



## IV572 - September 2022

### War and resistance in Putin's Russia

30 September 2022, by **Ashley Smith, Ilya Budraitskis**

**Ashley Smith: What impact has Putin's mobilization order had in Russia? How is it being implemented and who is most targeted for the call-up? How many are being drafted into service? How has this shifted consciousness in Russia about the war?**

Ilya Budraitskis: The scale of the mobilization is hard to determine but it is clearly much larger than the publicly stated call-up of 300,000 people. It is not a partial mobilization. They are drafting all sorts of men, some in their twenties, many in their thirties and forties, and some more than fifty years old. Putin has even mobilized people with chronic illnesses.

It is happening all over Russia from Moscow to the republics. Like always happens in this autocratic state, the local authorities—as they did in the last “election” when they cooked the books to increase numbers “voting” for Putin's party—are trying to prove their loyalty to the regime, boosting the numbers they draft in cities and towns.

People speculate about the scale of the mobilization because the document announcing it included clauses, which were not made public, that could bring the actual number of draftees to as many as a million. So, people are really scared. They

understand that this mobilization could engulf almost anyone.

It has provoked widespread panic. As many as 260,000 people, mostly men, have fled the country. They have fled in different directions. The main destination has been Kazakhstan. Officials there have reported that about 90,000 people have entered the country since the declaration of mobilization.

This wave shows no sign of stopping at this point. There are already huge lines at the borders not only of Kazakhstan but also Georgia and Finland. People have to wait as long as two or three days in their cars before they can get across.

Most of the people who have fled are not activists. They don't have any clear political position, except that they do not want to be conscripted to fight in Putin's war. It is implicit resistance to the regime and its imperialism.

Of course, there are some political activists who tried to stay in the country and organize in face of months of repression that are now leaving. Any activist who remains in the country is a target for the draft, especially those arrested on protests. Some of them are immediately deployed to Ukraine.

The regime will likely close all the

borders and stop the outflow of people. Already there are some restrictions. The border guards are beginning to interrogate people to determine if they were served papers. They deny the right to leave to those who are on the conscription list and, at least at this point, let the rest through.

The huge number of people seeking refuge in Kazakhstan and Georgia is already causing problems for those countries. For example, in the north of Kazakhstan, there are simply not enough hotels or places for these people to find shelter.

Some Kazakh volunteers are helping people to find a place to stay. In one case, in Uralsk, a mainly Russian speaking city in northwest Kazakhstan, the director of a local cinema invited all the Russian refugees to stay there. Now, hundreds of people are sleeping there.

**AS: Putin's mass conscription has also triggered a new wave of protest. What is the nature of the protests? What are its slogans? Who is coming out to protest? How organized is this resistance and does it have the potential to challenge Putin's rule?**

IB: There are two kinds of protests that have developed. One is the continuation of student demonstrations we saw in the big

cities especially Moscow and St. Petersburg at the start of the war.

These are organized through Telegram channels. The Feminist Anti-War Resistance has played a leading role in this work as well as Spring, which is very popular among students. The state smashed these protests, arresting well over 700 people.

The brutality meted out against these protesters has been severe. In one of the most terrible examples, the police arrested a young guy for reading a poem against the war in Moscow. They raped him with a dumbbell. Such brutality is shocking even by Putin's standard.

The second and new form of protest is a wave of more spontaneous resistance outside the main centers of Russia in the republics, especially the North Caucasus. These protests are not led by political activists. They are just local people who do not want to be sent into this horrible war.

People have organized protests to stop the conscription of men, even going so far as to beat up the officers who are serving papers. In other cases, there have been quite large demonstrations.

The most impressive one so far was in Dagestan in the North Caucasus. This is a mainly Muslim republic and one of the poorest areas of Russia. Unsurprisingly, it has also been a disproportionate source of soldiers for the war and those have suffered some of the highest rates of casualties and deaths.

Putin's mobilization provoked a serious protest in the capital, Makhachkala, as well as in some of the villages. Crowds of people—men and women—tried to demonstrate against the police and military officers who were sent to coordinate the mobilization.

Like elsewhere, the protesters were smashed by the police and military. Dozens of people were arrested. Nevertheless, such demonstrations have serious potential to grow not just in Dagestan, but also in other areas in the Caucasus.

Similar protests have exploded in Siberia. In Yakutsk, hundreds of

women organized an impressive peaceful demonstration to stop conscription.

While they were largely spontaneous, people have started to coordinate them over local Telegram channels and other social media. This has led local authorities to back off the most extreme repression.

The local officials are quite worried that the resistance could get out ahead of their ability to control and repress it. So, they may concede that they made mistakes in the mobilization and that they will try and limit the number of conscripts.

Now, I want to stress that both sets of protests are not just against the mobilization order. They are also against Putin's invasion and occupation. They have anti-war slogans and chants. And even if they are just against the mobilization, that in and of itself is anti-war.

Here's an example of this anti-war consciousness in the protests. It happened in one of the republics and was broadcast on local TV. A woman tried to convince the man he was serving conscription orders to that it was his duty to defend Russia by fighting like previous generations who fought in the Great Patriotic War, World War II.

The man responded, "my grandfather fought for our motherland in that war, but this war is not to defend the motherland, it is just about politics." This shows the anti-war sentiment that the mobilization has stirred up.

**AS: Up until this mobilization, Putin seemed determined to avoid such a call-up of the broader population. Ukraine's recent victories have clearly changed the whole situation and is putting Russia on the defensive. Is there a shift inside the state and ruling class about the war? Are their fissures at the top of Russia over the war?**

IB: Putin has been forced to shift his military strategy first and foremost because of the victories scored by the Ukrainian offensive. Their ongoing liberation of territory left him no other

options but to draft more people.

The Russian military simply does not have enough active duty personnel to hold the line. Over the last decade, Putin has dramatically downsized the old Soviet army, which was made up of massive numbers of conscripts. It was a truly immense force.

In its place, he established a professional army designed to carry out small operations, not major seizures of territory. This remodeled army was quite effective when Putin deployed it in Georgia in 2008, Ukraine in 2014, and Syria in 2015.

But Russia's invasion of Ukraine is completely different than those special operations. In this case, the military faces a determined population and military that is prepared with both the will and means to resist and turn back a special operation. So, the state has been forced to call-up troops more on the model of the Soviet model to hold conquered territory.

When Putin was reforming the army into a smaller professional one, some generals opposed it. Undoubtedly, they are now feeling vindicated and have been pushing for the call-up to stop what they fear would otherwise be a defeat in Ukraine.

The old KGB now called the Federal Security Services or FSB in its Russian acronym has cautioned against such a call-up. Because they spy on the Russian population, they are more in touch with the dangers of organizing such a large-scale conscription.

So, there are probably some tensions in the state. But there are as of yet no deep fissures. The FSB is in fact now pressuring Putin to close the borders to stop the flight of draftees.

There are also probably some divisions in the ruling class. Some of the big businesses and some ministers in charge of economic policies may be worried about all the damage sanctions are doing. Some have even made public statements of concern.

But they have little power in the state's decision-making. The oligarchs long ago put their faith in Putin. And anyone in the lower echelons of the state merely takes orders. They are

just managers of Putin and his clique's decisions.

Only military defeat at the hands of the Ukrainian liberation struggle could split the ruling class and state bureaucracy. Now, it remains solid and unified behind Putin.

**AS: Putin's strategy has been forced to retreat from seizing all of Ukraine. What is his strategy now? What impact will the call-up of broader forces have on the military situation?**

IB: Putin, remember, initially wanted to seize Kyiv, and impose a puppet government over the whole country. The Ukrainian resistance stopped that and now is driving Russian forces out of occupied territories.

In this new situation, Putin's main priorities are to save the territories that he has occupied and to stop the Ukrainian offensive. If he doesn't, he will lose this war. So, he hopes to freeze the battle lines in place and dig in deep to hold what they have conquered.

That's why they ordered the mobilization. They will deploy as many soldiers as possible, even with inadequate training, to slow down the Ukrainian offensive.

They have no plans for any offensives at this point. We need to be clear, however, that he is not giving up his goal of the full conquest of Ukraine. He just can't carry that out right now, and instead must hold on to occupied territory, and buy time for a future offensive.

**AS: As part of that, he is now organizing referendums to set up the annexation of parts of Ukraine. He's also drafting Ukrainians into the Russian military there. What impact will that have in Russian-occupied territories?**

IB: These referendums are a sham. He organized "votes" at gunpoint. Russian authorities forced people to vote in favor of annexation. Of course, some did so willingly, but most under duress, and many hid or have fled.

Russia organized this vote to send a signal to people in the territories that

they are now Russian subjects and that Russian forces are there to stay forever. The only option they have left is to accept the Russian-backed authorities.

The aim is to make these Russian territories and declare that any attack on them is an attack on all of Russia. That in turn justifies their call-up of forces in Russia to "defend the motherland."

They will intensify their repressive rule in the occupied territories. Already they are fighting a low-scale insurgency led by Ukrainian partisans against the occupation. These resisters have killed dozens of police and local administrators.

To defend their rule, the Russian military is replacing local Ukrainians with Russian bureaucrats. Thus, the local administrations are becoming openly colonial governments.

Faced with all this, many Ukrainians have fled their homes to elsewhere in Ukraine, some earlier and many more now. Russia, however, is now closing down the checkpoints to stop their flight.

Amidst these desperate moves by Putin, Zelensky has made appeals to Russian soldiers to surrender or escape from conscription. Some may heed that call. Regardless, this will not be a peaceful occupation.

**AS: Up until recently, Putin has been able to win at least tacit support for the war from other states, especially China. That, however, seems to be ebbing. That was demonstrated by China and India's very public expressions of concern and pressure on Putin to bring the war to an end. What impact will this pressure have?**

IB: This is an important development. China especially is a key ally for Russia. It and India's public criticisms of Putin's war at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit are very significant.

Up until now, because of the history of U.S. imperialism, Putin was able to gain some support from states like China and others more broadly in the Global South. But this was always

quite thin.

Putin's attempt to present himself as a kind of leader of the "Third World" in the struggle against the Global North was never very convincing. He offers nothing to actually oppressed countries and is in fact carrying out oppression of an oppressed country by invading and occupying Ukraine.

While Putin has tried to justify all this with his hollow rhetoric of anti-imperialism, he more often turns to various conspiracy theories, especially one he repeatedly invokes—the Golden Billion Theory—and that has no purchase on almost anyone outside the far right.

According to this theory, the West has a plan to exterminate everyone on the planet except the "golden billion" people who live in their countries. Obviously, this has little to do with reality as the Western powers depend on the labor, resources, and markets of the whole world.

So, few governments in the Global South were ever going to recognize Putin as their leader. And certainly, now with Russia facing defeat, they are more likely to become critical, as their collective vote to invite Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky to address the recent UN meeting demonstrates.

In reality, Putin doesn't present any kind of program for the Global South and people know that. While he may complain about Western imperialism, unequal distribution of resources, and so on, he does not offer any positive solution, but calls for support of his imperialist invasion of Ukraine to reclaim Russia's lost empire. That is not a very convincing program or any kind of alternative to Western imperialism.

And the war itself has produced a crisis for the Global South. It has cut off food exports and spiked inflation in energy costs. That is only making life harder in the Global South.

Countries like China and India do not want to share the consequences of the disaster Putin has wrought. So their pressuring him at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization meeting

poses real problems for him.

**AS: Putin seems to be in a weak position. He has even threatened to use nuclear weapons. Is this just bluster and posturing before he tries to sue for peace? Or is there a real risk that he would use them?**

IB: We should not dismiss his threats of nuclear attacks. We should take this rhetoric very seriously. For years, Putin has promised that Russia will use nuclear weapons to defend its interests.

In fact, it is part of the state's military doctrine that it will use tactical nuclear missiles if it faces an existential threat to the country's security and the security of its borders. Now, after the annexation of parts of Ukraine, they will deem any attack on them as an attack on Russia, and an existential threat that justifies them launching a nuclear attack.

At the same time, there are restraints on using such nuclear weapons. It is not just up to Putin. Their use has to be approved by several levels of the military leadership. Putin might not want to take the risk of some generals disapproving their use, something that could lead them to challenge his rule from within the state.

Also, as Putin is no doubt aware, the U.S. and NATO would then respond with possible nuclear counter-attacks. They have already made that clear to Russia. But Putin's regime is at stake in this war, so it's hard to tell what's bluster and what's a real threat.

**AS: Ukraine and its people are determined to liberate their entire country. The Western powers have backed them to this point. If Russia offers a deal how will the Western powers and Ukraine respond?**

IB: I think that the West, and especially the European Union, will be eager to bring about a ceasefire and will probably pressure Ukraine to accept it. But Putin will not accept anything in writing that recognizes the territorial integrity of Ukraine. He remains determined to seize the whole country.

And for their part, Ukraine is

determined to liberate all of its territory from occupation, including Donbas and Crimea. So, any deal is off the table, and any ceasefire will likely be temporary.

We have been through this before back in 2014, when Russia seized Crimea and established the so-called People's Republics. The conflict froze, but then broke out again, under a decade later.

If a ceasefire happens after the annexation, and that is by no means guaranteed, it will be disrupted by another round of Russian attempts at imperial conquest and Ukrainian efforts to liberate their land.

The only way out of this scenario is the end of Putin's regime. Its very existence is tied up with this imperial war. If it remains in power, the war will go on. It will only end with the downfall of the regime.

**AS: One final question. Russian society seems tremendously destabilized by Putin's enormous setbacks, Western sanctions, and now resistance to the draft. It has a feel of the kind of crisis that precipitated the Russian Revolution in 1917—war, defeat, internal crisis, and stirring of resistance to the regime. Where is Russian society headed?**

IB: The combination of the war, the sanctions, and especially the mobilization have caused a severe and growing crisis in Russia. There is no doubt about that. But the regime remains resilient. It has been able to smash each round of protest in the main cities of Russia.

In the Caucasus, the local authorities have to be more careful. They never just repress protests. They know that police attacks could trigger even bigger protests. So, they always use a combination of police repression and concessions.

So, the regional resistance is perhaps the most important. It has the greatest potential right now to sabotage the mobilization and challenge Putin. But in the main cities, people are looking for individual means to escape the country rather than risk organized

resistance and get smashed.

Other people don't have the money and opportunity to try and leave the country. So, they hide in their apartments or flee to the countryside where they can lay low and avoid the authorities and remain in hiding. Of course, this will create chaos as people fail to show up at their jobs, compromising an economy already weakened by sanctions.

All of this will weaken Putin's base, which has already been reduced dramatically. But this is not active resistance, yet. His regime has relied on passive obedience, which was premised on security in private life.

Now that is being threatened by the war, sanctions, and mobilization. If it continues to be compromised, it will create serious challenges for Putin to hold on to his base of support. But there is an enormous gap between individual solutions to the crisis like flight from the country and hiding in villages and active resistance to the regime.

Remember the Russian Revolution did not happen right at the start of World War I. It took three years of bloody war as well as social and economic crisis for workers and peasants to overthrow the Tsarist regime.

We are just at the very beginning of the process today. It will take some time for the organized political and social forces to come together and threaten Putin's rule. For now, I think we will see a continuation of a pattern of individual resistance and broader passive obedience.

And we should not underestimate the remaining support the regime has. Even with the hundreds of thousands fleeing conscription, there are a lot of people that are joining the army now. They believe the propaganda from the regime about defending their homeland from attack.

So, we are at the beginning of a crisis. But we should be clear; this crisis can only be overcome by the fall of Putin's regime. That is the only way to bring an end to this war.

29 September 2022

# Republican Governors Use Migrants as Pawns in Political Game—But Put Themselves in Check

29 September 2022, by **Dan La Botz**

DeSantis had not informed the local authorities, no one was there to meet the migrants, and all of the promises that had been made to them were lies. News media showed the disappointed and disoriented migrants, men, women, and children, as the authorities, NGOs, and local people worked to provide them housing, food, and assistance.

DeSantis defended his action, attacking President Joseph Biden for failure to secure the southern border where immigrants, including drug dealers, and criminals, were entering, he said. He said sarcastically that he was happy to provide transportation for migrants to the Democrats sanctuary states. Florida's legislature has approved \$12 million to ship migrants out of the state and DeSantis spent \$615,000 of that money on the flights to Martha's Vineyard.

For several months, three Republican governors—Doug Ducey of Arizona, Greg Abbott of Texas, and Ron DeSantis of Florida—have been transporting immigrants out of their states to gain political support for their party before the mid-term election that will take place on November 8. They have so far bused 10,000 migrants to Chicago, New York, and Washington, D.C., all Democratic Party led states and cities.

They are doing so, they say, because of the tremendous burden that immigrants have placed on their states and they want to bring the issue to public attention. But they are also taking glee at the difficulties they are causing for Democratic Party governors and mayors of the states and cities to which the migrants are sent while ignoring the hardships caused to the migrants.

The stunt to help the Republican Party in the midterms also raises the governors' own profiles. Abbot and DeSantis are both up for reelection and both could be candidates for the Republican nomination for president in 2024. It could backfire.

Sheriff Javier Salazar, a Democrat in Bexar County, Texas launched a criminal investigation into DeSantis. He called what had happened "an abuse of human rights," and said he believed the migrants were "preyed upon" and "exploited" for "nothing more than political posturing."

