



IV568 - May 2022

Republicans Are Responsible for the Massacre of Children

31 May 2022, by **Dan La Botz**

Only ten days before, on May 14, another 18-year-old, that one a white racist, entered Tops Friendly Market, a grocery store in Buffalo, New York, killing 13 people, 11 black and two white. But mass killings, that is taking more than three lives, occur in communities rich and poor. There were 417 mass shootings in 2019, 611 in 2020, and 693 in 2021, according to the Gun Violence Archive. The deadliest mass shooting took place in Las Vegas in 2017, where a gunman killed more than 50 people and left 500 wounded. This year there have already been 221 mass shootings, among them 27 school shootings. The most common mass shooting takes place in the home and is associated with domestic violence, but people are also killed in mass shootings in churches, synagogues, concerts halls, and sporting events. Many other Americas are killed in ones and twos in gang fights, by police, and in suicides. No nation in Europe, not Britain, Canada, or Australia has such a record of mass murder. It is a uniquely American problem.

The National Rifle Association, the country's principal gun lobby and a rightwing organization aligned with the Republican Party, went ahead four

days after the Uvalde massacre with its annual convention and gun show in Houston, Texas. Former president Donald Trump and Republican politicians spoke, arguing that guns were not the problem. They called for "hardening" schools with locked doors, metal detectors, and armed guards, for more mental health counseling, and they lamented the "evil" in our society. Some Republicans call for arming teachers so they can respond to armed intruders. Republican Ted Cruz said, "What stops armed bad guys is armed good guys."

Yet it is clear that the presence of so many guns and so many high-powered guns in our country is the principal cause of the mass shootings. The U.S. population is 330 million, but we have 390 million guns. And men and women, whites, Blacks and Latinos are buying more guns. Today there are 20 million military grade assault rifles in the hands of civilians. These are the guns that have taken so many lives in mass shootings in the last decade.

Following the Robb School killings, thousands of students at high schools around the country walked out of their schools in protest, demanding the

government to do something about the killings. Hundreds of adults also protested outside of the NRA convention in Houston and in other cities. They speak for a majority of Americans, with 68% wanting criminal and mental health background checks on gun purchasers, and 47% desiring stricter gun law. Democrats, by and large, favor stricter regulation of guns, but Republicans oppose virtually any restrictions on gun ownership. By and large this opposition to gun control is led by the same white Evangelical Christian who oppose abortion and LGBTQ people. For the NRA, Evangelicals, and Republicans, guns symbolize the independent white Christian man who is prepared to defend his home and his business from Blacks and Latinos, and, if necessary, take up arms against the government.

The question is, will the Republicans' opposition to gun control, like their opposition to abortion, lead independents and Democrats to turn out in greater numbers for the November mid-term election. We'll see. Women and gun-control activists both will be organizing to defeat the Republicans.

28 May 2022

Raphaël Arnault, the antifa who wants to be an MP

30 May 2022, by **Mathieu Dejean**

A few weeks ago, Arnault left his position as spokesperson for the Jeune Garde Lyon (JGL, an anti-fascist collective created in 2018) to become a candidate of the “social, ecological and popular left” in the parliamentary elections of 12 and 19 June, in the second constituency of Lyon (Rhône). He is running with the support of the Nouveau parti anticapitaliste (NPA) against the candidate nominated by the Nouvelle Union Populaire écologiste et sociale (Nupes - New People’s Ecologist and Social Union, the left-wing political coalition led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon), the former member of Macron’s party En Marche Hubert Julien-Laferrrière. The ultimate metamorphosis of a new generation of anti-fascism.

On 20 May, near the Gros Caillou, in the Croix-Rousse district - one of the areas most targeted by far-right groups, which have their strongholds in the city - the echo of the “siamo tutti antifascisti” slogan seems distant. The 27-year-old activist, an educational assistant, polished his style to launch his campaign - his ponytail has disappeared, and he speaks without a microphone, in shirt sleeves. The memories of the attacks of the most radical far right are still fresh in the memories. The event has not been announced publicly, as a security measure. The fifty people present were alerted by internal loops, in a closed circuit. During the presentation of the duo he forms with Mathilde Millat, his 24-year-old running mate, an NPA activist and an employee in a popular education association, a *service d’ordre* (SO - security service) made up of JGL activists discreetly monitors the surroundings.

A tense campaign

“In Lyon, as soon as there is a social movement, out of experience, we pose the question of attacks. It’s a systematic concern,” explains Raphaël Arnault. His campaign will not escape the rule. Since his face became known nationally - he appeared on the show “Touche pas à mon poste” on the C8 channel, a way of challenging media hegemony on the far right - this football enthusiast lives in a state of permanent vigilance. In September 2021, activists from the far-right group Zouaves Paris ambushed him as he arrived at the Gare de Lyon in Paris. He got away with a bloodied eyebrow

“When your commitment is to be on the front line against the fachos, politics becomes something physical,” say left-wing YouTuber Usul, a Mediapart contributor and a friend of Raphaël Arnault, who has also been exposed to the threats of these violent groups established in Vieux-Lyon. The genesis of the JGL is linked to this local configuration. In January 2018, after a series of attacks by the Parti nationaliste français and the Bastion Social on the Croix-Rousse, a group of five friends, activists in various circles - Raphaël Arnault became involved with the NPA when he was a student at Lyon 2 university - decided to organize self-defence.

“[In Lyon] there is an immediate need to push these groups back, to close their offices, their boxing halls, to weaken them so that activism for emancipation in the broad sense can be further deployed, whether it be the various feminist, anti-racist, trade union struggles..”, says sociologist and anti-capitalist activist Ugo Palheta in *Défaire le racisme, affronter le fascisme* (“Undoing Racism,

Confronting Fascism”-, La Dispute, 2022).

Unlike autonomous anti-fascism, which is viscerally anti-state and operates by affinity network, the JGL practices “class” anti-fascism, which responds to this local situation by forging links with more traditional left-wing groups. “The only time I’ve seen neo-Nazis retreat in Lyon is when they were confronted with the SO of the CGT (major trade-union confederation). This is what guided us: we do not pride ourselves on having reinvented anti-fascism, on the contrary, we are inspired by the heritage of the workers’ movement,” says Arnault, who has tattooed above his right ear a branch of laurels, symbol of his anti-fascist identity.

Quickly, the collective “Fermons les locaux fascistes” (“Close the fascist premises”) was set up and won some victories. This is the crucible from which he says he derives his legitimacy today. Present in the small crowd on 20 May, Cédric, who is an activist in Alternatiba, confirms this description: “The Jeune Garde has absorbed the far-right violence directed towards the activist milieu. It has become our shield.”

“Bringing visibility to anti-fascism has been important for the people who are campaigning here,” Usul said. Now they have someone to turn to. The JGL has a concrete existence that does good in the milieu.” Annie (first name changed at her request), a 20-year-old activist in the JGL and a student in a preparatory literary class, says she grew up in a “racist village” near Lyon. The anxiety-provoking climate she felt when she arrived in the city, where fights with the far right are frequent, convinced her to join the organization. Now, she enthusiastically supports the

metamorphosis of “Raph”: “This candidacy brings visibility to the fight against the far right. For us, this also plays out in the institutions. And the fact that we are young is also a symbol of our desire for a policy that comes from below, to reappropriate our means of action.”

Occupying all terrains

Inspired by the rhetoric of Olivier Besancenot, who he mimics in his speeches – big hand gestures, a mixture of pictorial language and political jargon, recurring references to “our social camp” – Arnaut seems to embody the motto of Scred Connexion, a rap group the former NPA spokesman likes: “Never in the trend, but still in the right direction.”

In the highly codified milieu of anti-fascism, his candidacy appears to be a transgression. Tensions between the Groupe antifasciste Lyon et environs (Gale), recently threatened with dissolution, and the JGL have thus redoubled in violence at the beginning of the campaign. Both sides accuse each other of physical attacks – the JGL tried to close the case by issuing a unitary statement calling for “de-escalation”.

Safak, one of the co-founders of the Jeune Garde, a tiler in real life, who cultivates a look close to the rap duo PNL – impeccably trimmed beard, white T-shirt, beltbag worn across the body, tattoo “ACAB” (“All coppers are bastards”) on the forearm – supports this strategy: “This struggle was privatized by a very inward-looking activism, concentrated in the university environment. We founded the Jeune Garde together to escape this logic.”

And then, he notes that the far right does not have the same modesty about entering the institutions. “Former *identitaire* activists are being recycled as candidates for the legislative elections, and many are already parliamentary assistants. After Marine Le Pen’s score, it’s all the more important to counter them wherever they are,” he argues.

The step is all the easier for Raphaël Arnaut to take as he sees in the score – 21.95% – of Jean-Luc Mélenchon (for whom he voted) in the first round of the presidential election as an opportunity to win on a line “of breaking with neoliberal policies”.

“When I became an activist, after the betrayals of François Hollande, there was no longer any hope of reconnection between the institutions and us, the new generations active on the ground. This presidential election has changed the situation, we say that the left is once again becoming the left,” he says, sitting on a bench in the courtyard of a downtown area in Croix-Rousse.

His deputy, Mathilde Millat, who voted for NPA presidential candidate Philippe Poutou and cites Usul, Olivier Besancenot and feminist activist Andrea Dworkin as sources of inspiration, shares this analysis: “Mélenchon has pushed the cursor to the left compared to a few years ago on anti-racism, feminism, animal rights... What he said about ecological planning has been listened to, without it being considered extremist or populist,” she said.

The tectonic plates on the left work, on paper, in favour of their radical political offer. However, in the second constituency of the Rhône, which voted more than 30% for Mélenchon – the district of the Presqu’île, bourgeois and Catholic, being an exception – the pairing does not enjoy the support of Nupes.

Repairing an anomaly

At the end of the negotiations between the apparatuses in Paris, the NPA was not included in the agreement [1], so the outgoing deputy Hubert Julien-Laferrrière, a member of Génération écologie, elected in 2017 under the banner of *En marche* after having been a member of the Socialist Party (PS) tendency of Gérard Collomb (a former mayor of Lyon turned Macronist), was selected as the Nupes candidate.

A decision very little appreciated by

local left-wing activists. “Those who know him know that he has long been overseen by Collomb and that he passed Macron’s laws for three years [before breaking with him – editor’s note], so he sticks in their throats. We are trying to repair this local anomaly,” says Arnaut, who therefore presents himself under the label of a “social, ecological and popular left”.

In fact, Sarah, an activist in La France insoumise (LFI) in Vieux-Lyon since December, confides that all the action groups (GA) on the slopes of Croix-Rousse and La Duchère are campaigning for him: “His candidacy reassured many activists who, in this particular configuration, did not see themselves voting for the Nupes candidate.”

Exit, therefore, the campaign tools of the Popular Union, such as the application “Action Populaire”, very practical for organizing leafletting and door-to-door canvassing, and the recognizable logo in the shape of “V”. Raphaël Arnaut rejects the term “dissent”: if elected, he wants to join the parliamentary group of the Popular Union.

Contacted by phone, Hubert Julien-Laferrrière agrees that he expected his candidacy to cause a stir. However, he defends himself: “Many on the left believed in some of Macron’s promises. I left after two and a half years, and since then I have been fighting faithful to the commitments I made in 2017, for human rights, the reduction of inequalities, against pesticides and neonicotinoids. I ask that you look at the work I have done in the Assembly, beyond the label ‘EX-LREM’. He also believes that the Nupes is an “opportunity” to seize.

In front of his supporters, including many young people and some more seasoned activists, Raphaël Arnaut concludes his first speech by claiming greater fidelity to the spirit of the label: “The real popular union is there, at the base. This candidacy does not come out of nowhere. We can really win, we aren’t here to pick poppies.”

For logistics, he will be able to count on the support of the NPA, the only organization to officially support him – elsewhere, the NPA has decided to

support to varying degrees the candidates of the Nupes when they embody a “left of rupture”. Philippe Poutou will make a trip to Lyon to support Raphaël Arnault and Mathilde Millat on 8 June. The rap group ACS

(“À contresens”) should also participate in the festivities.

In the group photo, on 20 May, some make the “V” of victory, symbol of the Melenchonist federation. Safak smiles, satisfied: “I know he is able to shift

the boundaries that anti-fascism had set for itself.”

This article is translated by International Viewpoint from [Mediapart](#).

Lockdown and Political Repression in China

29 May 2022, by **Jia Kang**

Amidst such public mercantilism, a large number of civilians that have been put forcefully under isolation found nowhere to buy food or could not afford it due to economic constraints. More and more people have no means of living. This has led, on some occasions, to the desperate plundering of groceries stores and warehouses, and even to the besieging of government buildings as a signal of social discontent.

In Shanghai, the dire political and social scenario became particularly evident. Shanghai is China’s traditional financial hub and the bridgehead of Chinese current capitalism. During Jiang Zemin’s administration (1993-2003), Shanghai developed its own business system marked by the symbiotic relationship between local officials and private entrepreneurs. As an international metropolis, Shanghai has a large number of migrant workers, accounting for more than 80% of the city’s population. When there was a shortage of consumers’ basic staples, the migrants, who already lacked financial resources, were immediately discriminated against and segregated by the local population under the state’s vested support. The per capita income of migrant workers is only about \$700 a month. During the epidemic period, though, they could not work or had their salaries reduced. As prices soared in Shanghai, and vital vegetables like

cucumbers could be sold for \$1.50 each, many migrants have opted to sleep on the rough, having to choose between eating and commuting back home from work and school.

The situation in Jilin is similar to Shanghai. Evidence shows that the local government mercantilists basic staples and conceal reports on the pandemic situation. Moreover, it is often the case that rivalries between local governments and Beijing hinder effective measures in favour of the masses. For example, because most of the bureaucratic faction in Shanghai diverges from the central government, the situation has not improved significantly since the State Council Vice-premier visited the city, and many migrant workers can only obtain staple materials from their hometown governments.

