



## IV571 - August 2022

### “Our goal Is to win this war”

31 August 2022, by **Dick Nichols, Viktoriia Pihul**

**How is the feminist movement trying to best cope and help with the present disaster? What are its priorities?**

The war we now live through has affected and changed every aspect of our lives. The occupiers are working, among other things, to demoralize the population. That is why they use all means, including violence. At this very moment we need to understand that rape is a way of showing power and control over a situation, not a desire for sexual contact.

Of course, the work of feminist organizations under these conditions has changed considerably. Before the war, feminists and those who fought with us for women’s rights and visibility did a very large part of the educational work: educational courses, programs and events; organizing actions, marches, etc.

*Now this work is being transformed and assistance is primarily focused on survival and humanitarian support: finding humanitarian aid, medicines for trans representatives, creating shelters, helping women with children to find or provide babysitting services. Social Movement, for example, collects humanitarian aid for women and children from trade unions. Organizations with which we have friendly relations, like [Femsolution](#), [Feminist Lodge](#) and [Bilkis](#) now do likewise.*

This is a contradictory moment: on the one hand, the feminist movement is getting closer to women, hearing their voices. *The good point for women’s rights is that women lead and are more engaged in community humanitarian efforts.* It provides opportunities for humanitarian actors to seek women’s participation and guidance. I think that it is very important to focus on this: *women are involved in very important processes that allow Ukrainians to live and survive in the rearguard.*

On the other hand, many of the problems that the movement has worked on for years risk becoming “not now” issues. And what women are now doing to help win may be overlooked in public discourse. Because all attention is now focused on military operations and men’s role, and the female contribution at the front will be less noticeable as well. That is, the inequality in the representation of female and male roles does not disappear during the war, but rather increases.

I see potential spaces for feminist work as grassroots activism and work with women to build cohesion, awareness of our visibility, and further struggle for women’s political participation. For example, gender quotas, the work of gender commissioners, the promotion and implementation of the [Istanbul Convention](#), which was ratified last

month in Ukraine, working with the problem of domestic violence, the creation of shelters for women. All this can be realized when women want to represent their interests and fight the stereotype that in politics everything is done by a few great people, and they do not decide anything.

**Olena Zelenskaya (Ukraine’s “First Lady”) has said: “Our resistance, as our future victory, has taken on a particularly feminine face. Women are fighting in the army, they are signed up to territorial defence [units], they are the foundation of a powerful volunteer movement to supply, deliver, feed ... they give birth in shelters, save their children, and look after others’ children, they keep the economy going, they go abroad to seek help. Others are simply doing their jobs, in hospitals, pharmacies, shops, transport, public services ... so that life continues.”**

How accurate is this picture of women’s engagement in the fight against the Russian invasion?

In this context I want to underline that gender roles are now changing in Ukraine. *Women on the homefront have a war going on, too, which is just as important.*

Zelenskaya’s words really reflect what I have seen in these more than four

months of war.

With many people becoming unemployed and primarily men joining the Armed Forces of Ukraine, women are taking on new roles and multiple jobs to make up for the lost family income. Many women, forced to leave their homes and possessions behind, find themselves needing to buy household necessities all over again in a new place. By the way, the state has provided one-time assistance of 6500 hryvnia (€220) to Ukrainians, but this is very little taking inflation into account.

At the same time, women are now spending more and more time with children, as they are on distance education. Women very often decide to stay in the occupied territories to care for the elderly parents or others. Or they are afraid of losing their sources of income. Thus, they are increasingly at risk of violence, both from the Russians and domestic psychological abuse.

All this creates an additional burden and requires a lot of effort on the part of women. *I want to emphasize that they often take their work and their contribution to the resistance for granted.* It is our task as feminists to support women, to recognize their needs and to help in any way we can. The most important thing is not to let the female face of war remain in the shadows.

**How important for the overall morale of the resistance against the Russian invasion has the big increase in women's participation in the army and volunteer organizations been?**

From the very first, we were all on adrenaline, taking on all kinds of things: volunteering, searching for ammunition, humanitarian aid, transporting people out of dangerous areas. With time, of course, this phase is replaced by immersion in trauma and helplessness.

But I hear and see in the public space women saying, "We have no right to give up." As I said, women have begun to band together locally to help. They weave camouflage nets, cook food for the military, pack and ship

humanitarian aid. This promotes cohesion, so women feel they are not alone in their grief. It seems to me that even psychologically there is a certain support in this that we hold on to. Now voluntary work has become not something from the world of activists, but something close and understandable to almost everyone.

As for women's participation in the army, I immediately remember our "bird" from Azovstal. This girl Katya, who defended Azovstal in Mariupol until her last day. She sang songs and said she would fight to the last. Her photo and video of her singing went viral on all social networks. She became one of the symbols of the defense of Mariupol.

*Now 35,000 women serve in the Ukrainian military, 1000 of them are commanders, and two are generals.* It is important that women also went from the first day of the war into territorial defense. Now there is more talk about women's participation in the army, and they are becoming an example for all of us who are on the home front.

**Regarding attitudes in the Ukrainian Army, Hromadske International noted in 2014: "To be honest there's nothing to celebrate yet as the changes are very slow. In the General Staff of Ukraine's Armed Forces you can hear the phrase 'my dear,' so the army needs to be reformed starting with them. Many don't understand that significant changes will only take place after more than one generation."**

That comment would seem to be confirmed by the army celebration of the 30th anniversary of Ukrainian Independence, which saw women soldiers marching in high heels. Is the seriousness of the resistance struggle against the Russian invasion helping put an end to this sort of sexist nonsense?

Sexism and inequality are still present in the army. In 2014, women who were, for example, snipers or artillerymen, were written in the employment record book as "communications officer" or something similar, and they received

less money. In eight years, the situation has changed, but globally the problems remain. For example, *at the beginning of the full-scale war women were issued with men's flak jackets and shoes, which are often larger in size, because there were no small ones. Women's body armour is also very different, but there was none.* So too with hygiene items: pads, shampoos, mosquito repellent and even hairpins. I want to mention the volunteer initiative Zemliachky: they are very supportive of women who serve and do humanitarian aid for women who are fighting, given their special needs.

As to public stereotyping, I want to share one case that impressed not only the feminist movement, but also most people who do not belong to it. A Ukrainian stand-up comedian at the end of May (when it was three months into the war) "joked" as follows: "Can you imagine what a women's battalion would look like? I can't. Would it be a battalion of sucking troops" ... and further references to blowjobs. It was a blatant case of devaluation, sexism and toxic masculinity. What's more, people in the audience laughed, and a stand-up YouTube channel posted the video on their page (and still hasn't deleted it). This video was sent to one of the feminists by a woman who had fought in [Debaltsevo](#) in 2015 and had seen hell on earth, including the torn bodies of her comrades. One can only imagine how she felt when she saw this video.

Also, one musician, who joined the military forces of Ukraine, on March 8 in his Instagram "congratulated" those guys who are hiding from the army, with the inference that they are supposedly women. These are just examples of recent high-profile cases, but on a domestic level there is still an unequal perception of women and men who are fighting.

*But those men who are in the Armed Forces with women note their courage, fearlessness and bravery.* Various volunteer initiatives make social films and projects to bring women in the army out of the shadows and show how they are on a par with men in combat, and the men themselves attest to this. *I think that this war will break down a lot of*

stereotypes. But still, it is a very high price to pay.

**In times of crisis — of defense of invaded nations and civil wars — women fighters always appear, for example, the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War, the Soviet women in the Great Patriotic War and more recently the women battalions in Rojava, so important in the defeat of Islamic State. What similarities and differences with these experiences do you see in the engagement of Ukrainian women in the resistance to the Russian invasion?**

I think that Ukraine now has its own character.

It is very different from the Soviet narrative of [War Has No Woman's Face](#) and it is not like the resistance of women in Rojava, because Kurdish women had to fight for basic rights and representation in society. In Spain there were constant conflicts about how women tried to fight for the right to fight as equals in the Republican army, but they were constantly thrown into secondary roles. It is difficult for me to say anything about the position of women in the army now, as that is best said by the women themselves after some time in the war has passed.

From what we can see, women's position in the army is surprisingly good, but surrounded by a lot of prejudice (as I described above). *The main problem is that the army is provided mostly for men's participation.* Both men and women resist in common, for the rights of all the people.

But it must be understood that the role of women in it is very important, because their position would be much worse if Russia seized power. Because the power of the aggressor is very conservative and sharply denies women's rights.

**We have read that there is a strong feminist tradition, if not in that name, in Ukraine, of self-sufficient women resistant to patriarchal attitudes and norms. What truth is there to this vision? How does it show in the present mobilisation of women against the Russian**

**invasion?**

Feminism in Ukraine is now a grassroots movement, run by activists. If you ask an average woman from the periphery what feminists are, she will answer something along the lines of "these are some crazy young girls who have not developed a personal life, so they dye their hair in bright colours and hate men." For example, my friend always tells me that feminists can only be young girls who don't have children and just want to find a community or a place to hang out. Obviously, there are a huge number of women with children in the feminist movement, but this attitude persists.

*I think that this non-mass popularity of feminism is due to economic and social prerequisites: women have to work, look after children, provide for them somehow, and be a housewife (the stereotype that a woman is the keeper of the home is not going away). In the constant race for survival, you need to have the time and energy to be part of a movement/organization/community.*

It is indeed said about women in Ukraine (and they say it about themselves) that they are very strong, able to take a lot into their own hands, work hard and climb heights. But, as I mentioned before, they very often take that for granted.

Amid all the events and volunteering, the work of feminist organizations with women has increased dramatically. *It is also important that in addition to feminist organizations, there are organizations in which women play a leading role, and which are essentially fighting for women's rights in certain aspects (such as labour rights)—I want to mention the nurses' union [Be like Nina](#).*

I believe this will help us build trust and show that feminism is about fighting for our rights and our self-determination.

**The strongest component of the Russian anti-war movement is Feminist Anti-War Resistance, whose Telegram channel carries regular reports of what is really happening in Ukraine, including correspondence from women in**

**the areas temporarily by Russian forces. How is the Ukrainian movement looking to collaborate with its Russian sisters?**

I follow the activities of this movement and consider these girls to be the only adequate leftists in Russia. While the once popular leftists are either splitting up or continuing to tell old narratives about the USSR and the "fraternal peoples" and shoot videos on YouTube, these girls are engaged in underground activities and newspapers, putting up flyers, writing critical materials. I think that this is an important point for a *totally fragmented Russian society, where everyone is for himself or herself.*

Many female members of Feminist Anti-War Resistance signed the manifesto of Ukrainian feminists that I wrote together with my comrades.

I cannot make any predictions about further interaction. It is important to understand that Ukrainian feminist initiatives are also going through difficult times. In the light of military events very many people do not even want to hear about having any kind of cooperation with anything Russian. And here everything will depend on how the situation develops.

**What are the most important issues that feminists in the rest of the world need to understand about the struggle of their sisters against the Russian invasion of Ukraine?**

We have seen many pacifist statements by Western feminists, including [their manifesto](#). In the face of war and the daily deaths of our women and children, we are critical of this position. In this context, I am part of a working group of Ukrainian feminists who have written the [Ukrainian Feminist Manifesto](#). We call for support for Ukrainian women, including our right to armed resistance. *This war shows us that feminism is a movement that needs to respond to changing situations, to be flexible and to develop principles according to new conditions.* What I mean here is that succumbing to geopolitical reasoning and geopolitical thinking and withdrawing from conflict by condemning all sides is *not*



*a workable position. We must clearly distinguish the rapist from the victim and help the victim to assert her right to exist and to be a subject.*

**Is there anything else you would like to add?**

Our main goal now is to win this war. We understand that it can be protracted, and it is not a quick process, and there are hopes for it. *What is critical to victory is not to let the war and all the terrible events in Ukraine disappear from the world's*

*agenda. If everyone conditionally gets used to it, it will be harder for us to survive and the problem will not only be ours — there is a risk to the world, too. I ask you to support one of the [Social Movement's biggest campaigns](#) for writing off Ukraine's foreign debt. It is a great burden for the Ukrainian economy, which has been created by years of oligarchical dominance. We have [created a website](#) where we have gathered arguments, a petition, and materials from around the world in support. It's important for*

women, too, because we will be the ones rebuilding Ukraine.

*I want to say that women are already doing a lot to make Ukraine recover. And we, as a leftist organisation, are fighting for our labor and social rights, which the government is trying to curtail to various degrees. This is important for the post-war rebuilding of Ukraine to be possible and based on the principles of non-discrimination.*

Source: [Links](#), *international journal of socialist renewal*, July 13, 2022

## Trump's Legal Problems Could Affect the Republicans in November

30 August 2022, by **Dan La Botz**

Trump endorsed 200 candidates—159 of whom deny that Biden won the election. Some Trump's candidates won, some lost. Several of his victorious candidates are kooks like the quack Dr. Mehmet Oz in Pennsylvania, or white nationalists like "replacement theory" advocate J.D. Vance in Ohio. Their extreme rightwing views may make it hard for them to win in the general elections. Believing that, Democrats helped to finance some of them.

Trump continues to dominate the party, but the former president's legal problems could pose problems for him and the party. The U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland with the approval of a federal judge got a search warrant and on August 8 sent FBI agents to search Trump's home at Mar-a-Lago to recover many boxes of documents, some of them secret papers dealing with "nuclear" issues, that Trump had illegally taken with him when he left the White House. The warrant stated that the search was based on possible crimes: the concealment, mutilation or removal of records; obstruction of justice, including the destruction, alteration or falsification of records in federal investigations; and possible violations

of the Espionage Act. Trump could be indicted for these felonies.

Garland, who is also investigating the January 6 insurrection and attempted coup d'état, could bring charges against Trump for his role in those events too. The U.S. House investigation into January 6 has argued that Trump was responsible for a conspiracy to organize the insurrection and overturn the results of the 2020 election, putting pressure on Garland to indict. Trump could face charges in Georgia too for criminal interference with the 2020 presidential election in which he asked Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, the state's top election official, "to find 11,780 votes. Biden defeated Trump in Georgia by 11,779 votes. In New York State Attorney General Letitia James is investigating the charge in a civil case that Trump misrepresented his companies' finances, while Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg in a parallel criminal investigation has already led to two indictments — both the Trump Organization and its CFO Allen Weisselberg were indicted in July 2020.

True to form, Trump claims that he is

innocent of any wrongdoing and is being persecuted by the Democrats and the "deep state." Most Trump followers—about 40 percent of the electorate—remain loyal and have rallied around him, making him the likely presidential candidate in 2024, if he is not in jail.

Some Republicans have pulled away. One Colorado Republican state senator, Kevin Priola, recently quit the Republican Party and became a Democrat because, he said, Republicans' attacks on democracy were an "existential threat." Groups such as the Republican Accountability Project are spending millions to try to reach Trump's base and change their minds, though so far without great success.

Joe Biden, who calls Trump's politics "semi-fascism," has seen his popularity rise somewhat and the Democrat's chances in the midterm election are looking up. Democrats recently passed the \$369 billion Inflation Reduction Act, the most important environmental legislation in years, the \$52.7 billion Chips Act to promote to support semiconductor chips manufacturing, the U.S. Congress supports his military

spending for Ukraine while the Senate approved the proposal to admit Sweden and Finland to NATO, and finally, he used his presidential powers to cancel millions in student debt. All of that and opposition to the

Republican Supreme Court's overturning of abortion rights may drive Democrats to the polls in numbers large enough to keep the Senate and perhaps—though

unlikely—keep the House.

## 30 August 2021

*Written for l'Anticapitaliste.*

# The Heaviest Rainfall in 115 Years and Record-breaking Heat Waves: Climate Disaster Caused by Growing Inequality

29 August 2022, by **Karen Yamanaka**

Even before the heaviest rainfall in 115 years and floods, South Korea and surroundings had been experiencing unprecedented extreme weather such as abnormally high temperatures, typhoons, droughts, heavy snow, and cold waves over the past few years. It is one of the obvious consequences of global warming. The disasters made many Koreans realize that “serious climate change” is not someone else’s problem, but their own. [1] They will also cause enormous damage not only to every sector of human activity but also to natural ecosystems.

## Serious situation on the Korean Peninsula and its surroundings

The IPCC report predicted that temperatures would reach 1.5C above 1850-1900 levels by 2040. [2] The report also predicted that there will be an increasing occurrence of some extreme events unprecedented in the observational record even at warming of 1.5C. [3]

As already mentioned, extreme weather has become ever more severe in South Korea and surroundings. South Korea’s National Institute of Meteorological Sciences (NIMS) announced that the future temperature of South Korea would be

7 degrees higher than the current state. NIMS also expected that there will be days when the temperatures exceed 45 degrees. [<https://usun.usmission.gov/remarks-by-under-secretary-of-state-bonnie-d-jenkins-at-a-un-security-council-briefing-on-the-zaporizhzhya-nuclear-power-plant/>] Russian strategy, the EU, and the UN Secretary General have all called for the establishment of a demilitarized zone around the plant. Russia has rejected the call. But the deputy chair of Russia’s Security Council, former president Dmitriy Medvedev, didn’t miss the opportunity to issue another threat: “Let’s not forget that the European Union also has nuclear power plants. And accidents can happen there, too.”

A nuclear accident at Zaporizhzhia would be horrible, though not nearly as bad as Chernobyl disaster because of Zaporizhzhia’s more modern design. Neither, however, would compare with the harm from even a small nuclear weapon explosion, to which we now return.

## The History of Nuclear Threats

Nuclear threats have a long, sordid history in the Cold War. As a study for the non-governmental National Security Archive summarized it,

During the 1950s and early 1960s, there were a remarkable number of crises during which U.S. leaders made threats, authorized nuclear weapons for use, and put strategic forces in a higher state of readiness. While the Soviets also made threats, e.g., Suez, in 1956, the U.S. threat posture was comparatively overwhelming. [15]

In 1953, a top-secret National Security Council directive declared that “In the event of hostilities, the United States will consider nuclear weapons to be as available for use as other munitions.” In 1955, Pres. Eisenhower, in part to encourage the American public to get over its squeamishness regarding nuclear arms, publicly stated that he saw no reason “why they shouldn’t be used just exactly as you would use a bullet or anything else.”

Eventually, however, and particularly following the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, after the world had peered into the abyss, U.S. presidents came to appreciate that nuclear arms were in an entirely different category from conventional weapons and that their use would, in John Kennedy’s words, “open up a whole new world.” Both U.S. and Soviet leaders became much more restrained in their nuclear threats and pursued arms control agreements to reduce the risks of nuclear war. In recent years, it has been very rare for a national leader to

threaten the use of nuclear weapons. Yes, North Korea has [warned of](#) preemptive nuclear strikes against the United States (complete with videos showing Washington DC or lower Manhattan going up in flames). And Donald Trump has [blustered](#) that: “North Korea best not make any more threats to the United States. They will be met with fire and fury like the world has never seen.” But their schoolyard behavior, with Trump [tweeting](#) that his nuclear button was “much bigger & more powerful” than Kim Jong-un’s, while infantile and reckless, was not as worrisome as Putin’s threats, which take place in the context of Europe’s largest war in the past seventy years, when inadvertent escalation presents a real risk.

Numerous [experts](#) have [expressed concern](#) that we are today nearer to nuclear war than at any time since the Cuban missile crisis.

## Responding to Nuclear Threats

Returning to the initial question, should the peace movement demand that the United States and NATO stop arming Ukraine so as to avoid provoking Russia? Sometimes it makes sense to give in to an unjust aggressor if the consequences of not doing so are potential extermination. If a villain points a gun at our heads and demands we drop our weapons, we reluctantly do so.

Of course, Putin - unlike the hypothetical villain — knows that it is not just his adversary who will suffer the consequences if he pulls the trigger. In June 2021, Putin joined Biden in [reaffirming](#) “the principle that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.” But might Putin be crazy enough to start a nuclear war that would destroy Russia too? And does that mean that even the remote chance of nuclear war requires us to accede to Putin’s demands to stop arming Ukraine or imposing sanctions?

The problem with succumbing to Putin’s demands is that doing so is not necessarily the best way to minimize

the dangers of nuclear war. Because a rational leader would not undertake a policy whose costs outweighed the benefits, sometimes leaders bluff, feigning that they are willing to face costs far greater than warranted in order to intimidate their adversaries into surrender. Surrender here, however, can increase the prospects of nuclear war going forward.

One of the foremost advocates of this nuclear bluffing strategy was Richard Nixon. As he explained his approach to his White House chief of staff H. R. Haldeman,

I call it the Madman Theory, Bob. I want the North Vietnamese to believe I’ve reached the point where I might do anything to stop the war. We’ll just slip the word to them that, ‘for God’s sake, you know Nixon is obsessed about Communism. We can’t restrain him when he’s angry — and he has his hand on the nuclear button’ and Ho Chi Minh himself will be in Paris in two days begging for peace. [16]

Nixon and his national security adviser Henry Kissinger tried to carry out this strategy in [October 1969](#), hoping to frighten the Soviet Union into pressing North Vietnam to accept American terms. On October 6, Kissinger ordered the secretary of defense to conduct a “series of increased alert measures designed to convey to the Soviets an increasing readiness by U.S. strategic forces.” The next week, the Strategic Air Command put on alert 176 bombers and 189 refueling tankers. Nixon met with the Soviet ambassador, displaying, according to an impressed Kissinger, the “guts of a riverboat gambler.” On October 26, the Strategic Air Command flew six armed B-52 bombers over Alaska. But, despite the intimidation, Moscow did not compel Hanoi to surrender - and (fortunately) nor did Soviet leaders panic and launch a preemptive strike on the United States.

The [political science literature](#) shows that the madman strategy generally

doesn’t work. The biggest problem with the strategy is, in the words of Stephen Walt, an advocate of realism in international relations:

When other states deal with a powerful but unpredictable leader, they may tread carefully but they aren’t going to make big concessions.

After all, if a madman is dangerous now, doing anything that makes them more powerful just makes them more dangerous later. Appeasement is sometimes a smart diplomatic strategy, but only if one believes that making concessions will remove grievances, reduce suspicions, make the other side more benign, and allow mutually beneficial relations to emerge. [17]

Imagine what would happen if Washington responded to Putin’s nuclear bluster by stopping its weapons supplies to Ukraine or lifting its sanctions.

The Kremlin, now with a proven method of getting its way, could then demand surrender from Georgia and Moldova, two former Soviet republics where Russian troops currently hold contested territory. And when the United States and NATO refused to provide arms to these governments (because, after all, one doesn’t want to risk nuclear war), the two countries would have little option but to submit. But why stop there? If Russia then demanded (with appropriate rhetoric and missile tests) that NATO troops be removed from the Baltic states, would it be worth risking madman Putin escalating to nuclear war? So best comply. And if it then further demanded that no NATO arms be provided to these former components of the Soviet Union, again, why provoke the Bear? But at some point, either Moscow or Washington will miscalculate - will NATO back down? is Russia bluffing? — and we’ll be in the midst of a nuclear war.

And Putin wouldn’t be the only one to try to take advantage of this strategy. Would his success encourage other

nuclear bullies? Might Israel then make demands of Iran, to which Tehran would have to give in lest it face Armageddon? Might China demand that the United States stop arming and even trading with Taiwan, facilitating a bloodless conquest? Might North Korea demand that South Korea and Japan subsidize its economy?

But giving in to Putin's threats wouldn't only encourage continuing acts of nuclear extortion. It would also provoke the potential victims of this extortion to rush to acquire nuclear arms of their own as a means of self-protection. South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Egypt, and others would inevitably seek to become nuclear weapons states (if they are not already doing so). Some [experts](#) have claimed that widespread nuclear proliferation would be great, because no one would ever go to war again, fearing nuclear retaliation. But as most [analysts](#) understand, [the risks, of accidental inadvertent](#), or escalatory war, or terrorism, or sabotage increases exponentially with the number of nuclear weapons states.

To be sure, [the historical record](#) suggests that nuclear arms have not been very successful as a coercive tool. (Consider that possession of nuclear weapons didn't allow the United States to prevail in Vietnam or the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.) But if nuclear threats gave the Russians a victory in Ukraine (for that's what a cut-off of Western military supplies would mean), the calculus would change dramatically. Nuclear weapons expert Todd Sechser has observed:

Russia has given us a vivid reminder that nuclear weapons are not a magic wand. As the war began, Vladimir Putin made several nuclear threats - both explicit and implied. But the fear of nuclear escalation has not intimidated Ukraine into submission. Nor have these threats dissuaded the West from imposing crippling sanctions on Russia and providing military aid to Ukraine. If anything, Putin's nuclear bellicosity has only fueled the

international backlash against Russia. The war has thrown a spotlight on the political limits of nuclear weapons, and dictators with nuclear ambitions should take note. [18]

If instead, NATO had given in or gives in to Putin's demands, the lessons for leaders with nuclear ambitions would be rather different.

Appeasement, then, has its dangers, setting off dynamics that might increase rather than decrease the risks of nuclear war. But military build-up and the logic of deterrence have their dangers as well, as we know from many historical examples. [International relations](#) scholars and [peace](#) researchers has long identified the "security dilemma" as a major cause of war: when one country takes steps to increase its own security that in turn decrease the security of its adversaries, the resulting countermoves end up reducing everyone's security. ([The eastward expansion of NATO](#) was a classic example of this dynamic.) So while it would make good sense to call for the scaling back of aid to Ukraine if there were a real danger of nuclear war, giving in to Russian demands if they were a bluff might actually increase the dangers of nuclear war.

Nuclear threats always have to be taken seriously, and great care taken in responding to them. There are several reasons, however, to regard Putin's threats as posturing and to treat them as such.

First, his threats have involved insinuation and bluster, but have not actually involved any corresponding military moves. This might make Putin look tough to his domestic audience, might scare public opinion in Ukraine and in the West, but without actually risking the consequences of military escalation. Were Putin in fact to put his nuclear forces on alert, that might have real consequences. Washington might increase the alert status of its own forces, and, at worst, there would be the risk of a U.S. preemptive strike. But by engaging in dramatic rhetoric while making sure that U.S. intelligence can see that he has not

moved his tactical nuclear arms from their [storage facilities](#) to military bases, Putin shows that he appreciates the dangers of nuclear weapons. Indeed, in March 2022, the United States and Russia established a "[deconfliction hotline](#)" to avoid any inadvertent escalation in Ukraine. In May, the U.S. Secretary of Defense and Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff [re-established communication](#) with their Russian counterparts for the first time since the war began.

Second, Putin had a history of trying to use nuclear blackmail. He [said](#) he was prepared to put his nuclear forces on alert during the 2014 annexation of Crimea. As in 2022, however, the rhetoric was not matched by actions.

Third are domestic costs. It is sometimes suggested that there are no forces or institutions in Russian society limiting Putin - the antiwar movement is too weak - and thus the danger of his pushing the button is all too real. But Russia doesn't have to be a well-functioning democracy for there to be domestic constraints on Putin. Consider that the Russian armed forces do not have the number of troops they need (Russia has been fighting a large conventional war "at peacetime strength," in the words of U.S. military analyst [Michael Kofman](#)); this deficit could be solved by ordering a general mobilization, but Putin evidently judges that the domestic political costs of doing so would be too great. One can assume that escalating a "special military operation" into a nuclear war would also substantially raise the domestic political costs for Putin and his supporting oligarchs.

Fourth are international costs. We have seen Russian diplomacy engaged full tilt at trying to win over foreign countries. Europe is united against Putin's invasion, but in other parts of the world, many countries are trying to avoid taking sides. For Russia to use nuclear weapons would deliver a tremendous blow to Moscow's international position, especially in Africa and Latin America, where there are nuclear-free zones. Even China, which has given tacit support to Russia, would be hard pressed to support a first use of nuclear arms, contradicting its own declared policy. (China's military cooperation with



Russia since the invasion has been quite limited, and it [abstained](#) on the General Assembly resolution condemning the Russian assault.) The [prediction](#) that China would support sanctions against Moscow in the event it uses nuclear weapons does not seem unreasonable.

And fifth, Russia seems to be quite cautious in actually declaring that red lines have been crossed. For example, in April, when a Ukrainian missile struck Russia's Black Sea Fleet flagship, with the [help of U.S. intelligence](#), Russia insisted that there had been no missile at all, just an onboard fire. And in August, when Ukrainian forces set off explosions at a Russian [airbase in Crimea](#), "Russia's Defense Ministry moved quickly to play down the extent of the damage, saying no equipment had been destroyed and no casualties reported," assertions that "were contradicted by a video from the scene and by a tally of the damage by officials in Crimea." The Kremlin's interest in hiding its military failures from the Russian people makes it harder to mobilize Russian public opinion to support any escalation.

## Red Lines

Despite these reasons for believing Putin's nuclear threats to be more bark than bite, caution requires thinking through different levels and types of aid the United States and NATO might give to Ukraine and when these might be too risky.

Those policies that would put U.S. military personnel into direct combat with Russian troops are obviously highly dangerous. Yes, it is possible that Russia would back down in the face of a direct challenge from Western military forces, but that seems a risk too serious to take. A no-fly zone - as advocated by Zelensky and [various U.S. pundits](#) - would entail [similar risks](#), because shooting down Russian planes or destroying the anti-aircraft weapons that might threaten U.S. planes raises the prospect of direct U.S.-Russian conflict.

Biden has [stated](#) very clearly: "So long as the United States or our allies are

not attacked, we will not be directly engaged in this conflict, either by sending American troops to fight in Ukraine or by attacking Russian forces." But where is the red line in terms of indirect U.S. involvement? This is not a matter of what Putin says - given his incentive and tendency to bluff - but a question of what U.S. actions might provoke Russia to resort to nuclear arms.

One way to get a sense of actual red lines would be to look at historical precedent: other cases where a great power with nuclear weapons was fighting a non-nuclear-armed opponent that was being supported by another great power. How far did they go? What were the red lines?