At the same time, Lawyers for Civil Rights has filed a class action suit on behalf of the Venezuelan asylum seekers and Alianza America, a network of immigrant organizations, against DeSantis. The suit claims DeSantis "engaged in a fraudulent and discriminatory scheme to transport

nearly 50 vulnerable immigrants, including women and children, from San Antonio, Texas to Martha's Vineyard without shelter or resources in place."

"No human being should be used as a political pawn in the nation's highly polarized debate over immigration," said Ivan Espinoza-Madrigal of Lawyers for Civil Rights.

Everyone agrees that the U.S. immigration system is broken, with nearly two million undocumented immigrants detained each year. But Republicans suggest that they are criminals or parasites who live off American benefits, while in fact all studies show that immigrants get jobs, contribute economically, and commit fewer crimes than others.

No doubt the Republican governors will win the support from Trump's political base. But photos of the families with their children standing on American streets looking lost and afraid will also cost them the votes of many independents. Liberals, progressives and socialists, both immigrants and the native-born, mobilized to assist and defend these migrants, and they will go to the polls to vote for Democrats.

25 September 2022

## Islamic regime shaken by unprecedented



28 September 2022, by **Bahman Ajang**

Women were at the forefront of the first protests, cutting their hair and burning their headscarves in public in defiance of the hijab law. Unlike the individual initiatives of 2017-2018, this time removing one's headscarf is done collectively, leading to a direct confrontation with the authorities.

## **A women's revolt that comes from afar**

Compulsory veil-wearing is one of the ideological foundations of this patriarchal and theocratic regime. It was imposed by force on women despite their huge mobilizations in 1979 to oppose it. After 43 years of protest, feminist demands are now coming to the forefront of the political and social demands put forward in the demonstrations.

Part of the depth of women's current refusal is that they are present in all spheres of social, political and economic life. Almost all of them are literate and have a level of education at least equal to that of men. Nevertheless, they have great difficulty in finding a job and are therefore confined to the home.

The average number of children per woman is 1.6. In response, the law of 15 November 2021 criminalizes abortion. It also considerably restricts access to contraception and vasectomy. At the same time, the regime encourages early marriage before the age of 15.

For the past ten years, women have been investing in internet communication. They have multiplied blogs and online videos. In the months leading up to Masha Amini's death, women converged on anti-hijab protest hashtags, posting videos of themselves walking with their heads

uncovered or being harassed in the street.

## **The strength of Kurdish resistance to oppression**

As early as 18 September, protests broke out in Mahsa-Jina Amini's native Iranian Kurdistan. General strikes were organized there from Monday 19. Hostility towards the regime is traditionally strong in this part of the country where the population is particularly oppressed. Aspiring to autonomy and democracy, they were among the first forces of opposition to the Islamic regime. Repression is particularly fierce there: a good part of the political prisoners in Iran come from there.

## **Social and geographical extension of the mobilizations**

Starting with women, the movement very quickly spread to the student world. It reached out to other young city dwellers, but also to older people.

All the unions and associations not recognized by the government openly supported the movement. For example, on 17 September, the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Workers' Union (VAHED) declared that it "strongly condemns this crime" and "demands prosecution, a public trial and punishment of all those responsible for the murder of Mahsa Amini. The structural, institutionalized and patriarchal discrimination against girls and women in the country must end."

The protest quickly led to a growing

number of demonstrations across the country, burning up as many as 100 cities in a week, including all the major ones. In the face of this, the repression has so far resulted in more than 50 deaths, hundreds of injuries and thousands of arrests across the country.

## **A rapid politicization of the movement**

The initial slogans, generally directed against the morality police, were very quickly enriched by mass chants such as: "Death to the dictator", "Down with the Islamic Republic", "No Shah, no Supreme Guide", "Woman, Life, Freedom", or "Bread, Work, Freedom". The movement was highly politicized from the start, and it was no longer a purely protest movement.

## **A long-standing resistance to the regime and its neoliberal policies**

The rapid politicization of the current movement is not surprising. Indeed, the rupture between the regime and the population is total. According to polls conducted by state institutions, only 12-14 per cent of the population is in favour of the regime. The regime thought it could consolidate its reign by pushing aside the "reformist" tendencies embodied by former presidents Khatami and Rouhani. He designated Ebrahim Raiisi, considered by human rights organizations as guilty of crimes against humanity. Far from "responding to the country's problems", his policy has led to an unprecedented social crisis: galloping inflation, mass unemployment,

increasing insecurity and impoverishment of the majority of the population: according to official statistics, 50 per cent of the Iranian population lives below the poverty line.

For several years, Iran has been regularly shaken by popular uprisings of varying degrees, but most often based on a set of social, economic and environmental demands. These mobilizations are opposed to the neoliberal policies implemented by all the successive governments of the Islamic Republic since the end of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988).

To mention just a few, the revolts of 2017 and 2019 were violently repressed in blood. According to some sources, more than 1,500 people were killed in 2019. Arrests and continuous harassment of activists in the trade union, student and feminist movements have been the only responses of the regime, without any social proposals. This repression has not prevented 4122 protest movements and actions, strikes, sit-ins, by workers, teachers and other employees, as well as pensioners, from taking place last year. An absolute

record in the history of the Islamic Republic. The workers' movement's response to President Raisi's rule. The high point of this response was last summer's major strike by workers in the oil and petrochemicals industry, when more than 100,000 workers in this sector responded to the call to mobilise.

Iran has been the scene of water revolts, notably in Khuzestan (2021), Isfahan and Shahrekord (2022), which quickly took a political turn and were repressed.

## The manoeuvres of those nostalgic for the Shah's dictatorship

After the total failure of the "reformist current inside the state" and its discredit among the vast majority of the population, a campaign was led by the major media in exile, some of which were supported and financed directly by the Gulf monarchies and their US sponsors. Using a few isolated slogans chanted during the

two previous revolts, they presented the son of the Shah (overthrown in the 1979 revolution) as the "symbol of the unity of the people". They tried to present him as the embodiment of a "return to Iran's monarchical roots". Their campaign was amplified by the strength of their large-scale means of communication, and via viral actions in social media.

However, as of 25 September, after 9 days of nationwide revolt, at no time has such a colouring of the demonstrations been heard or observed, either among the mobilized citizens, or among the organizers and major actors of the collective actions. Moreover, the slogans chanted show precisely the absence of such an orientation. This is a victory for the living, progressive forces in Iran.

This ongoing revolt is a higher stage of the struggle of the women and men of Iran in their quest for democracy and social justice. No Shah, No Supreme Leader!

28 September 2022

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

# Post Fascist Leader Giorgia Meloni Wins in Italy

27 September 2022, by [\*\*Dave Kellaway\*\*](#)

Giorgia Meloni, the leader of the post-fascist Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy), will be the first female prime minister of Italy. Her party did even better than the final public polls a week or so ago. She is the politician who shouted the traditional fascist slogan, *Dio, Patria e Famiglia* (God, Fatherland, and Family) at the neo-fascist Vox rally a year ago in the Spanish state. Meloni says she is not a fascist but wants a similar approach to Orban, the extreme right wing leader of Hungary. She says Mussolini made some bad mistakes, like the racial

laws, but he did good things too. Marine Le Pen, the French far-right leader, has already expressed her delight at Meloni's success. The Italian leader led a campaign where she attacked gay and trans rights, rejected the positive welfare reform, the Citizens Income, argued for stopping any migrant boats landing in Italy, and stressed the idea of Italians first, which includes confronting the European Community.

Fratelli d'Italia increased their vote six-fold compared to 2018. According

to the analysis on the transfer of votes between elections made by Conorzio Opinio for the RAI, the state broadcaster, 40% of her voters came from former Lega supporters. Meloni's political choice to stay outside the Draghi government of national unity has paid off. Salvini was part of the government and the Lega appeared to be vacillating and unclear on its policies, particularly in relation to the COVID pandemic. Another 13% came from Berlusconi's Forza Italia and 9% from the Five Star Movement. Ten per cent of its votes formerly abstained - it

looks like the hard right did a better job of gaining from the huge pool of abstentionists than the Democratic Party, who had prioritised this tactic.

The absence rate rose to 37%, ten points worse than in 2018. Ordinary people see a circus in parliament. There have been 3 completely different governments since then – the Lega/M5S coalition of the populists, then the PD/M5S and finally the Draghi government of nearly all the main parties since 2018. This means that confidence and trust in politics is at an all-time low. People are experiencing increasing inequality and a cost of living crisis, and they see that their votes do not count for much.

Another worrying fact from these results is that Meloni is the first party throughout Italy except in the South, where she is six points behind the M5S score of 26%. Fratelli d'Italia has completely changed the hierarchy within the right wing coalition. Its score is bigger than the combined results of the Lega and Forza Italia. If the results had been more even, then we might have seen manoeuvring to prevent Meloni becoming prime minister. The results are so bad for Salvini that his leadership is now under threat. Currents that want to narrow the objectives of the Lega to its original regional autonomy/independence mission are already on the warpath.

Meloni also campaigned effectively and immediately moved to quash any exhibitions of fascist gestures, dumping a candidate who made the Roman salute. She consistently put forward a pro-Western view on the Ukraine war, unlike Berlusconi, who even argued that Putin just wanted to replace Zelensky with some better people! Salvini was also tarnished by his former closeness to Putin—there is a photo of him wearing a Putin t-shirt and his party had all sorts of dubious financial deals with Moscow. Meloni also benefited from being the new (a refurbished brand) and not involved in any of the politics of the last four years, as well as the fact that she was running to be the first woman prime minister.

Her economic policies are firmly anchored in the neo-liberal approach

of previous Italian governments, and she has toned down her virulent attacks on the EU. Meloni wants to present herself as a prime minister similar to the other parties. However, she will try and move Italy towards an Orban type society—in terms of a vicious anti-migrant policy, a war on all things she defines as 'woke', and a dismantling of the citizens' income welfare payment. She wants to replace the latter with a system based on supporting businesses that hire the unemployed. A presidential system like in France is also one of her campaign promises, but she needs a massive majority to do that simply in parliament. A presidential system lends itself better to an Orban-style government. Her success will be an encouragement to all the more extreme fascist groups such as Forza Nuova and others, who will see her as a friend within the institutions. Any new mobilisations by working people will face an iron hand.

Enrico Letta and the PD more or less maintained their support, but his ambition was to become the biggest single party and to stop Meloni's right wing coalition. He has failed miserably on both fronts, and his leadership is likely to come under severe pressure in the upcoming congress. He failed to form a coalition with the moderate neo-liberals like Calenda and Renzi. He ended up with the PD's left'satellites', Sinistra Italia/Greens. The whole manoeuvre looked clumsy. Indeed, Calenda/ Renzi, although falling short of their target of 10%, did get around 8% and 37% of their voters came from the PD. The Sinistra Italia/Greens also managed to cross the 3% threshold to get MPs, so the PD lost a little to its left also.

Italian politics has some similarities with the recent British situation where the capitalist class, faced with Brexit and the economic, health, and ecological crises, struggles to construct a stable political hegemony. The Italian paradox is that the ex-Communist party, the PD, is the only stable party. All the other main ones go up and down spectacularly from one election to the next. At the same time, in many ways, it is also the party most trusted by the establishment. It was the most enthusiastic supporter of Draghi. However, Letta's failure will

also open up a debate within the party about re-forging a coalition with the M5S, who took a bit of a left turn in this election.

One surprise of the campaign and the results has been the revival in M5S fortunes. Its parliamentary representation had halved over the course of four years through splits and defections. Conte led the campaign without the historic leaders, and Beppe Grillo (comedian and founder) kept quiet. Di Maio, the foreign secretary and leader of the latest split, was defeated in the Naples region by an M5S candidate, and his group, Impegno Civico (Civic Engagement), did not pass the 3% threshold. Conte's main campaign focus was on defending the party's signature policy, the Reddito di Cittadinanza, or Citizens Income. This was popular, particularly in the South, which is poorer and where more people benefited from it. He even took up other progressive ideas, like a shorter working week. Of course, this party has been in government since 2018 and has nodded through many neo-liberal policies. But politically, it is difficult at the moment to say there are many differences with the policies of the PD.

Di Magistris and the radical left alternative, Union Popolare (People's Unity), failed to make the 3% threshold despite the exemplary mobilisation of activists to get them on the ballot. It received more or less the same number of votes as equivalent groups in 2018. A number of people I know who were critical of the PD's moderate line opted for Conte, and the relative success of Sinistra Italia/Greens must have made it difficult for the Union Popolare to really take off. Its results reflect the defeats and the low level of activity of the workers' movement. Protests and militant action by workers to defend their jobs, like at Whirlpool or GKN, do take place, but the national unions fail to generalise these struggles as they are integrated into discussions about the Plan for National Recovery and Resilience, which has an EU financed budget of 200 billion. It seems there are no electoral shortcuts to the patient rebuilding of the resistance and struggles.



These election results are a defeat for working people. Migrants, gays and trans people are particularly in the firing line. We need to not be overly alarmist. Post-fascists have been in government here before. A fascist state will not be imposed in the next few months, but we see all the

features of creeping fascism in play. It is possible that differences between parties of the right wing coalition could lead to a political crisis, although the weakness of the Lega and Forza Italia makes this less likely. Given the state of political opposition

in parliament, it looks like only mobilisation on the streets, in the communities and in the workplaces will turn things around.

26 September 2022

Source *Anti\*Capitalist Resistance*.

## One Ukrainian democratic socialist's opinion on the war

26 September 2022, by **Bill Fletcher, Vladyslav Starodubtsev**

**Vladislav Starodubtsev:** Thank you for inviting me. It's great to see you here.

**Bill Fletcher: I want to just start with, what is the current situation? We get various reports in mainstream media, and I'm interested both in terms of your look at the war, but also what's happening within Ukraine itself with the Ukrainian government?**

**Vladislav Starodubtsev:** Okay, I will probably start from afar. Once the war started, actually the day before, Russian officials called to the Ukrainian parliament and said that they want a complete surrender of Ukraine to Russia. Ukrainian officials said to them that we will wait a few months for the complete surrender of Russia. On the next day, there was a parliamentary brief where Zelensky gathered all the politicians of all parties, all the military personal and high government officials, and they were preparing for the invasion the next day.

Russians tried to capture Ukraine for a week, and US and European officials, at the day of the invasion, were calling Zelenskyy and people in parliament and asking them to leave to safety and abandon Kyiv, but as we see now in the six months after the invasion, nothing like this happened, and all the Western governments that

were saying that Ukraine will fall in three days just completely failed and cannot understand what to do now.

In this situation, Ukraine still fights and resists Russian occupation, and today they're starting a new counter-offensive to liberate [inaudible] from the occupation. It's a lot more... Ukrainians are doing a lot more than people from the West and general politicians expected from them. Actually, we are showing great resistance to the occupation.

But of course the war creates a lot of problems, a lot of social problems, a lot of political problems that we need to be honest with. What the Zelenskyy government does is absolutely awful and creates a lot more social instability [inaudible] in times of war by using the situation as a pretext for attacking the rights of trade unions, of the people who are in precarious conditions, attacking of housing rights, of social rights, depriving of basic social securities for the needs of advancing their market fundamentalist ideology.

This creates a lot of social tensions in Ukraine. A few weeks ago, there were a few laws adopted that just completely harm the rights of trade unions to defend their workers, and a few laws that introduced zero-hour contracts that actually deprives the right of eight-hour working days and

the right to have minimum wage and stable working conditions.

At the same time, they are progressing privatization laws. They are even privatizing the [inaudible] industry, so in times of war, where war economy is needed and social dialogue and social stability is absolutely necessary to enforce, they are pushing for awful neoliberal reforms.

**Bill Fletcher: Well, let me ask you this. It may be a naive question. But picking up on your last point, at a point where this invasion remains underway, why is the Zelenskyy government carrying out policies that, in effect, will destabilize Ukraine?**

**Vladislav Starodubtsev:** I think it's more ideological. They believe that they're doing good stuff, that this policy should be done in times of war, and even before the war. They have this very market fundamentalist worldview, that everything could be solved by the market hand, and if you just let the market do everything, it will be done. Of course it's absolutely not working. It's actually collapsing the country in real time. They're doing tax cuts, prioritization, and cuts to the workers rights, but they're trying to push for their agenda to the final. They're actually using the situation of the war to push for the most horrible reforms in economic democracy and

trade union rights that were introduced a few years ago, that they failed to push at that time. For them it's a possibility to achieve their vision of Ukraine. I wouldn't say that it's a pretty good vision, especially in times of war. It's absolutely compromising the Ukrainian defense.

**Bill Fletcher: Now, as you know when the... There's been what I think to be a sort of strange response to the Russian invasion on the part of many leftists and progressives in the West, including but not limited to in the United States. When the Russians invaded Ukraine, I thought it was obviously a settled question that the Russians were the aggressors and everybody should oppose that and support the Ukrainian resistance. But a different set of different views began to surface. I'm curious how you and other Ukrainians look at this phenomenon within different left and progressive circles in the West, of some people actually supporting the invasion, others essentially adopting the point of view of Henry Kissinger, the former secretary of state, and insisting on what the terms of a settlement should be. Very different points of view about whether the United States or anyone else should provide arms to Ukraine, and people are all over the place. I'm wondering how you and your organization and others view this phenomenon.**

Vladislav Starodubtsev: I would say that 99% of the left and general Ukrainian society have only one opinion on all of these issues. They're, of course, supporting Ukraine for the fight to total victory, and for the, of course, sending heavy weapons to Ukraine, to Ukrainian resistance, because it's a question of survival. It's a question of their democratic rights, of their national rights, and of their lives in general, of being able to live a peaceful life, not in the horrible fascist occupation.

