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Precarity and Green Unionism

31 January 2022, by **Steve Ongerth**

Unions represent a check against precarity, though this occurs on a graduated scale. The stronger the union, the less the workers' precarity. Union strength manifests in various ways: It can result from a well-organized, international, militant, democratic union (ideal, but rare, with few real-world examples, such as the International Longshore Workers Union and the Industrial Workers of the World, [1] of course). More often than not, union strength is a result of a concentration of elite craft workers in skilled-trades unions. That situation represents a strong guard against precarity, but only for workers in the union, so that solidarity is limited.

Other checks against precarity include high demand for skilled workers in rare supply, high demand for hard-to-replace workers (such as those who require skilled credentials, like teachers or transport workers), or tight labor markets (which exist in our semi-post Covid-19 world due to a combination of factors).

This is nothing more than class struggle 101, as expertly phrased by Karl Marx and others.

There are new forms of precarity emerging due to the climate catastrophe brought on by capitalism. Workers find themselves facing new health and safety hazards and threats to their working environment.

Some examples include:

Increased risk of smoke inhalation due to increased and more severe wildfire activity.

Increased exposure to longer and more severe heat waves, directly resulting from global heating; for example IWW workers at Voodoo Doughnuts in Portland, Oregon, were fired for striking due to extreme heat in June (the National Labor Relations Board ultimately ruled in favor of the workers). [2]

Loss of work time due to severe snow storms, severe hurricanes, or flooding (and some workers have lost their jobs due to inability to transport themselves to work through such conditions).

Even Covid-19 is essentially related to climate (as Ian Angus et. al. have pointed out in their excellent analyses linking climate and metabolic rift to increased pandemics [3], and we know that Covid-19 raised precarity to a whole new, unforeseen scale. The struggles related to Covid have sparked a wave of increased union militancy.

Many workers, even in unionized workplaces, lack climate- or environment-related protections, and only through widespread worker organizing have any basic workplace rights related to these hazards

emerged. (The good news is that this has helped further erode support for neoliberal capitalism, though much of that dissatisfaction has been channeled into a social-democratic capitalist reformism. It still represents an opportunity for green syndicalists, ecosocialists, and others to organize genuinely revolutionary anti-capitalist alternatives, and the receptiveness to those is increasing.)

A transition to a cleaner energy system is an essential part of averting the worst aspects of climate disaster (though we are in for a world of hurt, even under the best scenarios). This won't be easy or uncomplicated. Skilled union workers in building trades, many of which are heavily intertwined with the extractivist, fossil fuel, and growth-for-growth's-sake supply chains, perceive the needed energy transition as a form of precarity they wish to avoid. This is largely based on exaggerations made by the capitalist class, particularly those directly profiting from the aforementioned supply chains.

It doesn't help matters that the vast majority of the "green" jobs have a higher degree of precarity than those in fossil-fuel-based industries as well as lower standards of working conditions and pay. That is why green unionists, ecosocialists, and climate justice activists alike call for a just transition for the affected workers. One of the key demands of this

transition is that these workers are not subjected to greater precarity!

This is what could be called green unionism. Green unionism is an essential strategy for addressing climate catastrophe as well as the ongoing challenge of precarity, a persistent feature of capitalism that the bosses will almost certainly try to continue to implement (often as a form of disaster capitalism) as the climate catastrophe worsens.

Is Green Unionism Even Possible?

It's not unheard of for skilled union workers facing threats of increased precarity to propose radical alternatives to avoid it and at the same time provide a green transition. As early as 1976, workers who made weapons and instruments of war in the United Kingdom at Lucas Aerospace, when faced with downsizing, proposed making socially useful green technology instead! [4] Meanwhile, in Australia, the left-communist influenced Builders Labourers Federation engaged in a series of strikes to oppose building developments that they deemed "anti-environmental." This series of strikes became known as the Australian Green Bans. [5] Almost simultaneously, Italian workers in Porto Marghera proposed even more revolutionary demands: the abolition of all "noxious" (ecologically destructive) work entirely! [6] Strongly influenced by the ultra-left autonomist Marxist movement of the time, they called for nothing less than the absolute abolition of the entire factory system (as opposed to self-managed creative work, organized by the working class autonomously from capitalism, as a way to run society).

These green syndicalist movements, unfortunately, were isolated and mostly ignored or even denounced by much of the "official" left, including most Communist movements, plus they arose as Keynesian social democracy began to decline in the early 1970s. Lacking both a large enough scale and favorable objective conditions, these movements quickly faded and were largely forgotten by

time, especially as neoliberalism was ascendant.

It wasn't until the 1990s that pockets of green unionism arose again, in two particular instances: One was Tony Mazzochi of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union (now merged with the United Steelworkers) which represented workers in many "polluting" industries, such as oil refining and nuclear power. Mazzochi argued that "there is a superfund for dirt, therefore, there should be a superfund for workers." It was he who essentially devised the concept of "just transition."

Meanwhile, in northwestern California, a one-time union member turned Earth First! activist (and carpenter), Judi Bari, introduced class-struggle environmentalism into the budding Earth First! movement. Under her influence, the Earth First! attempts to blockade clear-cut capitalist timber extraction had a pro-worker component to them.

Both Mazzochi and Bari were organizing against the threat of precarity. However, the times weren't in their favor, being at the height of the neoliberal era, right after the "fall of communism" in 1989.

Ecological and climate conditions have worsened greatly since then, but the strength of grassroots movements has grown substantially and the popular opinion among the working class is much more favorable now to anti-capitalist alternatives. And, ironically, climate catastrophe and Covid-19-induced conditions—which brought on the "Striketober"—have made the proverbial soil much riper for a growing and deepening green unionism movement. This is manifest in the growing support among unions and union workers for addressing climate change, including support for the concept of a Green New Deal (loaded and complicated though that may be). In fact, support for the Green New Deal consistently polls higher among union workers than it does among the general public, in spite of the alleged (and greatly exaggerated) "opposition" from organized labor. This support includes some workers employed directly in the greenhouse gas emitting industries. For example,

some of the strongest support for Robert Pollin's California Climate Jobs Plan, which is essentially a proposal for "shovel ready Green New Deal programs for California," comes from the United Steelworkers (Tony Mazzochi's old union!). [7]

Ultimately, we will need a complex combination of ecosocialism, an overall degrowth to the economy, but a growth of green jobs, especially in the short term. In fact, so many new jobs must be created that the recent "Striketober" could be dwarfed, as the demand for skilled work will increase so much the capitalists will be unable to replace striking workers. And forget about the "robot apocalypse"; like precarity, automation and deskilling have existed from the beginning of capitalism and are nothing new. Several knowledgeable, veteran class-struggle union members, including Kim Moody, have convincingly shown that the "robot apocalypse" is nothing more than doom porn. [8] If anything, there are more jobs in existence now than ever before, and that won't change much. What matters is—and you may have guessed it—the degree of precarity the workers in these jobs experience.

None of this should be taken to suggest that we will win the class struggle automatically. Nothing is guaranteed, and we cannot let the capitalist class or random chance carry out our organizing work for us. It is essential that as ecosocialists, climate justice activists, union members, and others, we dedicate our efforts to organizing at the point of production. One way to do this is through what the IWW (inspired by Alice and Staughton Lynd) calls Solidarity Unionism: the winning of gains through workplace organizing whether or not legally represented by a union or covered under a recognized union contract. That is how the labor movement arose in the first place, and there is no reason to think that the requirements are appreciably different now. If the mainstream business-union bureaucrats, such as the leadership of the building trades unions, drag their feet or stand in our way, we must out-organize them, even in spite of them. And if, at any point, unions engage in the sort of aforementioned green syndicalist efforts that arose in the

1970s, we must ensure we, the working class, have their backs.

Climate catastrophe is the ultimate

form of precarity. There are no jobs on a doomed planet.

To paraphrase Karl Marx, workers of

the world, unite! We have nothing to lose but our very existence!

Source *New Politics*.

The rulers of the great powers are playing with fire

30 January 2022, by **Gilbert Achcar**

True, neither Moscow nor Washington has hinted at the use of nuclear weapons so far, although there can be no doubt that the two countries did put their nuclear arsenals on standby in the face of the current circumstances. It is also true that the level of military alert in America has not yet reached the level it reached in 1962. But Russian military build-up at the borders of Ukraine exceeds the levels of troop concentration at a European border witnessed in the warmest moments of the “Cold War,” while Western verbal escalation against Russia has reached a dangerous level accompanied by military gestures and preparations that create a real possibility of a conflagration.

The rulers of the great powers are playing with fire. Vladimir Putin may think that this is like moving queen and rook on a chessboard in order to force the opponent to withdraw their pieces; Joe Biden may believe that it is a suitable opportunity for him to repolish his domestic and international image, very much faded since his embarrassing failure in staging the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan; and Boris Johnson may believe that his government’s pretentious bragging is a cheap way to divert attention from his domestic political problems. The fact remains, however, that events in such circumstances quickly acquire their own dynamics to the beat of the drums of war—dynamics that surpass the control of all individual actors and risk triggering an explosion that none of the players had originally wanted.

The current tension between Russia and Western countries in Europe has reached a degree not seen on the continent since the Second World War. The first European war episodes witnessed since then, the Balkan wars in the 1990s, never reached the level of prolonged tension and alert between the great powers themselves that we are witnessing today. If a war were to break out as a result of the current tension, even if it initially raged only on Ukrainian soil, the central location and sheer size of Ukraine are enough to make the danger of the fire spreading to other European countries bordering Russia, as well as to the Caucasus and Central Asia, a grave and imminent danger.

The main cause of what is happening today relates to a series of developments, for which the first and major responsibility falls on the most powerful who had the initiative—and that is, of course, the United States. Since the Soviet Union entered terminal agony under Mikhail Gorbachev, and even more so under the first president of post-Soviet Russia, Boris Yeltsin, Washington behaved toward Russia like a merciless victor toward a vanquished, whom the victor wants to prevent from ever getting back on its feet. This translated in the expansion of US-dominated NATO by including countries that had previously belonged to the USSR-dominated Warsaw Pact, instead of dissolving the Western Alliance in parallel with its Eastern counterpart. It also translated in the West dictating an economic policy of “shock therapy” to Russia’s bureaucratic economy, provoking

huge socio-economic crisis and collapse.

These premises are what most naturally led to the result that one of Gorbachev’s most prominent advisers—a former member of the Supreme Soviet and of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union—Georgi Arbatov, had warned against thirty years ago, when he predicted that Western policies toward Russia would lead to “A New Cold War” and the emergence of an authoritarian rule in Moscow reviving Russia’s old imperial tradition. This has actually happened with Putin’s ascension to power, representing the interests of the two most important blocs in the Russian capitalist economy (in which state capitalism and private interests are mingled): the military-industrial complex—which employs a fifth of the Russian industrial labor force, in addition to the armed forces personnel—and the oil and gas sector.

The result was that Putin’s Russia is practicing a policy of military expansion that goes far beyond what prevailed during the time of the Soviet Union. Then, Moscow did not deploy combat forces outside the sphere that had fallen under its control by the end of World War II, until it invaded Afghanistan at the end of 1979, an invasion that precipitated the USSR’s death agony. As for Putin’s Russia, after it regained economic vitality thanks to the increase in fuel prices since the turn of the century, it has intervened militarily outside its borders at a frequency comparable to that of US military interventions

before the defeat in Vietnam, and between the first American war against Iraq in 1991 and the inglorious exit of US forces from that country twenty years later. Russia's interventions and invasions are no longer confined to its "near abroad," i.e. those countries adjacent to Russia, which were dominated by Moscow through the USSR or the Warsaw Pact. Post-Soviet Russia has intervened militarily in the Caucasus, especially in Georgia, in Ukraine and most recently in Kazakhstan. But it

has also been waging a war in Syria since 2015 and intervening under a transparent cover in Libya and more recently in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Thus, between renewed Russian belligerence and continued US arrogance, the world finds itself on the brink of a disaster that could greatly accelerate the annihilation of humanity, to which our planet is moving by way of environmental degradation and global warming. We

can only hope that reason will prevail and that the great powers will reach an agreement addressing Russia's security concerns and recreating conditions for a renewed "peaceful coexistence" that would reduce the heat of the New Cold War and prevent it from turning into a hot war that would be a huge catastrophe for all of humanity.

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Implosion: U.S. Politics since the J6 Riot

29 January 2022, by **David Finkel**

Liberal and mainstream media are filled with exposures of the riot and how voter suppression, gerrymandering and the crippling Senate filibuster are likely to carry the Republicans to Congressional majorities in the coming November midterms and potentially to victory — or a successful "coup" in the 2024 presidential contest.

Many of these analyses are accurate and useful, often shocking in the details being revealed, but it's necessary to penetrate somewhat deeper into the causes of the depraved dysfunction that U.S. politics have become.

The Riot in Retrospect

After all, by the rules and customs that are supposed to govern the two-party system of bourgeois politics in this country, Trump's fraudulent "stolen election" claim alone should have fractured the Republican Party and ended the political lives of those who pushed it.

That's even before the January 6 abortive putsch, about which we're learning more and more every day: that it was prepared and enabled in the inner circles of the Trump White House, by high-level personnel changes at the Justice Department and the Pentagon, and by active encouragement of the Proud Boys,

Oath Keepers, Three Percenters and assorted white-supremacist and neo-Nazi elements to mobilize on the day.

These forces were evidently intended to play a role as external street-level auxiliaries to a concerted inside plan to tie Congress in procedural knots over the certification of state electoral votes. That was supposed to lead (or force) Trump's vice-president Mike Pence to halt the count and create a pretext for throwing the election into the House of Representatives, or a presidential "emergency" declaration, or god knows what. The House Select Committee investigation may or may not ultimately get to the bottom of it.

By some credible emerging accounts the Capitol break-in may even have prematurely aborted the strategic plan, by forcing Congress to recess and go into hiding for the crucial hours until the place was cleared. By that time, the shock waves resulting from the publicly murderous intent of the mob had forestalled any (small) possibility of a constitutional "coup," let alone the fantasy of an extra-constitutional one entertained by lunatics like Gen. Mike Flynn.

But the same Republican politicians who touted the Big Lie of the stolen election have continued to rake in their corporate finance contributions, as if nothing untoward had occurred.

And any who dare to refute the Big Lie are likely to be "primaried" from the far right in the run-up to the midterms.

The question is posed: Why have the political and (so far) legal consequences for the plotters and the Trump crime syndicate been so meager? By comparison, the much smaller crimes of Richard Nixon's Watergate produced a Republican wipeout in the 1974 midterms and what looked to become a long Democratic ascendancy (soon to be squandered in the wretched Jimmy Carter presidency, but that's another story).

False Celebration

In the wake of January 6, we received glowing lectures that the sacred "institutions of our democracy" had held firm against "the greatest threat since the Civil War," if not the British torching the White House in the War of 1812.

The public was supposed to breathe a sigh of relief, secure in the assurance that the right-on-schedule inauguration of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris meant the return to "normal governance" after the Trumpian chaos. As we know, the succeeding year has been anything but — and not only because of resurgent COVID, the Afghanistan debacle and the Build

Back Better stalemate.

We've explored some dynamics of the looming crisis of legitimacy in the recent Against the Current editorial The Long J6 Riot, and among the many dissections of the Biden presidency we can recommend Eric Toussaint's article One year after.

I won't repeat those discussions here, but rather look a bit further at the deeper roots of dysfunction. Three in particular deserve closer attention. Racism

The first is so obvious to the naked eye that it's widely recognized in "mainstream" discourse: the unleashing of raw racism. Like the infamous Charlottesville, Virginia "Unite the Right" march, the January 6 riot was fueled by the Great Replacement myth of "White Christian America" and its civilization being overrun by Black, brown, Muslim and assorted immigrant people brought in by conspiratorial elites.

This is accompanied by the demonization of Black Lives Matter, the 1619 Project, Critical Race Theory, prison and police reform, "cancel culture" and whatever other imagined horrors that Tucker Carlson, Fox News and post-Limbaugh talk radio can conjure up in their reality-free parallel universe.

It should go without saying that racism is what fuels the paranoid delusion of the "stolen election" — stolen of course by the fact that nonwhite people voted — which over half of Republican voters claim to believe. And of course the cynical manipulation of that delusion underlies the tsunami of voter-suppression state laws aiming to make sure that "those people" never vote in those numbers again.

But if racism is the most visible factor in the implosion, it hardly ever stands alone. Race is so powerful an element in U.S. politics precisely because it intersects and synergizes with others, two of which are particularly salient in the current crisis. Crumbling Institutions

Those vaunted institutions supposedly protecting political "stability" from

shocks and ruptures have been turned into agents of rightwing disruption and potential takeover. The past year has shown that the U.S. political system that appeared so solid and unshakeable is, in fact, fragile and vulnerable.

The rot was setting in years before the January 6 riot, including when the Supreme Court wiped out a century of campaign finance laws and effectively wiped out the Voting Rights Act — in each case, going against both majority public opinion and the clear will of Congress.

In the wake of the November 2020 election, when Trump was infuriated that "my Supreme Court" wouldn't back his efforts to overthrow the result, many people were heartened by the Court's commitment to preserving the "peaceful transfer of power" at the heart of the electoral system.

But that was illusory. Of course, even this reactionary Court wasn't going to stupidly sacrifice its own legitimacy as a burnt offering to Donald Trump. Rather, in throwing out Trump's absurd lawsuits, the Court cited states' authority to conduct their own elections — thereby getting ready to uphold the subsequent voter suppression and intimidation laws sweeping through Republican legislatures.

At the same time, the ideologically packed Court is getting ready to overthrow Roe v. Wade either in one outrageous ruling or in steps — in defiance of the clear majority of public opinion, something that by custom and tradition it's generally avoided.

There are signs that Chief Justice Roberts is (rightly) fearful that the monster he's helped create might destroy the Court's public stature. But unless Senate Democrats are prepared to break the filibuster in order to restore voting and abortion rights — or there's massive pressure on Biden to enlarge the Court as Franklin D. Roosevelt once threatened — this vicious and cynical Court majority is likely to move full speed ahead on these, and possibly other explosive questions.

The decentralization of governmental power in the U.S. system, with so much authority held at the state level, was supposed to help insulate the system from shocks and severe fluctuations. The two-capitalist-party setup and their alternation in power was to serve the same purpose, and it certainly has kept the U.S. working class politically enchained.

What's changed is the mutation of the Republican GOP ("Grand Old Party") into a kind of political Gangster Operations Party. Although similar in important ways to the far-right, anti-immigrant, virulently anti-Muslim Le Pen "Rally" (former National Front) party in France, or AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) in Germany, the critical differences are that (1) those parties are excluded by elite consensus from holding national power in the leading European countries (although Poland and Hungary are ruled by such parties), and (2) a substantial part of the Republican base in the United States is heavily armed.

Compound all this with the entrenched absurdities of the Electoral College and the U.S. Senate's tilt toward the small states, and you have a recipe for true disaster, and not just in one or another electoral cycle.

In short, much of the institutional setup that preserved the stable strength of the U.S. bourgeois political system has morphed into factors toward its destabilization and potential destruction. It's not as if the U.S. ruling class plotted or necessarily desired this outcome — in fact, the tearing of the United States' political fabric puts it in a much weaker global position, especially in the escalating rivalry with China — but our corporate capitalist masters have been too happily getting super-rich to worry about it.

Of course the obscene inequalities that have enriched capital in the neoliberal era are a big part of what's caused the political rot to begin with. That's been widely recognized as a factor in the rise of Trump, so I won't dwell on it here.

But if racism is the most obvious factor in the political implosion, and

the crisis of “the institutions of our democracy” are belatedly coming into clearer focus, there’s a third element that mainstream discourse is barely willing to discuss — one that I think may be the most important of all. Imperialism

In case anyone may have forgotten, both the rise of the criminal Trump and the progressive insurgency of Bernie Sanders were substantially fueled by popular disgust over endless debilitating U.S wars and interventions — as bipartisan as they’ve been disastrous.

In fact, if there’s one essential book to read about the mess we’re in, I’d suggest that it’s Spencer Ackerman’s *Reign of Terror: How the 9/11 Era Destabilized America and Produced Trump*. Ackerman goes through the excruciating story of the culture of lies, torture, endless claims of victories and self-deception that marked the Forever Wars in the wake of the 9/11 attacks.

It’s not a new lesson: In the Vietnam war, the U.S. government’s crimes, coverups and lies to the world, the U.S. public, and to itself meant that the truth had to be kept secret. That’s what led after all to Daniel Ellsberg’s revelation of the Pentagon Papers as well as Nixon’s “Plumbers” unit, the Watergate break-in, and everything that followed.

In the post-9/11 wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, seeing the atrocities committed by the U.S. military would lead two ordinary individuals, Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning, to become extraordinary heroes simply

because they hadn’t left their morals behind when they entered the military and national security machines.

But for the wider U.S. population disgust with being lied to, and seeing all the sacrifices in the name of patriotism go for nothing, produced a range of responses from antiwar activism to rightwing backlash. When Biden ultimately and inevitably pulled out of Afghanistan last year, the chaos accompanying the withdrawal has further accelerated the United States’ own political implosion.

Ackerman nails not only neocons, but the bipartisan nature of the long post-9/11 debacle: “In Democratic politics and much self-identifying liberal journalism, there remained a fundamental allergy to leftist critiques of the War on Terror.” And “Obama, the locus of much antiwar hope, entrenched the War on Terror...” (Ackerman, 187)

Again, not a surprise in historical perspective: Vietnam was the Kennedy-Humphrey Cold War liberals’ war before it became Nixon’s.

Interestingly, Ackerman cites a statement by James Madison that the “malignant element in republicanism may be traced in the inequality of fortunes, and the opportunities of fraud, growing out of a state of war... No nation could preserve its freedom in the midst of continual warfare.”

To be sure, progressive folks, let alone revolutionary socialists, don’t worship at the shrine of the American Founders and Constitutional Framers. They had issues — slavery, genocide, extreme patriarchy. But in their own

time, they understood some things.

They knew, for example, that a crook and swindler like Donald Trump could become President. That’s why they wrote into the Constitution an emoluments clause and an impeachment process (although I don’t think they imagined an entire political party and a mass media network lined up behind the crook).

Yes, they also had frankly imperial ambitions with their eyes on Cuba and Haiti — especially the slaveowners among them — and on Canada too. Yet they understood that what we now call Forever Wars will inevitably toxify domestic “republicanism.” They knew that from Roman history if nothing else, and I suspect they wouldn’t be terribly surprised by what’s happening to us.

The potential of rightwing domination of federal and state legislatures, of the judiciary, and after 2024 possibly the White House, is truly appalling and terrifying with its implications for everything from white supremacy to climate apocalypse. To resist this threat requires understanding its roots, and above all, building an alternative politics that doesn’t depend on a failing Biden presidency to rescue us.

How to accomplish that enormous task is a question beyond the scope of this article, something that all of us on the left need to confront, hopefully together.

6 January 2022

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

Fascism and racism in the Spanish State

28 January 2022, by **Steve Cedar**

The Spanish State is no exception, and the major force of the far-right that has emerged in recent years is Vox, an extreme right-wing populist party that has grown with alarming speed and

has representation and influence in the autonomous communities and over 50 members of the central Spanish parliament. In fact, Vox is unique in comparison with other far-right

parties in Europe in that it is a split from the main traditional conservative party (PP) rather than a new party. This split is part of an attempt to save the right (beleaguered by corruption),

as was the creation of Cs (Ciudadanos); Cs hooligan and provocative politics opened the door for Vox, and it is no coincidence that Cs voters have gone wholesale to Vox. The existence of far-right populism gives a chance to the traditional right to broaden its base; the PP is seen as too 'posh' and mainstream and a combined PP - Vox vote is greater than PP alone.

They have grown due to several factors: disillusionment with politics and the traditional parties by a large section of the population, including sections of the working class who are punished by the system; outside of Catalonia, rabid hatred of the pro-independence movement, and this anti-Catalan sentiment has brought them many votes but also inside Catalonia, with C's going to Vox in Catalonia), a key difference from the rest of Europe; the textbook racism and islamophobia that is the mark of all these populist parties across the world; and a cry for the nostalgia of the Spain of Franco; patriotic, flag-waving nationalism, attempting to claim the homogeneity of the right at the expense of other right-wing parties. And of course, a hatred for the left, calling the PSOE-Podemos government a "communist" government. In brief, a classical far-right/fascist discourse adapted to the specific Spanish state, with all the distortions and lies that are the trademark of early fascist movements. To sum up, its key questions to mobilise are based around race, Catalonia and misogyny: the latter also differs (if only in degree) from the rest of the far-right in that they deny

the existence of gender violence.

And what is the response of the left to this rise in a right-wing organisation?

At an institutional level, little or nothing. Despite making brave speeches about the threat of the extreme right, the PSOE-Podemos (UP) government capitulate to the extreme right on questions of immigration, human rights, refugees, repression and anti-Catalan sentiment.

Antifascism is seen as more as a crime in the courts than the constant acts of fascist groups across the state, clear evidence that the old Francoist regime was never removed from the judicial system.

While both government parties are formally antifascist, it is questionable if they use their influence to do much about the question.

At a local level, members of UP are more active, particularly, but not exclusively, outside of Catalonia.

PSOE hide behind the purple cloak of Podemos to give themselves a left cover, and Podemos continue to shred any left-wing participation in their ranks, with more purges and expulsions and become just another left reformist electoral option. Any antifascist action taken by the social-democratic left will only be as a result of pressure from the popular movements.

Where VOX have tried to appear in public with stands in working-class neighbourhoods, such as Vallecas in

Madrid, or pro-independence towns in Catalonia, such as Vic, they have been met with organised opposition from all sections of local society: the young antifascists, tenants associations, trade unionists, and general public who recognise VOX for what they are: the old fascist movement of Franco with new branding, in common with the discourse in the rest of Europe, although its leaders undoubtedly are Francoists.

As revolutionaries, our task is not easy. We must build opposition to VOX on the street and in the communities, and work with people on this question who maybe we do not agree with on some other issues, but as I always say, nobody has a copyright in the fight against fascism and racism. We have the task of participating in building a unitary movement against the extreme right, but which must be based in the communities and workplaces, and not a "front" organisation, or a virtual one, but a real united front movement that can involve people who want to fight back and stop this tide of racism that is approaching.

However, a united campaign against fascism on its own is not enough; not enough if the aim is to undermine its working-class votes; a political alternative is needed, and this alternative is not offered by non-anti-capitalist allies; so while inevitably a united campaign means working with reformists (especially base of UP or ERC in Catalonia, for example), these parties are incapable of offering an alternative to alienated working-class Vox supporters who are alienated from the system.

Explaining Kazakhstan Events

27 January 2022, by **Alexei Kozakov**



It looked as if this scenario would come to fruition for a while. In the early 2000s, the Kazakh middle class

became increasingly visible, forming new political parties and contested elections. But this was quickly ended. It ended when some leaders of opposition (Nurkadilov, Sarsenbayev) were murdered, some (Zhakiyanov,

Ablyazov) thrown in jail, and even Asar, a party founded by Nazarbayev's eldest daughter Dariga was dissolved and forced to join Nur Otan, the ruling party. In the January 2021, parliamentary elections no opposition

party was allowed to register, political activists were arrested and Nur Otan and its allies secured over 70% of the votes. Officially, voter turnout was 63%; other studies suggest around 30% (similar to Kyrgyzstan 2021 elections). In 2021 Kazakhstan was classified as an authoritarian regime by the Economist Democracy Index: out of 167 countries, it was ranked 128, a few points below Russia. The democratic deficit has meant there is almost no legitimate ways for the societal voices to be heard. For example, it had no local elections until last year; even village heads were appointed. Kazakhstan passed a law on local self-government and carried out pilot experiments allowing elections in a few localities. However, they were rigged and reform stalled.

2. *The recent events revealed deep fissures in society and the brittleness of the Nazarbayev political economy construct.* While Nazarbayev has withdrawn into the shadows, the “collective Nazarbayev” remains. Tokayev has no independent base, as his cabinet choices reveal. In his 11 January address to lawmakers, Tokayev promised to increase income, reduce unemployment, pay greater attention to the regions, establish free vocational education for youth, etc. But he said little about governance reforms except to mention there will be a “phased political modernization” at some point.

While Tokayev was making his speech, the internet was restored and that drove public sentiment against the President and the regime several notches higher. The 15 January *Financial Times* quoted a young activist: “Our people say: ‘They turned the internet off, blood flowed. They turned the internet on, evidence flowed’...We had only one demand: change the regime in power. People are tired of not having citizens’ rights, of constant disrespect for human rights.”

3. *The Kazakh protests began on 2 January in the oil-producing city of Zhanaozen, Mangystau oblast [administrative unit -ed.], in response to the almost 100% increase in the price of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) from 50-60 tenge per liter to 120 tenges.* [Each tenge equals 24 euro

cents -ed.] In that hydrocarbon-rich oblast, 90% of vehicles run on LPG, and it is also widely used in heating households.

Zhanaozen holds great symbolic importance in the country. When in May 2011, workers went on strike for unpaid salaries and better working conditions, the state-oil company fired nearly 1,000 employees. Workers started the around-the-clock occupation in the town square, demanding recognition of workers’ rights and remaining there until 16 December. On that day, police stormed the square and fired openly on the crowd, killing at least 14 protesters. The 2022 protests in Zhanaozen quickly spread to other oblasts in the country’s west. These protests were largely peaceful because workers groups were the organizing core, and the towns socially cohesive. The number of people participating in the demonstrations was quite large. On 3 January in Aktau, a town of some 180,000, over 6,000 demonstrators were in the main square, and a similar number in Zhanaozen. A few days later, gas prices were lowered, and the government resigned. What happened in Almaty, and to a lesser extent in Chimkent and other southern and eastern oblasts, was a different story.

4. *In Almaty, on 4 January, around 1,000 people gathered in the city center to protest, and police used stun grenades and teargas to disperse them.* The next day, another peaceful march was held, but security forces vanished from the scene at noon; suddenly, an unruly mob arrived. Over the next several days looting and destruction turned the biggest and most prosperous city into a war zone littered with dead bodies, burned buildings and incinerated cars. Over 200 were killed — although the final count is unknown — and 8,000 were arrested.

No adequate analysis has been offered to explain this unprecedented turmoil and destruction. On 10 January, Tokayev claimed that this was the work of “terrorists and thugs” and “foreign bandits” that were part of an attempted coup d’état backed by foreign forces. However, a key factor

in the marauding was the pent-up frustration of youth and marginalized populations who acted spontaneously. Much of the destruction of government offices and other wanton activities showed the hallmarks of good organization. All the bazaars and in and around Almaty and trade along the Chinese-Kazakh border, including the lucrative Khorgos dry port, are controlled by Nazarbayev’s oldest brother Bolat. A plumber by profession, he has become fabulously wealthy. He is widely known to be the “boss” of the region and has many “enforcers” in the city and surrounding countryside.