Consider the Korean War. The United States was fighting against (non-nuclear) North Korea. China, which also didn't yet have nuclear weapons, directly intervened in the fighting on North Korea's side, sending in two million "volunteers" - without precipitating U.S. attacks on Chinese soil, nuclear or otherwise. (The U.S. general in charge, Douglas MacArthur, called for strikes on China, but Truman fired him.) The Soviet Union had [helped](#) prepare Pyongyang's initial attack on the South, and increased its military aid to North Korea [tenfold](#) from 1949 to 1951. It [gave](#) China enough arms for 64 infantry divisions and 22 air divisions and provided 90 percent of its munitions. In addition, Soviet pilots directly participated in the war, flying the [latest](#) Soviet fighter, the MIG-15 (though with Chinese or North Korean markings, and only over communist-held territory), shooting down [many](#) U.S. planes. Some [5,000](#) Soviet pilots served in the conflict. Even though Moscow went to great length to disguise their direct involvement, the United States [was aware of it](#) and decided to keep it secret so as not to lead to a wider war.

In the Vietnam war, [China](#) sent some 100,000 engineering troops to North Vietnam, where they built and repaired military facilities and rail lines, and 150,000 anti-aircraft artillery soldiers, to defend strategic targets north of Hanoi from U.S. planes. In the years that U.S. forces were heavily engaged, 1965-1972,

Beijing provided Hanoi with 1.3 million guns, nearly a billion bullets, 43,000 pieces of artillery, 12 million artillery shells, 344 tanks, 141 military vessels, and 82 planes. (Keep in mind that China at this time was a very poor country, in the midst of its own violent and chaotic Cultural Revolution.)

Soviet aid to North Vietnam was much more substantial. From [1965 to 1972](#), Moscow provided more than \$2 billion in military aid, which would be \$12 billion in [2022 dollars](#). For a country with about a third the GDP of the United States at the time, this was an extraordinary level of support. (For comparison, U.S. military aid to Ukraine under the Biden administration has been about [\\$10 billion](#).) Soviet aid [included](#) surface to air missiles (SAMs), jet planes, and technical advisers. The first SAMs fired at U.S. planes in 1965 were fired [by Soviet crews](#). The CIA [reported](#) in 1968 that there seemed to be no limit to the type of aid Moscow was providing "with the possible exception of offensive weapons that would result in a confrontation with the US."

The Cuban missile crisis is another interesting example. Kennedy [publicly stated](#) that Soviet anti-aircraft missiles in Cuba were not a threat to the United States. Obviously, these could be used against U.S. planes attacking the island, but that was not a problem. If, however, the Russians should place offensive missiles that could hit the American homeland, then "the gravest issues would arise." Kennedy was being hypocritical here, given that the United States had nuclear missiles in Turkey that could hit the Soviet Union; to Kennedy, Moscow was forbidden to do what Washington was permitted to do. Nevertheless, the distinction between a weapon that can only be used for self-defense and one that can be used to inflict substantial damage on another country's home territory is a real one.

And it's a distinction that applies in Ukraine too. Giving Ukraine weapons that could strike deep into Russia would be much more provocative than providing arms that could be used against the Russians inside Ukraine.

These historical examples suggest that NATO aid to Ukraine is not more



reckless than superpower behavior of the past.

Research analysts Samuel Charap and Jeremy Shapiro [suggest](#) that the search for a specific red line is misguided. While stating that the United States and its allies should continue providing Ukraine with the armaments it needs, they argue that there is no specific red line the crossing of which would cause Russian escalation. Rather, the risk of escalation comes from Russia finding its aims thwarted.

The problem is not that providing Ukraine with some specific weapon could cause escalation but rather that if the West's support of Ukraine succeeded in stemming Russia's advance, that would constitute an unacceptable defeat for the Kremlin.

They are certainly correct that the United States ought to contribute to a negotiated settlement by spelling out to the Russians which of its economic sanctions it is prepared to lift if and when they reach a settlement acceptable to the Ukrainians. And Washington needs to make very clear to Ukraine the limits of its aid so that Kyiv can make decisions with full information. And NATO certainly ought to declare its readiness to conclude a new, verifiable treaty to eliminate intermediate range nuclear forces from Europe, thereby increasing security for all. But if Russia still hopes to "advance," it is hard to see how the West could avoid thwarting Russia's aims.

Moreover, it is no longer possible for Moscow to avoid an "unacceptable defeat" because it has already lost more than anything it could gain in Ukraine. The mobilization of NATO and the accession of Finland and Sweden have weakened Russia's security far more than any hypothetical Ukrainian membership might have done; and the economic losses it will suffer from the flight of capital and skilled workers and the loss of access to high tech imports will more than outweigh the value of what it can loot from Ukraine.

## U.S. Policy

Given the stakes involved, the U.S. response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine needs to be very carefully calibrated. So far, the Biden administration has shown commendable caution in not responding to Putin's nuclear bluster with bluster of its own, and without increasing the alert status of its own nuclear forces. Washington even [delayed](#) and then cancelled a planned ICBM test to avoid escalating tensions. Moreover, Biden explicitly declared:

As much as I disagree with Mr. Putin, and find his actions an outrage, the United States will not try to bring about his ouster in Moscow. So long as the United States or our allies are not attacked, we will not be directly engaged in this conflict, either by sending American troops to fight in Ukraine or by attacking Russian forces. We are not encouraging or enabling Ukraine to strike beyond its borders. We do not want to prolong the war just to inflict pain on Russia. [19]

(There are some statements by U.S. officials that seem to contradict the last sentence, but it is hard to believe that the Biden administration thinks U.S. interests are served by dragging out a war that is taking such an economic toll on Western nations and that is delaying Washington's strategic pivot to Asia.)

Does this mean that Washington is adequately addressing the risks of nuclear war? Not at all. There are many ways in which U.S. policy contributes to the continuing danger of nuclear holocaust and where different policies enacted today could make us all safer.

1. The United States still formally takes the position that it is willing to use nuclear weapons first. It states that it "will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are party to the

NPT [Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty] and in compliance with their nuclear nonproliferation obligations," which covers about 180 countries. This limitation on Washington's nuclear weapon use is welcome, but it still means that the United States could attack Russia, China, North Korea, or Iran with nuclear arms despite no prior use of nuclear weapons. China, on the other hand, despite some reckless language on party [media](#), has declared that it would never be the first to employ nuclear arms. The Soviet Union had a no-first-use policy from 1982-93, but dropped it for a less restrictive policy after the end of the Cold War. Britain, France, and Pakistan too do not have a no-first-use policy. There are two main benefits of a no-first-use policy. First, the country that makes the declaration will be less likely to use nuclear weapons. And, second, nervous adversaries of the country making the declaration will be less likely to preempt out of fear that in a crisis they will be hit first, which in turn makes the declaring country more inclined to adhere to its commitment.

So the first thing the Biden administration could do to reduce the dangers of nuclear war is to issue a no-first-use declaration.

2. There is disagreement among analysts about whether Putin has the authority on his own to order a nuclear strike. The best guess is that he [doesn't have](#) that authority on paper, but [in practice](#) can make sure that only his lackeys hold the relevant checking positions. This seems reckless in the extreme, to put the fate of the world into the hands of three or maybe even one person. But whatever ambiguity exists with regard to Russian authority structures, it is unambiguous that in the United States the president has sole authority to launch a nuclear war. Just think, we had the fate of our species in the exclusive hands of Donald Trump for four years. It is absolutely [essential](#) that sole presidential authority be revoked.

3. Many have lamented the toothlessness of the United Nations in being able to address the aggression of a major power. The Security Council, which under the UN Charter

has primary responsibility for international peace and security, is often blocked by the veto, as when Russia cast the lone negative vote on a resolution condemning its aggression in Ukraine. But Washington is in no position to condemn the undemocratic veto power, given its own [frequent use of the veto](#). The United States did co-sponsor the recent General Assembly [resolution](#), adopted by consensus, which calls for the General Assembly to meet whenever a veto is cast in the Security Council. But it has not joined Britain and France and 120 other member states in supporting a code of [conduct](#) under which permanent Security Council members pledge not

to use their veto on issues relating to genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes.

4. One country beyond the original five nuclear powers that acquired its nuclear arsenal by theft and deception is Israel. (Israel also [cooperated](#) on nuclear weapons development with South Africa, before the latter voluntarily gave up its nuclear program.) The pressures for developing nuclear weapons on Iran and then other Middle Eastern powers trace their origins to the Israeli program. U.S. military aid to and diplomatic support for this “rogue”

nuclear power continues to undermine global efforts at non-proliferation.

It is urgent that the war in Ukraine come to an end. Apart from the horrendous devastation in Ukraine, the risks of accidents and inadvertent escalation are quite serious. But to cut off Western arms supplies to Kyiv in response to these risks can only lead to Ukraine’s military defeat and more suffering for its people, along with the victory of an international aggressor and nuclear bully. This would mean the creation of a far more dangerous world.

*Source: New Politics.*

## Indiana’s Abortion Ban: Lessons from Dystopia

23 August 2022, by **Maria Bucur**

Most of my friends were single children or had at most one sibling. Contraception of any kind was either unavailable or of poor quality (especially condoms). In rural areas, where more than 50% of the population lived, abortion was de facto the only means of controlling fertility long before the Communist takeover and remained so throughout the period of the ban.

Nobody talked about sex as a normal component of our humanity. Sex education was relegated to the realm of obfuscations and double-entendres. Even among loving heterosexual couples, sex was a source of fear for women and anxiety for men.

The justification for the restrictive abortion legislation was the fear that the decline in birth rates would diminish the potential for growth of the labor force. Modernization and productivism demanded more people working to build the workers’ paradise.

While women had come to be seen as necessary participants in the labor

force, their reproductive capacity rendered them a particular set of workers who also needed to engage in reproductive labor.

Legislation that provided paid maternity leaves up to two years and a growing network of state subsidized creches and kindergartens reflected this outlook. But women ended up performing a double workday, with little change in men’s behavior in regard to parenting and household unpaid work.

The abortion ban failed to accomplish the pronatalist goal that had anchored it. The fertility rate went up for a few years and then back down. By 1983, the birth rate had gone down to pre-abortion ban levels.

No research that can be trusted was undertaken to understand this vexing outcome. But I speculate that illegal abortions and a lessening of sexual intercourse were the root causes. This explanation points to women as willful agents of their own reproductive potential and to the society wide consequences of an abortion ban.

Significantly, the quality of women’s lives went down significantly during that period: “by 1989, Romania had the highest recorded maternal mortality ratio in Europe (170 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births), 87% of which were attributed to abortion complications.”

In this context doctors, prosecutors and law enforcement, professions dominated by men, became closely entangled with survival. Surviving a regime that forced you to criminalize your wife and daughter’s sexuality. Managing your love life and familial ties to protect those very women from the brutal consequences of their love for you or your son-in-law.

Would a prosecutor be willing to send to jail the doctor who helped their daughter get an abortion? Would a policeman arrest the person who might help their wife get her next abortion? There are stories of both undermining the enforcement of the law as well as manipulative use of one’s power in order to protect one’s own women, but turn a blind eye to others, or worse.

Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel, *The Handmaid's Tale* is a faint echo of the reality I and millions of other women lived for two decades.

## From Romania to Indiana

Decriminalization of abortion was the second act of the post-Communist regime. Though many forms of religious radicalization have developed in the intervening three decades, few Romanian politicians have attempted to raise the specter of the recriminalization of abortion.

The trauma of those decades of treating people with uteruses as objects of biopolitical control has continued to affect Romanian society — so much so that arguments about the beginning of life at conception and the notion that a fetus is a person do not hold water even with a population that has become more and more religious in word and practice, during the intervening period.

As I watched first the *Dobbs v. Jackson SCOTUS* decision and more recently the debates over and passing of the SB1 abortion-ban in Indiana, my initial disbelief turned into anger and quickly into the realization that a low-grade biological war has started in the United States.

This war posits those of us with a uterus as persons with lesser rights, because a small minority of dedicated religious radicals have decided that their version of what a person is should prevail over any other version of personhood.

In Romania the arguments were about purposing cisfemale bodies for the benefit of the proletariat, within a larger context of understanding rights as always connected to needs of state and not to any definition of personal autonomy.

In Indiana, the arguments have been about the criminal nature of a medical procedure because a subgroup of evangelical Christians believe not only that a person begins to exist once a fertilized egg comes into being in a uterus, but also that such a belief

vacates all other possible scientific or religious concepts of personhood.

The separation of church and state is, in fact, the underlying problem for these individuals. And that makes the SB1 abortion ban in Indiana EVERYONE's problem, not the problem of just people with uteruses who are premenopausal.

The abortion ban solves no social problems that most of the electorate actually understands as such. Forced births have consequences that Republican state legislators have been unwilling to name or confront: while the reproductive labor of women is normalized as necessary to support the growth of a fetus, child raising is relegated to the realm of private responsibility that the state needs to police but has no obligation to actually support.

The [Republican legislative supermajority](#) seems just as content with the duplicitous notion that the well-being of that newborn and their mother is no responsibility of the state. No testimony from those touting the personhood of a fetus (Republican legislators and evangelical testimonies from citizens) acknowledged that women need to work to pay for the cost of raising a child.

The Indiana legislature was silent on reproductive and caretaking work, under the assumption that both are the private responsibility of the mother, even as the state is to control the same private responsibility during pregnancy. No maternity leaves beyond the unpaid 90-day FMLA were contemplated by the legislature. No extra funds from the federal relief package for better pre- and neonatal care, despite Indiana's abominable rate of being third highest in the nation in maternal mortality rate. No support for daycare.

## Women's Assigned Roles

Hidden in the silences of the new forced-birth bill are assumptions about women's function in society. Women as workers is not what frames how Republican legislators imagine

pregnancy and parenting.

Even though hundreds of employers signed an open letter opposing SB1 based on how it would affect women's participation in the workforce, the legislature was unimpressed with those concerns. So how are women to take care of the rent, utilities, feed their kids, clothe them, and pay for medical bills?

There is another obvious hidden assumption here: that all women should be in heterosexual marriages where, just as in the 19th century version of white womanhood, they would be staying at home and raising kids, while their husbands would be out in the world working.

The absurdity of this scenario flies in the face of all facts about women's participation in the economy and trends in terms of marriage. More and more women are working fulltime, or even more than one job. Fewer people are getting married at early ages. More women are becoming economic heads of household, both as single parents and as a part of a couple.

These social trends have developed out of longer structural changes and have generated an enhanced quality of life for women overall. Education, the shift of the economy away from manufacturing and towards services, and contraceptive technologies have all facilitated women's higher levels of employment and away from the norms of family formation that featured the traditional male as breadwinner.

In fact, at this point the only category of persons who still overwhelmingly thinks that the nuclear family with the male breadwinner should be the social norm are married white men ages 39-65, who make up a minority of people living in the United States. But this category also happens to be hugely over-represented in politics, and especially in the Republican supermajority of the Indiana legislature.

## Escape from Indiana?

What will Indiana look like five years



from now, if this legislation remains in force without any additional measures to mitigate the economic impact of the consequences I've mentioned above?

As an educator at the largest public university in Indiana, I can point towards some likely outcomes. The gender make-up of the undergraduate population is currently tilting towards more female students, and that trend will end. Only parents who cannot afford to send their daughters to Illinois or Michigan, meaning those with fewer economic means and likely less white, will continue to send them to institutions in Indiana.

The large numbers of out-of-state students at Indiana University, for instance, who have hailed especially from the east coast, Illinois and California, are likely to become less female. What sane parent would send their daughter to Indiana University, a party school, for four years of "college experience" when they could send her to a state where abortion is legal?

Graduate students, who have become somewhat more diverse in terms of gender in the past 20 years, will likely become more cismale as prospective female graduate students seek states which respect women's reproductive rights. Moreover, some of the most promising candidates, whatever gender and other demographic they may be, will have an additional reason to choose another program in a state where all individuals enjoy the same rights.

It may be that some programs will continue to thrive regardless of this trend. But medicine will not be one of them. The dire consequences of that trend are already visible.

Nursing and medical students have been on the frontlines of opposing SB1. A survey of the IU School of Medicine fourth year interns reveals that 85% of them intend to leave the state after graduation now that SB1 has passed.

Indiana already has 27% of its counties designated as health care deserts. That percentage is likely to increase in the future.

Indiana University has made great efforts to recruit a more diverse faculty, but it has a dismal record of retaining them. The new legislation creates a structural problem that is particularly thorny for female faculty. Women ages 25-45, at the peak of their fertility years, will have to consider the advantages of employment at Indiana University against the possibility they will have to deal with unexpected/unwanted pregnancies.

Given the expectations of high academic productivity within a set number of years at the very beginning of that period as a condition for a longterm contract, the abortion ban generates added risks that one might not want to take, especially if other employment opportunities exist. In short, we are likely to see a decrease in the number of female faculty in all programs.

For those affected by the abortion ban who do continue to work or study at Indiana University, added stress factors and thus mental health problems will be a likely outcome. Without additional resources in that area, women will be forced to shoulder those problems either on

their own or through informal networks of support, just as they had to shoulder the COVID crisis in the past two years as mothers of children who were participating in school activities from home.

The level of satisfaction among female faculty is already substantially lower than that of male faculty; without mitigating measures to counter the trend into the future, it will go down.

If the criminalization of abortion brought about no longterm positive results even in a country like Romania with institutional commitment to financially supporting the needs of women forced to shoulder the double day of work, what is the criminalization of abortion without any state or employer support going to produce?

There is no reason to believe that everything will go on as it has until now. There is no reason to imagine that women will not vote with their feet and leave Indiana.

Female flight is a massive problem in the making that is not solely women's. It is a problem for schools. It is a problem for all employers. It is a problem for the healthcare industry. It is a problem for our society, writ large.

While the term "social justice" has somewhat fallen out of fashion, "social injustice" seems like a fitting term for what is happening in Indiana after the passage of SB1. Without a massive effort to call out legislators in the way that electorate turned out in Kansas, the current injustices will only grow and hurt our well-being as a society.

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

# **Stop the repression ! Release political prisoners ! Uphold democratic rights !**

## **22 August 2022, by Samajawadi Janatha Sansadaya**

Inter-University Students Federation (IUSF) Convenor Wasantha Mudalige, Inter-University Bhikkus (Buddhist monks) Federation Convenor Galwewa Siridhamma Thero, and IUSF Kelaniya University member Hashan Jeewantha, have shockingly been detained for up to 90 days - renewable up to 12 months - under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) of 1979. Meanwhile, Chintaka Rajapakse of the La Via Campesina affiliated Movement for National Land and Agricultural Reform (MONLAR) has been remanded under the ordinary criminal law at least until 26 August.

Sri Lanka's state of emergency imposed by Ranil Wickremesinghe as Acting President, lapsed on 18 August. The IUSF demonstration did not violate any court order and the fewer than 1000 protestors were non-violent with no damage to public property or injuries caused to persons including state security forces. However, hundreds of armed riot police and Special Task Force personnel used water cannon and tear gas to disrupt the demonstration. Once the march

had been dispersed, the police chased and assaulted students who were on the run.

Since the political stabilisation of the ruling class in Sri Lanka, following the parliamentary election of Ranil Wickremesinghe on 21 July, there is a wave of state repression against prominent personalities of the people's struggle movement including trade unionists who spoke in its rallies and media conferences, as well as victimisation of hundreds of citizens who entered the state buildings occupied by protestors on 9 July.

President Wickremesinghe, who also holds the ministerial portfolios of Finance and Defence, profited from the citizens' uprising that removed the Rajapaksa family from government. However, he is now intent on suppressing the Aragalaya, to secure his regime until presidential and parliamentary elections are due in 2024 and to administer economic shock therapy through a new wave of neoliberal structural reforms.

On behalf of comrades of the IUSF and MONLAR, the Samajawadi Janatha Sansadaya appeals to the international labour movement and all those in solidarity with the people's struggle in Sri Lanka, to launch actions for the immediate release of all political prisoners, for the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, and for the democratic rights of the peoples of Sri Lanka including freedoms of expression, association, and assembly.

In addition to pickets of Sri Lankan diplomatic missions and interventions by representatives of workers and left organisations, please send letters of protest to:

President Ranil Wickremesinghe  
*Presidential Secretariat*  
*Galle Face*  
*Colombo 01*  
*Sri Lanka*  
ps@presidentsoffice.lk

**Samajawadi Janatha Sansadaya**  
**(Socialist People's Forum)**  
Colombo. 20 August 2022

# Submission to the independent commission on the constitutional future of Wales

21 August 2022, by **Anti\*Capitalist Resistance**

The Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales has been established by the Welsh Government. [20] The commission has 2 broad objectives.

The first is to consider and develop options for fundamental reform of the constitutional structures of the United Kingdom, in which Wales remains an integral part. The second is to consider and develop all progressive principal options to strengthen Welsh democracy and deliver improvements for the people of Wales. [21] This is a submission from Anti\*Capitalist Resistance (ACR), supported by Socialist Resistance and Ecosocialist.scot. It has been slightly

amended from the original with footnotes for issues that may not be well known outside Cymru.

We are three ecosocialist organizations who work together around a common view on constitutional organization and political issues within the British state. Where possible we work with organisations like Labour for an Independent Wales, Melin Drafod, Undod, Welsh Underground Network and YesCymru. [22]

Our analysis of the national question in Cymru draws heavily on the work of the late Ceri Evans, published in Whispers of a Forgotten Nation - The

Writings of Dr D. Ceri Evans.

## **What matters to you about the way Wales is run?**

We believe, as ecosocialists, that Cymru (indeed all countries and states) should be run in the interests of the many not the few. Priority must be given to the needs of ordinary working people and not to the ability of capitalists to make a profit. We strongly support the right of the people of Cymru to independence but agree with the view expressed by the great Irish Socialist James Connolly:

'If you remove the English army tomorrow and hoist the green flag over Dublin Castle, unless you set

about the organization of the Socialist Republic your efforts will be in vain. England will still rule you. She would rule you through her capitalists, through her landlords, through her financiers, through the whole array of commercial and individualist institutions she has planted in the country and watered with the tears of our mothers and the blood of our martyrs'.

However, while we strongly support the creation of an independent Welsh Socialist Republic, we recognise this is not on the immediate agenda and is only possible when the people of Cymru decide they no longer want to live under the domination of the British state and capitalism. However we don't believe nothing can be done in the meantime to benefit the lives of the people of Cymru. This means taking measures to eliminate poverty and inequality; end the gig economy of zero hours contracts in favour of permanent socially useful and environmentally beneficial jobs; end all measures which, either by omission or commission, disable people with physical and/or mental health impairments from playing a full role in society. Above all we need to ensure there is still a planet for us to inhabit.

We welcome the decision by the current Welsh government to declare Cymru 'a nation of safety' and its active support of refugees. We are very much in agreement with the belief expressed in the Constitution of YesCymru that:

'YesCymru believes in an inclusive citizenship, which embraces the fact that all those who choose to make Wales their home - regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation - are full citizens of Wales'.

Such a view rejects 'blood and soil' concepts of nationalism - which ultimately discriminate against those deemed to be outside 'the nation' in favour of equal rights for all those who choose to live in Cymru.

The views of the Welsh government and Plaid Cymru [23] are in stark

contrast to the Nationality and Borders Act of the Westminster government and their plans to deport people fleeing terror to Rwanda. We hope that the government of Cymru will refuse to cooperate in this appalling policy and that Cardiff airport (owned by the Welsh government) will not allow deportation flights to Rwanda.

We also welcome the decision of the Welsh government to take environmental concerns seriously though we would question the aim of 'Net Zero' since it allows capitalism to continue to pollute the planet, produce vast amounts of totally unnecessary and useless goods which use up more and more of the planet's resources and do nothing to reduce global warming. In fact, we have already seen several examples of capitalist enterprises based in England buying up farms in Cymru and planting trees to 'offset' their carbon emissions. This not only takes land out of food production - at a time when the availability of food is under threat globally - but often the trees planted are inadequate for the tasks of soaking up carbon.

In any case trees are only adequate for soaking up carbon in the long term. In Cymru far more emissions savings could come from reducing sheep and cattle farming and the chicken industry as well as preventing pollution of rivers by run off from chicken farms, as is happening today along the Wye Valley. Of course, this would be a difficult political challenge, persuading farmers to convert to arable farming and convincing people that we need to reduce consumption of meat and dairy. But if we are to continue to live on planet earth it is a challenge that can no longer be ignored.

We support a moratorium on new road building (except for access to new socially responsible housing developments with triple glazing, high levels of insulation and solar panels - like in Germany) and welcome proposals to introduce electric buses in a number of towns and cities throughout Cymru though much still needs to be done to increase the provision of public transport in many rural areas. [24] Attention needs to be

given to developing transport links on a north-south axis which would benefit the people of Cymru and allow them to travel more easily within their country rather than the predominant east-west axis which largely serves the interests of exporters from England. However, we totally reject the idea of a North-South motorway put forward by Tory MS Janet Finch-Saunders as environmentally damaging. We need fewer private cars and more public vehicles on the road and especially on rail.

Something like 11% of the UK's rail network is in Cymru yet receives only 3% of the funding. Cymru is paying toward HS2 since it is supposed to be a project benefitting England and Wales yet not a single foot of track comes into our country. The nearest stations will be Birmingham and, if it ever gets that far north, Crewe. Plans to create rail links between Swansea and Bangor via Carmarthen and Aberystwyth are welcome though whether or not the finance will be available to develop them is by no means certain - especially since the Westminster government determines what monies Cymru receives.

We also welcome the planned introduction of a default 20 miles per hour speed limit in built up areas with the aim of getting more people to walk or cycle. - This will have beneficial effects on health and consequently less demand on the NHS; it will also increase road safety, especially for children and people with limited mobility, and reduce the effects of pollution on our planet. However, we believe such a measure could be implemented with considerably less opposition if local citizens were involved in the decision-making process rather than allowing those opposed to the measure to be able to portray it as something imposed upon them, an attack on their democratic rights by a government in Cardiff that wishes to impose its ideas (and rule) on 'ordinary' people.

Free public transport has been introduced for limited periods in a number of places. We very much support this but would like to see it extended permanently, particularly now when so many working people are being hit by wage cuts, loss of jobs



and inflation. The creation of a national transport network using electric vehicles would not only help to significantly reduce carbon emissions but would also provide well paid jobs (both for those building and those operating the vehicles). It would also make it easier for people with physical or mental impairments to interact with others. The current lack of public transport in many areas means particularly means that those with impairments who do not have access to a car are disabled from participating in many of the activities of daily living. The Welsh government needs to do far more to ensure that all transport is accessible.

The ability of the Welsh government to develop a coherent strategy to combat global warming is severely limited by the ability of Westminster to reject environmental schemes in Cymru (as with the Abertawe/Swansea tidal scheme) or insist on environmentally damaging projects such as the Aberpergwm coal mine near Glynneath. [25] The control of much of the coast by the Crown Estate (see below) means that any revenue from offshore windfarms and tidal energy will go to the Crown and the UK government and not to the government of Cymru. There is a clear need for a huge expansion of Ynni Cymru and other community energy projects which could allow Cymru to meet all its energy demands entirely from renewables by 2035. But only if Cymru is able to control its own policies and finances.

We welcome the belated decision by the Welsh government in their agreement with Plaid Cymru to provide free school meals to all pupils in state schools in Cymru. However, the current roll out is far too slow and needs to be speeded up. This has been made even more urgent by the cost-of-living crisis which is unlikely to disappear soon. Parents are being forced to reduce expenditure on food meaning that children are likely to be eating unhealthy, overprocessed food, possibly containing unnecessary additives.

The GIG/ NHS in Cymru is in desperate need of cash and skilled staff. There are serious problems in

the ambulance service and Accident and Emergency units. District Nursing Services are overstretched, in some areas only able to deliver palliative care. GIG/NHS staff have not had chance yet to recover from the Covid pandemic and are constantly overworked. Much of what GIG/NHS offers is good, and staff makes every effort to meet patients' needs; free prescriptions in Cymru (as in Scotland but unlike England) are welcome, particularly at a time of rising costs of living. And it is generally agreed that on the whole the Welsh government handled the Coronavirus pandemic better than the Westminster government. Unfortunately, the current pay offer, in reality a pay cut, to NHS staff is unlikely to solve the problem.

Land ownership is a major issue in Cymru, which relates also to both farming and housing. Land is relatively cheap in Cymru compared to the rest of the UK which means that it is bought up by multi-national firms or investment funds who then use it to 'offset' their carbon emissions or, given the difficulties faced by small scale farmers, their land is bought and consolidated into large scale farms. The creation of Unnos - Land and Housing Wales, answerable to the Welsh government and accountable to the Senedd is a welcome step forward. But greater strides can be taken if Unnos and Ynys Cymru are run as cooperatives along the lines of Suma Wholefoods Cooperative and the previous Tower colliery cooperative with democratically elected and active participation from trade unions, local resident groups and consumers rather than the top-down public ownership models of Cardiff airport and Dwr Cymru. [26]

In addition, there is the issue of Crown Property, brought to attention by the recent Banners on Beaches protests organised by YesCymru. The Crown Estate 'owns' 65% of shoreline and riverbeds, more than 50,000 acres of land and the first 12 nautical miles of seabed from the shore. In Scotland control of Crown Estates is devolved to the Scottish Parliament and last year contributed £700 million into the Scottish government's purse. In Cymru, by contrast all revenues are divided between the Crown and the

UK government with the Welsh Government receiving nothing. In fact, instead of benefitting from Crown Estate property people in Wales have had to pay the Crown Estate for work that only benefits the Crown. [27] The East Rhyl Coastal Defence Scheme for example, built on Crown Estate land received no financial contribution from the Crown Estates but was paid for by Denbighshire County Council and the Welsh Government.

The Crown Estates exist independently of the actual monarch, belonging to 'The Crown' rather than Elizabeth II or her successors. Nevertheless, there is also the question of the role of the monarchy in Cymru in the future. Recent disclosures reveal that Elizabeth Windsor, as a private individual, enjoys immunity from more than 160 laws that apply to the rest of us. These laws guarantee immunity to her private property portfolio and grant her unique protections as the owner of large, landed estates. They also exempt her from laws ranging from animal welfare to workers' rights, health and safety and pensions as well as the Equality Act 2010. While these exemptions relate to the Queen as a private individual it is inconceivable that they are not granted because of her positions as head of state. And they will be extended to her successor. [28]

We therefore support the proposed re-introduction of a bill to devolve the Crown Estates in Cymru and agree with Liz Saville-Roberts, Plaid Cymru leader at Westminster, when she urged all Labour MPs to support the bill.