Of course, all these debates, they're just awful. A few days ago, I think yesterday, there was an event organized by Democratic Socialists of America, these very random people

that have no legitimacy to talk about Ukraine, that were talking the same thing about peace negotiation, about US aggression, proxy war, that actually just denigrates any opinion of the Ukrainian population and what we are thinking, and tries to speak over our heads to ensure their word views and political agenda. It's, of course, absolutely awful.

This situation, I would say, is very colonial thinking, that only the US has some subjectivity in world politics. Even Russians cannot do it, or the Russian state, cannot do anything without their subjectivity. They're only reacting to the actions of the US government or other Western governments. These views deny a possibility of states to do independent politics and be imperialist without any relations to the US, and kind of justifies those aggressions on the US. But of course, it's absolutely untrue.

Such people are actually arguing for peaceful settlement with Russian imperialism, thinking that if they're compromising with the fascists, they will build a more progressive world order. They're, for some reason, thinking that building the world based on the rule of the strongest and based on the multipolar imperialists [inaudible] for world power. It's actually a more progressive and democratic world that we have right now, but there is nothing progressive in the multipower world of multiple imperialism. There's nothing progressive in the world where a status quo can be destroyed by the rule of the strongest against the weakest nations. There is no anything progressive or democratic, and that these beliefs and views are the same as Henry Kissinger should tell something to the left, especially the American left.

**Bill Fletcher: One of the principal arguments that you hear is that the NATO expansion into Eastern Europe was what provoked Putin, and that had there not been a NATO expansion and had there not been discussions within Ukraine about the possibility of entering NATO, that none of this would've happened. How do you respond to that?**

Vladislav Starodubtsev: There was a NATO in Chechnya, but no, of course, but Russia still went to war with the Chechnyan people and so destroyed their countries, actually two times, and they weren't needing any NATO expansion for this. But for some reason for now, everyone believes that Russia is a peaceful actor that only defended itself from, I don't know... This image of NATO expansion is absolutely untrue.

Ukraine actually never, ever after its independence, had any war. It didn't have an army and didn't have any aggressive ambitions against Russia or any other countries. Ukraine even gave its nuclear arsenal... It's the second country in the world that denuclearized all their nuclear arsenal just to show that it's a peaceful country that doesn't want any conflict, while Russia attacked Georgia, attacked Chechnya, and now attacking Ukraine from 2014, and they're using different explanations for all of this.

Chechnya, for example, was an integral part of the Russian republic. Georgia was a [inaudible] people. Ukraine was actually the... A multiplier argument. That's Ukrainians' nation shouldn't exist, that Ukrainians are - As an ideology. They're talking about Ukrainians as ideology, not as a nation - Is hostile to the ideal of Russia, that Russian people are somehow oppressed in Ukraine and so on and so on. They're using multiple arguments just trying to appeal to any authors they can possibly do. To the far right, to the far left, to centrists, and so on and so on.

But the fact of what they're doing now, they're doing complete justification of occupied cities.

They're prohibiting any Ukrainian [inaudible] of occupied cities. They're the stronghold of Ukrainian [inaudible] and all Ukrainian teachers that are teaching in Ukraine are prohibited in occupied regions. They're doing [inaudible] and oppression, killing people for engaging in... Actually their [inaudible] of their democratic rights. Their repressing trade unions and so on, is the reaction to the [inaudible] itself. It's really a country that wants to defend itself and would attack and

enforce their culture, enforce radical assimilation politics, and kill thousands of people to defend itself. Is it really a realistic argument? Is this? I think no.

**Bill Fletcher: Putin has made a number of threats, implied and, actually quite explicitly, regarding nuclear weaponry and the potential use of tactical and maybe even strategic nuclear weapons. There are those that say that US military support to Ukraine simply prolongs this conflict and brings us closer to a nuclear exchange. How would you respond to that?**

Vladislav Starodubtsev: I would respond very easily, that if you always compromise with fascist powers and dictators, you will come to the period that there will be nothing to compromise left. If you want to stop a fascist terrorist state that is engaged in genocides, just by feeling that it could continue to do horrible things and completely continue to do aggressions, they will continue to do this. They will have all carte blanche to go for the other countries, to go for Poland, to go for Baltic states, and just expand farther and farther. This argument that says that if you want to stop Russia, if you will give weapons to Ukraine, that it could promote nuclear war and escalation and problems and conflicts, it just shows that people want to compromise with fascist states and compromise their... Actually not their, but freedom of other people, to appease the dictatorship and the fascist regime that have as its ideology expansion and occupation of foreign territories. With such compromises, it'll be giving a very strong signal to the world that any state can expand and attack any state that they want if they have nuclear weapons.

Is it a correct argument for abolishing nuclear weapons? It just gives a lot more privileges to the states that already have them. It creates the world order, as I said, based on the rule of strongest and based on the rule of the countries that have nuclear weapons. It's actually not helping to de-escalate everything. It only gives a carte blanche for continuing such actions for forever. Because if you don't give any answer to this, these

powers will just continue to invade and show other countries that there is such a possibility to attack bigger states.

**Bill Fletcher: Let me ask you one final question, and it's something that's been rolling around in my head since I interviewed professor Noam Chomsky a few months ago. In effect, he said that, while he opposed the Russian invasion of Ukraine, that there was very little that we in the United States, progressives, could do to influence Putin, but what we could do is influence the Biden administration, the United States government, and put pressure on them to not expand the war. That was essentially his orientation. It led me to wonder several things that went beyond what he was raising, and one is, what is it that you and other Ukrainian leftists would recommend? What would you like progressives, liberals, leftists in the United States to be doing now that they're not doing to support Ukraine's right to existence?**

Vladislav Starodubtsev: There's been a war going on already for six months. A lot of people in the West are tired of speaking about Ukraine over and over again. They're thinking that their countries or their governments already sent too much weapons, gave too much help to Ukraine, and that it's a settled question, but in reality, the Ukrainian army is absolutely, the Soviet army has some equipment dating to the '50s of the last century. There are some artillery shells made during Stalin times. And of course such an army couldn't effectively resist the second largest army in the world.

What the left should do, it's actually what left all throughout history did. It's supporting oppressed people and oppressed nations, and giving them the right to resist and to fight against the oppression. In this situation, the most empowering and emancipational thing is to demand sending more weapons to Ukraine, heavy weapons, artillery, tanks, planes that are empowering Ukrainian people, a weak nation, oppressed nation, to fight for their rights for existence, and to put

an end of the world order that is based on the rule of the strongest, of imperialism, and of military aggressions.

Defending Ukraine, at the moment, is defending democratic rights in all of the world, and actually defending the world order, because if Ukraine will fall, and there will be no strong answer from any of the world powers, it means that any other country could do something like this. Turkey can destroy all its opponents, continue invasion to [inaudible] and so and so on, and continue their military aggression in all other states, for example. China can do something [inaudible] Taiwan, Serbia, and Kosovo. So it creates a carte blanche for the world to be a lot more dangerous and a lot more authoritarian than it was ever before. Practically, the left wing should oppose this and do everything for Russia to lose this war. It includes sending weapons and adopting the most heavy sanctions on the Russian state that will hamper the war economy and won't allow the Russian state to pay wages for their military personnel, for the workers that are working in the plants that are producing tanks and other military equipment.

The most important thing to do is to agitate for the weapons and agitate for the sanctions, to continue pressure from the grassroots organizations and popular movements, and for the government to adopt such positions. The fact that governments are still supporting Ukraine, it's not because they're very altruistic, very democratic, and so on and so on. It's because popular opinion is with Ukraine. They can't just ignore this issue. All of their governments, US, even Britain, wanted to sell Ukraine. They didn't adopt any strong sanctions in 2014 and they didn't provide any help, practical help, in 2014. The first [inaudible] Ukraine, absolutely imperialist Minsk agreement, and continued business as usual with Russia. They are trading arms with Russia, they're doing their capitalist cooperation, and now they're just waiting for any possibility to continue this cooperation. For there to be any possibility at all, trading with fuel and gas with Russia, trading arms with

Russia, and so on.

The things that the left should do is to pressure, from the popular movements, their governments, the same governments that wanted to sell

to Ukraine in the first three days of the invasion and were calling Zelenskyy to move to leave and just to [inaudible] war, to pressure their governments to support Ukraine, and continue to support until the

Ukrainian people will have their total victory.

20 September 2022

Source: [The Real News Network](#).

# The Tale of an Almost Strike: Workers, Unions and Politics

25 September 2022, by **Dan La Botz**

"These rail workers will get better pay, improved working conditions, and peace of mind around their health care costs: all hard-earned," Biden said when announcing the deal. "I thank the unions and rail companies for negotiating in good faith and reaching a tentative agreement that will keep our critical rail system working and avoid disruption of our economy."

The handling of this matter, which comes out of 150 years of experience, is classic, though the urgency of this political movement is unique.

Railroad workers were driven to threaten this strike by continuous employer pressures for greater productivity, by their lack of sick days, and by rising prices.

In the United States, where railroads are privately owned and make billions in profits, there were one million railroad workers in 1950, but through consolidation, automation, and simple management pressure, that number has been reduced today to just 150,000.

"The job is just really becoming fewer people doing more work faster," Ross Grooters, a locomotive engineer for Union Pacific in Iowa and co-chair of Railroad Workers United told a

reporter. Railroad workers, like many U.S. workers, had a contract that didn't provide for any sick days. And with an inflation rate of 8.5 percent, workers also felt that they had to win a pay increase, and if that took a strike, they were ready to walkout.

U.S. labor law, however, makes a national railroad strike nearly impossible. The law was created because of the devastating impact of past strikes all crushed by government violence. The 1877 Baltimore and Ohio Railroad strike destroyed millions in property and took 100 lives. The Pullman strike of 1894, led by Eugene V. Debs, involved 250,00 workers, and cost 40 lives, while the shop crafts strike of 1922 involved 250,000 workers and cost ten lives.

Determined to end the railroad strikes, the U.S. Congress passed the Railway Labor Act in 1926, which is still in effect today. The RLA was intended to end strikes by forcing employers and unions into a long, tedious process of mediation under the National Mediation Board. When the parties and the board have reached a tentative agreement, that begins a 30-day cooling-off period during which neither bosses nor workers can take any further action. The last national railroad strike was

led by the Machinists Union in 1992.

Union activists complain that they don't know exactly what's in the new contract. "It's impossible right now to make heads or tails of what this agreement means, and it's disgraceful how opaque is it," said Ron Kaminkow, a member of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen. Workers have apparently won a 24% wage increase, amounting to an average wage of \$110,000 by the end of the contract in 2024 as well as \$5,000 in bonuses. Workers will also receive their first paid sick day, and additional unpaid days of medical leave, as well as more flexibility in scheduling.

For Biden and the Democrats, now facing Republicans in the mid-term elections on November 8, it was imperative to stop the strike which would have caused very serious economic problems for the country, further disrupting supply chains and halting production in many plants.

The unions and workers could still vote this plan down, but they had been offered significant improvements and the pressure from the politicians, the bosses, and some union officials to accept it will be enormous.

18 September 2022

# Let's get our lives back!

## 24 September 2022, by **European network for solidarity with Ukraine**

In recent years, we have witnessed intense and coordinated attacks on women and LGBTI people's reproductive rights. These rights have been won through feminist struggles and are now in jeopardy. We have witnessed an unprecedented increase of gender-based violence, including physical aggressions against women, the feminist movement and feminists individually.

These attacks are carried out by patriarchal and misogynistic governments and networks of far-right and fundamentalist conservatives in Europe and all other continents.

The aim of this growing far right all around the world, including macho world leaders like Vladimir Putin, Donald Trump, Narendra Modi, Victor Orban and Jair Bolsonaro, is to control the bodies and reproductive capacities of women and LGBTI people. This is part of a wider strategy to centralize and strengthen the state and social control over women's lives. All in the service of a reactionary power that hates women, rejects refugees, mistreats the detained and discriminates on the basis of gender, race, sexuality, religion and social status. Women are being forced into a division of labor in which they are reduced to a subordinate role of mere reproducers.

Gender hierarchies, but also race and class hierarchies, are being strengthened. This is because constraints on access to reproductive health, including the possibility to either terminate or carry a pregnancy to term, disproportionately impact:

- migrant and undocumented women and LGBTI people .
- those who are under constant threat of criminalization or deportation.
- those who are poor and do not have the resources to travel abroad or

attend a private clinic.

In several countries, bans on abortion coexist with racist policies. Policies that systematically target the bodies and reproductive rights of racialized women: forced sterilization, forced contraception, obstetric violence.

The state reserves the right to decide who is allowed to reproduce or obliged to reproduce and decides the extent and the purpose.

In Putin's Russia, there are policies that incite women to adhere to the so-called "traditional values" of the "Russian World". To produce more cannon fodder for its militarist projects. In countries such as Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and several states in the US, abortion rights are severely restricted or banned altogether. While femicide and violence against women and LGBTI people has reached unprecedented levels all over the world, many of these countries have also refused to ratify or to implement the Council of Europe's Convention of Istanbul (2011) on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

The war in Ukraine has brought home to us some of the most brutal forms of this all-out attack. Women's and LGBTI rights obtained by feminist struggles in Ukraine are used in Russian propaganda as one of the pretexts for Russia's invasion. Russian troops use massively war rapes as a strategy to subdue the Ukrainian people. Ukrainian refugees, victims of war rapes, who are faced with unwanted pregnancies are mostly unable to access safe and legal abortion in Poland or in neighbouring countries, where abortion is criminalized and even abortion pills are being made illegal.

These attacks do not go unanswered.

In the United States, Brazil, Poland and Russia, feminists are collectively organising and resisting against patriarchal-white supremacist-neoliberal power and for the right of all women and LGBTI people to regain control over their own bodies and lives. Feminists from all over the world are standing in solidarity with feminists in struggle.

In recent years, the exemplary struggles of feminists against sexism, racism, reactionary policies, militarism and war have rightly led to the recognition of the feminist movement as the vanguard of popular resistance, as the movement that fights on the front line against the reactionary, anti-democratic, corrupt and liberticidal policies of our governments. We are inspired by these struggles that take their place in the centre of politics, such as by the US march against the inauguration of Donald Trump, by the Chilean feminists who helped inflict defeat to the far-right presidential candidate José Antonio Kast and by Polish women who inspired massive rallies in all corners of Poland to protest against the anti-abortion law and instilled fear in the conservative establishment. Today we are particularly inspired by the armed and unarmed resistance of Ukrainian women and their resilience in the face of war, as well as by the anti-war movement of Russian feminists who are the main force of opposition in Russia.

It is time to react together and on a massive scale. Organizing national responses and demonstrations is no longer enough! The enemy is international and is creating alliances that go beyond national borders. It is time to reinforce the impetus for a great feminist transnational movement to defend the rights of all women and LGBTI people worldwide, regardless of race, class, religion or nationality.



And take the initiative to create broad alliances against the reactionary, misogynic and racist far-right all over the world.

So let's come together, let's coordinate, let's act internationally!

Let's fight back to regain control over our bodies and our lives!

As a first step we call on feminists around the world to raise prominently solidarity with Ukrainian and Polish women in their mobilizations in defence of abortion and reproductive

rights on the occasion of 28 September, International Day for Abortion Rights.

[#AgainstAbortionBacklash](#)

Source [European Network for Solidarity with Ukraine](#).

# Woman! Life! Freedom!

23 September 2022, by **Laya Hooshyari**

Women, especially women of ethnic groups, religious minorities, the working class and urban poor, are among the groups that have experienced the greatest amount of oppression. Each of these groups is facing various economic, social and political crises, and at the same time, their very daily life is marked by resistance. Women are experiencing a myriad of oppressions, of which the mandatory hijab is one of the main forms.

## Resistance

However, Iranian women have never accepted the mandatory hijab and always struggled to repeal it through various forms of political and civil protest. In the past few days, with the murder of Mahsa (Jina) Amini by the agents of the Islamic Republic, another wave of the Iranian people's uprising has started in many cities of Iran. What happened to Mahsa (Jina) is so painful, shocking and terrible for the people of Iran that her murder has sparked national demonstrations and strikes in various places.

"Mahsa (Jina), you have not died! your name will become a symbol". This is what is written on her grave. On September 14, 2022, Mahsa (Jina), a

22-year-old woman went to Tehran for a leisure trip with her brother from her hometown Saqqez, a Kurdish city in the west of Iran. A Guidance patrol which violently monitors women's hijab and behaviour in streets arrested her in Haqqani subway station in Tehran because she was not wearing an appropriate hijab. After beating up Mahsa (Jina), the Guidance patrol forces took her to downtown Tehran's notorious Vozara detention centre. Mahsa (Jina) suffered a concussion after a few hours in Vozara Detention Center due to severe beating and injuries. She was transferred to Tehran's Kasra Hospital. After being in a coma for two days, she died.