As a result, people have demonstrated their discontent in various ways. In Baoshan District in Shanghai, thousands of workers invaded nearby grocery stores and street offices, where they found tons of decaying materials that were illegally stored. At Fudan University, tens of thousands of students protested against the closure of the University and carried out a non-violent movement, which was jointly suppressed by the Chinese military and police. At Tongji University, students even organised a massive protest claiming access to meat supply; Many more segments of

the society took the streets to protest, but due to the censorship, there is not enough related information.

Most of China’s social networks are done on the Internet. Because people can be easily spotted by authorities on the internet, they talk about correlated topics or use code words to hide their intentions. For example, the expression “fun deprivation” (闷闷) became a popular code word referring to the local situation – which is taken from a speech delivered by the spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For more sensitive remarks, people use other international platforms such as xmqq [2] and Twitter to communicate. I heard of some leftists who have participated in the real struggle, such as publicly supporting the workers’ movement in Dongguan and Guangzhou, but most of them are limited to research and online discussions.

As the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China will be held soon, the government will use more extreme means to maintain political stability. The hardest period might be from May to October, especially from 4 June to the end of the Congress, because the Communist Party of China does not want a recall of the 4 June 1989 incident in Tiananmen Square.

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Source: *Anti*Capitalist Resistance*.

Context and challenges of Sinn Féin's unprecedented electoral victory in the Assembly elections

28 May 2022, by **Thierry Labica**

For the first time since the partition of Ireland and the creation of Northern Ireland 101 years ago, Sinn Féin, a left-wing, nationalist republican party in favour of the reunification of Ireland, came out on top in this election, with 29 per cent of the vote and 27 seats (in an assembly which has 90 seats).

These elections have major implications on a variety of levels, for Northern Ireland and the island of Ireland itself, for the post-Brexit UK and on the international level, beyond even Europe.

First and foremost, Sinn Féin's victory is significant insofar as the political structure of Northern Ireland, since its creation, aimed to make such an eventuality impossible: everything was designed, from the outset, to guarantee Protestant majorities in favour of maintaining the province in the United Kingdom. By becoming the first party in the mini-state, Sinn Féin signals a historic development that is all the more significant since only two years earlier, in 2020, the same party had become the main political force in the south, during the legislative elections in the Republic of Ireland; with nearly 25 per cent of the vote. Sinn Féin, led by Mary-Lou McDonald inflicted an unprecedented defeat, again, on the tandem of historical right-wing parties which have traditionally exercised power (Fianna Fail and Fine Gael) [3].

These results are themselves so many additional expressions of the profound changes that are going through Irish society in the south as well as in the north, concerning, for example, abortion and marriage for all (in the Republic of Ireland), in this culture that was for so long under the

influence of a particularly powerful Roman Catholic conservatism. Also central in the sequence opened up by the Belfast Agreement, there is the fact that there exists in Ireland a generation which, although amply informed about the recent history of the island, has not known the circumstances and the suffering of thirty years of civil war. Sinn Féin's audience today cannot be completely unrelated to the passage of time, which now distances the party from its link to the IRA [4] and the context of the armed struggle.

These profound historical inflections have for some years encountered the context created by the 2016 referendum on leaving the EU. The Northern Irish election at the beginning of May takes on its full importance in view of this situation, marked by the chronic deadlock on the question of the status of Northern Ireland in this context.

A chain reaction

Let us summarize. Northern Ireland was supposed to leave the EU, its single market, its norms and standards, along with the rest of the United Kingdom. This implied, for reasons of regulations on trade, the establishment of a customs border on the island of Ireland between the north and the Republic, which is still part of the EU. But for political and constitutional reasons, the project of such a border is unthinkable: it would contravene the provisions of the Belfast Agreement and would potentially be a factor in a resurgence of violence that no one wants to see. A temporary solution has been negotiated between the EU and the government of Boris Johnson: the

"Northern Ireland Protocol". Under this arrangement, Northern Ireland remains in the EU single market, and customs checks are carried out in the Irish Sea, between Great Britain and the island of Ireland and not on the island of Ireland, between the 'British' North and the South.

For the Unionist and Loyalist parties in Northern Ireland (which defend remaining in the United Kingdom and loyalty to the English crown), this protocol is an affront since it establishes an intermediate, or hybrid, status of the northern part of the island, outside the territory of the United Kingdom. In protest and to force the Johnson government to break the agreement with the EU, the leader of the main Unionist party [5], Jeffrey Donaldson, therefore decided to boycott the power-sharing structure (within the executive) instituted by the Belfast Agreement, which he has done since the beginning of February 2021. Donaldson has also practiced the policy of the empty chair within the framework of the interdepartmental meetings between the north and the south. In doing so, he has been blocking the operation of the autonomous Northern Irish executive for more than a year [6] and thus continues to prevent Michelle O'Neill from exercising her mandate as First Minister resulting from the election of May 5.

Three factors contribute to weakening the historically hegemonic position of the Unionists. The first is due to the constitutional order resulting from the Belfast Agreement and which imposes, among other things, the principle of power sharing. But it should also be borne in mind that more recently, in 2016, a clear majority of Northern Irish people (56 per cent) voted to stay

in the EU when the Unionists defended a Johnson-style exit. And thirdly, unlike Theresa May, whose survival depended on ten Unionist MPs after her collapse in the 2017 general election in the United Kingdom, Boris Johnson does not need a single Unionist parliamentarian in the Westminster parliament to ensure his absolute majority. In other words, the Unionists cannot exert any pressure on the Johnson government in London where the English Tories (much more English than British) have been in the vast majority since December 2019. Hence the recourse to this other lever, namely the boycott and the pronged blockage of the Northern Irish executive.

Sinn Féin is strengthened

If Michelle O'Neill and Sinn Féin are now still prevented from governing, the dividends for them seem quite obvious: in the face of the DUP, defeated in the elections, which demands that the agreements made with the EU be trampled on, and which refuses to submit to the most elementary democratic rule, Sinn Féin has every opportunity to appear as a reasonable organization, respectful of – and fully in phase with – the popular will expressed at the ballot box (whether during the referendum on the EU or following the last legislative elections), anxious to make the institutions work well and to comply with the constitutional framework that is reputed to have made it possible to put an end to decades of carnage.

Furthermore, Sinn Féin, now the main political force in both the North and the South, can not only rely on the economic reunification established de facto by the protocol, and finally sees itself as being fully legitimate in demanding the implementation of the key provision of the Belfast agreement, namely, a referendum on the formal reunification of Ireland (but it should be noted that according to the 1998 agreement, it is still up to the British government to judge the advisability of such a consultation). This could mark the end of the former British colonial stranglehold on the north of the island. For the President

of Sinn Féin, Mary-Lou MacDonald, this objective is intended to be achieved within five to ten years, since it is necessary, she explains, to proceed in an orderly manner, with the most skilful possible respect for deep-rooted identities (“British”, Protestant Unionists and Loyalists) which must be recognized and included, far from any spirit of revenge, in a singular regional multiculturalist nationalism (which could however lead to a pure and simple renewal of historical sectarianism, that terrible obstacle to any kind of class solidarity).

These possibilities are imminent, but as we can easily guess, nothing is obvious in this case. In the days following that election, Johnson’s foreign secretary, Liz Truss, made it known that the government in London had “no choice” but to get rid of various provisions of the protocol negotiated with the EU, since it was now a question of preserving nothing less than “internal peace”.

In the event of such a gross denial of democracy, and such a flagrant betrayal of the rules agreed both with the EU and within the framework of the Belfast Agreement, it is rather difficult to see how the recourse to violence – certainly always regrettable –, could not be posed. This is what could happen when the liberal democratic order commits the atrocity of serving interests other than those of the old colonial power and its most indefectible defenders.

We see here how the protracted Brexit crisis brings out the limits of the 1998 agreement which had, however, in its time, so well enabled the Anglo-American imperialist axis to pose as a skilful and benevolent mediator of ancestral and apparently insoluble conflicts – this, only five years after the Oslo agreements, the limits of which appeared incomparably more quickly, it is true. Having said that, it remains true that the situation remains largely dependent on what the American attitude could be in response to the breaches of contract envisaged (at the time of writing) by the British government [7]. Already, last September, Joe Biden let it be known in the clearest terms that he was “particularly attached” to the

provisions concerning Ireland and Northern Ireland and that, both from his own point of view and that of his Republican colleagues, there could be no question of going back on it.

If things were not complicated enough like that, two additional indirect, but important, components must be added to this configuration of power relations.

Towards a qualitative weakening of the power of London

The first relates to the fact that, as everyone knows, the question of the reunification of Ireland (and the end of the United Kingdom, the only real solution to the Brexit crisis) is not the only national question posed to the government in London. The other comes from Scotland where the nationalist party (SNP) strengthened its hegemony a little more during the local elections at the beginning of May. Here too, the priority question is that of a new referendum on independence (after that of 2014, at a time when the Scots, overwhelmingly pro-EU, did not yet know that an English vote would impose a forced withdrawal into the historical imperial space of London’s power). We can certainly count on these two national and nationalist dynamics, Irish and Scottish, to stimulate and reinforce each other.

So, no more Northern Ireland, no more United Kingdom; no more Scotland, no more Britain. And incidentally, Welsh separatism, admittedly less strong, does not however follow far behind, as the exit from the EU and the end of the structural fund programmes dispossess Wales too, financially and politically, of a large part of the sovereignty it thought it had acquired. For London, such dislocation and loss of regional control (over the three “small” nations of the United Kingdom) would mean an ultimate corrosion of the reputation of a strong state and of global imperial power. It is hard to see how the Tory supporters

(followed by an increasingly right-wing Labour) of the “renaissance” of a “global” post-Brexit Britain, reaffirming its place in the world, could put up with such a rout in their own backyard [8].

Finally, there is one last component, the Republic of Ireland itself. Do we really want a reunification there which, in order to offer the necessary inclusive framework, would undoubtedly have to give up its aggressive capitalism, between the explosion of inequalities again, a catastrophic housing crisis and official tax havens? One can count on the Irish bourgeoisie – like any other – to be more concerned with the “stability” of the business environment than with national emancipation. Many of its intellectuals and columnists, over the years, have not failed to express their “liberal” rejection and condemnation of “extremism” and terrorism in the

north, of Sinn Féin and the IRA [9].

Is the contemporary Sinn Féin, the first political force in the south and north of the island, feminized, rejuvenated, led by high-profile female leaders [10], able to produce the terms of a renewed emancipatory and progressive nationalism? Its recent political dynamics deserve attention and solidarity. It remains to be seen what its increased participation and legitimization in the existing institutional order in the north and in the south will make of this political force: will it be the relay of the emancipatory aspirations and social movements of a new generation confronted with the extreme brutality of a largely subordinate Irish capitalism? Will it be able to put itself at the service of the resurgence already in progress of progressive aims for the whole of the island, against corrupt, decayed political and

religious institutions, hostile for a long time to the upheavals that an effective reunification would entail, and therefore always determined to keep control no matter what? Or will Sinn Féin get bogged down in the swamps of normalization which would already agree to a federal reunification, from above, which would leave intact the autonomy of the North, would cajole its reactionary monarchist bigots in the name of respect for cultural diversity, and would be careful not to spoil the feast of the rich and their tailor-made political order in the south?

The “new era”, sometimes announced a little too quickly, is not for now. But Sinn Féin’s advance is helping to outline its contours.

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Beyond Roe v. Wade: Struggling for Abortion Access

27 May 2022, by **Emily Janakiram**

Alito’s draft also claims that overturning Roe sets no precedent for attacks on contraception or marriage equality. Abortion is still legal at the federal level—but if Roe is overturned, “trigger” bans will automatically go into affect in 24 states.

The Long Predicted Overturn

The dismantling of abortion rights is of a piece with the moment. The growing wave of class consciousness and labor organizing, the devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the galvanized movement to defund and abolish policing, could only be met in one of two ways: greater concessions to the working class, or greater surveillance and incarceration to dampen struggle.

It is indeed necessary to contextualize abortion rights as part of a greater political struggle. Roe v. Wade was itself not a benevolent decision handed down by the courts to grant reproductive rights. Abortion rights were won by a militant wave of feminist organizing that demanded these rights as part of a greater left-wing demand for liberation. The Cold War-era government, fearing this militancy, folded abortion rights into an affirmation of the capitalist state’s primacy in guaranteeing bodily autonomy and the rights of the individual.

It is a perilous mistake to pin the hopes of reproductive rights on a trick of legislative or judicial maneuvering – though of course, a federal guarantee of free abortion on demand wouldn’t hurt. But such a guarantee could not happen in a capitalist, patriarchal

state that deems anyone with a uterus as an incubator for future workers, and which offloads the costs of birthing and raising those workers onto families.

The draft opinion frets about the “domestic supply of infants,” confirming what socialist feminists have been pointing out for some time—that the war on reproductive rights is not only about ideology or culture wars (though obviously, ideology forms a significant part of it). It is also about raising the birthrate and the pool of workers, as people are increasingly refusing to have children in a country that makes doing so incredibly dangerous and difficult if not impossible. Capitalism requires a large, easily exploitable workforce. Without any concessions to make the work of birthing and raising children safe or dignified, the state calls on its

most trusted weapon – the police – to coerce people into continuing to produce.

Black, Brown, and Indigenous people face the highest mortality rates during childbirth in this country, and they disproportionately perform the work of social reproduction under the most dangerous conditions. Bans on abortion will disproportionately harm these populations. Most of the people targeted, surveilled, and incarcerated by the criminalization of abortion will also be Black and Brown people, Indigenous people, and undocumented people. The mainstream pro-choice movement will not make the connections between police abolition and abortion rights, but for socialists the interconnectedness of these movements is important to recognize.