Housing is also a major issue in many parts of Cymru. Cymru is not alone in that; Cornwall, the Lake District, parts of Yorkshire and Northumberland and areas of Scotland all have problems with second home or holiday lets, as in a slightly different way, do some of the wealthiest areas of London. Whitby in North Yorkshire recently held a referendum on limiting the purchase of new houses to those intending to use the housing as their sole residence.

However, in Cymru there is an important issue that is largely lacking

elsewhere (except Gaelic speaking parts of Scotland) language. Whole villages throughout Cymru have seen the population change from predominantly Cymraeg speaking to English speaking, while in some areas the majority of houses are now either second homes or holiday lets as young people from the area can't afford the prices relatively wealthy outsiders are willing to pay. As a result young people move away, village shops have to close as the village is frequently deserted for much of the year when the second home owners are in their other residence(s), schools close for lack of pupils, public transport becomes even less frequent and the whole culture of the place becomes Anglified, with even longstanding names of houses changed because their original 'Welsh' name was 'too difficult'.

Bizarrely the Daily Telegraph, while encouraging its readers not to holiday in Cymru (or Cornwall) because place names are 'too difficult' is nevertheless still encouraging them to buy second homes in Cymru. However while the Daily Telegraph, continues to run articles encouraging people to buy a second home in Wales, poverty forces local people out of areas of Cymru and unequal distribution of wealth allows rich people to buy up property at a price way beyond the ability of local people to pay and while we live in a society in which wealth is more and more concentrated in fewer and fewer hands then nothing short of taking land into public ownership will even begin to solve the problems associated with housing in Cymru.

We support the measures adopted by the Labour government and Plaid Cymru, as well as some local authorities, to attempt to reduce the impact of second homes by allowing councils to massively increase Council Tax rates for second homes or holiday lets. We also support the granting to local authorities of powers to raise local tourist levies, such as are common throughout much of western Europe at least. However, these measures alone can only have a limited effect and will probably mean that rather than rich people from outside Cymru being able to buy up property only seriously rich people will be able to do so. The Whitby

referendum perhaps offers a more fruitful approach.

We believe it would be more effective for the government of Cymru to prioritise a programme of council house building as well as providing funds to councils to buy back former council houses when they come on the market. Wrexham/Wreccsam council, for example has already started to do this on a small scale. With backing from the Senedd this could be done on a scale that would help to increase the number of council houses available for families.

The current government in Westminster has introduced some of the most restrictive and punitive legislation that in practice seriously limits the ability of people to protest. It also effectively criminalises the Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities denying them the right to continue to live in traditional ways. The right to demonstrate has also been severely curtailed and increased powers given to the Police to control protests. We are opposed to these and other oppressive, sometimes racist pieces of legislation and would hope that in an independent Cymru all restriction on the right of protest, including the right to strike would be abolished.

#### **What do you think the priorities for the commission should be?**

The Commission should seek to discover what the people of Cymru want its current and future arrangements to be. It should explore all avenues and possibilities; for example, in the event of Irish reunification and/or Scottish Independence would either of those developments affect how people would view the future governance of Cymru.

#### **Thinking about how Wales is governed, by the Welsh Government and the UK government, what are the strengths of the current system, what aspects do you most value and wish to protect? Can you provide examples?**

We support the devolution of powers to Y Senedd Cymru as this allows decisions to be taken closer to home.

We support the expansion of Y Senedd to 96 members as this will allow it to more effectively carry out the hugely expanded workload - particularly because the number of MPs from Cymru at Westminster is being reduced by 20 percent. Devolution allowed Mark Drakeford (and Nicola Sturgeon) to deal with the Covid pandemic more effectively than Boris Johnson. Their TV presentations were generally far more coherent than those of the UK government and, unlike the Westminster government, both the Welsh and Scottish governments used a signer so that people with a hearing impairment were not disabled from understanding what was being said.

Elections in Cymru are more democratic than for the Westminster Parliament where the First Past The Post (FPTP) system allows parties to win large majorities in the House of Commons despite having amassed only a minority of votes. At the moment, in the case of Cymru (and Scotland), this effectively means they are governed by a party that did not win majority support in either country. The continued existence of the Welsh Office, answerable to Westminster rather than the Senedd, reinforces this.

While there may be some issues as to how proportional the electoral system for the Senedd is it certainly produces a more proportional result than FPTP and ensures a balance between male and female MSs. In Cymru elections (apart from for the Westminster Parliament) people can vote at age 16. This is also true in Scotland but not in England.

#### **Are there any problems with the current system, and if so, how could they be addressed? Again, please provide examples.**

The ability of Westminster to interfere within devolved matters (and the underlying concept of unitary parliamentary sovereignty) is a dangerous precedent that must be abolished in all forms. The Internal Markets Act, for example, allows the Westminster government to override decisions of the Welsh government. Though even before this Act Westminster could still control

important decisions. For example, the refusal by the UK government to support the proposed Swansea barrage that could have provided environmentally clean energy to houses in Abertawe/Swansea. Westminster ministers have tried on several occasions (so far without success) to force the Welsh government to abandon its cancellation of the M4 relief road. Transport links in Cymru essentially run east-west rather than north-south. In other words, they are primarily concerned with transporting goods from England rather than allowing people in Cymru to move freely from one part of the country to another.

Most recently the Westminster government has announced its intention to repeal the Trade Union Wales Act 2017 a law passed by the Senedd which prohibits the use of agency staff to break strikes in Cymru. This is both an attack on trade union rights and on the right of the Senedd to make policy for Cymru. Now, in contravention of its own promises at COP26, it is insisting on opening the Aberpergwm coal mine.

It has also taken money unilaterally from the Welsh (and Scottish) government to finance military aid to Ukraine. While we are not opposed to providing the weapons Ukraine requires if it is to be able to defend itself against the Russian invasion this should not be done at the expense of services in Cymru (or the rest of the British state for that matter). Given the enormous profits the arms manufacturers are making they should be subject to a windfall tax to ensure Ukraine is able to defend itself AND there are no cuts to an already inadequate budget in Cymru.

Large areas of policy are reserved to Westminster, without which it is virtually impossible for a government in Cymru to function effectively. Westminster still controls monetary and fiscal policy, and the Barnett formula ensures Cymru does not get its fair share of finances, Trade policy, welfare policies, defence, foreign policy, the judiciary and others are all reserved for Westminster, even though the latter is devolved to the Scottish Parliament. Although the Labour government has declared

Cymru a 'nation of sanctuary' it is unable to do this effectively because everything has to go through the UK Home Office which, in the case of refugees from Ukraine we have seen, has been slow, inefficient and lacking in care. And these are refugees the Westminster government claims to support.

This is not totally surprising since the UK government insisted on housing refugees at the disused army camp at Penally, despite most people who knew the area, knew the facilities (or rather lack of them) at Penally warning against this decision. The views of the Police and Crime Commissioner were totally ignored.

Moreover, the current government in Westminster has shown considerable hostility to even the current extremely limited devolution to Cymru. They have instructed all local and national governments that the Union flag must at all times take precedence over the Ddraig Coch or Saltire [29]. They have attempted to impose unionist values on the people of Cymru, whether by insisting that schools all sing a frankly dreadful dirge celebrating the 'virtues' of 'Britishness' or trying to coerce schools in Cymru to distribute copies of a pamphlet extolling the 'virtues' of monarchy.

Westminster has used the post-Brexit period to further step up its assault on devolution. The 'Shared Prosperity Fund', unlike the EU funding it replaces, completely by-passes the devolved governments. It can, and has been, used by the Westminster government to reward Tory seats. The Westminster government wishes to impose freeports in Cymru despite there being no discussion on the matter. Similarly, it wants to impose nuclear power stations in Ynys Mon/Anglesey without any discussion about the merits, or otherwise, of nuclear power.

The electoral system is a major problem. Cymru has been subject to Tory governments in Westminster despite the Tories never having a majority in Cymru. The anti-democratic First Past the Post system must be changed; most modern functioning democracies have much more rigorous democratic processes

than those that currently exist within the UK, or what is being proposed by the Welsh government. Single Transferable Vote system needs to be introduced immediately for ALL elections - Westminster, Y Senedd, local councils etc - with the voting age reduced to 16 and all those who live in Cymru, wherever they were born, able to vote.

**Thinking about the UK government, the Welsh Government and Welsh local government (your local council), what do you think about the balance of power and responsibility between these three types of government - is it about right or should it change and if so, how? For example, who should have more power, or less?**

The balance should be as local as possible, but also correspond to the appropriate level of strategic vision. The UK government in its current and likely future form is not interested in Cymru beyond its ability to uphold the union, and power needs to be devolved to the Welsh Government in areas that could have real benefit to the lives of the peoples of Wales; devolution of Justice and of Welfare are two notable examples within the current constitutional framework. Welsh Government must encourage local authorities to use the powers given to them to serve their constituents, not elected officials.

However the pre-modern, essentially undemocratic (if not actually anti-democratic) nature of the UK state (including the House of Lords, the monarchy, the FPTP electoral system, the control of the media by a tiny number of very wealthy individuals, the very narrow 'catchment' area for judges, senior civil servants etc) makes it largely irrelevant whether or not Westminster, Cardiff or local councils are responsible for particular things as virtually all power will remain in Westminster's hands. This is reinforced by the lack of a written constitution, the constant undermining of what rights people have by a government intent on removing large numbers of our rights and the often ignored 'Crown Powers', especially in centralizing decision making with a consequent lack of



transparency and accountability.

There is nothing to stop UK government's attempting to weaken or even overturn the powers devolved to the Senedd. The current Tory government in Westminster has shown considerable enthusiasm for rolling back devolution. But there has been little enthusiasm from the British Labour Party for greater devolution: in fact, the Welsh Labour government has largely been ignored by the current leadership of the British Labour Party. It would be a step forward, in our view, if the Welsh Labour Party were to refound itself as a party separate from the British Labour Party

We do not believe it is acceptable for the ability of the Senedd to make lasting policy decisions to be dependent on the whim of whatever party happens to be in government in Westminster. If there is to be any meaningful change in the balance of power between the UK government, the Welsh government and local government the ability of the UK government to overrule or override the Senedd has to be taken out of the equation. This should be enshrined in a Constitution for Cymru.

The current Constitutional setup and the reliance on the UK government to provide the funds necessary also makes it more difficult to hold members of the Senedd and especially Welsh government to account. Certainly, it has been claimed that the Welsh government could have done more to oppose the Aberpergwm mine. And the Welsh Labour government has not criticised the below inflation pay rises (in reality pay cuts) for NHS and education staff for which they have responsibility. We can understand their reluctance to pay more than the UK government has decided since the pay 'increases' have to be paid for within existing budgets - meaning a reduction in services. However, we do expect a Labour government to support workers in their struggle against pay cuts.

We would add another tier to the decision-making process - local decision-making bodies. While some councils in England have taken a few steps in this direction (Preston and

Salford in particular) our preferred model would be Porto Alegre in Brazil where all citizens could make proposals and vote on how the council's budget should be spent. This 'from the bottom up' form of democracy is, for us, the most important level - far more important than decisions being made for us. It is absolutely essential for those with physical or mental health impairments to be able to determine their own needs and ensure the resources to meet them are available so they can play a full role in their communities. It is about ordinary working people taking decisions for themselves without which, in our view, there can be no Socialism.

**As a distinct country and political unit, how should Wales be governed in the future? Should we:**

**• broadly keep the current arrangements where Wales is governed as part of the UK and the Westminster Parliament delegates some responsibilities to the Senedd and Welsh Government, with those responsibilities adjusted as in Q5 OR**

**• move towards Wales having, more autonomy to decide for itself within a more federal UK, with most matters decided by the Senedd and Welsh Government, and the Westminster Parliament decides UK-wide issues on behalf of Wales (and other parts of the UK) OR**

**• move towards Wales having full control to govern itself and be independent from the UK OR**

**• pursue any other governance model you would like to suggest**

**• alongside any of these options, should more responsibilities be given to local councils bringing decision making closer to people across Wales and if so, please provide examples**

In our view the nature of the UK state means that if Cymru is to become a modern democratic state that can only be done by separation from the UK, that is to become an independent state. In fact, it is debatable whether Cymru as it currently exists, is in fact a country. Most unionist politicians certainly don't see Cymru as more than a part of the UK, a region. At the

height of the Covid pandemic Boris Johnson famously called on TV news stations to stop talking about the 4 nations, insisting there was only a single 'British' nation. The people of Cymru are undoubtedly a nation though the Dragon may have acquired a few more since Wynford Vaughan-Thomas and Alf Williams claimed in 1985 it had 2 tongues. [30] Afghans, Syrians, Poles and now Ukrainians have all added their culture to the Welsh nation.

The current UK state is not a free and voluntary union. Cymru never voted for union with England: it was imposed on it via military conquest and legislation under Henry VIII. The 6 counties forming Northern Ireland also never voted for union: they were a creation of the British state against the wishes of the overwhelming majority of the people of Ireland. Scotland may have voted for union in 1707 but in rather difficult circumstances. In any case in a genuinely democratic union each of the constituent nations has the right to secede they don't have to go begging Westminster for the 'right' to hold a referendum on independence. In a genuinely democratic union they automatically have that right.

However, we don't believe a federal solution would answer the needs of the people of Cymru, not least because it would always be at the mercy of the government in Westminster. The anti-democratic FPTP and the sovereignty of Parliament rather than the people mean that a government in Westminster could pass laws revoking parts or even all of the federal arrangements. A federal structure would almost certainly be dominated by England since it is highly unlikely that any party which draws its support primarily from England would be willing to accept a federal structure in which Scotland, Wales and the 6 Counties (if Irish reunification has not yet taken place) would have equal status with England. And even if that did happen as noted above a government could use its Parliamentary majority (achieved via the anti-democratic FPTP system) to change the arrangements or scrap them altogether.

That does not mean an independent

socialist republic in Cymru would refuse to enter into alliances with workers in other parts of the former UK. The idea that workers in Cymru will not unite with workers on the other side of Offa's Dyke is frankly ludicrous. If workers can unite in common international unions across the longest land border in the world, the border between Canada and the United States, then there will be no problem uniting workers in England and Cymru.

Nor does it mean we can't make a start on improving democracy and governance in Cymru, even under the current limited settlement. Campaigns around Free School Meals, transport provision (or the lack of it), defending asylum seekers, stopping the constant growth of second homes, defending Cymraeg, opposing nuclear power stations, fighting for clean renewable energy are all part and parcel of the struggle for an independent socialist republic in Cymru.

And students from an independent Cymru would be eligible to (re)join the Erasmus exchange scheme, from which they are currently excluded by virtue of being part of the United Kingdom which has withdrawn from the scheme. The Taith scheme

launched by the Welsh government has many strong points, but it isn't really able to compete with the Erasmus programme.

**Overall, what is most important to you about the way in which Wales should be governed in the future? Is there anything else you want to tell us?**

The only way in which Cymru can be sufficiently free to develop its social, economic and cultural potential within an international context of its own making is by establishing an independent socialist republic. Anything short of that will mean Cymru will be at the mercy of governments in Westminster who will almost certainly be uninterested in, if not downright hostile to, the needs and wishes of the people of Cymru. The people of Cymru will not be able to choose whether or not to enter into international alliances and will be bound by treaties entered into by governments they never voted for, governments probably elected on the basis of the anti-democratic First Past the Post system.

Without independence governments in Cymru will be unable to enact many laws that will improve the lives of ordinary working people because

Westminster will almost certainly reject them if they are inimical to the political views of the governing party while laws developed in Westminster will be imposed on Cymru - as happens today despite devolution.

There are many issues that will need to be given much further thought if Cymru is to be independent. It will require financial sovereignty (i.e., a central bank) and political sovereignty; economic sustainability; how legacy arrangements with the UK (or England if the 6 counties have reunited with the rest of Ireland and Scotland is independent) are arranged to avoid further exploitation.

How can the work already begun around climate change and the environment be expanded to allow Cymru to achieve zero carbon in the shortest possible time?

There are many more questions, many of them raised in the submission from Undod Chwith Cymru/Left Unity Wales. We hope that since the Commission has not ruled out independence then it will launch a full enquiry into these and other issues that go beyond the purely constitutional.

Source: [Anticapitalist Resistance](#)

# Drought, heat wave and revolution

20 August 2022, by **Daniel Tanuro**

It is useless, within the framework of this article, to list facts and figures demonstrating the extreme seriousness of the drought affecting the European continent. Even those who hardly follow the news have seen the frightening images of the Po drying up, the Loire reduced to a trickle of water, the Thames dried up at the source and for eight kilometres, the Rhine so low that navigation becomes impossible there... This unprecedented situation is the result of a serious rainfall deficit, accumulated since the end of winter, after several consecutive years of

drought. Water has become scarce, and in some areas very scarce.

It is also useless to align data concerning the heat wave. It is an understatement to say that the temperatures "are higher than the seasonal averages", as they say on television: they exceed them by a lot. The 40°C mark has been crossed several times in many regions - including regions with a temperate maritime climate, such as Britain. The heat wave obviously aggravates the drought. The current combination of the two phenomena is exceptional in

terms of its geographical extent, its intensity and its duration.

Three points will be briefly discussed: the explanations and their cause, the possible evolution, and the policies to be implemented.

## Explanations and causality

Let's start with the explanations. It will be useful to refer to this good popularization article on the [RTBF-](#)

**Info site.** It explains simply, with supporting diagrams, how the splitting of the polar jet stream encloses an anticyclone (an area of high pressure) in a geographical region, so that a mass of hot air remains permanently blocked above it.

The articulation of the splitting of the jet with the northward movement of the Azores anticyclone is the subject of debate among scientists. As the author of the article says: for some people, "it is the high pressure that causes the jet to split"; for others, "it's the doubling that favours the rise of the anticyclone". One thing is certain: "duplication is indeed a reality which increases the extent of dry and hot periods in our latitudes".

Another certainty: there is little doubt that global warming is the underlying cause of the splitting of the jet stream. Indeed, its stability is conditioned by the temperature differential between the pole and the equator. As the warming in the Arctic is greater than the global average, the differential weakens and the jet stream becomes more irregular, slower, more capricious, which can lead to its splitting.

Heat waves and drought are therefore very clearly attributable to climate change, against which the IPCC has been warning for thirty years. According to the latest IPCC report (GT1) "it is virtually certain that the frequency and intensity of heat waves has increased since 1950 (globally) and will continue to increase in the future even if global warming is stabilized. at 1.5°C". The report states that "the combination of heat wave and drought has probably increased" and that "this trend will continue". For Europe, the report projects (with a high level of confidence) an increase in pluvial flooding in the north-east of the continent and an increase in droughts in the Mediterranean region, with reduced summer rainfall in the south-east.

No surprises, therefore: the observed reality is consistent with scientific projections. Except for the fact, and this is not a detail, that it far exceeds them. By a long chalk.

In reality, everything is going much

faster than the mathematical models indicated. The climatologists interviewed by the press do not hide their surprise at temperatures which suddenly jump 4° or 5°C above the seasonal averages. Rather, such extremes were expected around 2030, or beyond - if governments continued to do (almost) nothing.

We must bear this observation in mind to address the second point: possible evolution.

## **What the future holds for us, and what it is likely to hold**

Like others, I have often drawn attention to a [fairly recent scientific publication](#) which has caused quite a stir. Authored by luminaries in the field, it discusses the positive retroactions of warming (in other words. the effects of warming promoting warming). Its originality is to examine the way in which positive feedbacks could feed each other in a sort of snowball effect, or cascading reaction.

The following quote is crystal clear: "Cascading retroactions could push the Earth system towards a planetary threshold which, if crossed, could prevent climate stabilization at intermediate temperature rises and cause continued warming towards a "planet oven", even if human emissions are reduced".

According to the authors of the article, the process could begin at a relatively low level of warming, between +1°C and +3°C.

One of the feedbacks most likely to trigger the process is the destabilization of the Greenland ice cap. This cap constitutes a particularly fragile point. Specialists estimate that the tipping point for its disintegration is somewhere between +1° (+1.5°C according to the IPCC) and +3°C of average warming. We are therefore probably already in the danger zone, or in the process of approaching it at high speed (with unchanged policy, +1.5°C will be crossed before 2040,

according to the IPCC).

If this tipping point were crossed, what would be the consequences? On the one hand, the influx of water into the ocean would accelerate the rise in sea level. The process would take a long time to come to an end - a new equilibrium point - but would be irreversible. On the other hand, this influx could lead to an abrupt, sudden collapse of the ocean circulation called AMOC (Atlantic Middle Ocean Circulation), which conditions the climate of the regions bordering the Atlantic. And there, the impacts would be immediate.

Here is what the recent IPCC Working Group 1 report says about the risk of AMOC collapse: "While there is medium confidence that the projected decline in the AMOC will not involve an abrupt collapse before 2100, such a collapse might be triggered by an unexpected meltwater influx from the Greenland Ice Sheet. If an AMOC collapse were to occur, it would very likely cause abrupt shifts in the regional weather patterns and water cycle, such as a southward shift in the tropical rain belt, and could result in weakening of the African and Asian monsoons, strengthening of Southern Hemisphere monsoons, and drying in Europe." (IPCC AR6, WG1, TS p. 73)

Everything is obviously in this "if" which opens the possibility of "abrupt shifts". One thing is certain: the consequences of these shifts would be extremely severe for ecosystems and populations. Especially obviously for the poor masses of Asia and Africa. Hundreds of millions of humans would be faced with dramatic situations.

As we have read, Europe would not be spared. The Iberian Peninsula is particularly threatened. Desertification has been progressing there for years. It would cross a qualitative threshold, irreversible on a human scale.

What is the possible link with the current drought and heat wave, knowing that Greenland is not surrounded by the splitting of the jet stream which explains these phenomena. The link is that, for a variety of reasons, warming over the Arctic is twice the global average.



According to the IPCC, it is “virtually certain” that the Greenland ice cap has been losing mass since 1990”: specialists estimate that 4890 gigatons (billion tons) of ice (+ 460) melted between 1992 and 2020, leading to an increase in the sea level by 13.5 mm.

The IPCC emphasizes (once again!) a very important point: these projections are based solely on estimates of ice melt: they do not include the dynamic processes that would accelerate the loss of mass (the detachment of huge fractions of the cap sliding into the ocean), because “Importantly, likely range projections do not include those ice-sheet-related processes whose quantification is highly uncertain or that are characterized by deep uncertainty.” (IPCC AR6, WG1, TS, p. 79)

In view of what is happening elsewhere on the planet, it is not unreasonable to fear that evolution, in Greenland too, will be faster than the models project. That’s an understatement. In fact, a number of clues clearly point in this direction.

Thus, at the end of July 2022, the temperature in Greenland far exceeded seasonal norms. The melting of the ice was twice as important as the other years at the same period. In three days, an estimated 18 billion tons of ice were transformed into water. Scientists have calculated that the amount of water thus released would cover the territory of West Virginia (62,259 km<sup>2</sup>) with a layer of water of about thirty centimeters. This acceleration of melting processes is unprecedented. [31]

No need to expand further: the climate future is more threatening than ever. The lights are red, flashing insistently, and the poorest, the most fragile risk taking the brunt of it.

## What to do ? (a well-known tune)

Let’s move on to the policies to be implemented. The catastrophe is underway and the IPCC tells us that it will continue to progress “even if the warming is limited to 1.5°C”. Note in

passing that the current disaster is the product of a warming of “only” 1.2°C compared to the pre-industrial era. It is not very difficult to imagine what will come after...

Given the situation, it goes without saying that we cannot content ourselves with demanding radical measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions: these measures are obviously essential - more than ever! - but they must be combined with an immediate and very concrete policy of adaptation to the observed and foreseeable warming.

Faced with the increasingly frequent and intense combination of drought and heat wave, what can be done to protect people, plants and animals? A short, medium and long term vision is necessary. It must aim to articulate a public adaptation plan that is both binding (to be effective) and flexible (to be adaptable to the unexpected).

This plan must include priority components in terms of water management, prevention of the health effects of extreme heat (for vulnerable people and at city level, confronted with the phenomenon of “heat islands”), agriculture - forestry, land use planning, infrastructure and energy.

The latest report of the second IPCC Working Group can give ideas on how to design the plan and fight for the plan from social movements. This report is obviously not anti-capitalist, but it reads that “Prevailing development pathways do not advance climate resilient development” (very high confidence). (IPCC AR6, TS.E.1.1, p. 100)

The reasons cited are: the widening of income inequalities, unplanned urbanization, forced migration and displacement, the continuous increase in greenhouse gas emissions, the continuation of changes in land use, the reversal of the long-term trend towards longer life expectancy... [32].

The denunciation of neoliberal policies is implicit, but quite clear.

On the positive side, the IPCC report rightly insists on the fact that adaptation to climate change must be

holistic, social, democratic, participatory, reduce inequalities, rely on the weakest social groups, strengthen the social positions of women, young people and minorities, etc. But its approach is focused on the decision-makers it seeks to convince, not on social movements and their struggles. However, it is on these social movements that everything depends, not on governments.

This is not the place to elaborate a catalogue of demands, we will content ourselves with a few indications and reflections.

Water management is a key point. As the IPCC (GT2) writes, “Central to equity issues about water is that it remains a public good” (high confidence).” (IPCC AR6, WG2, TS.E.2.5) It’s the guiding line.

In particular, it involves questioning the monopolization of water resources by capitalist groups producing bottled water and various beverages, that of forests by producers of paper pulp, pellets or other goods ( see the ecological and human damage caused by eucalyptus plantations in Portugal!), that of groundwater by agribusiness (in Andalusia, for example).

But the guiding line of water as a public good also implies a host of more immediate concrete demands: going back on the waterproofing of surfaces, on the sewerage of rainwater, on the rectification of streams, on the destruction of wetlands; promote agricultural and forestry techniques that restore soils and their absorption capacity by limiting runoff; reorient agriculture much more radically towards agroecology; without forgetting the investment in the distribution network (in Wallonia, for example, 20 per cent of the water produced is not invoiced - network leaks are therefore very significant).

A rational, social and ecological management of water requires another pricing policy. The liberal ‘true-cost’ policy is socially unjust, since all consumers pay for industrial wastewater treatment in large quantities. Moreover, the neoliberal policy encourages the waste of the



resource, since the financial income of the distributor depends in part on the fact that the users also pay for the purification - useless! - of the rainwater put into the sewer...

Another system must be implemented: for households, free consumption corresponding to the reasonable satisfaction of real needs (drinking, baths and showers, washing the house, doing the dishes and laundry, etc.), then rapidly progressive pricing above beyond this level.

The protection of people should be another effective priority. This is not the case. Led by climatologist JP van Ypersele, the Walloon Platform for the IPCC notes that the 2003 heat wave killed more than 1,200 people while that of 2020 killed more than 1,400... Between the two dates, nothing was therefore done... in spite of [promises](#)...

A public plan for adaptation to extreme heat should at least organize the systematic greening of agglomerations (trees everywhere, to provide shade) as well as the thermal insulation of all hospitals, schools, homes for the elderly or disabled .

More broadly, we must reaffirm the urgent need to insulate and renovate all housing. Not only to radically reduce emissions from heating (and air conditioning!) but also to protect health and well-being. In this matter as in others, the observation is there: the neoliberal policies of incentive by market mechanisms are both ecologically inefficient and socially unjust. This policy of half measures must give way to a public initiative, otherwise individual solutions such as the purchase of air conditioners will prevail, leading to an increase in energy consumption and CO2 emissions .

The IPCC insists on the importance of a holistic policy, which considers both adaptation to global warming and the reduction of emissions ("mitigation", in the jargon). Typically, the energy sector straddles both areas. There is a lack of water to cool the nuclear reactors. In view of the projections, this reality can only worsen in the years to come, so that the adaptation policy will be faced with infernal alternatives: should the water be used

as a priority to cool the power stations (by heating rivers!) to generate electricity? to drink ? or to water the crops? (and which crops?) All the more reason (there are many others!) not to count on nuclear power as a "mitigation" solution...

I will not go back here on the measures to be taken in terms of structural reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, I have already devoted many writings to them. In short: energy and finance must be socialized, in the same way as water, we must get out of agribusiness and organize the rapid end of mobility based on the individual car. This bouquet of deep structural transformations is the necessary - but not sufficient - condition for a rapid and effective decarbonization of the global economy.

Without this drastic anti-capitalist remedy, it will prove to be strictly impossible to respect the climatic constraints explained by the scientists. In this case, the "hothouse planet" evoked by Johann Rockström and the other authors mentioned above will most certainly become an irreversible reality. It would mean a human and ecological cataclysm of unimaginable magnitude. Inconceivable.

## **"Notional" climate policy or ecosocialism ?**

Every cloud has a silver lining: everyone can now become aware of the extreme gravity of the situation and the terrible danger we are facing . I reproduce here an excerpt from a [post published on August 11](#) on social networks, concerning the drought in Europe:

"With the floods (of 2021 in Belgium and Germany), climate change has given us, so to speak, a blow on the head. A blow from a club hurts, it can kill those who are on the front line. With the drought, warming shows that it can take us by the throat and squeeze slowly, each day a little more, without rushing, so that we will have plenty of time to see death progress - the most lucid see it already : the

death of plants, the death of rivers, the death of animals, our own death. Because how could we survive when everything disappears? »

Faced with what is at stake, everyone can also become aware of the fact that government policies are totally inadequate, and to be honest, criminal.

These policies do not make it possible to reduce emissions quickly (emissions continue to increase!) to reach "zero carbon" in 2050. It is even the opposite that is happening before our eyes: the post-pandemic recovery and Putin's war against the Ukrainian people have unleashed an all-out rush on fossil fuels (coal in China, Russia, Turkey; lignite in Germany; shale gas in the United States; gas in the European Union). With on top of that a frenzy of neocolonial grabbing, rivalries between powers and barbaric management of migrations.

Not only are government climate policies ineffective, not only do they increase social inequalities, but they also do not protect populations against disasters. This protection of populations is however, in theory, the elementary constitutional task of any government, of any state.

This formidable mess is a potential factor in the spectacular deepening of the crisis of legitimacy of the powerful of this world, regardless of the "camp" to which they belong.

The instability thus created should not fail to have repercussions on the ideological level. We had an example of this recently, in Belgium, with the free forum in the form of self-criticism that Mr. Bruno Colmant published in "[La Libre](#)".]].

