is the will of God. If given access to frozen Afghan government funds, the Taliban would most likely help the families of their own suicide bombers. So far, humanitarian aid and medical equipment sent to Afghanistan through the Taliban have been mostly distributed among their militias.

What are some ways of sending humanitarian aid to the people of

Afghanistan without being dependent on the Taliban?

Relief aid and large donations can still be sent through the World Health Organization. UNICEF has also been able to pay medical and educational staff without going through the Taliban network. Those who wish to send smaller donations for Afghan women, can contact Afghan Women's Mission which is based in the U.S. The address is <https://www.afghanwomensmission.org/2010/08/make-a-donation/>.

Funds sent to RAWA through the

Afghan Women's Mission would be used to distribute basic food to needy families, especially to single-women headed households. We also promote literacy among poor and rural women. With more funds, we hope to establish underground clinics and schools for women and girls. RAWA would also appreciate solidarity through the publication of articles that tell the truth about what is happening in Afghanistan.

12 December 2021

Source [*New Politics*](#).

The permanent hold-up in DRC

16 December 2021, by Paul Martial

Kabila, who was in power in the DRC for 18 years, set up a system of embezzlement using BGFI, the Gabonese and French International Bank. This bank was founded by two pillars of Françafrique, the Bongo family in Gabon and the Sassou Nguesso family in Congo-Brazzaville. These two families are linked, Omar Bongo being Nguesso's son-in-law.

Kabila as predator

Joseph Kabila has appropriated large parts of the country's economy by using public funds to finance his companies. These include Egal, a company that imports meat and fish, Sotexki, a textile company, Port de Fisher with a luxury yacht as an asset, and simple shell companies such as Sud Oil. Another source of funding for Kabila was mining contracts with large bribes, especially those with Chinese companies. As for international aid, it has been wasted. For example, the Francophonie summit which, for a two-day meeting, cost 90 million euros, partly financed by French official development assistance. Kabila and his relatives opened accounts for their shell companies at the DRC's BGFI. The

latter made international transfers using its French subsidiary or other institutions such as Citybank and Commerce Bank. The "Congo Hold-up" documents uncovered concussions amounting to 350 million euros.

But while the bulk of the documents focus on the Kabila clan, they also implicate two close advisers of the current president, Félix Tshisekedi.

The consequences of corruption

This corruption is obviously condemnable from a moral point of view, and economically damaging because of the loss of revenue for the DRC. As the World Bank states: "DRC has the third largest population of poor globally. Poverty in DRC is high, remains widespread and pervasive, and is increasing due to impacts from COVID-19. In 2018, it was estimated that 73% of the Congolese population, equaling 60 million people, lived on less than \$1.90 a day (the international poverty rate)." [[The World Bank [The World Bank in DRC](#).]

But the corruption of leaders also totally perverts the political system.

Indeed, it fuels the construction and maintenance of clientelist networks, often ethnic. This has a deleterious effect on the country's social cohesion. Elections become a formidable market where votes, among an increasingly impoverished population, are bought for a few dollars. This is how we arrive at paradoxes, where for a presidential election, the cost per voter is higher in Madagascar than in the USA.

This way of running the country not only perverts the democratic process, it sometimes annihilates it. The issue of staying in power becomes vital, encouraged by those closest to them. To this end, leaders deploy strategies ranging from manipulation of constitutions to widespread electoral fraud.

These large-scale corruption systems are encouraged by the capitalist system. The race for natural resources, sometimes scarce but indispensable in the manufacture of certain products, pushes multinationals to bribe rulers to obtain exploitation permits, thus maintaining the international division of labour that is fatal to poor countries. This corruption is perfectly integrated into the international economic system because most of the money embezzled

Is Johnson losing his Teflon?

15 December 2021, by **Dave Kellaway**

The *Mirror* journalist told BBC TV Breakfast programme that they had heard stories, since January last year, about parties held in the Prime Ministers' offices during the 2020 Covid lockdown. Such parties were illegal under the pandemic rules of the time. A recent anonymous arrival of a brown envelope with more details allowed them to put proper resources into the story a few weeks ago. Other newspapers must have been aware of the rumours but had done nothing. Unsurprisingly this reflects their pro-Tory bias. They give Johnson a comfortable ride compared to the merciless smears and attacks on Jeremy Corbyn, the former leftwing leader of the Labour Party. Sources now suggest that some of their journalists or owners had been at one or two of these Christmas parties.

In any case Johnson, as a consequence of his inbred dishonesty and lying, has already had to change his story from a week ago. Previously in Parliament he denied any breaking of rules or even accepting that a proper party had taken place. Today he says that "he had been assured" no such event had happened and in any case he was asking the cabinet secretary to investigate. That is a bit like the police investigating the police or Yorkshire cricket club checking on racism. [17] The investigator-in-chief might well have gone to one of these events. Reports now point to perhaps six or seven parties held in government offices. At least three are now being officially investigated.

Real damage has been done by the Allegra Stratton video. She was the prime minister's press spokeswoman and the video showed her doing a practice question and answer session with other aides. She is seen

struggling to answer a question about a Christmas party and breaking down into giggles about it. Anyone seeing it could deduce such a party had indeed taken place. Seeing Johnson's closest advisors with their upper class accents laughing out loud about the "cheese and wine" party takes a prize for the most politically self-destructive act of the year. For people who actually followed the rules and were not able to be close to their loved ones in their final moments this must have been bitter viewing. Experts in political communications know that most folk do not read serious newspapers, consume speeches or follow parliamentary questions but they do watch the news or follow social media and this is mostly visual. Striking images and sound bites trump thousands of finely crafted words. Johnson knows this better than anyone - remember the Brexit bus emblazoned with the £650 million a week for the NHS slogan (claiming that Brexit would release this extra money) or the campaign poster of the "Turkish" migrants queuing to get into Britain. What poetic justice if he is being skewered by another powerful image... of Stratton giggling at her entitlement!

Ingrained in the British ruling class is this sense of entitlement. There are rules for the little people and another set of more flexible ones for them. So delinquent actions in restaurants at the elite universities of Oxford and Cambridge get a soft glove treatment from the police compared to the way poorer black kids in Hackney are treated just for congregating together on the streets. It means if, like Boris Johnson when mayor of London, you are sleeping with businesswoman Jennifer Arcuri you can bung them some public money to help their

business without any of the usual transparency procedures. It might be too much to hope for that the press might actually take up this case. You could write more than one book on Johnson's flouting of the normal rules of public or political life. One minor story is that he would just accumulate parking tickets rather than park properly like anybody else. More seriously he once admitted on the telephone that he would sort out somebody for his Eton elite private school buddy, Darius Guppy. He could arrange a "couple of black eyes". Of course police involvement was nil.

While the video has helped explode the story it is also being used cynically by Johnson. Basically he can point to these sneering advisors - whom he personally appointed - and say it was nothing to do with me. Sajiv Javid, the Health minister, adopted the same line this morning after refusing to be interviewed yesterday. It takes a day to get a defence line organized. Johnson has already rushed to push Stratton under the bus and no doubt others will follow. She tearfully "resigned" outside her multi-million pound London house. We can only hope that somebody at one of these parties took a photo on their mobile. Even better if a selfie shows Johnson there. Organizing the scapegoats will surely involve some inducements to delete all photos. So far one photo showing Johnson leading a Christmas quiz has emerged but since it has him on a screen rather than socializing with a drink in his hand, it is not the knockout blow required.

Johnson is hoping that the hasty announcement of Covid plan B measures will squeeze the scandal off the front pages. He went on national TV to address the nation about the

imposition of new Covid restrictive measures and was seen in various vaccination sites the day after. News media has been full of the million jabs a day target that he is championing and the Christmas party scandal has been squeezed off the front pages. This is classic Johnson booster, "man of the people" mode. He thinks this may pull him through the crisis.

His problem is that there is a direct link to Covid. How can you expect people to follow the rules now if the people making the rules are not following them? This morning, in my local supermarket, about 50 per cent were maskless. When I asked somebody on the till what the store was doing to encourage masks he mumbled something about not being given any instructions. What chance has a shop worker have of confronting shoppers if the Prime minister's team do not give a damn? Labour, for once, has taken on a bolder opposition emphasizing "It is one rule for them and another rule for us."

Starmer, Labour leader, at last, finally, went on the attack in Prime Minister's questions on the House of Commons and did a decent job in exposing the cynical dishonesty and incompetence of Johnson. He skilfully contrasted the partying insiders with real stories of people who were not able to be with their loved ones at Xmas or as they were dying. Having said that, it would indeed have been like a striker missing a completely open goal, if he had failed to land any punches. How many points would Labour be ahead in the polls if this had been his approach from day one of the pandemic rather than his line of "constructive opposition" that he adopted until quite recently?

So far Johnson's political career has been remarkable - he won London, the Brexit referendum and the 2019

election. His surfing of the shift to the right in society and politics over a number of years, as a consequence of the defeat of working-class communities and the failure of Labourism, has meant, like Trump, his personal lack of ethics has been ignored or tolerated. His bumbling, philandering and boosterism makes him appear more likeable for many people. Incompetent and immoral he may be, but he has a finely tuned political nose. He recognized that the reactionary Brexit project could bring him to power so he screwed up the position paper he had written arguing remain and never looked back (the story goes that he had written a Remain article and a Brexit article). His cuddling up to Nigel Farage's far right United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and then swallowing them whole was skilfully done. Behind the hail-fellow-well-met demeanour of course there is a bit of steel and ruthlessness. Unlike Corbyn he cleared out his pro-EU opposition before the 2019 election and is capable of dumping people at the drop of a hat. People often do not take him seriously enough but his authoritarian attitude to parliament, democratic rights and legal safeguards is very dangerous for the labour movement and us all. Repressive legislation on protests, migrants and judicial review is all currently underway.