The fact that Jina's death is not an ordinary death and is a governmental murder, a murder that happens every day without a voice being raised in the media inside and outside of Iran, and it can also happen to every single Iranian woman, makes this a political issue for all Iranians.

## Strike

On September 19, Kurds in several cities across Iran's Kurdistan staged a general strike. Feminists have published a statement in at least two cities of Iran to organize a large

gathering together with different sections of the society. As in the past, women are at the forefront of the protests and by taking off their scarfs, and they have shown that they are protesting not only against the hijab but also against the entire brutal structure of the Islamic Republic.

In the cities of Tehran, Rasht, Karaj, Diavan Darre and Dehglan, to name just a few, there have been scenes of the officers beating and shooting the people. Several people have been arrested or wounded and at least three people have been killed by the police forces. The names of these dead are Mohsen Mohammadi, Reza Lotfi and Foad Ghdimi. These protests and strikes will continue today and the days after.

What is the essence of the recent protests? One can find this in the slogans that have been used by the protesters around the country: Women! Life! Freedom! I will kill those who killed my sister! Death to the Dictator! (Islamic Republic) Emancipation is our right! Our power is our collectively! Bread! Work! Freedom! ...

20 September 2022

Source : [Anticapitalist Resistance](#).

# Ukrainian coal miners defy national protest ban to go on strike

22 September 2022, by **Kateryna Semchuk, Thomas Rowley**

Miners and management at a state-owned coal operation in western Ukraine have called a strike over what they say is an attempt to seize control of the mine.

The strike action at Mine No. 9 in the town of Novovolynsk continues the **first major workers' protest** in Ukraine since Russia's 24 February invasion and the Ukrainian government's announcement of martial law, which forbids all protests.

Last month, the miners **prevented** a new director from taking up his post, citing his alleged link to an embezzlement scandal at another coal mine in the region.

They also claimed that his appointment had been made on the say-so of local *smotriashchiy* – a term for the Ukrainian coal sector's network of corrupt unofficial overseers. That director denied any wrongdoing and stated he was not under investigation.

Now, they say, efforts to take control of the mine have reached a new level and the miners have gone on strike to protect their jobs and working conditions.

They describe a stark sequence of events. On 9 September, a new manager arrived at Mine No. 9 with a lawyer and a dozen private security guards.

While acting director Volodymyr Yurkiv was holding a meeting, the new proposed manager, Serhiy Trotsko, tried to remove Yurkiv and the others from the office.

Trotsko said he had been newly appointed by Ukraine's Ministry of Energy, but did not show a copy of the

appointment order, according to Yurkiv. (The ministry confirmed to openDemocracy on 14 September that it had appointed Trotsko.)

This led to a confrontation between the miners and Trotsko and his security team, according to videos of the events seen by openDemocracy.

Yurkiv, who was demoted to chief engineer by the ministry following a previous protest in August, says Trotsko's appointment had not followed due procedure. Similarly, he said Trotsko had arrived without proof of the ministry's order.

Speaking to openDemocracy, Trotsko said he had brought legal counsel to Mine No. 9 because he "doesn't know the intricacies of law", and that he had hired the lawyer and private security team himself.

Mine No. 9's management team and Mykhailo Volynets of the miners union have expressed frustration that they were unable to contact the ministry about the crisis. Volynets even made an official complaint to Ukrainian law enforcement over Trotsko's attempt to take over.

He sees it as connected to the Ukrainian government's **announcement of a 2.5 billion hryvnia (£58m) fund** for buying coal for the winter season, which is likely to put significant stress on the country's heating systems.

## Fragile future

Early in Volodymyr Zelenskyi's administration, the Ukrainian president made a promise to stamp out corruption in the coal sector. Workers at Mine No. 9 link the recent appointments to the possible return of

corrupt practices.

Zelenskyi's promise gave workers at Mine No. 9 hope for the future, Yurkiv says, adding that the miners want to return to work "on the condition that [Trotsko] leaves".

He told openDemocracy: "I'm not trying to hold on to my job – this would be a wrong impression. I want [Mine No. 9] to stay afloat and, most importantly, to work."

Just five days of downtime at Mine No. 9 have cost it 1.5 million hryvnias (around £35,000), he says.

This is not the first time Trotsko has tried to take up a coal industry management post under resistance. Three years ago, he **tried** to take up a post as director of Lvivvuhillia, the state coal company in Lviv region, **with the help of a lawyer** who travelled to the site. He failed after coal workers prevented him from entering the building.

Trotsko has **told** local media outlet Bug that he worked his way up from electrician to director of the Nadiya mine in Lviv region, and that he had brought private security to Mine No. 9 in Novovolynsk "so that no physical force" was used against him.

Speaking to openDemocracy, he said he had brought a copy of his appointment order, signed by the minister of energy, on the day he started – which Yurkiv says he was not shown.

He claims that the protests at Mine No. 9 were instigated by a "certain group of miners" for whom a change in management would mean an end to their jobs.

"Most of the workers at the mine understand everything, but are under the influence of their leaders," Trotsko said.

According to the Ministry of Energy, Mine No. 9 has nearly exhausted its forecasted reserves of coal. The mine is set to close in 2023 – and employees are concerned that management changes could lead to it closing sooner.

Trotsko says he was appointed to increase the mine's profitability, and to give the ministry a reason to cancel the closure of the mine.

Andriy Syniuk, the director of the ministry's coal industry department, told openDemocracy that he and his department "have nothing to do" with the situation at Mine No. 9.

Syniuk previously accompanied a proposed new manager, Viktor Herashchenko, to Novovolynsk on 2

August – but workers blocked their path to the mine.

When asked if the spate of new managers at Mine No. 9 was based on a decision by the ministry's top bosses, Syniuk declined to comment.

This time, no representative from the Ministry of Energy arrived alongside Trotsko to present him to employees.

In fact, Mine No. 9 management had not been informed by the ministry that a new director had been appointed, even during the routine morning meeting with ministry officials on 9 September, according to Pavlo Holota, Mine No. 9's assistant anti-corruption director.

The miners collectively issued a motion of no confidence against Trotsko at a general meeting on 9 September with the new manager present. In response, Trotsko summoned the police to file a report

on obstruction of his work.

The head office of the national police in Volyn region told openDemocracy that the force had opened an investigation into alleged obstruction of legitimate business activity at Mine No. 9.

The mobilisation at Mine No. 9 is not the only protest in the western Ukrainian coal fields during Russia's invasion of the country.

At the beginning of September, workers at the Nadiya mine in the Lviv region came out to protest after Trotsko, who had worked at that mine for 17 years, came along to introduce a new managerial appointment. In response, a group of six miners refused to come up to the surface for three days.

14 September 2022

Source [Open Democracy](#).

# Frontera Struggles for Reproductive Justice

21 September 2022, by **Mireya Garcia, Mònica Clua-Losada**

Her story and legacy is remembered daily by the grassroots organizers of the RGV, who continue to fight for a future where reproductive justice and body autonomy is guaranteed for everyone.

## Reproductive Justice and Body Autonomy in the Rio Grande Valley

The struggle for reproductive justice in communities of color such as the RGV has been deeply interwoven with issues of racial justice, LGBTQ+ rights and the fight for body autonomy and body self-determination. In many communities, exclusion from quality,

inclusive and dignified healthcare is deeply connected to issues of reproductive justice. The material fight for healthcare access matters for everyone, but for our community, the fight for healthcare, and for particular types of healthcare, is the fight for survival. The RGV, like many other places in the United States, has always had a thriving grassroots tradition which has developed through struggles for the right to one's own body and a dignified life.

There are some important but often overlooked aspects to the RGV, and many other communities along the US-Mexico border. Many may be surprised to learn that the United States has 71 internal checkpoints 100 miles north of the US-Mexico border. The geography of the RGV allows these checkpoints to cut off the RGV

from the rest of the country entirely. There are only two roads north, and both have permanent checkpoints (Falfurrias and Sarita), and all three Valley airports have CBP agents that check every passenger prior to any TSA checks. Until very recently, the Whole Woman's Health Clinic in McAllen was the only clinic where pregnant people could receive an abortion in the Valley. Anti-abortion advocates have attempted to shut down the Whole Woman's Health Clinic in McAllen for the past few years. The fight to keep the clinic up and running is documented in the 2022 documentary, "On the Divide." However, in July, the clinic was forced to close, along with other Whole Woman's Health Clinics in Texas.

The next nearest abortion clinic in Texas used to be in San Antonio, but it

is currently being relocated to Albuquerque in New Mexico. It used to be around a four-hour drive (if you're driving from Brownsville, TX to San Antonio) and would force pregnant people to go through the checkpoint along the drive there, which isn't a viable option for undocumented immigrants. In short, for many pregnant people in the Rio Grande Valley, and many other places along the US-Mexico border, the only available choices to them are to risk being deported or be the victim of a forced pregnancy.

There are many ways in which the fight for reproductive justice is the fight for racial and social justice in communities like the RGV. Wealthy people, with US-citizenship, will simply be able to travel out of state for their abortions. The lives placed at risk will be the ones belonging to pregnant people who lack the means and the freedom to move around the United States when trying to terminate their pregnancies.

And of course, there is a further risk: in the absence of safe abortions, more people may choose to carry out their pregnancies to term, increasing the risk of children ending up in foster care or adoption services. In Texas, children in foster care or adoption services are at significant risk due to the religious nature of those services. It is worth remembering that the United States is the only country that has not ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Not only are children of color over-represented in foster care, but most of the agencies in charge of placing these children in homes are religious, and often place LGBTQ+ children in situations or families that violate their dignity and integrity.

## The Power of Resistance

However, it is precisely in this time of outrageous attacks on our most basic rights that communities like the Rio

Grande Valley also show the power of resistance and the ways in which we can organize hope. There are two examples that are worth highlighting. The first one was the July 2021 successful defeat of an ordinance in the city of Edinburg, TX. The ordinance attempted to create a sanctuary city for the "unborn" in Edinburg. This was an important victory, and one that was organized almost overnight.

It mattered because local activists considered this to be a test case. Edinburg city officials probably did not expect such protest, because in their view the proposed ordinance would not really have an effect on Edinburg, as there was no abortion clinic in the city. But if successful, it would have paved the way for neighboring McAllen to approve a similar ordinance. Local activists, especially, La Frontera Fund, knew that it was crucial to win this battle. And they certainly won. This was such an important victory, ahead of the changes the following 12 months would bring, including SB8 and the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, perhaps the two most devastating events on our basic human rights.

Lizelle Herrera could have been forgotten in a South Texas jail. On April 2022, before *Roe v. Wade* had been overturned, the 26-year old was arrested and placed into Starr County Detention Center on a \$500,000 bond. The county sheriff's office stated the reasons for her detention as: "intentionally and knowingly [causing] the death of an individual by self-induced abortion." Once again, the resourceful and quick reaction of local organizers who immediately went to protest outside the center and mobilized extensively succeeded in freeing Herrera. Local reproductive justice activists used social media to accomplish both victories and gained national attention in doing so.

For us to ensure that abortions are safe, legal, and accessible, we need to make sure that we are centering Black and Brown people, working-class

folks, people with disabilities, young people, immigrants, and queer and transgender people in our work. We will be the most impacted by abortion bans, and we will also be the ones leading the fight for liberation. Struggles for body autonomy and liberation have historically been inextricably linked with struggles for racial and sexual liberation.

Communities like the RGV need to be brought to the forefront of the national reproductive justice agenda. This is down to the ideas, experiences and particular ways in which our community is impacted and able to organize in especially challenging circumstances. The fight for reproductive justice continues in the RGV and grassroots organizers are considering ways in which they can continue their work in an extremely hostile environment.

One way of doing this, besides continuing with the limited work that can be done in the current legal environment, is to establish counter-institutional power in the community. The group South Texans 4 Reproductive Justice, a volunteer-run group, that among other activities used to escort people seeking abortions at the recently closed down Whole Woman's Health Clinic in McAllen, are currently fundraising to buy the clinic building to create a community center that will educate, promote and create a safe space for emergency contraception distribution and delivery, as well as building community power.

While the reversal of *Roe* has been a major setback for the reproductive justice movement in the Valley, the fight for liberation is far from over. The community's outpouring of support for La Frontera Fund and South Texans for Reproductive Justice's efforts shows otherwise. More than ever, more people are interested in and committed to joining the movement. The RGV has always been resilient when faced with adversity and will continue to be so.

Source [Spectre](#).



# After the floods, Pakistan needs reparations, not charity

20 September 2022, by **Farooq Tariq**

At the time of writing, more than one-third of Pakistan is under water. Flash floods, generated by abnormal monsoon rains have so far claimed the lives of **1350 people**. One million residential buildings are totally or partially damaged, leaving more than **50 million people** displaced from their homes.

Crucially, the flood is expected to add **\$10 billion worth of damage** to an already teetering economy. More than 793,900 livestock have died, and families across Pakistan of a critical source of sustenance and livelihood. Around two million acres of crops and orchards have been impacted.

These impacts are undeniably a symptom of an accelerating climate crisis. Despite producing less than one per cent of **global carbon emissions**, Pakistan bears some of the worst consequences of the climate crisis globally. The nation has consistently ranked in the Global Climate Risk Index as among the top ten most vulnerable countries in the world over the past twenty years. As Julien Harneis, the UN humanitarian coordinator in Pakistan says: 'This super flood is driven by climate change — the causes are international'.

The people of Pakistan are the latest victims of a global crisis to which they have contributed almost nothing,— and which has instead been driven by the excess emissions of rich countries and corporate polluters. This fundamental injustice is at the root of increasing demands for climate reparations from Pakistan and the wider Global South.

***We are now taking out more loans to simply pay off the interest of our previous debts. The money sent out of Pakistan to pay off our international creditors could be spent instead on rehabilitating the millions who are displaced***

One such demand is debt cancellation. Debt injustice and the climate crisis go hand in hand. As extreme weather events intensify countries on the frontlines, such as **Mozambique**, and island states in the Caribbean are facing increasing economic damages. After these events, low-income (and often already heavily indebted) governments face a shortfall in funding and have little choice but to take out further loans to rebuild livelihoods and communities.

We can already see this cycle happening in Pakistan. Even before the floods, Pakistan was drowning in debt, having faced a steep fall in foreign exchange because of soaring global commodity prices and a rise in the US dollar. The cost of electricity and food has soared. By the end of this year, Pakistan will have had to pay a total of around \$38 billion dollars to the IMF, World Bank and other financial institutions including the Chinese State Bank. A spiral of borrowing is generating an impending economic crisis.

The floods have prompted a flurry of foreign aid, with USAID contributing \$30 million, adding to a United Nations contribution of \$3 million last week. The UN is launching a new flood relief plan for Pakistan, as its officials echoed calls for greater contributions from around the world. But still, it is nowhere near enough.

As humanitarian organizations scabbled for emergency funds, a familiar face reared its head once more. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), recently approved a bailout request with a plan to release **\$1.1 billion to the country**. At first glance, this may seem like a vital step in Pakistan's recovery, but to pile further debt on a country already in the grips of a financial crisis will only end in further disaster.

The empirical evidence overwhelmingly supports the view that a large portion of government debt harms economic growth potential, and in many cases, the impact gets more pronounced as debt increases. Pakistan's high degree of indebtedness has made it more vulnerable to economic shocks and weakened the country politically vis-à-vis powerful external lenders. It has also greatly reduced Pakistan's ability to invest in education and healthcare, or its infrastructure.

If the West intends on supporting Pakistan through this crisis, it needs to implement a series of measures that tackle the scale of damage inflicted by the Global North upon the South since the Industrial Revolution. As a first step, this should include comprehensive debt cancellation, alongside greatly increased climate finance to support communities to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

In addition, many climate-vulnerable countries including Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Tuvalu are now also calling for compensation from rich countries for the disasters they are now facing.

This is often termed as 'Loss and Damage', which even now in 2022 is still not an official part of the negotiations agenda at the UN climate



change conference, COP. Climate-vulnerable countries have on numerous occasions demanded climate compensation from the rich countries and corporations that have created climate chaos – each time **they have been blocked**. At COP27, there must be further concrete progress on these discussions.

The concept of waiving debt is not new. During the pandemic, some debt relief was put in place for low-income countries, although the private sector has continued to collect payments, which inevitably exacerbated the economic crisis generated by Covid-19. But even private creditors can be kept at bay when there is a strong moral demand. In July, a few months after Russia's invasion, Ukraine's creditors made a landmark agreement to cease collecting debt

payments during the war. This provided vital relief to the Ukrainian economy and allowed the country to focus on spending every available penny on supporting its people.

If international institutions suspended the collection of debts, Pakistan wouldn't need new loans. The money sent out of Pakistan to pay off international creditors could be spent instead on rehousing the millions who are displaced. Pakistan needs at least four years to rebuild and reconstruct its economy and to cover up the damages done by floods and heavy rains.

But there also remains a wider question: who should pay for the climate crisis? Why should Pakistan have to take out any loans at all to pay for the impacts of a crisis it has not

caused? Pakistan's climate minister Sherry Rehman told **The Guardian** that global emission targets and reparations must be reconsidered, given the accelerated and relentless nature of climate catastrophes hitting countries such as Pakistan.

Of course, repairing climate apartheid and fixing the crisis is not as simple as writing a cheque, and many other measures are needed to support Pakistan's people through the catastrophe they are facing.

Yet without debt relief or funding to compensate for loss and damage, Pakistan's cycle of debt and climate crises is only set to worsen.