It is the police who brought charges against 26-year-old Liselle Herrera for inducing her own abortion, as well as against Purvi Patel and Bei Bei Shuai, and others. And it is the police who will be enforcing abortion bans around the country, jailing healthcare providers and anyone who “aids and abets” in obtaining an abortion – in some cases, potentially abortion patients themselves.

The Democratic Party, the Police, and The Need for Abolitionist Politics

As should have been clear to anyone paying attention, and is glaringly evident now, the Democratic party machine will not win this fight for us. The Democratic leadership is in fact backing anti-abortion Texas representative Henry Cuellar against his opponent Jessica Cisneros, while simultaneously insisting that it will defend abortion rights by electing more Democrats in the midterm elections.

A different approach is necessary. On May 3rd, organizers and demonstrators converged on downtown Manhattan’s Foley Square in the thousands, energized by rage

and horror at Alito’s leaked memo. The attendees represented members from across the abortion-supporting political spectrum, from “I’m With Her” liberals to members of small revolutionary organizations.

Yet even during the planning stages of this demonstration, it became very clear that most of the organizers were opportunistically seizing this moment to win votes for Democratic candidates, and treating grassroots organizations unaffiliated with pro-choice politicians as interlopers. The irony is palpable when one considers that it is primarily organizations independent of the Democratic Party which have been building abortion funds to help people access abortions, networking to distribute abortion pills, and defending clinics. The Democratic party, on the other hand, has been useless in defending abortion rights, and their mealy-mouthed, milquetoast support for “a woman’s right to choose” has brought us to this backwards position.

While radical mobilization is afoot, it has to contend in a landscape dominated by this Democratic machine, which aims to limit anger and channel struggle into electoral means. We’ve seen that at the national level as the Democrats sought to tamp down protests at Supreme Court Justices’ houses. In New York, the Foley Square demonstration was carried out with a police permit – the streets around the demonstration were thick with cops. Speakers included representatives from Attorney General Letitia James’ office as well as Mayor Eric Adams, which is particularly ironic, given that Adams has not increased city support for the New York Abortion Access Fund, a key provider for abortion seekers arriving from out of state.

Under Adams’ tenure as mayor, the NYPD has conducted over 700 sweeps of homeless encampments, mostly carried out by the “anti-terrorism” Strategic Response Group (SRG), well known for brutalizing protestors. Rents across the city are increasing as much as 40 to 50%, resulting in even greater homelessness. It is ludicrous to position Adams as a defender of the oppressed’s rights. The heavy police presence, as one speaker from NYC

For Abortion Rights pointed out, does not guarantee attendees’ safety – it actually endangers many of them. At the end of the speakout, a loose coalition of comrades from Left Voice, DSA, NYC For Abortion Rights, and others spontaneously marched to Washington Square Park, leading hundreds of attendees from the rally. The organizers, however, would not participate or sanction this march, because it did not have a permit.

This event is a microcosm of the national struggle for abortion rights – a movement that is ready for militant action, and a Democratic body that not only insists on leading this movement, but coopting its most promising strategies by insisting that cooperating with the police and the courts is the best way to defend bodily autonomy. Meanwhile, clinic defenders and other abortion rights activists across the country are operating in defiance of the police. NYC For Abortion Rights has carried out demonstrations against right-wing anti-choice groups and clinic defenses without police permits for several years. When we say, “we are having abortions forever”, we are calling for a confrontational resistance to whatever the courts decide and however the police will enforce it. And this confrontational resistance is both absolutely necessary and absolutely impossible when limiting struggle to actions permitted by the police.

Turning to the police to protect abortion patients is misguided to say the least. It is the threat of imprisonment that keeps abortion seekers isolated, afraid, and unaware of the resources that do exist to help people safely self-manage abortions as well as travel to obtain them. If we are afraid of clinic closures and a return to dangerous back-alley abortions which will kill pregnant people, we need to remember that it is the police who make self-managed abortions so dangerous. Self-managed abortions can absolutely be done safely, especially with the advent of the abortion pill. Self-managed abortions are safer than, for instance, home births. Though of course we cannot blithely accept the closure of clinics as a foregone conclusion, they must not only be defended, but expanded to meet unmet demand. Surgical

abortion in clinics remains an essential demand, and one that ought to be a center piece for struggle ahead.

However, the criminalization of “aiding and abetting abortion” will ensure that safe self-managed abortions become dangerous and traumatic, that information and resources to perform them safely will remain inaccessible, and that abortion seekers will have no one to turn to and no one to help them, except for the most brazen and unscrupulous of opportunists.

The Struggle Ahead

In the wake of the leaked memo, police brutalized protestors in LA. We can expect this to continue as long as direct actions to protect abortion rights continues to gain momentum into what must become a hot summer. And as the right-wing Supreme Court continues to expand the powers of the police to surveil populations, abortion patients and pregnant people will be in even greater danger.

There are already tech companies invested in selling data about pregnant people to law enforcement, using period tracking apps and geolocation. Policing is perhaps the most valuable tool the state has in dismantling bodily autonomy, and in conjunction with new technologies of surveillance and a general turn to the right, those seeking abortion are directly in the cross-hairs.

The far right is aware of the connections between mobilization and the legal and penal powers of the state. They have been riling up their base against the morning-after pill, hormonal birth control, and the copper IUD as abortifacients. Alito’s draft, whatever he may claim, clearly leaves room to dismantle access to contraception too. Around the world the police, particularly in the US, are allies of the far-right. They are the ones who escort the New York Archdiocese’s march to harass abortion patients. And while uniformed cops do not participate in clinic harassment campaigns, we do

have reason to believe the police work with clinic invaders behind the scenes. The draft ruling can be seen as part of the far right’s ever-tightening of the connections between their own militant mobilization, the state’s legal apparatus, and the penal powers bridging the two.

New York City for Abortion Rights (NYCFAR) was formed five years ago to be part of an important left response to this coordinated strategy on the right. It was formed to counter-protest the Archdiocese of New York’s monthly march to harass patients at the Planned Parenthood on Bleecker Street. Clinic defenders gather and picket outside St. Patrick’s Basilica on Mulberry Street, which hosts the clinic harassers. NYCFAR members form a blockade on the street to delay these antis’ (anti abortion demonstrators) arrival to the clinic. As other anti-abortion groups set their sights on New York, NYCFAR expanded their strategy to counter those groups as well (more on that here). This past summer, as the threat to Roe became more apparent, the Archdiocese expanded their campaign to every borough in New York. NYCFAR was successful at shutting their efforts down in Brooklyn after a campaign of militant clinic defense and raising community awareness, particularly in tying the Archdiocese’s actions to the then-recent passage of SB8 in Texas.

Of course, the police are always a sizable presence at these demonstrations - neither to help escort patients safely into the clinic, nor to enforce the Freedom to Access Clinic Entrances act by keeping antis away from the clinic door, but to defend this far-right procession as they march to the clinic. NYCFAR activists have often witnessed the cops and the antis talking and joking amicably. This past summer, after several pieces were published in the National Review about NYCFAR’s clinic defenses, SRG arrived at a clinic defense in Brooklyn and arrested two NYCFAR members in the middle of the street for “blocking pedestrian traffic.” None of the antis were arrested.

On May 7th, following the Roe leak, NYCFAR and abortion supporters in

New York City had a tremendous and unprecedented victory at our clinic defense, which had been announced before the leak. Normally, there are at most twenty of us. This time, there were at least a hundred people outside St. Patrick’s ready to defend abortion rights, in the early morning, in the rain. Picketers chanted, “Thank God For Abortion,” “Not the Church, Not the State, the People Must Decide Their Fate,” “Abortion is Healthcare, Healthcare is a Right.” Ninety minutes later, we learned that, for the first time in five years, the antis had decided not to march - because the police wouldn’t escort them. This was entirely due to our numbers and militancy. It also directly spells out the tactics necessary to defend abortion.

Not just in New York City, but around the U.S., we have a daunting struggle ahead of us. This situation is barbaric and appalling beyond words. But if we are to prevail, we must not fall to despair or nihilism, and we certainly do not need to reinvent the wheel. We can look to successful campaigns which have not only defended, but won reproductive rights.

Before Roe, there was the Jane Collective, an underground network of abortion providers that conducted safe abortions, and transported people as needed to perform them. Abortion funds exist today to do this. We must publicly proclaim that we will keep having abortions, and that we will keep “aiding and abetting” abortions, no matter what the Supreme Court decides. Feminist movements across the globe have won abortion rights through mass social protest and direct action.

We can and should take inspiration from their struggles. In Ireland, in Argentina, in Poland, and Chile, the abortion struggle has been fought on the streets, through direct action and unapologetic claiming of abortion as an inalienable right - not by electing politicians who will defend “the right to choose.” It is this militant action that we will need in the United States if we want to win.

If, however, you cannot participate in militant struggle, one of the most important and simple things to do is donate to abortion funds such as:

[National Network of ABortion Funds](#), [ineedana.com](#). Unlike a donation to Planned Parenthood, a donation to these organizations goes directly to helping someone access abortion; for instance, if they need to travel out of

state. You can also support an organization like [PlanC](#), which provides abortion pills to people who can't travel to a clinic as well as resources about self-managed abortion. You can even buy abortion

pills here: [AidAccess](#) before you're pregnant.

18 May 2022

Source [Spectre](#).

Food crisis in Africa

26 May 2022, by **Paul Martial**

In this global food crisis, Africa remains the most vulnerable continent. Although there are many reasons for this crisis, they all have one thing in common: political choices that run counter to the needs of the population.

Speculation and rising prices

Russia's military aggression against Ukraine has exacerbated the food crisis in West Africa, but it did not trigger it. Prior to the war, there were severe tensions over food supplies caused by speculative actions on the Chicago stock exchange, one of the world's leading markets for agricultural products.

Over the past four years, the number of malnourished people in West Africa has increased dramatically. It has almost quadrupled to nearly 38 million people.

The continent has emerged considerably weakened economically from the Covid-19 health crisis. Unlike the West, African countries have not had the fiscal space to adopt stimulus policies, or even to fund social measures to mitigate the crisis.

In Africa, the share of household budgets spent on food is very high. For example, in Nigeria, the most populous country, it accounts for 59% while in France the average is 13%. Increases in food prices, especially when they are significant, become an

obstacle to the possibility of feeding oneself properly for a large part of the population. In Burkina Faso, sorghum has increased by 37% and millet by 50%. Overall, food prices are higher than in 2008, the year of the food riots in some thirty countries. To this must be added the price of fuel, which has doubled on the continent.

Declining production

Agricultural activity is hampered by the multiple armed conflicts in the region, caused by jihadists and community militias. The number of displaced people is estimated at around 6.7 million. This means that there is a lack of manpower for the work in the fields. In the Sahel, cereal harvests are down by 12% compared to 2021, and for some countries the drops are even greater: - 15% in Mali, -18% in Mauritania and -36% in Niger.

At the same time, the Sahelian states, faced with the security challenge, are giving budgetary priority to the army. In ten years, security spending has increased by 339% in Mali, 288% in Niger and 238% in Burkina Faso.

As for humanitarian organisations, they are confronted with a prioritisation of donor aid for Ukrainian refugees and they too must face price increases. A tonne of wheat paid by the WFP (World Food Programme) has risen from \$290 to over \$400 with the announcement of the Indian embargo.

The problems experienced in West Africa are also present in the Horn of Africa. Countries such as Ethiopia and Somalia are experiencing difficulties in feeding their populations. Again, with high inflation, the cost of a food basket has increased by 36% in Somalia and 66% in Ethiopia.

Harmful policy choices

This situation is not due to any fatality but mainly to the consequences of the policies of the leaders of rich countries, by refusing to take the necessary measures against global warming, by crushing African countries under the weight of debt, by developing a policy of plundering natural resources and by favouring agrofuels. A first immediate solution would be to "take the quantities of maize produced for agrofuels, 140 million tonnes in the United States, i.e. half, 85 million tonnes, and redirect them to the food market to cover the missing quantities and reduce the pressure on cereal prices", as a researcher at CIRAD, the French agronomy agency for development, points out, quoted by the weekly magazine *Le Point*. [11]

A common sense measure that would save thousands of lives. Adopting it would require a little political courage to go against the profit-seeking production model.

26 May 2022

Elections in the Philippines: the revenge of the Marcos clan and the campaign of Leni Robredo

25 May 2022, by **Pierre Rousset**

Many polls, local and national, are held on a general election day in the Philippines. Some are local and regional, but three are national:

- Presidential and Vice Presidential elections. These are two separate votes, so the winners may belong to two opposing parties (this has already happened several times and is precisely the case now with Rodrigo Duterte as president and Leni Robredo as vice-president [12], the latter being deprived of any role by the former).

- The renewal of half of the Senate (or upper house of Congress). It is composed of 24 members elected for 6 years, but renewable by half every 3 years: the 12 candidates with the most votes are declared elected. In the current state of voting, it seems that the only progressive candidate to be elected is Risa Hontiveros, from the Akbayan party (she is in eleventh position).

- Members of the House of Representatives (parliament) are elected by constituency but, since 1987, 20 per cent of the seats are reserved for nationally elected party lists. The original aim of this reform was to allow parties that had no chance of winning in a first-past-the-post election against the established powers to obtain MPs and represent popular social sectors. The “big” parties were not allowed to run in this election. For a while this did allow for the election of MPs from the militant left, but the traditional (trapo) politicians eventually took over and ran multiple bogus parties.

Democratic elections?