Up to now he has kept the Tory party and his Brexit-based electoral base together. Voters factor in his dishonesty and poor ethics and voted for him on transactional grounds - either to get Brexit done or to stop Corbyn winning. His MPs will put up with his serious failings if they think it will mean they will keep their seats. If there are signs that voters may become disaffected either in the "red wall" seats just won from Labour in its heartlands or "blue wall" seats in traditional Tory areas, then we may

see moves to replace him. The Shropshire bye-election on 16 December may be an important indicator of the way the wind is blowing. Last week's Bexley bye-election vote was not a knock-out blow although the low turnout and reduced majority showed things may be shifting. Labour benefited from a 10 point swing from the Tories but hardly mobilized its base either and the result still did not point to a majority Labour government.

Socialists need to shout about the scandals but also work to support struggles for wage increases, to defend the National Health Service/public spending and to oppose the bills attacking the NHS, migrants/asylum seekers and the rights to protest. A number of successful local wage struggles show that there is a new potential for fighting back. Any crises in the ruling party can boost the confidence of those looking for change.

We should support the resistance but also call on Labour not just to perform in parliament but to get behind every strike and every campaign. Starmer thinks the way to win the next election is to convince the establishment that Labour can be trusted not to threaten capitalist interests in any way or form. He is therefore unlikely to fully support migrant and asylum seekers or clearly defend the right to protest. Refusing to support his own conference's policy for a £15 minimum hourly wage is not going to help Labour mobilise its base.

Anti*Capitalist Resistance exists to help group socialists who see the need for an alternative to both Johnson and Starmer's solutions to the social, economic and ecological crises.

9 December 2021

Source [Anti*Capitalist Resistance](#).

The new, young and radical feminist

movement, at the forefront of popular resistance in Greece!

14 December 2021, by **Sonia Mitralia**

It all started when the Mitsotakis government tried to align itself with the most reactionary and obscurantist neoliberal forces on the planet, launching a frontal assault on women's human rights. Fortunately, this did not take into account the revival of the feminist movement, which took up the challenge - and this is how it went!

The case of the “unborn child”

Encouraged by the victory of the right wing “New Democracy” party in the 2019 parliamentary elections, the Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Church invented, on the first Sunday after Christmas, a day dedicated to the “unborn child”. They said this decision was taken in order to protect the life of the child before birth and solve the demographic problem of the Greek nation!

36 years after the legalization of abortion in Greece - thanks to a very progressive law, passed in 1986 after an assiduous struggle lasting nearly ten years by the feminist movement - the Greek Orthodox Church thus gave the signal for a frontal attack on this hard-won right.

A few days before New Year in 2020 and on the day dedicated to the “unborn child”, the front page of a sports magazine (!) caused a tsunami of indignation on social media. On its cover was depicted a large hand, holding a ridiculously small foetus in its palm, while underneath it was written in bold capital letters, the sentence: “LET ME LIVE”.

Despite the reactions of social media, the Minister of Development - the notorious racist and former neo-fascist Adonis Georgiadis - was quick to

congratulate the magazine, saying that Greece having twice as many abortions (300,000 per year, according to his exaggerated claims) as births would cause the country to lack nearly a million children, and would pose a problem for the survival of the Nation.

A few days later, giant posters appeared in the Athens metro with the same message and the same foetus. And authorship of this anti-abortion campaign was claimed by a long list of fundamentalist Orthodox Christian associations...

But the retrograde and obscurantist Orthodox Church did not act alone; it enjoyed the support of many ministers and senior government officials. After another public outcry, the Ministry of Transport quickly ordered the removal of the posters. But these attacks on abortion rights were only the prelude to what would follow.

Influenced by regimes like Orban's in Hungary, the Mitsotakis government took a first step to give itself a pro-natalist profile and decided to rename the “General Secretariat for Gender Equality” - an institution also born from the second wave feminist movement - as “Secretary General for Demographic and Family Policy and Gender Equality”.

The return of the father's law

But other attacks would follow. The New Democracy government clearly showed this by adopting in May 2021 a law on joint parental authority which reformed key articles of the Civil Code in terms of family law.

It was truly a crucial moment for women and children who are victims

of domestic violence. This bill came into being after having been long demanded by a very chauvinist and aggressive lobby of neoliberal, violent and vulgar fathers. The latter joined forces with the N.D. government on the basis of their common interests and around a pro-family discourse.

Thus, the government revised what had been the quintessence of family law and is still very progressive today, achieved in 1983. This law was a real anti-patriarchal revolution because it replaced the right of the father - progenitor - (paternal power) by parental authority.

Now, after the dissolution of marriage, unlike the 1983 law, the new law imposes compulsory joint parental custody, so the child is forced to spend 1/3 of their time with the parent with whom they don't usually live, even if they don't wish to do so. Even when the father is violent, the child's desires are not taken into account. To remove communication from an abusive parent, you need a final judgment. This can last for years or never happen, because going to court in Greece is difficult - it costs money and a lot of stress and women from single-parent families are vulnerable, poor and destitute, being in a situation of incredible distress, accentuated even more by the austerity policies imposed in the name of debt and the pandemic. All this means that an abusive father can harass, rape and dispose of the child as he pleases, but also use the law to blackmail, indict, perhaps even criminalize mothers who simply want to protect their children and who risk their safety and their lives.

The draft law was severely criticised by Greek lawyers for its legal weakness and the violation of human rights and the Istanbul Convention it entailed. It was also rejected by all

women's organizations and the feminist movement, which faced a hate campaign led by the unleashed and misogynistic fathers' lobby, supported by almost every major media outlet in the country.

When the law was passed by the majority - against most of the opposition parties in the Greek Parliament - the fanatics of the fathers' lobby celebrated on social media and made physical threats against the country's judges and prosecutors to force them to apply the law in favour of fathers: for example, the "Equal Parental Rights" group wrote: "we direct the heavy artillery against the JUDICIARY, we load, we start and we wait! Let those of our members who disclose what is happening in our group, inform the Union of Judges and Prosecutors that they are now in our sights."

In short, these masculinist groups have become extremely dangerous: Their anti-feminism, their culture of virility, the reconstruction of a hegemonic masculinity constitute ideological gateways to the most extreme right and sooner or later they will move increasingly to violent action at the social and not merely familial level.

The eruption of Greek #MeToo and the awakening of consciousness

The picture is bleak, but in mid-January 2021, in the midst of the pandemic, more than three years after the emergence of the #Metoo movement in the United States, the Greek #MeToo burst onto the

forefront of the country's social and political scene.

The Greek #Metoo was triggered by the revelations of Sofia Bekatorou,⁴³ a two-time Olympic sailing medallist (gold and bronze), who publicly claimed to have been raped at the age of 21 by a senior official of the Greek Sailing Federation. Addressing all women who have been sexually assaulted, she sent the message: "Break the silence, speak!"

This year also, the emergence of the Greek #MeToo has helped to mature feminist consciousness in the face of the most atrocious form of gender violence, femicide. The murder of Eleni Topaloudi in November 2018 in Rhodes - a 21-year-old student, raped, tortured by two young men, thrown into the sea while still alive - helped introduce the term "femicide" into everyday language.

But it was also this year - especially this summer - that throughout the country, from Athens to Thessaloniki, from Crete to the Cyclades islands, there were successive murders of women by their partners. However, this time, the difference with the very recent past was eye-opening: the media talked about it rather extensively, tongues were loosened, political parties were abandoning their usual silence, and above all, women were taking to the streets, feminists in the lead, to shout their anger and call for solidarity!

The renewal of the feminist movement

Here is another example of the revival of feminism: Last June, an advertising spot asked women... to procreate, especially those who had "aged" and

had been too preoccupied with their careers and thus neglected interest in their fertility. It was an advertisement for the "1st Panhellenic Fertility Conference" which was supported by the church, assisted reproduction companies, the "Secretary General of Population and Family Policy and Gender Equality", the public broadcaster (ERT) and the President of the Hellenic Republic herself. But, after a new public outcry, President Katerina Sakellaropoulou was forced to withdraw her support for the Conference and almost all official participants did the same... the conference was cancelled. It was a total fiasco!

Eventually, the Mitsotakis government was able to pass its joint parental authority bill - narrowly - but even the pro-government media admitted that it was a Pyrrhic victory. Feminist resistance has sown trouble even within the Council of Ministers and caused dissension even in the parliamentary group of New Democracy. It was the first time since its formation in 2019 that the right-wing government has undergone a crisis and, by common admission, responsibility for this absolute novelty lay with the feminist movement.

The conclusion is not difficult: 2021 has seen the birth in Greece of a renewal of the feminist movement, young, radical but also unitary, which already occupies the forefront of popular struggles against the Holy Alliance of neoliberal reaction and nationalist and orthodox obscurantism. The event is significant, almost historic, in a conservative and disoriented Greek society, which is always seeking a left worthy of its name.

What comes next promises to be exciting...

A scathing disavowal of Macron's African policy in Burkina Faso

13 December 2021, by Paul Martial

Certainly this staging was inspired by the report of the Centre d'analyse de prévision et de stratégie (Centre for Analysis of Forecasting and Strategy - CAPS) which in its note of April 2020 indicated: "We must anticipate the discrediting of the political authorities" and "urgently support the emergence of other forms of credible African authorities to address the people" - the new interlocutors would be "religious authorities, diasporas, popular artists" and "neo-liberal businessmen".

Crisis and neo-colonial reality

However, the Montpellier summit did not manage to hide the reality of a France that supports African governments as long as they serve its own agenda. Thus, Paris will criticize the coup d'état in Mali, but covers for the seizure of power by the son of the dictator Déby and ignores the third term of the Ivorian Ouattara.

At the military level, Operation Barkhane turned out to be a real fiasco. Those who applauded this intervention did not see that the Sahel crisis is above all political. Moreover, we should speak of "crises" in the plural. Some are recurrent like the antagonism between livestock raisers and farmers, others are disagreements within a community, and can be religious, or social. What they have in common is that they offer jihadists an opportunity to establish themselves. While these crises are not new,

frameworks once existed to enable their peaceful resolution. The weakening of states due to structural adjustment policies, the scarcity of resources and the increase in social inequalities, accompanied by corruption, have shattered these mediations.