In this text, the ex-chief of staff of the very liberal Didier Reynders, the economist who designed the "notional interest" scam, believes that "neoliberal capitalism is no longer compatible with the climate challenge".

Mr. Colmant is right: the "free market" will not get us out of the impasse. Meeting the climate challenge imperatively requires a public plan, social and ecological

objectives other than profit, public resources, and therefore a radical redistribution of wealth, contrary to "neoliberal reforms".

However, having criticized "neoliberal capitalism", Mr. Colmant finds himself in the uncomfortable position of someone who stops in the middle of the road.

Indeed, the neoliberal dogma of the free market is not the only obstacle on the way to a rational management of the climatic catastrophe: the capitalist obligation of growth is another, even more fundamental obstacle, and one that Mr. Colmant is not ready to overcome. A non-liberal, Keynesian or neo-Keynesian capitalism can exist. A capitalism without growth is, as Schumpeter said, a contradiction in

terms. However, without a decrease in final energy consumption - and therefore without a decrease in production and transport - it is impossible to reach "zero emissions" in 2050. Even by sweeping the carbon under the carpet with "offsets", "capture-sequestration", and other "notional emission reductions", this is excluded.

It is an objective necessity: we must produce less, work less, transport less, share wealth, take care prudently and democratically of beings and things. It is necessary, in other words, to break the productivist capitalist machine. Productivist? we should say "destructivist", so clear is that "Capital ruins the only two sources of all wealth: the Earth and the worker" (as Marx said after his anti-productivist

turn).

The climate war has begun and it is a class war. By this I mean that it requires a point of view on the REAL needs of men and women, that is to say a point of view freed from commercial alienation and the race for selfish profit which stands reality on its head.

Outside of an ecosocialist, internationalist, feminist orientation, there will be no salvation. Let us organize ourselves to say so and to act in this perspective, beyond borders, "camps" and "blocs". In short, it's time to dare to be revolutionary.

13 August 2022

Translated by International Viewpoint from [Gauche anticapitaliste](#).

# First congress of Democracia Socialista proposes ecosocialism as the alternative to the climate crisis

## 19 August 2022, by Democracia Socialista (PR)

The presentation, which was open to the public and in which more than 50 people participated, was transformed into a space for debate, exchange and coordination for leaders and members of organisations fighting for the defence of the environment, the protection of our ecosystems and the rapid transition to renewable energy sources.

According to Jorge Lefevre, spokesperson for DS, the activity exceeded the established objectives. "Compañero Jorge Colón clearly presented the crossroads at which we find ourselves," he said referring to the climate crisis. "The logic of the capitalist system demands that the economy grow without limit. When the economy does not grow, there is crisis. The growth which capitalism requires in order to avoid and overcome crises, the boundless expansion of the market and the

accumulation of profits, are in contradiction to peoples' need to survive the climate crisis which confronts us" he added. "The survival of humanity in the face of the climate crisis is incompatible with capitalism. The socialist perspective allows us to recognise that the destructive effects of this genocidal crisis are felt principally by the popular masses and most vulnerable social groups (women, people of colour, indigenous peoples, peasants, those of the global south, etc). We need an ecosocialist alternative, a democratic form of organising society and planning the economy in order to survive the civilisational crisis into which humanity is being plunged", the union leader maintained. "You cannot sustain a system that demands growth when the survival of humanity demands degrowth," he added.

Preceded by a report by Andreu Coll,

militant of Anticapitalistas in the Spanish State and a member of the Fourth International leadership, as part of its work the organisation analysed the international situation. The international conjuncture is marked by what are designated "interimperialist conflicts". Rising tension between the USA and China, exacerbated dangerously last week with the visit of Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan, the clash between NATO and Russia over the expansion of their respective zones of influence and the war provoked by the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian army, are manifestations of these conflicts.

Additionally, the activity was attended by professors Félix Córdova Iturregui and Iyari Ríos, who presented their analysis of the current situation and highlighted the structural nature of the deep crisis in the Puerto Rican economy. Lefevre added that "the

economic crisis that manifested itself in the so-called recession of March 2006 contains several very complex historical levels. It was not a cyclical crisis, the result of the movement of the contradictions inherent in the cycle of capital, but the result of the accumulation of crises at different historical levels, the main ones being the collapse of capitalist and traditional agriculture that accompanied the golden age of the project of industrialisation between 1947-1974; the collapse of the petroleum-chemical project between 1974-1985; the disappearance of

practically half of all manufacturing jobs, beginning with the final disappearance of Section 936. [33] It was no coincidence that the so-called recession that began in March 2006 coincided with the end of the period of grace granted to corporations under 936 before the Section disappeared without the elaboration of any viable alternative to replace it", said the spokesman.

Lefevre, a member of the organisation's Political Committee, raised the importance of having an

analysis at the historical level of the Puerto Rican crisis, to be able to break with the crisis and with capitalism itself. "The analysis of a concrete situation has to be rigorous and serve us as a compass to guide our tasks and our actions." Alongside Lefevre, María E. Suárez Santos, Natalia Santos Orozco and Manuel Rodríguez Banchs make up the Political Committee.

*August 8, 2022.*

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

## Taiwan Strait Crisis: for the right to peace and security in East Asia

18 August 2022, by **Karen Yamanaka**

It was the first time Chinese missiles have flown over the island. On August 5, 24 Chinese aircrafts and six vessels were detected by the Taiwan Defense Ministry near its territory. Compared to the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1995 and 1996, the military abilities of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) have been greatly enhanced over the past 25 years. On August 5, China said that it would withdraw cooperation with the US including military relations and climate change while imposing sanctions against US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi in retaliation for her Taiwan visit. On August 16, the US military said it conducted a test of a Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) that had been delayed during China's show of force near Taiwan earlier this month. [34] The US delegation's visit to Taiwan has created a mounting crisis and it developed fears of conflict in the area.

### Conventional US-Taiwan-China

### relations and the Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis

This is not the first time the military tensions between Taiwan and China across the Taiwan Strait have occurred. Three Taiwan Strait Crises have occurred in the past; the first (1954-55), the second (1958), and the third (1995-96). The first and second crises began when the Communist People's Republic of China (PRC) shelled the island of Kinmen (Quemoy) which was held by the Nationalist Republic of China (ROC). The third crisis began when PRC fired two sets of missiles to intimidate the Taiwanese electorate in the first presidential election of under President Lee Teng-hui with the foreign policy away from the One-China policy. The war-threatening crises may have triggered full-scale conflict between PRC and ROC. They moved a step towards resolution with the intervention of the US. It will also have set a precedent for application of extended deterrence by the US. Since the crises, a zero-sum game relationship had been

created in the Taiwan Strait. This was also a non-zero-sum game in which both parties may have potentially self-destructed. China and Taiwan did not want to use force to resolve their bilateral disputes, and there had been no political-level talks between them. For peace negotiations between the two countries, China had to first halt its military activities. But military force would be the last card taken under compelling circumstances for China. If China discarded the card, there would be a possibility of Taiwan's independence and intrusions of foreign military forces into Taiwan's territorial waters. The US had benefited the most from the zero-sum game. The Taiwan Strait Crisis had given the US a pretext for mass military deployment in East Asia. And it allowed the US to have far-reaching influence in the Asia-Pacific region. Also, arms exports to Taiwan brought huge revenues to US arms.

### Dramatic shift in US-China military

## balance

The situation of the fourth crisis this year is different from that of the past three crises. In the third crisis, the US had sent two aircraft carrier battle groups, which forced the Chinese leadership to admit its inability to prevent US forces from coming to the region. However, China's naval combat capabilities have improved, and the strategic environment in the region has changed significantly. The zero-sum game relationship is gradually changing due to the dramatic shift in the military balance between the United States and China. And the vicious spiral of militarization and nuclear escalation had been fueled in the region. Under such circumstances, Russia's political stance should be noted as China and Russia stand together against the common enemy in the North Pacific. In reality, Putin has threatened to use nuclear weapons against Ukraine. Putin's threat to use nuclear weapons was posed intentionally to raise the situation to the nuclear level at once, make the Western countries hesitate to intervene, and make the Ukraine lose the fighting spirit. China will keep an eye on threats to use nuclear weapons in the Ukraine situation as its own. In the relationship between China and Taiwan, the risk of escalation involving nuclear weapons is fiercely realistic. Recent claims by Russia and China have lowered the nuclear threshold. This is becoming a risk not only for the countries concerned, but also for the entire East Asian region. [35]

## A new global element has been added

In the current fourth Taiwan Strait crisis, new global elements have also been added to the conventional conflict structure. Unlike the third Taiwan Strait crisis era of 1995-96

when the Internet was not widely available, China seeks new ways to fight the crises according to the Chinese military official concept: public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare. [37] It means that a new element has been added to the conventional confrontational relationship between China and Taiwan. The difference between Ukraine and Taiwan is that the Taiwan Strait exists between China and Taiwan. However, Russia's Putin administration and China's Xi Jinping administration have a lot in common such as skeptical towards democracy, control of media to support dictatorship, desire for revival of great power, and unverifiable logic "historical relationship" to justify military aggression. Those similarities that Russia and China have will link with each relationship of Ukraine and Taiwan in some way. In particular, their logic to justify a military aggression deserves special mention. A few years before, the subjective notion that Ukraine is not a country, but a historical part of Russia, appeared to be deeply ingrained in the minds of Russian leadership. [38] This is essentially the same as China's claim "Taiwan is part of the sacred territory of the People's Republic of China. It is the sacred duty of all the Chinese people, including our fellow Chinese in Taiwan, to achieve the great reunification of the motherland". [39] In the notions of Russia and China, there is no right of self-determination for the Ukrainian or Taiwanese people.

## For politics which prioritizes the right to peace and safety

At present, the conflict over the Taiwan Strait may provide the venue that triggers another war among the great powers. The US had held the

Taiwan card to maintain its dominance over China making the most of the zero-sum game relationships between Taiwan and China. But the situation of the current crisis is different from that of the past crises. PLA's military exercises and training activities surrounding the main island of Taiwan mainly targeted Taiwan, and not the US directly. [40] But China will continue its current course of action seeking new ways to fight the crises according and may escalate the situation step by step depending on the situation. Meanwhile, the United States which has benefited from the conventional zero-sum game relationship in the Taiwan Strait is promoting arms exports to Taiwan. On June 17, US House Armed Services Committee Member Jim Banks announced the Taiwan Weapons Export Act for legislation to fast-track delivery of critical weapons to Taiwan. [41] The bill is companion legislation to Senator Josh Hawley's bill in the Senate which was proposed on April 7. Currently, war profiteers are making unreasonable profits while forcing working-class populations to constant wars and social disasters not only in East Asia but also in the world. The "warmongering logic of the military-industrial complex" which is built on the precondition that armaments must be produced and therefore used should be conclusively refuted. [42] The risk of nuclear escalation is fiercely realistic with lowered the nuclear threshold. We must break the vicious cycle of provocations and stop the nuclear arms race in the East Asian region by tenacious anti-war resistance to the remilitarization.

For politics which prioritize the right to peace and security of working-class populations of East Asia instead of military alliances and economic interests!

Demilitarization in the region will provide a potential to prevent a global war.

*18 August 2022*



# The 25 September general election, the reactionary, racist and fascist right-wing and how to fight them

16 August 2022, by **Gippó Mukendi Ngandu** , **Franco Turigliatto**

This is the case both at the level of effective trade union action in terms of demands, and from the point of view of political organisation, i.e. the presence of a well-established left-wing force capable of defending their immediate and medium-term interests on the political terrain.

## Clowns dancing to the tune of a single master

This situation of impasse has been going on for years in the face of a dramatic social context of growing poverty, increasingly generalised job insecurity, the dominance of neo-liberal policies and unbearable social inequality. This should provide the conditions for working people to rise up but it has allowed the various bourgeois forces to completely dominate the political scene and even more the electoral contests. The political parties' 'titanic' media clashes, the manoeuvres and counter-manoevres, the high profile moves of the various bosses and ringleaders of the so-called centre, serve to ensure their daily presence in the newspapers and on television, to 'prove' themselves as the most useful managers and servants of the bosses' interests. They build popular consensus through programmes (or more precisely electoral slogans) which are most often bogus and deceptive but are often indicative of whose interests they intend to represent (see Berlusconi and Salvini's flat tax).

In the meantime, the social class

responsible for all this havoc, i.e. the bourgeoisie, the capitalists, remains out of the picture, it is never challenged. Certainly, its newspapers produce hypocritical editorials denouncing the weaknesses and wrongdoings of its own parties and the difficulties in building a coherent and effective political leadership. In the background we see the enormous profits of the big companies, from Eni to Enel and the Prysmian Group (cable and energy sectors) from Stellantis to Brembo, from Leonardo to Ferrari, from Unicredit to Intesa, including the Italian Post Office - so much so that La Repubblica newspaper is forced to headline 'A profits bonanza'.

## The danger of the reactionary right-wing and creeping fascism - asking the wrong questions

The future of the working classes is threatened by the political, social and governmental role of the right-wing and extreme right-wing. It includes reactionary, racist and even fascist forces, whose coalition is widely seen as winning by all the polls with a hegemonic role for Fratelli di Italia (FdI - Brothers of Italy - led by Giorgia Meloni)

The danger facing our country is great: a victory for these forces and their government can only bring terrible new difficulties for working

people, starting with the weaker sectors, migrant workers, the poor and unemployed, and women.

There can be no underestimation of the risks: the post-election period will in any case be different and even more difficult socially, economically and institutionally, and we must be prepared for the new challenges. A FdI government 100 years after the march on Rome (when Mussolini took power) will unleash the worst dynamics. Cases like the one in Civitanova Marche (a racist murder) will multiply, and all sorts of police, fascist and racist abuse will be tolerated and justified.

Faced with this prospect there are many social, political and intellectual leaders and personalities, who have been active in recent weeks in appeals, articles and in improbable electoral/technical proposals of alliances to try to prevent or impede a resounding victory of the right-wing. Some even hope that some social economic demands or giving greater attention to the working class or poorer neighbourhoods may shift the centre of gravity of consensus or activate sectors that are today entirely passive. Of course the latter proposal is positive if combined in a perspective that is not only electoralist.

However all these arguments are badly posed or are completely unrealistic. Above all, they are incorrect because the authors do not want to identify and understand the reasons that have produced the widespread hegemony of reactionary ideologies in society, the demoralisation and resentment that push people towards the extreme

right. Indeed, reading many of the speeches one wonders: where were they all in the last period? Why have they not lifted a finger against austerity policies? Or if they more or less criticised them, why did they continue to support those who managed them? Why did they believe in Draghi (prime minister from February 21 to July 22) and even today continue to see in him, grand servant of the bosses, the miracle worker of the Italian crisis? How can it be thought that those same people who for twenty years have battered the 1948 Constitution in various ways, already succeeding in distorting it in some fundamental parts, can defend the Constitution? How can they defend the democratic rights that it still partly preserves?

These people wanted to implement Draghi's government deadly and divisive 'differentiated autonomy' of the regions which will increase social inequality and reduce government resources in poorer areas. As it is the democratic aspects of the Constitution are very poorly represented in the current electoral systems. These politicians do not really champion the socially progressive aspirations in the text that have been contradicted by the social and economic counter-reforms of the last 30 years.

How can one think of tackling a huge social and political problem, which is the mass support for the extreme right, with electoral gimmicks, with alliances with those very same people who consider the 1948 constitution unfit for the needs of global competition?

Someone should explain why Fratelli d'Italia, which in the 2018 parliamentary elections garnered just over 4% of the vote and in the 2019 European elections 6.5%, and which was still hovering around 10% when the Draghi government took office, is now given 23% thanks to a skilful, albeit feigned political opposition, so much so that its leader, Meloni, presents herself as the next prime minister to all and sundry! We are talking about a party, which has the fascist flame and Mussolini's coffin in its symbol for these elections!

Perhaps the policies of Draghi's

government supported by all the mainstream parties apart from the FdI were not so good, if new social sectors are looking to the extreme right in search of an alternative that is not only false, but very dangerous for the future of the country.

Some of these people should make an effort to understand that the current success of the reactionary and fascist organisations can be explained not only by the political vacuum on the left, but also by the large trade union bureaucracies' subordination to capital. In all these years they have not even tried to seriously defend the living and working conditions of the working classes, being content with the 'negotiating table', refusing to seriously and systematically build the conflicts and social struggles with alternative class objectives. This would have been the best antidote to the propaganda of the right-wingers and fascists.

## Without struggle Meloni wins

In the absence of class-based struggle, it is ideologies and media propaganda that inevitably condition the consciousness of the masses. Only participation, experiences of struggle, discussion of alternative agendas and platforms determine class consciousness, an understanding of one's place in society, a civil, democratic, collective and socialist consciousness. It is from all this that the will and the need to build another society arises. It drives forward the social and political organisations that take up this task. Through this process people understand who are the false friends and of course the enemies to fight.

Real openings are given to the reactionaries and the fascists when the trade union leaders:

- accept the logic of capitalist competition, i.e. competition between workers,
- do little or nothing to prevent the Fornero pension counter-reform or Renzi's labour reforms,

- forget to denounce the unbearable levels of exploitation by employers, in the countryside, but also those in logistics, where employer and state repression join together to strike at workers' struggles.

The battle against the right must be fought with great strength in the electoral campaign, but it must be done not only with respect to winning votes but above all by working to activate the insurgency and convergence of the exploited on a different class agenda. The capitalists, even if they would prefer a new Draghi government, will have no difficulty in using the forces of the reactionary coalition against the workers.

But at the same time we will have to point out those who are the false friends, those who more or less claim to be on the left, but who are nothing but one of the expressions of the ruling class.

If we are not able to campaign politically and campaign to support struggles, we will lose twice over, because the election result will be particularly bad and it will be even more difficult to withstand the impact of an extreme right-wing government or a new technocratic, authoritarian government, a direct expression of the bosses.

The reconstruction of a deep-rooted, authentic anti-capitalist left force can only happen through a resumption of mobilisations and a profound and radical change in trade union policies. We need to rebuild trade unions that do their job: building struggles, unionisation and the unity of all workers, those with more or less stable jobs, those with precarious jobs and those who have never had a job or who have lost one.

## Some considerations on the pro-Atlantic and pro-European

## PD and Letta's strategy

We have already written about the role of the PD, a party that, for years, through the metamorphoses from the old DC (Christian Democrats) and the PCI (Italian Communist Party), has put itself forward as the most authentic, rational and, of course, 'democratic' manager of the political and economic choices of the big bourgeoisie, the Italian one, but overall the European one, expressed in the European Union project. That is why the PD has been the most faithful supporter of the Draghi government and its policies; that is why it is also the most pro-European. Not in the sense of taking up the interests of the continent's working classes, but of defending the capitalist (and imperialist) project of Europe. It is also today the most pro US current, i.e. converging with NATO and US imperialism. Some may still be surprised that the PD was the most vocal supporter of Italian participation in the war in Ukraine, and of the massive increase in military spending, but there is consistency in these negative choices.

In the same way there is consistency in the electoral tactical choices it has made. The narrow electoral logic induced by the current system should have pushed Letta and associates to pursue an alliance with the M5S (Five Star Movement), which still has polling support of around 10%. It would have allowed it to compete in many first past the post constituencies, limiting the success of the extreme right. But for the PD's ruling group, the alliance with Conte (M5S leader) in search of votes through some distancing from Draghi's policies and an accentuation of some socially progressive demands, even if couched in an interclass way, was too risky. Too risky and contradictory, knowing full well what kind of policies the bourgeoisie will demand in the face of "the clouds gathering" to use Draghi's expression.

On the other hand there was no problem with the alliance with the Greens and SI (Italian Left, small satellite group of PD), useful to give the so-called 'broad coalition' a

sprinkling of social concern, but whose limits and propensity to remain inside the PD's courtyard are well known. It was fundamental, from the PD perspective, to find an alliance also with the so-called centre, in the 'hope' of recovering votes on the right. It is also particularly useful to have a very moderate ally with which to justify an alignment with capitalist priorities and to dump the modest social and civil demands that are being advanced in the election campaign, such as those that are appearing on billboards.

These are choices that correspond to the PD's bourgeois nature consistently expressed in the most delicate political transitions, from Veltroni's leadership of the newly formed Democratic Party (PD) in 2008, then the support to technocrat Monti's government, Letta's and then Renzi's, and finally the decision to break, under pressure from Italian President, Mattarella, the alliance with the M5S in Conte's second government in order to participate in the government of national unity.

Letta's marriage with Calenda's centre was truly a farce. It lasted only five days. In any case, it would not have allowed him to seriously compete with the right-wing, even if it adopted a totally pro-business programme.

## The historical ambiguities of the M5S in search of a revival in its fortunes

A few words on the M5S, it is good to remember that this was the most governmental party of the entire legislature and that even today it is in government with Draghi; its ministers have not resigned. The partially positive measures it has implemented can be counted on two fingers, while the list of negative ones is very long. We are talking about the policies that have produced and accentuated the social crisis in which we are immersed. It would be a serious mistake to confuse an isolated and uncertain 'non-participation' in a vote

of confidence in the Senate on Draghi with the opening of a new path of opposition and 'struggle', as some on the left have wanted to 'believe', or 'delude themselves with'.

## The Union Popolare (People's Union)

An alternative social and democratic programme, combined with the desire to rebuild the struggles of the oppressed, is what the forces that have come together in the 'Unione Popolare' list want to defend and represent in this election campaign. They are Potere al Popolo (Power to the People), Rifondazione Comunista (Communist Refoundation), the deputies of ManifestA (a split of 4 MPs from M5S) and the DeMa Movement of De Magistris (two time elected mayor of Naples).

Some limitations have characterised the formation of this list, starting from the inability or unwillingness to open up to a greater number of social and political forces. There has been some tactical ambiguities, but with serious political consequences, such as the search to form a political pole with the M5S, a structurally interclassist force. We also have the choice of the list's symbol with a name, presented as an electoral tactic for greater visibility, a choice that always entails the risk of contributing to the personalisation of politics desired by the dominant system. Finally, there is an aspiration to be a government force and the readiness for future alliances, which can only foster ambiguity and confusion as to the direction of travel.

For our part, we think it is necessary to support it and search as much as possible for collective work in the construction of a political alternative, and that this must always have a clear class orientation. We wanted to recall this critical evaluation that we have expressed in recent weeks. However, it does not prevent our support for the list. This is in fact the only slate with an alternative perspective with respect to the current dominant political framework. In contrast to the slates of Sinistra Italiana and the

Greens which are completely subordinate to the PD, to the point of swallowing without any problem the Cottarelli (responsible for public spending cuts) agenda, a natural continuation of the Draghi agenda .

And it is no coincidence that there is media silence on it so far: better not to talk about it, better not to collect the necessary signatures for its presentation. In fact, for the People's

Union there is a need, unlike almost all other political formations, small or large, to collect many tens of thousands of signatures in a very few days. This is thanks to the very politically dubious, but also constitutionally dubious, operation of Mattarella and Draghi, who gave such a short run in for the elections. They did this in a holiday period when there are some who can act as they please

thanks to the media tools they have at their disposal and others, the forces of the left, who have to act from below just when factories and workplaces are closed for the sacrosanct holidays of workers. This is an attempt to make the pursuit of a fundamental right extremely difficult. It is also up to all of us to guarantee this elementary democratic right in the coming days by inviting people to sign up for the Unione Popolare slates.

## One Year Since Taliban's Takeover

15 August 2022, by **Hassan Jan**

The whole political and democratic processes were always occupied by the warlords and former jihadis. On the other hand, the US and its allies miserably failed in containing the Taliban insurgency that had now more regional allies than they had in the 90s. The combination of these factors led to the demise of the regime. But, misery continues for the Afghan masses. The new Taliban regime has proved to be a disaster for the masses on all fronts especially in the economic front. With no economic prospect, the new regime is emphasizing more on moral policing than the real economic woes of the masses. Thus, Afghanistan is on a fast track to becoming rubble.

In the last four decades, reactionary and counter revolutionary insurgencies have been plaguing Afghanistan. In order to crush the nascent revolutionary government formed in the wake of Saur Revolution of 27th April 1978, American and Western imperialism along with their regional stooges nurtured and promoted the counter revolutionary Mujahideens and a narco-economy was created to fund them. This operation was called "Operation Cyclone" and millions of dollars were poured into it to fight the revolutionary regime led by People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) who dared to overthrow capitalism and landlordism from

Afghanistan and build a prosperous society. Thousands of counter revolutionary mercenaries (Jihadis) were recruited from Pakistan and all across the world, trained and dispatched to Afghanistan. The decline and economic crisis of Soviet Union and the internal strife of PDPA ultimately resulted in the demise of revolutionary government. Despite all their short-comings, the revolutionary government withstood the entire Jihadi onslaught. It was the collapse and ultimate disintegration of Soviet Union which proved detrimental to the revolutionary government as it cut off the necessary economic lifeline of the country.

After the fall of PDPA regime in 1992, the different factions of Mujahideens, supported by different regional powers, fiercely fought amongst themselves over the control of Kabul. This civil war turned Afghanistan into debris. Such state of affairs was not even in the interests of American imperialism as it was greedily drooling at the untapped natural resources of newly separated states of central Asia. Taliban emerged out of the same Mujahideens in 1994. With the strategic backing of Pakistan and tacit support of America, the Taliban soon overwhelmed other Mujahideen groups and captured Kabul in 1996. In order to extract the riches of Central Asian countries, a strong central government in Kabul was necessary as

it would guarantee the safe passage of resources from these countries through Afghanistan into Pakistan and then from Arabian sea to the international market. The American oil and gas exploration company Unocal, eyeing the gas pipeline contract, supported Taliban's ascent. However, the conflicting interests of various regional and imperialist powers rendered the project unsuccessful. Using the 9/11 bombing of twin tower in New York as a pretext, USA invaded Afghanistan to, apparently, punish Taliban and Al-Qaeda for the attacks and build democracy in the country.

While invading Afghanistan, American imperialism had some explicit and implicit goals. The explicit goals were the overthrow of Taliban, crushing of fundamentalism, building democracy, human rights, women empowerment etc. while the implicit goals were the containment of Chinese influence, keeping an eye on Russia, threatening Iran and the plunder of vast mineral resources of Afghanistan. After twenty years of occupation of Afghanistan US imperialism and its allies miserably failed in all these objectives. It is an irony that America wanted to build 'democracy' and crush Islamic fundamentalism with the help of the same Mujahideens whom they trained and armed to overthrow the revolutionary government of the PDPA. These Mujahideens, warlords and drug lords were the face of



western democracy installed in the country.

American imperialism started this process of "nation-building" in Afghanistan at a crucial historical juncture when the neo liberal economic model of world capitalism was reaching its limits. The last major expansion in productive forces under global capitalism was during the postwar boom, that also owing to the colossal destruction of productive forces in the war. However, that boom soon came to an end in 1973 oil crisis. Since then, in order to increase the declining rate of profit, world capitalism has resorted to neo liberal recipes of cuts, austerities, privatizations, downsizing, rightsizing, deregulations and reduction of state intervention in the economy. This new model of 'trickle down economics' has been a disaster even for the masses of advanced capitalist countries. All the major sectors of the economy were relinquished to private sector to maintain the rate of profit. This neo-liberal economic recipe unleashed a new breed of monster billionaires while subjecting hundreds of millions of people in abject poverty around the world.

At this stage of world capitalism, the 'reconstruction' and installation of democracy in Afghanistan was bound to be doomed. Global capitalism had lost its historical progressiveness. Neither they had envisaged such 'reconstruction' nor was there any possibility for such endeavor. They had their own designs in which they completely failed. Despite all their huge expenditures on reconstruction, they could not transform Afghanistan into a modern state, just as the Americans had done in South Korea, Hong Kong and other island states around China during postwar boom to contain the spread of left movements. All their constructions and infrastructural projects were designed for military and strategic purposes.

As far as democracy is concerned, the same warlords and ex-Mujahideens were brought to power whether Hamid Karzai or Ashraf Ghani. The rhetoric of human rights or women rights only benefited certain sections of urban middle classes who emerged as a result of global aids and NGO-tic

investments, while the rest of Afghanistan continued to suffer. The black economy around drug trade continued to thrive which is, even today, the economic lifeline of Taliban. Even the personnel of American embassy in Kabul were involved in the illicit drug trafficking. An estimated 90 per cent of Afghanistan's economy was (and still is) undocumented or informal of which poppy cultivation and drug trade is the largest part. The presence of such economy ultimately breeds corruption and chaos in the formal hierarchy of the state institutions. During the two decades of democracy in the country, neither the Afghan government nor the Americans could contain this informal economy, rather the Afghan government officials were involved in the profitable black economy. Ultimately, their "nation-building" project failed miserably.

Meanwhile, despite all their state-of-the-art military equipment and military superiority, the NATO forces could not contain the Taliban insurgency. Taliban had their safe houses in Pakistan and had the uninterrupted strategic and military support from the Pakistan's deep-state. Unlike the 90s, Taliban had now increased their regional outreach by forging cordial relations with Iran, Russia and China. When the Americans had failed in curbing Taliban, they promoted IS-K (Islamic State-Khorasan) against it by causing defections in Taliban ranks and importing ISIS mercenaries from Iraq and Syria. Taliban's outreach to Iran and Russia came to a limelight when the then Emir of Taliban Mullah Akhtar Mansoor was killed in Pakistan near Iran border by a US drone strike. It was later revealed that Mullah Akhtar Mansoor was actually returning from his visits to Iran and Russia to garner support against America and the IS-K.

As per the estimates of Aljazeera reports, US made a colossal 2 trillion USD military expenditures in Afghanistan in the last two decades. Despite this, the Americans had to negotiate with Taliban for a graceful exit from Afghanistan. The Qatar agreement with Taliban was basically an instrument of surrender on the part of America. They had completely failed in all their objectives. Neither they

could crush Islamic fundamentalism and reconstruct Afghanistan nor could they contain Iran, Russia and China. During the whole process of negotiation with Taliban, the Americans kept their handpicked Afghan government led by Ashraf Ghani aloof from the talks which says volumes about their view of the government and regime they had built in the last two decades. They knew the degree of relevance and potential of Afghan government and the real powers-that-be in the country.