The outgoing president, Rodrigo Duterte, has trivialized a regime of terror (multiplication of extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrest of opponents [13], etc.). He has ensured the greatest impunity for the repressive forces. Recently, it has engaged in an all-out war against progressive movements in the large southern island of Mindanao. Concerning the organization of the elections, in a report published on 17 May, an observation mission mandated by the ICHRP [14] noted a number of concrete problems: a high level of malfunctioning in the electronic voting system, poor maintenance of the electoral roll, campaigns to denigrate candidates and fake news via social networks, threats made against the “reds” (real or supposed), etc.

The use of social networks, Facebook, TikTok or Youtube by the government is reaching new heights in the Philippines, and a large part of the youth, addicted to mobile phones, is only connected in this way, especially in the working class.

The return of the Marcos clan

After imposing a martial law regime in 1972, Ferdinand Marcos really privatized the state apparatus to the benefit of his clan and its allies, excluding the big rival families from all power. It was not until 1986 that the dictatorship was overthrown in the “EDSA revolution” [15], combining a

minority military rebellion with a vast popular mobilization, with Marcos being exfiltrated from the country by Washington.

The return to power of the Marcos clan is therefore an event. It is the culmination of a process during which several presidents gradually rehabilitated the family, hindering the prosecution of Imelda Marcos, Ferdinand’s widow, for crimes committed during the dictatorial couple’s reign, and allowing the return of exiles to the country in 1991. It was sanctioned by the alliance forged for the 9 January elections between Ferdinand Marcos Jr, known as “Bongbong” (BBM), his father’s unrepentant son running for president, and Sara Duterte, her father’s unrepentant daughter, running for vice-president. The rallying of other important family clans made it a winning alliance.

Alliances between large families play a prominent role in the Philippine political and institutional game. The power of political dynasties is rooted in a particular province or region: Ilocos Norte for the Marcoses in the North or Davao for the Dutertes in Mindanao. They invest the parliamentary institutions, a place of permanent negotiations for the sharing of prebends.

Today, the Marcos clan is raking it in, much more so, it seems, than the Dutertes. Bongbong, a good, popular, charismatic speaker, promised much during his election campaign. It is safe to assume that the clan (and Imelda) is above all eager to re-establish its former prominence and wealth. Power and money are at the heart of elections. An election costs a lot of money and winning it must be worth a

lot. Thus, the flow of money that elected officials control allows them to distribute lucrative positions and to feed patronage networks, creating a deeper relationship than the simple purchase of votes (which also exists), implying a certain reciprocity to ensure a clientelist base in the long term.

The electoral fabric of the Philippines is complex. Regionalism is rooted in the geography of a mountainous archipelago and the complexities of the colonial past, as well as in cultural identities: Filipinos speak many languages and dialects. Some churches play the clientelist card to the hilt, securing entry into the spheres of power by dictating the votes of their followers. One of the major challenges for the left forces is to overcome this fragmentation of the popular strata, without trying to erase the diversity of regional histories.

This recognition of diversity is obviously particularly important where mountain people (in the north and in Mindanao) and Muslim populations (in central and southern Mindanao in particular) live.

Leni Robredo: the dynamics of a campaign

The Commission on Elections (Comelec) gave 59 per cent of the vote to Bongbong and 28 per cent to Leni Robredo - the next candidate only got 7 per cent, even though he was Manny Pacquiao, a once revered boxer turned senator. As the Comelec is not known for its probity and effectiveness in the fight against electoral fraud, one can be sure that the result credited to Leni

is not overestimated.

The opposition candidate brought together votes from a variety of backgrounds. She is not a flamboyant and charismatic figure, but she ran a grassroots campaign that had a real activist momentum, with up to 20,000 people at some rallies. It was not a foregone conclusion.

Leni Robredo, a member of the Liberal Party and outgoing vice president of the Philippines, campaigned this time as an independent candidate. She was nevertheless identified with the Aquinos, whose party is the LP, although she is not related to them. However, Ferdinand Marcos (father) had Benigno Aquino assassinated in 1983 and his widow Corazon was brought to power in the "EDSA revolution" in 1986. The electoral confrontation thus seemed to be the umpteenth episode in the perpetual conflict between these two dynasties. However, a large part of the Filipino population is unaware of the dictatorship's past, which has been systematically eradicated from memory and transformed into a mythical golden age. Instead, they have experienced the abortion of the 1986 promises of progressive reforms and the arrogant rule of the Aquino clan (based in Tarlac, Central Luzon). The presidency (2010-2016) of "Pinoy", Benigno "Nonoy" Aquino III, was particularly discrediting. This is one of the reasons why the time had come for the Marcoses to take their revenge.

Leni Robredo managed to break out of this pre-determined framework. A human rights lawyer, she was very active in the fight against the Covid-19 epidemic, denouncing the inaction of the Duterte regime. Her personal integrity is well known. She embodied a democratic alternative to the

Marcos-Duterte bloc and promoted the formation of the Pink Movement [16], which was open to numerous trade union, social and civic organizations and volunteer networks, with the active participation of many young people and the support of parties of the militant left. Given the circumstances, it seems a sign of success that the Comelec had to credit her with second place.

Another left-wing list was running with Leody De Guzman for president and Walden Bello for vice-president. Leody is a labour activist, a leader of the Partido Lakas ng Masa (PLM, Party of the Laboring Masses). Walden, a former MP for Akbayan, is well known in international anti-globalization circles. Leody is credited by the Comelec with 0.17 per cent (eighth out of ten candidates) and Walden with 0.19 per cent (seventh out of nine candidates). The specific objective of this tandem was to popularize the socialist perspective, it opened up a space for substantive discussion that activists were able to take advantage of.

It is always tricky to write an article from France on a subject as complex as the scope of elections in the Philippines until you know what the progressive forces in the Philippines are saying. The experience of Leni Robredo's campaign should, in the eyes of the popular currents involved in it, ensure the foundations of a lasting resistance to the Marcos presidency (which will become effective on 30 June). Once again, it was not a foregone conclusion, but the momentum was there. At a rally on 13 May, Leni declared that "this day is not the end, but the beginning of a new chapter".

25 May 2022

Good riddance to Morrison, time to fight Labor

24 May 2022, by Tom Bramble

The defeat was also a judgement of Scott Morrison, the prime minister who buggered off to Hawaii as bushfires destroyed thousands of homes, who failed to order enough vaccines and rapid antigen tests to deal with the pandemic, who attempted to sabotage the highly popular Western Australian border closure as COVID-19 raged in the eastern states, who did nothing to counter the culture of sexual abuse in parliament and whose idea of governing amounted to little more than posing for photos.

The billionaires never had it so good as under the Coalition. Their fortunes rose to stratospheric heights. The Coalition showered money on private schools. After promising to follow the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry, Morrison quietly shelved virtually all of them, protecting the Liberal Party's rich mates. It was the same with the Royal Commission into aged care, which lifted the lid on the appalling situation in privately run facilities. Virtually nothing has changed since the Commission handed down its report.

The Morrison government threw tens of billions of dollars in subsidies to business during the pandemic, even when these businesses in many cases were continuing to make substantial profits.

The poor got shafted under successive Liberal prime ministers. JobSeeker payments are at scandalously low levels. Social security recipients were persecuted under the robodebt program, which generated fake debts and drove tens of thousands to stress and some to suicide. And as inflation began to run hot, the government could only offer a future of endless wage cuts. Ministers told workers looking for wage relief that they should just get a better paid job, those suffering rental stress that they should just buy a house. And students were slugged with big increases in university fees.

Through it all, the military was expanded, and the Morrison government began to ramp up threats of war against China. Hundreds of billions that should go to welfare, health and education are instead going to building up the means of mass destruction.

So good riddance to the Morrison government.

Labor has won office, but hardly received a ringing endorsement. Its primary vote has sunk to an historic low. It won at least seven seats but in large part only because of Greens preferences. Only a strong performance in Western Australia put it in a position to potentially form a majority government. In several outer suburban seats in Melbourne, Labor's primary vote fell by double digits.

That Labor's primary vote is even lower than in 2019, the previous long-term low, is an indictment on the ALP's rightward shift since losing that election. The conclusion the party leaders took from that loss was that they had to retreat from offering even the mildest program of redistribution to the working class. Out the window went the policies tackling tax breaks for the middle classes and wealthy—franking credits, capital gains tax concessions, negative gearing. Out went any rhetoric about attacking the top end of town. Out went any hint that Labor might seriously deal with climate change and the fossil fuel industry.

Under Albanese and shadow Treasurer Jim Chalmers, the rhetoric was now about helping the “aspirational” voter. Soon after the 2019 election, Labor backed the Morrison government's program of tax cuts for the well-off and threw its support behind the Carmichael coal mine and the opening of the Galilee Basin in central Queensland. It was this reaction to defeat three years ago that explains why Labor had nothing to offer. As Chalmers told the Press Club just days before the election: “We want to be a pro-business, pro-

employer Labor Party”.

The low combined primary vote for the two major parties indicates significant and growing dissatisfaction with the political status quo. From 1946 until the early 1990s, the two parties racked up 90 percent or more of the vote, and in the following two decades, at least 80 percent. At this election, the two parties won the support of just 68 percent of the electorate.

The beneficiaries of this shift away from the major parties vary enormously. The Greens have certainly benefited from declining loyalty to the ALP and received their highest ever primary vote results in the Senate and the House in this election, beating their previous best, which was in 2010. The party had a swing towards it in its only lower house seat of Melbourne, won two in Brisbane and is in the running to claim another. The Greens also picked up several extra Senate spots.

The party's pitch was overall to the left of Labor, with policies to tax big business and the mining industry to fund dental and mental health care in Medicare, free childcare, increased public school funding, the wiping of student debt and the construction of one million new homes, along with halting all new coal mines and gas projects. Its strong vote was one of the few things to welcome on election night—it tells us that well over a million voters are looking for a party more progressive than Labor.

In what might possibly be the most significant development in this election, the so-called teal independents destroyed much of the Liberals' parliamentary representation in wealthy areas in Sydney and Melbourne. [17] In doing so, they exposed the deep rift in the Australian ruling class's preferred party of government. It appears that tens of thousands of relatively affluent, professional middle class voters, disproportionately women, turned on their traditional party in protest at its

misogyny and refusal to seriously address climate change. It is impossible to tell how permanent this schism might be, and whether they form a stable parliamentary bloc.

The far right also picked up votes from the major parties and represent an increasing problem. One Nation stood in many more seats than in 2019 and, combined with Clive Palmer's United Australia Party (UAP), the two boosted their primary vote by 2.7 percent to 9.2 percent. Adding the Liberal Democrats and other far right micro parties takes the far-right vote to 11.7 percent, up by 5.0 percentage points since the last election. Worryingly, the far right did well not just in their regional strongholds and traditional Liberal suburbs, but also increased their vote in traditionally Labor-voting working-class outer suburbs in Sydney and Melbourne, where they picked up 15-20 percent. Unsurprisingly, the UAP lost Liberal Party recruit Craig Kelly's lower house seat, but the party might yet claim a Senate seat in Victoria.

Finally, the Victorian Socialists (VS), which openly championed the working class against the billionaires, standing in eleven seats across the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne, put up a decent fight. Fielding 700 volunteers, VS had won more than 20,000 first preference votes when the counting of votes closed on election night, easily the largest number of votes for a socialist electoral project in many decades. In Calwell in Melbourne's northern suburbs, VS notched up just shy of 5 percent of the primary votes and in Fraser in the west, 5.4 percent. Elsewhere in the north, VS fought off stiff competition for the left vote to win 3-4 percent. In some cases, VS candidates outpolled those from the far right. In November, VS will be repeating this enormous effort in the Victorian state election.

The Albanese government will be sworn into office on Monday, but offers little to those millions who wanted the Morrison government tossed out. Even though Labor's leaders claim the party will defend

workers' living standards, they refuse to push for a real increase to the minimum wage. They will do nothing to keep a lid on prices. They will do nothing to control rents or expand public housing. And they will do nothing to help workers build union power to fight for higher wages on the job.

All the pressure now is the other way. With government debt ballooning from \$273 billion in 2013 to a forecast \$1 trillion next year, and with interest rates rising, the bosses and their representatives in the financial press are demanding urgent action to cut government spending. For years, they were urging the government to do something to lift wages; now they are saying that wages must be cut to curb inflation. Expect public spending cuts from this Labor government in coming years. And don't expect the ALP to go after the rich to do their bit. Labor is committed to tax cuts in 2024 that will benefit those on incomes of more than \$200,000 to the tune of billions of dollars.

With the world economy now looking shakier than for some years, we can anticipate that a Labor government will do the bosses' bidding in enforcing sacrifices for the working class. To prove their commitment to the capitalists during the election campaign, Albanese and Chalmers pointed to the experience of previous Labor governments, in particular those of Hawke and Keating, when Labor brought the union leaders, bosses and government together to screw the working class (or, as Labor's leaders put it, to lift productivity and profits). This is just what they have in mind for us now.

Nor can we expect to see Labor take serious action to deal with climate change. Labor is committed to the fossil fuel industries and its carbon emissions targets are a joke.

While Labor offers nothing and as the economic circumstances for millions get tougher, we can expect to see growing dissatisfaction with a government that has weak foundations and that only one-third of the

electorate actually voted for. The right will undoubtedly try to capitalise on this dissatisfaction. With many of the so-called Liberal moderates losing their seats, with Peter Dutton keeping his, and with the Nationals holding up their vote, the balance in the Coalition will shift to the right.

Tony Abbott's former chief of staff Peta Credlin wasted no time arguing in Murdoch's Sunday tabloids that the Liberals must move further right to reconnect to their supporters in the outer suburbs who had abandoned them for the far-right parties. The far right will be emboldened by their experience in this election and, if they can cohere their forces, may be in a position to mobilise people in protests against a federal Labor government as they did in Victoria in opposition to lockdowns and vaccine mandates late last year and earlier this year.