5 September 2022

Source: **New Internationalist**.

# Swedish elections provoke earthquake

19 September 2022, by **Kjell Östberg**

While the voters' most important issue was health care and while the climate disaster became increasingly clear, an aggressive right, with the help of a passive social democracy without ideas, succeeded in dominating the election campaign with discussions on crime, claiming the connection between immigration and crime and avoiding dealing with the climate crises and instead campaigning in favor of expanded nuclear power.

The right has painted a picture of Sweden being hit by an uncontrolled wave of violence. In fact, crime, including violent crime, has generally fallen in Sweden in recent decades. But in one area there has been a considerable rise, namely armed confrontations between criminal gangs, mainly related to drugs. Hundreds have been killed, the vast majority gang members, but also bystanders. This has been used as excuse to demand significantly harder penalties and repression.

The result had been a sharp turn to

the right. This turn is particularly noticeable within the right block. Its electoral success can be entirely attributed to the Sweden Democrats. The other right-wing parties all lost votes.

The Sweden Democrats, on the other hand, increased by over three per cent and is by far the largest party on the right. A coming bourgeois government is entirely dependent on their support. This means nothing less than an earthquake in Swedish politics.

For a long time, not least on the left, there has been the view that the Sweden Democrats' success was above all due to dissatisfied workers, who are actually still social democrats, voting in protest for SD and that they could quickly be won back with a slightly more radical social democratic policy. This is grossly underestimating Sweden's most successful political party.

## Sweden Democrats - the most successful political party

The Sweden Democrats have a skilled and determined leadership, with roots in racist and fascist movements. It has systematically built up a strong party. Not least, it has been able to use the favorable municipal and state grants that political parties receive to give the party organizational strength. The Sweden Democrats are also the most successful of all parties at using social media with xenophobia as the main unifying message. This has not least given them a growing influence among younger voters

The party's electoral successes have been striking. At its parliamentary debut in 2010, the party received 5.7 per cent. The support has since increased to 12.9 per cent, 17.5 per

cent and this year 20.6 per cent. No other party has the same strong cohesion. Attempts from the left to win over the voters of the Sweden Democrats have failed. Eighty-six per cent of the party's voters from 2018 voted for the party again this year, a uniquely high party loyalty.

Indeed, the Sweden Democrats have continuously won over new voter groups, both from the right and the left. In this year's election, 14 per cent came from the moderates and 12 per cent from the social democrats. The Sweden Democrats have long been the strongest party among male workers. But also large groups of entrepreneurs, and after the last election, farmers vote for the party. The party is politically homogeneous. The vast majority of their voters describe themselves as right-wing and they deeply identify with SD's national conservative and xenophobic credo. The Sweden Democrats' roots in and connections to racist and fascist groups are no complication for them.

Until the 2018 election, there was a demarcation line of decency also within the Swedish bourgeoisie against a collaboration with a xenophobic and right extremist party. This line has long since been crossed. First up was business, which successfully managed to get the Sweden Democrats to accept continued privatization of Swedish welfare. Then it wasn't long before the leader of the Christian Democrats, Ebba Busch, offered meatballs and opened the right to organized parliamentary cooperation. Quickly every red line disappeared. But the party was no easily caught victim. On the contrary, the Sweden Democrats' program has largely become that of the bourgeois parties. "No other party has stood up like the Sweden Democrats in strong headwinds against increased immigration," declared the leader of the moderates and intended prime minister Kristersson admiringly. They have been a good example in the fight against crime, said the Liberals' leader Johan Persson.

We see the result now. Today, the Sweden Democrats have outgrown the traditional bourgeois parties and is the dominant right-wing party. In all the

regions outside the big cities, they usually have 25-30 per cent of the votes, surpassing the Moderates, the leading bourgeois party for the last 45 years, by up to 10 per cent. Without doubt, the Sweden Democrats have exceptionally good opportunities to influence the new government's policy, even if they probably will choose to not join formally.

## Social Democrats adaptation

The Social Democrats have been in government for the last eight years, despite the bourgeois parties plus the Sweden Democrats having a majority in the Parliament. This was possible because two bourgeois parties, the Liberals and the market-liberal Center Party, reached a political agreement with the Social Democrats. One of the aims was to keep the Sweden Democrats out of political influence. Through the agreement, the Social Democrats made far-reaching concessions and accepted, among other things, lower taxes for high income earners, reduced job security for workers and the introduction of market-controlled rents. The social democratic government has also implemented a series of measures to reduce immigration and to place Swedish refugee policy at the EU's minimum level. Border surveillance has been tightened, family reunification has been made more difficult and refugees will no longer be able to count on permanent residence permits.

In this year's election campaign, the Social Democrats' tactic has been to essentially adapt their program to that of the right. Issues such as the climate crisis or defense of the welfare state today under attack by commercial interests, which were formally part of the Social Democrats' election platform, played a secondary role, if they were raised at all. The Social Democrats rather tried to overbid the right in demands for tougher penalties - that the government has presented some 70 laws in this direction has been a constantly recurring message. Likewise, the connection between criminality and immigration has been underlined. Special legislation has

been proposed for "non-Nordic" people and the prime minister has spoken condescendingly about "Somalitowns". New nuclear power has also been accepted.

The most notable capitulation, however, was the decision to abandon 200 years of formal Swedish neutrality policy and support a Swedish accession to NATO. The initial social-democratic reaction after February 24 was that a Swedish NATO accession would contribute to further destabilizing the security political situation in northern Europe. However, after an intense campaign from the right-wing parties, the party leadership chose, without letting the party members take a position, to give in to the pressure. The main reason was with all certainty to remove the issue from the election campaign agenda, and they have succeeded in that. NATO accession and the war in Ukraine were completely absent from the election campaign.

## Left Party vote falls

The social democrats reached its second worst result in 111 years, despite an increase in votes, from 28.3 to 30.4 per cent, and thus lost government power. The increase of the Social Democratic vote can be explained by the fact that there was a shift to the right also within the left bloc. The Left Party got a mediocre result and fell from 8 to 6.7 per cent. The party leadership made an American-inspired campaign around the party leader while trying to present themselves as the new social democrats. Particular attention was paid to the purpose of trying to win back "workers in milltowns" attracted by the Sweden Democrats.

For that reason, the Left Party downplayed issues that they thought such workers would disapprove of, such as, for example, demands for changes of life to save the climate or NATO. The party also supported a proposal from the bourgeois parties for a sharp reduction in the price of petrol. In addition, they demanded to enter an eventually coming red-green government that would also include

the neoliberal center party – the only bourgeois party that insisted on not cooperating with the Sweden Democrats. As a result was the Left Party lost particularly among the workers it tried to reach – while the Sweden Democrats continued their success in these environments.

On the other hand, the Left Party, like the Social Democrats, did well in the bigger cities. Sweden is thus similar to

many other European countries with red big cities and a blue (or blue/brown) countryside.

It is clear that the forces that today mainly offer resistance to the right-wing wave are among movements that fight against the climate crisis, racism, sexual repression and social austerity. Some trade unions, above all within welfare and social service, have also

been radicalized.

Today, the Left has a huge task to build a broad counter-offensive with these forces, with the climate crisis and the defense of welfare state at the center.

18 September 2022

Title and subheads by **International Viewpoint**.

# Italy's Rising Black Tide, A Creeping Counter-Revolution

18 September 2022, by **Stéfanie Prezioso**

On September 25 Italy will hold elections following the resignation of Prime Minister Mario Draghi and the concern is palpable. *The Economist* wrote that they could hardly come at a less opportune time, in the midst of at least three interconnected crises: the invasion of Ukraine, the energy crisis and inflation, which in late August reached 8.4% in Italy, its highest level since 1986. In addition, Italy's debt is currently 150% of its GDP, which is "the largest proportion of debt held by residents of any large eurozone country." [1] Finally, as the *Financial Times* pointed out, governments and investors are wondering what impact Mario Draghi's departure will have on the EU's 800 billion Covid stimulus fund, of which Italy is the main beneficiary. [2] Economic market fears are also focused on the rise in the spread, i.e. the difference between the yield on Italian government securities and German ten-year bonds, which reached a two-year high in June, a true "political thermometer."

The outgoing President of the Council announced on August 5 that he wanted to go to New York to "reassure investors," a step that could pave the way for a new "technical" government in the unlikely event that there is not a sufficient majority to form an executive after the elections; an option favored not only abroad but also in

Italy by a significant part of the bourgeoisie, who stress to anyone who will listen that the economic policy agenda set by Mario Draghi remains the yardstick by which the next government must be measured: "Yet any significant disruption or deviation from the reform and investment programme, laid out in a 664-page annex to Rome's deal with the commission, would jeopardise Italy's full access to the funds," writes Amy Kazmin in *Financial Times*. [3] An agenda he had already set in 2011 when he was head of the ECB. An agenda based on massive cuts in the system of social insurance and protection for the unemployed, wage earners and pensioners in a country that has brought about a massive increase in poverty in recent years, reaching an all-time high of some 5.6 million people in absolute poverty by 2021. [4]

The concern is all the more palpable because the coalition of the right and the extreme right has a strong probability of gaining the majority this time: the polls give it more than 45%; with the electoral law, this coalition could obtain 70% of the seats in parliament. The announced victory of Giorgia Meloni, leader of the Fratelli d'Italia (FdI) party, and her possible arrival at the head of the government is a serious threat for a party in whose

arteries fascism still circulates and whose logo proudly displays the symbol of the tricolor flame in the center representing the still living spirit of fascism. [5] FdI has its roots in post-war neo-fascism, a direct heir, both in terms of militant personnel and political traditions and cultures, to the fascist experience, such as that of Giorgio Almirante, an enthusiastic fascist, editor in the 1930s of the anti-Semitic magazine *La Difesa della razza*, who joined the ranks of the Salò Republic in 1943, and after the war founded the Italian Social Movement (MSI), whose legacy Meloni proudly claims. FdI's support has steadily increased, from 1.96% of the vote in 2013 to 4.35% in 2018 [6] ; today some 25% of voters say they would vote for it. As the centenary of Mussolini's March on Rome approaches, post-fascism seems to be at the gates of power in Italy. A counter-revolution without a concomitant revolutionary process, a phenomenon described in his time by Antonio Gramsci as "passive revolution."

Now, beyond the snapshot offered every day by a wide range of political scientists, philosophers, activists, sociologists, it is important to try to understand how we arrived at this disaster, in order to grasp the contours of a "change of era," to go

back to the source and see where the (ir)resistible rise of the worst possible outcome—embodied by a nationalist, racist, reactionary, patriarchal right—begins.

## More than thirty years of the black tide

The fear of a “return of fascism” occurs at regular intervals in the country that saw its birth a century ago. The international press has been focusing for some weeks on Giorgia Meloni and her movement, forgetting in passing that she is not a newcomer to the coalition of Silvio Berlusconi, who appointed her Minister of Youth in 2008, and reinforcing the idea that she is the only newcomer in the relatively large field of parties that call themselves “anti-systems;” also failing to highlight the enduring ties of Matteo Salvini’s Lega with the neo-fascists, their “captain,” of the 2018 elections. At the time, the presence of Matteo Salvini in the ranks of the right-wing coalition, together with Silvio Berlusconi’s party, Forza Italia, and Giorgia Meloni’s Fratelli d’Italia, reactivated the same fears; all the more so as the 80% of Italians polled then affirmed the need for a “strong man” to emerge from the crisis and those who thought that democracy was the best possible form of government reached their lowest level since 2008 (62%, or minus 10 percentage points in ten years).[7] A proportion that has slightly increased today to about 70%, although the demand for a strong leader remains in the majority (some 59% of Italians surveyed).[8]

Silvio Berlusconi’s party, which had been the driving force of the right-wing coalition before 2018 has been slowly disappearing. But the change in the balance of power within it is a change in the degree, not the nature, of the coalition invented by Silvio Berlusconi more than a quarter of a century ago, uniting the conservative and reactionary right, the “new” far right and neo- or post-fascist organizations. After all, hadn’t Berlusconi himself been “compared” to Benito Mussolini during his various

terms as Italian Prime Minister (1994, 2001, 2008)? The arrival in his first government in 1994 of five ministers from the Italian Social Movement was only one of the steps leading to a broadening of the horizon of political legitimacy of a party that was the direct heir of fascism.

Silvio Berlusconi has been the victorious paladin of a black tide in a country where fascism has never disappeared and because it has been inscribed little by little on the social, political, cultural, mental territory of Italy, so that it has “inserted itself in the brutally selfish entrails” of its society. A miasmatic fascism, in a way, exhaling the stale air (*la mal aria*) of a culture that survived the regime set up by Mussolini.[9] Dr. Frankenstein-Berlusconi succeeded in bringing together in 1994 Gianfranco Fini’s Italian Social Movement (MSI), the oldest neo-fascist organization in Europe, and Umberto Bossi’s Lega Nord, a movement with a heightened identity-based regionalism that has been growing in influence since the early 1980s; in 2000, to unite all the right-wing parties in the Casa delle Libertà (House of Liberties), and then for a time in 2009 to merge the heirs of the MSI and the conservative right in a single Popolo della libertà (People of Liberty).

Berlusconi’s style was a successful form of “hybridization” that combined “old traditions with the new modernizing thrusts of the previous decade.”[10] Based on both the search for “active popular consent” and coercion (the subsequent restriction and repression of collective freedoms), berlusconism mobilized a strong cultural apparatus of ideological legitimization that succeeded in imposing its political hegemony. It relied on a particularly effective network of public (the three RAI channels) and private (the three channels owned by Silvio Berlusconi, Canale 5, Rete 4, Italia Uno) television channels, daily newspapers (such as *Il Giornale*, *Il Foglio*, *Libero*) and magazines. These increasingly important instruments were combined with the crisis of legitimacy of traditional political organizations caught up in the turmoil of Tangentopoli bribery scandals, process that was going to accelerate

the phenomena of distancing from the social and cultural traditions to which the population was attached until then, but also from the social bonds to which it could lean and refer to.

Historical revisionism accompanied the Berlusconi regrouping ever more surely. So much so that in 2003, Fabrizio Cicchitto, a former deputy of the Socialist Party, maintained that La Casa delle libertà was “placed in the current of historical revisionism.” Anti-Communism and with it anti-fascism constituted the ideological cement, but also what Francesco Biscione defined that same year as the “*sommerso della Repubblica*”, that is, the persistence of a reactionary anti-democratic culture, the real breeding ground of the Berlusconi coalition. To this historiographical offensive were added the repertoires of political action mobilized by the right to erase from memory and history “the misdeeds and infamies of fascism.” In Silvio Berlusconi’s country, the public and political use of history has never been so “unscrupulous.” Constantly seeking to oppose anti-fascism and democracy; where democracy becomes synonymous with liberalism and where the boundaries of anti-democracy extend to everything that cannot be associated with the liberal vision of the world. Thus, as the historian Pier Paolo Poggi pointed out, the “point of connection between revisionism and the dominant political cultures [...] is precisely in the judgment on capitalism” and the depoliticization necessary for “the enslavement of billions of human beings.”[11]

The discourse of this right was and remains poor, but effective. It values civil society as a whole, as the only filter for “protecting the national community,” which it places above and beyond class divisions and, above all, the “defects” imputed to representative democracy.[12] This political culture was consistent with its own objectives: to overcome the legacy of the *Welfare State*, to impose anti-social policies, but also to make any prospect of social emancipation infinitely more difficult.[13] The apparent “victory” of this new right cannot be understood without the rift opened by the crisis of the left and the effective support of a part of it to

Berlusconi.[14] The reorganization of the political field on the left began the presentation of a governmental "alternative," at first social-democratic (of the Democratic Party of the Left, from 1991, of the Democrats of the Left, from 1998), and then purely democratic (of the Democratic Party – DP, from 2007, born of the merger of former members of the Democrats of the Left and Romano Prodi's Catholics). After 2014, Matteo Renzi's DP closed the cycle; the demolisher embodied in Italy at that moment the "capitalist realism" of which Mark Fisher spoke, that realism that presented neoliberal capitalism as the only possible option.[15]

Pretending to get rid of the "scoriae," the dross, of the totalitarianisms of the 20th century, the post-communist intellectuals abandoned to the general condemnation what they considered from now on, at best as "the past of an illusion" (François Furet), at worst as a too cumbersome heritage. This process was accompanied by the blacklisting of Marxist historians. The parliamentary left has thus shown itself to be open to a rereading of the past, in particular of the period of resistance and anti-fascism, calling for the creation of a "shared memory," which was the basis of the legitimacy of the alternation of governments of the two political poles that competed for power between 1994 and 2018.

But the so-called radical left too has at least in part, followed these interpretations. Fausto Bertinotti, leader of Rifondazione comunista (Communist Refoundation), the only party of the radical left to have a national audience in the early 2000s, also gave in to this "post-antifascist" ideology in his own way, valuing, in a letter to the editor of *Corriere della Sera*, "non-violence" as "an essential condition for bringing to life to the end all the radicality of this process of social transformation that we call communism."<sup>[16]</sup> The Resistance as well as the revolution were thus returned to a "useful experience in order not to repeat the past mistakes". The great cultural revision of the plural right has been deeply inscribed in the Italian subsoil, all the more surely because it has been at least partly accompanied by the renunciation of the left to its history.