The first clashes broke out around the Altyn Orda market controlled by Bolat. Most informed people in the city are convinced that his group, which included some bands of religious young people, played a dominant role in the disturbances and were designed to discredit Tokayev. The withdrawal of the security services and police at critical times during the destruction is seen as part of this plan. [9] Tokayev’s controversial call to bring in CSTO troops [Collective Security Treaty Organization, a pact between Russia and five other post-Soviet states. -ed.] to secure key strategic objectives is not without foundation. What is also noteworthy is that civil society organizations played only a minor role, and mainly in the first days. As Almaty always bore the brunt of suppressing the political opposition; human rights activists and the arrests of 2021 aimed at neutralizing opposition to the fraudulent election had already weakened them.

5. *While calm has been restored in Kazakhstan, the inner power struggles are likely to continue.* The new leadership faces problems which have accumulated over the years. Of course, Kazakhstan has the economic and human resources to restore calm. But that is a temporary solution. Long-term stability depends on the ruling group’s willingness to change the country’s political economy, offer its population a new social contract, and implement structural reforms required to change the current economic model and generate the growth necessary for a social accord.

6. *Anger over inequality played a*

significant role in the protests. In recent decades the "Nazarbayev system" produced marked growth in inequality. In 2021, the top 1% of the population held 30% of the total net personal wealth; the top 10% had 60% and the bottom 50%, a mere 5%. [10] This is particularly grating in societies that came from the Soviet political culture where egalitarianism was a significant value. The Nazarbayev family and close friends became fabulously wealthy by using their monopoly of political power to create oligopolies and restrict free markets and competition. A class of super-rich oligarchs had grown up in the oil, mining and banking sectors. In 2019, just 162 individuals held 50% of the country's wealth, according to KPMG. [11] Ostentatious exhibits of wealth, especially the purchase of luxurious properties in Europe and the United States, were particularly irritating. In 2020 investigative journalists released reports widely viewed on social media that the immediate family-owned real estate was worth \$758 million while the average salary is about \$500 a month. (Recall that one in four Russians watched Navalny's documentary on Putin's palace.)

7. The root of the current discontent lies in the fact that the material well-being of many Kazakhs has noticeably deteriorated in the last two years. In 2021, inflation rose to almost 9%, food prices increased 11%, while salaries stagnated. The pandemic hit the labor market hard. The worst-hit were domestic migrants, mostly young men (the average age in Kazakhstan is around 30), who move to the cities from the provinces to find work. Many of them lost a significant portion of their income because of strict lockdowns imposed. They were a significant component of the angry protesters who clashed with law enforcement in Almaty - these young people are called "the lost generation."

8. Youth employment is just one important issue authorities must address. In countries such as Kyrgyzstan, labor migration to Russia acts as a safety valve. Some 30% of the able-bodied population have left the country, with their remittance totaling 30% of GDP. Kazakhs,

however, do not migrate, except for the highly qualified professions who are a significant brain drain. Most young people move to the major urban centers, especially Almaty, searching for employment. A 2017 OECD study found that although 96% of young Kazakhs are employed, they are often engaged in low-quality, low-paid, and high-risk jobs. Such low-quality employment is generally found in the informal economy, which employs about a third of young Kazakhs. Another segment of youth is self-employed.

Kazakhstan, because of rising incomes, had a "baby boom" that began around 2005 and ended a decade later. This fact puts considerable pressures on job creation since throughout the 2020s some 135,000 people a year will enter the labor force. The extractive industries sector is capital intensive, and while it provides a significant government revenue, its contribution to overall employment is small. [12] Because the small- and medium-business sector (SME) is underdeveloped, finding good jobs is a challenge for youth. Moreover, although the education participation rate has seen rapid growth, company executives complain that while graduates have diplomas, they do not have the skills demanded by the labor market. Skill shortage is cited as one of the top three obstacles to doing business in the country.

9. Kazakhstan is caught in what economists call "the middle-income" trap. Political reform that leads to greater democracy and better governance is seen as the critical factor in securing sufficient economic growth to become a high-income country. [13] Kazakhstan's GDP per capita has declined by \$14,000 in 2013 and \$9,000 in 2020. The country relied heavily on oil rents, representing almost 25% of GDP in 2005 but down to 13% by 2019.

Rents from extractive industries cannot be the only source of growth; the economy has to diversify. In Kazakhstan, SME's contribution to GDP does not rise above 20%; its total employment is less than 30%. By contrast, SMEs in the EU (on average) provide 67% of GDP and 65% of employment. But SME's growth in

Kazakhstan is hampered by many unresolved issues including endless inspections, corruption, over-regulation, and "raiding." The SME sector also plays a critical role in promoting regional development, another of the country's more pressing issues. Consequently the SME sector cannot stabilize the economy and society as it does in other countries. Yet during the COVID pandemic, the relatively little financial support SME's received from the government has resulted in their severe setback.

10. Kazakhstan, the ninth largest country globally yet with a small population, has enormous regional variations. Regional inequalities are to be expected. However, Kazakhstan's regional inequality in GDP per capita is particularly high and has increased over the 15-year period (OECD 2017) in comparison with countries of similar profiles. These disparities are driven by the economic performance of regions that specialize in extractive industries as well as investments in selective regions while other regions lack economic diversification and face unchanging living conditions over a decade. The billions spent on prestige projects in Astana sharpened inequalities.

In February 2019, hundreds of mothers staged a protest in Astana that lasted three months. It became a "cause celebre" nationally and internationally, revealing that beyond the glittering center thousands lived in appalling housing conditions. Five children died in a fire in a ramshackle dwelling while their single mother was working. The protesters demanded that the government provide proper housing, more places for children in public kindergartens, and increased social allowances. It was the only protest not disbanded by police.

11. The first demonstration in the USSR was the 1986 Almaty student protest, which was brutally quelled. It took place in Brezhnev Square against the Politburo's appointment of Gennady Kolbin - a Russian outsider - when Gorbachev appointed him First Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan. But it signaled to Gorbachev that he needed to pay attention to national sensitives. In

1989 he appointed Nazarbayev First Secretary and then he became Chairman of the Kazakh Supreme Soviet. This was how Nazarbayev rose to power. After three decades, the 1986 protests remains one of the most underreported incidents in Soviet history. There is a monument to the memory of the students in central Almaty Square; in recent years those who marked this anniversary were regularly arrested.

During the collapse of the USSR, Kazakhstan was the last republic to declare independence, 31 August. On 1 December 1991, Nazarbayev appeared alone on the ballot for Kazakhstan's first Presidential election. By 2010 the sycophantic Parliament awarded him the title of "Elbasy," leader of the nation. His stepping down from power in 2021 included arranging immunities from prosecution of himself and his family and the retention of the all-important position of Chairman of the National

Security Council. Nonetheless in 2022 he was removed from that office and some of his children were also removed as heads of monopolistic oligarchical companies.

But no one should deny Nazarbayev's role as founder of the nation. At the time of independence, the Kazakhs were a disappearing nation. During collectivization one-third of all Kazakhs died. Nazarbayev's own family fled to the mountains to survive. In the post-war period, there was massive in-migration of Russians and other nationalities. During Khrushchev's virgin lands campaign of the 1960s their headquarters was Tselinograd, today's Astana. Kazakhstan was where hundreds of atmospheric and underground nuclear tests were conducted.

At the time of independence, Kazakhs were a diminishing minority in their land: they were only 39% of the total population, and just 7% in Almaty, the capital. With the collapse of the USSR

in 1991, Kazakhstan's GDP fell 50%, to a per capita GDP of \$1,200 (1995).

Nazarbayev's achievements under these difficult conditions of constructing an inclusive nation, as well as state-building and economic development were remarkable. He raised Kazakhstan as a new voice on the Eurasian space and the international arena. In 2014, he had the boldness to criticize Russia's incurrence into Ukraine. He often compared himself to Ataturk and Lee Kuan Yew. Ataturk died poor, while Lee Kuan Yew openly declared he deserved a high income; Singapore is one of the world's least corrupt countries.

One of the most popular slogans of the 2022 events was "Shal ket," old man out. The old man is out, but his "collective" remains. And alternatives have yet to be born.

Source *Against the Current*.

Can Colombia's Left Survive the Persistent Logics of Armed Conflict?

26 January 2022, by **Ben Gilvar-Parke**

Now in Colombia, a country whose successive governments have ranged from hard to center right throughout its modern history, [a social democrat and former guerilla militant leads in the presidential polls](#). Gustavo Petro, the runner up in Colombia's 2018 presidential elections, is the leading candidate for a coalition of left of center political parties called the Pacto Historico (historic pact), which seeks to change Colombia's status as a "center right" country, for the first time in its history.

If Colombia's left is successful in the spring 2022 parliamentary and presidential elections (March 13 and 29), it will be a miracle that defies the brutal logics of Colombia's 52-year-long internal armed conflict; a half

century of U.S.-backed counter-insurgency and extrajudicial killings of civilian leftists.

Although peace accords were signed in 2016 and the principal guerilla group - the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) - officially demobilized in 2017, wartime logics continue to color dynamics between the far right Colombian state and the Colombian left.

Cold-War-era counterinsurgency logics, exported to the world by the U.S. military, blur the lines between civilians, state actors, and insurgents. These logics, present across Latin America from the early sixties onward, posited that every civilian in a territory of conflict had to pick a side:

either collaborate with the military or be seen as a "communist/guerilla" and risk extrajudicial execution.

In 1962, two years before Colombia's conflict began, U.S. Colonel William Yarborough suggested during a visit to Colombia "the organization of local death squads accountable to the U.S. government" [14] to stamp out the threat of Colombia's peasant communists. In 1963, Colombian General Alberto Ruiz Novoa, a veteran of the Colombian battalion that fought alongside the United States in Korea, made a recommendation that slightly tweaked Yarborough's formula: he advocated for the creation of armed civilian "peasant self-defense" groups, accountable to the Colombian military, and trained to fight communists within

their communities. [15]

Through the enduring political influence of military and paramilitary groups, counterinsurgency doctrine has persisted, even as the war came to an official close.

Stretching from 1964 to 2016, the Colombian conflict is the longest running cold war conflict in Latin America. Many attribute the length of Colombia's conflict to the FARC finding a sustainable income source through territorial control of Colombia's frontier regions and levying taxes on cocaine production. While this is a major factor, the rise of anti-communist paramilitaries and their implementation of scorched earth tactics against the civilian Left meant that an earlier negotiated end to the war was impossible.

In 1982, then-president Belisario Betancur began negotiating a peace process with the major Left insurgencies, offering the opportunity for leftists and demobilized guerrillas to compete in electoral politics. By 1985, the FARC and the Colombian Communist Party had formed the Union Patriótica (UP), a political party that emerged as a popular alternative electoral option for Colombians. What followed was [political genocide](#). As Andrei Gomez-Suarez notes, between 1985 to 2002, "more than 5,000 UP members had been assassinated, hundreds had been disappeared or forced to leave the country, others had gone back to continue waging war against the state, and many others had abandoned their political identity in order to survive the violence." [16]

In the 1980s and 1990s, anti-communist paramilitarism - encouraged by U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine and often fused with narco-trafficking - was booming in Colombia. In the paramilitaries' war on the Left, civilians often paid the price. In [Segovia, Antioquia, where Union Patriótica won parliamentary elections](#) in 1988, the military abandoned a security checkpoint to let anti-communist paramilitaries into the town. In this case, paramilitaries commanded by [the infamous Castaño brothers](#) killed 43 civilians, one among many massacres that led to 1988 being dubbed "the year of the

masacre." On the subject of civilian casualties, Carlos Castaño said, "In war, unarmed civilian is a relative term. Two thirds of the guerrillas are unarmed, act like civilians, and collaborate with the guerrillas." [17] Paramilitaries committed crimes with impunity, with official state forces either collaborating or looking the other way.

Paramilitary Power

With the growth of paramilitary power, these organizations soon found their political expression on a national level. Alvaro Uribe Velez, a wealthy cattle baron from Antioquia, rose to prominence as a senator and then governor of Antioquia. There, he fostered paramilitary structures called [convivirs](#), [18] which reported directly to the military.

By 2002, a time when paramilitaries began to run electoral candidates and win by intimidating voters, Uribe ran for president, on the platform of what he called "democratic security:" no more than recycled cold war counterinsurgency theory. His message was clear: in order for the war against the FARC to be won, citizens would have to collaborate with the military. In his own words, "In democratic societies there is no citizen neutrality in the face of crime. There is no distinction between police and citizens." [19]

After assuming the presidency in 2002, Uribe continued links of patronage with paramilitary actors, [including prominent narco-traffickers](#). While waging all-out war on the Left insurgencies, [Uribe negotiated an amnesty deal with the major paramilitary groups, insulating them from accountability for human rights violations and array of criminal activities](#). The deal capped prison sentences at 6.5 years and was rejected by both the EU and UN for failing to punish crimes against humanity. [During this time of demobilization, paramilitary leaders estimated that 35% percent of the Colombian Congress was under their control](#).

Under his plan for Democratic Security, Uribe organized over one

million civilians to be paid informers, and presided over Plan Colombia, a major influx of U.S. military aid which began in 2000 and massively modernized the armed forces. With this influx of U.S. defense money, and the FARC at an all-time low popularity, Uribe was convinced that now was the time to win the war on the Left insurgents.

But victory, for Uribe's policy of democratic security, required complete submission to the state. For communities that sought neutrality in the conflict, like San Jose de Apartado, in the banana region of Uruba, this was a doomed endeavor. Long caught in the crossfires of armed groups, San Jose de Apartado declared itself a neutral "peace community" in 1997 and was the site of international human rights accompaniment. Despite international focus, in 2005 prominent community leader Luis Eduardo Guerra was killed, along with four children and three other community members. This massacre meant that, since declaring itself a "peace community," 115 community members had been killed. [20] Of the killings, president Uribe said: "There are good people in the community, but some of its leaders, patrons, and defenders have been signaled by people who live there as FARC auxiliaries." [21]

Again, Uribe blurs the lines between combatant and civilian, and through encouraging the use of force, emboldened his security forces to do the same. As one soldier said, "I feel supported by the government because finally there is someone who understands us and encourages us to win this war." [22] During the period of 2002-2010, when Uribe commanded the armed forces with U.S. trained General Mario Montoya, [the army tried to spur soldiers toward "victory" against the FARC by offering bonuses to kill combatants](#). Through a mix of zeal, impunity, and incentive systems for kills, many units in the military began the widespread practice of kidnapping working class Colombians, often displaced because of the internal armed conflict and living in a new community. These civilians would then be dressed up as insurgents and killed. [This practice, which became known euphemistically as "false positives," is estimated to have taken](#)

up to 10,000 lives, according to military whistleblowers.

In 2022, the memory of the Uribe era of armed conflict persists, as does his political influence. Throughout the term of Alvaro Uribe's protege and current Colombian president, Ivan Duque, Colombia experienced a series of paros nacionales "Uribe Paraco, el pueblo está berraco," ("Uribe, you paramilitary, the people are fed up").

On April 28, 2021, a paro nacional convened in response to a tax reform and the handling of COVID by president Duque. These strikes were brutally repressed, but protesters remained in the streets for months, now protesting militarization in the country. "We saw how bodies appeared dead in the rivers. We saw how the police and the ESMAD (riot police) shot at young people point blank," says Miguel Villanuevas, a student leader in Caqueta. "This showed us that the military and police don't serve the constitution, but instead serve a specific political class that wants to defend its privileges at all cost."

Throughout the months of mobilization, viral videos circulated of police committing atrocities against protestors, which fed the indignation behind the marches. President Duque, for his part, took a hard line in his defense of the police and military, ordering law enforcement to be "overwhelming in their response to terrorists, vandals, and criminality." Colombia's defense minister claimed that protests were infiltrated by the FARC, and Alvaro Uribe went further, tweeting "Let's support the right of soldiers and police to use their firearms to defend their integrity and to defend people and property from criminal acts of terrorist vandalism."

This rhetoric is a classic tack for Colombia's far right: demonize political opponents as the terrorist, the guerilla, the vandal, or the criminal in order to execute them with impunity. So far, 42 protesters have been killed through state repression, adding to the ever-growing list of "social leaders" killed in Colombia.

Since the peace process in 2016,

extrajudicial killings of territorial or environmental defenders, political party activists, human rights defenders, displaced peasants, and ex-combatants of guerilla groups have been cast into this euphemistic frame of "social leaders". For protesters in the paro, the killing of social leaders, along with the lack of implementation of the 2016 peace agreements, are major sources of ire with Duque's "Uribista" government. In 2020, 120 social leaders were murdered in Colombia according to the U.N.'s High Commissioner for Human Rights.

After the strikes and brutal repression, the Duque government is at a historically low approval rating. With mass participation in the national strikes, there is a growing popular opposition to the paramilitary doctrines of Alvaro Uribe. For the upcoming elections, even right-wing parties are excluding his candidate from coalitions for the upcoming elections, for fear that the "Uribista" status quo is politically toxic.

For the Pacto Historico, the newly-formed coalition of Left parties contesting the presidency, their intention is to translate the energy of street protests and rejection of the status quo into a positive project of major reform. Attempting to ally themselves with the paro movement, their slogan has become: "from the streets to the polls, from the polls to power."

Miguel Villanuevas, the student leader in Caqueta, is a Pacto Historico volunteer. "Now there is a fracture," Villanuevas says. "The strike of April 28, 2021 changed the consciousness of the (Colombia's) citizens. Not just in Cali or in Bogota, but in many places in the country where there had never been a strong mobilization, citizens went to the streets to say: Enough."

The Pacto Historico, as a political movement, hopes to tie messages of national unity to social spending and poverty reduction, in what Villanuevas describes as not just a rejection of militarism, "but a social pact with Colombia's citizens."

From their campaign announcement video, it is clear the Pacto hopes to break with past dynamics and provide

a positive vision moving forward. In the video, a smiling young person cheerily affirms: "the past doesn't matter, this is our opportunity to generate a positive change. This is our moment of national unity."

The question is whether the paramilitary and narco-bourgeoisie, who consider the electoral Right and Uribe's Centro Democratico movement to be beneficial to their power, can sow enough fear in the population to prevent a leftward shift. After such monumental national strikes, can counterinsurgent logics (the fear of being stigmatized as a guerilla and killed) continue to regulate people's political participation? In many ways, it already does.

Because of the specter of political violence in frontier regions where armed groups from the conflict still operate, many political leaders look for electoral vehicles outside of left parties like Pacto Historico. As Diana Sanchez, director of the MINGA association, explained, leaders across the ideological spectrum "have to look for party endorsements that guarantee that they are not killed and can participate." In these territories, where the majority of social leaders are killed, vote winning will prove to be most dangerous.

During the 2018 elections, when international observers visited these areas, they found civil society groups terrorized by paramilitaries, with social leaders killed during their visits, and armed groups declaring voters for Gustavo Petro (the leading Left candidate) to be "military objects."

Miguel Villanuevas notes that "in the places where Pacto Historico campaigners do not have control over security, we're not going to go, because the war, at this moment, is beginning."

According to Villanuevas, the Right is launching their strategy of reaction, knowing the deep unpopularity of their movement. "The Uribistas know they're going to lose power, they're afraid to lose power, and the only method they have to prevent this is taking up arms."

Political Change and Continuity in the Dominican Republic

25 January 2022, by **Amaury Rodríguez, Virgilio Oscar Aran**

Más de los mismo (more of the same) is a popular expression within Dominican culture, which highlights the lack of political changes. This expression can easily apply to the economic policy guiding the current administration. When President Abinader ran as a candidate, he stressed the inequality that plagued the years of governance under the Dominican Liberation Party. His presidential platform highlighted how economic growth benefited the upper middle class and the elite. He also stressed that the Dominican Republic's development economic model provided economic growth to a small sector of the population. This message, combined with the message of fighting corruption, catapulted Abinader to the office of the presidency in 2020. [23]

Nonetheless, when Abinader commenced his presidential term, the first political decision he undertook was to appoint Héctor Valdez Albizu, who was instrumental in implementing the current neoliberal model in the Dominican Republic, president of the Central Bank. This economic model has three critical pillars: a) liberalization of the economy, b) growth via incurring into foreign debt, b) attacking the working class. Thus, the head of the Dominican Central Bank has similar powers as the dominant role other Central Bank presidents played in the hemisphere such as Domingo Felipe Cavallo in Argentina during the process of liberalization of the economy or Alan Greenspan in the United States.

Indeed, the real process of economic liberalization began when the PLD

took power in 1996. At the time, neoliberal policies were sweeping Latin America, and the PLD did not hesitate to jump on the bus of this economic transformation with adverse consequences for the Dominican working class. The first target of the liberalization process was the state-owned enterprises such as the state electric company and others. The narrative used to enchant the population was that privatization would help to eradicate the inefficiency and corruption that plagued those companies. The reality was different, however, and it was to sell those companies to foreign multinationals or local business interests and for elected officials who participated in the process of selling, to enrich themselves with kickbacks. The current president of the Central Bank played a critical role in that process.

But the process of privatization also brought another reality regarding economic resources. The state enterprises represented a source of revenue for the state, and without that source of revenue, the state had to find new resources. One of the options was to tax the Dominican elite but that option was immediately discarded.

Dominican reformist politics

The emergence of the PLD in the Dominican political landscape began in the 1970s when societies faced complex political, economic, and social challenges. Founded by Juan Bosch (1909-2001) in 1973 after leaving the

nominal social-democrat Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD), which he and others founded in Cuba in the 1940s, the PLD was, in all essence, a reformist bourgeois party. However, the party leadership concealed its true colors by making use of progressive language, a posture that would prove successful for party building as the crisis and divisions facing the Dominican left had no end in sight. Bosch built a base of loyal supporters due to his role in the anti-dictatorial resistance abroad, and his proven credentials as a democratic politician as he became the first democratically elected president in 1963 after thirty years of dictatorial regime. Overthrown in a military coup seven months later, Bosch's party at the time, the PRD, led the 1965 democratic revolution that sought to restore constitutional order and democratic liberties, playing a central role in the anti-imperialist resistance against the US military intervention that same year.

In a political landscape dominated by two main capitalist parties, on one side the right-wing Social Christian Reformist Party (PRSC) and on the other the center-left Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD), the emergence of a third party offered a sense of respite from traditional politics, disrupting bipartidism in the process. The PLD's early reformist orientation eventually solidified the party as a left-wing pole of attraction during the 1980s. Early on, Bosch had envisioned the PLD as a political instrument to fulfill the task of national liberation under the leadership of the petit bourgeoisie class, a social class assigned a

“historical role” in his political writings. The party’s outlook did not only reflect Bosch’s ideas about the origins of capitalism in the Dominican Republic and the implications in the fight for national liberation, but it also reflected the class interests of some of its leading members. In fact, the bulk of the PLD’s membership had become—or were en route to become—young professionals who hailed from lower and middle-class strata. Among the party membership were some conservative opportunists and former collaborators of the Trujillo dictatorship who cloaked their right wing, authoritarian sympathies under the guise of pseudo-progressive language.

In a 1986 interview, Bosch admitted that the PLD was leftist without a socialist program. [24] Unlike the old reformist PRD of yesteryear—a mass, left-of-center, populist, pro-capitalist party with active labor, radical and anti-imperialist wings—the PLD did not claim to represent the working-class or other popular sectors.

Over time, three critical factors eventually helped the PLD under Bosch’s leadership consolidate its position as the “truly leftist reformist party” vis-à-vis the PRD. First, the Stand-by Arrangement of the Dominican government led by the Dominican Revolutionary Party, with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), marked a period of discontent within the progressive segment of the coalition that first catapulted the PRD to power in 1978. The second factor was the attraction that the new reformist party had on Dominican leftists who gradually abandoned revolutionary politics: from renowned radical fighters and unionists to artists and intellectuals of great standing and political prestige.

Finally, the third factor that contributed to the rise of the PLD was the internal division of the PRD. Beginning in 1982, when the presidential candidate Salvador Jorge Blanco (1926-2010) won the election, a civil war erupted inside the PRD. Two factions emerged: one led by president Salvador Jorge Blanco, who represented the elite segment inside the PRD, and the other faction led by Jacobo Majluta, who served as vice-

president to former president Antonio Guzmán Fernández and as interim president for 41 days after the president committed suicide. In 1986, as the PRD presidential candidate, Jacobo Majluta (1934-1996) lost the election against the Social Christian leader Joaquín Balaguer (1906-2002). In short, the weakness of the PRD within the Dominican political landscape—exacerbated by the loss of popular support after state repression quelled anti-IMF mobilizations in 1984—served the growth of the PLD in the late 1980s.

The PLD shifts to the right

With the beginning of the 1990s, the shift to the right of the PLD began to be more noticeable. Two factors accelerated the internal transformation of the party. First, the loss of the 1990 presidential elections in which the PLD was perceived as the winner, but Joaquín Balaguer was able to retain power by manipulating the election results with the support of the Dominican elite and the United States, opened the door to question the so-called leftist tendency inside the party. Due to pressure from the conservative wing of the party, the PLD had to change its mantra from that of a center-left party to a centrist party that incorporated segments of the conservative elite if the party wanted not just to win an election but the recognition of that election by the elite.

The second critical factor was the tectonic change in the geopolitical sphere between the Soviet Union and the West led by the United States. In the 1990s and on the onset of the fall of the Communist regimes, the PLD leadership consolidated the shift of the party to the right when it openly embraced bourgeois ideology in a move that propelled it into the arms of Washington and local archconservative elites. For a segment of the party leadership, the world changed, and the struggle of ideology became an obsolete political tool of the past. This perception was in tune with conservative political scientist Francis Fukuyama in his now infamous book, *The End of History and*

the Last Man, in which he described the so-called victory of the West as the end of human beings’ ideological evolution in support of Western values. This new realignment coupled with Juan Bosch’s inability to lead due to declining health and his eventual death in 2001, posed a dilemma for the leadership: how to maintain party unity and preserve its “progressive” image for public consumption while engaging in political duplicity. Over the years, the chameleonic PLD leaders—who were invested in restructuring economic and social relations in tandem with the free-market—adopted, as in a masquerade ball, multiple political colors, depending on the occasion, in the hopes of retaining and gaining support. Moreover, progressive language and periodical invocations of the deceased leader served the PLD as subterfuge to deceive, disorient and confuse both opposition parties and voters.

As the crisis of the left intensified, the PLD leadership began to position itself beyond left-right ideologies, preaching the virtues of capitalism at every opportunity. Aware of the particularities of Dominican politics, which is pretty much acute and sensitive to international political trends, the PLD leadership spent a great amount of time making vague references to Anglo-political conservative, neoliberal and anti-progressive realignments such as Clintonism and Tony Blair’s Third Way. That is not to say that these two neoliberal heads of state did not influence the thinking of peledistas (PLD members), but the seeds to embark on privatization of public holdings to further dismantle basic services like healthcare and education were already there.

Further, small but popular gestures like establishing diplomatic relations with Cuba were meant to appease the left while the leadership argued that the party’s ideology was neither left or right; it continued to spew center-left and progressive rhetoric despite its alliance with fascists from the *Fuerza Nacional Progresista* (Progressive National Force, FNP), a minuscule far-right party whose influence (and resources) grew because of its alliance with the party in power. By the time

those at the helm no longer felt guilt for espousing their reactionary ideology, the PLD leadership had already adopted a traditional, patriotic and nationalist identity.

Some within the party, for instance, former president Leonel Fernández, claimed to be political heirs of right-wing strongman and close-U.S. ally Joaquín Balaguer whose regime (1966-1978) killed thousands including left-wing revolutionaries.

Furthermore, the PLD came to power in 1996 through an electoral alliance with Balaguer and other right-wing political actors. Calling themselves the Frente Patriótico (Patriotic Front), the PLD and the Right launched a coordinated racist campaign to derail the presidential candidacy of José Francisco Peña Gómez (1937-1998), a Black Dominican of Haitian origin who was one of the leaders of the 1965 democratic revolution that sought to restore Bosch to power after a right-wing US-backed military coup in 1963.

During its heyday in power, the PLD leadership accumulated immense personal wealth and built a massive clientelist base. A key pillar of their success was figuring out that money could buy loyalty. The party leadership was also willing to undermine the Dominican political system, if it suited them, by buying the leadership of opposition parties.

The formerly petty bourgeois, and now nouveau riche, millionaire PLD leadership thus announced their intention to perpetuate their regime. Following in the footsteps of Mexico's constitutional dictatorship under the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI) and reviving the local authoritarian tradition implanted by the Trujillo and Balaguer regimes, the peledeista political class expressed a desire to cling to power for forty years, that is, until the year 2036. The leadership's voracious greed and appetite for power accelerated what seemed like an irreversible authoritarian turn. [25]

Resistance from below

Akin to a party-state electoral machine, and in some ways like its predecessors, the PLD used state violence to remain in power. However, what set the PLD apart was its reliance on other forms of social control aimed at creating consensus and legitimacy. For example, due to limited employment opportunities in semi-colonial capitalist societies, government jobs, career advancement and scholarships to prestigious universities abroad are enticing to activists and intellectuals.

In that sense, the PLD co-opted some radical sectors but, at the same time, those who were able to repel the PLD's coercion and corrupting tentacles played a significant role in leading the popular resistance that over the years helped galvanize opposition to PLD governments under both former presidents Leonel Fernández (1996-2000, 2004-2012) and Danilo Medina (2012-2016, 2016-2020).

It took years of struggle, in fact, to bring the PLD to its knees. From the fight against the 2010 racist, sexist and homophobic constitution to labor and anti-austerity strikes and protests that challenged neoliberalism and the signing of unilateral U.S. trade agreements in the context of growing hemispheric resistance that slowed down the expansion of neoliberalism in the region; to what is perhaps the most durable social movement from those years, the civil rights struggle led by Sonia Pierre (1963-2011), a force to reckon with, as she defiantly challenged anti-Haitian racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, capitalist exploitation and sexism.

By 2017, widespread anti-PLD sentiment exploded into a mass anti-corruption movement known as Marcha Verde (Green March), mobilizing a large working and middle-class electoral bloc who continue to play a central role in shaping anti-corruption politics to this day.

Downfall

Former President Danilo Medina's bid for re-election accelerated the PLD's downfall from power. Medina abandoned his attempt to run for a third time when it became more and more evident that widespread anger triggered by the regime's nepotism, abuse of power, authoritarianism and utter neglect of basic services, such as health care and education, had reached its boiling point. At the end, Medina handpicked a puppet candidate to remain the king behind the throne.

By the time the 2020 presidential election campaign arrived, the PLD was facing a nasty and bitter internal crisis accelerated by rigged primary elections stacked against Leonel Fernández, Medina's rival, who left the party shortly after and launched his own party (Fuerza del Pueblo or Peoples' Force), a "new" party as reactionary and corrupt as the PLD. This new crisis split the PLD voting base, a sign that the end was near.

With the defeat of Medina's candidate, Gonzalo Castillo, a new political cycle found one of the factions within the reactionary camp weakened as a result. This electoral defeat dealt a significant blow to the political and personal ambitions of former president Medina whose protégé and would be successor failed to garner support among the electorate even after running a ridiculously expensive electoral campaign that included distribution of cash to poor and unemployed young and adults voters alike, buying votes, hiring journalists and entertainers to spread propaganda, silencing dissent and forcing state employees to attend pro-government rallies at the risk of losing their jobs.

The PLD's debacle at the ballot box amounted to a resounding rejection of conservatism and a reactionary political and economic model based on extreme acts of nepotism, abuse of power, state violence, intolerance, impunity, paternalism, individualism, racism, sexism, homophobia, ecocide and the worship of money. Thus, the defeat of the PLD was a step forward, albeit a partial one, in the struggle to democratize Dominican society.