As soon as the Americans started their withdrawal, the Afghan government started to crumble like the house of cards. The almost 300,000 Afghan army and security forces could not present any formidable resistance in face of Taliban's offensives. On the one hand, the massive corruption and mismanagement had long rendered the Afghan army impotent. Half of the army personnel were simply ghost army i.e. they were present only on papers. On many occasions, the army surrendered due to non-arrival of supplies. The soldiers had to bribe the authorities to provide them food and other vital supplies. On the other hand, the political leadership (the warlords and ex-Mujahideens) and government had no plan of offering any resistance. They had their own plans of negotiating with Taliban. They were simply the proxies of difference regional powers. For example, Herat's warlord Ismail Khan initially offered some resistance but ultimately upon the instructions of his masters in Tehran surrendered to Taliban. Later he fled to Iran. The swift fall of provinces owes much to the backdoor diplomacy of warlords and tribal chiefs with Taliban. In this mayhem, the president Ashraf Ghani was utterly clueless in face of Taliban offensive. What else can be expected from an ex-official of international financial institutions who was trained only in clerical duties? In the absence of a centralized leadership and vital supplies, the commanders and high-up officials of one province after another surrendered to Taliban. On the fateful day of 15th August 2021, President Ashraf Ghani boarded a plane and fled with, reportedly, millions of dollars in brief cases. Taliban entered and captured Kabul even before the completion of American withdrawal

scheduled for 31st August.

The defeat of American imperialism at the hand of the one of the most reactionary outfits was not possible were it not for the support of Pakistan, Iran, Russia and China. This time around, Taliban's capture of Kabul has been relatively bloodless due to the involvement and consensus of aforesaid regional powers. One of the implicit goals of American invasion of Afghanistan was the containment of Iran and Russia and besieging China. IS-K was the brainchild of American imperialism for this purpose.

The reactionary triumph of Taliban has unleashed a new era of misery for the Afghan masses. American imperialism with all its economic and military might could not build a viable state in Afghanistan; how can a group of reactionaries with no resources and economic program different from their predecessors transform Afghanistan into a better society? Ever since the advent of Taliban government in Kabul, Afghanistan has been blockaded economically. Sanctions have been imposed and the country has been cut off from the global market resulting in the winding up of the meager economic activity around legal economic infrastructure. Before Taliban's takeover in 15th August, Afghanistan's 75 per cent of economy relied on foreign aid. Immediately after the collapse of former regime, all these foreign assistance came to a halt resulting in mass unemployment due to nonpayment of salaries. As far as the regional powers (Iran, Pakistan, Russia and China) supporting new Taliban regime are concerned, they can't provide as much economic assistance as Afghanistan used to receive during the last two decades. For example, China has its eyes on vast mineral resources of Lithium, Copper and other elements. China has pledged to invest in the country but due to uncertainty they are hesitant. Iran, Pakistan and Russian are already reeling from economic crisis.

According to a UN report, more than half a million people lost their jobs in the last one year. It is estimated that

97 per cent of the population will sink below the poverty line in 2022. Social media is rampant with pictures of former journalists and media employees selling fruits on the streets of Kabul and other cities. The heart-wrenching scenes of people gathering around almshouse for a piece of bread have become commonplace in Kabul. Queues of poor women outside bakeries for a loaf of free bread have become a new normality. The number of beggars has also increased in the country. 95 per cent of Afghan families are facing food insecurity. According to a survey by Save the Children in February 2022, "82 per cent of Afghan families had lost wages since August 2021 and almost one in five were sending children to engage in labor (for miniscule wages), while 7.5 per cent stated they were resorted to begging or requesting money or food from charity."

On the one hand, with no economic resources and viable economic program the Taliban are trying to impose their reactionary misogynist morality on society. Girls have been barred from educational institutions. Women employees of different departments have been instructed to provide a male replacement for their jobs so they can perform their duties in their place. Those working in TV channels have been directed to cover their faces and wear Islamic Hijab.

On the other hand, the rifts between Taliban factions are also raising their heads. In the initial days of their power, there was a violent scuffle among Taliban leadership during a meeting in Kabul. Reportedly, the brawl happened in the wake of power sharing among different factions, the main among them the Haqqani network, led by Sirajuddin Haqqani, and Mullah Barader faction. Mullah Barader was reportedly injured during the scuffle and he fled to Kandahar. Haqqanis are considered to have close links with Pakistan's deep-state. Currently, Afghanistan's internal security and interior ministry is headed by them. Mullah Barader led the negotiation with America in Doha which resulted in US withdrawal.

Reportedly, he wanted to strike a separate deal with USA in 2010 against the wishes of Islamabad, when he was arrested in Karachi and held till 2018. He is considered to be in favour of a more inclusive government in Kabul. In conditions of bleak economic outlook, more such brawls and internal rifts will be on the horizon.

Afghanistan has been in the throes of imposed civil wars in the last four decades. These chaos and mayhem have derailed all the political processes. Political activism has been replaced by the bullying of warlords, Mujahideens and now Taliban. It is literally a graveyard and debris which the Taliban has captured with no economic prospect. With each passing day the country is heading towards an ever greater humanitarian crisis. The masses will definitely resist such state of affairs. The protests against gender discrimination by women folk have shown the possibilities inherent in the situation. If Taliban tries to suppress such mass resistance it will further infuriate the masses and complicate the already volatile situation because Afghanistan is not like the theocratic state of Iran where economic opportunities and social progress is at a far higher level. Further repression can lead to a virtual disintegration of Afghanistan on ethnic lines. The so-called National Resistance Front (which is an alliance of reactionary former Jihadis) together with IS-K can launch deadly attacks on Taliban which can turn into a dangerous bloodbath. But things can go in other directions too. The war in Ukraine has exacerbated the crisis of already fragile state of Pakistan. The crisis of the state has blown up. Inflation of basic commodities has skyrocketed in Iran. This can lead to social explosions in these countries. Any progressive change in Islamabad or Tehran will be a beacon of hope for Afghanistan. Only such a revolutionary change in Pakistan or Iran can provide a sigh of relief for the suffering Afghan masses.

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# Radical Left Against the Rise of Neo-Fascism

14 August 2022, by **Franck Gaudichaud, Martín Mosquera**

**Martín Mosquera: Can you make a general balance of the electoral sequence which takes us from the presidential to the legislative elections?**

**Franck Gaudichaud:** What we can say is that we are facing an acute crisis of the ultra-presidential system of the Fifth Republic in France and that, at the same time, there is an acute political crisis of Macronism, the current main political face of the ruling class and of authoritarian neoliberalism in France. These crises are reflected at the electoral and institutional level, but in a deferred manner with respect to the multiple tensions (social, racial, gender, territorial, ecological, cultural, etc) and the class conflicts which exist deep within Gallic society.

Firstly, it is necessary to underline the extent of abstention, something very important both in the last presidential election and in the legislative ones, although even more so in these: more or less half of the electorate did not show at the polls. Neither the left, nor Macronism, nor the extreme right managed to mobilise massively. We have very high levels of abstention, of more than 60 or 70% in the youth and in the popular sectors. This is a central point for any left perspective, since it is in the popular neighbourhoods, among migrants and young people, that the left should capitalise and continue to grow (and not only at the electoral level). Finally, in the second presidential round, Macron was elected —for the second time— against the extreme right (of Marine Le Pen), with 58% of the vote. But half of his voters (including many on the left) supported him by default, that is, to prevent a victory of the extreme right (stopping fascism at the polls), although in reality they reject the disastrous political balance of Macronism.

A second trend is that the crisis of the presidential coalition is reflected even more clearly in the legislative election and this leads to the fact that, for the first time in twenty years of republican life with a presidential system since 2002 of a five year term, that an elected president does not have an absolute majority in Parliament. Macron's coalition finds itself with a relative majority of 245 seats and, lacking more than forty seats, a long way from reaching an absolute majority... It went from obtaining 33% of the vote in 2017 to less than 26% today : La République En Marche (LREM/The Republic on the Move) - Macron's party - lost half of its seats compared to the previous legislature! This means the opening of many unknowns in the short term and a period of strong institutional instability: the current government of Elisabeth Borne - a former socialist supporter of neoliberal austerity recently appointed as Prime Minister - will have to negotiate each step with the traditional right, perhaps with some members of the social-liberal center and even - as they are already actively doing - seek support (or abstention) from Marine Le Pen in Parliament, giving more space and a position of power to the extreme right. The problem represents a major fissure for Macron, which further reinforces the ultra-presidential drift that the regime has suffered since 2017, without building a solid political apparatus of its own and with a Parliament considered by the power only as a space for validating its managerial directives.

Third lesson: we are witnessing the confirmation of the tripolarisation of the French political sphere and the end of the bourgeois bipartisanship that has dominated the scene since the creation of the Fifth Republic by General De Gaulle in 1958. That is to

say, three blocs appeared and the historical parties that have governed France in recent decades, the great parties of the ruling classes up to now, that is, Les Républicains (the traditional right) and the (social-liberal) Parti socialiste (PS/Socialist Party) have almost disappeared from the presidential scene. These two parties have been totally dispersed, atomised, by this new scenario of tripartition: one of Macron's tasks has been precisely to pulverise these historical parties to reconfigure a neoliberal "extreme center" around himself. However, the PS and the right have shown a certain capacity for resilience in the legislative elections, thanks to their national anchorage and local figures.

A first pole is brought together around Jean-Luc Mélenchon, one pole of the parliamentary left whose center is France Insoumise (FI), a left much more to the left and more radical than the PS, with which it managed to unite for the legislative elections - in an unexpected tactical gesture that owes much to the new weight of FI and to the figure of Mélenchon- and almost all of the various forces of the parliamentary left within NUPES (Nouvelle Union populaire écologique et sociale/ New Popular Ecological and Social Union). A second pole is that of authoritarian neoliberalism around Macron and his coalition called Ensemble. And a third, a pole of the extreme right, with clear neo-fascist tendencies, around Marine Le Pen and other small xenophobic and ultra-conservative groups. It is noteworthy that during the presidential elections we have witnessed the emergence of an even more radical and openly fascist extreme right around the polemicist and former journalist Eric Zemmour, who despite a speech vindicating Marshal Petain (a Nazi collaborator) managed to gain almost

2.5 million votes, 7% of the votes. Zemmour's radicalism has even contributed to giving Marine Le Pen a slightly more "republican" image and presenting her, to ever broader sectors of the establishment, as a possible governing force.

The great challenge that this political-electoral sequence leaves for the left is to know to what extent it will be possible to build alternatives to both Macronism and an extreme right in full growth and institutionalisation. That is, to create unitary social and political fronts and, at the same time, build non-sectarian anti-capitalist forces in order to face a very complex scenario, in a context of inflation, economic crisis, climatic collapse and bloody armed conflict in the heart of Europe.

**MM: What can you tell us about Melénchon's presidential election, the construction of NUPES and the legislative result of the left?**

FG: During the presidential election, the first trend that was confirmed is that the left is at very low levels, around 30/31% of the total vote. Within that percentage, the central axis has been France Insoumise and Melénchon, who got 22% of the votes, only one point behind Marine Le Pen and the possibility of competing in the second round against Macron. This constitutes another missed opportunity for a clear electoral battle between authoritarian neoliberalism and a left of institutional transformation that proposes advanced reforms. Unfortunately, Melénchon was defeated again, but he managed to show - beyond his many limits and contradictions - that a discourse of democratic reforms breaking with neoliberalism and racism, with a very active and popular campaign, reclaiming ecological planning and the return of the role of the public state, could defeat the extreme right, marginalise social liberals and threaten the power of Macron and finance capital. As is widely known, the FI and Melénchon are full of ambiguities and blind spots. The same Melénchon who for 30 years was the leader of the PS continues, in his numerous speeches, to vindicate part of the tradition of the "governmental left" of François

Mitterrand or even that of Lionel Jospin (who brought so many disappointments and betrayals to left-wingers). This is an orientation that in many respects could be described as "national-republican", in particular when referring to the "glorious" role of France in the world (including in its current "colonies"), to the role of the Armed Forces and of "nuclear deterrence" to "build peace in the world", when it mobilises "patriotic" symbols and relies on an understanding of our history that is quite far removed from the tradition of decolonial and anti-imperialist struggle of other sectors of the left. At the same time, FI's programme on essential ecological planning and combating the financialisation of the economy is, without a doubt, one of the most detailed and progressive on the left; as are the rights of women and LGBTQI or in terms of an aggressive tax policy towards large companies and multinationals. During the campaign, Melénchon's opposition to the use of civil nuclear energy, the clear denunciation of police violence and the structural racism of the State and, in particular, Islamophobia, were very advanced for the general level of consciousness in the country and have been a fundamental breath of fresh air in a media camp saturated with xenophobia and prejudice. Melénchon's model is the "revolution at the polls" or "citizens' revolution" - in a certain way, essentially a reform plan "from above" linked to the demands of civil society. In fact, he is very inspired by the dynamics of Latin American progressive governments: he first approached the processes in Venezuela, Bolivia, Brazil and Ecuador. Now -with the second progressive wave in the continent- he decided to go on a new "tour" of the continent, particularly through Mexico, Honduras and Colombia, showing his interest in the new governments in power. This is a clear political message also intended for France.

The rest of the left that competed in the presidential election did not allow for unity and it seems to me that in the face of an increasingly threatening extreme right this has been a serious tactical error. We therefore saw EELV (the ecologists) and the Parti communiste (PC/Communist Party) get

less than 5%. The PS, the grand party of government since the 1970s, took less than 2%. This is a tremendous collapse! And the revolutionary left, with the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) and LO (Lutte Ouvrière/Workers Struggle) competing, proved able to mobilise little or almost nothing at the electoral level, obtaining 0.7 and 0.5% of the votes respectively. Despite this it must be said that the campaign of Philippe Poutou (NPA) was very dynamic and managed to find real sympathy on the left and from certain politicised sectors on the popular and union fringes, for being a worker and anti-capitalist, who does not mince words in front of conservative journalists and bourgeois political leaders. The huge bet, and the tactical and political success of Melénchon, has been the creation of NUPES. It is there that Melénchon forced all the parties of the institutional left to ally for the legislative elections around his programme L'Avenir en commun (the future in common), with some concessions as part of these negotiations, in particular that of constituencies for a dying PS. This meant the unification of the socialists, communists, greens and FI. Obviously, the incorporation of the PS was tactically important at the electoral level for Melénchon because of its country-wide presence. But this had a very high political cost because it is a social-liberal party. What Melénchon managed to do by bringing the PS to its programme of breaking with neoliberalism is something unexpected (and denounced by the old socialist leaders as an unbearable "radicalisation"). But it has not been possible to incorporate the NPA, the anti-capitalists, into that coalition, precisely because the alliance with the center, with the PS, was prioritised and no space was given to the revolutionary left.

In the end the result of the legislative elections was quite disappointing, since NUPES won only 133 seats (30-31% of the votes, 13% of those registered and 6.5 million votes), when the expectation was for much more (the entire world was talking about 200 seats), which was very far from the objective Melénchon set in the campaign of obtaining a majority and imposing a government



on Macron. The uninominal ballot system underrepresents the left in the Chamber, where despite achieving a strong presence in the large metropolises and medium-sized cities, does not do so in the countryside. Under a proportional voting system NUPES would have won at least 15 more seats. But, beyond the effect of the electoral system, we can see that it was not possible to widely mobilise young abstentionists and those from the popular classes around the coalition programme of the left. Thus, it can be seen that, in most of the clashes in the second round of the legislative elections between the extreme right and NUPES, the extreme right won...! That is a lesson of great importance and it confirms a danger. In any case, NUPES opens up a perspective for the left, due to the fact that, whereas it had only 17 seats in the previous mandate now it has over 130 seats with more than 70 coming solely from the most radical sector, FI. This opens many avenues to fight against Macron and the extreme right institutionally, from within Parliament. The first weeks confirm this will of the left-wing deputies, although with a certain tendency to seek an audience on social networks rather than to build projects... The challenge is to open up to social movements and union mobilisations, supporting them to confront Macron's combative neoliberal programme and at the same time to reveal the antisocial and racist options of the extreme right.

The question is whether NUPES is really going to maintain that unity or if it was just an tactical electoral option. We already see the first tensions within this space between the social-liberals of the PS, the PC, the environmentalists and FI. Melénchon's proposal to have a unified parliamentary bloc has been rejected by the rest of the coalition's components. So there is an internal tension that translates into possible divisions in the parliamentary work of the left. But there are also differences at the strategic level.

**MM: In this scenario what can we expect from Macron's second term?**

FG: Effectively, we are entering a

period of crisis and instability, beyond Macron's management, of the regime of the Fifth Republic. Macron, who no longer has a majority, is going to be forced to negotiate permanently, in particular with Les Républicains (on the right) - who for the moment have said they would stay in opposition - or with spaces of social liberalism and with the extreme right. Due to its composition the newly appointed government is even more to the right than the previous one and is much weaker, dependent on parliamentary right and on Marine Le Pen's caucus. Several analysts predict a possible dissolution of Parliament and a call for new elections (a power of the president). In parliamentary regimes, such as Germany or Italy, a minority government can govern, forging coalitions. But the Fifth Republic doesn't work like that. It must be understood that the context we are in is that of an acute crisis of legitimacy of the French "republican monarchy". Most European political regimes are parliamentary systems where coalitions are the norm; in France we have an exacerbated presidentialism where in the event of a minority, presidential power enters into crisis. Thus we see the exhaustion of the regime initiated by General De Gaulle in 1962 (which underwent substantial modification in 2002). In addition to that, we should remember the many affairs: embezzlement in the McKinsey case (a private consultant who received millions of euros), accusations of sexual violence against two ministers, the Uber case and influence peddling when Macron was minister of the economy which impacted the world press, etc.

In this context, the promises of the current tenant of the Élysée Palace are more of the same: a continuation of neoliberal violence whose axis is the pension reform, in order to raise the retirement age from 62 to 65 years. That is a very big social regression. With this comes a policy directly aimed at the richest, with tax benefits for large companies and the wealthiest sectors of the country. Macron thus confirms his profile as "President of the ultra-rich", an expression coined by two renowned critical sociologists. Despite his weakness, Macron tries to guarantee the country's capitalists that he will

follow the chosen path, in a context of an explosion of public debt with billions of euros injected into the economy by the State during the pandemic crisis (to directly finance companies to enable continuity of employment).

It is most likely that the institutional crisis will also correspond to a political-social crisis from September, with the reactivation of social and trade union movements around the defense of the public distribution retirement system, but also in the face of the enormous crisis that currently exists in health, where there is no longer the capacity of the public hospital system to respond to the outbreak of the pandemic. Similarly in the education system which teachers — who do not want to live in totally precarious working conditions — are deserting. So we clearly see a weakened power without the ability to respond to the institutional crisis, but with a strong class arrogance, where Macron says only that he is going to prolong his neoliberal reforms and support Ukraine against Putin.

What we see today, then, is a consolidation and expansion of the far-right and neo-fascist vote. Indeed, the result is unexpected for Marine Le Pen and the Rassemblement National (RN/National Rally). The Macronist strategy of choosing the extreme right as its "best adversary" in order to present itself as the last barrier in the democratic struggle, inflating Le Pen to marginalise the radical left, only managed to further consolidate a neo-fascist option in France.

First, we have seen how she managed to reach the second round of the presidential election once more and obtain more than 40% of the votes with more than 13 million votes (remember that the RN had obtained only 4.6 million in 2007). What was not expected, particularly from the left, is its exceptional, historical result in the legislative elections. The extreme right achieved a vote never seen in the history of the Fifth Republic, with more than 3.5 million votes and 89 seats, an enormous result despite the weakness of its local presence. If we compare this with 2017, its presence in Parliament multiplied by 10! This in a context

where the electoral system is initially very unfavourable to formations such as the RN. We see its consolidation nationally in the north and southeast of France, in areas where there was strong deindustrialisation, where the Communist Party lost its footing and where now Marine Le Pen is capable of appearing as "the party" of the white working class. Also the RN devastated rural areas, stripping spaces of public services where employment is precarious and scarce. The sociologist Ugo Palheta speaks of the constitution of an ultra-nationalist and cross-class "white bloc" that rejects all class discourse in order to construct an ultra-nationalist discourse where the enemies are migrants, foreigners and "globalisation", but it also has internal enemies: youth from neighbourhoods of post-colonial migration, Muslims, trade unionists, feminists and the LGBTQI movement. In several regions there is an enormous consolidation, in entire departments, where all the deputies are from Rassemblement National, where there is an enormous rejection of Macronism but also a scenario in which the left is not capable of competing with the RN. So we see a consolidation of an extreme right around an openly anti-immigrant, anti-feminist, racist programme articulated with an in quotes, "social", anti-Macron discourse, where there is a mix of Islamophobia, vindication of the police and their violence, with, at the same time, a rejection of the policy of Macronist social destruction (although its economic programme is, in reality, also ultraliberal, something already confirmed by its first votes in Parliament).

Now, the RN is going to have a huge capacity to politically influence from within Parliament and thanks to the support of Ensemble they have just won the two vice-presidencies of the National Assembly: two neo-fascists in the presidency of the second organ of state power! The party will receive more than 10 million euros per year throughout the mandate. Obviously, we are facing a risk of neo-fascist consolidation, in alliance with other forces at a European level, which will allow the Le Pen dynamic to be cemented with its possible allies in the European extreme right, with a policy

regarding the need to unify the right in France but around Marine Le Pen, in the same way that Melénchon tried to unify the left around his own programme. So the immediate anti-democratic danger is there. It is the democratic urgency of the moment —to deny it would simply be political suicide.

Obviously, it is necessary to add to this the international European context, with all that the war in the heart of Europe signifies, an ongoing tragedy with hundreds of thousands of dead and the flight of millions of people from Ukraine to Western Europe. Macron, who recently assumed the rotating presidency of the European Council, tried to present himself as a war chief and great diplomat, but above all we see his impotence and his alignment with NATO, without real proposals and without alternatives to seriously defend the right to self-determination of the Ukrainian people in the face of Putin's invasion. Beyond that, what weighs heavily in this second term is the economic crisis and the way in which inflation is generating a lot of social discontent in an increasingly militarised European geopolitical context (for example of Germany) and danger at a global level.

The question is what will the capacity be of the social and popular movements to reactivate and defend a broad, unitary policy that combines post-neoliberalism, opposition to Macronism, anti-fascism, anti-racism, feminism and a perspective of ecological transition, in this context of many dangers alongside some opportunities?

In recent years, we have seen key social struggles in France, in particular around the reform of the labour law in 2016, with strikes, trade union unity and important fights. But it is also necessary to reflect on the limits of the possibilities of the large trade union federations to conduct these strikes and class conflicts. We have seen a sector of the youth that adheres to perspectives of civil disobedience around the themes of ecology and "defence zones" (ZAD), for example in Notre-Dame-des-Landes, a politicised youth that mobilises around the theme of the

capitalist climate crisis in a radical and autonomous way. And obviously, we remember the importance of the mass movement of the yellow vests, which was the big surprise of recent years, where a new popular actor appeared mostly outside the "framework" of traditional, political or union organisations, but who, on both a symbolic and political level, inflicted the first defeat on Macronism, twisting its arm and forcing it to inject more than 10 billion euros in favour of the poorest sectors, despite the violence of state repression and the class contempt of the "big" media. What is also interesting is to see that now, with the legislative election and the NUPES coalition, figures from the social movement were elected as deputies to the National Assembly; I am thinking of Rachel Kéké, a very combative black woman, leader of a very important strike in hotels in Paris. Also, for example, we can cite the election of Christophe Bex, a trade unionist and former yellow vest from the Toulouse area, another figure like Aurélie Trouvé, from the anti-globalisation movement, who was elected as a deputy from the popular neighbourhoods of Paris. Obtaining these seats is extremely positive if they are not fooled by strong institutional-media pressure, the logic of power and the framework of the Bourbon Palace, the better.... It will not be an easy task. The challenge is to create a bridge between the social and the political, between the popular movements and the institutional sphere, not in terms of co-optation-moderation from the state institutions but rather of exacerbation-rupture "from below". That bridge has to be revitalised while always preserving the autonomy of the popular movement. And what needs to be built continues to be the self-organisation of the people and forms of democratic popular power, in a clear break with the French capitalist and militarist state. Something that appears, in many aspects, far from the will of many leaders of the current NUPES...

And the big question is whether initiatives such as the Parliament of the Popular Union built by France Insoumise during the campaign, which brought together trade unionists, activists from associations, intellectuals and artists around the

construction of an electoral programme for post-neoliberal and ecological transition, could be transformed into some sort of political tool from next September. At the moment, a movement like FI does not have a national backbone, an organic neighbourhood presence, nor spaces for democratic debate, which means that all decisions are made around Melénchon and his captains, another overwhelming problem. Without a national and democratic framework, France Insoumise is above all an electoral and parliamentary machine, without body or legs.

To think about the responsibilities of anti-capitalist organisations and activism in this new scenario, we obviously have to reflect on the new space that NUPES occupies: it is a central event that polarises the entire discussion on the left today. And it was to Melénchon's and FI's merit that things were stirred up. From a sectarian position, one can think that it is "more of the same", a simple reformulation of the "plural left" of the 2000s or a mere neo-reformist attempt doomed to failure like SYRIZA or Podemos. This is not my position. Firstly, it is necessary to characterise NUPES, a challenge for collective discussion because militants still do not have the same vision and because, as I have already mentioned, NUPES is crossed by many contradictions. In the first place, because of the presence of the PS, which has always been a party of order, despite its new "leftist" discourse, but, on the other hand, taking into account FI, which has had the capacity to develop a more groundbreaking discourse with neoliberalism and even forging a highly developed programme, which

managed to bring together in a Popular Parliament intellectual figures, artists and social leaders who did not come from France Insoumise but who adhered to the perspective of a united social and political front to confront both Macron and a very powerful extreme right. This tool is full of problems (one of them is its international policy or its vision of the State), but it has the courage to exist and its orientation can (and should) be fought for because FI-NUPES has a mass impact beyond parliament and we must debate with its militants.

In this context, the NPA has not been able to enter the coalition, although it has shown that it is willing to discuss openly and try to push to create a united front. It has not been possible in particular because of the presence of the PS in the coalition, as I said. However, the organisation supported a large number of NUPES candidates in most constituencies. For example, in Paris, with people like Danièle Simonnet, Rachel Kéké or Aurélie Trouvé. That at the national level was a public tactical option of the NPA, assumed as an independent organisation, in order to defend a unitary, non-sectarian and at the same time anti-capitalist perspective, without hiding our differences regarding the strategic logic of NUPES. In this space, it is necessary to push, debate, radicalise positions and defend the creation of a united anti-neoliberal and anti-fascist front, without neglecting the need to regroup with other forces, collectives and groups in a clearly independent anti-capitalist organisation that can, in a given moment and according to the cycle that opens, even integrate into NUPES in a transparent and loyal way, but also with its own strategic perspectives and centering the

popular movements, mobilised society, class-struggle unions, workers, feminisms, youth and migrants in struggle in these perspectives. We have the task of continuing to defend the need to build a mass eco-socialist force in France. Precisely because there will be no possible alternative if we do not draw lessons from what the Tsipras government was in Greece, from what the evolution of Podemos was and its incorporation into a PSOE government in the Spanish State or in terms of the almost total disappearance of a genuine left in Italy. In this sense, it is about developing democratic practices of organised common militancy, because until now NUPES is a conglomerate where parties coexist, but where there is no space for real democratic debate, where parliamentarism dominates, where former PS ministers walk around unpunished after having driven antisocial policies when they were in government. As anti-capitalists we need to advance our own proposals in a unitary but at the same time radically autonomous way from social-liberalism. The challenge is gigantic: the evident failure of the founding project of the NPA also has to be the object of (self)critical assessments in order to project others, adapted to the new cycle of class struggles that France and Europe are experiencing. And the urgency, I insist, is to think about how to push back this monster that is growing more and more: the possibility of fascism.

2 August 2022

*Translated by David Fagan for **International Viewpoint** from **Jacobin America latina**.*

## **For a definitive end to the prosecution of Walden Bello on charges of "libel" and "cyberlibel"**

## 13 August 2022, by **ESSF**

Walden Bello, with whom we have shared many struggles, was arrested on August 8 in Manila-Quezon City on charges of "libel" and "cyberlibel", and later released on bail.

The charge of "libel" (and more particularly "cyberlibel") is commonly used in the Philippines by people in positions of power to silence opposition, or simply to exact revenge. This is clearly the case this time, with the accusation being made by Jefry Tupas, a former collaborator of Sara Duterte, herself former mayor of Davao City (territorial base of the family clan), daughter of the previous president Rodrigo Duterte and current vice president.

An incisive critic of Rodrigo Duterte's murderous regime (extrajudicial

killings have claimed tens of thousands of lives), Walden Bello, himself a vice presidential candidate in last May's elections, had challenged Sara Duterte to a televised debate - she retaliated by declaring him persona non grata in Davao City, accusing him of being a narco politician and of cyberlibel.

A former parliamentarian for the Akbayan (Citizen Action Party), Walden Bello (76) is internationally known for his involvement in the anti-globalization movement. He has been awarded the Right Livelihood Award (the alternative Nobel Prize) and the Most Distinguished Sociologist Award from the International Sociological Association. His arrest is a message to anyone who attacks the vice president

and the government: not even fame will protect you.

The penalties for being charged with defamation are very high (up to eight years in prison), as this is a criminal charge in the Philippines, not a civil one, as it often is in other countries. What is at stake are the fundamental freedoms of expression, of the press, of investigation, of criticism - freedoms that are increasingly challenged by the new law against cybercrime.

The international solidarity association Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières (ESSF) stands against the persecution of Walden Bello and demands the definitive end of the proceedings against him.

*August 9, 2022*

## “We Must Rebuild a Left-wing Student Union in Ukraine”

### 12 August 2022, by **Patrick Le Tréhondat**

**PL: In your call for solidarity with Ukrainian students that you launched, you mention the problem of student housing. Can you tell us about that?**

Katya: In Ukraine, students can live in state dormitories near their universities. The accommodation fee is relatively small (150-300 euros for six months), but even in peacetime, it was unbearable for students who received scholarships of no more than 50 euros per month. Most dormitory residents usually came from eastern Ukraine or their families lived in the occupied territories. For some of my friends, studying at a university was the only way to leave the Donetsk People's Republic or Luhansk People's Republic because the state could provide them with housing and

minimal means of subsistence. Students faced housing problems with the beginning of the full-scale invasion in different regions of Ukraine. Like me, students from Kharkiv were forced to flee their student housing. People from Mariupol and many other bombed cities will never be able to return home again, and their parents obviously cannot help them because they have also lost everything.