The threat from the right must be combatted. If the Albanese government will not lift a finger to defend workers' living standards in the face of rising inflation, unions will have to strike. That will involve an argument in our unions both to convince fellow workers that we can organise and fight but also against our union leaders who have done their best to turn our unions into electoral machines to get the vote out for Labor. The union leaders have stood by for years while the bosses and governments have got away with whittling away jobs and workplace rights. That has to end.

To wage such a fight, we need to build a bigger socialist current in workplaces and on university campuses. The growth of the far-right vote at this election illustrates the potential for other forces to take advantage of the situation. We have to fight for the politics of solidarity and socialism against the politics of division and despair to point a way forward for workers and students everywhere.

22 May 2022

Source **Red Flag**. Footnotes by **IVP**

The dashed hopes of the new Chilean left

23 May 2022, by **Tristan Katz**

Today, inflation is devouring the meagre incomes of the majority of Chileans, the violence caused by growing poverty, the repression of social struggles, the return of the far right via the transport strikes are all problems that underline the limits of his electoral programme. With a popularity rating of between 18% (Cadem, Datainfluye, Criteria) and 33% (Pulso Ciudadano), the left in power is under pressure.

A stubborn social reality and new tensions

The global return of inflation is not sparing Chile. The CPI, the government's price measurement index, estimates that in April 2022 it will rise by 10.5%, bringing the increase in prices to levels not seen for 30 years. Vegetable oil has risen by 24.7% in one month (62% in one year), petrol by 30%, and double-digit increases for most basic necessities. This price shock is hitting the working classes hard. The official figures for poverty (10.8%) in 2021 are contradicted by the estimates of independent research institutes (such as the SOL foundation), which put it at 39.9%, with 55% of women raising their families alone below the poverty line. The statements of the Minister of the Economy, Nicolas Grau - a socialist, we are told, but a former real director of the Central Bank - make forecasts that sound like promises, talk about direct aid that is overdue, and evacuate the central demand for an increase in wages.

The May Day demonstrations illustrated the political and social tensions that are building up. On the one hand, a rally in support of the government around the CUT and the coalition parties, on the other, a left-wing opposition with a dissident class struggle trade union pole and social movements. The latter was the target of repression. Nothing surprising so far: the high school and student movement had the right to the truncheons and tear gas of the left a few weeks ago for simply asking the government to keep its promises. The novelty comes from a serious incident that sets the tone for the period to come. The carabinieri were voluntarily demobilised and were absent from this rally. The procession was attacked by the extreme right, in the form of gangs, on the pretext of protecting shopkeepers. The attack was premeditated, with video evidence of precise gunfire, resulting in the shooting of four people, including three independent journalists (among the victims Francisca Sandoval was hit in the head). What has deeply shocked the working class, and not only the militants, is the complacency of the government that is supposed to mark a real break with the old world. Many discussions revolve around the question: did the government let the situation fester? In any case, the government is playing with double standards, as in the case of the transporters' strike (with strong links to the extreme right and demanding more repression against the actions of the Mapuche collectives), which is active, violent but not hindered by the police, and social demands are repressed... as before.

The constituent process in crisis

Social promises were not the strong point of the Chilean left; it had staked everything on democratic renewal and the end of the Constitution resulting from the Pinochet dictatorship. The law 21-200 decreeing the modalities of a constituent assembly, the designation of deputies and the final validation of the new constitution contained ambiguities, like Boric's election. The new president relied on a limited electorate of 25% and on two coalitions: one from the new left and the other from the governing left of the former Concertation (coalition of Christian Democrats, Socialists). The same applies to the fate of the Constituent Assembly, because there is a profound contradiction between the mechanisms for opening up the constituent process (elections, agenda, scope of changes) and a system of validation that does not work by simple majority. So many things have been discussed, from the plurinational character of Chile to new rights (civil, education, gender, end of water privatisation, etc.), but conservative circles have a de facto blocking minority. Social discontent and the fear of the petty bourgeoisie - which the right-wing press dramatises with the explosion of delinquency (homicides have doubled in one year), associated with migrants - could put a stop to the only tangible promise of this supposedly renewed left and open up an unprecedented political crisis.

19 May 2022

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

“Nationtime”: The Black Political Convention

22 May 2022, by **Malik Miah**

The meeting discussed a Black Agenda that raised the proposal of political independence from the two major parties and whether an independent Black political party could be forged.

This writer participated in the convention, one of dozens of young socialists who had been involved in the civil rights and anti-police violence struggles, as well as the antiwar movement that had broad support among African Americans.

I had organized protests in my home city of Detroit in high school and college. I came to Gary as both a revolutionary socialist and militant Black nationalist. My organizations — the Young Socialist Alliance and Socialist Workers Party — expected “the coming American socialist revolution” to be a combined struggle of the working class for power and for national liberation of the oppressed Black nationality.

Power of the Moment

Despite political and ideological differences, participants were united in frustration with the Democratic and Republican parties whose national conventions loomed on the horizon. We wrestled with one major question: Should Black people build within, or from outside, the system?

As part of the Black Agenda, the Gary Declaration issued by the convention stated that the political system was failing Black people and the only way to address this problem was a transition to independent Black politics.

The concept of self-determination for an oppressed nation within an imperialist state like the United States means first, organizing independently of the mainstream political structures

and posing openly: Should we demand our own nation?

“A schism had developed among those who wanted to work within the system versus Black nationalists who were basically saying it needed to be torn down,” said Leonard Moore, a history professor at the University of Texas-Austin and author of a book about the event.

“But there was a collective feeling that ‘We need to come together, because we’re all over the place.’ Organizers wanted to get all these Black voices around the table.” (Quoted in *USA Today*, February 1, 2022)

The context was important. There were few Black elected officials anywhere and there was a powerful anti-Vietnam war movement that most civil rights and Black nationalists supported.

Martin Luther King, Jr. had spoken out in 1967, one year before his assassination. His voice then was a minority among the Black liberal establishment. That changed afterwards.

The historic gathering was arranged by Gary Mayor Richard Gordon Hatcher, one of the first Black mayors at the time, poet and prominent Pan Africanist Amiri Baraka, and Democratic U.S. Rep. Charles Diggs of Detroit, Michigan, chair of the newly formed Congressional Black Caucus.

There were young activists and entertainers like Harry Belafonte and Dick Gregory, socialists, and Pan-Africanists.

Rev. Jesse Jackson of Operation PUSH stirred up the crowd with a forceful call-and-response speech declaring it was: “Nationtime.”

“I don’t want to be the gray shadow of a white elephant or the gray shadow of a white donkey,” Jackson told the

audience. “I am a Black man, and I want a Black party.”

He asked: “For Black Democrats, Black Republicans, Black Panthers, Black Muslims, Black independents, Black business owners, Black professionals, Black mothers on welfare — what time is it?”

“Nationtime!” the crowd cried.

(A documentary unearthed in a Pittsburgh warehouse in 2018, narrated by Sidney Poitier and Harry Belafonte, “Nationtime” presents a dynamic and powerful look at the three-day Gary convention. See the [film trailer](#).)

Why the Convention Happened

The national Black community was still shaken by the King assassination four years earlier, and by police brutality and worsening conditions in the urban “ghettos.”

In 1972, crisis plagued Black America. Heroin ravaged inner cities, Black soldiers were dying in Vietnam and unrest from Chicago, Newark, and Detroit to Los Angeles had instilled a realization that legal civil rights were inadequate without addressing Black poverty and unemployment.

With the Black Power movement at an elevated level, and the formation of the Congressional Black Caucus in 1971, two growing camps — nationalists and integrationists — found themselves at odds.

“Black people were increasingly the margin of difference for Democratic candidates,” said Ron Daniels, a member of Ohio’s convention delegation and now president of the Institute of the Black World 21st

Century, a Black empowerment organization. "But the feeling was they were not getting rewards proportionate to their support."

Hatcher, who represented the establishment but also identified with Baraka's nationalist views, approached leaders of potential sites such as New York, Chicago and Atlanta, but found them hesitant to host such an event, fearing chaos and violence.

Instead, he offered up Gary — specifically West Side High, since the city of 175,000 had no hotel large enough to accommodate such a large gathering.

The so-called Steel City, 40 miles east of Chicago, seemed an unlikely place for a political insurgency. But Hatcher was one of the country's first elected Black mayors, and with a Black police chief, the city represented what Black people could do at a local level.

Hatcher had Gary's City Hall draped in red, black, and green banners.

"Mayor Hatcher was a visionary," said Vernon Smith, an Indiana state representative of 32 years who attended the event as a newly elected Gary city council member. "He saw the strength that could be amassed if we brought everyone together."

Historic Importance

The three-day event would ultimately form a National Black Political Assembly to implement its 68-page agenda. But it would be eight years later that a National Black Independent Political Party (NBIPP) was created.

The euphoria of wide unity evident at the gathering would be short-lived. The most radical pro-Black party wing lost, and the establishment figures became elected officials, businesspeople and academics.

Socialists saw the gathering as historic in the moment no matter what later happened, showing that militant Black nationalism is a byproduct of systemic racism and capitalism.

Our belief is that the nationally oppressed can win self-determination only with the overthrow of the capitalist system. The fight for

democratic freedom and equality is the road to do so.

My views were reflected in an article by Derrick Morrison, in *The Militant* (April 14, 1972):

Despite a muted discussion and bureaucratic organization, the National Black Political Convention held March 10-12 in Gary, Ind. reflected a new stage in the developing nationalist consciousness of Black people. Up to now, the most vigorous examples of the organization of Black people as an oppressed nationality had been provided by Black students, Black GIs, Black prisoners, in some cases Black workers, and in a few cases Black women.

But now even the Black Democratic politicians are reflecting the deepening discontent and nationalist sentiments of the Black community. Only a few years ago they denounced as racism in reverse all efforts at organizing Black people as a people; now they are legitimizing this concept on new levels.

The Movement for Black Lives in 2020 cited the historic gathering as a model for its 2020 virtual convention, and this April 2022, Mayor Ras Baraka of Newark, New Jersey, is continuing his late father's legacy by convening a 50th anniversary event in Newark along with Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba of Jackson, Mississippi.

This year's gathering, Baraka said, marks a chance for the community to harness the resolve and pledges made in the wake of George Floyd's murder and the Black Lives Matter movement to forge an agenda around which to politically organize — the same goal sought in 1972.

"It's more than just a festive occasion," Lumumba added. "We are coming in with a real desire to push forward Black America's agenda. We may have more Black leadership nationwide, but we still have rampant

poverty, failing infrastructure in our communities and issues of equity and justice. All of those need to be addressed with our collective genius."

A Period of Upheavals

The year 1972 was a period of rising class struggle and resistance to racism, national oppression, sexism and other issues.

The Black Liberation movement had led the way since the 1960s and inspired other social groups. In the Southwest, Mexican American and Chicano communities raised similar democratic demands for La Raza.

Puerto Ricans in New York City, Chicago and other urban areas demanded self-determination for Puerto Rico. Militant activists organized the Young Lords (inspired by the Black Panther Party) in Chicago and the Bronx, New York in fighting for community control.

The year was also a key period for the women's rights movement. The central issue during this second wave of feminism was abortion rights, the fight to control their own bodies. The Supreme Court had not yet ruled in favor of that basic human right, which today's Court plans to overturn.

The Gay and Lesbian rights movement was also on the rise across the country, not just in San Francisco and New York City.

The first Earth Day occurred in 1970 and the Environmental movement pressured the Nixon administration to set up the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) in 1970.

Labor unions were fighting back, especially Black workers who were placed in the worse jobs and historically excluded from the skilled trades such as mechanics and pilots.

In basic industries including coal and iron ore mining, steel production and auto manufacturing, union workers were winning stakes and internal democratic reforms. Miners for Democracy threw out the Tony Boyle gangster union bureaucracy.

Steelworkers Fight Back was challenging the entrenched leadership.

In the auto workers union, reform and radical groups like the League of Revolutionary Black Workers was an important force for militant activism. Public sector union militancy was also emerging among teachers and health care workers.

The biggest social movement in 1972 was the antiwar movement against the U.S. war on the Vietnamese people. The final U.S. defeat was still three years away.

African liberation struggles were advancing. As an activist in the Pan Africanist movement, I joined in protests in support of the armed national liberation movements in the Portuguese colonies of Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde Islands.

The fall of Portugal's authoritarian dictatorship did not occur until April, 1974 when left wing officers took power. The Portuguese African colonies soon won their independence.

White rulers in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and South Africa were still in power. Nelson Mandela was still in prison and apartheid did not fall until 1994.

The events of 1972 thus were part of other major social political changes that rocked the United States and world. Some led to freedom as in the African colonies; others led to the deep incorporation of the Black political leadership into the Democratic Party and capitalist institutions.

Many young people went Left and became more committed to revolutionary change. Gary reflected all these elements — liberalism and revolutionary nationalism — at a moment when it was unclear what the future would become.

Seeking Political Leverage

Long before the Gary convention, political gatherings of Black people

had taken place periodically since the 1820s in cities such as Cincinnati, Philadelphia, Chicago and New Orleans.

Organizers of the 1972 event at minimum aimed to inspire more Black people to pursue political office.

Black Congresspeople hoped to leverage the resulting agenda to extract concessions from both parties at the upcoming conventions. At the time there were fewer than 1000 Black elected officeholders across the country, from local and state to federal levels. Today there are thousands (including Black Republicans).

The event also involved Coretta Scott King and Betty Shabazz, the widows of King and Malcolm X, as well as James Brown, Isaac Hayes, Muhammad Ali and Richard Roundtree, star of the 1971 film "Shaft."