Rumours and confrontation

The episode of the recent blockade across Burkina Faso of the French military convoy illustrates the crisis between French and African elites on the one hand and the people on the other. Starting from the French military base of Port-Bouët in the suburbs of Abidjan in the Ivory Coast, a large logistical convoy of the army was supposed to reach Gao in Mali. On arrival in Burkina Faso the convoy was blocked, first in Bobo Dioulasso and then in Kaya. Protesters were injured by French and/or Burkinabe warning shots. In an attempt to defuse the mobilization, the government shut down the internet as dictatorships traditionally do. Protesters suspected that this convoy would provide aid to the jihadists. Some commentators scoff at these accusations. without saying anything about Le Drian's statement that the Russians' hand is behind the blockade.

Such rumours are fostered by the repeated lies of the French army in Africa. Whether it is denials of responsibility for the bombing of a

wedding in Bounti in Mali that left 22 dead or complicity with the Egyptian dictatorship in the context of Operation Sirli. In this recent case, the information provided by the French General Staff was used to neutralize traffickers on the border between Egypt and Libya.

A wounded country

Burkina Faso has been hard hit by jihadist violence, nearly 1.3 million people have been displaced, fleeing conflicts. The attack on the Inata barracks where more than 50 gendarmes were killed was a shock to the country. A barracks that was no longer being provisioned. A situation that exacerbates the reproaches of the inefficiency of Barkhane and his collaboration with Burkinabe generals who pay more attention to managing their personal business affairs. The people perceive the French army as above all a support to African leaders who, in their eyes, have lost all dignity before Macron. Indeed, he can afford to summon them to Pau to renew their allegiance to France. But also, to make derogatory jokes about President Kaboré during his invitation to Ouagadougou. Macron would never behave thus to a leader of a Western country.

The convoy is now passing through Niger but here also it is meeting violently repressed demonstrations. This reveals the growing rejection of France's African policy.

2 December 2021

"The population will not accept the result of a consultation organized under the current conditions"

12 December 2021

We, the participants of the Yes camp, hope that this final consultation of the Nouméa Accord will take place in a serene and peaceful climate; everyone can see that this will not be the case. Since 6 September 2021, our country has been hard hit by the health crisis. The death toll continues to rise and the time has come for compassion and condolences for the families. The Covid-19 has created a climate of anxiety, the population is divided on the vaccination obligation and the health pass, both among the Yes and No supporters, in addition to its impact on the world of work, from sensitive sectors to those impacted by the reduction in their turnover. [...]

A biased consultation

The final declaration of the Nainville-les-Roches round table of 12 July 1983 opened a 38-year long period in which the Kanak people decided to share their right to self-determination with the other ethnic groups present in New Caledonia. We invited the victims of colonial history, who no longer have any other country, to be part of us, through three consultations and through Caledonian citizenship. This citizenship open to others also provides non-Kanak citizens and communities with a political guarantee of equal treatment and inclusion in the common destiny. It secures the future of the populations concerned. It is the matrix of the legitimized people of this Country. Is there a forced march towards the destruction of this living together?

We refuse to be locked in, as the French State is trying to force us to do, in a choice between a solitary independence of rupture and a new status in France with the enlargement of the specific electoral body to the citizens of this Country. The State's document on the consequences of Yes

and No does not enjoy consensus. It was judged as "being neither more nor less than a propaganda manifesto for the No" by the 39th FLNKS congress on 21 August in Nouméa, and by the other pro-independence movements. [...]

An irrevocable decision of non-participation

The Minister for Overseas France limits his arguments to a health situation that has become acceptable, without addressing the question of the social climate. In all countries, health and social issues go hand in hand, never one without the other. It would be more appropriate to work on the conditions for organizing a new electoral campaign and voting modalities for a consultation whose date would be agreed for September or October 2022 depending on the health situation, which would however, by that time, have continued in the local way of life.

The Nouméa Accord provides that in the event of a third No, the political forces will discuss the situation thus created. We will only respect the outcome of the last consultation if it takes place in a calm and peaceful social climate and after a fair campaign.

If the French State decides to maintain the date of 12 December, the political groups have already given notice of their irrevocable decision not to participate by not sending any propaganda material to the control commission for the referendum consultation.

Refusal of any commitment to the

transition period

If the French state decides to maintain the date of 12 December, who will be around the table to discuss the following day? We won't be there. We do not feel committed to the timetable of a period, transitional or otherwise, that would take us to June 2023.

The consequence of maintaining the date of 12 December will make it impossible to be serene about our institutional and economic future in the short or medium term. The French state will have to assume sole responsibility for the situation thus created. The population will not accept the result of a third consultation organized under the current conditions. When the time comes, if necessary, we will point out to the international community the failings, the underbelly and the shortcomings of a backward-looking state that does not keep its word and clings to the reductive schemes of yesteryear. The time of colonization is over.

Our future will be one of full and complete sovereignty, because today what divides us is French neo-colonization. We must put an end to this situation once and for all. We have always reiterated our desire to define a new link with France or other countries, as advocated in the [Nouméa Accord](#). [18] This choice is that of a sovereign State free to co-construct interdependence, as Jean-Marie Tjibaou stated. The deepening of these interdependencies or partnerships must be at the heart of the reflection on a project referendum for the 3rd consultation. But if it is absolutely necessary to choose between freedom and these interdependencies, then we will choose our freedom.

8 December 2021

Translated by *International Viewpoint* from [L'Anticapitaliste](#).

Supreme Court May End Federal Abortion Protection—What's To Be Done?

11 December 2021, by Dan La Botz

The case before the court, *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health*, is a Mississippi state law that bans abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy. For decades in most states, women had the right, set by another Supreme Court decision (*Casey v. Planned Parenthood*), that permitted abortion until the fetus became viable, usually defined at 24 to 28 weeks, so as not to impose on women an "undue burden" in getting an abortion. If the Supreme Court upholds the Mississippi law, that would overturn *Casey* and would encourage other states to pass even more restrictive laws. Or the court could simply overturn *Roe* completely, since there is no clear rationale for choosing 15 weeks.

How did we get here? First, Republicans who are overwhelmingly opposed to abortion rights, dominate the majority of state governments. In 23 of the 50 states, they are in complete control and in 12 states there are divided governments. Working with the anti-abortion organizations, Republicans introduce dozens of anti-abortion laws every year, so today more than one-third of states already have 20-week abortion bans.

Second, when former president Donald Trump ran for office in 2016,

he promised to appoint justices who would overturn *Roe*. Once in office, he did so, appointing three anti-abortion judges giving the conservatives a 6 to 3 majority on the court. Liberal Justice Sonia Sotomayor asked, "Will this institution survive the stench that this creates in the public perception that the constitution and its reading are just political acts?" A recent poll finds 61 percent of Americans believe the court is motivated by politics, not law.

What mistakes did the abortion rights movement make that led to this situation? The biggest mistake was the failure of the leading organizations, particularly Planned Parenthood, to take on the Hyde Amendment. In 1976, Henry Hyde, a Republican congressman, succeeded in getting the U.S. Congress to pass a law banning federal funding for abortions. That effectively made it impossible for many poor women and women of color who depended on Medicaid to pay for abortion.

The white women who led the national groups failed to make a fight over Hyde, which would have entailed organizing poor and working-class women and women of color at the grassroots. As journalist Amy Littlefield writes, "Over the next several years, the Supreme Court

upheld restrictions on public funding of abortion that effectively made abortion access in America a two-tiered system: Those with resources could get one, and many of those without could not."

What can be done now? Many progressives want President Joseph Biden and the Democrats to change the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court is now made up of nine justices who serve for life and can only be removed by impeachment. Since the founding of the court there have been 115 justices and only one has been impeached. The court has no set number of justices and has varied from 5 to 10, but since 1869 has had 9, so some advocate that Biden should expand the court and appoint more justices. President Franklin D. Roosevelt attempted such a move in 1937, but it failed in Congress. An expanded court is not likely to be adopted.

Many women on the left argue that we need a new women's movement to fight for abortion rights, a movement made up of not only white middle class women, but including and led by working women and the poor. Polls indicate that about two-thirds of Americans support abortion rights, so building such a movement is doable.

The elections and the conservative way out of the crisis in Chile

10 December 2021, by Igor Goicovic Donoso

If we follow this same train of thought, this is also fewer than those who voted on the plebiscite for the approval of

the Constitutional Convention of October 2020 (50.95%), but much more than those who participated in the election for delegates to the constitutional convention in May 2021 (41.51%). Without a doubt, the most worry data continues to be that more than half of the population entitled to vote is not doing so, thus revealing the profound fragility of the Chilean democratic system.

And as has been the case in recent years, the highest percentage of electoral abstention occurs in the working-class electorates of the country. Working-class electorates such as La Pintana (40.31%), Independencia (41.06%), Estación Central (42.53%), San Ramón (42.68%), Lo Espejo (42.90%), Cerro Navia (43.14%) or Recoleta (44.18%), show lower voting rates than the national average. Additionally, we can see that in these electorates, for example in La Pintana, the presidential candidates representing the conservative bourgeoisie (Kast, Parisi and Sichel), collectively obtain 38.27% of the votes. In other words, more than 1/3 of the voters in working class electorates vote for representatives of the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, electorates in which the dominant classes of our country reside, such as Vitacura (69.01%), Barnechea (65.33%) or Las Condes (63.27%), continue to show high levels of electoral participation and, in these, the candidates representing the most conservative political positions prevail by a huge margin. In the electorate of Vitacura, for example, the conservative candidates obtained 85.88% of the votes. Consequently, it is not surprising that the ultra-conservative candidate, José Antonio Kast, obtained the first majority in yesterday's elections (27.91%) and that the third place in them is being disputed inch by inch by the two other standard-bearers on the right: Franco Parisi (12.80%) and Sebastián Sichel (12.79%).