Both the Russian and Ukrainian armies often use dormitories and schools as military bases. Sometimes, like at the Kyiv National University, students have to live in the same building as the Ukrainian military. It is a necessary measure but endangers the lives of students. In Kherson, Putin's troops did not act so kindly: the army occupied the dormitories and

evicted the students, not allowing them to take their things. Such cases occur everywhere in the occupied territories, not taking into account the fact that there are frequent cases of Russian bombs hitting educational buildings and dormitories.

Maxim: Even though plenty of students are now on the verge of poverty, as well as physically and mentally affected by the war, the state still obliges us to pay for education, which does not always take place, and always lags far behind the pre-war level. And most unfair - we must pay for the rooms in which we cannot live. Yet the dormitories in Ukraine's relatively peaceful regions continue to function as usual. They even accommodate refugees and students who find themselves without housing.



But it is dangerous to live in hot spots, and even when the danger decreases, the administration does not want to be responsible for students' lives and evicts them. Thus, many students stay in a dangerous city, but now conditions force them to rent housing on top of everything else.

It is difficult to demand the observance of one's rights in a country at war, which is also in a deep economic crisis. Whether to pay for a hostel becomes a tough moral choice for students. For non-payment, we face eviction, not being allowed to take exams, neglect of our personal belongings, constant psychological pressure, and, eventually, exclusion. But besides this, unpaid debts may affect the ability of the Ministry of Education to pay salaries and scholarships. Some universities may reduce housing due to unprofitability. The distribution of funds is entirely opaque, so everyone feels guilty that their university is dying from a lack of funds. However, the real reason for this may not be the student but the corrupt administration. This problem is very complex and can hardly be solved with a general strike, and so on. We are in a terrible and unique situation, the solution of which can only be a real revolution in the student movement.

**PL What other daily life problems do students encounter?**

Katya: Since direct physical danger threatens the lives of students and their families who remain in the territory of Ukraine, the opportunity to concentrate on studies is currently a privilege. Psychological exhaustion or debts force them to leave their studies, leading to the risk of a shortage of specialists who could be involved in activities and help develop Ukraine now and after the war.

Many have gone abroad. Students in such a situation have two options: to continue their studies and live at the expense of the universities that enrolled them, or to try to survive on their own. The second way often leads to the necessity of precarious work for young people without legal protection and complicates the integration process and getting used to a new environment. Some students complain

of chauvinistic or contemptuous attitudes from the community and from new teachers and colleagues in the country that shelters them. Such problems have sometimes forced people to return to their homeland. I know many examples of college students who chose a life in danger in Ukraine instead of being bullied in a foreign country. That is why it is worthwhile to promote the creation of comfortable non-violent conditions for refugees in European universities and to distribute materials that will help students adapt to a new environment.

Maxim: It is also necessary to consider the decrease in teachers' motivation due to the same psychological exhaustion, the frequency of non-payment of wages, and the disdainful attitude of the state toward the protection of workers. There are many examples when teachers heroically continued their work during active hostilities. It was they who organized the evacuation of students, participated in humanitarian aid, and gave their last strength for the sake of science. However, there are negative examples where students lost contact with the structure of their universities, which could have been their only refuge. Or where teachers became collaborators and imposed on students the opinions dictated by the occupation authorities.

**PL: In the appeal, you mention that students have engaged in territorial defense. Can you tell us more about this?**

Maxim: Young people comprise a considerable part of Ukraine's armed forces, particularly the territorial defense. Although the state exempts university students from conscription, many students voluntarily participate in armed resistance. Some of our friends signed up for the territorial defense as soon as the war started. Military authorities rejected some, since the number of inexperienced volunteers was sufficient.

Students work in the army under precisely the same conditions as other people. Usually, to continue studies after the end of their service or after a rotation, many take a gap year. However, cases have become more frequent when, due to problems with

the bureaucracy at many universities, students at the front receive letters from educational institutions telling them that they will no longer be able to continue their studies. Fighting students need a lot of help, the closer to the front line, the more difficult it is to get things necessary for the war. Moreover, the territorial defense regiments are now fighting on the front lines on the same basis as the armed forces of Ukraine. Of course, it's not easy being young in a war.

**PL: I believe that, Katya, you are a member of the student council of your university and a representative of your dormitory. Can you explain to us what this council is, are the student representatives elected, what do they do, and what is your role as a dormitory delegate?**

Katya: All higher education institutions in Ukraine have student self-government bodies. Their members engage in different activities and can interact with students and the administration differently, but primarily they perform purely bureaucratic tasks or cover student life in the media and social networks. There are a number of decisions that the administration of the university cannot make without the consent of the representatives of the student government. Hence, if you are assertive enough, you can achieve some constructive changes, although a corrupt administration will most likely considerably hinder your efforts. To get into student self-government bodies, you need to be elected by students in elections that are held with a certain periodicity (in different universities at different times) or show yourself well and please the administration.

Frankly speaking, I got into the student parliament by accident. I was invited to the artists' trade union meeting (a "yellow union," of course). I went there, and it turned out that I was enrolled in the student council of our academy because my teachers recommended me as a responsible person. It was unexpected and unwanted for me, but now I consider it an excellent and essential experience in my life, which will help me in revolutionary practice. From the first

day of working in the student council. I tried to explain the horrible conditions that we students were living in as clearly as possible and tried to protect our rights.

The most acute issues in our college at that time were material and economic issues. Therefore, I began to work specifically on dormitories and financial problems to solve them. It is difficult to concentrate on creativity when your roof is leaking, the floor is rotting, and cockroaches are eating your last meal. The work of the head of the dormitory is very similar to trade union organizing. All students who lived at the academy had the same problems and were determined to act radically. Before the war, we were going to go to a rally against the increase in student housing prices. We didn't manage to, because the war had started. However, thanks to my participation in the dormitory management, they managed to completely replace the corrupt personnel of the dormitory and started renovations (for the first time in the last 30 years!), which greatly simplified our lives in the first days of the invasion. They provided an adequate manager, a boiler, a basement with painted walls, and new water pipes. If it weren't for such simple changes, I'm sure these days would have become a living hell for us. I built communication with students on horizontal leftist principles, which made it possible to quickly mobilize them and prevent unnecessary anxiety due to disorganization. For two weeks during the bombing of Kharkiv, we lived in a friendly commune and survived thanks to mutual aid and solidarity (there was no support from the administration or the government).

**PL: And you Maxim, what is the situation in your university ?**

Maxim: The situation with my university is a bit different from the one described by Katya. I study at the Ukrainian Catholic University. It is a reasonably new, private higher education institution that does not depend on state management. All the funds spent on the maintenance of the hostels, the staff, and the payment of the scholarships- issued on a grant basis — come from wealthy people, private companies, and international

patrons. Because of this, the services they provide, such as the dormitory, are of a very high-quality for Ukraine. At the same time, this entails, although it is not blatant, the deeply ideologically-conservative line of the administration. In addition, paying for education is beyond the reach of the vast majority of young people in Ukraine. The total cost of education is \$3,000 per year, with an average national salary of \$400 per month, leading to a year-to-year decrease in the level of entrants as the economic situation worsens. Another important aspect is the neoliberal nature of the university since a large part of the funding comes from companies interested in receiving specialists. Since the main goal of the university is making a profit, the level of knowledge offered is becoming increasingly superficial, so that the graduate can immediately get a job in a company and perform monotonous tasks. It is necessary to understand once and for all that profit-oriented private universities cannot effectively perform the role of academic institutions. Therefore, the reform and restoration of public universities-and not their liberal "optimization" which always means only mass layoffs-should be the primary task for a country that wants to have a high level of education.

During my studies, I often participated in student volunteer initiatives. At the same time, I learned how to organize administrative work and plan projects. This experience expressed itself fully when I ran for and was elected to the student parliament. For the students of my university, the issues of ecology and individual freedom were acute. So we tried to implement various innovations to promote these ideas and reduce the influence of conservative propaganda of the university clergy on students of other religions or atheists.

With the beginning of the war, university students, in cooperation with the administration, organized a horizontal security system. Student volunteers alternately patrolled the campus perimeter, wove camouflage nets for the front, and managed the collection and logistics of humanitarian aid. Like me, those in the computer science program have

been involved in hacking the sites of the Russian propaganda machine and have started designing and 3D printing tourniquets for the military.

**PL: Finally, a few words about the Ukrainian student movement. Are there student union organizations or youth organizations active? What are the activities of Sotsialnyi Rukh among the youth?**

Katya: Some organizations in Ukraine articulate themselves precisely as student movements, but unfortunately, they are all anti-left. The libertarian organization, Ukrainian Students for Freedom, which seems to be the largest student organization now, developed a reasonably active network. For them, freedom is a free market and privatization of universities, which we fundamentally disagree with. The independent trade union Direct Action once united left-wing students of Kyiv and other major cities of Ukraine. Nowadays, most active Ukrainian leftists came out of this trade union, but since 2018 its activity has been frozen. There are no alternatives for students except for openly right-wing, bourgeois, and scout organizations. The youth of left-wing views usually join the activities of broader organizations, as happens in the social movements but does not have a better-known independent network. In our organization, there are quite a lot of young people who work on an equal footing with everyone else and actively engage in revolutionary activity. The youngest member of the Council of the Social Movement is 19 years old and very active. And there are also younger members active. Our activists are determined to renew networks of solidarity between the students of Ukraine, and the help of international students can contribute to this. During the war, the rights of young people who cannot provide even their basic needs are grossly violated. It is now that leftists can show how important social support of students is for them and thus encourage young people to think about the need for radical changes in the social system.

*August 1, 2022*

First published by [Soutien à l'Ukraine résistante](#). Translated by [New](#)

# Corruption and neoliberalism in South Africa

11 August 2022, by **Paul Martial**

Before he came to power in 2009, Jacob Zuma had already been pinned down for corruption during an arms sale by the company Thales. In 2016, he was accused of having used public money, nearly 15 million euros, for the renovation of his residence located in Nkandla. But this was nothing compared to what the commission of enquiry into his corrupt complicity with the Gupta siblings will reveal in 2018.

## Large-scale corruption

The Gupta siblings methodically took over all state-owned companies. The report of the investigation conducted by Judge Zondo is damning. Eskom, the electricity generation and distribution company, paid hundreds of millions of dollars in advance for poor quality coal to one of the Gupta companies. They tried to influence the national railway company PRASA (Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa) in a locomotive purchase deal. South African Airways came under enormous pressure to abandon the route to India in favour of the sibling company Jet Airways. Again with Zuma's help, they had the upper hand in the appointment of ministers. With the help of a consultancy firm, Bain & Company, they managed to turn one of the continent's most efficient tax departments into an inefficient structure.

Jacob Zuma, who has played a central role in this state capture throughout

his time in power, has made numerous attempts to avoid answering to the courts. Attempts were made to hush up affairs, journalists were intimidated, he refused to appear before the anti-corruption commission of enquiry, and violence was used against his imprisonment, with riots in Johannesburg. Scenes of looting took place and more than 300 people died. To lift his imprisonment, he cited health problems.

## The ANC is losing ground

Although the ANC remains the dominant party in the country, its results are eroding during the elections. Mandela's party has embraced liberalism and, while there have been some efforts in the social sphere, it is far from being a success. The system has increased inequality and has mainly benefited the party leaders who have become considerably richer. Most of them justify themselves by invoking the suffering and deprivation endured during the struggle against apartheid.

When Cyril Ramaphosa came to power, he promised to wage a firm fight against corruption. This is difficult to achieve given the widespread nature of corruption in ruling circles. Judge Zondo is recommending prosecution of over a hundred people, including former ministers. Ramaphosa's probity has been tarnished by a case of theft from one of his properties. The burglars allegedly found the equivalent of 3.8

million euros, which raises legitimate questions about the source of such a sum. Speaking at Rustenburg Stadium, northwest of Johannesburg, on May Day, Ramaphosa was loudly booed by workers. The leaders of COSATU, the union close to the government, were unable to calm the crowd.

## Dangerous exasperation

The emergence of the "Economic Freedom Fighters", Julius Malema's radical organisation, is strengthened by its criticism of the ANC's economic policy and corruption, but the country is riddled with xenophobic demonstrations, sometimes violent. The main targets are immigrants from Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Nigeria, as well as Somali refugees. The Operation Dudula movement - which could be translated from Zulu as 'turn back' - makes undocumented immigrants the main cause of the country's woes. They are accused of delinquency, drug trafficking and undermining the labour market. There is increasing pressure on businesses and small enterprises to employ only South Africans. Unfortunately, this type of movement is not new, but it is now taking root in the population and could degenerate into full-scale violence. Hence the urgent need to build a political alternative.

21 July 2022

Translated by *International Viewpoint from l'Anticapitaliste*.

# The Weaponization of Food

10 August 2022, by John Feffer

International outcry against the Russian bombing of Odesa—as with its earlier strikes on [shopping malls](#), train stations, and [hospitals](#)—has been fierce. “Striking a target crucial for grain export a day after the signature of Istanbul agreements is particularly reprehensible & again demonstrates Russia’s total disregard for international law & commitments,” [tweeted](#) Josep Borrell Fontelles, who coordinates the European Union’s foreign policy.

Despite Russia’s action, the agreement on grain exports will likely hold. After all, Russia didn’t technically violate the accord. The Kremlin promised only to avoid hitting the ships carrying food to the outside world.

More importantly, the deal has been designed to benefit all sides. Ukraine needs the export earnings from the approximately 22 million tons of wheat, corn, and other products in its warehouses, and it has to get rid of this surplus to make way for this year’s harvest. Turkey will make money facilitating the transport and sale of the commodities. And Russia, as part of a parallel agreement, will get sanctions relief for its own agricultural exports, which will bring in [billions of dollars](#) given both Russia’s record harvest and high global food prices.

The deal also helps Russia address the reputational damage connected to its naval blockade of Ukrainian ports, which has contributed to driving up food prices around the world. Russia has countered charges that it has weaponized food by blaming the West for causing the food crisis with its punitive sanctions against the Kremlin. This week, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov is touring Africa in an effort to bolster the Kremlin’s brand, which depends not only on agricultural trade but on [huge amounts of arms sales](#) and the

services of security firms [like the Wagner Group](#).

The recent grain deal, brokered by Turkey and UN General Secretary António Guterres, will take some time to implement. An entire monitoring system has to be put into place to ensure that the ships heading out contain nothing but food and that they don’t return full of weapons. There are mines around Odesa that have to be avoided—or removed. So, the countries of the Middle East and Africa will have to wait a while before they see the Ukrainian and Russian grain that they’ve depended on for so long.

Even then, it’s not clear how much effect the renewed grain shipments will have on food prices. Those prices jumped dramatically in March, after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. “Cooking oils, cereals and meats hit all-time highs and meant food commodities cost a third more than the same time last year, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization’s monthly food price index,” [reported The Guardian](#) back in April. Wheat prices alone jumped nearly 20 percent last March.

The spike in food prices has in turn brought people into the streets all over the world, from Peru to Palestine to Indonesia, to [protest](#) their governments’ inaction in the face of inflation. The government in Sri Lanka, which had been in place for most of the last two decades, fell as a result of the country’s current, unprecedented economic crisis. In the Sahel, 18 million people [face severe hunger](#) because of diminished harvests while 13 million people are experiencing severe drought in the Horn of Africa. Ordinarily, it’s the World Food Program that steps in to help. But the WFP purchases more than half of its wheat from Ukraine. An estimated 47 million people are on the verge of starvation.

Who should all these people blame for their predicament?

## Russia: Villain?

Food prices were already on the rise before Russia invaded Ukraine. Supply chain problems connected to COVID, the spike in the price of inputs like fertilizer connected to rising energy prices, diminished harvests connected to climate change: these were all contributing to rising prices beginning in 2020.

A less well-known factor has been financial speculation. After the food price hikes in 2007-8, the International Food Policy Research Institute published [an analysis](#) that would prove prophetic:

The flow of speculative capital from financial investors into agricultural commodity markets has been drastic, and the number of future traded contracts is increasing over time. From May 2007 to May 2008, the volume of globally traded grain futures and options rose significantly. Excessive speculation in the commodity futures market could, in principle, push up futures prices and—through arbitrage opportunities—spot prices above levels justified by supply and demand fundamentals.

The recent [fall in food prices](#)—after the spike in March, the cost of a basket of food commodities began to drop—proves that “excessive speculation” has indeed played an influential role. Commodities have yet to flow out of Ukraine—or Russia—so the drop has more to do with expectations that a coming recession will reduce demand, which, as



economist Ann Pettifor [points out](#), has restrained financial speculation. The supposed laws of supply and demand have little to do with it.

I don't think these factors let Russia off the hook, however. Putin clearly targeted Ukrainian agriculture as part of his overall assault on the country. It wasn't just the blockading of Ukrainian ports, which the Russian government [signaled its intention](#) of doing several days before the invasion. Once the war began in earnest, the Russian military [hit](#) grain terminals, [blew up](#) silos and burned fields, [hijacked](#) Ukrainian grain to sell as Russian exports, [stole](#) agricultural equipment, and [destroyed](#) a bridge linking Ukrainian farmers to export markets in Romania.

These moves were designed to cut off Ukrainian access to its own food supply as well as deprive it of export earnings. But another strategy might also have been in play.

Those close to Putin have spoken of the Russian leader's belief that he can outlast the West, which will eventually have to deal with shifts in public opinion after months of rising energy prices. Even more ominously, Putin pushed for a grain blockade in the hopes that it would "lead to instability in the Middle East and provoke a new flood of refugees," [according to](#) Russian economist Sergei Guriev, former chief economist at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Russian ex-president Dmitry Medvedev effectively acknowledged Russia's weaponization of food when he [wrote in April](#) that "many countries depend on our supplies for their food security. It turns out our food is our silent weapon. Quiet, but mighty."

Russia wouldn't be the first country to use food as a weapon in this way.

Africa expert Alex DeWaal identifies [seven cases](#) of governments resorting to this tactic, which the UN has declared a war crime. The Saudi-led coalition behind the war in Yemen, for instance, has blockaded ports and prevented food deliveries from reaching starving Yemenis (although the blockade has been eased, it is [still in place](#) in parts of the north). The Ethiopian government has [restricted the flow](#) of food and finance to the Tigray region in an attempt to starve the rebellious state into submission. Syria, South Sudan, Myanmar, Venezuela: the governments in these countries have also relied on this brutal and unfortunately effective strategy.

## So, Why Did Russia Sign the Agreement?

Putin is clearly worried that time is not in fact on his side. Even as he has continued to pursue maximalist goals—[asserting once again](#) this week that regime change in Kyiv is a priority—Russian forces have reached what might prove the high-water mark of their territorial acquisition. Ukraine's [effective use](#) of HIMARS (high-mobility artillery rocket system) to target Russian artillery positions and logistical centers behind the line of engagement has not only stopped the Russian advance in key areas but has prepared the way for a Ukrainian counter-offensive to retake the city of Kherson and other territory in the south.

Yes, inflation is taking its toll in the West. The European Union, bracing for the impact of reduced Russian energy imports in the winter, [just came to an emergency agreement](#) to cut natural gas consumption by 15

percent starting next month and lasting until next March. The willingness of Americans to pay a price to support Ukraine—higher energy costs, risk of escalation—[has fluctuated](#) since March and will not likely last forever.

But Putin faces a more difficult challenge. He doesn't have the soldiers for an indefinite war of attrition. His military-industrial complex has been hit hard by the sanctions—so much so that he has gone begging to Iran to get drones. The Russian economy has [essentially been hollowed out](#), with domestic production at a standstill and the foreign companies that accounted for 40 percent of Russia's GDP not returning any time soon. The only thing that stops Russia from going off the precipice is its energy exports. These are significant, to be sure, but they won't be enough to save the country from a downward spiral a la Venezuela.

That's why Putin needs to start selling his grain, salvage Russia's reputation among the world's biggest food importers, and consolidate whatever gains he can in the territories that the Russian army has seized in Ukraine. Sensing desperation, Kyiv is going to press what it thinks to be its advantage.

This war will end not with a clear-cut victory—Russia will not seize all of Ukraine, Ukraine will not deprive Russia of all of its ill-gotten gains—but only with what both sides can claim as a victory. In the meantime, as the tug-of-war continues across one of the world's primary breadbaskets, the eventual delivery of food to the global hungry will be a win for everyone.

July 27, 2022

Source [Foreign Policy in Focus](#).

# The Roma struggle from protests to political liberation

## 9 August 2022, by **Sebijan Fejzula**

The recent death of [Stanislav Tomáš](#), a Roma man from Teplice, Czech Republic, has sparked [demonstrations](#) across many European countries. On June 19, a police officer knelt on Tomáš' neck while detaining him, leading to his death soon after. Despite the international solidarity among European Roma this case has encouraged, we still have a long way to go in mobilizing politically against all racially motivated anti-Roma violence. Moreover, when it comes to the struggle against anti-Roma racism — or [antigypsyism](#) — we are still lacking the solidarity of the leftist social and political movements in Europe. Why can white Europeans see and denounce oppression in Chiapas or Palestine, but not the oppression against Roma that is taking place within their own communities?

Roma in Europe have long suffered from police brutality. This is not a matter of unfortunate behavior, or bad apples, but rather goes to the heart of the police's role as the "guardians" of the European societies as they are imagined by the ruling elites. Roma are victims of permanent state terror, yet, there is little discussion around the issue of police brutality as a result of structural racism. Scant attention has been paid to understanding and discussing that police brutality is *just* the cruelest face of anti-Roma racism — the issue is far more complex.

The death of Stanislav Tomáš is not an isolated case. It is tightly rooted to structural anti-Roma racism, ingrained in the core of European countries and their notions of "secure societies." For centuries, white anxiety for security has manifested itself in various forms: from urban and school segregations to police violence to mass incarceration and political dehumanization.

Our people are very much aware of the situation they face and their daily experiences with the white world. As [Kale Amenge](#) (Roma for Ourselves), an independent and autonomous anti-racist Roma political organization that works for the collective emancipation of Roma and the building of Roma

political autonomy, we demand the right to live as Roma on our own terms, not how someone else wants us to be.

Are we able to secure a safe space for Roma in Europe, where we will not be persecuted from the supermarket to the political arena, facing deportations and the forced sterilization of Roma women? Are we able to secure a safe space where we will be able to be respected on our own terms of living?

### **THE NORMALIZATION OF ANTI-ROMA VIOLENCE**

The fact that the Roma community in Europe is still being systematically oppressed, 80 years after the [Porajmos](#) — the Romani Holocaust by Nazi Germany — and many are seen and treated as foreigners within their own countries, shows how little political attention has been paid to the Roma struggle. The dominant narrative of the Nazi Holocaust only really includes the Jewish experience — excluding, among others, Sinti, Roma, the disabled, LGBTQ, communists and other anti-fascists. The Roma are facing the extreme consequences of anti-Roma racism — the death of Stanislav Tomáš and an [ongoing eviction threat](#) of several Roma families in Pata Rât of Cluj-Napoca, Romania, are just the latest examples. The legitimized violence against our bodies and a brutal denial of human dignity continues.

The ongoing denial of anti-Roma racism within academia, anti-discrimination policies and the media is precisely what has created the urge for self-justification and a need to constantly prove that we, as a people, as a culture, are not responsible for our own suffering. We are not the problem, as many have tried to argue. The problem is whiteness as a structural racial order in which Roma

are seen as posing a threat to the social order.

It is within this context that anti-Roma racism appears as a regulating tactic to control, observe and discipline the Roma body. To offer an example, in 2018, Matteo Salvini, who was Italy's Minister of Interior at the time, [announced](#) that Italy planned to kick out all foreign-born Roma, but lamented, "unfortunately we will have to keep the Italian Roma because we can't expel them."

Of course, such racist speeches and practices are not exclusive only to the right-wing parties; the normalization of violence against Roma today is also the result of the failure of parties, organizations and movements on the left to fight against it. At the same time, white feminist movements have adopted the role of "white saviors" who need to "rescue" Roma women from the so-called "Roma patriarchy."

All these historical narratives and current political practices have become embedded in the ideology of white supremacy — the political violence of the European countries against us never ended with the adoption of human rights charters nor with the EU Roma National Integration Strategies. In fact, in those EU Roma National Integration Strategies the notion of antigypsyism is hardly discussed, which leads towards the naturalization of racism within those public policies and specific "Roma issue" initiatives carried out in the European context.

Consequently, there is a marginalization of anti-racism — excluding anti-Roma racism as a central concern in terms of the Roma situation — which contributes to an understanding and conceptualization of antigypsyism as the consequence of the "Roma lifestyle." Thus, our "different" culture, traditions and ways of living as Roma are blamed for the racism we face. In short, anti-Roma racism has mainly been approached as a cultural rather than a political problem.

As a whole, these policy frameworks for Roma stand in opposition to a genuine anti-racist project. As Cayetano Fernandez, a researcher and organizer with Kale Amenge, has [defined](#) it: “Anti-Gypsyism is a race-based system of domination that has historical roots in modernity and that obeys the construction of the European white man as the model of humanity, thus dehumanizing all others.” As a result, the idea of danger has been historically embedded in the definition of Roma people as fundamentally uncivilized, untrustworthy and “ungovernable.” Therefore, the only possible way of dealing with Roma is through violence.

This violence is justified because on the one hand, it is done in the name of “securing” the white populace — both in practical and metaphysical terms — and on the other, it is done in the name of saving the Roma from themselves, from their barbarian behavior. This image of Roma as a threat to both white identity and people is an outcome of the historical colonial production of the “Gypsy Other” as white imaginary fiction. In his article, “The Roma Collective Memory and the Epistemological Limits of Western Historiography,” Fernandez argues that the history that has been created about the Roma people is a white construct which has primarily produced an ontological search for, and legitimation of, white identity. In short, anti-Roma violence is justified because it is done in the name of “order” and “public security.”

## **QUESTIONING THE WHITE POLITICAL AGENDA**

We are witnessing how Roma ghettos from Tres mil viviendas in Spain to Teplice in Czech Republic have become modern open-air prisons where Roma bodies are controlled, observed, brutally abused and killed. The categorization of those spaces as racialized — and for that reason — “dangerous” neighborhoods that must be under permanent vigilance has

provoked an intense police presence, as well as several cases of police brutality.

Roma ghettos are always perceived as synonymous with crime, hence the violence is permanent and exceptional. The ghettos are the places where Roma are denied humanity and dignity, while white lives continue to be secured based on the constant and continual dehumanization of us Roma. For many years, I have been investigating and working on the politics of structural and everyday antigypsyism, cases of police brutality and its traumatic effects on Roma Europe and no matter where I go, the Roma people tell me one sentence that represents the biggest violence against humanity: “They (white societies) see and treat us as non-humans.”

As Roma movements, we have focused on creating projects to include Roma in the education system, but we have failed to question the system that we seek to include Roma in and to take into account the daily and cultural violence Roma face in this system. Mindful of this, I completely understand those Roma parents who decide not to let their children go into an educational system that treats their children as non-worthy. Maybe, instead we should focus on creating secure spaces for our children, where they will not only feel safe, but more importantly, they will feel worthy and accepted.

So, how did Roma become the killable body? To answer this question, we must look at the historical construction of the imaginary “Gypsy,” the criminal, the drug-addict, the “unruly Roma.” These are the bodies that are considered non-human and who bring disorder to the imagined “civilized Europe,” the functioning of which is based on law and order. The construction of the Roma body as a threat to the white order has produced policies and narratives of criminality and state sovereignty that justify the need for surveillance and control of Roma “ghettos” — through CCTV systems, police violence and mass incarceration.

Through the historical construction of the Roma as a threat to the white

order, violence against us has become normalized and justified. Indeed, the killable body is not just the dead body; it is the body that faces daily violence, the body that is seen and treated as non-worthy, the body that is fated to live under dehumanized conditions. It is the body that is killed again when it is refused justice by system. The Roma body is seen as posing a political threat to law and social order, transforming the notion of “naturally prompt to criminality” to a “public enemy” of the state. In summary, the killable body is the body that is constantly violated, both symbolically and physically. And yet, without pressure from a coherent anti-racist Roma political movement, Europe remains completely silent.

## **TOWARDS A UNIFIED ROMA POLITICAL AGENDA**

For years, many of us have been trying to speak about this political violence, but we cannot wait any longer. While I completely encourage and support all the protests that have recently taken place, I am also calling on the people to finally start to not only question the system, but to go further and organize towards a political agenda based on the needs of our people. We need to propose an agenda for structural changes and not just cosmetic ones — an agenda that will not seek individual benefits but will actually put our collective needs first. A transformative agenda means applying measures that will finally bring structural changes to the established white order.

Of course, Roma in Europe are not alone in their fight against structural racism. We, the racialized people (Black, Muslim, migrants, refugees, etc.) share the same political enemy in the states and their institutions — and our political power lies in our alliances against them. We must come together and understand that only together we can destroy the figure of the White Man that was created as a symbol of humanity. Far from trying to continue in the role of white savior within such

a struggle, white people should use their privileges and fight against whiteness — especially in those spaces that are not accessible to us. They should organize themselves around the issue of whiteness, as suggested already in 1966, by the leader of the Black Power movement, Stokely Carmichael, in his speech at University of California, Berkeley. There, he said: “And the question is, can we find white people who are gonna have the courage to go into white communities and start organizing them?”

As Kale Amenge, we urgently call for the establishment of a common unified political agenda against antigypsyism, an agenda that will truly represent and defend the political interests of our people, based on political honesty and unity, without getting caught up in the networks set up by the racist state itself. An agenda that will be based on political autonomy and coherency.

We have created an agenda that allows us to tackle the following issues produced by the supposedly-democratic system: the 12-Point Program of Kale Amenge for the political liberation of the Roma people.

### **1. End the ghettos, build up communities**

The ghetto is a way to lock our people up and plunge them into violence, dispossession and poverty. In spite of this, our people survive with dignity alongside other sister communities on the periphery of modern cities. We denounce the racist engineering that leads to the ghetto as a device for confining racialized communities.