Delegates gathered around signs designating their home states, taking notes on the proceedings.

The gathering was not without rancor. Shirley Chisholm of New York, the first Black person to seek a major party's presidential nomination and the first woman to seek the Democratic Party nomination, boycotted the convention when organizers failed to endorse her, a rejection she saw as sexist. Instead Chisholm traveled to Florida to stump for votes.

NAACP leaders objected to what they felt was the "separatist" nature of calls for a third party reflected in the Gary Declaration, which read: "By now we must know that the American political system, like all other white institutions in America, was designed to operate for the benefit of the white race: It was never meant to do anything else."

The document called for radical change. "Such responsibility is ours," it said, "because it is our people who are most deeply hurt and ravaged by the present systems of society."

Mayor Hatcher advocated giving Democrats one last chance, but declared in his keynote address that if the parties failed the community

again, they would suffer the consequences. That included the threat of a third party that he claimed would siphon away support from other communities of color, as well as "the best of white America."

"We shall take with us many a white youth nauseated by the corrupt values rotting the innards of this society," Hatcher said.

"Nationtime," Unity and Decline

Bobby Seale, who along with Huey Newton founded the Black Panthers in 1966, was among those at the convention emphasizing political involvement, frustrated by what he saw as time wasted debating cultural nationalism.

"It's not about that," he said he recalled thinking. "It's about political power. They're the ones who manage the money."

Then came Jesse Jackson's rousing "Nationtime" oration.

"You could hear it reverberating Marcus Garvey," recalled former NAACP executive director Ben Chavis, then a North Carolina delegate, in a 1989 interview conducted for PBS: "Eyes on the Prize II."

"You could hear it reverberating all those prize struggles from the '20s, and the '30s, and the '50s and the '60s. I mean, it came to be fulfilled in that moment, of crying that it's Nationtime, now — not next year, not next century, but now. In 1972. In Gary, Indiana."

Within months of the convention, however, the cohesion had begun to dissipate as mainstream Black leaders withdrew support for the Agenda, citing contentious issues like reparations and its support for Palestinian liberation.

The final Agenda was considered overly broad, alienating many while trying to please all. "They willy-nilly adopted everything," one delegate said. "This led to conflicts that would lead to dissolution of the whole thing. There was no way those fundamental

differences could come to any compromise.”

In 1974, a second Black convention would follow in Little Rock, Arkansas, with other gatherings taking place only sporadically afterward.

The National Black Political Assembly, which had been formed as a compromise to those calling for a third party, eventually fizzled, victim of an ill-defined infrastructure.

For convention organizers, simply pulling off the gathering was itself a victory, and it succeeded where they intended — at the ballot box.

“If you’re looking for 100% unison, it was doomed going in,” an organizer said. “The true value of the convention wasn’t necessarily the agenda or the position papers. It was that immediately after the convention Black people went home and ran for office. It ushered in a new Black political culture. By the end of the ’70s, you had several thousand Black elected officials.”

In 1973, Atlanta and Los Angeles elected Black mayors in Maynard Jackson and Tom Bradley. “Black folks came off the sidelines and decided that Black politics mattered,” Daniels said.

With the focus on elected officials, the Black Power movement began to decline. Meanwhile, the Congressional Black Caucus took on the community’s umbrella leadership role.

The convention laid the groundwork not just for Jesse Jackson’s 1984 presidential campaign — but likely Barack Obama’s presidential campaign and victory as well as Kamala Harris’s vice-presidential run.

Political Incorporation

Of course, more Black faces as part of the ruling parties and state structures did not benefit everyone. In the wake of successive recessions, deindustrialization, the 2008 financial crash and Covid, the majority of working class African Americans are less well off than in the 1970s.

Some 12 years later in 1984 and again in 1988, Jesse Jackson ran for the Democratic Party presidential nomination. Under a radical democratic platform echoing the Black Assembly, his 1988 Rainbow Coalition created an unprecedented multiethnic support network even winning some state primaries. Yet we were no closer to “Nationtime” or a Black independent party.

The fundamental political error made at those conventions, beginning with Gary, was the pursuit of a strategy of working in or with the Democratic Party and looking towards its politicians for leadership.

Instead of an independent course, the result was incorporation into the system.

The NBIPP Effort

Eight years after Gary, it became clear that the strategy of working within the political system was a failure. The Black party should have been formed out of the 1972 convention, even if only by the most left wing sectors of the Black movement.

The National Black Independent Political Party came too late in 1980. Jackson did not join it as he had become a player in the Democratic Party.

Yet it was significant that the NBIPP was formed. It represented the radical nationalist perspectives of the Black rights movement. That voice remains alive to this day.

D.L. Chandler wrote recently:

The National Black Independent Political Party (NBIPP) was formed in November 1980 as a response to the growing concerns of the African American community and their place in the political ecosystem. To date, the NBIPP remains as perhaps the most prominent example of Blacks breaking with the major two-party system of Democrats and Republicans.

Keeping true to its overall mission,

the national charter expressed its concerns and aims in pointed fashion.

‘The National Black Independent Political Party aims to attain power to radically transform the present socio-economic order. That is, to achieve self-determination and social and political freedom for the masses of Black people. Therefore, our party will actively oppose racism, imperialism, sexual oppression, and capitalist exploitation,’ the charter stated.

The NBIPP disbanded after just six years with little in the way of explanation. Although several books have since been written about the rise and fall of the NBIPP, few outside documents point to the machinations behind the party’s end.

As a supporter and promoter of NBIPP, I knew it was nearly impossible for it to run candidates. The Old Guard, including Jesse Jackson and the Black elected officials had decided that independent politics was not the way forward for their careers and the Black community.

The Black middle class grew in the post-civil rights revolution era. It became the base for these new empowered Democrats.

Nevertheless, the Black Agenda created in 1972 and the formation of NBIPP marked milestones for the Black left, including those of us active in the socialist movement.

It was my view that an independent Black party could lead to increased street actions and multiethnic unity, including the formation of an independent Labor party unifying Blacks, and the broader working-class population.

We thought that radical change was possible soon. NBIPP’s collapse, in fact, was due to objective changes in the class struggle in the 1980s. Backlash and White Supremacy

The right-wing white backlash was beginning everywhere. Some eight years after Gary, Ronald Reagan was

elected president. He openly appealed to white racism.

One of his first actions was attacking Black rights (then falsely calling affirmative action programs as a form of “reverse racism”) and the union movement. He and many Democrats also criticized busing programs to desegregate public schools.

Reagan broke the strike of air traffic controllers in 1981, and the AFL-CIO did nothing. This gave employers the green light to use scabs and go after private and public sector unions.

A flaw in our socialist analysis of the Gary event was that we never explicitly explained the ideology of white supremacy.

Socialists and militant nationalists attacked the root cause of national oppression and racism — the capitalist system. But the ideology of white

supremacy was key to capital’s divide-and-rule methods.

Whites are taught at an early age that people of color, especially Native Americans and descendants of slaves, were inferior. Racism is central to capitalist rule.

Key to Building Unity

Unity did happen in the 1960s at the height of the civil rights battle. But it was never as strong as needed.

Many on the left saw class “bread and butter” issues as the way to bring white and Black people together. But downplaying the national oppression of Blacks and others is why the ruling class has effectively divided the working class since even before the

1776 revolution.

White people including workers will and can be radicalized around issues of racism, as the anti-police violence movement in 2020 showed. But it must be done openly. Unconscious bias must be confronted.

The far right understands this better than liberals. They use “cultural” issues to convince many white people to protect their advantages as whites. It is not a surprise that these same elements want to ban books from schools that discuss Black history and racism.

Despite their unfulfilled promise, the Gary convention — its debates and written program — and the later formation of NBIPP remain important events to study and learn from.

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The Economic Consequences of the War

21 May 2022, by **By Rajan Menon**

Not surprisingly, following Russia’s February 24th invasion, coverage has focused mainly on the day-to-day fighting; the destruction of Ukrainian economic assets, ranging from buildings and bridges to factories and whole cities; the plight of both Ukrainian refugees and internally displaced people, or IDPs; and the mounting evidence of atrocities. The war’s potential long-term economic effects in and beyond Ukraine haven’t attracted nearly as much attention, for understandable reasons. They’re less visceral and, by definition, less immediate. Yet the war will take a huge economic toll, not just on Ukraine but on desperately poor people living thousands of miles away. Wealthier countries will experience the ill effects of the war, too, but be better able to cope with them.

Shattered Ukraine

Some expect this war to last [years](#), even [decades](#), though that estimate seems far too bleak. What we do know, however, is that, even two months in, Ukraine’s economic losses and the outside assistance that country will need ever to achieve anything resembling what once passed for normal are staggering.

Let’s start with Ukraine’s refugees and IDPs. Together, the two groups already make up 29% of the country’s total population. To put that in perspective, try to imagine 97 million Americans finding themselves in such a predicament in the next two months.

As of late April, [5.4 million](#) Ukrainians had fled the country for Poland and other neighboring lands. Even though many — estimates vary between several hundred thousand and a

million — have started returning, it’s unclear whether they will be able to stay (which is why the U.N.’s figures exclude them from its estimate of the total number of refugees). If the war worsens and does indeed last years, a continuing exodus of refugees could result in a total unimaginable today.

That will put even more strain on the countries hosting them, especially Poland, which has already admitted nearly [three million](#) fleeing Ukrainians. One estimate of what it costs to provide them with basic needs is [\\$30 billion](#). And that’s for a single year. Moreover, when that projection was made there were a million fewer refugees than there are now. Add to that the [7.7 million](#) Ukrainians who have left their homes but not the country itself. The cost of making all these lives whole again will be staggering.

Once the war ends and those 12.8

million uprooted Ukrainians begin to try to rebuild their lives, many will find that their [apartment buildings and homes](#) are no longer standing or not habitable. The [hospitals and clinics](#) they depended on, the places they worked, their children's [schools](#), the shops and [malls](#) in Kyiv and [elsewhere](#) where they bought basic necessities may have been razed or badly damaged, too. The Ukrainian economy is expected to contract by 45% this year alone, hardly surprising considering that half of its businesses aren't operating and, according to the [World Bank](#), its seaborne exports from its now embattled southern coast have effectively ceased. To return even to pre-war levels of production will take at least several years.

About [one-third](#) of Ukraine's infrastructure (bridges, roads, rail lines, waterworks, and the like) has already been damaged or demolished. Repairing or rebuilding it will require between [\\$60 billion](#) and [\\$119 billion](#). Ukraine's Finance Minister reckons that if lost production, exports, and revenue are added in, the total damage done by the war already exceeds [\\$500 billion](#). That's nearly four times the value of Ukraine's [gross domestic product in 2020](#).

And mind you, such figures are approximations at best. The true costs will undoubtedly be higher and vast sums in assistance from international financial organizations and Western countries needed for years to come. At a meeting convened by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, Ukraine's Prime Minister [estimated](#) that the rebuilding of his country would require \$600 billion and that he needs \$5 billion a month for the next five months just to bolster its budget. Both organizations have already swung into action. In early March, the IMF approved a [\\$1.4 billion emergency loan](#) for Ukraine and the World Bank an additional [\\$723 million](#). And that's sure to be just the beginning of a long-term flow of funds into Ukraine from those two lenders, while individual Western governments and the European Union will doubtless provide their own loans and grants.

The West: Higher Inflation, Lower Growth

The economic shock waves created by the war are already hurting Western economies and the pain will only increase. Economic growth in the wealthiest European countries was 5.9% in 2021. The IMF [anticipates](#) that it will fall to 3.2% in 2022 and to 2.2% in 2023. Meanwhile, between just February and March of this year, inflation in Europe [surged](#) from 5.9% to 7.9%. And that looks modest compared to the leap in European energy prices. By March they had already risen a whopping [45%](#) compared to a year ago.

The good news, reports the Financial Times, is that unemployment has fallen to a record low of 6.8%. The bad news: inflation outran wages, so workers were actually earning 3% less.

As for the United States, economic growth, projected at [3.7%](#) for 2022, is likely to be better than in leading European economies. However, the [Conference Board](#), a think tank for its 2,000 member businesses, expects growth to dip to 2.2% in 2023. Meanwhile, the U.S. inflation rate reached [8.54%](#) in late March. That's twice what it was 12 months ago and the highest it's been since [1981](#). Jerome Powell, chair of the Federal Reserve, has warned that the war will create additional inflation. New York Times columnist and economist Paul Krugman believes that it will drop, but if so, the question is: When and how rapidly? Besides, Krugman expects price increases to [get worse](#) before they begin to ease. The Fed can curb inflation by jacking up interest rates, but that could end up further reducing economic growth. Indeed, Deutsche Bank made news on April 26th with its prediction that the Fed's battle against inflation will create a "[major recession](#)" in the U.S. late next year.

Along with Europe and the U.S., the Asia-Pacific, the world's third economic powerhouse, won't escape unscathed either. Citing the effects of the war, the [IMF](#) cut its growth

forecast for that region by another 0.5% to 4.9% this year compared to 6.5% last year. Inflation in the Asia-Pacific has been low but is expected to rise in a number of countries.

Such unwelcome trends can't all be attributed to the war alone. The Covid-19 pandemic had created problems on many fronts and U.S. inflation was already creeping up before the invasion, but it will certainly make matters worse. Consider energy prices since February 24th, the day the war started. The [price of oil](#) was then at \$89 a barrel. After zigs and zags and a March 9th peak of \$119, it stabilized (at least for now) at \$104.7 on April 28rd — a 17.6% jump in two months. Appeals by the [U.S.](#) and [British](#) governments to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to increase oil production went nowhere, so no one should expect quick relief.