The parliamentary elections for senators and deputies also represented a consolidation of conservative positions. Of the 50 parliamentary positions that make up the Senate, the right wing (Chile Podemos Más [Chile We Can Do More] and Frente Social Cristiano [Christian

Social Front]) have 25 representatives, to which must be added the parliamentarians of the Christian Democracy (5) who on many occasions vote together with their right-wing coreligionists. It should be noted that often senators from both the Partido de la Democracia [Party for Democracy] and the Partido Socialista [Socialist Party] also vote for conservative motions. The only positive factor in the composition of the new Senate is the participation of two communist senators, the first since the 1973 coup, along with Fabiola Campillai, a social movement leader who was a victim of police violence.

The situation in the Chamber of Deputies, elected in its entirety, is more complex. The Frente Social Cristiano and Chile Podemos Más, obtained 68 representatives, to which must be added (without a large doubt), the six parliamentarians who flagged the presidential candidacy of business engineer Franco Parisi, who came third in the Presidential elections first round. In this way, the conservative sectors have very good parliamentary representation which will allow them to wheel and deal with the most reformist sectors of the old Concertación and Frente Amplio. Clearly, the institutional or parliamentary path is not the best option for winning the transformations that were called for by the popular sectors in October 2019.

How do we explain the popular disenchantment and, by extension both the low popular participation and the significant support that conservative candidates have obtained in the different electoral bodies? Undoubtedly, the different alternatives proposed by those representing the popular sectors (Boric, Provoste, Enriquez-Ominami along with the symbolic candidacy of Professor Eduardo Artes), were unable to read, much less represent, the demands of the popular sectors. The economic crisis, triggered in 2020 by the effects of the pandemic, has deepened the precarious existence of the popular sectors, yet in the face of this only measly palliatives (pension retirement funds) have been promoted. But, on the other hand, structural problems, associated with job instability, the pension system,

serious problems of the health system, inequities in education or the unequal distribution of wealth, have not aroused genuine interest from the political elite. If nothing distinguishes these sectors from the representatives of the bourgeoisie, what is the point of opting for them?

On the other hand, it is no less real than the security problems that affect many popular neighborhoods, generating significant levels of support for those candidates who demanded discretionary use of the repressive forces. As if it was no longer part of our daily life. But this shows that, beyond the media agitation about criminal violence, this is a real problem that affects large sectors of the population and for which the reformist left has not been able to develop concrete proposals that are distinguished from the calls for repressive violence proposed by broad sectors of the conservative world. Something similar can be observed with respect to the immigration issue, where the conservative discourse that proposes applying discretionary expulsion policies, achieves significant support, especially in regions with the greatest influx of immigrants. Thus, in the regions of Arica Parinacota, Tarapacá and Antofagasta, in the extreme north of Chile, the average of the vote obtained by the three candidates on the right was 64.44%. In the face of xenophobic discourse and in the face of policies of discrimination and expulsion, the reformist left and its allies in the political centre still did not have an alternative response.

In the macro-southern zone (Bio Bío and La Araucanía), where the Mapuche conflict has developed with particular intensity in recent years, the elections were held in a state of emergency, with the police and the army occupying the territory militarily, intimidating the aboriginal communities and giving all their support to the ranch elite, heir to the usurpations of the late nineteenth century. In the La Araucanía region as a whole, electoral participation was below the national average (45.08%), reaching particularly low percentages in those electorates with a majority Mapuche population: Melipeuco (29.13%), Curarrehue (34, 53%) or

Carahue (39.06%). Those who did vote did so mainly for the representatives of the conservative right. In this very region, candidates Kast, Sichel and Parisi obtained 64.46% of the votes.

Whatever the result of the second presidential round, on December 19, 2021, the defeat of the popular field is plain. If José Antonio Kast prevails, the immobility of the neoliberal economic model and the extension of the repressive policy will be guaranteed, all with a significant degree of parliamentary support. An extension of the state of emergency is probable whenever the business elite demands it. If Gabriel Boric succeeds, he will be forced to negotiate governmental agreements, not only with his political opponents from the old Concertación

(who have significant parliamentary representation), but also with his opponents on the right-wing benches. This guarantees the extension of the neoliberal model and even of the repressive policy.

But we can't fool ourselves. If reformism was defeated in the recent elections, so was the revolutionary camp. And it has been defeated more forcefully. Without the ability to develop political proposals to confront the electoral situation, revolutionaries missed (once again) an important opportunity to agitate for their own policies, which would show clear differences with both the bourgeoisie and reformism. Since October 2019 we have not been able to advance in the definition of our own programmatic proposals, of

structuring a social and political movement with the capacity to convene and mobilize the popular sectors, much less to give meaning and proportionality to direct action and mass self-defense. We continue to be engulfed in sterile discussions, in activism lacking political objectives and in a mobilizing ritual that is becoming more and more worn out every day.

We are approaching the temporary resolution of the crisis unleashed by the popular sectors in October 2019. And we are in the worst-case scenario: one of a profound defeat for reformism, but also with a strategic defeat for the revolutionary sectors.

Translated by David Fagan from [Punto de Vista Internacional](#).

Martinique and Guadeloupe thrown into chaos by the French state

9 December 2021, by **Correspondents l'Anticapitaliste**

The caricatural image of late colonialism that plagues Martinique, Guadeloupe and Guyana, is represented — by chance or necessity? — by the Minister for the Colonies, a certain Lecornu. This individual landed in Guadeloupe, preceded by his armada (GIGN, RAID), which has not yet restored the “order” that the minister said would be a condition for his visit. [19]

A “republic with variable geometry

As soon as he got out of his tank, the imperial envoy met the police and thumped his chest in a threatening press conference. He made a surreal demand: discussion with the trade unions is conditional on the unions denouncing the nocturnal violence taking place on the margins of the conflict.

The conflict has a starting point: rejection of obligatory vaccination and the health pass by a clear majority of the population in both Guadeloupe and Martinique. This refusal is largely a collateral effect of colonialism. The people's mistrust goes back a long way. The outrage over the chlordecone scandal is only the most prominent example of recent decades. Faced with this massive rejection, the colonial regime has found only one answer: the “law of the Republic” must apply throughout the “national territory”. Derogations were good when it came to the supposed ban on sowing the poison of chlordecone. They are unthinkable for obligatory vaccination!

Complex situations

In Guadeloupe, a profound, unitary mobilization, under the aegis of the trade union movement, is regularly bringing thousands of demonstrators

and roadblocks in the streets throughout the country.

In Martinique, the situation is more complex. The partially observed general strikes sometimes comes into conflict with the blockades which also hinder the movement of activists during the almost daily calls for rallying at the union headquarters. Some young people are angry both at obligatory vaccination obligation and at the social disaster that is eating away at the country. On the margins, there is destruction, looting, fires sometimes affecting facilities that the people need (high schools, training centres, medical practices, pharmacies, local post offices and so on). The recent attack on a gendarmerie, in such a context, takes on a particular significance.

The requirements of the moment

The state, the elected representatives and the authorities in general are unable to organize a way out of the

crisis through real negotiation. A great responsibility now rests on an cross-sectoral trade union coordination, particularly in health: strengthening the cohesion and unity of these structures, ensuring the coordination of those in struggle, forcing progressive elected representatives to rise to the level the

situation requires. These are the tasks that our comrades are working on. The solidarity of the workers' movement in France is a necessity to avoid the worst and pave the way for real progress.

2 December 2020

Why Euro zone countries' debt to the ECB must be cancelled

7 December 2021, by **Éric Toussaint**

The reason for such an increase is straightforward: instead of finding the necessary new resources by taxing the wealthiest 1% and the big corporations [as the CADTM and others had been demanding](#), governments have preferred borrowing, thus increasing the weight of illegitimate debt.

The past 40 years of neoliberalism and its repeated crises has widened the gap between the working classes and wealthy asset-owners and increased the burden of public debt in the continual process of capital accumulation. The coronavirus pandemic does not affect all social classes equally. Big corporations such as the GAFAM companies (Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft) have garnered huge profits thanks to the lockdowns; Big Pharma companies such as Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca, Johnson & Johnson, Curevax, Merck, have had windfalls from the pandemic by selling vaccines and treatments at exorbitant prices (see [Coronavirus: Global Collective Commons vs Big Pharma](#)), major banks and investment funds have also benefited from government grants as have big energy sector corporations.

Refusing to implement a Covid tax on the wealthiest and on big corporations has not only increased inequalities but also resulted in a steep increase of the debt, as tellingly illustrated in Europe. The total public debt in the Euro zone

amounts to €12 trillion. From early 2020 to July 2021, Euro zone debt rose, on average, from 86% of the GDP to 100%. A number of countries have a much higher debt/GDP ratio. The public debt of Belgium and France is close to 120% of their GDP; for Spain 125%; for Portugal 140%; for Italy 160%. As to the public debt of Greece it reaches 210% while at the worst time of the 2015 debt crisis it amounted to 180% and the Troika pretended it would go down.

The ECB holds a significant portion of the Euro zone public debt. At the moment of writing these lines, it has over €3.9 trillion in eurozone sovereign securities, i.e. over 30% of the above mentioned €12 trillion. Figures for each country are available on the ECB website. The ECB buys sovereign securities of eurozone countries through two programmes: 1. the [Pandemic emergency purchase programme \(PEPP\)](#) and 2. the [Public sector purchase programme \(PSPP\)](#).

Some examples: The ECB holds about €140 billion of the Belgian debt, €730 billion of the French debt, €360 billion of the Spanish debt and €675 billion of the Italian debt.

The ECB purchased the securities from private banks as it does not grant loans to Euro zone member States. On the other hand, States repay these bonds to the ECB.

Since 2020 many economists and social movements have demanded the cancellation of debts held by the ECB, see the call "Cancel the public debt held by the ECB and 'take back control' of our destiny" [signed by over 150 economists published in various media in February 2021](#). The ECB can cancel debts held on eurozone countries. It is a mere bookkeeping operation that does not raise any difficulty, and a central bank cannot go bankrupt.

The ECB board and European governments rejected this proposal because they favour an increase in public debt. It will allow them and their institutions to quickly roll out the good old new discourse. After claiming that States could increase their debts, they will say that they must now cut expenses, reduce public investments, introduce new structural measures in old-age pensions and social security systems, restore the rules on fiscal deficit, which have been temporarily suspended but in no case cancelled. In other words, they are impatient to return to the austerity policies inscribed in the European Treaties.