Berlusconism has integrated all spheres of society, even without Berlusconi himself or his party. "I am not afraid of Berlusconi in himself, but of Berlusconi in me," the singer, composer, actor and playwright Giorgio Gaber summed up in his own way shortly before his death.

## The suicide of the Republic, a daily practice?

This sense of the crisis of Italian politics is hardly new. It has been repeated at regular intervals since the early 1990s and the collapse of the Italian political system, caught up in the turmoil of the "clean hands" [*Mani pulite*] judicial machine, against the backdrop of an economic and social crisis. This tsunami gave rise to several new forces, or those presented as such, all of which collaborated, each in their own way, in the deepening of inequalities and the destruction of fundamental social rights. Their legitimacy has been eroded by alternating political administrations, marked by an inability to respond to the most pressing needs and by an almost assumed corruption which, as the Italian Communist Antonio Gramsci wrote, is "characteristic of certain situations in which the exercise of the hegemonic function [the necessary balance to be struck between consent and force] is difficult, the use of force presenting too many dangers;"[17] this is particularly the case for Forza Italia and the PD, the two forces that the ex-communist and former Democratic Council President Massimo D'Alema referred to, on April 10, 2018, as the "pillars of Italian bipolarism" "expression of the two great European political families." [18]

This irresistible erosion of the new deal of the early 1990s, the time of a generation, has been coupled with the more general failure of politics, which in Italy has taken radical forms unknown elsewhere.[19] Consider the fact that since the beginning of the 21st century<sup>o</sup>, the executive branch has been managed five times by highhanded "Princes", as the French say, in this case by the two successive

Presidents of the Republic (Giorgio Napolitano and Sergio Mattarella): Mario Monti's "technical" government in November 2011, replacing a resigned Silvio Berlusconi; Enrico Letta's, in April 2013, after the February elections in which no clear majority had emerged from the polls; Matteo Renzi, in February 2014, after the latter, who had become secretary of the Democratic Party, had pushed out Enrico Letta; Paolo Gentiloni, replacing Matteo Renzi, on the evening of December 4, 2016, after the resounding failure of the referendum for the revision of the Italian Constitution, for which he had worked hard; and finally Mario Draghi in February 2021. In particular, it is the "technical" governments of Mario Monti and Mario Draghi that have substituted the deliberative function of parliament for that of the choices of their executive, presented as "above" the parties. Parliaments in a state of war which, under the guise of a "financial" and/or "health" emergency, have agreed to abandon most of their prerogatives and to impose real structural shocks on the population.

As journalist Carlo Formenti notes, the economic and social crisis that had begun in 2008 was becoming an "instrument of capital aimed at disarticulating the subaltern classes and destroying their capacity for resistance." [20] In 2012, a balanced budget was enshrined in the Italian Constitution (art. 81) with the support of the Democratic Party; Spain had done the same a few months earlier. Stefano Rodotà, professor emeritus of law, ironically stated at the time that this decision sanctioned "Keynes' unconstitutionality." [21] The working classes bore the brunt of the austerity programs, with cuts to pensions, welfare, health, culture, education and so on. Not to mention the quality of life related to climate change and the demonstrated inability to deal with it with real public catastrophes (fires, floods, earthquakes) as more than 40 million people, two thirds of the total population, now live in dangerous areas.

The "withdrawal of the working classes from the political exchange" has become an objective in order to impose a "reaggregated bourgeois bloc." [22] And the increasing



abstention is the most convincing indication of this. The number of voters has fallen by 3.7 million in ten years. Abstention rose from 19.5% in 2008, to 24.8% in 2013 and 27.1% in 2018, higher in the South than in the North (in Naples, 60.51% don't vote).[23] It is estimated that in the next elections only about two of eligible voters will cast a ballot.[24]

The chain of economic crises has relentlessly worsened the living and working conditions of wage earners, transforming little by little, but no less surely, the political horizon and the social legitimacy of the struggle. The *backlash* against the simple idea that one can organize to fight injustice, seems all the more essential because it has been accompanied by "a dynamic of constant adaptation to the worst," linked as much to a kind of "trivialization of injustice" as to a form of deterioration of the relationship of Italians to the state. At the mercy of alienation and exploitation, workers have gone from being a class capable of thinking of themselves as the engine of social change to a "phantom class," singled out by the Italian political sphere.[25] To paraphrase Princeton political scientist Wendy Brown, neoliberalism has masked and depoliticized the reproduction of inequality, the "deproletarianization" of wage earners to "get them to embrace the ways of thinking and behaving of entrepreneurs;" the concomitant stigmatization of "foreigners" and the unemployed serving as a diversion from the rising anger. [26]

This dark framework has produced resentment and anger. The Italian population's relationship of trust with its own political institutions (state, parliament, parties) has been severely shaken. Distrust of politics has been coupled with a crisis of confidence in the state and in the instruments of mediation. Consider the fact that, according to a survey published in *La Repubblica* in December 2011, trust in the state stood at 29.6%, in the parties at about 3.9% and in parliament at 8.5%.[27] Today, after two years of the pandemic these figures have increased significantly but remain relatively low (State, + 7%; parties + 9%; parliament + 14%).[28] Popular contempt for the "political class" is

certainly linked to the latter's powerlessness to confront the crisis. But it must also, and perhaps above all, be linked to the growing feeling of "disempowerment" and a loss of control by the population over decisions on which it no longer seems able to act, while the parties represented in parliament seem to have been content to raise the white flag by admitting their total incompetence. A clown provided the alternative.

## ***Que se vayan todos! Away with all of them!***

Beppe Grillo and his 5-Star Movement (M5) will for a time ride this Trojan horse and fill the void of representation in Italy by permanently drying up the potentialities of a left to be rebuilt. The movement that took shape in 2009 under the name of the 5-Star Movement (M5S) was initially built on the extraordinary popularity of the Genoa-based comedian. The son of a small businessman from Genoa was discovered by the star presenter, Pippo Baudo, at the end of the 1970s, who opened the doors of the flagship RAI program, *Fantastico*. But it was the collaboration with Antonio Ricci that made Grillo popular with the show *Te la do io l'America* [I'll give you some of America], broadcast on RAI in 1983. The same Ricci would soon frequent the court of Silvio Berlusconi and create, in 1988, the Berlusconi show *par excellence*, *Striscia la notizia* (still on the air), a comedy news show with naked women and a *deus ex machina* embodied by a large red stuffed animal named Gabibbo, the standard-bearer of what he called "popular feelings" and whom he compared in December 2018 to Matteo Salvini.[29] Antonio Ricci invented the television language of Berlusconiism. His objective: to conquer the audience, which he did for more than thirty years with empty phrases: "I don't give a damn," he said, "about satire, whether or not it pleases people like me, the intelligent and the cultured. What interests me is to capture the attention of Mrs. Pina at 08:30 PM." [30]

Beppe Grillo knew how to surround himself with personalities with a strong cultural capital of sympathy from Michele Serra (journalist and columnist of *the Repubblica*) to Giorgio Gaber, through Antonio Ricci and Dario Fo; he recovered fragments of collective identity that he rearranged as needed.

The Genovese comedian turned his satire into a major political lever. In 2005, *Time* defined him as "seriously funny" and listed him among the 37 "European Heroes" who are "changing the world for the better." *Time* noted in particular his role in exposing the Italian food giant Parmalat, the largest bankruptcy in Europe before the 2008 earthquake. Grillo entered hundreds of thousands of Italian homes through *Striscia la notizia*. The role of "comic vigilante" was made all the easier by the fact that he had constructed and disseminated a deceptive narrative of his own life, evoking a supposed banishment by the media after denouncing, in November 1986, on *Fantastico*, the corruption of the Socialist Party and of Bettino Craxi as head of the government. In 1988 he was back on RAI and in 1993 he had his own show in two parts, the *Beppe Grillo show*. In front of an audience disoriented by the Tangentopoli corruption scandals, he would pronounce his *catchphrase*: "I don't know what's happening, reality exceeds fiction": his audience was the same one that, a few months later, would vote for Silvio Berlusconi for the first time.

Beppe Grillo can be considered a perfect product of Berlusconiism. In the early 2000s, he became the spokesman for the anti-political protest that Silvio Berlusconi had embodied a decade earlier. What changed was his embodiment of the rupture, of a newness that was thought of here and now, without any future or distant horizon of reference. And just like his best enemy, the discourse he carried associated the disarticulation of the social link and expressed the absolute novelty in the Italian political field. He called for an end to professional politicians and all forms of social mediation (as unions), at a time when Sergio Rizzo and Gian Antonio Stella, two journalists from

the *Corriere della sera*, that is, the daily newspaper par excellence of Italian entrepreneurship, were sending back to the whole of Italy the image of a political class that was no longer at the service of the national community and the common good, but of its own interests. Their book, entitled *La Casta*, would be a landmark; the subtitle is quite telling: "This is how the political class became untouchable"[31]

The book was published on May 2, 2007; four months later, on September 8, Beppe Grillo launched the first *V[affanculo] Day* [Fuck off-Day], where he announced the death of political parties. Exacerbating the image of the sublimated relationship of the leader with his people, he proposed himself as the "only possibility of reality," in a period in which the DP was completing its transformation, at the service of "virtuous" economic policies of public debt reduction, becoming the party of the "right-wing," the other right-wing, the party of the modernist bourgeoisie. The abandonment of its electoral base, especially public sector employees and students, was coupled with a deeper renunciation of the very ideas of justice and equality. This adaptation to the existing order ended up permanently blurring the classic political categorizations in which the new generations no longer recognized themselves. The left has been reduced more and more to the group of those who thought they belonged to it, but without necessarily sharing its fundamental values. Certainly, at about the same time, the metamorphosis affecting the DP was taking place among other parties throughout Europe. However, its precursory status was accompanied here by an unparalleled extremism, the impact of which was particularly devastating, including for the radical left, which has also become disjointed, frayed, decomposed, "evaporated," swept away by the ebb tide.

Faced with the disaster of a left that was incapable of shaping a horizon for the anger that was rising, Beppe Grillo and his movement were to impose themselves as the only "alternative subject." In fact, the appearance on the Italian political scene of the Genoese comedian has, at the same

time, captured to his advantage the social sphere of indignation in the immense void left by the left and blocked the experiences of the type that were to spread all over the world (Indignados, Occupy, Fearless Cities, etc.) and their political incarnations (Podemos, Syriza, etc.).[32] The political, social, economic and moral crises that the Peninsula went through in the 2000s gave the movement the oxygen it needed. In Italy, the formula of the Argentinean demonstrators "*que se vayan todos*" was stripped of its insurrectionary force.

## The chalice of death

Umberto Bossi's Lega had succeeded in disarticulating Christian Democracy, in difficulty in its main strongholds, gaining a lasting foothold in the so-called "white zone" or Catholic and conservative areas of the peninsula, where the Christian Democracy vote was, until the 1980s, a vote "for the Church and against Communism." [33] In this sense, it played a key role in consolidating the right-wing constellation that emerged in the early 1990s. This is the same path that Beppe Grillo and his movement took. After all, wasn't it precisely Umberto Bossi's party that Gianroberto Casaleggio, Grillo's mentor and creator of the BeppeGrillo.it blog in 2005, had decided to emulate? This time, however, it was the so-called red zones, the former bastions of the Communist Party, that were their favorite terrain, dislocating, dispossessing and finally dismissing what was left of the values, history and memory of the left, in particular that of anti-fascism.

Thus Beppe Grillo chose September 8, 2007 to launch his first "Vaffanculo Day," a date with a high symbolic value in the Italian history of the 20th century and in particular in the history of fascism. Indeed, on September 8, 1943, Marshal Pietro Badoglio announced the signing of the armistice with the Allies. On that date, the king and the government fled the capital, leaving behind a disoriented population at the mercy of the German troops that had poured into the

country since the dismissal of Benito Mussolini 45 days earlier. "Tutti a casa" [everyone home] seemed to be the confused motto of that day, well rendered by Luigi Comencini's eponymous film. This Vaffanculo Day (V-Day) is the culmination of the thousands of "Vaffanculo" (Fuck you!) that Grillo had shouted on all the stages, big and small, of Italy. Like the one at the Smeraldo theater in Milan, where in 1992 he announced the birth of "gentocracy", invoking the seizure of power by the mood of the people and their anger; people who "are no longer afraid to say what they think [...]".[34] "*La gente*", a singular subject in Italian, whose plural declension in English (the people) renders well the idea of an entity that disintegrates into an "ego-governing" multitude of individuals.[35] "Gentism", thought of as the "ultimate evolution of the old notion of people" referred to the indistinct and interchangeable public, which in the language of the future M5S will become "one is one," a horizontality that leads precisely to the opposite of the declared objectives of direct democracy, that is to say, to the denial of the collective through the fragmentation of opinions and to the place ultimately left to the broad prerogatives of the "leader."

While the V-Day mobilizations took place in more than 180 Italian cities, including outside the country, it was in Bologna, in the heart of the so-called red zone, that Beppe Grillo chose to take the floor, challenging the left, or better, seeking to erase its memory. In front of tens of thousands of people, Beppe Grillo was going to tell the politicians to go home with a unique cry: "Vaffa..." [Screw you...] to "the caste": "Italians, September 8 has arrived, the day of *our* defeat; this September 8 will be the day of their defeat. V-Day, as in Vaffanculo Day." By making September 8, the day of the defeat of Mussolini's war, the day of the defeat of the public he was addressing, Beppe Grillo reappropriated the revisionist readings of Italian fascism of the 1990s, including the concept of "death of the nation," applied by revisionism precisely to September 8, 1943, that rendered illegitimate the parties that had emerged from the War of Resistance.

On that occasion, the comedian announced that he wanted to “take back the country” by organizing a movement of the “bourgeois” and the “conservatives.”[36] A year later, Beppe Grillo was to take over the 25th of April, the high place of memory of the Italian Resistance, organizing new rallies in more than 400 cities, shouting “we are the real partisans.” And it was in Turin, the flagship city of the workers’ movement, the “Italian Petrograd,” the city of Antonio Gramsci and the Factory Councils, the epicenter of the 1917 and 1945 insurrection, that he decided to speak. This time, it was to promote a referendum on the abolition of public funding for the press; a hard blow in particular for the non-aligned media, those of the radical left, and a welcome boost to those who, like Gianroberto Casaleggio, were making their money on the Web.

Beppe Grillo has actively sought to erase the memory of the struggles of the oppressed by confiscating space on the left, a left that he defines as “much worse” than the right, while claiming to be “neither left nor right, but on the side of the citizens.”[37] The movement set in motion at the time, which two years later was to become the 5-Star Movement (M5S), was not configured as a movement that promoted awareness of oneself, of others and of the group formed with others through battles fought collectively. For during the V-Days, it was not the square “place of protest and conflict” that was at the center, but Beppe Grillo, and in Bologna as in Turin and other Italian cities, it was not demonstrators who gathered, but spectators. The participation was limited to the “Vaffa...” repeated in chorus accompanied by the gestures of a “multitude” that, instead of the raised fist, symbolizing the collective struggles for human emancipation, raised the middle finger. An unbearable nose-thumbing to this idea, in the heart of the mobilizations of the years 1968, sung in 1972 by Giorgio Gaber: “The freedom, it is not to remain on a tree, it is not either the flight of a fly, the freedom it is not an empty space, the freedom it is the participation.”[38]

The “Vaffa” will function as a connector that seeks both to arouse

emotion and to play on a set of confused feelings, a tangible link between these “diverse elements” in the same way as the graphic of the V of MoVimento, borrowed from the film by James McTeigue, *V for Vendetta*, with its composite cultural character, or the “courage” of M5S in choosing the color yellow, a color “carefully avoided in the political world” because it is that of “lies, hypocrisy, betrayal.”[39] With the crisis of 2008, Grillo became the spokesperson for a new form of political organization, “light and powerful.”[40] A movement that combined the energy of the Web to mobilize, which could compare with the political parties of the Golden Years of Capitalism, and the channel of dissemination of the small screen, an instrument favored by Silvio Berlusconi and on which Grillo made his debut. The Web was the major card of this device.[41] In 2009, the blog BeppeGrillo.it was ranked seventh among the twenty-five most popular in the world by *Forbes* and, in the same period, it was among the ten most influential on the planet according to *The Guardian*. At that time, 53% of households in Italy had access to the Internet (compared to 66% at the European level), a rate that would only increase over time to reach 84% ten years later. The success of the blog and the following of it were linked to the almost total monopolization of the television channels by Silvio Berlusconi, who was in government at the time. The blog was meant to be “an alternative to the ‘classic’ information.”[42] “Beppe does a real journalistic job of synthesis,” said one of his *followers*, “it would be so tiring to go and look for all the information he gives us”[43].