### **2. Stop police violence**

We denounce the detention, surveillance and police aggression based on the so-called “ethnic” profiles that affect our people profoundly. The police detain, assault and humiliate our people on a daily basis, just as they do with our brothers and sisters in other communities. In this regard, we, the members of Kale Amenge, urge that every case of police brutality against our people is considered an act of racist ideology whose objective is

none other than to discipline and control us within the existing racist order.

### **3. An end to school segregation**

Throughout Europe, young Roma are confined to schools and other educational institutions in which they receive the message that they are inferior, that their “culture” is problematic. They receive a deficient education and are inoculated with the idea that they should be integrated, while at the same time they are denied this possibility, destroying their self-esteem and value. We urgently call for the creation and direction of our own spaces for community education, where our children can feel proud of who they are.

### **4. Against racism at work**

Since the onset of capitalism, our families have been forced to abandon their traditional trades and to sell their labor force as wage-earners and docile instruments of industrial society. At the same time, governments are consciously hindering areas of work such as the flea market in order to favor big business by pushing hundreds of artisans and small entrepreneurs into poverty. If a Roma person wants to access the conventional labor market, he or she will be discriminated against on the basis of his or her surname, physical features and worldview.

### **5. End judicial harassment**

European states do not have any significant studies on the reality of racism in the criminal justice system, but its existence is an open secret. For example, the over-representation of Roma people and other racialized communities in Spanish prisons suggests a proportionally stricter, harsher and unfair treatment based on race. Within prisons, Roma prisoners are treated in a denigrating way. Such is the case of our brother, Manuel Fernández Jiménez, who [died](#) in a Spanish prison under suspicious circumstances in 2017. We call for an urgent end to legal racism.

### **6. No to anti-Roma social policies**

Through the industry of non-governmental organizations, social

workers and assistants, Roma families are blackmailed, manipulated and forced to establish relations of dependence with the state that mistreats and depoliticizes them. We do not doubt that in this area there are honest people, but we refer to power structures that have to be dismantled and that go beyond the good will of respectful individuals. We define anti-Roma racism as a problem of the states and not as a problem of the Roma, therefore our fight must be political.

### **7. Anti-Roma racism destroys physical and psychological health**

Medical studies confirm it: on average, Roma people die up to 15 years younger than white people. Racism affects not only the ethical fiber of a society, it affects the mental and physical health of racialized communities. Racism takes the lives of racialized people, subjecting them to high levels of anxiety, frustration, depression, despair and uncertainty.

### **8. Stop anti-Roma and racist media and gypsylorists**

The Roma people do not need any more biased studies on their identity by academics to justify European programs or departments of ethnic studies. The Roma people do not need shows, morbid or exotic entertainment programs that profit from the public scorn and social humiliation of our people. The Roma people need to confront anti-Roma racism. Often, gypsylorism (a term used to define the academic knowledge production on the Roma developed from a white perspective) has become a tool of control and power.

The dominant conceptualization of anti-Roma racism as a cultural descriptor, rather than a set of political relations, has meant that the current image of Roma is the contemporary heir to the Roma identity that was historically manufactured by academics, “experts” and bureaucrats.

So, if you have an interest in our people, we urge you to focus your interest on analyzing the relation between our people and the state. We, the members of Kale Amenge, call on



the importance of centering our own experiences with the gadjo world in our fight against anti-Roma racism.

### **9. Stop racist deportations**

Anti-Roma racism is most violently expressed in the implementation of the anti-migration policies established by a large number of European governments, regardless of their political orientation. These policies destroyed our families, condemn us to poverty and make us vulnerable to attacks from the most reactionary elements of European society.

10. Remain vigilant against political instrumentalization

All political parties show a false interest in our people. Wherever the Roma population is seen as key to electoral outcomes, they all seek the Roma vote through dishonest, racist and patronizing campaigns. At the same time, all political parties are interested in instrumentalizing and using some members of our community as mascots. We do not settle for crumbs or carrots. We negotiate, but we do not give in. Kale Amenge denounces the “colorism” and political instrumentalization of our people and appeals to the need to build an autonomous political struggle.

### **11. Recognition, reparation and restoration**

To recognize our history is not only to recognize Flamenco and the cultural contribution of the Roma people, but to make visible — at the institutional, educational and social levels — the attempts of extermination that have

been carried out against Roma people over the past five centuries. Moreover, it is to recognize that these crimes are instrumental to the privilege that white people experience today and the situation of disadvantage and social exclusion that our people suffer. This necessarily implies initiating a policy of historical reparation and compensation that, beyond mere recognition, begins to generate the conditions that allow the structural difference that benefits the descendants of the executioners to be ended and that compensates the descendants of the victims of this history, which for us is still present.

### **12. Autonomy, community and political honesty — the path of Roma emancipation**

We demand an end to the usurpation of the Roma political space, hijacked by integrationist organizations incapable of confronting state racism. We call for the collective construction of a Roma political subject that truly represents and defends the political interests of our people, based on political honesty and unity, without falling into the available narrow channels set up by the racist state itself.

## **A COLLECTIVE REBIRTH OF THE ROMA CONSCIOUSNESS**

These twelve points together aim to represent a turning point in the

character of the political demands of the Roma people against a racist society. We do not perceive ourselves as the protagonists of something new, but as part of the collective rebirth of the Roma consciousness that clearly rediscovers its greatest and only enemy: anti-Roma racism. At the same time, we do not fight this battle alone, rather, alongside other racialized communities in the fight against racism, an institutional matter that involves collectively questioning specific power relations.

We are speaking of a nation that has more than 14 million people in Europe, so we have the numbers, but the question is how do we shift these numbers into political power? How do we create an autonomous international political agenda that will aim to unify the international struggle into one Roma struggle?

Can we, as an international Roma movement, finally come together and start to rethink concepts and strategies such as “integration” and shift our agenda onto the importance of self-representation, self-organization and, more importantly, to autonomy? It is more than clear that Europe is not experiencing a “Roma problem” but rather a problem of white supremacy and whiteness. In other words, the problem of Europe is its own obsession with white purity and dominance. Can we finally as an international movement change the terms of discussions and confront a political problem with a political agenda?

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# **“The Canary in the Coal Mine”: Sri Lanka’s Crisis is a Chronicle Foretold**

**8 August 2022, by B. Skanthakumar**

**What was the cause in Sri Lanka for the people’s uprising in 2022?**

Sri Lanka ran out of foreign exchange in the first quarter of 2022. It exhausted its reserves, already

depleted from defending the value of the Lankan Rupee (LKR), having serviced a USD500 million

International Sovereign Bond that matured in January. New inflows to renew reserves, confidently assured by the Central Bank Governor on behalf of the Gotabaya Rajapaksa administration, did not materialise.

For decades, there has been a chronic balance of payments shortfall, such that import expenditure raced ahead of export revenue, two-to-one. This deficit has been financed by foreign borrowings (initially bilateral and multilateral loans, but increasingly the international money market from 2007 during the Mahinda Rajapaksa presidency). In fact, the so-called foreign reserves were almost entirely foreign loans and not national income. To maintain the LKR at an artificially high value for almost a year, the Central Bank drew down on its dollar holdings. Once the reserves were exhausted, the rupee went into freefall in March 2022. It lost 44% of its value against the US dollar, and around 40% against other convertible currencies between January and May 2022 alone. Presently the US dollar trades at LKR361, whereas in June 2021 it was LKR200.

Without foreign exchange, highly import-dependent Sri Lanka could not afford to purchase fuel (petrol, diesel, coal, kerosene, LP gas), food, and medicines. The shortages of fuel affected not only transport but also the generation of electricity, making previously rare power cuts a daily and prolonged occurrence from February up to the present. With shortages of food and other essentials in the market, queues of people formed everywhere. The price of everything rose sharply. By July, headline inflation surged over 60% - food having skyrocketed by 90% and non-food items by 46%. One in three persons is food-insecure: without adequate access to food or reducing the number of meals, the portion sizes, quality, and variety. Community kitchens have begun in Colombo with crowd-sourced funding to provide at least one meal a day in low-income areas, along with ad-hoc distribution of cooked food parcels.

Fuel shortages and power cuts also debilitate the productive sectors of the economy spanning farming, fishing, and factories. The livelihoods of daily-

wage earners and urban poor households are devastated. The crisis has decimated the incomes of low-paid gig workers who run taxis and deliver food. The savings and retirement benefits of the middle and working classes have more than halved following devaluation of the rupee. Those on fixed incomes are losing ground to inflationary price hikes propelled by profiteering, without compensatory wage increase. Tens of thousands of mainly young people through the passport office, their first step to find jobs abroad. Several hundreds have been intercepted at sea, trying to escape in unsafe and overcrowded fishing boats to India or Australia.

Public discontent over the brewing crisis was evident during the COVID19 pandemic, with farmers, schoolteachers, garment, and plantation workers' protesting in 2021, as did women victims of microfinance loans in 2020. There were set-piece anti-government demonstrations and rallies by opposition political parties but only mobilising the faithful. Meanwhile the government kept downplaying the seriousness of the economic problems. People across classes were disenchanted by a government that was indifferent to their pain and inactive even as they suffered. [43]

The Rajapaksa family that has dominated Sri Lankan politics since 2005 has been the object of both adoration and fear within society, depending on one's ethnicity and political views. For the first time in a generalised way, stories of their abuse of power, attachment to astrologers, and unexplained wealth, became openly ridiculed. The demand for President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to "Go Home!" included the rest of his family too. This slogan was joined by another, "Give us our stolen money back!". Even though cross-class grievances indicate a systemic crisis, the citizens' movement that emerged in 2022 was largely framed by the middle-class belief that the mismanagement of the economy derives from grand corruption among politicians and bureaucrats.

This people's uprising is heterogenous, without structure or

leaders. It defies neat class labels. Its origin from within that inexact category of the "middle class" has shaped its character and consciousness. However, along the way it has become more diverse, receiving support from university students, daily waged workers, the urban poor, pensioners, people with disabilities, trade unionists, the clergy, and the LGBTQI community. Still, the active participation of the working class, farmers', fishers', and plantation workers, is minimal. Even the left-wing representatives of dominated classes who participate in it, have not been able to transcend the general demand within the citizens' movement for short-term economic relief; nor advance an agenda beyond regime-change and liberal democratic and constitutional reform. [44] The left has neither programme nor strategy for the socio-economic transformation of society and working peoples' power.

### **What were the stages of the mobilisations of the last months?**

In an organic way, handfuls of middle-class citizens began organising neighbourhood protests in the largest city Colombo and its suburbs. [45] As the crisis gathered pace, so did the numbers and the spread of the movement. There was a qualitative turn on 31 March when youth were violently attacked during a confrontation with security forces guarding Gotabaya Rajapaksa's private residence. Thereafter the protests, including outside of Colombo, grew in leaps and bounds. Some organisers, unconnected to political parties and new to activism, proposed a convergence of the protests on a symbol of presidential power, his office by Galle Face Green, Colombo's seaside park.

This massive demonstration of tens of thousands from across the island that began on 9 April turned into a continuous occupation (#OccupyGalleFace), denying Gotabaya Rajapaksa access to the Presidential Secretariat right up to his resignation in July. Elsewhere across Sri Lanka, people became inspired to occupy other public spaces demanding the resignation of the president, his family members, and the government.

However, the largest and most iconic occupation was in Colombo, dubbed by its residents as 'GotaGoGama'. [46] In the Sinhala language, 'Gama' means village. What began as a couple of tents to provide shelter for those who stayed on, organically grew into a commune with a kitchen, library, dance and drama performance spaces, a film hall, vegetable garden, western and ayurvedic medical care, solar-powered energy for mobile telephone charging, along with encampments of the deaf community, Catholics seeking justice for the 2019 Easter Sunday terrorist bombings, campaigners against enforced disappearances and for human rights, and numerous youth organisations including of the leftist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (Peoples Liberation Front) and Frontline Socialist Party.

Another significant stage in the citizens' movement began on 9 May, when supporters of then Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa attacked the protest sites (#GotaGoGamas) in Colombo and Kandy. There was instant solidarity from the public. The political violence provoked counterattacks by enraged people previously inactive in the protests but in passive agreement with it, directed at government politicians and their properties. This forced Mahinda Rajapaksa's resignation.

Gotabaya Rajapaksa soon appointed former political rival Ranil Wickremesinghe as prime minister. Wickremesinghe, along with his United National Party (UNP) that was in government between 2015 and 2019 had been roundly rejected by the electorate, securing only one seat from the total number of votes polled island wide. The President's move provided some stability within a government in disarray since early April, as Wickremesinghe formed a new Cabinet with the support of the Rajapaksa party, the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (Peoples' Front) and crossovers from the opposition. The perception, encouraged by business interests and liberal civil society, that Wickremesinghe with his pro-private sector, pro-western, cosmopolitan orientation is the best captain in stormy seas - along with anxiety over violence and "extremism" post-9 May - did contribute to fallback

in middle-class participation in the protests.

However, the crippling shortages of fuel and the deterioration of economic and social life maintained the anger within the citizens' movement now known as the Aragalaya (meaning 'struggle' in the Sinhala language).

To redouble the demand for 'Gota' now joined by 'Ranil' to "go home", 9 July was decided by the groups at #GotaGoGama for a mass protest targeting the president's office (besieged but not occupied) and his nearby official residence (where he had been bunkered under heavy guard since evacuation from his private residence in March). This turned out to be the single largest mobilisation of the citizens' movement so far in 2022. Against the odds and overcoming many obstacles in their way, people from popular classes overwhelmed the armed might of the military and police to spectacularly capture the Presidential Secretariat and the President's House. Spontaneously, others massed outside the Prime Minister's official residence, unoccupied by Ranil Wickremesinghe but under continuous protest by people camped outside it (#NoDealGama/#RanilGoGama), finally taking possession late that night. Finally, after months of protests, Gotabaya Rajapaksa who had taken refuge onboard a naval craft, announced his resignation, before taking flight for the Maldives and later Singapore.

Throughout 9 July, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe resisted the demand from protestors for his resignation, claiming he was needed until the formation of an all-party government. This incensed those who had expected him to depart along with the president with whom he had tied-up politically. Crowds spontaneously formed outside Wickremesinghe's private residence (which he had vacated in advance). They were beaten back by armed police, who also assaulted journalists filming this violence. As word of this attack grew, larger numbers arrived. In a bizarre twist, and under the watch of the security forces, his home was set on fire. Still, the prime minister (by now Acting President) resisted handing in

his resignation. This prompted militant demonstrations on 13 July outside his office, which fell to protestors despite tear gas and water cannon assault. In the subsequent week, the state premises that were occupied on July 9 and 13 were voluntarily vacated by protestors.

### **Do the different ethnic and religious communities across Sri Lanka participate in the protests in the same way?**

The *Aragalaya* is largely a movement within the majority Sinhalese nation, and of cities and towns in the Sinhala-speaking south of the island. The minority Tamil nation, particularly in the Tamil-speaking north and east, held back from actively participating in the movement. Small delegations from those areas did visit #GotaGoGama to express their solidarity, while raising their own demands for post-war truth and accountability, against militarisation of their traditional homeland, and for return of their lands under military occupation. The ethno-religious Muslim minority, at the receiving end of violence and Islamophobia since the end of the war in 2009 and following the Easter Sunday terrorist bombings in 2019, was initially wary but this changed over the fasting month in April. Hill Country Tamils and those of north-eastern origin but domiciled in the south did participate in the protests.

Ethnic minority communities had mixed sentiments towards the movement, as did the Sinhalese but for different reasons. As the former president is a representative of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism, some perceived the *Aragalaya* as a belated *mea culpa* from his heartland, except still unacknowledging of the injustices to minorities in a racist state. Others feared that their overt association with the protests would make them vulnerable to state surveillance and expose them to reprisals. No movement in and of itself, can erase the contradictions and fractures within society, especially when these are side-stepped at best and unseen at worst.

Nevertheless, some within the *Aragalaya* did revisit an uncomfortable



past, including historic discrimination against minorities, and the crimes against humanity committed on Tamils in 2009.

**Is it correct to say that the causes of the current crisis are the sum of the effects of the neo-liberal capitalist model recommended by the IMF/World Bank and desired by Sri Lankan big capital, converging in the last two years with the dramatic fall in tourist revenues coupled with the increase in the price of fuel and food imports? Please recall for us when the big neoliberal turn was taken, and by what kind of government?**

Loyalists of the Rajapaksas within the Parliament and its apparatchiks in state institutions, Sinhalese nationalist civil society and pro-regime media, locate this crisis in what is external to the domestic economy and therefore beyond the control of the regime: the COVID19 pandemic induced disruptions to global and domestic supply chains impacting production and circulation; the collapse of inward tourism over 2020-2021; Russia's war on Ukraine (both countries being prime markets for Ceylon tea and recently countries of origin for tourists); and global price spirals in fuel (petrol, diesel, LP gas) and food (wheat, maize, milk powder, sugar) and fertilisers (urea). This is of course to absolve former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, his advisors, and his family members in government (older sibling Mahinda was Prime Minister up to 09 May 2022 and younger sibling Basil was Finance Minister up to 04 April 2022), from responsibility for this disaster.

Critics of the Rajapaksas drawn from the political opposition, think-tanks and economists, and liberal civil society, attribute the crisis to rash, 'populist' actions following 2019's presidential election, principally reforms to direct tax thresholds and value added tax that halved receipts; the 'organic only' ban on chemical inputs in agriculture that damaged rice and tea harvests and herald a looming famine; money-printing (as endorsed by modern monetary theory) to finance government expenditure that fed inflation; the drastic fall in migrant workers' remittances through

official channels (as informal channels offered a more attractive dollar to rupee conversion rate); and refusal to enter into an International Monetary Fund macro-economic programme, accompanied by debt restructuring. This narrative squarely faults the regime, while acquitting the economic model of any part in the tragedy.

Therefore, mainstream, or dominant explanations for Sri Lanka's troubles blame conjunctural factors. There is a third point of view: the issues above are symptomatic and not causative of the crisis. In other words, the origins of our turmoil are structural. In Sri Lanka, the chickens farmed by neoliberal capitalism came home to roost in 2022. Every manifestation of the current crisis, and every failed response, is an outcome of these hegemonic ideas packaged in policies, processes, and mechanisms. [47]

The 1977 election triumph of the United National Party (UNP), the grand old party of the right in Sri Lanka led by J. R. Jayewardene (uncle of Ranil Wickremesinghe), was a decisive break from the dirigiste policies of the past. The UNP ushered the first wave of pro-market liberalisation reforms allegedly to overcome the failings of the 'closed economy' after 1970, and to imitate Singapore's path to prosperity. This was 10-15 years before the rest of South Asia would follow suit. These reforms it should be noted were not an outcome of an IMF-World Bank loan (which followed), but rather the vision of a new leadership team with new ideas in the UNP in concert with outward-looking sectors of the domestic capitalist class. Of course, the progress of what we now know as the 'Washington Consensus' or 'neoliberalism', did not conform to textbook theory: the political economy of Sri Lanka (as of any other social formation) stood in its way.

An internal war between the Sri Lankan state and Tamil separatists raged between 1983 and 2009 expanded the reach and social weight of the military. In between, there was an insurrection of Sinhalese youth against the state between 1987 and 1989 led by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, stemming from the dual political authoritarianism and

economic liberalism of the UNP. Nevertheless, there was another neoliberal wave in the early 1990s, begun by the UNP but continued by its historic centre-left antagonist the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). The most recent wave under the Rajapaksa-led SLFP was during the 2007-8 global financial crisis. So, there is continuity in the orientation and trajectory of capitalist development from the late 1970s up to the present, notwithstanding alterations in political regime. [48]

Trade, both import-export and domestic, was liberalised for entry of private capital. The withdrawal of the state undermined its capacity to regulate market prices, store and distribute food stocks. Cartels particularly in the milling and sale of rice and within the import sector grew stronger. Foreign capital was courted through establishment of export processing zones, generous tax holidays, and unrestricted capital flows, as well as repression of wages within export manufacturing in addition to the suppression of trade unions and labour rights. The service sector became the most significant in the economy, creating jobs without security and rights. Corporate taxation and the tax to GDP ratio is among the lowest in Asia. Indirect taxes which hurt the poor, contribute 82% of total tax income, underscoring the resistance of the rich to direct and progressive taxation. Small farmers lost their customary access to state land to agribusiness which benefited from bank loans and export incentives. Combined state allocations on health and education are less than the military budget, and adequate only to meet salaries and other recurrent expenditure. [49]

Export-oriented industrialisation supplanted import-substituting industrialisation, except that the exports are of low value addition ready-made-garments, while the imports are of raw materials, intermediate goods, and machinery, worsening the imbalance between import expenditure and export income. There was no effort to sustain industrial production for the home market, in cement, ceramics, paper, leather, textiles, fabricated steel, sugar, processing of fuel and lubricant



oils, etc. These were not considered to be industries of comparative advantage for Sri Lanka, and anyway imports were cheaper and plentiful, with quicker profit for less effort. This deindustrialised the island economy, destroying local capacity, skills as well as employment, and intensifying dependence on the vagaries of the world market.

Meanwhile, the main agricultural export of tea (and to a lesser extent rubber) continued to be important, except that the terms of trade consistently favour exporters of manufactures over primary commodities. Even major export items such as garments and tea substantially rely on imported inputs. Tourism became more significant as a source of foreign exchange, although never on a mass scale nor surpassing apparel and tea, but again requires large infusions of imports of construction materials, fittings and fixtures, and food and beverages, with added vulnerability to shocks as experienced during COVID19.

The single largest source of foreign exchange, however, has been remittances from workers in domestic labour in West Asia. The point to underline is that the three top contributors to foreign earnings - labour migration, apparel, and tea - all derive from women's labour in low-waged jobs.

What is the balance sheet of Sri Lanka's "open economy" after more than 40 years? [50] It has been to increase dependence on world trade (exports and imports), foreign and private capital, borrowing to finance mega-scale and often commercially unviable, infrastructure projects, as well as to bridge the yawning gap between income and expenditure. Sri Lanka's indebtedness has grown exponentially to USD51 billion, relative to a small economy of USD80 billion. The financialization of the economy diverts investment from production, also driving household indebtedness through microcredit institutions. Low-skilled labour migration especially to the Middle East is a mainstay of many poor households. State capacity to regulate prices of essential commodities and services and protect basic

consumption, jobs and incomes in society, and access to health and education especially in times of heightened distress such as at present, is degraded. Meanwhile inequalities of income and wealth have exploded grotesquely, as has the informalisation of employment creating greater insecurity for wage-labourers and their households. Class consciousness has eroded in the organised working class; and the decline of the left as an ideological, political, and organisational reference appears inexorable. [51]

### **Are there any similarities between Sri Lanka in 2022 and uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia (2011) and Lebanon (2019)?**

After the 31 March protest, the government described the citizens movement as replicating the 'Arab Spring'. This was intended as a slur. The inference was that the protestors by aiming to overthrow the president, were agents of upheaval, instability, and chaos; perhaps even opening the way for intervention and destabilisation by foreign powers, and not to forget the trope of Islamophobia to create a wedge among protestors. However, within the citizens' movement there was no comparison or reference to the people's uprisings beginning in 2010 in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa. There is no evidence even among organisers within the *Aragalaya*, of close study of those movements.

What maybe common between Sri Lanka in 2022 and the 'Arab Spring' is that economic crisis, lack of opportunities and daily hardships due to scarcities of essential goods, provoked young people into taking to the streets; grand corruption was identified as reason for the failure of governments to provide a decent standard of living to all; and the remedy was thought to be greater democratisation of the political system and state structure. What is starkly different, unlike Tunisia and Egypt, is the abstentionism in Sri Lanka of the working class in workplaces and through its organisations within the current movement, excepting delegations of trade union leaders to #GotaGoGamas in Colombo and

elsewhere, and the thunderclaps of the 28 April hartal ('stay-away') and 06 May general strike. A happier difference from Egypt is the absence to date of a military grab for power in Sri Lanka.

Among right-wing commentators in 2021, there were uncomplimentary references to Lebanon's crisis as holding a mirror in which Sri Lanka's future is foretold. There has been no discussion of the Lebanese '17 October uprising' within the citizens' movement in Sri Lanka. Insularity runs deep on this island, including in its left and trade unions. What may be shared in the uprisings in both countries is the conscious attempt to rise above ethno-religious divides, identifying as one people with common economic issues and a common enemy in the government, and rejecting the executive as well as the legislature. In both places their respective Central Bank governors were seen as shouldering responsibility for the crisis, even if in Sri Lanka the banking system is stable for now. Perhaps another commonality between the two movements is that they succeed in bringing down governments, but not yet in making one of their own choosing.

### **Is there an awareness of the importance of the debt issue among a significant sector of mobilised people? There were huge mobilisations against the IMF in Argentina also on 9 July 2022. Is there a significant sector that is convinced that there should not be a new agreement with the IMF? What should be done with the debt payments and with the IMF? What are your proposals for emergency measures to face the crisis in Sri Lanka?**

Whereas in Argentina, people take to the streets opposed to the IMF, in Sri Lanka it is more likely that people would demonstrate demanding an IMF intervention. Truly there cannot be another country where an IMF agreement is more desired than Sri Lanka. Of course, this infatuation is based on immediate desperation on the one hand, and innocence of austerity conditions on the other. There is no ongoing IMF programme to be familiar with its pain and

destitution of the poor. The most recent (16th since the first agreement in 1965) was in 2016 and not completed, but still being repaid over 2021. In the current crisis, it has been drummed into society that with all doors to fresh loans closed to it, there is no alternative for Sri Lanka than to look to the lender of last resort.

The lie that has been fed is that the silver bullet to kill the crisis is the IMF. It is not explained that the IMF itself is unlikely to lend more than USD3 billion through its Extended Fund Facility, and that too in instalments over 4 years. This sum does not amount to more than the cost of six months of petroleum products. It is also under half of what Sri Lanka was due to pay in debt service in 2022 alone. While it is assumed that IMF funds will support urgent imports, Sri Lanka will be expected by the IMF to resume servicing its debt, and to prioritise its revenue for this purpose. Above all, an IMF programme does not fix the reasons why Sri Lanka was caught in the debt trap, nor how with its current economic structure and insertion into the global economy it can ever achieve a balance of payments surplus, to avoid new borrowings.

There has been no resistance or alternative to an IMF programme from a stupefied left, ranging from the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna to social movement activists. "We should take the money but reject austerity or make conditionalities human rights compliant", say some optimists. "The IMF has changed from the 1980s, it is more relaxed on public spending and even supports a social safety net for the vulnerable", insist others. "We are already experiencing austerity, what can the IMF make worse?", bark a few. "It was a mistake to default on the debt" (which Sri Lanka did in May 2022) declare others. "We need an IMF agreement so that Sri Lanka's risk rating improves to borrow again from bilateral and multilateral agencies, and the bond market".

Some private sector trade unions have rightly demanded that the government should be transparent in the negotiation process with the IMF and release the draft staff-level agreement to the public. However, up to now,

beyond terse media releases on the process, there is no technical information on the outlines of the proposed programme.

It remains to be seen whether once an IMF agreement is rolled out, there will be a radicalisation of the movement around likely conditionalities such as increased taxes on fuel and food and tariffs on electricity, water and other public services, public sector pay freeze and downsizing, 'fiscal consolidation' through reductions in spending on health, education and social services, labour market deregulation including on working hours, 'hire and fire', and privatisation of state-owned-enterprises. The right has smartly found its opportunities to advance the neoliberal project in this crisis, taking advantage of fuel shortages and power cuts, to promote privatisation of the state-owned Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) and Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB). Sinhalese nationalists may go into xenophobic opposition against an IMF programme, if only for the purpose of differentiating themselves from President Ranil Wickremesinghe before the electorate. Often in relation to anti-privatisation campaigns involving Indian capital, and the US-backed Millennium Challenge Corporation agreement (MCC), left-wing trade unions and organisations have made opportunistic alliances with Sinhalese nationalists, in the guise of "anti-imperialism".

So far, the question of debt has not been taken up within the citizens' movement. Sri Lanka is already in default. This has interrupted a fringe discussion cutting across right and left, as to whether the government ought to unilaterally suspend debt servicing to prioritise foreign reserves for essential goods especially medicines. Sri Lanka will probably not resume debt repayments until sometime in 2023. The government has hired Lazard and Clifford Chance as its financial and legal advisors respectively to advise on restructuring the external debt. This year, there are murmurs around odious and illegitimate debts in relation to the Rajapaksas. Some solitary voices call for an audit of the debt especially the International Sovereign Bonds (ISBs). However, this has yet to become a

demand of political parties or social movements.

A brief overview of the composition of Sri Lanka's foreign debt may be of relevance at this point. The largest chunk of foreign debt around 47% comprise ISBs which are thought to be held by BlackRock, Allianz, UBS, HSBC, JPMorgan Chase, and Prudential, and to a much lesser extent Sri Lankan commercial banks and other locals (rumoured to include parties close to the Rajapaksas). Bilateral creditors principally Japan, China and India, and others collectively account for 31%. Finally, multilateral creditors, the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank, account for 21%.

The Western and Indian narrative of a 'Chinese debt trap' is mala fide. Nevertheless, two points on Chinese loans should be made. [52] Firstly, its actual proportion is closer to 20% than the Central Bank of Sri Lanka recorded 10%, as the official figure does not include lending to state-owned-enterprises (by the EXIM Bank of China and China Development Bank). Secondly, Chinese loans financed Rajapaksa-era mega-infrastructure and vanity projects which have not been to the benefit of the people, and whose costs were allegedly inflated by hefty 'commissions' to the former first family and connected parties. Therefore, these loans amongst others should be audited to determine whether the debts incurred are odious or illegitimate.

Aside from the ongoing debt default, there should be a moratorium on future servicing pending an audit (inclusive of domestic debt) and reorientation of the economy around the recovery of popular classes from this crisis. In addition to substantial 'haircuts' by private creditors, all illegitimate debts should be cancelled. Household indebtedness has also expanded during the crisis, as loans are taken for consumption needs, and to meet urgent expenses. There should be debt relief for households as well, supplemented by direct assistance for household needs and productive activities, to break the cycle of new loans to repay old loans. [53]

Some emergency or short-term measures that are urgently needed include the provision of a basket of essential foods to low-income households in urban, estate and rural areas, to protect them from starvation. [54] This should not be based solely on the existing registry, but include those pushed into poverty through the crisis, and internal migrants such as export factory workers and others temporarily resident near their places of employment. In this process the public distribution system that was dismantled by the 'open economy' should be rebuilt under community control. Farmers and fishers should be prioritised in supply of diesel and kerosene to be able to resume production and distribution. School and public transport should be privileged over private vehicles in the rationing and supply of fuel. Employers should take responsibility for transport of workers.