This extended period of pandemic has been used to flaunt rights and liberties. The cancellation of the public debt held by the ECB must be considered an emergency measure to secure public health. If so, it would reduce the Euro zone countries' debt by about 30%. Debt repayment would

be less crushing, and as a consequence public authorities would find fresh resources to increase expenses in such fields as health care, social solidarity, struggle against the ecological crisis and climate change. It is high time that the collective [interest](#) of the peoples of Europe take the upper hand on the tyranny of financial markets.

What's more, the precedent of cancelling of ECB held debts would deprive the ECB of a coercive instrument that is used to enforce its neoliberal agenda. Indeed, as long as the ECB is the Eurozone countries' main creditor, it threatens those who are reticent to the neo-liberal doxa, to stop buying their debts or to refuse them as [collateral](#), which would increase the cost of their new loans. That is exactly what happened with Greece in 2015, and what it threatened Italy with in the spring of 2019.

Taking this tool away would be a victory.

But we must not forget that besides the cancellation of debts held by the ECB there are other options. A popular government can unilaterally suspend debt repayment to the ECB, which will force it to negotiate and make concessions. This would prompt other governments to follow suit. To this end, citizens' support of a popular movement demanding an audit of all debts as a key instrument to establish their illegitimate, illegal, odious or/and unsustainable parts that ought to be cancelled, is of the utmost importance. This is still an essential strategic move today.

The fears that in case of cancellation, the financial markets and the various private creditors would demand higher [interest rates](#) to further finance governments, is unfounded. All governments that benefited from a substantial reduction of its debt had access to less costly loans than before the cancellation. Indeed, creditors consider that a country with a low level of indebtedness is more creditworthy.

Obviously debt cancellation is not the ultimate solution, other measures are necessary: higher taxes on the

wealthiest 1% and on big corporations as we have demanded from the start of the pandemic; fighting tax evasion with high fines on evaders, the suspension of the banking licence for banks that act as intermediaries for abusive tax avoidance, the elimination of European tax havens, the public ownership of key sectors of the economy,... Higher taxes on the wealthy must be combined with a reduction of taxes on the majority of people, such as a lowering of VAT on basic goods and services, such as energy. On the other hand, taxes on luxury goods must be increased.

Confronting the current social crisis inevitably means fighting inequalities. We have to fight multiple, interconnected and increasing inequalities and act on their sources such as unfair tax policies, austerity measures and the power of big corporations. In short, we have to focus on redistribution of wealth and resources as the main point of an eco-socialist programme. Because our lives are worth more than their profits, let us tear away the straitjacket of the debt.

Translated by Mike Krolkowski and Christine Pagnouille

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- **José Gusmão**, member of the European Parliament, The Left Bloc (Portugal)
- **Franziska Hildebrand**, International solidarity: stop austerity! activist, Die Linke.SDS Hamburg, Germany;
- **Elias Gläsner**, International solidarity: stop austerity! activist, Die Linke.SDS Hamburg, Germany;

The case of the young artist Abel Lescay in Cuba

7 December 2021, by **Lisbeth Moya**

While it is true that U.S. sanctions affect the economy, when analyzing Cuba one cannot overlook the bureaucratic phenomenon and the lack of popular participation in politics. Dissent is strongly punished and the government showed signs of this on July 11. Its reaction to any kind of dissent, even from the left, is to label citizens as "counterrevolutionaries", "politically confused" or "mercenaries paid by the

U.S. government".

The Archipelago phenomenon was an example of this. This is a platform that after the events of 11-J sought to establish a national dialogue, beyond ideological conditioning, and called for a peaceful march on November 15. This political project was showing signs of support to the right wing through public projections and the positioning of some of its members.

What is remarkable in itself, in the case of this analysis, is not Archipelago, but the treatment given by the government to this type of dissent. Once again, the media was used, without the right to reply, to demean in every possible way the main organizers and try to prove their links with the U.S. government. The march was disavowed under the allegation that socialism is constitutionally irrevocable and that

the intentions of this protest were to overthrow it.

However, one of the most worrying issues is that during the weekend of the march, one of the darkest chapters in Cuba's history was repeated on a massive scale: the "acts of repudiation" returned, events organized by the political power to attack the most private space of those who dissent: the family, the home, with shouts, insults and all kinds of verbal violence.

Imagine waking up with a mob of people in front of your house shouting "counterrevolutionary" and even more, with a political event organized at your door, in your neighborhood, in front of your children and parents. This was something common and shameful in the Cuba of the 1980s, something that has been discussed many times, something that many Cubans are ashamed of, and which is repeated today, with the stridency of social networks.

In this context, the government intends to avoid denouncing a crucial issue: Cuba is opening itself to the liberalization of a state-centered economy. The "monetary order", a measure announced to face the crisis, which since before Covid-19 was remarkable, came at a time of scarcity and with nuances that were not at all advantageous for the people. It is, in fact, an economic segregation that has led Cubans to despair due to the lack of basic products and inflation.

The ordinance eliminated the CUC, the hard currency circulating in Cuba since 1994, the middle of the Special Period, to make way for the Moneda Libremente Convertible (MLC), as well as any international currency highly traded on the black market.

When announcing the "Ordering Task", Minister of Economy Alejandro Gil assured that along with the MLC stores, the rest of the stores would continue to sell all kinds of necessary products in Cuban pesos, since the purpose of the new stores was precisely to collect foreign currency to supply sales in Cuban pesos. In practice this has not happened. The stores to which Cubans who do not have MLCs have access are out of

stock and there are fewer and fewer of them every day. Obtaining basic products is an odyssey and in spite of the increase in salaries, money is not enough because the inflationary process is enormous.

It is not surprising then that in the face of such a situation, aggravated by Covid-19, the impossibility of dissent and popular participation and the repetitive political discourse that Cuban leaders crudely handle in the media to legitimize the process, people took to the streets.

The word "left" is taboo in Cuba. A large part of the population assumes that the government's discourse and practices are socialist or leftist. This is a dissatisfied citizenry, with very little political preparation, because the curricula from an early age are focused on political indoctrination at the convenience of power, and not on the development of knowledge and reasoning in conditions of freedom.

It is no accident then that on July 11 people took to the streets. They were not mercenaries, they were not confused beings. They were exhausted people responding to objective contradictions.

That day, people opposed to leftist ideas took to the streets, yes, but also the working and marginalized people, the people the left should represent, the social bases the left should reach out to. On that day government supporters, young people of the so-called "official left", people privileged by the system for the most part, also came out.

In the midst of the chaos, violence from both sides surfaced. They were unarmed demonstrators against all the repressive bodies of the State and those other privileged or old uncritical defenders, armed with sticks and backed by the police.

The Cuban government faced a great crisis of governability, and it would be unfair not to take into account in this analysis the exhaustive US anti-communist propaganda, which from the social networks has penetrated deeply into the Cuban imaginary. But the internal causes of the social outbreak are there, latent in the daily

life of the citizens of this island. These causes remain unresolved and are getting worse every day, due to what July 11 meant for the demonstrators and their families.

To date, the working group on politically motivated detentions of the Cuban civil society platform Justicia 11J has documented 1,271 detentions in connection with the social outburst. Of these people, at least 659 are still in detention. It has been verified that forty-two have been sentenced to imprisonment in summary trials and eight in ordinary trials. The prosecution's request is already known for 269 persons who are awaiting between one and thirty years' imprisonment.

The figure of "sedition" has been used to impose sanctions on at least 122 people, according to this platform which has been in charge of counting and bringing to light the situation of those involved, due to the fact that there are no official figures available.

July 11 was the highest point of repression of dissent in Cuba. Historically, there was systematic harassment by State Security agencies of those who dissented across the political spectrum; there were also documented cases of expulsions from places of study or work for ideological reasons and many other similar evidences. Nevertheless, on July 11, repression was exercised on the bodies of the demonstrators.

Such is the case of the young musician and poet Abel Lescay, who after demonstrating in the city of Bejucal was arrested that night at his home. This process is particular, because he was taken to the police station naked and suffered Covid-19 during the arrest. He acted peacefully, he did not damage any kind of property, in spite of which the prosecution accuses him of the following charges: contempt of the basic figure, contempt of the aggravated figure and disorderly conduct. For all of them they request a seven-year prison sentence.

Lescay is a student of the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA) and could lose his career if convicted. He will be tried on December 5 and 6 at the Mayabeque Provincial Court.

Cases like this happen in Cuba these days, absurd and inconceivable situations. When I talk about these issues with members of the left in other countries, it is unheard of that someone should be sentenced to such a punishment for going out to exercise the right to demonstrate. "If that were the case, we would all be in jail forever," an Argentine friend told me.

I write these lines full of fear, even knowing what they mean in terms of repercussions for a militant of the alternative left who lives and works in Cuba. I write these lines because the

main dichotomy of a leftist militant in Cuba is to be clear about who she is facing and in what context. While we have as socialists the mission to fight against imperialism in the world, while these words could be instrumentalized for other causes, in Cuba we can no longer be silent, because it is about the lives of many. It is about the right to dissent and to exist with dignity.

I call on the international left militancy and those who read this text not to hesitate to investigate and support the cause of the political

prisoners in Cuba. I call for international solidarity with Abel Lescay, because only in this way will we be heard. The left, in spite of its nuances and differences, must think of itself as one in the world in the face of this type of outrage. We cannot think of the oppressor only as a bourgeois, the bureaucracy also oppresses. I never tire of saying it: "Socialism yes, Repression no".

Source: Translated by Oakland Socialist from Movimiento Socialista de Trabajadoras y Trabajadores de la República Dominicana.

Call for donations for ESSF Solidarity Fund 2022 - Getting ready for a new exceptional year!