Rates for [container shipping](#) and [air cargo](#), already hiked by the pandemic, rose further following the invasion of Ukraine and [supply-chain disruptions](#) worsened as well. Food prices also rose, not only due to higher energy costs but also because Russia accounts for nearly 18% of [global exports](#) of wheat (and Ukraine 8%), while Ukraine's share of global corn exports is [16%](#) and the two countries together account for more than [a quarter of global exports of wheat](#), a crucial crop for so many countries.

Russia and Ukraine also produce [80%](#) of the world's sunflower oil, widely used for cooking. Rising prices and shortages of this commodity are already apparent, not only in the European Union, but also in poorer parts of the world like the [Middle East](#) and [India](#), which gets nearly all of its supply from Russia and Ukraine. In addition, [70%](#) of Ukraine's exports are carried by ships and both the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov are now war zones.

The Plight of "Low-Income"

Countries

The slower growth, price hikes, and higher interest rates resulting from the efforts of central banks to tame inflation, as well as increased unemployment, will hurt people living in the West, particularly the poorest among them who spend a far larger proportion of their earnings on basic necessities like food and gas. But “low-income countries” (according to the World Bank’s [definition](#), those with an average per-capita annual income below \$1,045 in 2020), particularly their poorest denizens, will be hit so much harder. Given Ukraine’s enormous financial needs and the West’s determination to meet them, the low-income countries are likely to find it far more difficult to get the financing for the debt payments they’ll owe because of increased borrowing to cover the rising costs of imports, especially essentials like energy and food. Add to that [reduced export earnings](#) owing to slower global economic growth.

The Covid-19 pandemic had already forced low-income countries to weather the economic storm by borrowing more, but low interest rates made their debt, already at a record [\\$860 billion](#), somewhat easier to manage. Now, with global growth ebbing and the costs of energy and food rising, they’ll be forced to borrow at far higher interest rates, which will only increase their repayment burden.

During the pandemic, [60%](#) of low-income countries required relief from their debt-repayment obligations (compared to 30% in 2015). Higher interest rates, along with higher food and energy prices, will now worsen their predicament. This month, for instance, [Sri Lanka](#) defaulted on its debt. [Prominent economists](#) warn that that might prove to be a bellwether, since other countries like [Egypt](#), [Pakistan](#), and [Tunisia](#) face similar debt problems that the war is aggravating. Together, 74 low-income countries owed [\\$35 billion in debt repayments](#) this year, a 45% increase from 2020.

And those, mind you, are not even considered low-income countries. For them, the IMF has traditionally served as the lender of last resort, but will they be able to count on its help when Ukraine also urgently needs huge loans? The IMF and the World Bank can seek additional contributions from their wealthy member states, but will they get them, when those countries are also coping with growing economic problems and worrying about their own angry voters?

Of course, the greater the debt burden of low-income countries, the less they’ll be able to help their poorest citizens handle higher prices for essentials, especially food. The Food and Agricultural Organization’s food price index rose [12.6%](#) just from February to March and was already 33.6% higher than a year ago.

Soaring wheat prices — at one point, the price per bushel [nearly doubled](#) before settling at a level 38% higher than last year — have already created shortages of flour and bread in Egypt, Lebanon, and Tunisia, which not long ago looked to Ukraine for between 25% and 80% of their wheat imports. Other countries, like [Pakistan and Bangladesh](#) — the former buys nearly 40% of its wheat from Ukraine, the latter 50% from Russia and Ukraine — could face the same problem.

The place suffering the most from skyrocketing food prices may be Yemen, a country that has been mired in civil war for years and faced chronic food shortages and famine well before Russia invaded Ukraine. Thirty percent of Yemen’s imported wheat comes from Ukraine and, thanks to the reduction in supply created by the war, the price per kilogram has already risen nearly five-fold in its south. The [World Food Program \(WFP\)](#) has been spending an extra \$10 million a month for its operations there, since nearly 200,000 people could face “famine-like conditions” and 7.1 million in total will experience “emergency levels of hunger.” The problem isn’t confined to

countries like Yemen, though. According to the [WFP](#), 276 million people worldwide faced “acute hunger” even before the war began and if it drags on into the summer another 27 million to 33 million may find themselves in just that precarious position.

The Urgency of Peace — And Not Just for Ukrainians

The magnitude of the funds needed to rebuild Ukraine, the importance the U.S., Britain, the European Union, and Japan attach to that goal, and the increasing cost for critical imports are going to put the world’s poorest countries in an even tougher economic spot. To be sure, poor people in wealthy countries are also vulnerable, but those in the poorest ones will suffer so much more.

Many are already barely surviving and lack the array of social services available to the poor in wealthy nations. The American social safety net [is threadbare](#) compared to its European analogues, but at least there *is* such a thing. Not so in the poorest countries. There, the least fortunate scrape by with little, if any, help from their governments. Only [20% of them](#) are covered in any way by such programs.

The world’s poorest bear no responsibility for the war in Ukraine and have no capacity to bring it to an end. Other than the Ukrainians themselves, however, they will be hurt worst by its prolongation. The most impoverished among them are not being shelled by the Russians or occupied and subjected to war crimes like the inhabitants of the Ukrainian town of [Bucha](#). Still, for them, too, ending the war is a matter of life or death. That much they share with the people of Ukraine.

3 May 2022

Source [TomDispatch](#).

Where is the Left on pandemic politics?

20 May 2022, by **Justin Feldman and Sam Friedman**

The corporate liberals who dominate politics in much of the United States, Canada, and Europe, meanwhile, had for some months been promulgating the idea of a return to normalcy (by which they mean profitability and international economic competitiveness) since it is the retired elderly, workers, and racially oppressed peoples who are doing most of the dying, and since the impact of the pandemic could be simplistically and

inaccurately reduced to a question of vaccine refusal among politically reactionary individuals.

“Returning to normalcy”

In recent weeks, a more pointed push towards “returning to normalcy” and “treating COVID-19 as endemic rather than an epidemic” to justify this has become hegemonic among Biden administration officials, corporate liberal governors, and media pundits. Although a full explanation of the politics behind this turn may need to await academic treatment in a year or two, it seems to us that the roots of this change lie in the emerging economic situation and the level of working-class activity. For some months now, it has been clear that the pandemic had ushered in a shortage of workers to staff lower-paid service jobs, drivers, warehouse workers, nurses, and other hospital employees. This was enabling a rise in strike activity and considerable pressure on employers to improve pay and working conditions to attract new employees. Further, the shortage of workers was contributing to disrupted supply chains, and thus to inflation. Once the Omicron wave began to recede, the idea that it might be possible to “open up” again without “unacceptably many” immediate deaths, the ruling class had every incentive to emphasize and enact the return to “normalcy.”

A major first push came around opening schools and unmasking

students as part of normalization. Opening schools would be a relief for many parents who have had to go to work every day without childcare, and for other parents who were tired of having their kids around all the time. Further, the number of kids who would get seriously sick would be relatively limited due to the nature of COVID-19 disease (particularly since the number of people who get Long COVID, with its impact on brain size and mental fog, is not systematically tracked by state or local Health Departments or by CDC. The United Kingdom does track such data. These show that in January 2022, over 2 percent of the nation’s population had self-reported Long COVID for four weeks or more after they first knew they were infected). Thus, it would be a relatively easy first step towards normalization. Since most pandemic-specific forms of income support and eviction protection have ended or been weakened, and prices have been rising rapidly, this would free parents with child care responsibility to be pushed into seeking jobs, and would make it easier to force people who had been working from home to return to their offices or other workplaces where managerial control could be tighter and productivity increased.

Low visibility of Left

Throughout this pandemic, the Left has had little visible presence in pandemic politics, which is both a sign of the Left’s weakness and a real failure on the part of its leadership. Once again, the very crisis that socialists discuss as being the opportunity for revolutionary change is being missed—and it is a tragedy. At the start of the pandemic, socialists like Mike Davis and Rob Wallace had by far the clearest visions of the roots of the pandemic in capital accumulation processes, and these

views were acceptable to a large number of people. For example, during this period, one of this article's authors submitted several articles to public health journals that stated that capitalism was at the root of this pandemic, and explained how this was true. All were published, and none of the claims about capitalism were questioned by any of the peer reviewers or editors. Although public health researchers tend to be social democratic or corporate liberal politically, our prior experience had been that identifying capitalism by name as a root cause of epidemics was consistently challenged by reviewers.

Not only did we know that the pandemic was rooted in capitalism, we understood that the cutbacks of the last 40 years had hollowed out health departments' and hospitals' ability to engage in effective infection prevention campaigns or even to care for patients given the number of people with severe disease. Further, we knew that the economic shutdowns and other public health protections that impose restrictions on business would not fare well politically under a system built on anti-regulatory politics and these measures would also lead to longer-term economic problems for capitalism. A few months into the pandemic, David McNally spoke to a radical New Jersey meeting in June 2020 about how supply chain disruptions would continue for many, many months or years to come, and that this would lead many working-class people to question how they spent their time and to think about basic social change.

Further, socialist activists were involved in a number of the early pandemic labor struggles, such as the strikes and demonstrations of hospital workers to gain access to personal protective equipment and other ways to keep themselves safe and to reduce their workloads and stress. Socialist teachers, along with many others, were active in discussing and planning how to keep schools closed when pandemic conditions made them unsafe, as well as working to provide a good education to children while schools were closed. The Chicago Teachers Union conducted a massive strike around these issues early this year, and received widespread support

from community members (although less than in prior strikes), and though the settlement made some gains, it was a disappointment and left many students, teachers, and others at risk.

Socialists are also poised to have a voice in additional labor struggles as part of rank and file movements like TDU or through working with Labor Notes and its various occupational, industry, or union networks, as well as being part of various union organizing efforts. For this to be meaningful as part of pandemic politics, however, we need to have a clearer idea about how to engage the pandemic in ways that will gain widespread worker and community support.

And to repeat: Despite being in a position to build action and support around pandemic issues at its beginning, socialists have in recent months been near-invisible in the mass politics that have addressed the pandemic and the problems it poses for ordinary people. This has not, in our opinion, simply been due to our being shut out of the media. In many ways, it has been our own fault.

Part of the reason for this has been an over-emphasis on elections. Many socialists, both reformists and revolutionaries spent a lot of time campaigning in the 2020 elections out of fear of Trumpism at the same time that electoralism helped to de-energize the upsurge against racism that took part in the middle of 2020. The rapid collapse of the Sanders primary campaign left many socialists deflated and ultimately unclear about what political strategies to pursue under a Biden presidency. In terms of COVID-19, socialists and leaders of established Left organizations have largely not organized mass actions about the pandemic and its race and class implications. Many on the Left have adopted an analysis indistinguishable from that of corporate liberals who, once the vaccine became available, came to see non-pharmaceutical interventions as unnecessary and blamed the pandemic on the unvaccinated (this, despite low vaccination rates among lower-income workers as well as tens of thousands of deaths of vaccinated older and disabled people, largely those who had not received boosters).

Mutual aid efforts

Many people on the Left got heavily engaged in mutual aid efforts during the early months of the pandemic both because they were meeting people's urgent needs and because they hoped that such prefigurative politics would help to radicalize the people. Unfortunately, although these efforts were extremely useful in meeting needs, and some were groups who were active in the anti-racist mobilizations in the summer of 2020, they do not seem to have led to a lasting wider radicalization, at least so far.

Many leftists also took part in the Black Lives Matter protests, which constituted the largest mobilization in generations. The degree to which the uprisings of 2020 were related to the pandemic is unclear - that stage of the pandemic may have created a sense of solidarity that extended to racist police violence - and one task for the Left is to better theorize and understand their connections.

All during this time, the virus made workers and oppressed communities sick, and killed hundreds of thousands; and people became increasingly tired of the pandemic. The Right made hay of this situation by attempting to redirect people's exasperation away from the government's failure to protect them and towards public health measures themselves. While polling data shows that majorities of people of color and lower-income workers supported public health measures throughout the pandemic (and in fact wanted more), the policies that made these measures more tolerable such as expanded unemployment insurance, paid sick leave, and eviction moratoria ended, leading to needless harm and likely fueling a degree of popular pushback against protections. Additionally, liberals and right-wingers alike developed narratives justifying the mass death that was occurring - these resonated powerfully because they drew upon dominant features of U.S. society including individualism, vindictiveness, and the specters of eugenics and Social Darwinism. These narratives explained that when someone died of COVID-19, it was

because they were unfit in one sense (old age, disability) or another (a lack of intelligence or aptitude about making decisions regarding vaccination) and therefore their lives did not matter.

We should have been able to counter this with our well-founded analyses of why people should blame our rulers and the capitalist system whose needs the rulers aim to serve. But we failed to do so adequately.

The beginning of organized left responses

On the positive side, in recent months a number of new left initiatives have begun to cohere. One of the authors of this piece has been involved with two of them, the People's CDC and Vax-Plus. People's CDC (PCDC), together with other groups, has recently issued *The Urgency of Equity: A Toolkit to Make Schools Safer for All* from COVID-19 and an opinion piece in the *Guardian*. This Toolkit debunks many of the claims made by the Urgency of Now supporters of a return to normalcy, including presenting evidence that masking does not hurt the mental health of kids. It should be politically useful, but its analysis and suggestions face a fierce potential fightback from the supporters of a return to bourgeois normalcy. PCDC has also issued its first "People's Weather/Whether Report" which will be updated on a regular basis and will include estimates of the state of the pandemic in different parts of the United States together with advice about how people can protect themselves and each other. This report will not merely be updated along with the pandemic's evolution and scientific discoveries, it will also be updated based on community feedback. Importantly, its recommendations take seriously the ways in which current CDC advice and the actions of the U.S. and state governments are understating the risks of Long COVID, the risks of infection of older people, and the certainty of continued viral evolution and thus of new strains.