Neoliberal continuity under Abinader

In the absence of left-wing and working-class electoral political alternatives, ordinary people eager to subvert the critical political situation after twenty years of right-wing rule under the PLD and its millionaire class, replaced one political class by another by throwing their lot with businessman-turned politician Luis Abinader, from the Modern Revolutionary Party (PRM), a split from the PRD.

Abinader's win was a two-fold strategy: first, he and his party capitalized on the mass opposition to the PLD embodied primarily in the Marcha Verde anti-corruption movement; and second, Abinader put together a right-wing/center-left alliance that brought together a portion of the PLD voting bloc (represented by Leonel Fernández and his People's Force party) and other small right wing parties such as the PRSC and Dominicanos por el Cambio (Dominicans for Change, DXD) as well as the center-left Frente Amplio (Broad Front, FA).

Abinader also gained the support of middle-class progressive intellectuals and activists who saw the attempt by the PLD to perpetuate in power as a threat to democracy. But those progressive activists and intellectuals, guided by hatred for the PLD as well as their own anti-working-class politics and personal ambitions, ended up backing Abinader, conservative candidate to beat the incumbent, creating illusions among ordinary people. Left-wing journalist Lilliam Oviedo excoriates those who "out of naivety, crude pragmatism or opportunism, the [progressives] have thus crowned [their] desire to play cards in a dirty game". [26]

Public knowledge of Abinader's upper class and privileged background was not enough to deter progressive-leaning organizations and individuals from endorsing the PRM candidate. But the leadership of the PRM also engages in political duplicity, striking

a progressive, left-wing pose as an opposition party with a social democratic lineage that once in power, swung to the right. That is why this last election was another cosmetic change.

While it is true that President Abinader appointed an independent prosecutor to persecute corruption as part of the popular clamor for justice embodied in the Marcha Verde movement, his government has shielded corrupt political allies from prosecution. Since taking power, Abinader has disappointed a large majority of voters, including the base of his party that tends to be more progressive, by stacking the Dominican state and his cabinet with capitalist moguls (like himself) and corrupt politicians from both the PLD and the PRM. [27]

The role of the private sector became more evident when President Abinader launched a public-private alliance to invest in tourism projects to the detriment of both the state (which will act as the main investor) and working-class people whose pressing needs include access to decent healthcare, Covid testing and vaccines, education, food and housing. [28]

During the presidential campaign, Abinader and the PRM expressed support for the struggle to decriminalize abortion, a polarizing issue that challenges the hegemony of religious conservatives from both the Catholic Church and the growing evangelical community. The PRM was the only opposition mainstream party to openly support therapeutic abortion during the presidential campaign and won the support of feminist organizations. However, Abinader and his party—in alliance with Christian right sectors—have betrayed their promises again and again by refusing to decriminalize abortion, serving as a catalyst for the launch of massive street mobilizations and occupy-like encampments. [29]

Abinader and his Christian right allies have also contributed to further criminalize LBGTQ+ people by refusing to persecute hate crimes based on sexual orientation.

A year into Abinader's presidency has only created more misery and exploitation for poor and working-class people in the Dominican Republic. To manage pandemic and the resulting economic crisis, Abinader has relied heavily on repressive measures including street militarization to enforce unpopular lockdowns. Poor neighborhoods bear the brunt of state repression. In 2021, Abinader declared a state of emergency from March to the first week of October. By doing so, his government suspended free transit and democratic liberties. The state of emergency, backed by all traditional parties, granted Abinader special executive powers to rein in the state's finances with little or no oversight while re-opening the economy despite the rapid spread of the virus with the sole objective of keeping the tourist sector afloat at the expense of people's health. For the Dominican elite, the pandemic has been an economic bonanza long in the making. Abinader and the ultra-rich, financial capitalist class he represents, benefits greatly from tourism. According to a 2021 Central Bank report, 462,536 tourists entered the country by June. Additionally, other sectors that have grown during the pandemic included construction, free trade zones, local manufacture, transport and storage of supplies, mining and commerce. [30]

White supremacy and racism are key components of the white, Dominican elite that President Abinader represents. That is why it is not surprising that he has adopted right wing populist nationalism as a pillar of his regime, making his political positions more extreme than that of former PLD governments. His right-wing agenda clearly serves the interests of both local and US capitalists. By using racist, xenophobic anti-Haitian rhetoric (sometimes openly and sometimes in coded language), Abinader continues to scapegoat Haitian workers for social ills, polarizing the electorate and creating divisions between Haitians and Dominicans. His right-wing nationalist rhetoric—which portrays the political and economic crisis of neighboring Haiti as a threat to national sovereignty—is also meant to galvanize patriotic symbolism and national unity to slow down, and

eventually derail class unity.

The most recent nationalist propaganda serves as a political distraction that only benefits the ruling class. Interestingly, it is not a coincidence that President Abinader went on a right-wing nationalist tirade right around the time his name appeared in the Pandora Papers list of presidents and public figures who hide their fortunes in tax havens. [31]

Further, the Dominican state under Abinader continues to serve the needs of capitalist exploitation as his government prioritizes funding non-essential public works at this perilous time such as the construction of a Trump-inspired fence alongside the Dominican-Haitian border while poor neighborhoods suffer blackouts, and the housing crisis widens.

What's Next?

The social justice movement has a bright future, but it must deal with practices undermining past social justice movements on the island. While it is true that the Dominican Republic moved away from extrajudicial killings of activists, it is also true that the economic coercion of leaders of those movements continues. The PLD demonstrated the political and economic tentacles of the clientelist states and its willingness to provide economic "gifts" to social justice leaders in exchange for loyalty to the party. Already several former leaders of the Green March movement have abandoned social struggle after accepting lucrative government jobs.

Meanwhile, the struggle against the PLD's authoritarian turn and its electoral fraud during the municipal elections in 2020 as well the impact of youth and women mobilizations in Haiti, Chile, Argentina and the United States politicized and radicalized young people for an entire generation, leading to a resurgence of feminist, queer, black/afro-Dominican struggles.

Bearing in mind that the PLD's ultra-reactionary legacy will continue to have political and cultural ramifications, its long-term impact and survival will depend on whether progressive, labor, feminists, anti-racist and anti-capitalist sectors continue to organize and fight the right.

In the Dominican Republic many workers are not organized, and labor unions remain weak across the country. As long as there is a conservative leadership at the helm of some of the largest labor unions such as the Confederación Autónoma Sindical Clasista (Autonomous Confederation of Classist Unions, CASC), labor unions cannot become instruments of class and social struggle.

Nevertheless, the prospects of working-class struggle look promising. In recent months, teachers, healthcare workers and professors and staff from the Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo (Autonomous University of Santo Domingo, UASD), the public university, have led important labor struggles. Under the leadership of a socialist, members of the professor's union (FAPROUASD) won a 15% salary increase in November of 2021 as a result of mobilizations. As important is the labor struggle led by sugar cane workers of Haitian origin fighting for their pensions. Moreover, large segments of the population comprised of peasants and unorganized workers also challenge mega-mining extractivism on an ongoing basis.

The revolutionary left is small, but it continues to be the only political force that can mount a serious opposition to state repression and capitalist exploitation as reformist center-left parties have moved to the right. Known for its endless sectarian strife, the Dominican left is also known for its rich history of struggle. The more prominent organizations are rooted in some of the political tendencies that

were the backbone of the international left: Maoist (Movimiento Popular Dominicano or Dominican People's Movement, MPD), Stalinist (Movimiento Caamañista or Caamañista Movement, MC) and Trotskyist (Movimiento de las Trabajadoras y Trabajadores Socialistas or Socialist Workers Movement, MST). Despite their different origins, these revolutionary organizations share a deep commitment to internationalism and anti-imperialist politics rooted in the 1965 revolution and subsequent anti-imperialist war against US occupying troops. The left has potential to grow and contribute to rebuilding the student movement and strengthening feminist, labor, environmentalist and peasant struggles. Finally, it is important that the left continues to denounce the Dominican ruling class attacks on people of Haitian descent, and offer realistic, concrete solutions to working people at this moment of crisis while rejecting nationalism.

International solidarity with the Dominican people will be crucial to defeat the latest ruling class offensive. The progressive and revolutionary sectors from the Dominican diaspora in the US have played an important role in Dominican politics and will continue to do so in years to come. As the Dominican elite consolidates its power under Abinader and continues its relentless attacks on the working class, the revolutionary left must unite to organize workers regardless of national origin, fight racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia, and ultimately, build a strong working-class led left-wing political alternative to fight the battles to come in the ideological and electoral terrain as well as in the streets.

The authors dedicate this article to the memory of Dominican revolutionary socialist Hancy Martínez (1991-2021). The authors also thank Amín Pérez for revising an earlier draft.

Source [*New Politics*](#).

An Orwellian City Soon Joining an Orwellian State

24 January 2022, by **Au Loong-Yu**

The head of the Hong Kong police, however, thought the otherwise. Back in early December he had already wrongly accused online media of reporting fake news. Soon, based on the colonial law's Crime Ordinance, he would charge the management of Stand News for conducting "sedition". Under this draconian law, news reporting can be considered as "sedition", if the authorities do not like the report. What is even more ironical is that the current law still refers to the Queen of Great Britain, 24 years after the handover - for those who come out in defence of Beijing's attack on Hong Kong as merely an endeavour to "de-colonize Hong Kong" and "get rid of intervention by foreign forces", I wonder how they are going to square their circle.

The knock-on effect of the closure of Stand News was soon to be seen. On 2 January this year, another well-known online media, Citizen News, also announced its closure to avoid possible prosecution. Carrie Lam soon dismissed that this was a result of an attack on freedom of the press, claiming that it was only closing of its own account.

Beijing's frontal attack on freedom of the press had already begun in August 2020, when Jimmy Lai, the boss of Apple Daily, was prosecuted under the newly passed National Security Law. The Daily was forced to close down this June when the authorities went on to freeze its assets. Beijing's crackdown on Stand News was not a simple repetition of its action on the Apple Daily, however. Whereas the latter was directly involved in the 2019 revolt, the former was much more moderate. It had a clear stand on supporting the democratic movement, yet it had not violated the principle of checks and balance in news reporting. Taking on Stand News

is clear evidence of Beijing's agenda of criminalising news reports altogether.

Foreign correspondents have long been receiving chilling messages as well. In November last year, the Hong Kong government denied a visa to a journalist from *The Economist*. This is on top of a similar event in 2018 when a *Financial Times* journalist was also denied a visa.

The first two major cases of suppression after the implementation of the National Security Law were the prosecution of Jimmy Lai, followed by the prosecution of 47 pan-democrats for holding a primary election ahead of the scheduled legislature election in 2020. The prosecution is unfounded, but this kind of thing is expected under regular authoritarian regimes. Yet, since then Beijing has crossed this threshold, and has marched in triumph to impose its Orwellian regime on Hong Kong.

A review of another two major events since the prosecution of the 47 pan-democrats is enough to make my case. Knowing its extreme unpopularity, Beijing's faithful servant Carrie Lam, on the pretext of the pandemic, first postponed the September 2020 legislature election by a year to allow Beijing to "improve" the Hong Kong electoral system in March 2021 so that "patriots" could dominant. The "improvement" was to cut the directly elected seats from 35 seats (half of the legislature) to 20, while enlarging the legislature from 70 seats to 90 by adding an "election committee", mainly comprised of "patriots", to "elect" 40 legislators, guaranteeing Beijing's absolute control over the election, symbolizing the death of Hong Kong's autonomy.

And then on the 23rd of December, the statue Pillar of Shame at the University of Hong Kong was removed

in the middle of the night. The statue was created by Danish artist Jens Galschiøt to commemorate the 1989 Tiananmen massacre. Soon after, two more 1989 democratic movement monuments were also removed. These statues had not done what the government accused the 153 persons prosecuted under the National Security law of doing - sabotage, subversion, terrorism, colluding with foreign governments etc. They just stood there, staring at us. Yet Beijing could not even stand silent statues. This once again reminds us that the present crackdown is not limited to silencing political opposition but is also purging artistic and cultural legacies as well. With the disappearance of independent media, the great purge now knows no bounds.

Since the enactment of the National Security Law, fifty influential Hong Kong trade unions and civil organizations have been forced to disband. The same thing had happened to those organizations which were committed to supporting Mainland civil societies but was largely unnoticed. Among them there had been around ten groups in Hong Kong doing China labour solidarity work, but today most are either disbanded or deactivated.

These events also remind us of one thing - that the crackdown since 2020 is less about acting against "collusion with foreign forces", and more about Beijing's own domestic nightmare, namely the fear of people's memories of the June Fourth massacre and the fear that the democratic movement between mainland China and Hong Kong may join hands, as they did in 1989.

Maybe this is the best time to read or reread George Orwell's fiction *1984* - it increasingly looks like a script

written for the Hong Kong Drama. Beijing has destroyed Hong Kong's partial democracy, but it could claim that it was improving its electoral system. After its rigged election was only able to draw 30.2 percent of

voters — only half of the turnout for the previous election — its media claimed a big electoral success by knowingly twisting facts. While all the facts are proving that Beijing's agenda is to impose its Orwellian society on

Hong Kong, Beijing still claims that it is protecting the former's autonomy. If one wants to know what happens next in Hong Kong, read George Orwell.

16 January 2022

An embargo against the Malian people

23 January 2022, by Paul Martial

Following massive popular mobilizations against the government, Malian army officers had deposed President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta in August 2020. They had set up a first government and then, after having dismissed it, took over the reins of the transitional government directly. Initially the junta committed itself to organising elections on 27 February this year. With the holding of the national conference on refoundation, it decided to extend the transition by five years.

Ball of hypocrites

The sanctions against Mali are extremely harsh: closure of borders, ban on all transactions, freezing of Malian state assets in all West African banking institutions. While officially these measures do not apply to basic necessities and fuel, their shortages are likely to be felt quickly because of the lack of available cash. In short, the aim is to economically suffocate one of the poorest countries in the world with all the dramatic consequences for the population.

Such measures had already been taken against the Gbagbo government in support of Alassane Ouattara during the 2010 electoral crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, at the instigation of France.

Among the great democrats of the ECOWAS, we find the Senegalese

president Macky Sall who, a few months ago, opened fire against demonstrators with a toll of 13 dead including a 12 year old child, the Nigerian Mohamed Bazoum who has just imprisoned two journalists denouncing drug trafficking, The Ivorian Ouattara, who has run for a third term in office despite the Constitution, Faure Gnassingbé, who is in his fourth term as head of Togo, and the Beninese Patrice Talon, who has thrown his two main opponents, Frédéric Joël Aïvo and Réckyatou Madougou, into prison on charges of terrorism.

While there is strong criticism of the military junta in Mali, civil society and political parties condemn the embargo on their country. They rightly point out that democracy is not just the organization of elections. Everyone agrees on the need for profound reforms. Especially since Mali has already gone through this experience in 2012. At the time, France and ECOWAS imposed an electoral process that did not resolve the situation in the country.

France as the orchestrator of the embargo

Many believe that France is at the helm in establishing the embargo as it did in 2012. It presented a motion to the UN Council to support the embargo, which was vetoed by Russia and China. The same zeal is used to convince the European Union to

support the sanctions. Another example of this relentlessness: Air France, which was boarding passengers to Bamako on Wednesday 12 January, had to cancel operations immediately under the injunction of the French authorities, leaving dozens of passengers stranded at Roissy airport. On the other hand, French military flights continue, and are not even authorised by the Malian regulatory authority to enter the country's airspace.

Le Drian, a pitiful representative of Françafrique, denigrates the Malian junta as a gravedigger of democracy, but remains silent when Macron is the first Western head of state to meet the Saudi leader Mohammed Ben Salmane involved in the despicable murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Equally silent when his mentor ostensibly supports the military coup in Chad carried out by the son of the late dictator Idriss Déby.

Whatever the outcome of this crisis, the gamble of ECOWAS and the French government is lost. The tens of thousands of Malians who took to the streets against the sanctions reinforce the position of the junta, which is cleverly playing on the defence of the country. This popular mobilization is helping to strengthen resentment against France's imperialist policy. At least Macron's arrogance will have served its purpose.

20 January 2022

Nationalists push the logic of the worst in Bosnia-Herzegovina

22 January 2022, by **Catherine Samary**

Bosnia-Herzegovina seems to be on the verge of exploding again. How did it come to this?

Since the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995, Bosnia and Herzegovina has been a country divided into two “entities”, the Republika Srpska (RS) and the Bosnian-Croat Federation, which is itself divided into ten cantons, some of which are predominantly Bosnian (Muslim), others Croat. In reality, the country is being controlled by three ethno-nationalist oligarchies, which have a vested interest in playing the tension card to mobilise public opinion and divert attention from the economic and social problems that plague the country. Since the summer, Milorad Dodik, a Serb member of the country's tripartite presidency, has revived the hypothesis of a secession of the Serbian entity. On 10 December, the Republika Srpska parliament voted for laws that could lead, within six months, to the creation of separate institutions and even armed forces for the Serbian entity. Clearly, a process of secession has begun. This was the context of the 9 January parade, organised to celebrate the 30th anniversary of RS, proclaimed on 9 January 1992, a few weeks before the country fell into war.

Why did Milorad Dodik choose this moment?

On the one hand, even if he still seems to be the all-powerful “boss” of the Serbian entity, Milorad Dodik knows he is under threat: in recent years, powerful citizens' movements have challenged his authoritarian and clientelist system and his party even lost control of the mayor's office in Banja Luka, the main city of the RS, during the November 2020 municipal elections. With general elections scheduled for autumn 2022, Dodik is reviving nationalist provocations to try to stay in power. On the other hand, he knows that the divided “international community” is incapable of reacting: he counts on precious allies within the European Union, such as Hungary's Viktor Orbán.

And the Croatian nationalists are also playing their part?

Yes, they still dream of creating a “third ethnic entity”, which would be purely Croatian. They want to impose an electoral reform, which would reinforce the ethnic character of the vote. There is a total tactical convergence between the two nationalisms.

How far can this crisis go? Is a new war possible?

A war seems unlikely, because no one has an interest in it, but also because the country is being emptied of its population. Young people, whether

they have a degree or not, are leaving en masse for countries such as Germany, both because of the catastrophic economic situation and because they are tired of corruption and systematic clientelism: you often have to be a member of one of the nationalist parties in order to find a job, enrol your children at university, etc. You can't fight a war in a country where all the young people have left.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is also experiencing new forms of social mobilization.

Indeed, in 2014, the plenum movement, which challenged privatization and proposed original forms of direct democracy, shook the country, going beyond 'ethnic' barriers. It was repressed and stifled, but new mobilizations are developing, notably for the defence of the commons, such as wild rivers, threatened by countless micro-hydro power projects, which are above all money laundering and greenwashing operations, often with the blessing of the European Commission... The right to water or the right to the city are mobilizing citizens from all backgrounds, but these movements are struggling to find a political translation, because the institutional system is completely locked down to the benefit of nationalist oligarchies.

19 January 2022

U.S. Supreme Court Rules Against Workers' Health

21 January 2022, by **Dan La Botz**

The mandate for private business was one of two prongs of Biden's plan to end the pandemic among workers. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services mandated vaccination for nearly all employees of hospitals, nursing homes and other health care providers that receive federal funds. Though the most conservative justices opposed it, Supreme Court majority let that mandate stand, and it will protect the health of most of the country's 22 million health care workers.

The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) also mandated that in all businesses with over 100 workers, employees who worked indoors had to be vaccinated or tested regularly, which would have protected an estimated 84 million workers. The court struck this down.

OSHA, an agency that exists to protect workers health, was established by Congress in 1971 after a long fight by labor unions and public health activists to establish it. Congress gave OSHA, among other responsibilities, the power, when workers faced "grave danger from exposure to substances or agents determined to be toxic or physically harmful or from new hazards," to establish emergency standards to protect them. Clearly the COVID virus represents exactly such a

grave danger, one that has taken the lives of thousands of workers, not only in health care but also in meat processing plants, restaurants, grocery stores, and other workplaces. As I am writing this, COVID has killed about 850,000 Americans and is still killing them at a rate of nearly 2,000 per day, and many got sick at work.

The Supreme Court voted along ideological lines six to three to overturn the OSHA mandate for private business, arguing that OSHA did not have the authority to mandate vaccination. Two of the central arguments were these: First, COVID exists not only in the workplace but everywhere in society as a "day-to-day danger," so it is a public health issue nor a workplace issue. Of course, that is also true of other OSHA standards such as those regarding protection from fires or dangerous chemicals found in many communities. Second, the conservative justices argued that a vaccination cannot be undone at the end of a workday and therefore it affects workers outside of the workplace. OSHA's standard, however, did not require vaccination, but provided the alternative of regular testing. And, of course, there were exceptions for religious objections and those with particular health issues.

Clearly the court's conservative majority's underlying ideological objection is to the federal government's intervention in the affairs of private business. Concerns with workers' health should not interfere with the sanctity of capital.

Yet many U.S. corporations in various sectors have already mandated vaccination for their workers and most labor unions, despite some initial resistance, have come to support and even advocate vaccination. The American public by and large now supports getting the jab.

The Supreme Court is one of the most undemocratic institutions of our government. The sitting U.S. president nominates the justices who must be confirmed by a simple majority in the Senate. Former President Donald Trump nominated three, creating a much more rightwing court. They then sit on the bench until they quit or die and they can only be removed by impeachment and none has ever been convicted. The far left in the U.S. has long called for the court's abolition.

The court's decision is part of a growing authoritarian and anti-worker political tendency, one that is growing and must be resisted.

Source [*New Politics*](#).

How to overthrow a life-threatening capitalism?

20 January 2022, by **Stéfanie Prezioso**

For several months, with the emergence of Covid-19, the imperative need to break with a life-threatening system, put forward in recent years in demonstrations for climate justice, has been embodied very concretely in the life of hundreds of millions of people.

The pandemic, linked to the consequences of capitalist globalization, which threatens the climate, biodiversity, and thereby the health of human beings, has ignited the powder keg.

It brutally gave substance to this terrifying image proposed by the Marxist economist Jean-Marie Harribey, according to which world capitalism is a "black hole" in the process of "engulfing" human activities, nature, living things,

knowledge, etc. "To engulf, that is to say, to subject everything to the law of profitability, to profit and the accumulation of capital" ("The black hole of capitalism. In order not to be sucked into it, rehabilitate work, institute the commons and socialize money", 2020).

Life at the centre of our concerns

The reasons why women in many countries have gone on strike and have taken to the streets en masse for the past three years, but also the reasons why millions of young people have demonstrated for the climate, have suddenly acquired the force of evidence for many sectors of the population. These two movements do indeed display certain common concerns by placing "life" at the centre of their struggle: nourishing earth, food, water but also "the social nutrients necessary for a fulfilling life" (Tithi Bhattacharya).

What is it all about? Daily care and even more in the event of illness, especially for the elderly, as well as the care and education of children, partly provided within the family; monetary income (salaries, pensions, insurance and various forms of social benefits) making it possible to acquire the essentials of life on the market; public services making education, health, transport and housing accessible to all; free time to talk to each other, to participate, to get involved, to create ...

Placing life at the centre thus makes it possible to reappropriate the essential questions raised by ecofeminists of the global South - of this Third Estate of the world which had been the epicentre of the revolution in the post-war decades; a feminism anchored in a popular "territory of life", and for that reason being the basis of experiences of community life and of anti-imperialist struggles against multinationals (water, mines, oil or agriculture).

It is on the basis of these considerations that comrades were able to write in our fortnightly, on the eve of the women's/feminist strike of

June 2020, that henceforth "revolutionary Marxist feminists had [...] found it more relevant to analyze the system according to the capital/life contradiction, encompassing both the preservation of humans and the environment, instead of the traditional capital/labour contradiction. In part, they were right.

Yes, capital is opposed to life because it depletes the two sources of all wealth: human labour and nature. In this sense, the contradiction continues to sharpen between capital and the very conditions of existence of the human species on earth. And by doing so, capitalism could undermine the objective bases of its own sustainability to give rise to an unprecedented form of "barbarism". Indeed, this mode of production, as Marx underlined, inexorably tends to sow death. Because it "has such 'good reasons' for denying the sufferings of the working population around him", he is no more diverted from his objectives "by the prospect of the decay of humanity and finally by its depopulation than by the possible fall of Earth onto the Sun. (...) After me the flood! This is the motto of every capitalist and of every capitalist nation. Capital therefore does not worry about the length of the worker's life, if it is not constrained to do so by society" (*Capital*, Volume I). And the neoliberal order has accelerated these destructive tendencies.

However, the "old" capital/labour contradiction remains at the heart of the struggle to overthrow capitalism and establish a society of associated producers, reconciled with nature.

Work at the heart of the creation and reproduction of society

The tasks of daily care and education represent an essential sphere of human activity. Within the capitalist world, they cover paid or unpaid activities, within or outside the family framework, which are essential to the reproduction of labour power and its long-term exploitation. With Covid-19

and confinement, the centrality of this work of "social reproduction" has suddenly imposed itself on everyone. So much so that it no longer seems necessary to explain its indispensability for the economy: the essential role of front line carers has earned them hearty applause.

It took effort and courage to keep afloat, at the height of the crisis, public health systems that were severely weakened by budget cuts, education systems that were sorely tested, as well as food distribution and cleaning services, as exposed to view as they are poorly paid, carried out in large part by precarious workers, of whom women and racialized people constitute the vast majority. Not to mention those, working without papers, who lost their jobs without compensation at the start of confinement, nor of all the women whose domestic tasks within the family grew explosively.

This work, essential to the maintenance of life, was celebrated, not without contributing to the shift towards consolidating the traditional image of "woman as the saviour", wife and mother, as in times of war, in the last century: the celebration of supposed sacrifices. accepted instead of a concrete analysis of living and working conditions, which should be radically called into question. Indeed, what does the notion of social reproduction refer to?

First of all, from the point of view of Capital, to the need to reproduce and reconstitute day after day the labour force from which it derives its profits (the famous surplus value). As early as the 1960s, Marxist feminists developed a concrete analysis of what must be considered as the hidden face of capitalist exploitation, partly subcontracted in the form of poorly paid, even informal, labour, partly carried out free of charge, mainly by women, within the family.

It is not possible to develop here in all their complexity the rich debates conducted by authors such as Johanna Brenner, Susan Ferguson and Lise Vogel... They have paved the way for a new generation of Marxist feminists. Thus, in a recent book, *Social Reproduction Theory. Remapping*

Class, Recentering Oppression (2017), Tithi Bhattacharya points to a decisive issue: in reality, productive and reproductive work are one. After having defined social reproduction as the set of activities necessary to “produce life, maintain it and guarantee the succession of generations”, she continues: “human labour is at the heart of the creation or reproduction of society as a whole”.

Living work at the heart of social change

The feminist movement, like the climate movement, has seized on the term “strike”, a word steeped in the history of the struggles of “living work”, the only producer of wealth, to sometimes snatch meagre victories from the holders of capital, of “dead labour”, the result of the exploitation of previous generations. In doing so, they always sought, even confusedly, the path to emancipation through collective action. The use of this term is of particular importance for the feminist movement, because it clearly suggests that production and social reproduction are part of a “same capitalist unity” and that, consequently, the class struggle cannot in any way case neglect the

sphere of social reproduction in all its complexity.

An idea is taken up in the Draft resolution on the new rise of the women’s movement of the Women’s Commission of the Fourth International: “The use of the strike tool, the centrality of the struggles for social reproduction, the aspiration to understand the processes of production and reproduction as an integrated whole, and its functioning as a vector of politicization and radicalization of the masses, make this new feminist movement in itself a process of developing class consciousness.” [32]

Marxist feminists thus place human labour at the heart of their reflection, understood in its diversity and its globality, which is always based on the capital/labour contradiction. Indeed, it is in order to bring down the price of labour power that capital buys and increases the surplus value that it derives from it, that capital constantly aims to reduce the cost of its reproduction, borne mainly by women, poorly paid or working for free to produce the services essential to the reconstitution and sustainability of living labour.

Certainly, in the West in particular, many families, as far as they have the means, rely on salaried domestic work, most often poorly paid and informal, which mainly involves

immigrant women, racialized, often without legal status, to take care of their children and their elders, as well as housework of all kinds.

These services can also be provided by platforms that hire bogus freelancers and thus dispense with all social and even tax charges, such as UberEats, Deliveroo, etc. In working-class families, who use them less, men take on a larger share of domestic chores, even though women always do more.

To understand the role played by productive and reproductive labour (salaried and non-salaried) in ensuring capitalist accumulation is also to understand that only living labour, because it is the very condition of the profits of a small minority of exploiters, is able to overthrow the yoke of capital, through the collective struggle for its emancipation. Above all, only their immense numbers and their strategic position at the heart of capitalist relations of production can give workers the strength to overthrow this deadly mode of production and found an eco-socialist social order based on the free association of producers, on gender equality and on respect for the essential metabolism between human activities and the natural environment.

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The lead up to the 2022 election campaign in Hungary

19 January 2022, by **Ágnes Gagyi, Tamás Gerőcs**

Right after the outbreak of the pandemic, the Hungarian government was initially hesitant to undertake serious healthcare measures, and its first reactive propaganda attempted to link covid-19 to the official discourse on migration and George Soros. However, the regime soon changed course to make maximal use of the

broader space for state interventions opened by the situation, in order to accelerate concentration of domestic oligarchic capital and increase centralized control over its external and internal conditions. In his [notable speech from March 2020](#) in the parliament before introducing the emergency regulation, Viktor Orbán

said: “I need 133 brave people, the 133 bravest in the country. And that is you here on the government’s side and I ask that you not be shaken, do not retreat, do not succumb to uncertainty.” Using its parliamentary supermajority, the governing Fidesz party voted for a state of emergency regulation that both allowed the

government to rule by decree and greatly extended the authority of the Prime Minister. While the decree was temporarily suspended after the first wave, the emergency period was extended until today.

The government's steps to further centralize power since the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020 happened in a global context where swift concentration of capital (aided by state measures) motivated preemptive steps to enhance and protect the positions of domestic capital, and when the approaching 2022 elections promised a slight but realistic chance for a win by the united opposition. The regime reacted by stepping up new economic measures to secure favourable conditions for production and capital accumulation in entrenched economic sectors, thus also supporting domestic oligarchic groups behind it.

In contrast to the pre-Covid-19 era of economic nationalism and protectionist state intervention, however, this time the economic measures included privatization. State assets have been transferred to private hands as part of a broader preparation for the 2022 elections. In addition to the new rounds of privatization, the regime expanded benefits to multinational manufacturers, sped up the expansion of domestic oligarchic capital in domestic service industries, such as retail by squeezing foreign actors out of the market, and fed domestic oligarchic capital's concentration from the crisis of smaller domestic companies, while all along further flexibilizing labor and keeping crisis allowances to an extreme minimum. In short, these emergency measures had the effect of accelerating previous tendencies. In the following, we give a brief overview of these processes in the context of an escalation of the pandemic.