6 December 2021, by Adam Novak, ESSF, Pierre Rousset

Led by our regional partners, we have initiated political and financial aid to the Myanmar resistance which is facing an all-out war led by the military junta. We initially conceived this solidarity as a short-term support to the general civic strike that started in the aftermath of the putsch, but it has become a long-term project. In 2021, we have succeeded in providing a new stream of support to Myanmar without reducing our support to existing partners in Pakistan, the Philippines, Bangladesh and Indonesia. This is the result of a special effort from ESSF's regular donors, as well as special donations from a wide range of countries including the United States, Canada, Japan and various European countries...

We must prepare for a 2022 that will not be any more lenient than 2021. The Burmese junta currently receives enough support from neighbouring countries to continue its all-out war against the resistance. Our partners in

Pakistan need to provide whatever help they can to Afghan refugees with whom they often already have close ties. We are also considering providing modest financial support to the Thai opposition movement facing persecution for the "crime" of lèse-majesté (insulting royalty)

The Covid-19 pandemic is evolving unevenly across countries. Even where it is declining, in South Asia, it can rebound at any time. Indonesia became a regional epicenter for a while. The new epidemic wave in Burma is more deadly than the first one, mainly due to the interruption of the former civilian government's vaccination program. In the Philippines, the health situation remains particularly serious and the responsibilities of our partners remain unchanged: they have to deploy and maintain the whole pandemic response system (isolation facilities, oxygen cylinders, distribution of vaccines, etc.) while the Duterte regime is repressing independent

associations. Our Philippine partner organisations lost two of their members as a result of the infection.

We have benefited from exceptional financial support in 2021, compared to the previous year. It is important that this higher level of commitment is sustained in 2022.

ESSF supports the action of our partner associations and networks, without substituting for them. The initiative, the "thinking head" of our solidarity is in Asia, not in Europe. The Burmese crisis illustrated this well this year. We would have been hesitant to engage in sustainable aid to the people of Myanmar if our partners had not asked us to do so. And we would not have known how to provide that aid if our Asian partners were not able to verify the effectiveness of the support sent, in a very shifting and complex situation.

Donations to ESSF can be "earmarked" by indicating the country your donation is intended for. All other

donations are treated as contributions to our Asia Permanent Solidarity Fund and distributed according to emergencies to our partners, namely:

- the MiHands coalition of associations based in Mindanao, in the southern Philippines
- the "Free Women" movement in Indonesia,
- the farmers' associations BKF-BKS and their allies in Bangladesh,
- the Labour Education Foundation (LEF) and the Crofter Foundation in Pakistan.

In order to continue our activities and to build up the permanent solidarity fund of ESSF, we need your help, as a one-off donation or a regular transfer.

In January 2022, we will report on the funds received by ESSF and delivered to our partners in 2021..

We warmly thank all those who have contributed to the solidarity - and all those who will do so in the future...

Pierre Rousset and Adam Novak
ESSF, 25 November 2021

As an association, ESSF functions

without any form of remuneration, on an entirely militant basis. Thus **100% of donations received are transferred to our recipients in Asia**. Bank charges and currency exchange fees are the only significant costs related to these transfers, and are reduced to a minimum (less than 5%). ESSF does not "export" our own projects. We help movements to respond to humanitarian, social and democratic emergencies based on their involvement on the ground and their own perception of priorities.

To send donations

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cheques to ESSF in euros only, payable in France, to be sent to:
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93100 Montreuil
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(00525)
10 boulevard Chanzy
93100 Montreuil

France

ESSF, account number 445757C

International bank account details :

IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044 5757 C12

BIC / SWIFT : CRLYFRPP

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You can send money through Paypal: see the [PayPal button](#) on ESSF English home page: <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?page=sommaire&lang=en>

Through HelloAsso

You can also send money through the association HelloAsso: see its button on ESSF English home page: <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?page=sommaire&lang=en>

Or go directly to:

<https://www.helloasso.com/associations/europe-solidaire-sans-frontieres/formulaires/1/widget>

We will keep you regularly informed via our website regarding the use of the solidarity fund.

Source [ESSF](#).

Partying to Survive:

5 December 2021, by **Pedro Perucca**

However, this unanimous celebration can still be a little violent in a country where inflation reaches 52% year-on-year, and the post-pandemic everyday life of most people is decidedly complicated. But as these elections are probably the closest we will ever get to a capitalism where everyone wins, the opportunity to analyse them should not be missed.

A comeback favoured by few

The Frente de Todos (FdT) celebrated having achieved figures that, objectively, are the worst obtained by unified Peronism in a national election. Thinking only of the legislative elections: the 32% obtained is less than the vote that up until to now had been the worst result in Peronist electoral history of 36% in 1997, in elections which swept the

Alliance [Alianza para el Trabajo, la Justicia y la Educación /Alliance for Work, Justice and Education 1997-2001 of the UCR /Radical Civic Union of Raúl Alfonsín formed to oppose the Justicialist Party of Carlos Menem] into power and marked the decline of Menemism. Even in the legislative elections of 2001, months before the outbreak of the "They All Must Go" protests, Peronism exceeded 38%.

The only possible comparison would

be with the 28% obtained by the Frente para la Victoria [Front for Victory] in 2009 or the 32% in 2013, but by this stage we are talking about atomised Peronism. Today, united Peronism despite having trade unions and a good part of the social movements behind it, barely equalled that mark of a moment of crisis and division. But, as in the meme, the heterogeneous government front celebrates, gestures to the sky, bites the medal, kisses the girl and shakes the champagne.

At the event in the Chacarita bunker, President Alberto Fernández confirmed the call for today's march, Wednesday 17, the day of Peronist militancy, to "celebrate the victory accordingly." Elected deputy, Victoria Tolosa Paz [of the Frente de Todos] said in radio statements: "They won by losing and we lost by winning." Beyond the fact that she probably meant it exactly the other way around (Peronism won by losing and the opposition lost by winning), the phrase is not just an expression of a low-flying dialectic, but of something very real.

With an official defeat of more than 10 points, a difference of 5 in the province of Buenos Aires and triumphs in just seven provinces, the catastrophic results of the Primary elections could foreshadow a catastrophe in last Sunday's vote that that would have opened a scenario of almost terminal crisis for the Government. But the combination of a unified exit from the campaign (after the terrible handling of the internal crisis in the days after the primaries, where for 48 hours the Frente de Todos seemed to be on the verge of exploding), the mobilisation of the indisputably powerful Justicialist Party apparatus, some very modest measures aimed at salary readjustment (the "plan platita" or putting money in people's pockets, which was not as spectacular as the opposition decried) and probably healthy popular horror at the strengthening of the exchange rate in recent weeks managed to avert that debacle. It also meant a "dignified defeat" in the Province of Buenos Aires (slightly more than one point) narrowing the national gap to 8 points and even turning the results around in Chaco and Tierra del Fuego by tight

margins.

The Frustrated Longings of Macrismo

Juntos por el Cambio (JxC) [Together for Change] effectively, lost winning. It lost, as is often the case, because its expectations went way beyond reality. They fantasised that their results would surpass even those of the PASO and that it would open a "transitional" scenario (as Mauricio Macri himself said), in which, summoned by a lifeless government, they would co-manage the two years until the presidential elections. They were also prepared for an even more ruined Alberto being unable to fulfill his mandate, speculating on putting someone of his choosing in the line of succession (for example, María Eugenia Vidal's proposal to challenge the ruling party for the ownership of the Chamber of Deputies). None of that happened and then there was the triumph in 13 provinces; having managed to deny Peronism its own quorum in the Senate for the first time since the return of democracy looks like a consolation prize. Just look at the faces in the photos taken in Macri's bunker.

Moreover, they seem to be somewhat disconcerted by the pro-government commotion and are made to go leave to ask the government to "acknowledge defeat." They expected so much more. In the last two months they believed that they could better capitalise on the pandemic crisis, which would act as the magic pass that would completely erase the horror of their national administration from all memories, giving them a second chance to return to power in just two years. As this fantastic scenario is not confirmed, the internal opposition front, paused during the campaign, now also reopens among the hawks, pigeons and radicals. For them also, the years leading up to the 2023 Presidential election will be full of disputes.

In any case, despite all the distorting effects of the epidemiological crisis, 42% of the vote for JxC is easily

comparable to the 41% of 2019 (although of course, it is problematic to compare legislative and presidential ones) and it would seem to show the existence of a ceiling there as well. Far from the indignant hypothesis of progressivism, which was railed against the "forgetful" citizenry who, in order to protest against the undeniable economic difficulties of the present, choose to vote for the main enforcers of structural adjustment in our history, the reality seems to be very different.

We have a situation of poverty with unemployment at 2001 levels. Inflation is above 50% and the dollar is parallel to 200 pesos. The ruling party seems unable to control the price of food and other essential items, which have all skyrocketed. Downward parity is the rule in almost all unions. Retirement funds and pensions manage to reach only a tenth of price increases thanks to periodic bonuses. There is an infinite succession of events where, almost weekly, the FdT government shoots itself in the foot. In this context a massive desertion from the ruling party and an avalanche of support for JxC would not have been unusual. But that didn't happen either. A certain memory of the devastation wracked by Macri seems to survive. What there is no longer, without a doubt, is any enthusiasm for the Government. And this is another of the key components of the national political scene.

New Old Rights

The ultra-liberals of Avanza Libertad / La Libertad Avanza [Freedom Advances] were undoubtedly the most novel phenomenon of these elections, breaking through with almost one million votes between the Province of Buenos Aires (650,000 votes) and the capital, Buenos Aires (310,000) and scoring five national deputies. Even if this is not the case right across the country, it is still a worrying phenomenon. But here again there are nuances. The Javier Milei phenomenon [20], without subtracting anything from its serious relevance, did not meet post-PASO expectations either. Some analysts even predicted his vote would reach more than 20% for these elections, after the

surprising 14% of the primaries. However, it only reached 17%, which implies a somewhat sluggish growth. In the Province of Buenos Aires, José Luis Espert [21] was able to better capitalise on events and managed to become the third force, after having lost in the PASO to the Left Front (FIT-U).

Yes, they are evil. Their destructive formulas and violent speech are a real concern. But we must not forget that there were other far-right phenomena in our democracy. Antonio Domingo Bussi became governor, Luis Patti a deputy, Aldo Rico, in addition to being a deputy, was mayor of San Miguel.