The blog became the vector of what Robert Proctor called a “culturally produced ignorance,” using doubt as the privileged weapon of his “agnotology,” that is, his agnosticism, and the construction of parallel realities.[44] Grillo claimed, for example, that AIDS was the “greatest intoxicant of the century” or that cancer prevention campaigns were dangerous. In 2019, he even announced his participation in the congress of those who believe that the earth is flat.[45] The blog made use of *fakes* (users with false identities who

directed the discussion), *trolls* (users who intervened to provoke the interlocutors) and *influencers* (users who influenced others). “[46] A practice adopted by groups of the M5S or close to the M5S, some of which promoted campaigns of “media lynching” and threats. Grillo’s blog also spread the themes dear to the Greens, in the wave of the huge mobilization against the privatization of water, by “putting environmental issues at the heart of the indictment against capitalist companies,” while publicizing, for example, the use of Biowashball, a ball produced in Switzerland that would supposedly make detergents superfluous.[47]

Very quickly, journalists, all journalists, became the object of invective, going so far as to ban them from the meetings of the movement, including that of Piazza San Giovanni in Rome, at the end of the “Tsunami tour” for the national elections of February 2013. In 2017, Beppe Grillo even went so far as to call for the establishment of a “people’s jury” against newspapers and TV newscasts that publish *fakenews*, in a country that at that time was in 77th place in terms of press freedom.[48]

Refusing the left-right divide, in the same way as Umberto Bossi before him, Beppe Grillo has been able to constitute a sort of *appeal* for a growing fringe of the population. He initially drew on the broad opposition to Berlusconi, capturing, rearranging, disarticulating, and emptying a vocabulary proper to the left, attracting to him some of the leading figures of its intellectuals (Erri de Luca, Dario Fo...), and then enlarging his mass base, taking advantage of the decomposition of the Italian political field and blood-sucking of Berlusconi, “an unprecedented form of destruction of democracy.”[49] “We have managed,” Beppe Grillo said during the closing meeting of the national elections of March 2018, “to accelerate and annihilate all the parties, which have dissolved into a kind of nauseating surface [...] the only real party that exists today in Italy is ours.” Parties that he described as “zombies,” “the living dead,” and “walking coffins,” to which the M5S was to become, according to Gianroberto Casaleggio, “the amanita

phalloides" poison mushroom.

## Winter is coming

The M5S has long simmered in the bowels of the country, as demonstrated by its rapid electoral victories, inserting itself into the territories and organizing itself at the local level. It has its roots in the depths of the Italian subsoil, in the "*sovversivismo*" that Antonio Gramsci wrote about, "the 'subversive' character [*sovversivismo*] of these layers has two faces: one turned to the left, the other to the right, but the left figure is just a feint; they always go to the right in decisive moments and their desperate 'courage' always prefers to have the carabinieri as allies." And it is indeed the right and the extreme right (the Lega, Casapound, the southern extreme right) that appeared as the shore to which this ideology of non-ideology had attached itself durably, while actively feeding the lure of an alternative "left" formation. Thus the M5S has on occasion presented itself as a bulwark against the far right. On July 10, 2013, after being received by the President of the Republic Giorgio Napolitano, Beppe Grillo also let it be known in his own way: "[...] I went to the territories, and I'm angry because I've gathered the anger of those I met. [...] I always try to moderate the spirits, I said it to the President of the Republic, what I say is something I experienced [...]; we must moderate the spirits, the spirits of the people who want to arm themselves with guns, with sticks and who say that the revolution is done only like that and I say to them, calm down, let's try again with the democratic methods [...]." [50] But behind the invoked revolution, the suggested eversion and the distant echo of the "Bergamo guns" that the Lega Nord waved in the 1990s with the same rhetoric of an Umberto Bossi who then also claimed to have mastered the ardors of the base. [51] The M5S took also part in the common culture of the right based on the "cult of the leader, the disarticulation of intermediate organizations and an ideological eclecticism" what the historian Paul Ginsborg once called a mixture of charismatic, plebiscitary and traditionalist elements.

The M5S proved itself adept at "intercepting and interpreting every type of protest and uneasiness" and keeping them together. It has presented itself as a megaphone that gave strength and voice to the "feeling" (or resentment), to the "anger" of a population that, for more than thirty years, has suffered both the consequences of the economic, social and political crises experienced by the whole of Europe and the *inversism* (radical inversion of values) to which the great cultural revision of Berlusconi and the plural right has led. An *inversism* that can be seen, for example, in the positioning of the M5S spokespersons on fascism: "an ideology of the past" according to Beppe Grillo, who limited himself to saying that he is not a fascist; Luigi di Maio affirmed that, within the M5S, "there are those who refer to [Enrico] Berlinguer [an Italian communist leader in the 1980s], the Christian Democratic Party or Almirante". He defended the idea that "the categories of fascism and anti-fascism were only used to 'instrumentalize' [the debates], because no one deserves to be demonized, and it is possible that mistakes were made on both sides, but also that choices were made in good faith". Another young leader at the time of the M5S, Alessandro di Battista, sententiously announced that "it is more important to be honest than anti-fascist." A position that resonates with that of a growing part of the population. Beppe Grillo opened a dialogue with the neo-fascist movement CasaPound, or at least with its activists, and attracted to him men socialized in the Italian Social Movement, such as Luigi di Maio and Alessandro Di Battista, both sons of MSI militants. The father of the current Minister of Foreign Affairs, now outside the M5S, proudly admitted to having worked with Giorgio Almirante and Gianfranco Fini and said he found in the M5S the "values of the old right." [52]

The rhetoric used by Beppe Grillo, under cover of humor, is that of the extreme right. The shift of the electoral base of the movement towards the positions of the Lega, in dialogue with the general orientations of the M5S embodied by Beppe Grillo, seems to confirm this. In 2008, didn't he declare, "I'm not a politician...I

could do it only in a small dictatorship where I would have the possibility of using a stadium to put the 80,000-100,000 people who are hurting *Italy*." And in 2013, after the February elections, did he not say, "Let those who do not want to adhere to our rules say so immediately. Then we can stone them." [53] In January 2017, when the European far right, on the rebound of the arrival of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States, met in Koblenz, announced "the dawn of a New World" (Marine Le Pen) and the dream of a "new Europe" (Geert Wilders) hegemonized by their parties, Beppe Grillo announced in the French *Journal du Dimanche*: "International politics needs strong statesmen like them [Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump]. I see them as a benefit to humanity." [54] Steve Bannon's Alt-right site, Breitbart, was sure to welcome these words. Between 2012 and 2016, the propensity of M5S voters to vote for the right gradually increased. Thus, according to Delia Baldassari and Paolo Segatti, at the exit polls in March 2018, the preferred party of M5S voters after their own was Matteo Salvini's. [55]

Beppe Grillo's repeated attacks on the "self-righteous and angelic left" (*buonista*) concerning immigration policy or anti-racism was only one of the declensions of a new syncretism mixing indifferently the fight against migrants and the fight against corruption and mafias ("the illegal immigrant is useful," he wrote, "to criminality"). [56] Grillo and his M5S became the standard-bearers of the battle against a non-existent foreign invasion, supposedly endangering the security and wages of Italians, riding the racist Trojan horse without hesitation. The "gentism" that Grillo has championed since the distant 1990s referred to an "ethnic" people, as one of the leaders of Podemos, Íñigo Errejón, very ably pointed out, [57] and the M5S voters were not mistaken. Consider the fact that among those who voted for the M5S, the majority believed that "immigration is a threat to Italian cultural identity." [58] Didn't Grillo say that the Roma were a "time bomb" adding "before the borders of the Fatherland were sacred, the politicians desecrated them"? The

Nation, Italy, the defense of the Homeland and Italians against migrants, occult powers or Europe, have been on the agenda since the structuring of the movement and this rhetoric has not changed since then, at most it has undergone tactical adaptations.

The M5S-Lega government from June 2018 to August 2019 attests to this. A government that sociologist Domenico Masi defined as the most right-wing in the history of republican Italy, that analyst Ezio Mauro called the “realized right,” and that journalist Claudio Tito described as a “practical laboratory of a new right” based on a “new social block.”[59] This executive passed a number of measures, including the citizenship income, today the “social” flagship of the M5S, which is attacked from all sides, but which is in fact a *workfare*, putting the most precarious people to work with the prohibition of refusing more than three jobs offered in two years; jobs that could be found within a 100 km radius for the first, 250 for the second and in the whole country for the third. The citizenship income was further restricted to Italians and immigrants with a long-term residence permit who have lived in Italy for more than ten years, leaving at the side of the road all those who arrived in Italy after 2012, at a time when the number of immigrants in Italy has increased by more than 43% compared to 2008, and who constitute the most vulnerable, precarious and poor segment of the population.[60]

The same government passed the “Decree on Security and Immigration,” defined today as a mistake by Giuseppe Conte, the new leader of the M5S and at the time nevertheless President of the Council, one of the most authoritarian and reactionary provisions in the entire history of republican Italy, amended in 2020. It provided for the abolition of the residence permit for humanitarian reasons, the doubling of the number of days of detention in the administrative centers set up for this purpose (Permanent Return Center (Cpr), the impossibility for asylum seekers to be registered in the civil registry and therefore to have access to the right of residence. In terms of “security”, the decree authorized the use of tasers in

municipalities with more than 100,000 inhabitants and heavier penalties, up to two years in prison, for those who promote the occupation of land or buildings. The government led by Matteo Salvini and Luigi di Maio has made the fight against the poor and migrants its political priority. While racially motivated violence has continued to increase throughout the peninsula (an increase that Luigi di Maio loudly denied), the Lega-5-Star government has chosen to criminalize solidarity and facilitate the legal possession of firearms, including Kalashnikovs.

This governmental experiment lasted 14 months. In August 2019, Matteo Salvini opened a crisis within the government calling for immediate elections; frightened by this prospect after the Lega’s victory in the European elections in May, the 5-Star Movement and the Democratic Party established a new alliance, headed by... the same Giuseppe Conte. Moreover, there was no difference in nature with the neo-liberal policies pursued until then by the DP and the right wing allied with the extreme right, only the degree of difference in terms of job insecurity and restrictions on migration. The establishment of the M5S-PD government in September 2019 and the support of the M5S to the government headed by Mario Draghi in February 2021, in the midst of a health crisis, is the masterful confirmation of this.

The French sociologist Éric Fassin proposed to interpret what he called the “populist moment” not as a reaction to neoliberalism, but as a way of guaranteeing its popular success.[61] The M5S was a product of neoliberalism, but also of the internalized neoliberal subjectivity that its practice implies. “Users” who asserted their individual “human capital” through a digitized “mass self-communication” that seems to be able to dispense with traditional mediations, while blurring the asymmetry of actors[62]. Where the Web and its tools were not considered as means to reach a digital direct democracy to be built and thought according to the potentialities that Internet effectively opened up, but as a political form already completed. This techno-utopia was based on the

economic and cultural determinants of a neo-liberalism integrated by the subjectivity of the subjects, where horizontality and claimed participation are in contradiction with the necessary extreme centralization of a composite movement, on pain of implosion, as the last departures of the movement and the vertiginous losses in the voting intentions for the M5S seem to show.[63]

The neither “right or left” slogan about the M5S has functioned as a *mantra* that has prevented serious reflection on this unprecedented political phenomenon that has served as a conveyor belt for the political lexicon of the ultra-right. Grillo and his M5S have played on what Wendy Brown calls “class resentment without class consciousness.”[64] This resentment feeds back into the modalities of action and discourse of the M5S, which has blurred the mechanisms that reproduce, intensify and depoliticize inequalities, and thus has removed the capacity to react. Grillo and his M5S have advocated the disappearance of the instances that existed before to combat the forms of hatred, humiliation and subordination that the oppressed face, without proposing others. Using a *novlanguage* modelled on the Wikipedian *npov* (*neutral point of view*), emptying words of their content, inventing others, inverting or “obliterating their meaning [...] preventing us from thinking in different terms” and minimizing the attacks on the subalterns (the austerity cuts being restricted in Grillo’s language to *frattaglie*, slaughter/waste), reducing to nothing all possibilities of raising the level of class consciousness, which is the only way to counter them.[65] The M5S would be, in this perspective, a (post)modern right that comes from the war against the elites, from the permanent polemic against the State, from the refusal of political correctness.[66]

Not only did the M5S and its leaders agitate signifiers that are now hollow (direct democracy, freedom...), but also what the historian Furio Jesi, inspired by Oswald Spengler, called “ideas without words” characteristic of the culture of the right, or to be more precise, “spiritualized words”



“that pretend to be able to really say and therefore to say and at the same time to hide in the secret sphere of the symbol”; terms that are supposed to conceal a shared “secret”, but that do not need to be explained and that, through their use, become a vector of ideas without words and thus found the present and future solidity of the community to which they intend to address.[67] The vote for the M5S had no “social roots”; it was carried by “ideas without words.” It was a base that comes close to what Luigi Salvatorelli, a liberal antifascist, called in 1922, the fifth state, indicating a new category that “does not coincide with the socially and politically defined proletariat”, the fodder of a new form of revolt that seeks ways out.[68]

The M5S could be identified with a chemical catalyst. Beppe Grillo vouched for the biodegradable nature of his movement, indicating that it could be converted into a simple molecule that could be used by the new politics that it would have helped to create by producing the decomposition of the old[69].

## The eternal “return” of fascism

It is not uncommon in recent weeks to see references to a speech given by Umberto Eco at Columbia University on 25 April 1995. Entitled “Eternal Fascism,” it was given in the aftermath of the right-wing bombing that struck Oklahoma City, leaving several hundred people injured and dozens dead. Reflecting afresh on the persistence of fascism, its forms and its evolution over time, it seemed beyond the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Italian liberation, to be an urgent necessity. The text emphasized the still very real risks that the (re)birth of fascism posed to the world: “It would be so much easier, for us,” wrote Umberto Eco, “if there appeared on the world scene somebody saying: ‘I want to reopen Auschwitz, I want the Black Shirts to parade again in the Italian squares’. Life is not that simple. Ur fascism [eternal fascism] can come back under the most innocent of disguise. Our duty is to uncover it and to point our

finger at any of its new instances – every day, in every part of the world.”[70] This same lecture was republished just a few months before the March 2018 elections when the threatening presence of Matteo Salvini in the ranks of the right-wing coalition reactivated fears of a return of fascism. Giorgia Meloni and her party now seem to be closing the cycle of this creeping counter-revolution started some 30 years ago and in the political and cultural acceleration of which the M5S played a crucial role. In the meantime, Italy has been at the forefront of a global health crisis, counting its tens of thousands of deaths; an exsanguinated, politically unstable, socially torn Italy. One of the most fragile economies of the Eurozone, hit in the heart, where the containment measures have generated a global recession, unprecedented in historical magnitude and spread.

Fascist? Many terms are used to describe the right wing facing the doors of power today, hypnotizing the public debate, looking for words “to designate the family of dangerous demagogues.”[71] Their very overabundance refers to the difficulty of determining its new contours: fascist or post-fascist, to point out the continuity in its transformation; populist, to mark the novelty of a phenomenon born in the second part of the 20th century, designating (or not) a link of continuity with the fascism of the interwar period.[72] There is no doubt that FdI is the real thing, whatever the international press may have thought after the release of a video in three languages where Giorgia Meloni would have “abjured” fascism, but where however she addressed the problem of the legacy of fascism in one sentence and targeted mainly antifascism, communism and the left. And yet, those who wave the danger of fascism today fail to be heard by the majority of Italians, because it has too often been used to push the population to vote for the “lesser evil”, even while holding their noses, according to the formula used by Matteo Renzi during the 2018 election campaign. Serious mistakes have been made by anti-fascists, who thinking that calling anyone a fascist (Bossi, Salvini, Berlusconi, Grillo himself, etc.) was enough to disqualify them in front of

the electorate. While they failed to grasp the new dimensions of fascism and the need to fight them as such. But also because the destruction of the past, that is to say, of the ties that bind contemporaries to previous generations has been here, more than elsewhere, brought forward with special diligence in the last thirty years.

It is a country that recently saw a journalist from the daily newspaper *La Stampa* threatened because of a report dedicated to the nostalgia for fascism. A country where on October 9, 2021, the national headquarters of the largest Italian trade union was attacked and devastated by so-called No Vax groups. A country where a daily newspaper like *Il Giornale* was able to distribute *Mein Kampf* in the 1938 Italian translation as a gift to its readers.[73] A country that for decades has criminalized anti-fascism, that eternal “troublemaker” of a repressive political and social order, singled out as the only “real danger to Italian democracy.” Ernesto Galli della Loggia, an editorial writer for the daily *Corriere della Sera*, who often begins his editorials with “those who have read a few books”, which is supposed to give him unquestionable legitimacy, sums up this political position in one sentence: “If fascism is violence, illegality and the suppression of liberty, its antithesis is not anti-fascism, but democracy.”[74] And yet “where the dikes of anti-fascism have broken, racial hatred spreads.”[75] As on February 3, 2018 in Macerata (Marche), Luca Traini, former unsuccessful candidate of the Lega and former member of the order service of its leader, shot six people from sub-Saharan Africa; when, two hours later, the police arrested him, Luca Traini, wrapped in the Italian flag, shouted, “Long live Italy!” while making the fascist salute. After this attack everyone, from the FDI to the DP, accused the migrants of being responsible for this violence.