Support for manufacturing FDI and the

centralization of industrial taxes

In the sphere of FDI in manufacturing, an extension of the 2019 modification of the labor law referred to by trade union activists as the "slave law", helped manufacturers shield themselves from labor-related costs. Also, new investment contracts and the use of rule by decree to reorganize the status of special economic zones propelled a new wave of reindustrialization. This shifted both decision-making and industrial tax revenues from the hands of local governments to the central government.

Part of this new reindustrialization process were: a new manufacturing unit that produces Rheinmetall's Lynx infantry fighting vehicles; an extension of the Kecskemét Mercedes factory to produce electric cars; and a planning of a new Chinese accumulator factory. So was the Samsung electric battery factory built against the will of local residents and the local opposition government, using the legal background provided by the special economic zones decree.

Expanding national capital's share in domestic services

In the realm of domestic services, one tool for pressuring foreign companies has been the levying of special taxes on banks and multinationals. The largest shares of such taxes were paid by large foreign retail companies - the same competitors of growing Hungarian counterparts that have felt the pressure of policies like Sunday closure in the name of Christian holidays since 2010. Meanwhile, sectors already dominated by domestic oligarchic capital including construction, tourism and agriculture received special subsidies that were also prioritized in state investment schemes or granted legal and tax exemptions. Flexible labor laws allowed such companies to get rid of

employees without extra expenses while at the same time, benefiting from state subsidies.

The wave of closures and state-backed renovations in the hotel industry hit by the crisis is an illustrative example. Delayed and selectively limited measures of state assistance allowed smaller domestic companies hit by the crisis to fail, creating a favorable environment for oligarchic capital to take over those positions that struggling smaller domestic companies left vacant because of the economic crisis. This tendency has led to the concentration of capital. This is especially peculiar in hotel and catering industries where government-affiliated businesses rapidly took over the market, aided by state reallocation of EU-funds. This capital concentration was further propelled by a wave of privatizations in domestic services such as the energy and telecommunication infrastructures, and banking, where the state had previously extended its shares.

Diversifying external capitalist alliances - geopolitical and business deals with Russia and China

The Hungarian government used the opportunity of the pandemic to deepen economic ties with new geopolitical allies and push for a quick global recognition of their vaccines ahead of European or US approval. Russia and China in particular are the most important allies in this geopolitical space. Hungary was both the first EU member state and among the very few to this day that approved the Russian-developed Sputnik. Approval came ahead of the clinical testing phase, and it has been recently revealed that Hungarian authorities were under political pressure to approve the vaccine ahead of time.

In addition to the fast-track approval

of Sputnik as well as China's Sinopharm vaccine, the Hungarian government purchased a large number of Chinese ventilators. But the resulting overcapacity of ventilators caused difficulties for their installation in the hospitals. Not only did the lack of doctors and nurses become a major problem, but the problems of the healthcare system were compounded by the fact that the Chinese distributor did not provide maintenance for said ventilators. Illustrating how geopolitics has been tied to subsidizing national capital, an [investigative journalist](#) showed that the ventilators were purchased by a company that has often been subsidized by the state and the deliveries were extremely overpriced. Moreover, many of the Chinese ventilators remained in excess and were kept in warehouses before the Ministry of Foreign Affairs attempted to sell or donate excess capacities to allied countries, hence using them for diplomatic purposes.

Another illustrative example of the efforts to use the pandemic to feeding domestic oligarchic capital with the help of Chinese and Russian funds was the Hungarian government's announcement of the plan of a [EUR 1.25 billion Chinese loan to finance the construction of the Fudan University](#), while deciding to only withdraw non-refundable grants from the EU's post-pandemic recovery package, thus avoiding taking loans from the fund. Commentators noted, however, that the government's decision to quadruple foreign debt and its issuance of EUR 4 billion worth of bonds represents a strong break in the regime's continued effort to reduce foreign debt and thereby increase policy autonomy from Western donors since 2010.

While temporarily the current government strives to use the Hungarian currency's massive depreciation by applying EU transfers to sustain emergency funds without going deeper into debt, in the long term the sustainability of accumulating debt as well as the effect of rising inflation is very much an issue that any new government will need to face, in fact almost immediately after the elections.

Meanwhile, previous tendencies to substitute Western financing with Eastern sources have been reinforced because of the mounting corruption scandals with regard to use of EU funds. The European Union's anti-corruption body, OLAF, was scrutinizing several government supported projects and until those investigations become conclusive, Hungary's access to the post-pandemic recovery package- including the grants, has been suspended.

Using pandemic measures to weaken the opposition

In the 2019 municipal elections, the united opposition won a significant number of local governments, including that of Budapest. Weakening the maneuvering space for oppositional local governments has been another important aspect of the government's pandemic measures.

The confiscation of local industrial taxes by the state's fiscal authorities delivered a significant blow to local governments. To compensate for the revenue loss after the centralization and confiscation of the tax receipts, the national government allocated special subsidies to local governments. However, the political selection criteria put in place favored municipalities remaining loyal to the central government, whereas oppositional governments were allocated only a disproportionately small amount of money. In some cases even the day to day operations of oppositional local governments were jeopardized by the selective and discriminative emergency measures. The situation of oppositional governments was further worsened by the obligatory contribution to the state emergency fund required of all parties, as well as by local measures such as the temporary suspension of collecting parking fees in Budapest and other major cities (an important income source for local governments).

High death rates

Due to several factors, the two most often cited of which are relatively late and relaxed lockdown restrictions and the dire condition of the public health care system, Hungary was hit very hard by the pandemic. The number of cases and death toll during the first wave in the Spring of 2020 were still relatively modest, following the pattern of other countries in the EU, but the second, third and fourth waves have had devastating effects, putting [Hungary on one of the highest ranks of the death/per capita global figures](#). Altogether 40 thousand people are estimated to have died from covid-19 in a population of less than 10 million since March 2020 and 1.24 million active cases were registered between March 2020 and December 2021.

The large number of cases is peculiar for another reason too. Although Hungary started early with vaccination compared to other EU states, and reached a relatively high rate of vaccination after the first wave, it has significantly slowed down since Spring 2021. By the end of the fourth wave in 2021 December the rate was stuck at a little bit above 60%. The reason for the rapid start was that Hungary was the first European country that officially approved both China's Sinopharm and Russia's Sputnik vaccines, even before the European Medicines Agency had tested and approved them (Russia's Sputnik has still not been approved by this agency). While the country gained access to vaccines distributed by Western suppliers too, government propaganda explicitly recommended Sputnik and Sinopharm vaccines to the general population. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán himself received the Sinopharm vaccination, and senior government officials stated that they believed the Chinese vaccine was the most efficient amongst all other types. With the large variety of vaccines available to the public, there have been political discussions and speculations about the efficiency of the various types of vaccines, with liberals and social democrats accusing the government of risking old people's health by promoting Sputnik and Sinopharm. In late December, Transparency International (TI)

revealed, after gaining access to official documents related to the approval procedure in a legal case, that Hungarian authorities were also concerned about the efficiency of Sputnik and Sinopharm vaccines. Due to the fact that the entire documentation was not disclosed, TI actually sued The National Institute of Pharmacy and Nutrition (OGYÉI) for [keeping important sections of the approval documents from disclosure](#).

Social measures kept at minimum

An extension of the 2019 “slave law” allowed companies to temporarily lay off labor without compensation, while at the same time obliging it to work heightened hours of overtime when needed by capital. Hungary did not introduce a pandemic-related unemployment benefit, and wage subsidies related to lockdowns were kept at a very low level compared to most EU states. The lack of protective gear at workplaces, and especially in the healthcare and educational systems became a source of tensions, eased somewhat by workers’ skepticism about the virus that was fueled by social media sites.

The crisis of the healthcare system, an underfunded and crumbling structure awaiting reforms and seemingly headed towards privatization already before the pandemic, became highly visible during the pandemic. Like elsewhere, pandemic measures repressed non-covid-19 related care functions, and put extreme pressure on women who were expected to substitute for institutional healthcare and education at home. Despite the peaking death rates, wide-ranging personal experience with the system’s inadequacies, and the newly leaked documents revealing the unprofessional handling of the crisis on behalf of the authorities the healthcare issue seems to have been erased relatively successfully from public debates during the fourth wave and in the run-up to the 2022 elections, reflecting the government’s strong media power. In contrast, deteriorating conditions in schools remain a visible topic of public discourse.

Two social aspects of the crisis, emerging from pre-pandemic characteristics of the Hungarian labor force, are household debt and migration. The boom of forex mortgage lending, fueled by Western financial capital during the 2000’s, led to an especially deep penetration of indebtedness among lower-income households in Hungary, and after 2008, caused a mortgage crisis that stood out in its [social consequences within the region](#). While the Fidesz government used debt crisis measures to save better-off debtors and reconfigure the banking sector to the benefit of national capital, a large part of lower-middle class and working-class households with forex debts were pressed into work migration to be able to sustain payments. Next to the flexibilization of work to support manufacturing FDI after 2008, forex debt was a leading cause of the work migration boom of the 2010’s, which created a serious labor shortage locally.

Like elsewhere in Eastern Europe, pandemic measures pressed migrant labor back from Western workplaces, leaving households deprived of significant chunks of income to take care of their reproduction at home. A moratorium on mortgages and other types of debt payments enacted by the emergency decrees is key to tackling the symptoms of the decade-long housing crisis in Hungary. Analysts expect, however, that the lifting of the moratorium could unleash a new spiral of debt crisis at the same or even higher level than that of 2008. This could also culminate in a sudden turnaround in the political landscape toward which Fidesz would need to deploy more repressive reaction and/or even more stringent ideological narratives.

Ideological repressions hardened

Although the Hungarian government and Viktor Orbán himself maintained the image of strong men not afraid of the virus, and pursuing security measures out of responsibility (i.e. to restart the economy), official

discourse did not question medical understandings of the virus and maintained a pro-vaccine standpoint. By introducing Russian and Chinese vaccines ahead of their EU acceptance, as well as making immunity cards mandatory for participation at public events, the government successfully created an image of itself as having used its decision-making power to efficiently tackle the pandemic. Government communication downplays (or even ignores) other pandemic-related tensions - representing the healthcare crisis as a hard but successful struggle, and reframing the pressure on women as men responsible for the economy by thanking women for playing their due role in household work during the pandemic. It links popular income anxieties to promises to restart and expand the economy. Beyond the classic ideological games including opposing Brussels’ imposition of liberal values on Hungary, anti-migration discourse and linking various threats to George Soros, the run-up to the 2022 campaign has drawn anti-LGBTQ measures and ideological propaganda into the center of political communication with the aim of creating a symbolic majority on Fidesz’s side. A core face of the pro-family/anti-LGBTQ campaign, State Secretary of Family and Youth Affairs Katalin Novák has been recently nominated for State Presidency.

Preparations for the 2022 election

After Fidesz’ 2018 super-majority victory, Hungarian opposition parties have been working to set up a unified coalition in order to create a chance to win elections. This collaboration involves all parties from the liberal to the extreme right. At the 2019 local elections, all-opposition candidates - supported by metropolitan and urban middle-classes disgruntled with the regime’s monopolization of power and economic advantages - secured several victories, including at the Municipality of Budapest. These victories were interpreted as a sign that an all-opposition win at the 2022 parliamentary elections might be possible. As we showed, next to

stepping up ideological-political struggle, Fidesz reacted to this possibility with moves to protect the economic beneficiaries of its rule by privatizing state assets, especially in the face of mounting corruption scandals that could possibly lead to the change of government.

To date, the corruption scandal on the highest political level as of yet has led to the [demotion of deputy justice minister Pál Völner](#), who was accused of having illegally received regular payments from the president of the Bailiffs Chamber of the Hungarian Court as a ministerial commissioner responsible for the Chamber. The payments are supposed to be linked to the distribution of bailiffs' positions, which constitute a highly lucrative private business, but require official appointment. While debt moratoria had the effect of shrinking the bailiffs' market, it is expected to expand once they are lifted. Meanwhile, commentators speculate whether Völner's demotion is also linked to the political scandal around the Israeli Pegasus spyware which was revealed to have been used not only against independent journalists but even against prominent figures from the Fidesz elite, with [State President János Áder's bodyguard seemingly targeted](#). The authorization of the spyware was signed by Völner instead of his superior, Minister of Justice Judit Varga.

In late 2021/early 2022, several measures targeted social concerns in face of rising inflation, particularly the boom in energy or food prices which were accelerating further by the currency depreciation. To control inflation in October 2021 the government introduced a freeze on consumer energy prices, a price cap on petrol and diesel consumer prices was announced in November, interest rates on retail mortgages were frozen on October levels for half a year. On [January 12 a price cap on six basic foodstuffs was introduced](#). These price control measures also have a glitch as these steps are widely seen as motivated by winning the popular vote in the forthcoming general elections in April. In addition, they also fit into Fidesz' post-2008 logic of using crisis measures to strengthen and protect interests of domestic oligarchs.

Several signs show that these steps were coordinated with main domestic players in the respective sectors, with state-controlled oil company, MOL selling shares before the petrol price cap was announced, or [István Tiborcz, Orbán's son-in-law becoming the owner of Gránit Bank and the Coop retail chain](#) in late December (OLAF's anti-corruption investigations typically target Tiborcz's state-backed businesses)

Meanwhile, in terms of social support, the opposition coalition's electoral struggle partly relies on links to post-2010 demonstrations dominated by the urban middle-class and political alliances with liberal opposition parties which criticized the regime's rollback of democratic freedoms and corruption scandals together with its turn towards Eastern geopolitical alliances. These demonstrations somewhat opened towards expressions of social grievances (like those around ethnic discrimination, xenophobia, housing poverty, or union struggles), but framed these grievances under a dominant narrative of returning to pre-2010 Western-oriented development. While these groups mostly support liberal parties, a smaller segment of post-2010 middle-class politicization involved the appearance of a new left constituency who stepped up in alliance with liberal social critiques of the system. In the buildup to the 2022 opposition electoral campaign, new left groups are organizing together with social liberal-green segments of the opposition, led by Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony.

In the intra-opposition contest for all-opposition candidates for the national elections, Karácsony withdrew from the final contest that allowed Péter Márki-Zay, a conservative mayor of a rural city with a former marketing career in North America to take the lead over the social-democratic candidate Klára Dobrev (the wife of former prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsány). Márki-Zay is presently portrayed by local and international liberal circles as the ethical opposite to Orbán, and enjoys the support of neoliberal experts and capitalists (like former neoliberal minister of economy Gordon Bajnai) who have supported renewal attempts at liberal restoration

since 2010. Jobbik, the extreme right party which temporarily benefited politically from voicing social grievances under the Orbán regimes, has been contained and fragmented by Fidesz throughout the recent years, and is presently an unhappy supporter of Márki-Zay. In this process, previous oppositional collaborations with groups expressing social claims are canceled or reduced to lip service. The extreme right flank of Jobbik, which split off after the 2018 election defeat under the name Our Homeland Movement, has continued to reach out to popular layers with xenophobic, anti-LGBTQ and anti-vaccination messages. This newly established far-right party is expected to be able to mobilize voters on the wave of the anti-vaccination sentiment, and so far it is the only political group which openly opposes vaccination, using the slogan 'Covid Dictatorship'.

As liberal opposition continues to stick to uncritical messages in support of Euroatlantic integration and free markets, and the outreach of Jobbik's social criticism has been relatively toned down, Fidesz' penetration of popular classes is the only significant political outreach to those who suffer most from the process of social polarization. While new actions from the trade unions did react to subsequent modifications of the labor code in 2012 and 2018, their organizational power remains low, while their integration into top-down economic and political alliances is strong. Small groups of anticapitalist new left activism are present, but so far lack substantive connections to popular constituencies. In the case the political space is opened up by an electoral change in 2022, it is likely to remain dominated by a rearrangement of inter-capitalist conflicts and alliances, without significant influence from popular self-organization, and seriously contained by the privatization measures Fidesz is currently pursuing the protection of its economic dependants. However, a possible post-pandemic crisis might induce more serious ruptures in the capitalist regime built up by Fidesz. While internal and external capitalist forces would remain the strongest actors in such a crisis, and social losses would be exacerbated, this kind of broader crisis of the current

capitalist hegemony might provide some openings for anti-capitalist

social coalitions.

Source [LeftEast](#).

The Philippines hit by Rai, a devastating super-typhoon

18 January 2022, by **Pierre Rousset**

The Philippines are classified among the countries most exposed to climate change. The archipelago is notably swept away each year by about twenty violent tropical storms, of varying intensity, which sometimes give rise to stronger typhoons. They regularly destroy crops, housing and infrastructure in already poor regions. They are one of the main causes of humanitarian disasters, along with earthquakes and tsunamis or the current health crisis, as well as the displacement of people due to military operations in Mindanao.

It is important to understand what typhoons are and what the super typhoon Rai (named Odette in the Philippines) tells us about climate change and the aggravation of cyclonic or other extreme phenomena.

A typhoon (cyclone or hurricane [33]) produces strong winds and torrential rains, a formidable combination when it grows in size. At the beginning, it is usually only a tropical storm, more or less violent, but it can quickly turn into a proper typhoon. This is what happened during the night of 15 to 16 December 2021, when Rai, with a radius of action of about 400 kilometers, approached the Philippine archipelago and suddenly increased in intensity, reaching category 5/5 on the Saffir-Simpson scale [34], producing winds of 185 to 230 km/h. Ninth typhoon to have crossed the archipelago this year, it was only the second of this category.

Crossing the archipelago from east to west, it "landed" nine times on an island in the Philippines, decreasing continuously in intensity (down to category 2), but causing nevertheless

extreme damage before reaching the open sea in the China Sea, where it underwent a new phase of rapid intensification to reach again category 5, sweeping over Vietnamese islands, while remaining quite far from the mainland. It exhausted itself as it moved northeastward, facing the dry winds of the Asian winter monsoon. Typhoon Rai was the 22nd cyclonic event and 9th typhoon of the year 2021 in the northwest Pacific.

What does Super Typhoon Rai tell us?

Rai testifies to the ongoing climate disruption. Let's leave, on this subject, the word to Meteo France [35] who noted the following peculiarities or anomalies about it:

" - It is a very late category 5 typhoon: it is the first category 5 typhoon in December since the super typhoon Nock-ten in 2016, passed in the Philippines at Christmas.

- Category 5 in the China Sea: it is very rare to reach this stage in the South China Sea (sea located between the Philippines, Vietnam, China and Indonesia). This is the third phenomenon in the modern era to reach this stage in the sub-basin, after Pamela in 1954 and Rammasun in 2014.

- Rai had a (false!) twin in the southern hemisphere... Indeed, the cyclone Ruby, which circulated around New Caledonia the [previous] week, was born at the same time as Rai.

Both phenomena were born and strengthened on both sides of the equator at the same time, during an active phase of the Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO): this is an anomaly of strong convection (and therefore heavy rainfall) along the equator propagating from the western Indian Ocean to the Pacific. When it arrived east of New Guinea, it allowed the formation of convection zones conducive to the formation of cyclones. The cyclonic vortex on each side of the equator was also boosted by the passage at the same time of an equatorial Rossby wave, which circulates from east to west in the opposite direction to the MJO. (...). "

In the Philippines, the cyclone season was basically over long ago: it is, in the archipelago, typically centered on a period of time from mid-August to mid-September, with the rainy season is running from June to October. The American NGO Center for Disaster Philanthropy noted that with its "arrival in mid-December (...) we can see that the 2021 season will have lasted all year in the areas bordering the Pacific" [36]

Before moving away via the Sulu Sea, Rai/Odette swept through the Visayas and the north/northeastern part of Mindanao: Bohol, the province of Cebu or Negros Occidental, Palawan, the municipality of Cagayan de Oro, Agusan del Sur, Surigao. Most of the victims lived in the province of Bohol, located in the Central Visayas, where residents consider it one of the most destructive cyclones in recent history. The devastation is reminiscent of that caused in 2013 by super typhoon Haiyan (called Yolanda in the Philippines), which would be a

category 6, if it existed, without having its exceptional scale. However, where it remained stationary for a time, it caused particularly intense and deep damage.

According to recent estimations, in 11 regions, some 7.7 million people were affected by the super typhoon, which caused more than 400 deaths. More than a thousand people were injured and 78 are missing, half a million people have been displaced. According to the Philippine National Disaster Risk Reduction and Control Council (NDRRMC), some ten thousand villages were in the path of the typhoon, in more than 2,200 *barangays*, the smallest administrative unit in the Philippines; 1.2 million houses were destroyed.

A natural disaster of this magnitude means that entire areas are cut off, with communication routes impassable. That people are deprived of drinking water, food, shelter, access to health care..., that babies are deprived of milk other than breast milk. That one can die of diarrhea due to dehydration. That the infrastructure, the houses and buildings, schools and health centers, can be razed. In these conditions, when not supported by wealthy families living in other areas, the local population sinks into a deeper degree of poverty and destitution than ever before and may never recover.

Three weeks after Typhoon Rai struck southern and central islands of the Philippines, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) warned of a "mounting health crisis" in typhoon-hit areas as it scaled up its disaster response [37]

To make things worse in times of pandemics, in the refugee camps, where there is forced promiscuity, it is impossible to respect the basic protection measures (physical distancing, hand washing, etc.), while the Omicron variant has started to spread in the archipelago. Vaccination operations have been suspended by the authorities in the areas affected by the cyclone. The Philippines is one of the countries most severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in Southeast Asia.

The mobilization of the MiHands network

The MiHands network [38], based in Mindanao, includes some fifty associations, each specializing in a particular field of intervention (agriculture, small-scale production to ensure a stable income, health, peace processes, pediatrics, psychological support, etc.) or operating in a given region. This network is collectively mobilized in case of humanitarian emergency (climate disaster, armed conflicts...) to act together, combining their know-how. It is currently particularly involved in vaccination campaigns (against Covid, but not only).

Immediately after the passage of Typhoon Rai, the network mobilized to take stock of the situation in affected areas. For four days, electricity and cellular communications were cut off. On December 20, a small team was able to travel to Surigao, in northern Mindanao, and to the Caraga region in the northeast. The team initially came to assess the situation, but due to the extent of the devastation, they rush to prepare food and water shipments for disaster survivors without further delay.

The emergency action continued with, in addition to food aid, warm clothes, blankets, face masks, and other goods of daily use (hygiene kits...). It is now also planning in the long term, to initiate socio-economic rehabilitation, in the face of the loss of crops, the destruction of homes ..., as in the region of Caraga. Volunteers from Iligan, who were themselves victims of typhoon Sendong in 2011, are participating in the relief efforts.

The MiHands network, together with other movements, has launched an appeal for solidarity in the Philippines. The ESSF association is relaying this appeal on an international level and three thousand euros were already sent urgently at the beginning of January.

The solidarity networks must unfortunately act in a situation of

insecurity linked to the multiple military conflicts in Mindanao, heightened by the economic crisis and the electoral campaign for the May 2022 elections, but also to a blind repressive policy of the Duterte regime. At least 21 journalists were killed in Mindanao in 2021. Security agents intimidate trade unionists and political opponents. The military and police have raided the offices of moderate unions such as the TUCP and SENTRO. The aim is to create a general climate of fear while the perpetrators of state crimes are assured of the impunity promised by the presidency.

Pierre Rousset

To send donations

Cheques

cheques to ESSF in euros only, payable in France, to be sent to:

ESSF
2, rue Richard-Lenoir
93100 Montreuil
France

Bank Account:

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

International bank account details :

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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>

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

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

You can stay regularly informed via the *ESSF website* regarding the use of the solidarity fund.

Source *ESSF*.

Biden's Speech on January 6 Insurrection and the Growth of America's Far Right

17 January 2022, by **Dan La Botz**

We now know that Trump and the Republican Party had a plan to have their senators vote to reject state election returns in several states and to have Vice-President Mike Pence refuse the state's electors, which would send the election to the House of Representatives. At the same time, President Trump would declare a national emergency to prevent the election from going forward. Meanwhile, far-right groups organized the violent assault on the U.S. Capitol. While the coup plots failed, they represented a serious attempt.

But the rise of rightwing politics and authoritarianism and of armed groups preparing for violent action is an even greater problem than Biden's speech suggests and neither mainstream Democrats, nor progressives, nor the left, seems to have a strategy to stop the rise of the right. The last several years have engendered a complex, multi-faceted far-right movement active in government at all levels, in the news media, the social media, and the streets. There is now big money backing rightwing politicians and organizations and middle-class business owners and professionals as well as parts of the working class support them.

Trump controls the Republican Party and only a handful of Republicans dare oppose him. The Republicans now have several mini-Trumpes and the party is riddled with far-right

ideologues. The party is growing and its rank and file, tens of millions of voters, support Trump. Two-thirds of Republicans believe that Biden won the election through fraud, and most refuse to accept the results. Trump's party controls the U.S. Supreme Court, half of the Senate, a large minority in the House; in almost half of the states there is a Republican governor as well as Republican majorities in both houses. This allows the Republicans to control redistricting, the redrawing of the electoral maps following the decennial census, and to pass election laws to suppress the vote. Republicans have passed dozens of laws making it more difficult to vote, laws that most affect Black voters, young voters, and low-income voters, a majority of whom vote Democrat. Eight states now have laws that give the state legislature power to overturn the election.

The Democratic Party response to these developments is a federal Freedom to Vote Act, but it seems unlikely that Congress will pass it.

At the local level, far-right groups, including the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, Three Percenters, and paramilitary militias, organize protests at school board and city council meetings. Together with Q-Anon supporters, white Evangelical Christians, and anti-vaxxers they opposed vaccination or mask mandates, and along with white nationalists they oppose "critical race

theory," which means any teaching about the history and nature of racism in America. Some members of these groups are running for local office or for Congress. Right-wingers are also organizing to ban books from schools and public libraries, some have proposed that hundreds of books be banned, mostly books dealing with race, gender, and sexuality, many by Latino, Black, gay, or trans authors.

The U.S. labor movements has no strategy whatsoever to deal with the far rights, beyond voting Democrat. The Democratic Socialists of America, the country's largest socialist group, works to resist the right by electing more progressive Democrats, but those congresspeople and state legislators represent only a tiny minority. The anarchist left advocates building the anti-fascist movement to confront the far-right in the streets, but at this point few Americans on the left will take up a plan that inevitably leads to violence. The left must involve itself in campaigns to defend the vote as well as in the social movements and workers' struggles, challenging rightwing ideology and demagoguery and offering a democratic and socialist alternative.

12 January 2022

Source: **[New Politics]**-><https://newpol.org/bidens-speech-on-january-6-insurrection-and-the-growth-of-americas-far-right/>.

China versus America: war in the Pacific?

16 January 2022, by **Phil Hearse**

'FEARS that Beijing will wage war have soared after a Chinese nuclear-powered submarine was spotted in the Taiwan Strait on satellite imagery from the European Space Agency.'

DAILY EXPRESS 2/12/2021

Despite the current crisis on the Russia/Ukraine border, America's military leadership does not consider Russia to be its most important rival. On the contrary, as one observer put it, 'China is the new Soviet Union'. [39]

The quotes at the top of the page are just two of a single day's stories hyping the possibility of military confrontation between the United States and China in the Pacific and the South China Sea. How does the possibility of such confrontation fit together with the idea of greater collaboration between the two states in an arrangement that has been called a Global Police State?

Advocates of the Global Police State idea have stressed the internationalisation of capital, and in particular the integration of US and Chinese capital. [40] But US-China tensions seem to be at a high point, and inter-imperialist political and military rivalry seems frantic. And without doubt, it is the military stance of the United States that is aggressive on a great power level. [41]

The announcement of the so-called Aukus-Australia, the UK and US—security alliance in the Pacific area, which is clearly about much more than nuclear submarines, seems to counter the idea of Chinese-US interdependence. Surely Aukus is a sign of deep rivalry, and in particular military rivalry between China and the US? How does all this fit together?

A series of articles at the influential Brookings Institution caution against exaggeration of the dangers of conflict, and put forward the idea of competitive interdependence of the two economies. Ryan Hass argues that there is 'deepening interdependence' and, at the same time, a 'hardening competition' between two powers that are both way ahead of all their rivals, economically and politically. And Hass is insistent that war, or even an attempt to wreck the Chinese economy, would be disastrous for the United States. Investment and trade are growing despite Trump-imposed sanctions, and the two economies are completely intertwined, he argues. This competitive interdependence, says Hass, is the 'new normal.' His view, like the Brookings Institution on most things, tends to reflect a lot of big-business thinking, as well as that in much of the Democratic Party. [42]

AUKUS

When AUKUS was announced in September 2021, the mass media presented it mainly as a decision by Australia to buy American nuclear submarines rather than French diesel-electric subs. But it is much more than that. It is a comprehensive defence initiative, involving sweeping co-operation over weapons, technology, surveillance, planning and overall strategy. Given the military and technology relationship of forces, this ties the slavishly pro-American regimes in Britain and Australia even more firmly behind US objectives in the region.

Who was really the target of the AUKUS announcement? China mainly, but the AUKUS declaration also coincided with the planned announcement—to the exact day—of the new EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. [43] The EU document represents an attempt to get Europe to speak with one voice on

the region, and chart an independent course, especially in relation to China, away from the US position. [44] AUKUS was a precisely aimed torpedo that badly holed the EU strategy. Which was very revealing about the differences between Trump and Biden on China, militarism and the Pacific—much more limited than many US liberals and business people had hoped.

Defence alliances in the 21st century necessarily involve technology alliances. Adoption of a particular technological framework from major states ties smaller states into political alliances and dependence. As we discuss below, the key focus of US military planning and weaponry today is occupation of the Pacific around China and a planned war aimed mainly at the Chinese coastline and inland cities and military facilities.

That's how the US military see it, but that is not everything as far as US business is concerned, for one simple reason. China produces 30% of the world's manufactured goods, many of them on behalf of US companies. The list of US companies with major investments in China is amazing—if they are big, they are in China, even if like Northrop Grumman they are key defence companies. [45] Northrop Grumman helps manufacture America's most important defence system, the Lockheed Martin F-35 stealth fighter (see below), which is being prepared to blow up its own Chinese facilities. Well, maybe not, but you can see the dilemma.

A war with China would wreck the Apple Corporation and Walmart, GAP and Dell Computers and a huge swathe of other US companies. More than that, it would devastate key US exports. For example, the most important market for Texas natural gas is China, and a collapse of Chinese orders would be ruinous for the state. In terms of simple economic logic, it

would not appear to make sense for the United States and China to be pursuing a militarised contest. But in the Global Police State apparent economic logic doesn't always hold sway. Conflict with China in the epoch of 'militarised accumulation' means huge profits for defence and hi-tech companies like Amazon, Microsoft and even Facebook.

The ramping up of political and military tensions got supercharged when Donald Trump became US President in 2016. Trade sanctions were put in place in a torrent of accusations against China of theft of intellectual property, breaking of WTO rules on state subsidies, lax labour laws allowing ultra-cheap labour and currency manipulation. For the first time since World War Two, the US faces an opponent that seriously rivals it on the economic, financial and technological fronts. According to Abraham Denmark and Richard Hass, Trump's anti-China sanctions resulted in 'More Pain than Gain' for the American economy; their article is a warning of the dangers of a general confrontation. [46] But in the era of the rise of the authoritarian right, and in the United States a deeply reactionary military and defence establishment, what is logical for the American economy may not always win out. And we are likely just two years from having another extreme right American president. Indeed it could even be Donald Trump himself. But any Republican president would ratchet up anti-China rhetoric and militarism. A return of extreme right Republicanism to the Oval Office would make Biden in power seem like a brief interlude in the political 'new normal' of a major capitalist party whose authoritarian right-wing politics blend into fascism. And in which bellicose militarism plays an important domestic political role.