[22] Clearly things are different today and whilst they were a hindrance during the last civil-military dictatorship, they now represent the new right which have been making their way in world politics.

Election of the Left: Historic?

The Frente de Izquierda y de los Trabajadores - Unidad (FIT-U) [Workers Left Front- Unity is an electoral alliance of the Party of Socialist Workers (PTS), Workers Party (PO), Socialist Left (IS) and the Socialist Workers Movement (MST)] celebrates what is defined in several its media platforms as an "historic election." Without failing to recognise the consolidation of a left electoral space at the national level (it was the only force besides the FdT and JxC to appear in almost all the provinces) and celebrating that as an explicitly socialist front it obtained almost 6% of the overall vote (something that happens in few countries in the world), we find ourselves obliged to qualify somewhat the comrade's apparent euphoria. They obtained four national deputies: Myriam Bregman for BA City, Nicolás del Caño and Romina del Pla for the Province of Buenos Aires and Alejandro Vilca for Jujuy, in addition to some provincial and communal legislators. And that's good, despite many of the FIT-U's legislative decisions being controversial; it is also necessary to go further with criticism of a parliamentary logic that equates seats with political triumphs.

By comparing legislative elections, we see that the total of votes achieved on Sunday is 1,270,000 (5.4%), something not very far from the 1,156,000 of 2017 (4.7%), in the middle of Macri's presidential term and barely higher than the 1,211,000 obtained in 2013 (5.3%). That is, a more or less constant number over eight years of very different political situations. In addition, in 2021, a superior performance could be expected in a scenario characterised by a very restricted electoral offer (for the first time in many years, there were no center-left options that contested the vote to the left of Peronism), with a historical crisis of the Government alliance and the horrible economic variables already mentioned. And yet the left was not able to take advantage of this scenario. Historical? Not at all.

The most interesting phenomena of the FIT-U vote without doubt, are that of Myriam Bregman, nicknamed The Russian, in Buenos Aires City, achieving 8% and managing to break through a very important ceiling for the local left, showing that her charismatic figure was able to transcend the militant world; an important 20% growth in the vote in the Province of Buenos Aires; and the election of Alejandro Vilca, a garbage collector, in Jujuy, where right until the last moment the Left Front was in a contest with the FdT for the second provincial seat, losing by just 3000 votes. Also important in this case is the fact that it is the second election with votes above two digits for the left in that province (18.4 and 25.1, respectively), which could allow us to speak of a consolidation of a red constituency and a countertrend to some very short-term provincial phenomena of the last elections. After the historic 2013 election in Mendoza, which catapulted Del Caño [Nicolás del Caño member of the Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas, PTS/Party of Socialist Workers] into national politics, the FIT collapsed there, falling 62% in these elections compared to the 125,000 votes obtained in 2017, while in Chaco it fell by 53%, in Córdoba by 39%, and so on.

Uphill all the way to 2023

Beyond quantitative analysis, these elections also raise some more fundamental questions. In the framework of the great post-neoliberal transition that we are going through on a global level with, as yet, uncertain results, it would be important in our country to think about whether these results imply the continuity of the polarising climate that has characterised national politics for more than a decade or whether they begin to make way for a deeper crisis of representation, with an overall questioning of the political system.

For any organisation that intends to do politics in this country in the coming years, the strategies in each case are very different. The results of the PASO seem more in line with the second hypothesis, but this Sunday's rearrangement could indicate that, despite the sustained crisis scenario, the national political system still has enough strength to channel demands through institutional channels. The answer is not so clear, then, and we will have to wait for the patient's evolution.

In any case, the two years remaining until the presidential elections in 2023 will be very tough, with a clearly battered ruling front, which will have severe parliamentary difficulties due to the loss of control of the Senate - even though it managed to sustain itself as the largest minority in both Houses. Additionally, the ongoing negotiations with the International Monetary Fund will force the government to continue advancing in the ongoing adjustment plans (as Cristina Fernández de Kirchner herself healthily acknowledged in the context of brutal honesty of the post PASO crisis).

In other political crises, Kirchnerism was able to invoke a change of direction that rebuilt its popular support and gave it financial room to manoeuvre: for example the nationalisation of the AFJP private pension funds in 2008, which enabled it to show leadership and maintain

political control until reaching relative economic recomposition in 2011. But today the situation is different on several levels: not only is popular support very far from the enthusiasm of those times - with apathy, fatigue and disillusionment wreaking havoc among our own ranks - but what would be truly surprising is a strong progressive dynamic of initiatives by the government of Alberto Fernández in this context, in which the priority for the ruling classes is the advancement of the triple reform (labor, pension and tax).

It is true that this year the post-pandemic rebound will ensure a GDP recovery that may reach almost 10% and that there are variables in favour of record harvests and grain prices at the international level, but there is

still a long way to go before the recovery from above translates into improvements for below and, furthermore, the figures for next year are not so optimistic.

Tensions with union allies will intensify as the labor reforms advance sector by sector, as will the support of social movements, which will have to see how the official policy evolves for those who selflessly went through the epidemiological crisis (for which the appointment of Juan Zabaleta as minister of the area is not a good sign). [Juan Zabalet, retired racing car driver, is the recently appointed Minister of Social Development]

It is not unlikely that, in addition, a relative economic recovery will add to wage pressures in different sectors, an

issue that will tighten the rope in a scenario of serious exchange rate shocks, inflation, a fall in real wages and very limited growth for 2022. After the pyrrhic defeat on Sunday, the ruling party is already paraphrasing itself, waving the slogan of "there is 2023" and discussing whether the FdT has to go to the PASO to determine its presidential candidate or not. This speculation is somewhat counter-current in the context of the deep social and economic crisis that the country is going through and the remote prospects that the dull Albertist epic could ever regain some kind of popular enthusiasm.

17 November 2021

*Translated and annotated by David Fagan from **Jacobin America Latina**.*

Where Are We on Thanksgiving Day in America?

4 December 2021, by **Dan La Botz**

Just as we were about to sit down to Thanksgiving dinner, a jury in Georgia found guilty of murder the three white men who had chased down and killed the black jogger Ahmaud Arbury, and most Americans breathed a sigh of relief and gave thanks that for once justice had been done in a case of the murder of a black man.

Then too, after nearly two years of failed policies, resistance from conspiracy theorists and from rightwing organizations, almost 75 percent of Americans who are eligible have been vaccinated. In part, because of that, the economy has picked up. The GDP grew at over 2% and unemployment fell to its lowest level since 1968, though three million have still not returned to work. The improvement in the economy led to the Great Resignation as workers by the million quit their old jobs in search of better ones and we have seen an uptick in strikes and more efforts at unionization. We have for the first

time in decades a socialist organization of 90,000 members—the Democratic Socialists of America—and we have a few people in Congress who call themselves socialists. So there's something to be thankful for.

After the turkey, sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce, and pumpkin pie, however, we also begin to reflect on the larger context and national politics.

The Republican Party over the last year continued to move to the right, becoming in effect a far-right party that includes violent extremists. Many Republicans believe the last election was stolen and a third believe that violence will be necessary to change the direction of the country. Republicans, among them Q-Anon supporters, Christian Evangelicals, and armed militias, are going to school board meetings to protest vaccination, masks, and the teaching of black history.

The Democrats meanwhile are frustrated. The U.S. Congress passed President Joseph Biden's infrastructure bill with a budget of \$1.2 trillion, but the Democrats have so far been unable to pass the Build Back Better Bill that would deal with climate issues and help working families. Two conservative Democrats, Senators Joe Manchin and Krysten Sinema, have forced the Democrats to throw out proposals, cut the bill's budget, and to drop the idea of taxing the rich to pay for it. Democratic Progressives and the few socialists have been largely dragged along by the moderate party majority. Meanwhile, Biden's approval ratings have fallen to 44%, while 45 percent disapprove, and 11% remain undecided, suggesting the party could lose the mid-terms and end any chance for more progressive legislation in the last two years of Biden's term.

Ironically, in a country known for its

historic anti-Communist crusades and staunch opposition to even social democracy, to overcome the COVID pandemic and the economic crisis, the U.S. government has for the last year and a half provided vast amounts of money to businesses, states, and

individuals. Today some 41% of all Americans now have a positive attitude toward socialism, while 68% approve of labor unions, the highest approval rating since 1965.

So as friends and family got their

coats and went out into the cold and blustery November evening, I give thanks that there's a chance that in the coming year we can begin to build a mass working class movement and an independent working-class political party.

A persistent political and economic crisis in Lebanon

3 December 2021, by Joseph Daher

Almost two years after the outbreak of the uprising, the ruling parties' domination over large sectors of society is still firmly in place, while they have extended some forms of services to their popular base in a context of continued weakening of the state and deepening economic crisis.

Economic and social crisis in the country

At the same time, the socio-economic situation in the country has continued to deteriorate in all respects. The poverty rate has increased dramatically from 25 per cent in 2019 to 74 per cent in 2021. Lebanon has one of the highest inflation rates in the world in 2021, with a 137.8 per cent increase in the consumer price index between August 2020 and August 2021, and the devaluation of the Lebanese pound by 90 per cent since the crisis began in October 2019.

Foreign workers subject to the kafala system, which deprives them of their basic civil and human rights, have also seen their conditions deteriorate significantly. The majority of these workers are women from African and South East Asian countries. Similarly, Syrian refugees continue to suffer severe impoverishment and various forms of abuse. Almost 91% of them live on less than \$3.80 a day.

Aftermath of the 2020 explosion and rising political tensions

The impunity of the neoliberal sectarian political elites regarding the criminal explosion in the port of Beirut in August 2020 continues to this day. The investigation into the case has been repeatedly suspended following manoeuvres by the ruling class to stop it, and has ultimately failed to incriminate any of the ministers responsible.

In addition, multiple potential witnesses were murdered. This impunity of the sectarian neoliberal ruling elite allows for other similar criminal disasters. In August 2021, another criminal explosion occurred in the north of the country, in the village of Tleil in Akkar, killing around 30 people.