Other COVID-oriented groups have been around longer, such as Marked by COVID, a group mainly of people who have lost relatives to the virus or who have themselves had to endure Long COVID.

All of these groups are to some degree new, and with somewhat still-developing politics, so we hope their members will see and discuss this article and any discussion it stirs up.

What should left groups and movements do now? A fuller program

There are several ways to address the issue of "what should we do." One is to discuss our policy demands on governments. Another is to discuss what kinds of mass education we might engage in together with community health outreach workers, Committee on Occupational Safety and Health (COSH) groups, and workplace activists about how people can protect themselves and each other in their daily lives. This has been a main focus of PCDC and VAX-Plus so far, but in our opinion, they have not yet taken up how this should address collective action and self-defense at schools and against employers or other powerful groups whose actions threaten public health. A third is to discuss how unions, other worker organizations, and community activists can engage in direct struggles with employers, the state, and the far-right around issues related to the pandemic. We shall discuss these one by one, while emphasizing that these three approaches will be most effective if they can come together into a unified movement for the changes we need.

Policy demands

- It is absolutely a high priority to end so-called "Intellectual Property Rights" that prevent governments and manufacturers in most of the world from producing vaccines against

COVID-19 and medicines (both prophylactics like Evusheld and therapeutics for when people get sick like Paxlovid). This is essential for the health of people all over the world. It will also slow down the development of dangerous variants of the virus—which threaten people in the United States and elsewhere. Indeed, as we write this article, the BA/2 variant of Omicron may be sparking another massive wave of infection and death for the world.

- We need an OSHA regulation that requires vaccination. It should also include ventilation standards, testing, paid quarantine and isolation, as well as masking based on local disease incidence.

- Government paychecks and political support for working people who walk off the job due to health threats at work.

- More generally, we need ventilation rules for buildings and governmental certification to help institutions buy effective systems, as it's currently very difficult to navigate for many smaller institutions. And funded assistance in planning and implementing effective installations. (Many COSH groups can provide assistance in finding relevant experts with workers' needs at heart)

- We need abundantly available and free rapid antigen tests. While supplies have increased since the peak of Omicron, these tests remain prohibitively • • We need to expand the Americans with Disabilities Act to account for infectious disease and within-household exposure. It should be easier to request accommodations and reasonable accommodations should also reflect take-home exposure. (For instance, if workers live with immunocompromised people).

- We need better social insurance policies for immunocompromised people whose living or work arrangements are no longer tenable in a world with endemic COVID-19, such as expanding Social Security Disability Insurance benefits that are made more accessible than under the current byzantine process.

- Full income support for those unable to work due to pandemic restrictions.

- Continued state and national moratoriums on evictions. Funding to provide legal and other support to

those facing housing crises of all sorts.

- Safe and pleasant housing for the homeless.
- Creation and funding of well-ventilated child care centers.
- We need a federal corps of public health workers that could send antivirals to people's homes, help with vaccination and testing, provide convenient access to N95 masks, conduct contact tracing where this makes sense, etc.
- Global and national regulations to restrict economic development efforts or factory farming of animals that opens the way for the development of and interspecies transfer of viruses or bacteria that can cause new pandemics.
- Adequately funded efforts to prepare for the next pandemic, whether it be flu, another coronavirus, or transmitted in the polluted waters people may have to drink given climate change.

Every day protection of oneself and others

Community, union, Left, harm reduction, and other people-based groups that distribute information about COVID-19 should extend their general pandemic education to include:

- Collective and individual protective behavior in workplaces. Under what conditions should workers, including teachers and hospital workers, simply go home to protect themselves or their families? Under what conditions should they and their co-workers walk off the job as a group? These are hard issues to discuss as a generality. It requires discussions among the workers themselves about the details, including the actual risks they are facing from the virus and the ways employers or others might act in retribution. But these issues need to be addressed. For teachers facing the unmasking fad that political officeholders have been engaged in at the request of the corporations (and of some parents), it is a critical issue. It has been a critical issue for warehouse workers, meatpackers, and others for two years now.

- Protecting kids and their families at schools: Similar information is needed by kids and their families. Under what conditions should the kids stay home because the schools are too dangerous? Under what conditions is this an individual decision, and when should it involve organized action by kids and/or parents?

- If necessary stores like groceries or pharmacies, or government offices like unemployment offices, allow maskless crowding, under what circumstances is this unsafe? What individual or collective actions are appropriate for customers/clients and for workers?

- The Left, particularly through groups like PCDC and VAX-Plus, can help provide the specific information that workers, kids, their families, and others will need to meet the pandemic threats they face when the powerful act in ways that endanger them. This requires detailed local understanding of the pandemic situation people are facing. PCDC and others can try to develop web-based tools to let local organizers and activists do this themselves, along with technical assistance when requested. The broader Left can take part in political struggles that these efforts provoke, and perhaps provide other forms of assistance.

Direct struggles for needed changes

Neither employers nor governments will agree to do what is needed to protect our health on their own. They both exist so companies can make a profit off of our labors, and use biased news reporting, police, and firings to enforce their will. Early in the pandemic, they saw COVID-19 both as a major threat to the health and lives of the rich and also as a threat to the workers, police, soldiers, and other employees they need to keep the system running. But science has developed vaccines and treatments which they can afford and which they think will keep most workers alive and able to do the work they need—so at this point, they are “returning to normal” so “the economy won’t suffer.”

Unfortunately, at best, this means that older people (whose labors are not all that needed, and who receive Social Security and cost a lot on Medicare, all using funds they could otherwise invest) will continue to die; Black people, Indigenous Peoples, Latino/as and people who work in the more dangerous industries will develop Long COVID or die; and new variants will develop among the unvaccinated in the poorer and unvaccinated countries of the world.

So we have to conduct struggles that will be effective.

- Actively support direct action, including walkouts and strikes, by students, teachers, and families to keep schools safe. Students, teachers, and family members should keep close tabs on the state of the pandemic in their local - - Support hospital and nursing home workers' demonstrations or strikes to protect their patients and themselves.

- If you work at a unionized workplace, pressure the union to take needed actions to protect yourself and others. This may include organizing for better contract language, and then waging campaigns to get unions to propose this language and to wage a serious battle for it. It also means working with others in your workgroup and beyond to walk off the job if conditions are too unsafe.

- If you work at a non-union workplace, work with your workgroup and beyond to push for safer conditions, including safety strikes if needed. This can also provide the organizing boost that can build a union.

- The policy demands are unlikely to be met without plenty of mass action. This may include mass protests to pressure local, state, or national officials. It may also require political strikes and road occupations to disrupt the operations of corporations and governments. Disruption often leads to concessions that can protect our health!

- We may have to occasionally confront right-wing demonstrations. Some of these will propose policies in language that seem to support health (like ending mask policies in school) but really endanger us all. When we do confront such demonstrations, it is important to have large numbers of

working people take part who are diverse in race and ethnicity, age, and

gender.

Source [Tempest](#).

18 April 2022

Women's Movement in South Korea: How to Break the Structural Oppression

19 May 2022, by **Karen Yamanaka**

Since the 2000, the institutionalization of government-led women's policies was rapidly promoted. In 2001, the Ministry of Gender Equality was started by agreement among the ruling and opposition parties. Ministry of Gender Equality changed its name to the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family in 2010. Moon Jae-in, who became president in 2017, declared that "I will be a feminist president" and made promises such as elimination of gender discrimination in employment and eradication of gender violence. After inauguration, Moon Jae-in enlarged organization and budget of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family. As a result, progresses such as gender equality act and legislation on violence against women were seen.

On the other hand, problems of women such as low-wage female workforce became more serious. A few women tried to break the deadlock. But most women were stuck in poverty, discrimination and oppression. "Family-head (*hoju*) system", a symbol of patriarchy, was abolished in 2005. But it did not change the South Korean society, which had been built around patriarchy power. Liberation of all women will be impossible without the strategies to transform the underlying structure to overcome social or economic inequality. This article outlines the history of feminist movements and the current situation in South Korea to consider the possibility of feminist movements for social transformation as an alternative.

History so far

The early feminist movement in South Korea remained primarily within the university faculty since the establishment of women's studies in 1977 at Ewha Womans University. And other feminist movements were also limited to some feminist claims and struggles. For many years, feminism had not been common for Korean women. And feminism was generalized among women by the murder of a woman which occurred near Gangnam Station in Seoul in May 2016. As a result of this incident, Korean women began to speak out one after another, and it became a big social movement. From 2015, a year before that, there were signs of a growing awareness of feminism. "Misogyny" was spreading online due to fake news that the first infected person by Mers was a woman in her twenties who returned from overseas. And in the same year, radical feminist launched an internet community site called "Megalia". Korean women expressed "Megalia" by combining "MERS" and "Egalia" based on Norwegian feminist literature classic "Egalia's Daughters". In Megalia, the words that men despised women were also applied to men as they are as a counterattack against misogyny. However, some excessive mirroring not only insulted men excessively but also ridiculed unrelated sexual minorities, which became a social problem in South Korea. After all, the site was closed in 2017.

However, people who used Megalia had developed feminism peculiar to South Korea in various ways, such as

the opening and operating of a radical feminism site called "Womad". Since then, women's anger and struggles led to quantitative rather than qualitative growth of feminism in South Korea. In 2018, more than 70,000 women, the largest number for a single women's agenda, gathered at Gwanghwamun Square to protest against the police's partial investigation of illegal filming and photography. From around 2018, the tal-corset movement began to spread in the South Korean society. Those who were angry at violence against women had embarked on aggressive actions to eradicate misogyny. A series of activities were different from the forces of the existing women's movements. It was an explosion of the cumulative victim's experiences of individual Korean women who were unfairly treated in the society. After that, the women's movements to have the same rights and status as men continued in South Korea. In addition, #MeToo movement that accused harassment worldwide made the movements more active [18]. But on the other hand, the future vision of the movements was not in the prospect of social transformation. Therefore, the movements did not develop beyond the struggles against patriarchal order by individuals.

Government-led policies just for a privileged few

Since the year 2000, government-led women's policies have been institutionalized rapidly in South Korea. But the results of the policies

were further deterioration of the living environments of most women such as low-wage and unstable working conditions and double duty imposed on women as wage and domestic workers. The inauguration of Park Geun-hye in 2013 as the first female president in East Asia symbolizes the disparity between women. Government-led policies have only fostered the advancement of a small percentage of elite women in the public sphere. Park Geun-hye's reactionary neoliberalism with a populist and feminist face enforced repression of the majority of women. And the repression is deeply rooted in the South Korean society in almost all fields such as politics, economy, and culture. At least there was no commonality between former Korean Air Vice President Cho Hyun-ah and the Korean Air female crew members (or Filipino housekeeper illegally hired by Cho Hyun-ah) in the nut-rage incident, also referred to as nutgate which occurred a year after Park Geun-hye's inauguration [19]. It was clear that there were large class differences instead of common elements between the woman who exploited and the woman who was exploited. At that time, many South Korea's feminists could not explain differences among women, differences in class, and problems of domination and power among women. "Merit system" and "result-oriented pay system" with the success myth of a few women lowered the power for women's liberation.

Meanwhile, capitalism exploitation and patriarchy repression interacted and strengthened each other. As a result, feminist groups that hold existing political power, executives of major women's organizations, and some privileged women succeeded in advancing to the public sphere. However, the process is far from the human rights of women. It's just a

power struggle for personal and political interests. The liberal feminism policies have highlighted the class differences among women. Meanwhile, neoliberals ignored the majority of oppressed women and continued discussions mainly in the public sphere in institutional reforms. It showed the limitations of "liberal equality".

The mainstream in South Korea

Liberal feminism has been the mainstream in South Korea and has taken the initiative to make policies such as expansion of female labor. And representatives of women's organizations advanced to politics and government. These changes seemed to promote women's participation in the public sphere, but in actual fact the majority of women were left alone. Unfortunately, its neoliberal policies have converted service labor into market-oriented and expanded "traditional gender roles". And South Korea's neoliberal government exploited female labor force under low-wage and unstable working conditions in the name of "women's policy". "Gender mainstreaming" in "flexible work strategies" employed by capital served as a means of accelerating unfavourable living conditions for women. And the institutional reforms promoted by Korean liberal women's movements have not changed the lives of women.

It shows that the problems caused by capital cannot be solved by "equal measures" of institutional reforms. The "equal measures" wanted to find a few elite women who could provide a workforce "comparable to men". And discussions mainly in the public sphere in the institutional reforms have disregarded near-daily discrimination, domestic work, and sexual violence in the private sphere

as "personal problems." At the same time, liberal feminism has ignored issues such as racism and classism, denying the need to break the fundamental structure of women's oppression.

For social transformation for working-class women

On March 9, conservative Yun Seok-yeol has won the South Korean presidential election. It shows that most South Korean voters allowed the next government to trample on the fundamental human rights and to lose respect for legal and administrative women's rights [20]. In the current situation, it remains to be seen what new rise can take place for a movement aimed at social transformation from a class perspective. Six years have passed since the murder occurred near Gangnam Station in 2016. During this time, feminist movements for gender equality have developed independently in South Korea under the influence of the global #MeToo movements. However, the reality of life for the majority of Korean women has not changed. Neoliberal policies by fake progressive forces have resulted in the creation of a small number of elite women, while driving the majority of working-class women into chronic and severe poverty and oppression. In the process, feminist movements are heading for unexpected directions. Some "radical feminists" took conservative direction to prop up exclusive separatism with anti-gender ideology [21]. They are not sufficiently radical. Some dominant feminist groups still remain stuck and varied in the course of the linear model of western feminism [