AUKUS was about building a political bloc which would scupper any European plans for the region and ensure US dominance of the anti-China alliance in the region, one that includes Taiwan, the Philippines, Japan, South Korea and a raft of South East Asian countries. And as we have seen since the formation of NATO in the late 1940s, military alliances and shared weapons systems are crucial

ways of tying political relationships together.

The F-35 Stealth Fighter: preparing for war with China

Because nationalism and its attendant militarism are key factors in US domestic politics, neither Republicans nor Democrats will significantly reduce their anti-China rhetoric or the military pressure on China any time soon. If military competition, with huge amounts of ultra-lethal weaponry involved, can go hand in hand with economic collaboration, nevertheless there is no guarantee that the major US corporations will always be able to control the political and military dynamics, especially if Trump or a similar Republican becomes the next US president in 2024. (The Republican victory in the Virginia gubernatorial election in November 2021 has convinced many observers that the Democrats will lose the presidency in 2024.)

America's offensive military stance towards China, focused especially on lethal attacks on the Chinese coastline, depends on the huge power of US aircraft carriers, and their flotillas of frigates and destroyers; as well as bombers from the Guam and other air force bases, and the back up and landing forces of the Marine Corps. That's where the F-35 fighter and submarine warfare come in—the former to dominate the skies, the latter to defend the aircraft carriers and launch their own (non-nuclear) missiles.

Throughout the last 60 years, America's military stance and tactics have been highly theorised, by think tanks, corporations and the military itself. In the 1970s the doctrine of AirLand Battle emerged, mainly aimed at the Soviet Union. It was followed by AirSea Battle aimed at China, which has morphed into Multi-Domain Operations, whose focus can be seen through the F-35 stealth fighter project. [47] Multi-Domain operations are about having the technology and weapons to open up many fronts which an enemy cannot deal with, and

to have the surveillance capacities to 'see' over vast areas to enable multiple successful strikes, some fired from a distance of 200 miles, against the enemy.

The F-35 is much more than an air dominance or ground attack fighter. It can link with satellite technology and has advanced radar to 'see' over huge areas. It is alleged to be much more capable than its main rivals, the Chinese J20 'Great Dragon' and the Russian Sukhoi S-35. But the F-35 has benefitted from a huge sales effort by the United States. Indeed in commercial terms it is sweeping the board, with immense political and alliance-building consequences. More than 1000 F-35s have been ordered by 13 countries. Seven 'core' countries contributed finance to its development—Britain, Australia, Canada, Italy, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands. Turkey was expelled from the original core group for buying Russian anti-aircraft missiles. Britain contributed £220 million to project development, and already has enough of the ship-based F-35B version to enable the Queen Elizabeth advanced aircraft carrier, but unfortunately not yet enough to fit out the Prince Charles carrier. [48]

The *Queen Elizabeth* battle group (the carrier with its F-35 planes, plus destroyers and support ships) recently went on manoeuvres in the East Pacific as part of a joint operation with the United States. On its return, in a highly choreographed and symbolic operation, Italian and American F-35s landed on its decks. Just as during the two Gulf wars, the United Kingdom will follow the US lead. Embarrassingly, on the outward and inward bound trips in the Mediterranean the Queen Elizabeth and support ships were 'buzzed' by Russian jets flying out of Syria (the whole caravan went via the Suez Canal). Vladimir Putin was sending a hilarious message to the embarrassed Brits and the West in general. Your battle group could be sunk before it leaves the Med.

America expects to have eventually around 3500 F-35s on active service. Norway says a single F-35 will cost it more than \$7bn over its perhaps 20- or 30-year lifetime. Britain is expected

to have between 60 and 80 F-35s. These figures are astounding. A world total of 4-5000 of these aircraft at any one time is an amazing over-supply of military resources, at gigantic cost, with potentially appallingly dangerous consequences. But China and Russia have been busy with their own massive defence projects, including hypersonic missiles, which are exactly what they sound like.

Chinese Imperialism

China, as shown by the imprisonment of the Uighurs—the cultural genocide of a whole people—and the destruction of Hong Kong democracy, is a brutal dictatorship, and very far from being a ‘socialist’ country, as its ‘campist’ defenders believe. [49] China certainly has a defensive military stance vis-a-vis the United States (there are no Chinese aircraft carriers off the coast of San Francisco); but as we discuss below, China is being drawn inexorably into international military competition with the US. In addition, to promote Chinese economic and military interests, the Chinese Communist Party leadership has shown itself willing to strong-arm its neighbours, including Vietnam, the Philippines and others, over control of the South China Sea, and potentially the mineral wealth beneath it.

In his excellent article “A New Imperialism Emerges”, Pierre Rousset quotes a document that points out that:

To secure its sea lanes (merchant or military), Beijing has taken possession of ports in many countries, from Sri Lanka to Greece, using the weapon of debt when necessary. A default in repayment can allow it to demand that a port territory become a Chinese concession for a period of up to 99 years (which was Hong Kong’s colonial status!). [50]

In addition it has been widely argued that a key objective of its forward naval deployment is to defend the route through the Straits of Malacca, which is the main conduit of oil from the Middle East. But defending sea lanes is much wider than that, and in particular China’s key aim is to ensure its routes to Africa. China’s relationship with Africa is classically imperialist—exports of capital and imports of raw materials.

Africa is the fastest urbanising area of the world, now surpassing India and China. [51] By 2025 a hundred cities in Africa will have more than one million people. The result is likely to be an infrastructure revolution. More than 10,000 Chinese companies are operating in Africa and the value of Africa-China trade since 2005 has been more than two trillion dollars. China is the biggest external investor in Africa. Africa’s capitalist leaders seek rapid industrialisation and importing foreign capital is the quickest way to do it. It is said that you cannot find a building site in Africa over three stories high which does not have Chinese capital supporting it somewhere, or a new road of more than three kilometres that does not have Chinese engineers building it. [52] Through these partnerships China wants to be in on African manufacturing, agriculture and minerals.

This is a classic imperialist nexus. Whether China is imperialist or not cannot be gleaned from whether it has an aggressive military posture towards the United States or a defensive one, any more than you could assess who was imperialist at the start of the First World War by tracking who was the most militarily aggressive. The United States seeks to leverage its military dominance to confront China’s economic challenge, no doubt. That does not disprove the idea that China is imperialist.

The term ‘Global Police State’, which emphasises the interdependence of the UJS and Chinese economies, does not indicate a single military,

economic or political structure. It is a metaphor that stresses the globalisation of capital and its strong integration between the major players. A war would be a disaster for both China and the United States.

As a well-informed commentator notes, China’s hi-tech military development is proceeding apace. [53] Arguably it already has its own equivalent to the American F-35 stealth fighter, the J-20 ‘Great Dragon’, and is pouring in vast amounts of money to sustain its arms race with the US. China has built its first military base in Africa, near a large port in Djibouti. It sent troops and warships to rescue its citizens and those of other countries caught up in wars in Libya in 2011 and Yemen in 2015. And it has peace keeping troops in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The country’s international military outreach is growing fast.

The New Baroque Arsenal

In the early 1980s Sussex university academic and peace campaigner Mary Kaldor coined the term ‘Baroque Arsenal’ to characterise the vast oversupply of weapons under Ronald Reagan. [54] Today we have a Baroque arsenal on steroids. The massive wastefulness of this—from the point of view of human need, not from the point of view of world capitalist profit—is highlighted by the tragicomic stories of the US Navy Rail Gun, the Advanced Naval Gun and the Zumwalt frigate, all of which were abandoned after the expenditure of billions of dollars. [55] But the cost of these failures was not borne by their main developers—companies like BAE Systems, General Atomics, L-3 Applied Technologies, Saft America Inc. and Apple Technologies. Corporations across America, all got paid. The Baroque Arsenal Mark2 is not just an alliance builder, but a massive profit builder, what William I Robinson calls ‘militarised accumulation.’

*Republished from [Anti*Capitalist Resistance](#).*

Constituent Social Movements bloc advances environmentalist and feminist demands in Chilean Convention

15 January 2022, by **Camila Higuera**

Its members are Alejandra Flores (District 2), Cristina Dorador (D3), Constanza San Juan (D4), Janis Meneses (D6), Carolina Vilches (D6), Alondra Carrillo (D12), Alvin Saldaña (D15), Gloria Alvarado (D16), María Elisa Quinteros (D17), Bastián Labbé (D20), Vanessa Hoppe (D21), Manuela Royo (D23) and Elisa Giustinianovich (D28).

Giustinianovich is the group's representative on the presiding committee, since she shares one of the eight vice presidencies of the Convention, while Royo represents them in Human Rights, Alvarado in Budget and Dorador in Decentralization.

MSC's main objectives are to put human rights at the centre of constituent work, advocate for the freedom of political prisoners and promote the refoundation of the state, leaving behind the neoliberal subsidiary model, to build a pluri-national, decentralized system that guarantees access to social, economic, cultural and nature rights.

Before the Constituent Assembly was set up MSC was already forming useful links with other groups of independents, such as members in reserved seats and the Lista del Pueblo, together with those who formed the Vocería de los Pueblos, one of the first bodies of articulation of independent convention members of different origins. As the weeks passed, the bond was tightened, and a bloc was formed together with Chile Digno (Social Green Regionalist Federation and Communist Party).

Since then, MSC has established itself as an important force in the Convention, often receiving the

support of the Frente Amplio, Colectivo Socialista and Independientes No Neutrales.

Popular sovereignty

The political engine of MSC, as its name implies, lies in the desire to provide popular sovereignty to peoples and transform the social, cultural, political and economic model. "We are united by the desire to generate radical transformations, with collective, diverse, popular, pluri-national, feminist, ecological, anti-capitalist, decolonizing and dissident force," says the Manifiesto of the collective.

According to the document, MSC is "a political articulation of social, union, union, environmental, feminist, territorial and first nations organizations" that came together after the popular revolt and which together with the constituents - who function as spokespersons in the Convention - seeks to transform the system, with nature and territories being protagonists of this process.

The MSC's links with the defence of the environment and the territories have a long history. The Movement for the Defence of Water, Land and Environmental Protection (Modatima) has Carolina Vilches and Manuela Royo as representatives of the organization.

Vilches was elected by District 6, which includes the Quintero-Puchuncaví-Ventana zone, where an industrial complex borders the coast with thermoelectric power plants, copper smelting and refinery centres,

natural gas and oil regasification terminals.

The District is also composed of the Province of Petorca, an area that has been experiencing a water crisis for many years as a result of the exploitation of water used for avocado monoculture. As a result, more than 3,000 people are supplied with water by tanker trucks that travel through the valley three times a week. And it is in this area where Vilches in 2016 founded and ran the Water Affairs office of the province of Petorca, the first office of its kind in the country.

Manuela Royo, a member of Modatima Wallmapu and lawyer for the organization, testified in March 2021 before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in a public hearing on the defence of water resources. Also, this member has defended Mapuche who have been imprisoned and involved in actions such as Operation Hurricane.

The convention member Constanza San Juan was involved for years in the movement against the Pascua Lama mining project of the Canadian mining company Barrick Gold, which was cancelled after years of resistance from the Diaguita communities and the surrounding inhabitants.

Elisa Giustinianovich also has a record in the defence of ecosystems in the Magallanes region, where she has promoted the decarbonization and protection of the Tres Puentes wetland. In the southern region, Giustinianovich was a member of the Feminist Coordinator of Magallanes, an organization with which they built the Feminist Parliament of Rebel Patagonia.

Feminist guidelines

Although feminism is one of the common guidelines of all MSC conventions, Alondra Carrillo is one of the most recognized figures of feminist activism. She was spokesperson for the Feminist Coordinator 8M (CF8M) between 2018 and 2020, a year with a historic March 8 that brought together more than one million women in Santiago.

From this space, discussion was promoted, culminating in the correction of the interpretation of parity that was being used in the Convention, where initially the concept was applied as a ceiling for the participation of women. The same logic operated in the conventional elections held in May 2021 so that 10 women who obtained the majority of

votes in their lists had to cede their quota to a man to meet the criterion that both sexes must be represented in a proportion of 50% each.

The MSC convention members criticised this interpretation, indicating that parity is a mechanism that seeks to repair the historical marginalization of women from political and public space, so it cannot be used as a limitation, but as a minimum floor. In this way, the Convention bowed to the proposal of the MSC, accepting that from now on the limit of 50% maximum applies only to men, while for women it is the basis. This sets a precedent for future bodies where parity criteria will be established.

Other relevant initiatives proposed by the collective which led to an important political discussion in the Convention concerned the search for binding mechanisms of popular

participation. In this sense, the MSC manifesto mentions that through articulation and organization with communities, movements and territories they seek to “build an inclusive space, capable of bringing together historically invisible popular diversity to build pluri-national power, which allows us to be a deliberative and binding voice in decision-making.” As a consequence, the collective, together with other spaces of the Convention, approved in the Popular Participation Commission the holding of direct plebiscites as a mechanism of direct and binding participation between citizens and the constituent process. Although the initiative was approved with votes from all sectors except *Vamos por Chile*, it is still an open discussion that has to be put to a vote in the plenary to be established as a rule.

Translated by International Viewpoint from Interferencia.

Fighting French Fascism Means More Than “Anyone but Éric Zemmour”

14 January 2022, by Ugo Palheta

We should begin by noting that, according to polls at least, this period has seen an increase in the potential voter base for the far right. It has risen from about 30 percent before the summer (combining the voting intentions for Marine Le Pen and “national-conservative” Nicolas Dupont-Aignan) to 36-37 percent according to more recent polls (i.e., also including Zemmour) — a score to which we should also add potential support for Florian Philippot and François Asselineau. It is thus hardly impossible — depending on how the balance of power shifts — that by April’s first-round contest, the various forces of the far right could together rally 40 percent support. [56]

We should take this electoral shift, and the wider political situation in France, very seriously. The far right as

represented by Le Pen, Dupont-Aignan, and Asselineau took a total of 27 percent in the first round of the 2017 presidential election — already an historic high. And we can also get a measure of what the famous “barrage” against Le Pen, as represented by Emmanuel Macron, really amounted to. Under Macron’s rule, familiar neoliberal and authoritarian policies produced familiar effects, with fascist and fascist-adjacent organizations and ideas continuing to make headway both electorally and ideologically. The most violent groups have multiplied attacks on left-wing, feminist, and anti-racist activists in recent months. Mainstreamed Extreme, Zemmourized Mainstream

We also see this far-right advance when we look at the current most likely scenario for the second-round

contest: another runoff between Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen. She has today widened her lead over her competitors (including Zemmour, but also the conservative Les Républicains, which has yet to pick a candidate). Over summer, Le Pen was rated 40 percent in polls for the second round (already significantly above her 2017 score, 34 percent, and far above her father’s 18 percent in 2002). She is now [December 2021] running at 45 percent, approaching the highest levels she reached in the months after the terrible murder of schoolteacher Samuel Paty [57] in the context of an all-out reactionary offensive that saw the passing of Macron’s global security law, legislation against “Islamic separatism,” and government attacks on “Islamism-leftism.” [58]

It is possible that Le Pen is currently benefiting from the ideological effects of this offensive (in which Macron's administration has played a crucial role) and by the hypermediatization of Zemmour over the last three months. But it can also be assumed that she is benefiting from a perceived softening of her image by her far-right rival's harsh talk of "national suicide." This shift is illustrated by a poll conducted by Odoxa in mid-November — and the comparison between this data and a similar survey conducted in 2014. [59] Zemmour is today much more widely seen as "far right" (+24 points), "racist" (+23 points), "dangerous" (+23 points), "misogynistic" (+15 points), and "aggressive" (+9 points), while Le Pen is less perceived as "aggressive" and "racist" than seven years ago.

Another important factor is how far Zemmour's media and polling breakthrough has accelerated the classic bourgeois right's turn toward more extreme positions. The primaries for Les Républicains have played out almost entirely on the Zemmourian terrain of a "threatened," "submerged" France on the verge of "annihilation" because of excessive immigration, endemic criminality, etc. [60] It is not simply or mainly that one of the candidates — Éric Ciotti — sought to mimic Zemmour's positions in every way, including by taking up the racist conspiracy theory of the "great replacement." [61] It is that all the candidates were harmonized to a Zemmourist playbook, including even Michel Barnier, who may initially have seemed the most centrist.

In this sense, Stathis Kouvelakis was certainly right to assert that Zemmour has already won through the dissemination of his ideas across much of the political field (even if his candidacy itself turns out a failure). [62] And it is not that the pro-Macron right is going to belie this argument — having, in its four years in power, drawn deeply from the obsessions, language, and proposals of the far right.

"Anyone but

Zemmour": A Dead End

We can see that "anyone but Zemmour" would be a dead-end strategy for at least two reasons.

The first is that such a strategy minimizes the danger that Le Pen's Rassemblement National (RN, formerly Front National) continues to represent, and conceals the fact that its political project is no less oppressive than Zemmour's. [63] Le Pen's repeated calls for Zemmour to join her campaign demonstrate that she is in no way in disagreement with him on substance, only with his strategy. Her supporters insist, rightly, that everything he stands for has already been promoted by the Front National or RN over recent decades. That approach underestimates the strength of the RN's electoral rootedness. If Marine Le Pen currently seems able to withstand the crash test of a far-right competitor supported by one of France's main media empires, it is because Zemmour has never significantly eaten into the popular part of her electorate (blue- and white-collar workers), among whom polling support for Le Pen is both stable and far superior to all other candidates. [64]

The second reason is that the focus on the fascist Zemmour tends to conceal not only the radicalization of the forces of the bourgeois right (Macron's supporters and Les Républicains), of which the Le Figaro journalist is himself a pure product, but also the processes of fascization that have been set in motion by the Islamophobic, anti-migration and ultra-securitarian policies, carried out over the last twenty years in particular. We might think especially, in the most recent period, of the twin liberticidal laws (the global security and separatism bills), which could only be imposed so easily (if not without opposition) in the context of a shameless and forced instrumentalization of terror attacks. This has been aimed at dissolving Muslim and anti-racist organizations fighting Islamophobia (in the name of the fight against "separatism") and

delegitimizing the Left (because of its alleged complicity therein, labelled with an expression — "Islamism" — directly borrowed from the far right).

Anti-Fascism and Fighting Islamophobia

Any anti-fascist strategy must confront multiple fascist forces. That means fighting the fascists who occupy the electoral and institutional terrain and those who seek to dominate the streets. The fascization processes — in the form of institutional and ideological transformations — provide a fertile ground for the progress of the far right (of its organizations and ideas).

In the present French context, it seems quite obvious that Islamophobia is the foremost vector of this fascization process through

the institutionalization of discrimination (in the name of the threat that Islam supposedly constitutes to the Republic and to France);

the banalization of arbitrary procedures targeting Muslims in particular (from administrative raids on people's homes to the banning, without serious grounds, of organizations fighting against Islamophobia);

the dehumanization of people from the Global South who seek to reach Europe (on the grounds that they are Muslims and therefore potentially dangerous); and

the rise of a conspiratorial variant of Islamophobia that gives preemptive legitimization to the ethnic cleansing policies promoted explicitly by Zemmour (for what, other than this, is the plan of those who seriously imagine that France is occupied, dominated, colonized, etc. by Muslims?).

All this means that the struggle against Islamophobia is central to anti-fascism in France — and, without doubt, in the whole of Western Europe. The conditions for this fight have become particularly difficult in

France since it is now not only stigmatized by the media but also widely criminalized. The way in which the Council of State recently rubber-stamped the banning of the Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF) is, from this point of view, a warning for all the collectives or associations that fight against oppression. As one statement protesting the ban put it:

By a curious twist, the dissolution of the CCIF is thus approved on the grounds that by fighting — legally — against anti-Muslim discrimination and hatred, it has made itself guilty of discrimination and hatred. . . . Indeed, for the Council of State, “to criticize without nuance” public policies or laws that one considers discriminatory is to push the victims of the alleged discrimination down the slope of radicalization and to invite them to ignore the laws of the Republic. We Need Something Else

The rise of neo-fascism derives from a prolonged crisis of hegemony — that is, from the French ruling class’s weakened capacity to obtain the consent of the majority of the population to its (neoliberal) policies and from the disintegration of the relationship between representatives and represented (as seen through the weakening of the parties, the rise of abstention, etc.). But it also springs at least as much from the crisis of an alternative to neoliberal capitalism — that is, from a crisis of the Left (if by this we mean the forces that have not given up challenging capitalism in one way or another).

In its combination with the decline of social democracy and the communist parties, the crisis of hegemony could have constituted (or still could constitute) a favorable terrain for the rebirth of forces promoting such an alternative. Indeed, we have seen this rebirth take place in the form of electoral successes achieved by organizations such as Syriza,

Podemos, and La France Insoumise, and by figures such as Bernie Sanders and, especially, Jeremy Corbyn, who have come to challenge the hegemony of the “left” neoliberal currents within the Democratic Party and the Labour Party, respectively. But these successes were ephemeral and did not crystallize, for various reasons, into organizations capable of recreating organic, enduring links with the working class.

In the French case, social movements are vigorous (if we compare them with Britain and Germany, to stay within Western Europe), as is critical thought. But the political left has failed over the last twenty years to give rise to an emancipatory project capable of competing for hegemony with the pair constituted by the neoliberal extreme center and the neofascist far right. The effect was that the Left, excluding the Parti Socialiste (PS) — whose policy in office from 2012 to 2017 was wholly on the Right’s terrain — gathered only 21.3 percent in the first round of the presidential election (and only 27.7 percent even including the PS candidate Benoît Hamon). However, it could be at an even lower level in 2022.

In all opinion polls, it is among the working class — blue-collar and white-collar combined, who represent about 50 percent of the active population — that the Left polls at its lowest levels. One may take refuge in the comforting thought that this will itself suppress electoral illusions, free up working-class militancy, and clear a path toward insurrection. But this isn’t really what we see historically: most of the great moments of mass social conflict, where the question of revolutionary rupture was concretely posed, were also moments when the political left managed to gather the votes of a large part of the working classes and built vast activist organizations capable of reworking the common sense of the working

class from within.

It is this counter-hegemonic capacity — this organic link with the working class — that has been lost. The chimera of a “union of the Left” or of a “people’s primary,” hoping to line up all the existing organizations behind a single candidate and thereby add together their (small) scores, will not provide a way out of this morass. The problems run much deeper and will need confronting in the difficult period ahead of us. Unity is necessary politically (including electorally), but it must be sealed on the basis of a project of rupture — not on a vague platform alongside forces or figures that contributed to the disaster of François Hollande’s presidency and that wish to more or less renew the same neoliberal policies. [65]

It is indeed necessary to build broad mobilizations against Zemmour and his project, including this Sunday in Paris (just as the people of Marseille did last week). But such a mobilization should not focus too much on this sinister individual at the expense of leaving the field open to Le Pen and the RN, or indeed underestimating the necessary fight against everything that has allowed Zemmour’s rise. This also means fighting the banalization (and radicalization) of Islamophobia at the highest levels of the state, as in mass media, and in resisting the state authoritarianism daily expressed in the fate imposed on migrants and the securitarian surveillance of working-class and immigrant neighborhoods.

Finally, if we want to achieve lasting victories against fascism and its rise, we cannot be satisfied with one-off mobilizations or with pushing back Zemmour’s candidacy. We cannot escape the need to rebuild a mass organization capable of carrying forth a political alternative to racial and patriarchal capitalism, in popular mobilization as at election time.

4 December 2021

Chile's victorious "new left" brings hope, but it's all to play for

13 January 2022, by **Franck Gaudichaud**

Many Chileans breathed a sigh of relief on the night of 19 December — not just in the headquarters of the Chilean left but also in their homes and on social media — at news of the electoral defeat of the reactionary neoliberal far right, nostalgic for the old dictatorship (1973-89). José Antonio Kast had lost the presidential race to the leftwing coalition Apruebo Dignidad (AD, Approve Dignity), led by Gabriel Boric, an alliance of the Communist Party (PC), Frente Amplio (Broad Front, FA) and regional green parties. Crowds rejoiced in the streets of Santiago and nationwide. The sounds of car horns and singing went on late into the night. The former laboratory of neoliberalism had turned to the left.

The result had not been a foregone conclusion, however, given the high number of undecided voters. In the first round 53% of the electorate didn't vote, confirming a trend observed since Chile's transition to democracy in 1990 and especially pronounced since the end of compulsory voting in 2012: a huge abstention rate and growing disenchantment with a democratisation process characterised by uninterrupted neoliberalism and many lingering legacies from the dictatorship.

Between the two rounds of voting, Boric's campaign team tried to reach out beyond Santiago's middle-class, his core demographic, to remoter parts of the country, including rural areas and poor neighbourhoods. Their aim was to mobilise the abstainers and close the gap in areas where Kast had received strong support. It worked: turnout jumped to almost 56% in the second round, and for the first time over eight million Chileans voted. Boric beat Kast by more than ten points.

Boric's campaign manager Izkia Siches, 35, played a decisive role in this winning strategy, successfully revitalising the campaign. Siches, who was president of Colmed, the Chilean Medical College, during the pandemic, is known for her opposition to the incumbent president Sebastián Piñera's health policy. Early election data suggests that women, the working class and the young were the key factor behind the victory, contributing significantly to the almost one million difference in votes between the candidates. The left did especially well in Santiago's poor western districts, scoring over 70% in some of them. Estimates indicate that 68% of women under 30 voted for Boric, while Kast won among people over 70. [66]

The first-round result was a surprise: Kast, a 55-year-old ultraconservative Catholic lawyer and father of nine, came first with 28%, ahead of Boric on 25.8%. However, hope of a decisive Boric victory remained, given his exceptional trajectory over the past decade: he had begun in the autonomous left of the 2000s, then led the University of Chile Student Federation (FECH) in 2011, during the great mobilisation of young people for "free, public, quality" education.

Reformist and post-neoliberal

He entered parliament in 2013 as an independent without any party support, an achievement in the Chilean electoral system, which favours coalitions of centrist parties over independents. He was then re-elected alongside figures from the student movement such as Camila Vallejo of the Communist Party and Giorgio Jackson, who became his

right-hand man. Boric and Jackson co-founded the FA in 2017, strategically positioning it between the historical Communist left, whose touchstones were Castro and Bolívar, and the traditional parties of the old centre-left Concertación, the coalition of the Socialist Party and Christian Democrats which governed from 1990 to 2010 and was reviled for its faithful adherence to neoliberalism.

This institutional, frenteamplista (broad-front) "new left" which sought to be reformist and post-neoliberal, was a far cry both from the "radical left" label that the international press lazily applied to it and the accusations of communism in Chile's dominant media. Winning the primaries against the very popular (and more leftwing) Communist mayor of Recoleta, Daniel Jadue, Boric and the FA saw their tactics pay off.

Boric's presidential manifesto contained a new fiscal policy aimed at taxing the wealthy and the big companies to fund social reforms. These included public health; education; the return of the pension system (privatised by General Pinochet) to state control; the legalisation of abortion and the promotion of the rights of women and sexual minorities; the quest for a greener economy; and the negotiation of new fundamental rights for the Mapuche people.

High turnout against far right

This platform successfully rallied people from far beyond Apruebo Dignidad. But the spectacular increase in turnout in the second round — especially in the cities, and in regions that had been hostile to the left in the

first round (such as the northern port city of Antofagasta) — was above all a reaction to the emergence of the far right, at whose rallies pro-Pinochet chants were often sung. So some Chileans voted against Kast as much as for Boric, as demonstrated by the many declarations by social and feminist collectives and organisations, such as the Popular Assembly of La Granja in Santiago, which lent its support to “stand up to fascism”, without giving Boric *carte blanche*. [67]

In his first speech as president-elect, Boric stressed he would serve as president for all Chileans, and alluded to Salvador Allende, the socialist president who died in the 1973 coup. He also reiterated his support for the ongoing constitutional process, “a source of world pride”: “For the first time in our history we are writing a constitution in a democratic and equal manner ... Let us all take care of this process so that we have a Magna Carta that is a meeting point and not a source of division.”

Following the October 2020 referendum and the election of a Constitutional Convention by universal suffrage last May, Chile is at last on track to replace the 1980 constitution inherited from Pinochet. [68] The traditional centre-left and centre-right parties are in a minority in this body, which is dominated by independents (partly from social movements, especially feminist and indigenous peoples’ organisations) and representatives of the left from the PC and the FA. Kast, by contrast, has consistently expressed a wish to scupper the constitutional project.

Boric has said he plans to implement “structural changes without leaving anyone behind; grow economically; convert what are for many consumer goods into social rights regardless of wallet size”, but he has also sought to reassure his opponents by promising to be “responsible”. In the period between the two rounds of the election he reorientated his programme towards the centre, angering the Communists.

Boric began to look more like the parties in the former Concertación, even adding some of their most

prominent economists to his team — such as the former head of Chile’s central bank Roberto Zahler and the ultra-liberal Ricardo Ffrench-Davis — to try to “reassure the markets”. In addition to seeking the support of former social-liberal presidents Ricardo Lagos and Michelle Bachelet, Boric addressed business leaders at its Enade 2021 convention.

Crisis in “neoliberal paradise”

Having committed to respecting the austerity budget for 2022 passed by Congress, he revised his fiscal ambitions downwards: his plans to raise new taxes have progressively gone from the equivalent of 8% of GDP over two mandates to a much more modest objective of 5% over four or five years, depending on the economic growth rate. This change was presented as a sign of his fiscal “responsibility” and determination to control inflation. But the issue of inequality (the richest 1% capture about a third of Chile’s income), precarity and debt are at the root of the crisis in this “neoliberal paradise”. [69] The themes of crime and drug trafficking also appeared in Boric’s speeches, a response to Kast’s successful deployment of the language of security.

According to New York Times journalist Binyamin Appelbaum, what Gabriel Boric is defending is simply “social democracy”; in no sense could his project be called “communist”. [70] Despite the — often fake — alarm of Kast supporters, Boric has never mentioned the possibility of even partial nationalisation of the country’s vast natural resources, currently in the hands of the multinationals and bourgeois exporters. Chile possesses huge lithium and copper deposits, but Boric has spoken only of increasing the “royalties” that private operators pay. Allende nationalised copper, which he called “Chile’s salary”, but that doesn’t feature in the programme of this “new left”, and its Communist allies don’t believe that the time is yet right to raise the question of

nationalisations.

Despite the victorious coalition’s caution, some of the elite still regard it suspiciously. The stock market and the currency both plunged at the news of the result. The day after the election, Ignacio Walker, a former Christian Democrat minister and paragon of “Chilean-style” neoliberalism, expressed concern about whether the “social democratic” and “reformist” orientation of the newly elected government — which he welcomed — would turn out to be a façade for a return to the “‘refounding’ zeal that has characterised the Communist Party and the Broad Front parties”. [71]

The Communists’ participation in the government is a cause for concern in high places, and for some it raises the spectre of a return to the “Chilean path to socialism” and Popular Unity, the coalition that backed Allende (1970-73). However, the PC has insisted it will respect Boric’s commitments, as when it showed moderation in joining the “New Majority” at the start of Michelle Bachelet’s second term (2014-18).