At the same time, Hezbollah stepped up its attacks against the judge in charge of the investigation, Tareq Bitar, accusing him of politicizing the case and of being instrumentalized by the United States. On 14 October, a gathering of several hundred supporters of Hezbollah and parliamentary speaker Nabih Berry's Amal movement quickly turned into a guerrilla war, turning parts of the capital into war zones. The clashes left seven people dead, most of them

members of or close to the Hezbollah and Amal camps. There are strong suspicions that members of the Lebanese Forces (LF) or their supporters opened fire on Amal and Hezbollah demonstrators.

This polarization of the political field and the rise of sectarian tensions in the country further weaken the capacity of the popular classes to get out of this deadly and reactionary head-to-head.

Where is the popular resistance?

The protest movement has weakened considerably since October 2019, although it has never completely died out despite state repression, the financial crisis and the pandemic.

The continued absence of non-sectarian mass organizations and parties rooted in the country's working classes remains the main problem of the protest movement. They do not yet exist and this weakens the capacity of the movement to organize itself into a real social and political challenge to the confessional neoliberal parties and their system. The different sectors of the left and progressives are very fragmented within the protest movement and have not been able to build a united front capable of channelling demands and

organizing protesters across the country.

In this political context, marked by a

deep economic crisis and the absence of a viable political alternative, the confessional parties will be able to mobilize their confessional base and maintain their hegemony in the next

elections, which will take place in March 2022.

24 November 2021

Currency collapses, Turkish regime weakened

2 December 2021, by **Uraz Aydin**

However, President Erdogan categorically refuses to change his monetary policy and raise interest rates, which would help to contain inflation, as he is the head of the Central Bank, which has lost all autonomy.

A dramatic policy for the working classes

The rise in prices has reached unsustainable proportions, especially for the working classes, with, for example, a 132 per cent increase in the price of electricity and 95 per cent for heating in three years, as well as an 85 per cent increase in the price of flour in just six months. The media, 80 per cent dominated by the regime, is calling for a reduction in portions to combat the crisis...

But the situation will most likely worsen dramatically after last week's currency shock following a statement by Erdogan announcing a third 1% cut in the key interest rate in less than two months. Once again denouncing an alleged international conspiracy against his country's economic growth, President Erdogan is now calling for an "economic war of liberation" with great fanfare, which is taking the form of a crackdown on protesters and Internet users calling for the resignation of the government and early elections.

Crumbling

popularity

The collapse of the currency comes at a time when Erdogan, after 19 years in power, is at the bottom of his popularity (which is still considerable at 38%). His ability to "produce consent" from the working classes that make up the bulk of his electoral base is steadily deteriorating. His party is increasingly seen by this very base - and rightly so - as a hotbed of upstarts and careerists who have no other ambition than to monopolise the country's wealth through the multiple positions they hold in the administrative apparatus plunged in systematic corruption.

A composite opposition

The opposition bloc made up of six parties, ranging from the secular centre-left to the conservative right, from the secular far right to the Islamists, is also calling for early elections (presidential and legislative elections are normally scheduled for 2023). These parties have agreed, in the event of a victory that seems assured in terms of voting percentages - if Erdogan's clan does not refuse to let go of power - to abandon the current autocratic hyper-presidentialist system for a "strengthened parliamentary regime" that would allow a more equitable representation of political sensibilities in the National Assembly and would ensure the independence of the

judiciary, which is for the moment subservient to Erdogan and his Islamo-fascist block.

An alternative to be built

The arrival in power of the opposition bloc supported by the big bourgeoisie will most probably allow a relative democratization of the regime and progress concerning political rights and freedoms. This is why the radical left and the Kurdish movement will probably support the candidate who will face Erdogan in a second round of presidential elections. However, in the context of a "restoration" of the Turkish state and capitalism, the consequences of this regime change are likely to be very limited in terms of the interests of the working class and the oppressed, especially the Kurdish people.

Thus, apart from these two blocs of bourgeois politics, it is quite possible that a third bloc based on an alliance of the pro-Kurdish left party (HDP) with other parties of the revolutionary left will be formed. However, as Yenyol, the Turkish section of the Fourth International, asserts, this bloc should not be limited to the ballot but should work on anti-capitalist positions for a unitive reconstruction of the radical left aiming to take root in a workers' movement in a state of ebullition.

1 December 2021

Their borders.... Our deaths...

1 December 2021, by **Freddy Mathieu**

The cost of pushback operations

It is worth recalling that the Belgian police operation in which a two year old Kurdish child, Mawda, was killed, was part of a vast campaign to control border flows, involving significant police and financial resources between France, Belgium and the United Kingdom. Today, despite Brexit, these countries are still bound by an agreement on migration issues. "France has held the border for our British friends for more than 20 years," French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin said recently. "We call on the British to keep their promise of funding since we hold the border for them." [23]

The United Kingdom committed in late July to pay France 62.7 million euros in 2021-2022. "I asked the prefect for control staff all along the Belgian border, along the Nord department to the south of Valenciennes, to be able to arrest smugglers and migrants who want to leave Belgium to arrive in the north of France, in order to dry up the source. This strategy has proved its worth, in the month that it has been in place, we have doubled the number of smugglers arrested, 180 in September alone and doubled the number of migrants, from 1,800 to 4,000. We are asking our Belgian friends to do the same work on their side." [24]

Since the end of 2018, crossings of the Channel by migrants seeking to reach the United Kingdom have multiplied despite the danger linked to the density of traffic, strong currents and low water temperatures. But they increasingly lead to arrests, bullying and degrading treatment on the beaches of departure or arrival and all kinds of violence against migrants in search of a haven of peace. Belgium

has a significant share in this acceleration: the motorway areas from which migrants have tried to board trucks bound for England are truly militarized: fences, cameras and almost permanent patrols, controls in nearby places where migrants could shelter or receive help.

The new borders

The main consequence of these multiplying police operations is that migrants are driven to take increasingly long and dangerous routes. This had already been observed in the Mediterranean. In this case, the crossing of the English Channel by makeshift boats rather than by trucks, but this applies to other situations at all Europe's borders. Another logical consequence of this militarization of borders is that smugglers are also getting richer, by increasing the prices of crossings which have been made more difficult.

Brexit and the enlargement of Europe have drawn new external borders to the EU and the Schengen Area. But new internal frontiers are also emerging. They are walls, barbed wire, controls. They seem to be drawn around each migrant wherever they go: on the platforms of stations and on trains, in ports, in airports. Free movement has never been so badly named.

Currently, the European Union accuses the regime of Alexander Lukashenko of orchestrating border crossings between Belarus and Poland, in retaliation for the European sanctions put in place. Poland has deployed more than 12,000 guards to its border with Belarus and is building a border wall there. 32 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Germany is calling on the EU to help Poland "secure its external border". European countries are indignant around the theme of the defence of borders (of

the EU and even NATO) against the "invasion" by migrants who are being "instrumentalized" by Belarus (and behind this Putin's Russia) which is grist to the mill for the far right. But which of these European countries are concerned about the fate of these thousands of migrants stranded between two front lines? And are they concerned about the daily violations of international law by their Greek, Croatian or Polish comrades in violation of the Geneva Convention, the principle of non-refoulement, international maritime law, Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights and the European directives on the right of asylum? [25] Who is still talking about the outcry over pushbacks, where even the European Commission has been forced to set up commissions and investigate?

The association [No Name Kitchen](#) documents police violence on the Croatian border and participates in the Border Violence Monitoring network. In October 2020, this organization published a damning report on the violence perpetrated by the Croatian police on asylum seekers. In particular, several cases of sexual violence had been recorded. In response, EU Internal Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson said she "takes the accusations very seriously." She called in Zagreb for a "thorough investigation" into the violence after the publication of an Amnesty International report in June 2020. [26] What has changed since then?

What response will these countries give to the request of the twelve States of the European Union that have asked Brussels to finance the construction of barriers at their borders? [27] Their objective is to prevent the arrival of migrants. These barriers are described as "effective border protection measures" by the interior and migration ministers of these countries. Poland, like

Lithuania, has begun to build barbed wire fences on part of its border with Belarus. Hungary had already erected this type of barrier on the border with Serbia and Croatia (an EU member country but not in Schengen) during the 2015 migration crisis. Slovenia did the same with Croatia.

There is no doubt that behind the beautiful words written on the packaging of European migration policies there is a common project around which European countries stand together, supporting each other. And for which the EU has set up a very well equipped but also very hermetic agency: Frontex. [28] Frontex has recruited an army of border guards who can carry and use firearms and aims to have 10,000 guards by 2027.

“Against migrants, still more technology”

It is not only ministers who are counting their money: the magazine *Reporterre* went to the Milipol

security fair in Paris to find out about technological security innovations and noted that they are increasingly deployed to repel migrants. Robot dogs capable of running, climbing and swimming in extreme environments, tear gas canisters, facial recognition devices, assault rifles, thermal cameras, truck scanners integrated into the roadway and of course drones. The long-distance surveillance drone produced by the Belgian group John Cockerill can see up to 30 kilometres and is able to identify people very clearly. [29]

A juicy market (3.6 billion euros in France). “After suffering the health crisis like much of the global economy, the global internal security market is expected to rebound. Its growth forecast is 8% in 2021 and 6% in 2022, after a 3% decline in 2020. Some areas, such as surveillance drones, performed well with an increase of 5.8%.”

Make no mistake, all these techniques of policing asylum seekers can very well be used on a larger scale and for other population groups, especially in the event of “social unrest.”

Alternatives to racist and criminal migration policies

Let’s have a clear break with these anti-migration and security policies that companies take advantage of by selling their new technologies and exploiting migrants and undocumented people in conditions of misery.

Gauche Anticapitaliste proposes:

- **The opening of borders, freedom of movement and settlement for all!**
- **The abolition of closed centres that are nothing more than prisons for people who have not committed any crime!**
- **100% free of charge care for all!**
- **Justice for all victims of police violence/abuse/homicide!**
- **The unconditional regularization of all undocumented people and the same rights for all!**

*Translated from **Gauche Anticapitaliste**.*