The tax burden on the poor must be removed, with value-added-taxes increased on consumption by the rich. An employment guarantee scheme to assure a minimum number of days of waged work must be rolled out in urban, rural and estate communities. The super-profits made by banks, finance companies, and other sectors, during the pandemic must be subject to higher taxes. The military budget must be halved, with those allocations channelled into health (including nutritional supplements for mothers and infants) and education (including fresh milk and mid-day meal for students). There should be a moratorium on the loans of micro and small enterprises and reductions in the interest rate for bank credit, to enable them to survive while sustaining production and employment. Community-owned and managed credit and distribution mechanisms including cooperatives should be assisted to prioritise the needs of working people and

especially women.

With the appointment of the new president and the use of repression against the demonstrators, clearly the regime is not making serious concessions, what can happen?

While the ouster of the former president Gotabaya Rajapaksa and the expulsion of his family from government is a victory for the citizens' movement, the election of Ranil Wickremesinghe as the president, is a serious setback. [55] This has for the moment stabilised the political order that safeguards the Rajapaksa family, its political party, and the status quo, against which citizens have been protesting. This 'selection' of the new president has the blessings of big business, the middle class and liberal opinion. This new situation has substantially demobilised the citizens' movement and is systematically demonising it now. The *Aragalaya's* demand was for an interim all-party government led by a caretaker president and prime minister to institute reforms diluting the executive powers of the presidency and providing economic relief and stability pending an early general election. Radicals within it also demanded a People's Council, as an extension of participatory democracy, to represent the interests of citizens as a counterpart to the parliament. However, the *Aragalaya* has been checkmated by the scheming of the new president backed by the rotten majority in parliament. The aim of those in government is to string out the term of this parliament until 2024, protecting the parliamentarians of the Rajapaksa regime from criminal investigations, and possible loss of their electorates.

Within hours of Wickremesinghe's oath-taking as president on 21st July, he unleashed the military on the 'GotaGoGama' agitation site in Colombo, assaulting protestors and

destroying some tents and spaces. Since then, the repression has intensified and is unrelenting, while emergency law is in force. Around 100 people including those most visible as influencers or spokespersons during the movement have been abducted or arrested by the police for various offences relating to their entry into or occupation of public buildings or just participation in peaceful protests. Journalists and media organisations that provided sympathetic coverage of the protests are being harassed. Trade unionists who amplified the demands of the *Aragalaya* are being arrested at this time. The police are trying to remove the remaining protestors at Galle Face Green, thinking this will deflate the movement.

There is a concerted campaign on social and mainstream media to smear the protestors as variously 'fascists' or 'anarchists', funded by Western governments and NGOs and even the Tamil diaspora to effect regime change. There were solidarity protests across the North and East (Jaffna, Mannar and Batticaloa) on 29 July of civil society organisations, women's groups, Christian clergy, human rights defenders, and others from the Tamil and Muslim communities, calling for the release of all those detained and an end to the repression. There have been solidarity actions in Sri Lankan communities overseas. These must continue and have the support of the left and labour movement organisations in those countries too.

This struggle is unfinished and is presently experiencing a serious setback. But it is undoubtedly the most uplifting and hopeful social struggle in Sri Lanka of the 21st century. All those everywhere inspired by the people's uprising of 2022 must now rise in its defence.

*Aragalayata Jayawewa/Poraattathukku Vetri/Victory to the Struggle!*

Source: *CADTM*.

## The experience of the International Youth

# camp, an essential political moment!

7 August 2022, by **Kalya**

This annual camp is dedicated to indepth discussion of different themes, to the sharing of our local and international struggles and to the developing of common strategies and actions. Each day is divided into several parts. The mornings are reserved for plenary educationals on themes such as ecosocialism, feminist and LGBTQIA+ struggles, imperialism, anti-racism, anti-fascism, class struggle as youth and strategic approaches. This year we had guests such as Andreas Malm (Socialistika Partiet, Sweden), Olivia Borchmann (SUF, Denmark), Julien Salingue (NPA, France), Laurent Sorel (Gauche Éco-Socialiste, ex Ensemble Insoumis, France), Marta Autore (Comunia, Italy) and Jonathan Simmel (SUF, Denmark)

The afternoons are mainly aimed at highlighting specific concepts or situations arising from the theme of the plenary. They consist of concrete workshops on different struggles, inter-delegation meetings to deepen our international knowledge and share strategies of struggle, but also non-mixed spaces for self-organisation of feminist, LGBTQIA+ and anti-racist struggles. In order to build and elaborate a real internationalist

struggle, standing commissions on the Russian imperialist war in Ukraine and ecosocialism today were also on the agenda. A **declaration in solidarity with the resistance of the Ukrainian people** was also adopted.

Throughout the busy stay, the camp also remains a place for practising self-management where young activists manage the different daily tasks from cleaning to multilingual interpretation. There are also voluntary tasks such as the awareness team (to deal with conflicts or personal concerns) or the care team (which acts as a preventative measure and ensures the well-being of everyone) that allow us to make the space as safe as possible and to carry out certain tasks around care.

This kind of political practice is even more indispensable in a materialist perspective. The neoliberal capitalist system in which we live shapes our thinking; in other words, our consciousness is constructed according to the world around us. Throughout the year we fight this system, even when the revolution seems far away, we know that the struggle is permanent and on all fronts. For many participants, far from

being a utopian space outside the system, the camp, by its organization and structure, allows us to have a foretaste of a self-managed internationalist communist solidarity society requiring perpetual adjustments in order to ensure the proper functioning of community life. Indeed, during meetings between FI youth delegates in preparation for the camp, the camp is constantly redefined each year on the basis of previous criticisms. The camp is organized by the member organizations or those close to the Fourth International in Europe, and its construction is ongoing and international.

This political moment is an essential exercise that acts as a catalyst facilitating the sharing of experiences, a festive atmosphere and above all a true spirit of camaraderie. The experience of the youth camp is essential in the construction of tomorrow's anti-capitalist, ecosocialist, feminist, queer, anti-racist, anti-fascist and internationalist society.

*Translated by **International Viewpoint** from **Gauche Anticapitaliste***

# I'm a Ukrainian Socialist. Here's Why I Resist the Russian Invasion.

6 August 2022, by **Taras Bilous**

I'm writing from Ukraine, where I serve in the Territorial Defense Forces. A year ago, I couldn't have expected to be in this situation. Like millions of Ukrainians my life has been upturned by the chaos of war.

For the past four months, I have had the opportunity to meet people whom I would hardly have met under other circumstances. Some of them had never thought of taking up arms before February 24, but the Russian

invasion forced them to drop everything and go to protect their families.

We often criticize the actions of the Ukrainian government and the way



defense is organized. But they do not question the necessity of resistance and understand well why and for what we are fighting.

At the same time, during these months, I've tried to follow and participate in the discussions of the international left about the Russian-Ukrainian war. And the main thing that I now feel from these discussions is fatigue and disappointment. Too much time being forced to rebut obviously false Russian propaganda, too much time explaining why Moscow had no "legitimate security concerns" to justify war, too much time asserting the basic premises of self-determination that any leftist should already agree with.

Perhaps most striking about many of these debates about the Russian-Ukrainian war is the ignoring of the opinion of Ukrainians. Ukrainians are still often presented in some left-wing discussions either as passive victims who should be sympathized with or as Nazis who should be condemned. But the far right makes up a clear minority of the Ukrainian resistance, while the absolute majority of Ukrainians support the resistance and do not want to be just passive victims.

## Negotiations

Among even many well-intentioned people in recent months, there's been increasingly loud but ultimately vague calls for negotiations and a diplomatic settlement of the conflict. But what exactly does this mean? Negotiations between Ukraine and Russia took place for several months following the invasion, but they did not stop the war. Before that, negotiations on Donbas had lasted for more than seven years with French and German participation; but despite signed agreements and a cease-fire, the conflict was never resolved. On the other hand, in a war between two states, even the terms of surrender are usually settled at the negotiating table.

A call for diplomacy in itself means nothing if we don't address negotiating positions, concrete concessions, and the willingness of the parties to adhere to any signed

agreement. All of this directly depends on the course of hostilities, which in turn depends on the extent of international military aid. And this can speed up the conclusion of a just peace.

The situation in the occupied territories of southern Ukraine indicates that Russian troops are trying to establish a permanent position there because they provide Russia with a land corridor to Crimea. The Kremlin uses the grain looted in these territories to support its client regimes and simultaneously threatens the whole world with famine by blocking Ukrainian ports. The agreement on unblocking the export of Ukrainian grain, signed on July 22 in Istanbul, was violated by Russia the day after it was signed by attacking the Odessa Sea Trade Port with missiles.

Meanwhile, high-ranking Russian politicians, such as the former president and current deputy chairman of the Security Council, Dmitry Medvedev, or the head of Roscosmos, Dmitry Rogozin, [continue to write](#) that Ukraine must be destroyed. There is no reason to believe that Russia will stop its territorial expansion, even if one day it becomes beneficial for the Kremlin to sign a temporary truce.

On the other hand, 80 percent of Ukrainians [consider](#) territorial concessions unacceptable. For Ukrainians, giving up the occupied territories means betraying their fellow citizens and relatives, and putting up with the daily abductions and tortures perpetrated by occupiers. Under these conditions, the parliament will not ratify cession, even if the West forces the Ukrainian government to agree to territorial losses. This would only discredit President Volodymyr Zelensky and lead to the reelection of more nationalist authorities, while the far right would be rewarded with favorable conditions for recruiting new members.

Zelensky's government, of course, is neoliberal. Ukrainian leftists and trade unionists have organized extensively against his [social and economic policies](#). However, in terms of war and

nationalism, Zelensky is the most moderate politician who could have come to power in Ukraine after the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the start of the war in Donbas.

There's been some misunderstanding about his own record, too. For example, many authors now blame Zelensky for the nationalist language policy, centered around restrictions on the Russian language in the public sphere and including restriction of secondary education in the languages of national minorities. In fact, these language laws were adopted during the previous term of parliament's just that individual provisions of these laws came into force after Zelensky took office. His government has repeatedly tried to soften them, but each time backed down after nationalist protests.

This was evident after the beginning of the invasion in his frequent appeals to the Russians, his invitation to the Kremlin to negotiate, and his statements that the Ukrainian army would not try to retake the territories that were under Russian control before February 24 but would seek their return through diplomatic means in the future. If Zelensky were replaced by someone more nationalistic, the situation would become much worse.

I hardly need to spell out the consequences of that outcome. There would be even more authoritarianism in our domestic politics, revanchist sentiments will prevail, and the war would not stop. Any new government would be much less restrained from shelling Russian territory. With a reinvigorated far right, our country would be dragged ever deeper into a maelstrom of nationalism and reaction.

As someone who has seen the horrors of this war, I understand the desire for it to be over as soon as possible. Indeed, no one is more eager for the war to end than we who live in Ukraine, but it is also important to Ukrainians how exactly the war will end. At the beginning of the war, I too hoped that the Russian antiwar movement would force the Kremlin to end its invasion. But unfortunately this didn't happen. Today, the Russian

antiwar movement can only influence the situation by carrying out the small-scale [sabotage of railways](#), military factories, and so on. Something bigger will be possible only after the military defeat of Russia.

Of course, under certain circumstances, it might be appropriate to agree to a cease-fire. But such a cease-fire would only be temporary. Any Russian success would strengthen Vladimir Putin's regime and its reactionary tendencies. It would not mean peace, but decades of instability, guerrilla resistance in the occupied territories, and recurrent clashes on the demarcation line. It would be a disaster not only for Ukraine but also for Russia, where a reactionary political drift would intensify and the economy would suffer from sanctions, with severe consequences for ordinary civilians.

A military defeat of the Russian invasion is therefore also in the interests of the Russians. Only a mass domestic movement for change can open the possibility for the restoration of stable relations between Ukraine and Russia in the future. But if Putin's regime is victorious, that revolution will be impossible for a long time. Its defeat is necessary for the possibility of progressive changes in Ukraine, Russia, and the entire post-Soviet world.

## What Socialists Should Do

It's worth acknowledging that my focus has been largely on the domestic dimensions — for both Ukrainians and Russians — of the current conflict. For many leftists abroad, discussions tend to focus on its wider geopolitical implications. But in my opinion, in assessing the conflict, socialists should first of all pay attention to the people directly involved in it. And secondly, many leftists underestimate the threats posed by the possible success of Russia.

The decision to oppose the Russian occupation was not made by Joe Biden, nor by Zelensky, but by the Ukrainian people, who rose en masse in the first days of the invasion and

lined up for weapons. Had Zelensky capitulated then, he would only have been discredited in the eyes of most of society, but the resistance would have continued in a different form, led by hard-line nationalist forces.

Besides, as Volodymyr Artiukh [has noted](#) in *Jacobin*, the West did not want this war. The United States did not want problems in Europe because it wanted to focus on the confrontation with China. Even less did Germany and France want this war. Although Washington has done a lot to undermine international law (we, like socialists anywhere in the world, will never forget the criminal invasion of Iraq, for instance), by supporting Ukrainian resistance to the invasion they are doing the right thing.

To put it in historical terms, the war in Ukraine is no more a proxy war than the Vietnam War was a proxy war between the United States on one side and the Soviet Union and China on the other. And yet, at the same time, it was also a national liberation war of the Vietnamese people against the United States as well as a civil war between supporters of North and South Vietnam. Almost every war is multilayered; its nature can change during its course. But what does this give us in practical terms?

During the Cold War, internationalists did not need to laud the USSR to support the Vietnamese struggle against the United States. And it is unlikely that any socialists would have advised left-wing dissidents in the Soviet Union to oppose support for the Vietcong. Should Soviet military support for Vietnam have been resisted because the USSR criminally suppressed the Prague Spring of 1968? Why then, when it comes to Western support for Ukraine, are the murderous occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq considered serious counterarguments for aid?

Instead of seeing the world as being composed solely of geopolitical camps, socialist internationalists must evaluate every conflict based on the interests of working people and their struggle for freedom and equality. The revolutionary Leon Trotsky once [wrote](#) that, hypothetically, if fascist Italy

pursuing their interests had supported the anti-colonial uprising in Algeria against democratic France, the internationalists should have supported the Italian arming of the rebels. It sounds quite right, and this did not stop him from being an anti-fascist.

Vietnam's struggle did not just benefit Vietnam; the defeat of the United States there had a significant (if temporary) deterrent effect on American imperialism. The same is true with Ukraine. What will Russia do if Ukraine is defeated? What would prevent Putin from conquering Moldova or other post-Soviet states?

US hegemony has had terrible consequences for humanity and it's thankfully now in decline. However, an end of US supremacy can mean either a transition to a more democratic and just international order or a war of all against all. It can also mean a return to the policy of imperialist spheres of influence and the military redrawing borders, as in previous centuries.

The world will become even more unjust and dangerous if non-Western imperialist predators take advantage of American decline to normalize their aggressive policies. Ukraine and Syria are examples of what a "multipolar world" will be like if the appetites of non-Western imperialisms are not reduced.

The longer this horrible conflict in Ukraine goes on, the more popular discontent in Western countries could grow as a result of the economic difficulties of the war and sanctions. Capital, which does not like the loss of profits and wants to return to "business as usual," may try to exploit this situation. It can also be used by right-wing populists who do not mind sharing spheres of influence with Putin.

But for socialists to use this discontent to demand less aid to Ukraine and less pressure on Russia would be a rejection of solidarity with the oppressed.

26 July 2022

Source [Jacobin](#).

# Petro's Triumph and the limitations of "late progressivism"

5 August 2022, by **Daniel Libreros C**

## A great explosion of popular joy

Petro had obtained 8,527,768, increasing his votes by 2.7 million in relation to those obtained in the first round, of which 1,000,000 were obtained in the cities, half in Bogotá, and the rest mainly on both the Pacific and Caribbean coasts. In the most depressed and abandoned areas of the country, Pacto Histórico or Historic Pact, the movement led by Gustavo Petro, won. The poor and middle-class neighbourhoods of the cities voted similarly. In Cali, the city in which last year's "social outbreak" had the greatest impact, the mark of the rebellion appeared in the votes of the communes that had the greatest degree of confrontation and experienced the unpunished deployment of state terror that cost dozens of dead.

The electoral results by department confirm a socio-territorial map which includes inequalities in income that have been repeated since the 2016 plebiscite. Effectively, in the departments won by the Historic Pact, which total 40.37% of the national population and include a 29.04% share of GDP, the percentage of the vote was 66.35% to 31.88% whilst in the departments won by Rodolfo Hernández which total 44.27% of the population and have a GDP share of 44.91%, the vote was 62.19% to 35.51%.

As soon as the electoral result was known, popular jubilation exploded. Thousands of people poured into the streets and squares of all cities to celebrate victory, while videos of people sharing that same euphoria for the "historic change" circulated in the most remote places in the country.

Starting at night in the Movistar Arena, a theater located in the northwest of Bogotá, thousands of voters and members of the Historic Pact gathered to applaud the presence on stage of Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez. [56]

The leading role of Francia Márquez should be highlighted. She is the first woman of African background to become Vice-President and she was the electoral phenomenon of the "inter-party consultation" held on March 13 with close to 800,000 votes, the third in a long list of candidates who were running on that occasion. She comes from the Pacific coastal territories where mining extractivism recurrently displaces communities. That vote expressed the popular sectors' rejection of patriarchy and racism and made possible the emergence into public life of the so-called "ethnic minorities" in a country in which the tradition of the colonial "ethos" has destined the "exercise of government" to a small circle of white men of high social status who even share family ties ("Oligarchic Republic" is how a well-known historian of the 20th century came to characterise it).

In the middle of Petro's speech, the mother of Dilan Cruz, appeared on stage. Dilan Cruz, was an 18-year-old teenager who was murdered in the center of Bogotá by one of the members of the ESMAD (Mobile Anti-riot Squads) of the National Police, during the November 2019 mobilisations. This murder still remains unpunished. She raised her son's portrait and took the microphone asking for justice for him and for all the victims of state terror. It was an acknowledgement of so much pain accumulated by relatives of the victims throughout decades of murders, torture and disappearances

that continue without, however, the faces of those responsible appearing. In short, it was confirmation, both in that auditorium and in the streets, that the outrage at the "current state of affairs" had taken the form of a political triumph. Indignation at the increase in poverty, at the millions of young unemployed people and women who wander without a certain future and who participated in the recent "social explosion" facing state terror and open repression, to the millions of displaced people, to the relatives of those killed by the Covid-19 pandemic which has confirmed the negligence of a government that abandoned them to their own fate while giving public money free of charge to big business.

Meanwhile, political analysts and journalists from the international media denounced the arrival of a "progressive" to the Presidency of a country where the elites have been unconditionally subordinate to the United States, handing over military bases on their territory and accepting direct military interference during the execution of Plan Colombia to cite the most recent cases, an abject diplomacy which can be traced from the beginning of the 20th century with the surrender of Panama.

## Economic Policy Designed to "calm the markets"

On that same stage, Petro announced the central purposes of his government, purposes far removed from this popular sentiment. The first of them, he affirmed, is to "develop capitalism", because this signifies the development of the productive forces and makes the end of the "feudal residues" and manors that survive in

our unequal geography possible. This thesis, originating in the foreign policy of the former Soviet Union in the 1930s, and which accompanied the emergence of communist parties in Latin America, is part of the programmatic heritage of the majority of the Colombian left. Petro comes from another tradition, that of the M-19, a nationalist-oriented urban guerrilla group.

This thesis leaves aside the historical crisis of capitalism synthesised in the contemporary combination of economic, food and environmental crises and the guarded forecast for the future of the human species engendered by a type of accumulation of wealth that consolidates itself whilst destroying nature.

It also leaves aside the current crisis of capitalism expressed in the concentration of wealth, the suffering of millions of human beings condemned to hunger, the precarity of work and unemployment. Likewise, it ignores the difficulties that the form of capital accumulation in the neoliberal period, one which produced an unusual expansion of fictitious capital, poses to the financial elites in the current situation, in which the international economy is heading towards one of the worst crises in history.

It also ignores the current international division of labour which, organised by transnational companies through value production and supply chains, allows them to control the bulk of investment and distribution of wealth to the point that in the current environment of international trade, most of the exchanges are carried out between these companies; therefore, such "national capitalism" is impossible. [57]

In an interview Petro gave to the magazine *Cambio* a few days after his electoral victory, he further specified this characterisation with well worn arguments, presenting capitalism as the "great trigger of the productive forces of a society" as if that development, given the demands of capitalist accumulation, has not produced a brutal destruction of nature that threatens the very survival of the human species. [58] He also

promised the development of "a democratic, regulated capitalism, with respect for the environment and the dignity of human labour", as if a peripheral country could transgress financial deregulation, the backbone of profits for transnational groups since the 1980s, when "productivity gains" fell and as if wages in a peripheral country could be programmed outside of investors demands for profits.

It should be added that the economic options of the elected president include acceptance of neoliberal institutionality. The first element that confirms this characterisation is the recognition of the 1991 Constitution, in which the M-19 had already had a leading role drafting, as a "map" of its political project along with the insistence that the constitution makes neoliberal regulations official in the country on key issues such as the internationalisation of the "market economy", the privatisation of public services, the inclusion of health and education in the catalogue of "transnational services", the consolidation of a technocracy associated with international technocracy that defines development plans and fiscal policy as well as guarantees of payment to portfolio investors.

Furthermore, that constitution is not just neoliberal: it is monetarist. It made official a type of Central Bank in line with financial deregulation whose main function is to guarantee low levels of inflation, which today has serious consequences. Indeed, the generalised inflation that the world economy is experiencing at the moment has forced the central banks, coordinated by the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), towards a contractionary policy expressed in the rise in interest rates contrary to what they have done in recent years. In Colombia, the Banco de la República has just raised the reference interest rate to 7.5%, the highest in the entire history of that body. [59]

In a country with high rates of unemployment, informal work and poverty, and inflation in the price of food exceeding 20%, this policy of contracting demand will exacerbate

the deterioration of the population's living conditions. In addition, the problem is not limited to the internal level, as the rise in interest rates by the FED in the United States has precipitated capital flight, dragging the dollar higher along with greater difficulties in the external debt that reached US\$101,557 million in March of this year with a year-on-year growth of 14% and greater difficulties in international trade.

Additionally, Petro accepted the demands of the International Monetary Fund for this period. In an interview published by the newspaper *El Tiempo* on May 14, he acknowledged that he had committed to that credit institution "to reduce the fiscal deficit". [60] This declaration has precedents and refers to demands that are not limited only to the reduction of the fiscal deficit, which currently amounts to 6.8% of GDP (the increase in public debt, which went from 36% to 57% of GDP between January 2019 and the same month of 2022 being relevant) but to preserve IMF economic policies.

Indeed, a few days before the declaration of the then candidate, the head of the IMF mission for Colombia, Hamid Faruqee, acknowledged that they had approved "a new two-year agreement with Colombia within the framework of the Flexible Credit Line (FCL) programme for US\$ 9,800 million dollars", since all the candidates who presented themselves in the first round agreed on "political commitments in the sense that there would be a policy of continuity, of maintaining solid policy frameworks". [61]

The FCL constitutes an IMF financing programme created after the 2008 financial crisis. Its purpose is to facilitate access to resources from that organisation to those countries that it considers have stable regulatory support and macroeconomic guidelines. In principle, the credits of this programme are not accompanied by the requirements to carry out "structural reforms", although they include the supervision of economic policies that do not put the Fund's resources at risk:

In September 2020, the then



government requested an amount of US\$17.2 billion within the guidelines of the FCL, asking for an advance of US\$5.3 billion. "In the framework of the IMF programme, Colombia has committed to an ambitious fiscal adjustment programme in the coming years. Between 2021 and 2023 the country must achieve a combination of revenue increases and spending cuts of 7.4% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). If there were a "post-Covid-19 Austerity World Cup", the country would occupy a place of honour globally. The fiscal goals put Colombia as having the fifth largest fiscal adjustment programme among the 81 countries that have received credits from the IMF in 2020...". [62]

It was on the basis of this commitment that in April 2021 the then Minister of Finance, Alberto Carrasquilla, presented to Congress a tax reform proposal that sought to collect \$26 billion (2.5% of GDP) while maintaining the "pro-rich" bias of the previous policies. Mainly punishing the middle classes and the poor, it precipitated the social explosion that ended up preventing the passing of this legislation and precipitating the departure of Minister Carrasquilla. At the same time, two of the risk rating agencies that operate in the country, Fitch Ratings and Standard & Poor's Global Ratings, removed Colombia's investment grade.

At that time the Duque government imposed a less ambitious tax reform of \$15 billion (1.5% of GDP) and undertook to defer the amount of insolvent debt to 2022-2025, which was established as a (mandatory) fiscal rule in a new budgetary law. Mauricio Cárdenas, who was Minister of Finance during Santos' second term, commented on this rule:

"In just a brief paragraph, the ceiling on the fiscal deficit is defined, and will be forced on the government in office on August 7, 2022. The law establishes that as of 2026, a mechanism will operate based on the level of debt. But, between 2022 and 2025, the peremptory numbers indicated in that transitory paragraph will govern. The next government -regardless of the campaign promises and the results at the polls- will have to limit the deficit to what is set there

(...) According to the paragraph, the deficit will have to drop to 3% of GDP on average in 2024 and 2025. This means an adjustment of 7 points of GDP, almost 80 billion pesos today in the next three years. Where will the money come from? Who will have the ability to make this adjustment? ...". [63]

Accounting for projections of tax revenues due to the temporary rise in oil prices and those of the supplementary tax reform, the new fiscal rule requires that by the end of 2023 the fiscal deficit decrease by 2 points of GDP (from -5.6 to -3.6 points) which will condition governance, social policy and macroeconomic decisions. As usually happens in these cases, the official IMF statements announcing this type of agreement include the macroeconomic perspectives:

"Colombia has very solid economic fundamentals and policy frameworks anchored in a credible inflation targeting regime, a strong medium-term fiscal rule, a flexible exchange rate, and effective financial sector supervision and regulation. The authorities are firmly committed to maintaining very sound macroeconomic policies. There is also a broad consensus on the need to preserve the great strength of economic policy frameworks...". [64]

The risk rating agencies (Fitch and Standard & Poor's) have also declared that they await the official result, with a reduction in the public deficit and with an approved parliamentary process in order to modify the negative investment grade rating at the end of the current year.

In order to sign these commitments, it was necessary to choose a personality from the world of the economic technocracy for the position of Minister of Finance. A person who can carry out the adoption of a large-scale tax reform, one which also has the resources to be able to execute social spending. The person chosen to fulfill this objective was José Antonio Ocampo, an outstanding economist and historian, recognised in the country and in the region, who was Executive Director of ECLAC in the period 1998-2003 and Assistant

Secretary General of the Department of Economic Affairs and United Nations (2003-2007) and proposed by Joseph Stiglitz as a candidate to lead the World Bank in 2013. [65] He was Minister of Agriculture in the government of Cesar Gaviria and Minister of Finance in the government of Ernesto Samper during the 1990s and co-director of the Banco de la República in the period 2017-2019. Once his appointment was made official and asked about the upcoming tax reform, Ocampo declared, "Social spending has to increase, but by complying with the fiscal rule". [66] Then came the "tranquility in the markets", the appointment applauded by all the economic groups and the doors to sectoral negotiations opened.

Likewise, Ocampo has clarified that the projected amount to be achieved with this new tax reform is \$50 billion (5% of GDP), which will be obtained mainly with the increase in the income tax of individuals with a higher wealth index, including the "upper middle class", that segment of the population that earns an income of US\$2,500 per month and that, according to official statistics, represents 10% of the population. This tax orientation is supported by recent OECD reports according to which, Colombia is the OECD country that has the lowest taxation on individual incomes despite a high concentration of wealth. [67]

The reform would include a review of the exemptions for companies and "all of it complemented by a wealth tax that also seeks to achieve greater equity." In the case of rural land ownership, we would see the implementation of the "multipurpose cadastre" increasing land revenues the collection of which has been prevented by the political weight of landowners and ranchers.

**Environmentalist message to the dominant countries: "You**

## **pollute and we have to deal with the Amazon"**

In the same victory speech and on the same stage at Movistar Arena on June 19, Petro ratified another of the "strategic lines" of his government, on which he had insisted in the campaign, which is to join the international campaigns in favour of the decontamination of the planet linking these with inequalities in responsibility, much greater in the case of the dominant countries, for environmental damage. "You pollute and we have to deal with the Amazon" he affirmed and called on "progressive governments" of the region to coordinate activities from this perspective.

COP 21, the "Conference of the

Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change", held in 2015 in Paris in which 195 countries and "non-state actors" committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), mainly those associated with carbon dioxide, has been ratified at other summits, the last one in Glasgow in November last year. Beyond the discussion about non-compliance with these agreements, which has been recurrent, it is important to highlight the fact that they opened a segment in the capital market, that of the "green markets", an important area of the "financialisation of nature".

The financial investment institutions in charge of supplying this market segment are the green or sustainable funds "that integrate their portfolio based on environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG) criteria". The definition of environmental services as far as it includes a wide

spectrum of actions towards the "environment", is codified in international standards and the payment of the same supports these financial assets. [68] One of these assets is "carbon credits". "A carbon bond becomes a Certificate of Reduced Emissions (CRE) and, therefore, a CRE is equivalent to one tonne of CO<sub>2</sub> that is not emitted into the atmosphere. Carbon credits can be sold to countries in Annex I of the Kyoto Protocol, that is, to all industrialised countries".

Given that there are large natural carbon sinks in the Amazon and that part of Colombian territory includes that jungle region, the country has signed protocols for the decontamination of 51% of carbon for the year 2030 in which preventing jungle deforestation and recovering the part that has been converted into grassland constitutes one of the key elements to fulfill the protocols. [