‘Social peace and the new constitution’

Some of the social movements of the left have criticised Boric, as they are less concerned than he is with achieving consensus. As a result, the label of *amarillo* (yellow) has sometimes stuck to him. He has indeed remained vague on the Mapuche question (especially their right to self-determination and the restitution of ancestral lands) and the issue of labour law. He has opted not to support the proposal for a general amnesty for those the social movements refer to as the “political prisoners of the revolt” (of October 2019), some of whom have been in prison or under house arrest for two years without trial.

This inevitably brings up the president-elect’s controversial role in the protests of October 2019, an explosion of rage at the “neoliberal

model” that nearly toppled the Piñera government and was met with a level of state repression unseen since 1990. Boric is one of the deputies who in November 2019 helped devise the agreement for “social peace and the new constitution”, which was signed by the right and centrists but rejected by the PC and some of the FA, who condemned it as a stitch-up that ignored the will of the protesters. Some activists regard this agreement, which enabled the establishment of the Constitutional Convention, as a lifeline for Piñera and an attempt to channel the protests into institutions while the country was in a state of emergency.

A month later, Boric also voted for the even more controversial “anti-barricade law”, which gave legal backing to state repression at a time when the police’s human rights abuses were being severely criticised at home and abroad. Boric and his FA colleagues later apologised for voting with the right. Finally, in a region where the left shows unconditional support for the Cuban revolution, some saw Boric’s support for the 2021 Cuban anti-government protests as a betrayal.

The spirit of rebellion of October 2019 is very much alive in Chilean society. It was evident in the slogans the crowd chanted as they celebrated the left’s victory on the streets and in Santiago’s renamed Dignity Square on 19 December. And even if the

territorial assemblies have lost their dynamism after months of pandemic and economic crisis, many demands for social justice remain and the fire of revolt is still smouldering.

The new president, who’s a former activist and excellent organiser, knows this. He has promised a “fairer Chile” and “to extend social rights”, while acknowledging that “the days ahead will not be easy”... Already, the country is experiencing considerable capital flight, which will reduce his room for manoeuvre. He will have to deal with a legislature that will be largely hostile, because even though the old parties were excluded from the second round of the presidential election after finishing third and fourth in the first round, they maintain their presence at municipal and regional level and in Congress.

Tough negotiations ahead

The right won a Senate majority in November’s parliamentary election. The lower house is split between the left/centre-left and right/far-right. The parliamentary left is stronger, especially the Communists (with 12 seats) and Apruebo Dignidad, with 37 (in a 155-seat body), while at the same time it has consolidated its municipal base in key cities such as central Santiago, Valparaíso, Viña del Mar and Valdivia. But progressive politicians face tough negotiations over any major reform with the centrists and the parties of the former

Concertación coalition, which Boric has long disdained and which remains hostile to any significant change.

And though Kast has just lost a battle, he is far from defeated. His rise may only just be beginning. That, at any rate, was his message to his supporters on the night of his defeat. The “Chilean Bolsonaro” wants to keep making advances: as the brother of an economy minister under the dictatorship and son of a German Nazi, he might seem a throwback to the old authoritarianism of the 1980s.

But that would be to underestimate a phenomenon at work throughout Latin America: the emergence of radical rightwingers, who mobilise moral discourse, the evangelical churches and Catholic hardliners, xenophobic agitation against migrants and fear of feminist gains and the LGBTQ movement. Kast congratulated himself for entering parliament in force with 15 deputies (and one senator), at a time when the traditional right retains its hegemony in the conservative arena, even if it has decreased from 72 to 53 deputies.

Undoubtedly, the Chilean people have won an important victory, which explains this election’s regional and global impact. But now the real work begins.

*Source: Translated by George Miller for **Le Monde diplomatique** (English edition).*

What is missing from the debate about the China-US contest

12 January 2022, by **Au Loong-Yu**

The Crackdown on Hong Kong

Recent attacks on press freedom follow a major attack last year, when the authorities prosecuted Jimmy Lai,

the boss of Apple Daily, under the newly passed National Security Law. The Daily was forced to close down this June when the authorities went on to freeze its assets.

The great purge is not just about Hong Kong. This was obvious when the

Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China was forced to disband this September, when its main mission was merely to hold an annual June Fourth memorial in the city.

And then on the 23rd of December,

the statue Pillar of Shame at the University of Hong Kong was removed in the middle of the night. The statue was created by Danish artist Jens Galschiøt commemorating the 1989 Tiananmen massacre.

There is a sector of Hong Kong civil organizations which have been disbanding or de-activating themselves in the past two years that have rarely been noticed. This sector is made up of Hong Kong organisations which have been supporting China's civil society. Among them there have been around ten groups in Hong Kong doing China labour solidarity work. With Hong Kong trampled upon by Beijing, most of these groups have also either disbanded or deactivated.

Hong Kong is the third battle between the US and China, after their tension over the South China Sea and then their trade war. But the Hong Kong case is a bit more complicated. Beijing's crackdown on Hong Kong carries elements which relate to China's international relations, but there are also strong elements of domestic concern as well, namely the fear of people's memories of the June Fourth massacre and the fear that the democratic movement between mainland China and Hong Kong may join hands, as they did in 1989. Secondly, Beijing has to finish off Hong Kong's autonomy because it is dangerous to its continuous monopoly of power and its appropriation of the wealth of the nation - previously Mainland Chinese could learn about the rampant corruption of their leaders through the free press in Hong Kong. Nowadays, with the disappearance of the freedom of the press, Xi Jinping can sleep much better.

China as the embodiment of multiple contradictions

At the height of the 2019 revolt, Mike Pence made a speech targeting Beijing, which some consider to be a pronouncement of a new Cold War. I

am hesitant to use the term 'new Cold War', however. During the old Cold War there was literally a hot war going on in Asia, and the US empire was the one who was on the offensive, while the Chinese and the Vietnamese were more on the defensive. Behind this offensive-defensive dichotomy there was also the opposition between colonialism and anti-colonialism. Anyone who was committed to democracy and self-determination for oppressed nations would not have chosen to be neutral, let alone to stand with the US.

Today's situation is very different. Beijing's current contest with the US is not a contest with imperialism per se, it is not meant to replace it with anything better. It is a contest about who has the final say in dividing up the global value chain, a contest between the ruling elites of both countries which is hence profoundly unjust as well. Just take a look at what Chinese corporations are doing around the world; their investments are the same as any imperialist or exploitative regime, namely to pursue the maximization of profit at the expense of the earth and the working people.

In trying to position oneself in the China-US contest, people are debating China's political regime. Some say China is an authoritarian regime, but this description is not very satisfactory because regular authoritarian regimes are not capable of asserting such a level of control over the whole population, from social and economic to thought control. With such a level of control it is tempting to say that China is more totalitarian than authoritarian. Again, the term carries a strong connotation of the old Cold War, although it seems that the term itself preceded the Cold War. I think one of the difficulties lies in the fact that China is a bit of everything. By some measurements it is a developing country, but by other measurements it is an emerging imperialist country. On the one hand it is the sweatshop of the world, and its sweatshops only receive a small proportion of the global value chain, something which is a typical of dependent accumulation. On the other hand, the Chinese state is pouring huge amounts of money into sponsoring indigenous innovation and

is quite successful. It now also exhibits strong features of self-reliant accumulation. China is a collection of multiple contradictions.

Political Economy please

There is only one feature of the CCP which has been very consistent since 1949, and that is its hostility towards working people enjoying freedom of the press and democratic rights, and its insistence on its divine right to brainwash the people. I once had a chat with a Mainland dissident. He was detained for a month for his activity. When he was released, the secret police told him that, "our party respects freedom of thought and surely you can have your own thought, as long as you don't voice it". A thought without a voice is hardly the freedom of thought at all, however.

I think in the debate about the China-US contest, some focus too much on the merits or the dis-merits of this government or that government, forgetting that as socialists we should always put the people's well-being as the utmost concern. Some people may hastily proclaim that they agree with this and then roll out articles showing Beijing's performance on economic betterment, for instance how far Beijing has eradicated poverty, or how many labour laws have been passed, to prove that, "thanks to the CCP government the Chinese people's well-being has been taken care of, and hence this further proves that the Chinese state is progressive while the US state is reactionary". And then they decide to support Beijing in this global contest for hegemony.

Firstly, official figures are always misleading if not outright false, including the official propaganda that China has eradicated extreme poverty. Even top officials occasionally admit some truth. When the Premier Li Keqiang, who is very much marginalised by Xi Jinping, remarked that China has 600 million people (more than 40 percent of the Chinese population) with a monthly income of 1,000 RMB, the news shocked many people in China and the world - this is extreme poverty for many. Actually,

most labour quasi-organisations or networks working at the grassroots do not need Premier Li to tell them about the dire poverty among working people. If one wants to know the real situation at the grassroots level, one needs to learn what common people have to say and how they live their lives. Unfortunately, few people who support Beijing in opposing the US are rarely concerned about real people.

Secondly, I argue that, in China's situation, the economic well-being of the working people should be judged in relation to the criteria of how many political rights do the people enjoy. One simply cannot divorce the political from the economic. When the people are denied even basic political rights, sooner or later they will lose everything. It is no accident that while the CCP could change its economic policies with a blink of the eyes (what I called "the policy variables") its one party dictatorship never ever changed (what I called "the despotic constant"), and in the worst situation it could further degenerate into autocracy, and it is exactly where China is heading to right now. The party bureaucracy knows very well that as long as they could literally vest all power in their hands it does not matter in changing their economic policies to suit the situation or to make some minor concessions. For the people, even if they have a reasonable income for the moment they are never safe; the danger of being appropriated once again by the state or by developers colluding with the party is always there. Just look at the peasants in Mao's era. They were allocated a plot of land during the land reform in the early 1950s, only to lose everything to the so-called commune within a few years. They got back their land in the 1980s, only to begin losing it again in the current land grab, often led by local party officials.

As for labour rights, when in 1995 the first labour code was enacted this was hailed as a great step forward for labour and many people praised it as the beginning of a Chinese "New Deal". Yet these people never bother about the non-enforcement of labour laws, or just shrugged their shoulders when they were told that when workers tried to claim their rights they were being arrested. With the

extermination of labour NGOs in 2015, the non-enforcement of labour laws has gone worse, as the so called 996 labour dispute showed. This denial of basic political rights by the party state is enough for us to say that a judgement on the Chinese regime should never be based on economic performances alone, rather, this in itself must again be judged by political criteria. Hence from the standpoint of the working people, Beijing's Orwellian state is totally unjust and it must be replaced by a democratic one, and that the China-US contest should be judged in accordance with the people's interest of their historic fight for emancipation. We must back to the basic: the situation of capitalism demands a political economy in order to understand it fully, especially so when we are dealing with a Chinese state capitalism (even if it has a substantial private sector the state is still dominant). [72]

Ask the right question please

Further on, the argument about "whether or not the US government and the Chinese government are equally bad or equally strong" is also a false debate, because we don't need to prove that the robber who robbed us is as bad as the other robber, or as strong, before we can lock him up. Maybe Beijing is not as bad as Washington, and it is definitely not as strong, but it is strong enough to crush its people, and it has been doing so for decades. Therefore, real socialists who place both the political and economic rights of the working people as their central concern, should prioritise their own struggle for emancipation above all else, and should only judge the China-US contest from this paramount struggle.

In the west a lot of good people hate the US empire. But you do not need to support Beijing in order to express your anger against the US; just as the Hong Kong localists don't need to support Trump in order to express their anger against Beijing. It is the Chinese people that require your support. But who are the "Chinese people"? The difficulty lies in the fact that you don't hear them much. What

you hear is the CCP media claiming to represent Chinese people - the latter have been denied their own voice. In most of the international meetings among civil associations across the countries, be it trade unions or NGOs, not to mention political organisations, you rarely bump into their genuine representatives. Because real activists, not to mention genuine socialist activists, on top of being banned from going abroad to speak their own minds, are also constantly being hunted down and put into jail. At the same time pro-government scholars and governmental NGOs delegates travel around the world to prop up Beijing's international image. Yet this voiceless-ness of the Chinese people is the loudest cry in the world! If you haven't heard of it it is because you have not turned to the right direction, or because you take those the voice of the Party as the voice of the people.

Still occasionally the Chinese people do get heard. The wide spreading of the practice of "lying flat", practically a spontaneous civil boycott of the state ideology of "work hard to climb up the social ladder and ask no questions about the Party's monopoly of all resources", is just one recent example of social discontent. As far as China-US contest is concerned, some years ago certain online media posted articles about a possible China-US war, and then one follow up comment drew a lot of attention. It said that Chinese people should support the war effort by first calling on the members of the party's politburo to fight the war, and if they can't win the war then the entire membership of the central committee should be sent to the frontline, followed by all the party members. In the end Chinese people will prevail. The comment shows that there are people who know that in the current situation a China-US war is not their war (the post was deleted very soon, for obvious reasons). The people have their own war to fight, a war to restore their self-esteem and their political and economic rights to be free. Let us turn our ears in their direction and support their struggle.

11 January 2022

Author's note: This article is based on an interview conducted with the

Bolivia Update: Arce's First Year

11 January 2022, by **Bret Gustafson**

When new elections were finally held in October of 2020, the ousted party returned to power with a new president, Luis Arce. Evo Morales came back from exile in Argentina, and the resurgent MAS party - the 'Movement Toward Socialism' - took back the state. Now a year later, President Luis Arce continues to grapple with an extremist right-wing opposition and the challenges of governing in a post-coup scenario amidst an ongoing pandemic. Against ongoing efforts by the right-wing to destabilize the new president, the country's robust peasant and worker social movements, in large part rural and Indigenous, continue to turn out in the streets to offer their ongoing support - both for Arce and for the democratic mandate he won in the polls.

But beyond the electoral win, Bolivia's situation is complicated. Luis Arce has managed to juggle the pandemic, the economic downturn, and right-wing machinations. As such, his first year is a success if seen against the backdrop of the situation at hand. Bolivia has received a medley of vaccines - from Russia, China, the US, and Argentina - and has been feverishly trying to get them into people's arms. The government has also been methodically scooping up those accused of taking part in the 2019 coup and putting them in jail. This has followed popular clamor for justice for the victims of army violence as well as a scathing report by a 'Group of Independent Experts' (GIEI). Backed by the OAS (and partly financed by the United States) the GIEI carried out an exhaustive investigation and produced a report that detailed numerous human rights abuses and confirmed the two massacres carried out by the coup regime in late 2019. In the wake of Morales' ouster, the tide of

international opinion seemed to be adopting the argument that Morales was rightfully ousted in the wake of fraud - in no small part thanks to the efforts of the OAS and the US itself. But the work of a number of academic researchers has debunked the OAS's "evidence" for the coup. And the GIEI report, against what many expected, has actually documented the gross abuses of the coup regime. International opinion - and the facts - are now leaning in the other direction.

Even so, in past months the right-wing opposition, from its geographic base in the eastern Bolivian city of Santa Cruz, has been moving from one tactic to another in an effort to keep the Arce government on its heels. The ostensible motives are varied. In the immediate wake of Arce's October 2020 victory, a small segment of the right tried to mobilize claims of fraud once again. Given the international recognition that Arce won in free and fair elections, that effort fizzled. A few weeks later, when the government started jailing those responsible for the coup, the opposition again called for a national work stoppage, claiming that there was a political witch-hunt underway. That effort hinged on an ongoing division in Bolivia - between those who believe the 2019 events were a coup and those who believe that the upheaval was precipitated by Evo Morales' attempt at electoral fraud. The 'coup vs fraud' cleavage remains an abyss. The MAS' rural and urban majority base of support is on one side (it was a coup), while the mostly urban upper- and middle-classes of the opposition are on the other (it was fraud). The fact that this latter sector controls most of the media outlets means that the fraud message - and the story of 'political persecution' - is a constant daily barrage.

Nonetheless, this national work stoppage also fizzled. So the opposition tried another tactic - opposing a new law aimed at stopping widespread money-laundering. Here they got more traction, claiming that some provisions of the law increased the surveillance and subpoena powers of the state and were an infringement on citizen rights. After several days of blockades, marches, and clashes, the government was forced to retreat, giving the right a symbolic victory. And, while a number of military officials and even the ex-(de facto) president Jeanine Añez are in jail awaiting trial, the government has been unwilling or unable to go after one of the main coup protagonists: Luis Fernando Camacho. After being at the forefront of the effort to topple Evo Morales in 2019 - and even bragging that his father had paid the police to mutiny - Camacho returned to his regional stronghold of Santa Cruz to participate in local elections as a gubernatorial candidate. In March of 2021 he was elected governor. Though his popularity is limited to that eastern region, the national government has not moved to detain him for his role in the coup. This is a tacit recognition of government weakness, acknowledging that Arce's administration does not quite have the power to withstand the reaction that such a move might provoke.

So, while numerically the MAS and Arce enjoy the support of a popular majority, with much of this backing in the rural areas, in the cities and in the media the situation looks more like a polarized stalemate. As Bolivian analyst Fernando Molina recently wrote, it is not altogether clear whether or not the government will be able to successfully prosecute those it has jailed. For various charges of

corruption during the coup regime, the case is a little easier. In fact, the coup government's former Minister of Government, Arturo Molina, is sitting in a Miami jail cell right now, charged by US authorities for his own money-laundering carried out while in office. Yet for those charged with participating in the coup, things are more complicated. To prosecute the ex-president Jeanine Añez, the government needs a 2/3 majority vote in Congress, a vote it does not have. With the details of abuses of the coup regime now documented by the report of the GIEI, the report did not weigh in on the coup vs. fraud debate, leaving the narrative largely in the hands of a divided public.

Even so, Arce maintains widespread popularity in Bolivia and a right-wing return is not imminent. Yet there are still a range of uncertainties and challenges ahead. The first is the resurgence of the pandemic, with growing rates of infection despite the vaccination efforts. The second is economic. After a dismal economic year in 2020, Bolivia's growth rate has rebounded and is projected at 5.1% for 2021, the average for South America. But high levels of revenue from natural gas exports have dropped off. In the period since his first election in 2006, gas revenues allowed Evo Morales to redistribute wealth

and increase public spending, both of which had positive effects on the broader economy. But in 2014 gas revenues started a precipitous decline. National, regional and municipal governments, all of which had shared in the largesse, now face deep cutbacks. The possibility of the return of a gas boom is small. Many observers and Bolivians alike are now turning their attention to lithium. Bolivia's large lithium deposits, situated primarily in the department of Potosí, may indeed promise some future bonanza. Yet the department of Potosí, not coincidentally, has also been a thorn in the side of the national government. One of its leaders, Marco Pumari, was the sidekick of Camacho during the 2019 putsch. While Camacho remains free, Pumari has now been jailed. National and regional tensions, which have long characterized the relationship with Santa Cruz, are also simmering around the issue of lithium and Potosí. Arce's government not only has to grapple with international jockeying for rights to develop Bolivia's lithium deposits but also with domestic struggles tied to the management of whatever wealth those deposits might generate.

Even with all of these challenges, the scenario in Bolivia is much better than

it might have been, and the wider trajectory of Latin America seems promising as well. In Bolivia, the right-wing does not have the mobilizing power of a Trump or a Bolsonaro (as in Brazil). While it is hard to say what events might unsettle the Arce government, for the moment the situation is much better than it would have been with a prolonged coup regime or with the return of the old guard neoliberal political parties. In Latin America as well, things are taking a modest turn for the better. Along with the recent overwhelming victory by leftist Gabriel Boric in Chile, Xiomara Castro, a democratic socialist, has been elected to the presidency in the US' perennial lapdog, Honduras. Setting aside the travails of Nicaragua and Venezuela - complicated in their own right - the re-election of Lula da Silva in Brazil (absent a military coup) will also probably happen in 2022. With the three largest economies in South America - Argentina, Brazil, and Chile - all neighbors of Bolivia, and all under left-leaning governments, Bolivia's historic process of change looks to have several more years to work on its unfinished business - the deeper social and economic decolonization and democratization of the state. Things could be worse.

Source [New Politics](#).

Novak Djokovic is no Spartacus

10 January 2022, by [Dave Kellaway](#)

Djokovic himself has always been very cagey about his health or vaccination status. In the first phase of the pandemic he helped organise a tournament in Croatia which resulted in multiple infections including himself and other fellow tennis players. Recently, he has made no secret of his anti-vax position and consults with a notorious Serb nationalist who has new age ideas.

From his belief in purifying water

with emotions, where he claimed to have met and seen "people who have used energy transformation, through the power of prayer and gratitude to turn even the most toxic food and water into water with curative powers," to his visits to the pyramids in Visoko, Bosnia - a mountain in the town is the centre of well-documented hoax - where he goes to charge his body with positive ions, some of it comes off as quirky at best.

[Euronews](#) 8 January

Even his latest justification for exemption because of a December Covid infection is weakened when the press released pictures of him maskless in a public event a day or so after he is supposed to have been infected.

His mum was outraged that her darling son had to share a hotel with 'illegal' migrants and other unsavoury

people and he was being crucified like Jesus Christ. His father says he is a victim of 'Corona fascism' and a 'Spartacus' of our age. The Serbian government rather grotesquely even called the Australian ambassador and complained that its favourite son was being maltreated.

The Australian Tennis organisers were clearly concerned with getting the star player into their tournament and helped him with the 'exemption argument'. Losing the number one player in the world has an impact on the commercial potential of the tournament. As some of the tennis players implicitly pointed out at a press conference there seemed to be two weights and two measures when it came to which players were being given special treatment. Everybody else had to go through all the hoops that are now required for international sports tournaments in the time of pandemic.

Public opinion in Australia seemed to react in the same way as the British people when they heard about the Cummings road trip or the Downing Street parties. People in Melbourne had been through one of the longest lockdowns of the Covid period and now this millionaire tennis player was waltzing into their town making light of the importance of vaccination. Historically Australians are pretty hostile to any sort of "Pommie" sense of entitlement, the Djokovic affair falls in the same sort of territory. [73]

Although he was not as harshly dealt with as an ordinary non-white immigrant the judge who overturned the government's original visa refusal did point out that correct legal procedures were not followed. Basically it seems the government minister can personally decide who can and cannot come into Australia. This is used against many people who fully deserve to be able to settle there.

During a whole period in the 1950s and 1960s Australian governments were more or less openly in favour of a White Australia policy. Immigration from Britain was facilitated whereas it

was very difficult from Asia. [74] Today things have moved on and in the 2016 census 12.6% of the population claimed an Asian heritage. Treatment of the first people, the Aborigines has been a classic example of colonial settler racism. Aboriginal children were regularly taken away from their families in an attempt to erase their culture and forcefully assimilate them. See the 2002 film Rabbit proof fence for a brilliant exposition of this policy.

The one positive outcome of it all has been the light it has shown on the Australian government's repressive immigration policy. Anti-racist demonstrators got out in front of the hotel Djokovic was held in to highlight the way migrants have been held for years in this place. Novak's mum complained about the basic accommodation and food on offer to her son. This did allow migrants staying at the same hotel to speak out on the media denouncing the hell they had been living through for a lot longer than a couple of days!

There was an even worse feature of Australian anti-migrant policy, much admired by British Home secretary Priti Patel, which was the detention of migrants outside Australian borders in Papua New Guinea. Australia paid PNG for this which was only ended in 2021. The practice had been condemned internationally by many human rights organisations. The usual racist arguments about being full up and there being no more space is particularly ridiculous in the case of Australia as anyone who has looked at a map or visited the place.

This entire affair is grist to the mill of the anti-vaxers who are already erecting Novak into a Covid martyr. As socialists we encourage the priority of solidarity and public health over right wing or left wing libertarian arguments that people should be free to infect other people. It is one thing for a non-vaxer to live their refusal in isolation from other people. But for those who have to come into close contact with others, like professional

tennis players, it is incumbent for them to accept they have to get a jab or face being scratched from tournaments.

You can have your right not to be vaccinated but that does not override the right of other players and staff not to be infected by you. The great champion Rafa Nadal has got it right: "People have suffered enough," he said and encouraged people to follow the science.

Currently the Australian government has been wrong footed by the judge's decision to allow Djokovic in. It is weighing up the implications of a ministerial decision to reverse this. It is aware that the government's handling of the pandemic has been criticised in the past and there is a lot of evidence on social media that people are very angry about Djokovic's exemption. On the other hand this would be a 3-year ban which then may have implications for Australia keeping the grand slam event. A ban might lead the international tennis governing bodies or players' associations to call for a boycott.

Djokovic is unlikely to drop his irrational beliefs. The reason he is one of the greatest of all times is his incredible resilience and stubborn mentality in matches. Recently he has won grand slam finals from two sets to love down. He is the anti-Federer in many ways. Roger is smooth, everybody's favourite and seems to win effortlessly and in style. Crowds love him while Djokovic thrives on antagonism. If they do let him play don't bet against him winning the thing since he will be angrier than ever to make a point.

Whatever happens we stand in solidarity with the migrants unfairly repressed by the Australian government and in favour of a zero tolerance policy on vaccination for players in such events.

10 January 2022

Source *Anti*Capitalist Resistance*.

The United States and Russia Struggle over Ukraine. War on the Horizon?

9 January 2022, by **Dan La Botz**

At the heart of this is Ukraine's plans to affiliate with NATO. Both U.S. President Joseph Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin have invoked their nations' imperial histories and current ambitions, using the Ukraine as the occasion to reassert their claims to dominate Eastern Europe.

Some time ago, Putin lamented the fall of the Soviet Union, calling it "the greatest geopolitical disaster of the 20th century." Under both the Tsarist monarchy and then under the Soviet Union, Ukraine formed part of the empire, and Putin seems to yearn to reconquer and reincorporate it. Now Putin, claiming that the United States and its allies are threatening Russia by supporting Ukraine, has mobilized about 100,000 troops that are poised to invade.

Biden has made his own aggressive assertions. In June of last year, Biden told Western European allies, "America is back in the business of leading the world alongside nations who share our most deeply held values....We believe that NATO is vital to our ability to maintain American security for the remainder of the century." He specifically noted, "We stand in solidarity with our valued partners Ukraine and Georgia, and we will continue to support their reforms, bringing them closer to NATO." Biden also stated that the U.S. regards Article 5 of the NATO treaty—which states an attack on one country is an attack on all—was "a sacred

commitment."

The Ukraine, long a colony of Russia and lying between Russia and Western Europe, is deeply divided geographically and politically between pro-Western and pro-Russian politics, and so it has become a flashpoint. Independent since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine initially established relations with both the Commonwealth of Independent States, (former Soviet states) and with NATO. When former Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych, who favored an alliance with the Soviet Union, rigged the presidential election in 2004, the Orange Revolution forced a rerun and Viktor Yushchenko, who leaned West was elected. Yanukovych, however, won the 2010 presidential election and in 2013 decided to suspend association with the European Union and instead affiliate with Russia's Eurasia Economic Union. That led to the Euromaidan protests and the Ukrainian Revolution of 2014 in which Yanukovych was ousted and succeeded by a pro-Western president.

In response to those developments, in 2014 Putin sent Russian forces to invade and seize Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula, claiming it for Russia. He also provoked a war in the Donbas region of Eastern Ukraine and recognized two "republics" in the Ukraine that are demanding autonomy and still supports guerrilla

troops there today. Some 13,000 people have been killed in that conflict since April 2014.

At the center of the U.S.-Russian dispute is the question of Ukraine's affiliation with NATO. Ukraine joined the NATO Cooperation Council in 1991, cooperated with NATO ever since, and still plan to affiliate. At their 2021 summit, NATO leaders reaffirmed plans for Ukraine to become a full member, asserting that Russia would have no veto power over that decision. Putin says that the Ukraine must not join NATO and that NATO forces in Eastern Europe should be pulled back. If it does join NATO, Russia would "conduct itself as the United States would behave if offensive weapons were near the United States." When the Soviet Union placed missiles in Cuba in 1962, the U.S. pressured the USSR to remove them and the world came close to a nuclear war.

The European far left opposes both Biden and Putin, but there is no anti-war movement in the United States and none is possible in Russia. We need to speak up now, opposing U.S. imperialism first, Russian interference as well, and supporting a movement for an independent Ukraine, one not controlled by the country's reactionary oligarchs.

4 January 2022

Source *New Politics*.

Martinique and Guadeloupe still in turmoil

8 January 2022, by **Patrice Mhidi**

Repeated crises and system crisis

The turbulence affecting them follows an increasingly frequent rhythm. This reflects the systemic crisis of the colonial system that rages here under a sophisticated camouflage. These “old colonies” known as “outremers” in the vocabulary of yesteryear, are called “ultraperipheral regions” by the technocrats (only Europe can be THE centre!).

The crisis is based on the exhaustion of the economic model inherited from the slave period: “sugar islands,” then bananas for the European market. This system is no longer profitable even if it supports the big Béké planters skilled in capturing subsidies. [75] The broadening of the social base of the system was nevertheless achieved, following “departmentalization,” by the constitution of an administrative petty bourgeoisie, the pillar of a specific mode of consumption. The resulting economic and social dependence is only a reflection of extreme political dependence.

Recent decades have seen boosted tourism activity, given a new impetus to the production of top of the range rum and established a still meagre agri-food sector. These economic novelties and social changes have shown their limits and contradictions: unemployment is exploding. The cost of living is soaring. An annual average of 3,000 young people has left the country in the recent period. Delinquency is increasing against a backdrop of drug trafficking.

The resulting popular anger is mixed with a feeling of powerlessness for which “Politics” has become the symbol. The structuring of the political landscape has been affected.

Assimilation (the name given to the transformation of the colonies into “Overseas Departments” conducted in a climate of popular euphoria in 1946

under the aegis of Aimé Césaire and the Communist Party of which he was a leader) quickly entered into crisis giving rise to a passionate cleavage between the “departmentalist” right and the “autonomist” left. To the left of this a “pro-independence far left” emerged in the 1960s and especially the 1970s. The difficulties faced by anti-colonialists in winning strong popular support led to “adaptations” which were mostly unacknowledged.

The domination of the left during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s by the autonomist current, the PCM (Parti communiste martiniquais - Martinican Communist Party) and PPM (Parti progressiste martiniquais - Martinican Progressive Party) led by Aimé Césaire following his break with the Communists was ended in the 1990s by a “patriotic camp” which was rapidly hegemonized by the MIM (Mouvement indépendantiste martiniquais - Martinican Independence Movement) led by Alfred Marie-Jeanne, whose electoral orientation took him to the head of the Regional Council (1998) and then of the Territorial Collectivity of Martinique (2015): his main opponent being the PPM.

The PPM/MIM electoral rivalry led the latter to a “management alliance” with the very official right thanks to which it remained “in power” from 2015 to 2020, before being dislodged again (following the parenthesis of 2010-2015) by the PPM and allies (also including known elements of the local right). Some separatist organizations have lined up behind the electoral locomotive of Alfred Marie-Jeanne such as the CNCP (Conseil national des comités populaires - National Council of Popular Committees) and one of its splits, the Palima (Parti de la libération de la Martinique- Martinique Liberation Party), but also the autonomist PCM which is only the shadow of what it was in our history.

Other radical currents (the PKLS, Parti Kominis pou libérasyon ek sosyализm, a pro-independence split

from the PCM and the CNCP- comités populaires, another split from the original CNCP) are outside the institutions and more linked to the anti-colonialist protest.

The Groupe Révolution Socialiste (GRS - Socialist Revolution Group), the section of the Fourth International in the Antilles, has gone from the propagandism and ideological struggles of its beginnings to a significant intervention in the trade union, feminist, and decolonial mass movement where its responsibilities are recognized.

Combat Ouvrier, an organization of Lutte Ouvrière in the Antilles, concentrates its forces on trade union work where it leads the CGT (Confédération générale des travailleurs - General Confederation of Workers) of Martinique and Guadeloupe.

Martinique, Guadeloupe: same fight but with differences

The strongest differences between the popular movements of Martinique and Guadeloupe result from the bifurcation following the 1967 massacre in Guadeloupe. The resulting rejection of colonialism has reached a stronger mass dimension than in Martinique. We saw this in 2009. We see it again today. The hegemony of the UGTG (Union générale des travailleurs guadeloupéens - General Union of Guadeloupean Workers), which represents a kind of revolutionary syndicalism with nationalist and class content, facilitates unitary cohesion and leads to a much clearer break in Guadeloupe between social movement and global political representation. Oppositional political expressions as in Martinique outside the more traditional fields are therefore less strong in Guadeloupe.

Challenges in Martinique for the anti-colonialist and workers' movement

The electoralist turn of the MIM, initiated after its first entry into the Regional Council and accentuated with the taking of control of this institution, led to its unvarnished confrontation with colonial and capitalist realities. Like the left after Mitterrand's victory, its adherence to neoliberal management made it incapable of finding any solution to the problems plaguing the country and explaining its election. Colonial absolutism did not diminish in any way. The stigmatization of "Politics" became widespread. Inability to solve the problems of everyday life, nepotism, corruption became common accusations, increasing the old abstentionist background of the politics of the "old colonies."

The more radical left was kept out of the institutions by an electoral system with an eligibility threshold of 10% to block the way to small formations and a consequent bonus granted to the "winner". Its indisputable militant dynamism has not allowed it to overcome the feeling of global powerlessness stoked by its legendary divisions. It is therefore also affected by the rise of new oppositional forces.

Strengths and contradictions - a new protest movement

Very much attached to the question of symbols, this nationalist movement with an ethnic Africanist connotation stood out in the denunciation of the Békés and the role of some of them in the poisoning of the Antilles with chlordecone, in the demand for reparations for this crime, in the battle to eradicate all slave symbols persisting in the public space, in the breaking of statues of Victor

Schoelcher then of Empress Joséphine and Belain Desnambuc and today in opposition to government health policy with a strong impregnation of antivax culture.

Nearly half a century of the retreat of Marxist thought means that the legitimate aspirations of this activism, its courage, its just desire to critically assess all that exists, are not enough to pose the strategic and tactical problems of the struggle for emancipation in the light of the immensely rich lessons of the struggles for social transformation of yesterday and today. It is therefore also affected by old demons, the drama of egos and a certain complacency.

The urgency is there!

Impatience is not a good advisor, but it is legitimate. Because the urgency is there. For decades, some of the most perceptive observers of Caribbean realities (Aimé Césaire, Édouard Glissant among others) have evoked the risk of our disappearance as a people under the combined effect of historical, economic, social, cultural and demographic factors.

To ward off these dark omens, it is vital to restore revolutionary politics to its former glory. It teaches us to be wary of fatalistic predictions that deny the role of the political initiative of the masses.

History is not an endless chain of obscure plots. It is a matter of social classes and their struggles and therefore of changing power relations, conjunctures, deep impulses and conscious choices at each moment. One of the tasks of the Martinican moment is to build in the fusion of the experiences and energy of the working masses and activist generations the political subject capable of attacking without delay the dominant system and its henchmen.

Marxists must respond to this urgency without distorting by sweetening the emancipatory project. By waving the autonomist rattle as a diversion, the Minister for the Colonies indirectly

shows that he is well aware of the historical task of the last colonies today. The autonomy and independence of our lands is an obvious horizon. This would be enough for the happiness of some nationalist fractions. But emancipation would only be a caricature of itself, if decolonization did not mean the conquest of power by the working masses who are the heart and blood of the Caribbean nations.

This task would undoubtedly be a whim if the proletariat and the peoples of the last colonies did not work for a common struggle that was both decolonial and anti-capitalist with the internationalist support of the workers of the metropolis in whose interest it is.

Recent weeks

The past few weeks show that the system is, if not at a standstill, at least deeply troubled. The arrest and immediate release of Élie Domota, a key figure in Guadeloupe's mobilization against compulsory vaccination obligation and the health (or vaccine?) pass during a peaceful demonstration is an example of this panic. The government combines brutal pressure with tactical retreats.

There was already the pressure that led to four Martinican activists being imprisoned for simple demonstrations on the public highway. And after dispatching the GIGN and the Raid [élite police units] to control the mobilization, the strike, the blockades and some looters, in Martinique it has three times postponed the deadline for sanctions against medical staff and others who are unvaccinated.

It has announced that the transformation of the health pass into a vaccination pass would be postponed for the colonies in order to avoid unrest. The fact is that it faces mistrust of its vaccine policy far beyond what it imagined. The majority opinion considers the vaccine as an "experimental injunction" if not a poison for genocidal purposes. The explanation for this mistrust is not to be found mainly in the muted propaganda of evangelical sects active from the United States to Brazil. Nor

does it only come from the chaotic and, in our country, colonial management of the crisis. Nor even just the scandal of chlordecone, a colonial state crime that Macron had to partially acknowledge. Mistrust has its roots in the depths of a story made up of lies, the first being the negation of our humanity in the slave trade and slavery.

In such a context, our comrades have followed a very difficult line. Firmly

opposing compulsory vaccination and the health pass, participating in the fight against the government's recourse to force, opposing the sanctions programmed against the opponents of vaccines without the slightest complacency towards the lies abundantly disseminated by the extreme right which have never been so widely circulated in our territories.

The year 2022 begins under very

special auspices. Will the government succeed in carrying through its social murder of thousands of unvaccinated people by threatening continuity of care in a hospital system already much more dilapidated than that in the "metropolis"? As we write in our leaflets: the die has not yet been cast! Protests continued between Christmas and New Year's Day. The Antilles are holding their breath.

31 December 2021

Protests in Kazakhstan: A Color Revolution or a Working-Class Uprising?

7 January 2022, by **Ainur Kurmanov**

Today all post-Soviet mass-media and TV channels are riveted to the protests that suddenly engulfed Kazakhstan. To some they arouse hope, to others - horror and rejection. There are contradictions and different interpretations of what is happening: righteous people's protest, clan wrangling, conspiracy of pro-Western and pro-Turkish forces or even "Islamist reaction". But what is really happening? A Zanovo-media correspondent interviewed Ainur Kurmanov - one of the leaders of Socialist Movement of Kazakhstan.

A model republic

Kazakhstan is one of the biggest post-Soviet countries, which is only second to the Russian Federation in that system of political and economical relations, which was built after Soviet collapse. And this is not just because Nursultan Nazarbayev was one of the architects of the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States). The Kazakh model of smooth transformation of former party and Soviet nomenclature into a capitalist oligarchy with "an Asian face" was seen by many as a model. Indeed, this model had superficially attractive features not only for the ruling elites in other republics, but also for the average

citizen: a high economic level, the presence of formal attributes of democracy, and few restrictions on Western culture. Large reserves of natural resources, including oil, and the industrial potential inherited from the socialist period proved a good launching pad for the young state. At the same time, the official propaganda of the Russian Federation and the CIS channels liked to set Kazakhstan as an example of preserving "the union traditions", honoring the memory of the Great Patriotic War, the absence of nationalism, and so on.

Mass protests broke out immediately after the New Year holidays, on January 2. The reason for protests was the rise in price of liquefied gas for cars, from 60 tenge to 120 tenge per liter. The first unsanctioned demonstrations began in the west of Kazakhstan, in the Mangistau region, the heartland of large oil-producing enterprises. It is here that the notorious Zhanaozen is located, where ten years ago a workers' strike was brutally suppressed: 15 strikers were killed and hundreds injured in Zhanaozen.

On the next day - January 3 - the protesters in the Mangistau Province added new social and political points to their initial demands: reduction of

food prices, taking measures against unemployment, solution to the drinking water shortage, resignation of the government and local authorities. On this day, the protesters also began to gather in the squares and streets of Almaty, the capital city Nursultan and other cities. In a number of places, roads were blocked and protesters did not disperse even at night.

On Tuesday, January 4, protesters clashed with police. In Alma-Ata, security forces used stun grenades to disperse protesters. In turn, protesters overturned police cars. In the evening of the same day, mobile Internet, messengers and social networks stopped working.

Kazakhstani authorities tried to explain the gas price increase by the fact that its price is now determined by electronic bidding. As they say, "the market has decided". The administration of the Mangistau Region firmly stated that everything was within the frames of the modern market economy, and the previous price was not coming back.

But on January 4, under pressure from the protesters, the government was forced to lower the price of gas in the Mangistau region to 50 tenge per

liter. The President of Kazakhstan Kasim-Jomart Tokayev said that the rest of the demands of the population would be considered separately. And then on January 5, the current Cabinet of Ministers was dismissed. The director of the gas processing plant in Zhanaozen was detained.

Region of total poverty

The co-chairman of the [Socialist Movement of Kazakhstan](#) Aynur Kurmanov described the situation in the following terms:

The workers of Zhanaozen were the first to rise. An increase in the gas price served only as a trigger for the popular protests. After all, the mountain of social problems has been accumulating for years. Last fall, Kazakhstan was hit by a wave of inflation. It should be taken into account that products are imported to the Mangistau region and they have always been 2-3 times more expensive there. But on a wave of rising prices at the end of 2021, the cost of food rose even more, and substantially. We must also take into account that the West of the country is a region of solid unemployment. In the course of neoliberal reforms and privatization, most of the businesses there were shut down. The only sector that still works here are the oil producers. But for the most part, they are owned by foreign capital. Up to 70 percent of Kazakhstan oil are exported to western markets, most of the profits also go to foreign owners.

There is practically no investment in the development of the region: it is an area of total poverty and poverty. And last year these enterprises began to undergo large-scale optimization. Jobs were cut, workers began to lose their salaries, bonuses, many enterprises have turned into just service companies. When in Atyrau region the company Tengiz Oil fired 40 thousand workers at once, it became the real shock for the

whole Western Kazakhstan. The state did nothing to prevent such mass layoffs. And it should be understood, that one oil worker feeds 5-10 family members. Dismissal of a worker automatically condemns the whole family to starvation. There are no jobs here except for the oil sector and sectors that service its needs.

Kazakhstan has actually built a raw-material model of capitalism. The population has accumulated a lot of social problems, there is a huge social stratification. The "middle class" is ruined, the real sector is destroyed. The uneven distribution of the national product has a considerable corruption component. Neoliberal reforms have all but eliminated the social safety net. And most likely, the owners of transnational corporations calculated - 5 million people are needed for servicing the "pipe"; the whole 18+ million of Kazakh population is too much. And that's why this revolt is anti-colonial in many ways. The causes the current protests are rooted in the workings of capitalism: price of liquefied gas really rose on electronic trades. There was a conspiracy of monopolists who benefited from exporting gas abroad, creating a shortage of it and an increase in gas prices on the domestic market. So they themselves provoked the riots. However, it should be noted that the current social explosion is directed against the whole policy of capitalist reforms that have been carried out over the last 30 years and their destructive results.

Traditions of Workers' Spontaneous Strike

The form of protest initially was a classic "proletarian" strike. On the night of 3 to 4 January, a wildcat strike began at the Tengiz Oil enterprises. Soon the strike spread to

neighboring regions. Today, the strike movement has two main focus points - Zhanaozen and Aktau.

As conspiracy theorists write today, the unrest in Kazakhstan was carefully prepared in the West, as evidenced by the careful organization and coordination of the protesters. In Kurmanov's words:

This is not a Maidan, although many political analysts are trying to present it this way. Where did such amazing self-organization come from? This is the experience and tradition of the workers. Strikes have been shaking the Mangistau region since 2008, and the strike movement began back in the 2000s. Even without any input from the Communist Party or other leftist groups, there were constant demands to nationalize the oil companies. The workers simply saw with their own eyes what privatization and foreign capitalist takeover was leading to. In the course of these earlier demonstrations, they gained enormous experience in struggle and solidarity. The very life in the wilderness made people stick together. It was against this background that the working class and the rest of the population came together. The protests of the workers in Zhanaozen and Aktau then set the tone for other regions of the country. Yurts and tents, which protesters began to put up in the main squares of the cities, were not at all taken from the "Euromaidan" experience: they stood in the Mangistau Region during the local strikes last year. The population itself brought water and food for the protesters.

In Kazakhstan today there is no legal opposition, the entire political field has been cleared. The Communist Party of Kazakhstan was the last to be liquidated in 2015. Only 7 pro-governmental parties remained. But there are plenty of NGOs working in the country, which actively cooperate with the authorities in promoting a pro-Western agenda. Their favorite

here - the local "loyal" legislation allows foreign companies to take the profits out of the country. However, if possible, none of the global players will stop at changing the government into an even more obedient one. And, of course, the liberal opposition will try to establish and is already establishing its control over the mass protest movement.


Kazakhstan's armed forces try to confront the protesters

P.S. After the article was published, it became known that in Almaty and some other cities there are heavy clashes, the protestors have seized many key infrastructure buildings in Almaty and other cities. Under pressure from the protests, President Tokayev made unprecedented social concessions - he promised state regulation of gas, gasoline and socially important goods, a moratorium on raising utility bills, subsidized rents for housing for the poor, and the creation of a public fund to support health care and children. Protesters also demanded a return to the 1993 Constitution and a government made up of people outside the system. And they still demand lower food prices and a reduction of the retirement age to 58-60, higher wages, pensions, child benefits, and so on.

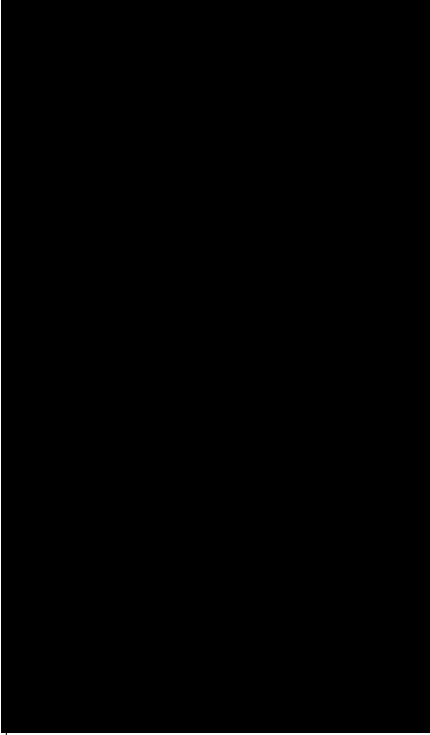
Liberal opposition activists hastened to declare that it is they who coordinate the movement.

By the evening of January 5, it was reported that Nursultan Nazarbayev was no longer the chairman of the SB. President Tokayev took his place and stated his intention to act "as tough as possible. At the same time, it was promised that "consistent political reforms" would soon be carried out.

Later on that day Takayev called for a "peace-keeping" (in fact, police) operation of the Collective Security Treaty Organization countries (Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) to suppress the protests, which the Kazakh were now declaring an attempt of intervention from outside. By the morning of January 6, CSTO council had approved of the request and there are already reports of Russian troops in Kazakhstan.



According to our interlocutor, the sinister Islamists allegedly behind the recent events are also extremely weak and poorly organized in Kazakhstan. As he assured us, in fact, modern Kazakhstan is committed to building a mono-ethnic state, and nationalism is its official ideology. All reports of "pro-Soviet" Kazakhstan by the likes of Mir TV channel are a myth:



But perhaps not everything is so unambiguous with the geopolitical priorities of Kazakhstan? It seems that its leadership all the same tends to conduct notorious multi-vector policy, maneuvering between Russia, the West, China and Turkey. But one condition suits all foreign partners

Ukrainians Are Far From Unified on NATO. Let Them Decide for Themselves

6 January 2022, by **Volodymyr Ishchenko**

Ukraine is not merely playing a secondary role in the exchange of threats and negotiations about its destiny. But in a typical colonial way, commentators are homogenizing Ukrainians and misrecognizing the political diversity in a nation of 40 million people. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky [recently tweeted](#) about the principle “Nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine,” contrary to Russian President Vladimir Putin’s inclination to determine Ukraine’s membership in NATO in a narrow circle of Great Powers. However, the problem is not only deciding “without Ukraine” but also deciding “for” very diverse Ukrainians as if they held identical opinions on the critical issues in question.

A [popular interpretation](#) of the Euromaidan revolution contributes to this strategic disguise. As the story goes on, in 2014, Ukrainians from different regions, which merged into one modern state only during WWII, finally truly united in the civic inclusive nation born in the revolution. Ukrainians made their “civilizational choice” in favor of the Western geopolitical orientation and are defending it against Russian aggression, which is attempting to return Ukraine to its sphere of influence. The war in Donbas that followed in 2014 is presented as primarily an inter-state war and not a direct continuation of the violent civil conflict that started in the last days of Euromaidan even before any military moves by Russia.

In reality, Euromaidan was a [deficient revolution](#). It did not form any national unity, but the elite groups which benefited from it (together with ideological cheerleaders) need to sustain this illusion for internal and external legitimacy via combination of silencing and repression. It is,

therefore, in their interest to paint the alternative positions on Ukrainian past, present and future as “non-Ukrainian” or even “anti-Ukrainian,” even though these positions are shared by many (if not most) Ukrainian citizens. As a result, these Ukrainians are more and more deprived of a voice in the domestic and international public spheres.

Ukraine has not simply turned into an object of the Great Powers’ play. In an especially humiliating way, Ukraine is exploited to cover imperialist interests and misrepresent them as a noble endeavor. The pathos-laden references to Ukraine’s sovereignty parallel the reality of the state, which is more dependent on foreign powers politically, economically and militarily than ever before since the Soviet collapse. Recognizing Ukraine’s diversity and shifting the discussion to the interests of Ukrainians is particularly imperative not only for immediate de-escalation of the conflict, but for any sustainable solution for Ukraine and the peace in Europe.

Do Ukrainians Want to Join NATO?

Russia is [demanding](#) ironclad guarantees that Ukraine (and other ex-USSR states) will not join NATO, and that NATO would not use the territory of these states for military expansion. The typical answer from Western officials and observers so far has been that it is for NATO and Ukraine to decide, not for Russia. Many Western commentators are obsessed with reading Putin’s mind: How he would react if not satisfied with a response to his ultimatums?

They are mirrored by the viral symmetrical speculations on the opposite side whether Biden would be ready to strike a deal with Russia. Not so many are interested in what Ukrainians think about all this. Do Ukrainians actually want to join NATO?

Ukraine’s neutral status, which excludes it from entering any military blocs, was inscribed into the foundational documents of the modern Ukrainian state: the Declaration of Sovereignty (adopted July 16, 1990) and the Constitution of Ukraine (June 28, 1996). In December 2007, on the eve of the infamous Bucharest summit that [settled](#) that Ukraine and Georgia “will become members of NATO,” [less than 20 percent](#) of Ukrainian citizens supported joining NATO. The majority of Ukrainians were split between support for a military alliance with Russia or retaining the non-bloc neutral status.

Ukrainians are far from unified in support of NATO membership.

NATO membership remained a cause of only a small minority within Ukrainian society until the tumultuous events of 2014. As a result of Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the start of the war in Donbas, support for NATO membership [jumped up](#) to about 40 percent. However, it was still not embraced by a majority of Ukrainians.

Two things contributed to this shift in public opinion. Some previously skeptical Ukrainians started to see NATO membership as a protection against further hostile actions from Russia. But no less important reason for the hike in support was that the surveys no longer included the most pro-Russian Ukrainian citizens from the territories not under Ukrainian government control — Crimea and Donbas. Millions of Ukrainian citizens

have been effectively excluded from the Ukrainian public sphere.

In the rest of Ukraine, support for a military alliance with Russia sharply dropped since 2014. However, most of the former Russia supporters did not turn into supporters of NATO but switched to support for a neutral status, “plague on both of your houses” position. If you think about the seven years of military conflict, which is predominantly (mis)represented as the war with Russia, the reluctance to embrace NATO by a very large part of Ukrainians is amazing.

Before the elections of 2019, the previous Ukrainian president, Petro Poroshenko, pushed for changes to Ukraine’s constitution to put it on a path to join the European Union (EU) and NATO. It did not help to prevent his devastating defeat by Zelensky.

Support for NATO in Ukraine varies by [region](#). A stable, solid pro-NATO majority exists only in the western regions. There is, perhaps, pro-NATO plurality in Central Ukraine. But in the eastern and southern regions, neutrality is more popular than NATO membership, despite the fact that this part of Ukraine would most probably be occupied in case of any real Russian invasion.

A correlation between support for NATO and different visions of Ukrainian national identity makes the issue especially divisive. Many Ukrainians see NATO as a defense from Russia. [Many other](#) Ukrainians feel that NATO membership would forfeit more of Ukraine’s sovereignty to the West, which they feel has been happening since 2014, and, at the same time, would [increase](#) tensions with Russia, escalate internal tensions among Ukrainians, and drag the nation in one of the U.S.’s “forever” wars, one of which just recently ended in a humiliating defeat.

There is some evidence that the Russian military build-up in spring 2021 could increase support for NATO. It is quite probable that NATO supporters would win a potential referendum. However, such projections for the referendum are less valid to assess the preferences for

Ukraine’s security strategy among Ukraine’s general population because they squeeze the choice to “yes” or “no” and do not cover millions of Ukrainian citizens in Donbas and Crimea who would not be able to vote at the referendum but have a strong opinion on the issue. Besides, it remains uncertain how Ukraine’s public opinion would react to very clear [messages](#) that the U.S. excludes sending troops to fight Russia in case it attacks Ukraine and to any potential compromises in the course of negotiations with Russia.

While criticizing Putin’s demands to decide Ukraine’s membership between the Great Powers, it is important not to fall into a similar fallacy and dubiously impose the desire to join NATO on Ukrainians. Ukrainians are far from unified in support of NATO membership. It is a contentious issue that can only be properly resolved in a political process in which a large part of dissenting Ukrainians are not discarded and stigmatized by default as “traitors” or “stooges” of Russian propaganda for being skeptical about NATO for good reasons.

Way Out and Way Forward

The opposition segment may represent a large minority or sometimes even the majority of Ukrainian citizens, but it has been poorly mobilized and organized in comparison to the nationalist and neoliberal sections of civil society. The latter only [expanded](#) its pressure for their unpopular agendas on the weakened Ukrainian state. The [radicalizing nationalist policies](#) during Poroshenko’s rule were followed, in 2021, by the sanctions and threats by Zelensky targeting a leader of the [popular opposition party](#), powerful oligarchs and most of the major opposition media. Despite [human rights criticism](#), this did not provoke any significant public reaction from the West, unlike repression of the Russian and Belarusian opposition. Many observers accepted a lazy securitizing explanation that repression of allegedly “pro-Russian” forces is inevitable or even legitimate in the country under the foreign threat.

However, further limitations on the political and public representation of a large segment of Ukrainian society does not make Ukraine stronger — only weaker and even more divided.

The Minsk Peace Accords, which require institutionalizing a special status for the breakaway territories in Donbas, could be an important part of the possible solution for Ukraine. They were signed after a series of defeats of the Ukrainian military in 2014-2015; however, little has been implemented since then. Noteworthy, even some supporters [present](#) it as an “unsavory compromise” with “Russia’s terms, imposed using armed aggression.”

However, it is important to understand the Minsk Accords as not something that Putin wants, but as a possible way towards a more democratic and pluralistic Ukraine that recognizes and accepts its own political diversity. Simultaneously, the Accords are both the ends and the means in this process. The Minsk Accords presuppose that the people in Donbas return as a legitimate part of the Ukrainian nation. Mostly they have very different opinions about the history and recent events, language policies, and international alliances than the nationalist political and civil society who speak on behalf of the Ukrainian society but only poorly represent its diversity. This would require a radical change of the dominant post-Euromaidan discourse in Ukraine’s public sphere and work towards a more inclusive definition of the national identity.

On the other hand, by returning the millions of Ukrainian citizens in Donbas back to Ukraine, the Minsk accords restore some of the lost balance (now institutionally protected) into Ukrainian politics that diverged from the attitudes and expectations of the general population. The Minsk accords simultaneously require and enable a substantive dialogue on Ukraine’s future.

There are risks, of course. There is a strong demand for peace in Ukrainian society, but [specific clauses](#) of the special status for Donbas (such as amnesty for combatants or institutionalizing separatist armed units as “people’s militia”) are not

popular. However, the lack of majority support has never been the main reason for the Ukrainian government to evade implementing the Minsk Accords, as it has never been an obstacle to the campaign for NATO membership and even less popular nationalist and neoliberal policies. Importantly, despite that the Minsk accords were an outcome of the military defeats, most Ukrainians **supported** them right after their signing in 2015. If many Ukrainians are disappointed now, it is primarily because of the little progress and ineffectiveness in bringing peace to Ukraine, not because the accords are fundamentally unacceptable.

More important was the explicit **threat of violence** articulated by the nationalist civil society leading the so-called “anti-capitulation” protests. They were rather small and only 26 percent of Ukrainians **expressed support** for the protests, while 41 percent were clearly against them. Nevertheless, they stalled further progress in implementing the Minsk

Accords after initial successes that followed Zelensky’s landslide victory in the 2019 election.

At stake, however, is not the “capitulation” of Ukraine, but of a very specific nation-building project for Ukraine, where Russia plays the role of the main “Other,” against which the adepts of the project articulate their national identity. The problem with this project is that the attempted assimilation of Ukraine’s internal cultural and political diversity (to repeat the problematic path of how the modern Western nations were constructed since the 19th century) is incompatible with how many people see democracy today. Arguably, it is as incompatible as replay of the Great Power politics from the “golden age” of imperialism. However, this nation-building project is also hardly even feasible under the present conditions because it will not be supported by the parallel modernization processes. One cannot repeat the “**turning peasants into Frenchmen**” process nowadays because the Communist Party

completed this task for Ukraine decades ago. It is no surprise that the fundamentally anti-Communist project of Ukrainian civil society has continuously failed to unify the nation, despite **three revolutions** in the life of one generation and supposedly mobilizing threat from abroad. So far, the attempts to push forward this nation-building project did not solve but rather intensified the **deep post-Soviet crisis** of political representation.

A different, pluralistic Ukraine developing in a more synthetic and dialogical way as a sovereign bridge between Europe and Russia is certainly possible. To get there, recognizing Ukraine’s political diversity and establishing conditions for institutionally protected national dialogue among Ukrainians with opposing views are vital. Whether it is really needed by anyone except Ukrainians is a different question.

28 December 2021

Source [Truthout](#).

Nothing natural about this disaster

5 January 2022, by **Thomas Hummel**

There was nothing “natural” about this disaster. While it is hard to pin any given tornado directly on climate change, tornadoes in December are typically extremely rare, since warm air is what gives them their fuel. The weather in the affected region had been unseasonably warm. Associate professor of atmospheric sciences at Northern Illinois University Victor Gensini remarked, “I remember waking up, looking at the weather maps and saying, ‘Geez, this looks a lot more like late April than mid-December.’” [76] Climate change has caused an increase in the frequency of tornadoes over the past twenty years. [77]

There was another way that this disaster was not natural. The deaths of all fourteen workers were absolutely

preventable. As the weather worsened, workers at both locations requested to go home out of fear for their safety. At both businesses, they were told that if they left, they would be fired. [78]

It boggles the mind that anyone is capable of reconciling the idea that our society is based upon the most unrestricted freedom in the world, and the fact that workers can be told that if they insist upon keeping themselves safe in the immediate present, they won’t be able to feed themselves and their families in the near future. This is in reality the most horrific kind of tyranny, and it’s the reality of low-wage, at-will work.

Far from being a one-off situation for Amazon, the company has a history of

putting profit above the safety of its workers during climate disasters. In the Pacific Northwest, Amazon employees were forced to work through a record-breaking heatwave over the summer, with temperatures in their warehouses reaching up to 90 degrees. [79] The company even ran “productivity contests” during the heat waves. [80] Similarly, during Hurricane Ida in New York City, Amazon employees were forced to stay on the job as the city experienced the worst flooding in its history. [81]

Companies like Amazon carry a massive share of the responsibility for climate change. [82] Having implemented nothing but performative measures to minimize their climate impact, they are now forcing their employees to risk their lives in the

midst of climate disasters so they can continue to make the company enormous profits. Those profits reached 20.33 billion in 2020. [83] I suppose that employees can rest in the comforting knowledge that their suffering helps contribute to Bezos' megalomaniacal dreams of leaving an earth he's poisoned to colonize space.

It's truly unbelievable that this is legal. There have been attempts to make it illegal to fire workers for not coming in during a "natural" disaster, but Amazon has fought against legislation that would have prevented this catastrophe from happening. [84]

The mainstream liberal media has an ambivalent attitude toward Amazon. On the one hand, they celebrate its success and efficiency as a glowing symbol of the power of the free market. On the other hand, Amazon has become something of a bogeyman. They point to some of Amazon's predatory practices as an aberration, a monster in whose absence the system would otherwise function according to their utopian imaginings. But the reality is that Amazon exists within a competitive system, and that competition means that they are pushed toward practices like these. It's true that Amazon has "out-monopolized" the monopolies, but as companies adapt their business practices to resemble Amazon's, the company has to push ever harder to maintain its position. It's their workers who bear the brunt of this. The company guarantees two-day delivery, a practice that more and

more companies are copying, and if they are unable to deliver on this, they risk losing market share. This dynamic is brought to a fever pitch during the holiday season, when workers are pushed harder than at any other time of the year. The deaths in Mayfield, Kentucky further highlight how this is not just an Amazon problem, but a systemic problem with capitalism at its root.

All of this highlights the dire need for workers to form unions. A good union could protect employees from firings when a company threatens expulsions if workers act rationally to keep themselves safe. It could inform them of their existing rights, and give them the confidence that they will not have to have to take on the company alone if they stand up for them. Having a union would allow workers to have a say in their safety at work, rather than trusting the unaccountable bosses of their company to take the right steps for them. Experience has shown that unless forced, companies will not take these steps.

Amazon spent nearly \$10,000 a day on consultants to defeat the unionization drive in Bessemer, Alabama. [85] But the National Labor Relations Board has ruled that Amazon engaged in union-busting practices during the union drive, and there will be another vote at the facility. [86] On a more level playing field, there's hope that the workers may vote for a union this time around. Independent of their union-busting tactics, Amazon also has such high turnover in its warehouses,

with three percent of the workforce there quitting each week due to inhumane and unsafe working conditions, that it makes any effort to organize a union logistically difficult. [87] Needless to say, there's still [a long way to go](#) to unionize the company, but there are encouraging signs, such as the newly elected president of the Teamsters stating that unionizing the company is one of his top priorities. [88] Successful union drives also have the potential to build on one another, and workers may look upon the victory of Starbucks workers in Buffalo, New York, and the way that success has already spread, showing them that it makes sense to fight for a union to improve their own lives. [89]

The relationship between capital and labor is like the relationship between wolves and sheep. You can build a fence, and hire a shepherd to keep the sheep safe, but there is no way to change the essence of that relationship, which is inherently predatory. The ideology of capitalism makes every effort to disguise the nature of this relationship. But the death of the workers in Edwardsville and Mayfield is evidence to millions of the wolves' nature. Forming a union is like building that fence, and hiring that shepherd, but ultimately Amazon workers will have to use that power to go further, to push for an entirely different sort of relationship, where the sheep can stand upright and become human.

Source [Tempest](#).

Political assessment of the failed repeal of labour law

3 January 2022, by [Brais Fernandez](#)

Far from the programmatic pact signed by the government, this agreement abandons the "repeal" approach and assumes as its basis the 2012 reform of the Popular Party. The governmental left has tried to sell

(once again) the agreement as historic; sectors of the right, such as the newspaper ABC, the famous and mediocre liberal economist Juan Ramón Rallo, the president of the CEOE and Luis Garicano have come

out in defence of the agreement, considering that, despite the irritation caused by the fact that it is led by the left, it does not touch (despite certain limitations on temping) the basic pillars of the labour model

implemented by the bipartisan party.

What is being changed and what is left untouched

In terms of changes in labour legislation, it is difficult to sell this as a success, although the illusionist machinery of progressivism tries to do so with its mixture of blackmailing and passive-aggressive argumentation against the critical left, seasoned with an increasingly sham and gloomy verbal illusionism. The lower cost of redundancies are untouched, the flexibility of objective dismissals is maintained, the lack of administrative control in collective dismissals, the processing salaries are not recovered? It remains to be seen whether the priority application of sectoral agreements will be applied to existing agreements, although it only affects wages, not working conditions. The only thing that can be sold as an improvement of rights has to do with the extension of the agreements, a concession to the trade union apparatus that makes it possible to avoid further formal setbacks after years in which the bargaining power of these actors had strongly regressed. Employers are satisfied: they retain the possibility of free and cheap dismissal and, on the other hand, the full capacity to organize work as they want, because they are able to modify conditions at will.

In other words, we are not dealing with a repeal of the PP labour reform or a new labour reform: we are dealing with a small correction of the framework of labour precariousness and pro-corporate flexibility that was historically imposed by the PP, PSOE and the CEOE, protected by the trade union apparatuses.

At the heart of the consensus, modernization

For some time now, the leaders of PSOE and Unidos Podemos (UP) have been insisting on the idea of a new

modernization. Perhaps the text that most clearly expresses this thesis, unfortunately little discussed on the left, is an article by Alberto Garzón and Enrique Santiago [90], which went unnoticed and which tried to provide a theoretical basis for what Pablo Iglesias had been saying for some time through his media statements.

This article dealt with the commitment of the progressive left to the modernization of the Spanish state. Modernization is the equivalent in economic policy terms of the term regeneration in politics. It is about updating the forms and sectors that are the backbone of Spanish capitalism. In the article, the classic rhetoric of green capitalism is combined with ridiculous illusions in the capacity of progressivism to direct investment and capitalist development. Absurd illusions, not only because of the nature of capitalism, but also because UP is a subaltern part of a weak government that is not going to undertake any reform that would modify the relationship between state and capital, and that could generate a disruptive counter-trend against neoliberalism.

The most interesting thing about the article, beyond these old and extravagant assertions about the “progressive development of the productive forces” and the capacity of the left to guide this process, is the political background, which has become a dogma of faith in the new UP led by Yolanda Díaz. The two leaders of the IU and the PCE recognized an ally in certain sectors of the bosses. The article clearly took up the old axiom shared by right-wing Eurocommunism and social democracy converted to socio-liberalism (whose most advanced synthesis is the Italian Democratic Party): modernization is “something that the government can only solve if part of the business class, the most dynamic and lively, is part of the solution”. In other words, the adversary is not the business class, because the short-term objective is no longer to weaken its social power, but to strengthen it. Instead he only enemy is the political right wing, which with its outbursts fails to fulfil its state responsibilities and becomes

an obstacle to modernization.

This progressive modernization faces certain objective limits (the role of the Spanish state in the global market, the multiple crises experienced by capitalism at the global level and the Spanish specificities that derive from it), but let us be clear. The aim of modernization is not to modernize the Spanish productive structure: it is to reactivate the Spanish growth cycle, because in reality, our modernizers (liberal or Eurocommunist) only believe that the economy can be activated through the reactivation of capitalist profits.

The famous consensus, the fetish word of our new-found Transition, reappears on the basis of these objectives. The famous consensus, a pseudo-Gramscian caricature justified on the basis of agreement with who should be your irreconcilable enemy and built on the exclusion of broad sectors that should be allies: precarious workers, migrants, workers in small and medium enterprises - little is said about how this labour reform fails to include them within the umbrella of union bargaining - and a long etcetera of the vast majority of working men and women. But let us be fair. If the thesis is that we must prioritize the alliance and links with employers, the non-labour reform promoted by Yolanda Díaz fulfils its role to perfection. It is no more and no less than a translation in labour terms of the famous modernization, as it adapts the regulatory structure of labour to the political and economic needs of capitalism. That is to say, this new labour agreement complements the other two great axes on which progressivism sustains the modernizing project, reintegrating the trade union leaderships in its management: the distribution of European funds (money that goes to big business as a way of compensating for its crisis of profitability through public subsidy, an orthodox neoliberal practice) and wage containment to prevent inflation from being paid for by corporate profits, the first example of which we saw with the tanks in Cádiz.

In short, I do not think that we are facing a move towards anything other than this modernizing project that we

have enunciated. This discussion is important because it locates us on the political and economic map on which progressivism is moving and prefigures a certain political position. It is a question of assuming a position of active opposition to modernization and to the different political milestones that make it possible, as well as building an alternative to it, but also, and this is important, defining the political scenarios that this project (still weak and subject to the volatility of crises) can generate.

Political readings

Politically, this is a defeat for the forces that for years have mobilized against this model of bipartisanship (including, of course, the militancy of the left-wing forces that signed the agreement), even though it is a political triumph for the modernizing integration of the left. I know it is fashionable to sell the idea that it is a partial advance, but from a political point of view it is false to sell it that way. The government agreement is breached, as the labour reform is not repealed. All the parties in the government bloc agreed on that point, achieved through years of struggle, because, let's not forget, this is a demand that has been kept alive by mobilization. After years of insisting that things were changed through the BOE, it turns out that when the left has a parliamentary majority to pass certain laws, it does not happen. Moreover, an unelected actor like the CEOE is introduced to determine the whole negotiation process. This negotiation has been a good indication of how the logic of the political regime inherited from the Transition works. When the right governs, the social consensus is broken and only businessmen rule. When the left governs, the social consensus is reorganized so that they also continue to rule. The hypothesis that UP in the executive would guarantee government agreements has already been shelved without much hesitation by the leaders of the left: now it is only a question of selling as progress what is a surrender a necessary and non-contingent counterpart of a profound strategic shift.

In this sense, it seems to me that from

the left (I use this term for lack of a better and equally broad one), we must discuss some questions.

I believe that this is not simply a problem of narrative or of how the government has sold what is evidently the acceptance of the current political order with some modifications. The problem is political and strategic. It is as naïve to believe that an anti-capitalist transformation is possible within this regime as it is to think that there is no margin for struggle and partial gains. Partial gains can be wedges, temporary and always subject to the need to be defended, which the subaltern classes manage to introduce and which aim to improve the conditions of life and struggle within and against the system itself. To renounce them is to renounce politics as well, and worse, to assume for example the idea that an impoverished working class will be more radical, when the opposite is the case. It is the strength and strengthening of our class, in a broad sense and without corporate residues, that will allow us to be in a better position to take on transformative challenges. In reality, it is about betting on introducing those wedges not to get out of the crisis, but to live and fight in it, displacing it through political and economic struggle towards capital, while the working class grows stronger. It is there, at that point, that agreements of struggle between the left can be found.

I make this clear because I think it is wrong to assume that this precise course of events was inevitable. It is the result of strategic decisions and the direction taken by the governmental left, which they are now trying to compensate for with cackling about unity and new leaderships. A strategy that seeks to improve the famous balance of power must be based on social and political conflict, and not on modernizing consensus, and requires two objectives: using all spaces to extend the conflict (and that includes using positions in the state and in parliament in that context, blocking whatever needs to be blocked to achieve these partial conquests) and a broad and organized will to mobilize. There has been no appetite for this in the governmental left; there has been no capacity on the left

outside the government or in the social movements. A bitter lesson, but one that deserves to be discussed without compromise, avoiding in my opinion falling into that fetish ("the social or the political") mentioned by Daniel Bensaid: we need to fight in the streets and in the workplaces, a stronger fighting trade unionism, capable of dragging along sectors today imbricated in the organisations of the modernizing consensus, but also their own political instruments and projects, so as not to depend on a logic of pressure that allows the apparatuses of the left to end up integrated into the state and assuming pro-capitalist management. To put it clearly: calls for struggle are not enough, we need political organisation to confront this new stage. Putting pressure on and delegating politics to the left is also an ideological mechanism that only generates disappointments and defeats.

In the short term, preventing this rift from closing

Everyone knows that this does not end either the problems or the debate on the world of work. Propaganda has very short legs. Both Basque and Galician trade unionism, as well as alternative trade unionism in the rest of the Spanish state, have already shown their opposition to this compromise. A political position correlated with this is also needed: we will see what happens with parties such as Bildu or ERC, as it would be good if they stood firm in their announced rejection of the reform and did not turn around at the first opportunity. [91] It has been decided to maintain the same labour law as in the previous stage, in order to deepen the "modernizing progressive" consensus. We do not yet know the political effects of this, although it is possible that when the propaganda high wears off, disaffection towards the governmental left will continue to grow, without, to be honest, other alternative forces being able to channel this disaffection towards the left in the short term. Let us draw the strength to fight in the short term, but let us also prepare ourselves for a new

stage, which, despite the consensus from above, promises to be turbulent. Because modernization is nothing

more and nothing less than a reorganization of the ruling class in its struggle against the working and

subordinate classes.

30 December 2021

The coalition government agreement

2 January 2022, by **Angela Klein**

The climate target that the government wants to achieve is very softly formulated: Climate neutrality by 2045. Climate neutrality means that a process or activity does not affect the climate. This means that more CO₂ can be emitted, as long as everything possible can be offset against it: additional CO₂ sinks, rights from emissions trading, and so on. It is also said that the coal phase-out should take place by 2030, but only "ideally", in other words: if it happens that way.

There are no binding targets to guide government action. There is certainly no mechanism that the Federal Constitutional Court has called for in order not to jeopardize the future of the younger generations: namely, that interim targets be formulated that can be used to check whether the measures are sufficient or not.

The replacement of fossil fuels is to be achieved exclusively by market-based means, i.e. by products that function on the basis of renewable energies forcing fossil fuels out of the market. This is clearly visible in the case of the internal combustion engine: there is no fixed date for its end, it is only said that it should disappear from the market as far as possible by 2030.

Whether the climate turnaround works or not is thus placed in the hands of the corporations, and the state once again abandons its protective function.

Doors open for renewables

At the same time, the traffic light "party" is placing the abandonment of

fossil fuels at the centre of its government programme; it is pursuing an extremely ambitious programme to replace them with renewable energies. Wind power and photovoltaics are to be massively expanded, there is a roof programme for the building industry, new buildings are to be low-energy houses, motor vehicles are to be converted to electric drives - battery factories are to be built on a large scale in Germany for this purpose so as not to be dependent on foreign supplies. Hydrogen production is also to be systematically expanded.

However, these measures are thwarted by a crucial precept: The main purpose of government action is to boost economic growth and thus production output to the maximum. This, however, will lead to a massive increase in electricity demand: the government expects an increase from 545 TWh today to 680-750 TWh in 2030. Where this additional electricity is to come from, it does not say. A not insignificant part of it will probably be imported - in any case, the traffic lights are aiming for climate partnerships with other countries, Eastern European ones or those from the global South. One instrument for this is, of course, development aid.

On the other hand, it can be assumed that the phase-out of fossil fuels will simply not take place to a sufficient extent - even the country's own "soft" climate targets will be missed. Then we'll just be out of luck. The entrepreneurs are betting that by then a suitable technology will be ready to suck the excess CO₂ out of the air and dump it in the ground. It's a cynical game.

Insatiable

From an ecological point of view, the main flaw in the coalition agreement is that it only focuses on energy conversion and expansion; there is no mention of energy saving, which would require certain areas of the economy to be cut back. But that would be the devil. On the contrary, the government's primary goal is to open all the floodgates to economic growth.

The energy transition is seen exclusively as a drive transition, supplemented by improvements in energy efficiency where possible. These are therefore purely technological measures that are supposed to lead to a reduction in CO₂ emissions. But what really causes the climate catastrophe - and also other environmental catastrophes such as the extinction of species, water and air pollution, etc. - is capitalism's inherent compulsion to produce excessively, because in the end that is the only way to make a profit.

With this programme, Germany is treading with seven-league boots on the path to global warming of 2.5-5 degrees, which the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) now predicts. The only precaution that the traffic lights offer against this is the personnel and technical expansion of disaster protection against flooding.

We have to look at it soberly: The primary goal of the traffic lights is not to comply with the Paris Agreement. Their ultimate goal is to use ecological restructuring as a springboard for a new phase of capital accumulation.

Significant parts of German capital sense a large market in the transition to renewable energies and digitalization and the opportunity to gain a technological advantage over competitors and thus expand their own global market position. The entire treaty is written under this star, right at the beginning it says: "The climate crisis endangers our livelihoods and threatens freedom, prosperity and security. In the face of intensified global competition, Germany and Europe must re-establish their economic strength. In the international systemic competition, we must resolutely defend our values with democratic partners."

And the chapter on "Climate protection in a social-ecological market economy" also begins with the sentence: Because the German economy is facing far-reaching transformation processes in global competition, we therefore see "the task of giving our country's economic strength a new dynamism".

Citizen participation: decoys and deceptions

It is inevitable that the internal contradictions of this programme will soon become apparent. "Trouble lurks behind every bush," Robert Habeck has noted in his overall assessment of the negotiations. Indeed, the programme has chances of making trouble with all sorts of social groups. Internally, therefore, the government is endeavouring to involve trade unions, environmental associations and others in its plans as early as possible and to build up all kinds of "alliances": for example, an "Alliance for Transformation", or a "Strategy Platform Transformation of the Automotive Industry", in order to neutralize possible resistance as early as possible. It sells this as participatory democracy, similar to the "citizens' councils" that the Bundestag is supposed to elect (sic!). The procedure has a potential for division, you can bet that the leaders of the trade unions and environmental

associations will get involved in such procedures. In fact, this means nothing other than an extension of the practice of co-management to many other social fields.

The flip side of citizen participation comes across as more robust: namely, in order to eliminate legal resistance earlier and more effectively, approval procedures (for major projects, for example) and jurisdiction are to be accelerated. Citizen participation is even restricted, namely to the initial phase of a procedure. Objections at a later stage are only to be possible if significant changes have been made to the plan.

The march towards the eco-liberal competition state

The welfare state is being further weakened - now under allegedly ecological auspices

For its plans, the government with the traffic light system wants to create a veritable start-up mood. Above all, their far-reaching digitization plans will have a profound impact on the structures of society - if they are realized.

The ambitious investment plans are thirsty for additional workers, and all the floodgates are being opened: the low-wage sector is being expanded - mini- and midi-jobs bring a little more money; there are to be more further qualifications for people on Hartz IV, the additional income limits are being raised, but the sanctions regime remains. Better social security is planned for the self-employed. The adjustment of incomes in these lowest areas is ridiculous: the standard rate will be increased by a proud 3 euros from 1.1.2022 - almost a mockery. And the 12 euro minimum wage has already been eaten up by inflation, leaving further adjustments to a commission.

The facilitation of the naturalization of asylum seekers also falls into the category of "recruitment of labour". The government sees Germany as a country of immigration, and a

citizenship law based on the principle of descent is ill-suited to this. The fact that it is to be fundamentally reformed is to be welcomed, regardless of the fact that this won't make the asylum regime any more humane: the already militarized defence against refugees at the EU's external borders is to be Europeanized and made more effective, and Frontex is to be expanded.

That is too meagre for a spirit of optimism. The traffic light therefore has a number of extended civil liberties in its baggage, with which the government will certainly meet with approval - however, they can also have a polarising effect: for example, the abolition of 219a, which makes medical information about abortions a punishable offence (the fundamental punishability of abortions remains unchanged); the legalization of cannabis (but home cultivation remains prohibited); the lowering of the voting age to 16; the restoration of non-profit status also for politically engaged associations, etc.

Privatization and digitalization

There is no mention of cushioning the social costs of the ecological transformation. Yet tens of thousands of redundancies are threatened in the car industry alone. The Working Time Act is to be put to the test: the employers' associations are demanding the abolition of the daily maximum working hours, the government is seeking the consent of the trade unions for even more flexibilization and in return throws them the candy that collective bargaining is important and the rights of works councils and trade unions in the company are to be strengthened.

The state continues to withdraw from the provision of services of general interest, the major deficits of underfunding, staff shortages and poor working conditions are addressed at most in the area of nursing care, and the fee-per-case system is not touched. The health sector is now called "health economy", the 15 lines dedicated to it are exclusively about the expansion of

high-tech medicine. And Health Minister Karl Lauterbach is known as a hospital privatizer?

The goal of making the financing of pension insurance future-proof is no longer even set by the traffic lights. In future, a state-backed equity pension will transfer part of the statutory pension to the capital market.

Staff shortages, for example in the education sector or in state administration, are to be replaced by digital technology. Digitization is the magic word and the most important pillar of the entire coalition programme: the government sees it as the key to an effective lean state and once again suggests that social and ecological problems can be solved by investing in technology.

Aggressively

outward

Externally, the eco-liberal competition state supports its great power ambitions through Europeanization and militarization. The seesaw policy towards Russia (and China) pursued by Merkel and Kohl is being abandoned in favour of a more aggressive stance. Germany's great power ambitions are becoming even more apparent. The distribution of power in the EU is to shift again in favour of more communitarized structures and more decisions are to be taken by qualified majority. This is particularly important with regard to the creation of a European army, because this old project has never met with, and still does not meet with, unanimous agreement among the member states. In future, Germany is to spend three per cent of its gross

domestic product on 'international action' - this puts diplomacy, development aid and the military in the same sack - it is probably not only meant in mathematical terms, but also politically.

And: Germany, as a state that stores nuclear weapons on its territory, wants to have a say in the future when the red button is to be pressed. This could be prevented so far.

What of all this can be translated into reality is, of course, written in the stars. "Trouble lurks behind every bush," commented Robert Habeck of the Greens, who is now economics minister. Let's make sure he's right on this point. The opposition must not get lost in the minutiae, it must counter the traffic light with a counter-concept.

18 December 2021

Why Critical Race Theory Is Important

1 January 2022, by **Malik Miah**

The attack on "Critical Race Theory" is fraudulent. The real issue, as every Black person knows, is not about democratizing public education. It is about race and racism, reflecting the long history of racial and national oppression of Black people.

How many indignant white parents can explain what the theory is, and how they've lost control of their kids' educations? Previous dog whistles about "welfare queens" or "law and order" or some other manufactured "cultural" issue were used to target the most oppressed peoples of the country. Racial wedging has gone on for 240 years.

Critical Race Theory is not the real issue, but it's still an important discussion to have about racial awakening and the role of racism in politics — the past, the present and the future.

CRT is Realism

Two authors, Claire Suddath and Shera Avi-Yonah, concisely explain that Critical Race Theory (CRT) "proposes that any analysis of American society must take into account its history of racism and the role race has played in shaping attitudes and institutions [including] the ways policies, procedures and institutions work to perpetuate racial inequity even in the absence of personal racial animus." ("How Critical Race Theory Became a Political Target," Bloomberg Equality online, October 2, 2021)

They cite as an example the well-known history of redlining African Americans in perpetuating poverty.

CRT is realism, not pessimism or anti-white. Its critique of the system is true. One could remark that CRT itself helps us understand why any public

school teaching about racism comes under such vicious, lying attacks.

The radical reforms won in the 1960s with the victory of the civil rights revolution that smashed the Jim Crow system in the South and its extension to the rest of the country as seen in employment, education and housing policies, led to immediate white backlash.

The primary beneficiaries of the changes were the Black middle class. Many more African Americans were able to attend top-notch universities, buy homes in once all-white neighborhoods and get skilled trades jobs in industries.

This was a break from the pattern of 200 years where the most skilled and educated Black people were denied these options.

The 1964 and 1965 Civil Rights and Voting Rights laws were adopted by

Congress. Legally speaking, Black people then were to be treated as equal and full citizens, not segregated into urban ghettos and not denied entrance into the best public schools and colleges. But further progress did not happen as hoped.

Myth and Backlash

Just as there is a myth of the immigrant “melting pot,” there is a myth of the colorblind “American” citizen.

The white backlash (a common theme in history) has eroded or taken back the most significant changes from voting rights to desegregation and housing opportunities.

Public schools remain segregated in practice. Nor did the election of Barack Obama as the first Black president in 2008 lead to a “post-racial” society. It led instead to Donald Trump — a bigot, misogynist and supporter of white supremacy.

Proponents of Critical Race Theory in academia for more than 30 years have explained that racism is systemic in the laws and how the positive reforms won after the 1960s could and were eroded precisely because racism is permanent within the system founded and codified in the United States Constitution. They explain how civil rights are eroded by the laws and the existing system, but they do not have an alternative system to replace it.

It seems a defeatist vision, which is why longtime defenders of civil rights argue that CRT is also a pessimistic vision. Why continue to fight to change laws that discriminate if it doesn't matter in the long run?

Of course, none of that is what the far right and the Republican Party are talking about. They are demonizing CRT to convince mostly whites of all social economic classes to support the white supremacist “replacement theory” that black and brown immigrants are coming here to make whites a minority and lose their advantages.

At school board meeting and racist demonstrations at schools around the

country, CRT is an epithet. It is presented as a threat to white children. The very idea that racism permeates every aspect of U.S. history and society is deemed a Big Lie.

Founders of CRT

Who developed the theory, and why?

Derrick Bell, who died in 2011, explored the weakness of the civil rights legislation and laws won in the past. He said in every case, white backlash occurred that led to civil rights retreats.

Bell points to the gains after the 1865 Civil War period known as Reconstruction and the vicious counterrevolution called the Redemption Era.

Kimberlé Crenshaw took the critique further with her analysis of Intersectionality, which means the interconnected nature of social categories such as race, class and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, producing overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

In other words, Critical Race Theory, along with understanding intersectionality, is a way to fully understand the permanence of racial and national oppression under the current capitalist system.

Karl Marx analyzed capitalism and answered the question: How to end class exploitation and working-class political subordination? Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote the Communist Manifesto as an action program to “win the battle of democracy” and ultimately replace the old undemocratic system and with communism.

That theory and perspective of revolution isn't what creators of CRT advocate or believe, including Crenshaw or Bell. But their analysis presents a strong indictment of racism and capitalism.

Kimberlé Crenshaw

Crenshaw is a law professor at Columbia University and UCLA. She runs the African American Policy Forum, the social justice think tank she cofounded 25 years ago, and hosts a podcast on the term she coined in 1989: intersectionality.

Rita Omokha interviewed her in the July 29, 2021 Vanity Fair:

“Crenshaw breaks it down. ‘Critical race theory is based on the premise that race is socially constructed, yet it is real through social constructions.’ In other words, ask yourself, what is a “Black” neighborhood? Why do we call ‘the hood’ the hood? Labels like these were strategically produced by American policy.

“Critical race theory says the idea of a Black person — who I am in this country — is a legal concept. ‘Our enslavability was a marker of our degradation,’ Crenshaw explains. ‘And our degradation was a marker of the fact that we could never be part of this country. Our Supreme Court said this’ — in the Dred Scott v. Sandford ruling of 1857 — ‘and it wasn't a close decision.’”

Crenshaw explained that the concept of CRT was to understand the laws after the post-civil rights revolution and their impact on African Americans. The key word, she said, is critical thinking.

“In 1989, during her third year as a law professor, Crenshaw — alongside four thought leaders, two white allies, and three organizers — introduced the term at a workshop. The label was happenstance. ‘We were critically engaging law but with a focus on race,’ she says, recalling a brainstorm session.

“‘So, we wanted critical to be in it, race to be in it. And we put theory in to signify that we weren't just looking at civil rights practice. It was how to think, how to see, how to read, how to grapple with how law has created and sustained race — our particular kind of race and racism — in American society.’”

Rita Omokha writes:

“What those on the right describe as a threat to democracy in fact promotes equity. It’s how we’ve become, historically, who we’ve been — how the fiction of race is made real...‘You cannot fix a problem you cannot name,’ Crenshaw says. “You cannot address a history that you’re unwilling to learn.”

Critical race theory pays attention to the ripple effects of policy decisions, asking “the kinds of questions the other side doesn’t want us to ask because it wants us to be happy with the contemporary distribution of opportunity,” Crenshaw says.

Crenshaw and her co-editors Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller and Kendall Thomas noted, in the Introduction to the 1995 anthology, *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, that attacks on CRT have conveniently overlooked the fact that not all its founding scholars are Black. They began publishing work in legal journals that furthered the discourse around race, power, and law.

“I don’t think this is about a real difference in opinion, nor is it a debate that is winnable,” Crenshaw says. “This is about a weapon they’re using to hold on to power.”

Derrick Bell

“The man behind critical race theory,” by Jelani Cobb appears in the September 20, 2021 issue of *The New Yorker*.

“Bell,” Cobb writes, “spent the second half of his career as an academic and, over time, he came to recognize that other decisions in landmark civil-rights cases were of limited practical impact.

“He drew an unsettling conclusion: racism is so deeply rooted in the makeup of American society that it has been able to reassert itself after each successive wave of reform aimed at eliminating it. Racism, he began to argue, is permanent.

“His ideas proved foundational to a body of thought that, in the nineteen-

eighties, came to be known as critical race theory. After more than a quarter of a century, there is an extensive academic field of literature cataloguing C.R.T.’s insights into the contradictions of antidiscrimination law and the complexities of legal advocacy for social justice.”

Cobb continued that Bell, Harvard Law’s first Black tenured professor, developed an analysis “that racial progress had occurred mainly when it aligned with white interests — beginning with emancipation, which, he noted, came about as a prerequisite for saving the Union.

“Between 1954 and 1968, the civil-rights movement brought about changes that were thought of as a second Reconstruction. King’s death was a devastating loss, but hope persisted that a broader vista of possibilities for Black people and for the nation lay ahead.”

Yet, within a few years, as volatile conflicts over affirmative action and school busing arose, those victories began to look less like an antidote than like a treatment for an ailment whose worst symptoms can be temporarily alleviated but which cannot be cured.

“Bell was ahead of many others in reaching this conclusion. If the civil-rights movement had been a second Reconstruction, it was worth remembering that the first one had ended in the fiery purges of the so-called Redemption era...

“Bell seemed to have found himself in a position akin to Thomas Paine’s: he’d been both a participant in a revolution and a witness to the events that revealed the limitations of its achievements.”

After the Bakke ruling by the Supreme Court that ruled quotas or concrete goals were illegal as tools to end historical racism, Bell concluded it is important to understand while many Black elites and white liberals see fighting racism with reforms of the system, these reforms cannot last because the legal system will not allow it.

Laws will be changed to accommodate

white power. The gutting of voting right by the Supreme Court in 2013 reversing 50 years of precedent shows that. Jelani Cobb notes that’s exactly what’s happened since Trumpism took over the Republican Party:

“(C)onservatives have been waging war on a wide-ranging set of claims that they wrongly ascribe to critical race theory, while barely mentioning the body of scholarship behind it or even Bell’s name.

“As Christopher F. Rufo, an activist who launched the recent crusade, said on Twitter, the goal from the start was to distort the idea into an absurdist touchstone... Accordingly, CRT has been defined as Black-supremacist racism, false history, and the terrible apotheosis of wokeness.”

Patricia Williams, one of the key scholars of the CRT. canon, refers to the ongoing mischaracterization as “definitional theft.”

What Solutions?

Understanding what CRT is, and isn’t, is crucial to taking on racist attacks on Black people. Ironically, CRT has become a fixation of conservatives despite the fact that some of its sharpest critiques were directed at the ultimate failings of liberalism, beginning with Bell’s own early involvement with one of its most heralded achievements — the defeat of legal segregation.

Derrick Bell was less focused on white politicians curtailing discussions of race in public schools than that they did so in conjunction with a larger effort to shore up the political structures that disadvantage African Americans.

During the civil rights struggles before the end of Jim Crow legal segregation, there was sharp debate among Black leaders and militants about how to end racism and bring freedom and equality. In the 1960s the two main voices were Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X.

King advocated that Black people fully integrate into U.S. society and believed African Americans would

eventually become full citizens in word and deed.

His closest associates after his death in 1968 continued to believe that capitalist society could be reformed, and equality won under the “free market” system. They created a new middle class that is the largest and most powerful in Black history.

Yet the vast majority of working-class Black people made little progress; the wealth gap remains as wide as ever, especially after the 2008 housing and financial crash.

Malcolm X, before he was assassinated in 1965, had come to the conclusion the problem was the system. He advocated more radical solutions than legal equality.

Malcolm was the father of the Black Power militancy of the late 1960s. Many African Americans made demands beyond civil rights, including calling for anti-capitalist solutions. These militants created all-Black groups to fight racism, but many also saw the need to build alliances with white allies in the fight against racism and the capitalist system.

Supporters of Critical Race Theory, advanced a theory that Marxists and Black revolutionaries have always explained. The convergence is that race and racism are man-made social constructions that only can be changed and crushed through revolution.

It begins with pressing for school education to tell the truth about settler colonialism as the basis of the United States. While the legal term “genocide” did not exist until after World War II, what white English settlers did to the native tribes was genocide and ethnic cleansing.

Asians were excluded in the late 1800s and African slaves and their descendants were never seen as human, much less as equal citizens even after the end of slavery.

Supremacist ideology is racism. Donald Trump was not the leader of that ideology. He is a 21st century mouthpiece.

Attacking CRT is no different than calling civil rights organizations like the NAACP “communist” — a

diversion from facing the real history of the country.

The civil-rights movement had been based on the premise that the American system could be made to live up to the creed of equality prescribed in its founding documents. But Derrick Bell had begun to think that the system was working exactly as it was intended — to erode and roll back racial progress.

How to end that cycle, Bell did not answer. From Bell to Crenshaw and a new school of academics who support CRT, the solution may not be at hand, but the understanding is clear: every step forward in civil rights leads to a backlash that can only be defeated by a radical political economic revolutionary movement.

Critical Race Theory and intersectionality are valuable concepts to better understand issues of race, gender, class and social justice. But full equality and freedom for African Americans is not possible until a new socialist economic system is constructed.

[Against the Current](#)