“Italy is a circular country,” wrote Pier Paolo Pasolini in his private writings, “like the *Leopard* of Lampedusa, in which everything changes in order to remain as it was before,” because, he continued, “it is a country without memory which, if it had any care for its history, would

know that 'regimes carry ancient poisons, invincible metastases.' [76] This country mired in a complex of economic, political, social, ecological and moral crises, which add up and combine, seems to be living at the time of the return of one of those interregnum in which "arise the most varied morbid phenomena" (Gramsci). All the more so because it has forgotten the meaning of history, of the oppressed and their struggles, because it sinks into a culturally produced ignorance for decades and because it seems to have exhausted all forms of discernment. The irrationality of capitalism has ended up undermining its traditional formations; the elementary democratic principles are eroded and *the escape from freedom* (Erich Fromm) seems to impose itself. The splintering of the social being is then masked by the appeal to the "people" against the "powerful", tending to neutralize the capacity to become conscious of oneself, of the others and of the multiple collective dimensions of our humanity, and to reject the phenomena of contestation in a pre-political universe in the manner of what Gramsci defined as apolitism, which is expressed in "phrases of rebellion [ribellismo], of subversivism [sovversivismo], of primitive and elementary anti-statism"[77] Something like the "*late fascism*" pointed out by the philosopher Alberto Toscano.[78] Whatever the outcome of the next elections, a change of era is underway. Italy year zero...

12 September 2022

Source **New Politics**.

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Source [New Politics](#). September 12, 2022.

# Defensive struggles against authoritarian restoration and social crisis in Tunisia

17 September 2022, by **Abir Mestiri and Khalil Amor**

The referendum on the new Constitution, held on 25 July 2022 despite calls for a boycott and an abstention of 72.6%, legitimizes ultra-presidential power and the submission of the judiciary to the president. The new Constitution legally ratifies the end of liberal democracy and calls into question the rights and freedoms contained in the 2014 Constitution. By defining the country as an "Islamic *umma*" (a community of Muslims), it justifies the most oppressive, sexist, LGBTphobic and other policies. It is a reactionary constitution with the aim of putting an end to the emancipatory struggles that accompanied the revolution.

## Personalization of power and increased police repression

The referendum on the Constitution was preceded by increased repression against feminist and LGBT activists and organizations. More broadly, all protest activists, as well as critical

journalists and political opponents, are targeted by the repression, which particularly targets those who define themselves as revolutionary.

In addition to the journalist and feminist Arroï Baraket, whose trial has been rescheduled for October, several feminist, LGBT and far-left activists have been charged by the police. Among them are Myriam Bribri, Wael Naouar, Jawaher Channa, Saïf Ayadi, Samar Tlili, Anis Harrathi, Hamza Nasri, Ayoub Amara, Mariem Mnaouar, Wajdi Mahouachi, Asrar Ben Jouira, Souhaïel Idoudi, Rania Amdouni, etc.

The police also lash out at football fans in the stadiums and on the fringes of the stadiums. Police repression is a structural phenomenon, but with the coup d'état, the police felt they had to grow wings.

## A wider but scattered protest

The repression and the personalization of power have dissipated illusions about Kaïs Saïed.

In July 2021, he succeeded in capturing for himself the mobilization against the Ennahda party. He presented himself as the "saviour of the revolution" by promising to put corrupt political elites on trial. In doing so, he put an end to the protest movement and to the liberal democracy established since the revolution. However, only a minority of left and far-left activists interpreted the event as a counter-revolutionary coup d'état marking an authoritarian restoration. Since then, the abolition of the Judicial Council and the dismissal of nearly sixty judges in February 2022, the hardening of police repression and the revelation of the draft constitution in June have shifted the lines. The denunciation of the "authoritarian drift" brings people together more widely and many defensive struggles take place, but collective actions remain rather scattered and scattered.

## An explosive social situation

The authoritarian restoration aims at



imposing on the working and middle classes very downgraded material conditions with the austerity imposed by the IMF for a new loan. The social situation is explosive, with galloping inflation, a shortage of basic foodstuffs (coffee, sugar, etc.), an accelerated disintegration of public services (water and electricity cuts are frequent and increasingly long), etc. Against the social crisis and the

employer's arbitrariness, localized strikes are being organized: that of employees of the French fast-food chain Pomme de pain in Tunis, protesting against the non-payment of their salaries for several months; that of air navigation technicians, etc.

At the moment, resistance is continuing, whether to safeguard the

spaces of freedom left over from the revolution and/or to protest against the deterioration of material conditions. They would benefit from being better coordinated and relayed internationally.

15 September 2022

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

## Unions Strive to Keep Ukraine's Mines Running, Protect Civilians and Appeal for Solidarity

16 September 2022, by **Christopher Ford, Nataliya Levytska**

**Christopher Ford - Please explain your own position in the NGPU. How many workers do you represent; where do they work; and in which areas of Ukraine?**

Nataliya Levytska - The independent trade union of miners of Ukraine (NGPU) represents mine workers in coal, iron and uranium ore, non-ferrous metals, peat and energy. It has representation in the regions of Donetsk, Luhansk, Dnipropetrovsk, Kirovohrad, Chernihiv, Zhytomyr, Rivne, Volyn, Ivano-Frankivsk and Lviv - a total membership, as of January 1, 2022, of 43,500 people. At the 9th NGPU Congress of May 27, 2021 I was elected to the post of first deputy chairperson. I have been working in independent trade unions for more than 20 years. The NGPU, together with members of trade union organizations, fights for the rights of miners, preservation of jobs, prevention of deterioration of labour legislation and social protection of miners and their families.

**CF - What is the NGPU trade unions' view of Russia's war on Ukraine?**

NL - The NGPU and our leading

organizations consider Russia's attack to be a cynical attempt by the Russian regime to destroy Ukraine and its people. From the first days of the full-scale invasion, many miners voluntarily went to defend the Ukrainian land in the territorial defenses and the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Most of our members volunteer and help civilians, the military and medics. We consider the Russian-Ukrainian conflict a war against democracy not only in Ukraine, but also in Europe and the world, as well as a genocide of the Ukrainian people.

**CF - There was already war in Donbas since 2014, how has the situation changed there with the full-scale Russian invasion in February?**

NL - In 2014 Russia attacked Ukraine and occupied part of the territories of Donbas. Some of the mines ended up in the occupied territory and actually stopped work. Miners and their families were forced to leave their homes and flee because they were in danger. The activities of the NGPU were banned by the occupation authorities of the so-called 'DNR' and

'LNR' and In May 2014 our leaders in Novogrodivka were kidnapped and tortured.

At the same time, mines on Ukrainian-held territory were still working so miners there had jobs and provided for their families. In the territory of Donbas, controlled by the Ukrainian government, local and central authorities invested in the development of local communities, with reconstruction of schools and hospitals. New jobs were created, children's and sports grounds were built, together with new parks and squares while hospitals and schools received modern equipment. But on February 24 changed everything.

Lysychansk, Severodonetsk, Popasna, Rubizhne and other cities of Luhansk region were actually destroyed by Russian troops. Almost the entire territory of Luhansk region is occupied. Most of the residents of the region became refugees, while others ended up in Russian filtration camps. All industrial enterprises were destroyed. There is no electricity, gas, or water supply in the cities. Most of the buildings have been destroyed and the housing stock is unusable.



Fighting continues in the Luhansk region and the enemy uses air bombs, rockets and prohibited types of weapons.

Fierce battles continue in the Donetsk region, and our members are heroically defending it as well. Most of the cities of Donetsk region are subjected to bombings and rocket attacks every day in which civilians die. Cities turn into ruins. Mines are subjected to shelling and forced to stop work. The infrastructure of the region is being destroyed by the Russian invaders – schools, hospitals, kindergartens, churches, cultural institutions. With the impossibility of preparing for the cold season, the authorities announced the evacuation of residents of the Donetsk region but the miners have worked on heroically in the mines despite the threat to their lives due to shelling.

**CF - What was the situation of mineworkers before the invasion, were mines and industry functioning?**

NL - Mines and industrial enterprises in the territory of Donetsk and Luhansk regions held by Ukraine were working. The workers had a job and a salary. Even if there were delays in the payment of salaries to the miners.

**CF - Have mines stopped working since the invasion began?**

NL - In Luhansk region, all seven mines stopped working. Some were damaged by shelling, some were flooded, but the full picture is unknown because the territories are occupied by Russia. And what consequences it will have for the region's ecology is also unknown.

In the Donetsk region, two mines in Vugledar stopped working because they were destroyed by shelling. Others are operational but are close to the war zone.

**CF - What has been the impact of war on conditions of life in the mining communities, especially in East and Southern Ukraine?**

NL - The war changed the life of every citizen of Ukraine. We live in the conditions of war every day and every night and when we hear the warning

sirens we do not know where and when Russia will use its weapons against us. Russia not only kills the population, including children, but also tries to psychologically break the Ukrainian people who are resisting and defending their democratic rights.

**CF - Are civilians and civilian areas being deliberately attacked by Russian forces?**

NL - I am convinced that Russia deliberately attacks civilian targets and the population, destroying all infrastructure and life support facilities. In addition, medical and school equipment, industrial equipment, grain and everything that is left is taken out of the captured territories. For example, even playground equipment was taken from Mariupol.

The KVPU, of which the NGPU is a member organization, constantly provides assistance to hospitals that have been damaged or looted by Russian troops. We are grateful to our brothers and sisters from other trade unions and partners for their help in this. Also, our local organizations in Donetsk and Dnipropetrovsk regions provide assistance to hospitals – from baby food to equipment and generators.

**CF - Russia appears to be trying to terrorize the population - how have Russian tactics affected the will of Ukrainians to resist?**

NL - Ukrainians have rallied and are trying to defend with all their might. Terror only increases resistance and hatred of enemies. Everyone is doing everything to bring victory closer: the population helps the Armed Forces, collects funds, organizes volunteer units and uses the smallest opportunities to resist the enemy. Even children are active participants in the volunteer movement.

Imagine that for the seventh month We live with constant alarm signals, destruction of our cities and threats of a nuclear disaster from Russia. Some of our members lose their loved ones to airstrikes and shelling while others who have become soldiers die in combat.

Despite this, Ukrainians continue to fight. International support helps us in this, because it shows that the whole world is with us.

**CF - Has there been a mobilization within mining communities to organize and assist each other since the invasion?**

NL - Of course, everyone helps each other. A family of miners from Donetsk and Luhansk regions found protection in Lviv and Volyn regions. Miners from Donbas were employed at the mines of the Dnipropetrovsk region.

As I already mentioned, we also help medical institutions. Moreover, we will provide humanitarian assistance to all those who need it, not only our members. The head of the NGPU, Mykhailo Volynets, often takes essential items to Donbas, Kharkiv, and Chernihiv regions himself.

**CF - Alongside the Ukrainian Army, are the territorial defence forces, and other battalions in mining and industrial areas mostly composed of workers?**

NL - Members of the NGPU take an active part in the fight against the enemy. Some were mobilized into the Armed Forces of Ukraine, others joined the ranks of territorial defence, the rest became participants in voluntary formations for the protection of territories. Until February 24, these people worked in mines, mined coal, and made plans. And today they protect the country. Unfortunately, we also have casualties among the mobilized miners. Yes, more than 20 miners from DC 'Lvivcoal' State Enterprise have already died at the front, there are also miners from other state-owned coal mining enterprises who have died.

In addition, our NGPU members work to ensure the energy independence of Ukraine.

**CF - In the local mobilizations to provide aid and organize defence, is there a significant involvement of women alongside men?**

NL - Women defend the country together with men. According to the Ministry of Defence, 5,000 women are

on the first line of defence. In addition, women play a major role in the volunteer movement.

Our members volunteer in Donbas, Dnipropetrovsk, and Kirovohrad regions. Even those who are currently forced refugees in Europe are trying to help: they collect funds, buy and hand over medicines and supplies for the military, and help to organize support for Ukraine in European cities.

**CF - What has been the role of the NGPU since the invasion began?**

NL - From the first days of the full-scale invasion, the members of the NGPU actively participated in the defence of the country. In addition, NGPU members work extracting coal that the country needs.

Also, the NGPU immediately began to use its resources to help the affected communities and defenders. We are grateful for the help we receive from our brothers and sisters, because now our work opportunities have decreased due to the destruction of the economy and the growing unemployment. Russia is deliberately destroying our businesses and infrastructure in order to destroy our state, as well as - to get rid of a competitor in global markets.

**CF - Is the NGPU organizing aid and assistance to families in the mining communities?**

NL - The NPGU provides humanitarian assistance to miners and their families, helps them to evacuate to safe cities and provides other necessary assistance.

**CF - Are all trade unions organizing to defend Ukraine from the invasion?**

NL - Today, all citizens of Ukraine, including members of all trade unions, are making maximum efforts to fight the enemy and bring Victory closer.

**CF - There was previously some division between trade unions in Ukraine. Has the war led to greater solidarity across Ukraine amongst trades unions?**

NL - There may be differences between

the unions and beyond, but now we are united in the fight against the enemy.

**CF - Russia claims they are fighting to 'liberate' Donbas and other areas from 'Nazis'? How do you respond to this allegation?**

NL - There have never been Nazis in Ukraine and there are none. There are no right-wing radical parties in the Ukrainian parliament. Both world politicians and celebrities come to Ukraine, and they see it for themselves. We do not need protection and liberation from anyone. Russia used 'Nazism' for propaganda purposes and as a pretext for an attack.

Ukrainians are a friendly, hardworking and free nation. We never attacked anyone. And if we see that the government is doing something wrong, we go to Maidan and resolve all issues. No aggression will stop our European and democratic aspirations.

**CF - Among the Russian forces there appear to be extreme right wing fascist groups. What is the politics of the Russian forces, including the so-called Donetsk Peoples' Republic?**

NL - All those who fight against Ukraine on our territory are fascists, whom we call racists. What they are doing on our land is worse than what happened during the Second World War. By the way, people who survived the Second World War are surprised by the current atrocities of the Rashists.

**CF - Russia also suggests that there is a threat to the Russian language in Ukraine, and of 'genocide' against Russian and Russian speakers?**

NL - This is pure delusion. In Ukraine, people have always been able to speak the language they are comfortable with. There was no oppression of Russian-speaking citizens. As a person who was born and grew up in the Donbass and spoke Russian, I never felt oppressed for my language. But now even Russian-speaking citizens are trying to switch to the Ukrainian

language.

**CF - How has the war impacted on how people think about Ukrainian language and national identity?**

NL - We are proud to be Ukrainians and we all try to speak Ukrainian.

**CF - What is the current situation in the occupied areas of Ukraine?**

NL - According to the information of our members who remained in the occupied territory, the situation is difficult. In Donbas, men are afraid to go outside because they are being forcibly mobilized into the Russian army. They catch people with a pro-Ukrainian position, forcing them to get Russian passports. Those who refuse are subjected to torture. All are passed through filtration camps. Also, the Ukrainian language and education in schools in line with the Ukrainian curriculum are prohibited in the occupied territories. Residents of the occupied territories are waiting for the Armed Forces of Ukraine, but they do not talk about it openly. There is also a resistance movement in these territories.

**CF - Is there a free trade union movement in occupied areas?**

NL - No.

**CF - With a growing economic recession, some people in the UK have argued that there should be a ceasefire and peace now - how do you respond to such a position?**

NL - We want peace, but we are not ready to give up our territories. In 2014, we ceded Crimea, then part of Donbas, without firing a single shot, but this not only did not lead to peace, it led to a full-scale war on Ukrainian soil. We already know that Russia does not adhere to any agreements. Therefore, we will fight to Victory and we really hope that the whole world will support us. Because we are fighting not only for ourselves, but also for every European country.

**CF - Do you think a peace which involves partition of Ukraine is acceptable?**

NL - Ukraine is a free, independent country. We don't want anyone to

divide us, and we won't allow it.

**CF - There is already discussion about the reconstruction of Ukraine after the war. Do you think the current struggle for national liberation should also have social objectives?**

NL - We must rebuild a social, European Ukraine. Our objective for the social reconstruction of Ukraine should be a decent salary, quality jobs, safe working conditions and social justice. And trade unions must always be an effective tool for protecting the rights of employees.

**CF - The Ukrainian parliament is processing laws which will significantly undermine employment rights and workers conditions, such as Draft Law 5371. What is your view of these new laws?**

NL - New laws must meet international and European standards, protect workers and create new jobs.

We are now fighting against Draft Law 5371 and other bills that violate workers' rights.

**CF - What do you believe is the motive for these changes?**

NL - Perhaps certain representatives of the authorities believe that if they deregulate labour relations, they will increase investments in the country. But it is not so. The deterioration of labour legislation will have a negative impact on the post-war economy of Ukraine.

**CF - Do you think these changes can be reversed?**

NL - We will do our best to make it happen.

**CF - What solidarity can trade unions in the United Kingdom provide for you?**

NL - We will be grateful for any solidarity support and help.

**CF - Should we campaign for the**

**British Government to send more weapons to Ukraine?**

NL - It must be so, because our defence and our Victory depend on the number of weapons.

**CF - We are supporting your appeal for assistance - Can you explain what specific aid is needed to help the mineworkers' resistance?**

NL - Ukrainians, including miners, need humanitarian and military aid. Any help would be greatly appreciated. For example, the members of the NPGU who defend the country need vehicles, unmanned aerial vehicles, thermal imagers, medical equipment, long-term storage and quick-cooking products. And the mining families who were forced to move to other regions need warm clothes, heaters, generators and food. Together with the support of our trade union brothers and sisters, we will definitely win!

Source: [Ukraine Solidarity Campaign](#).

# Being a transgender woman at the International Youth Camp

15 September 2022, by **Sister from Scotland**

You see, I am a transgender woman. But so far I have been a very cautious and closeted trans woman. I am really early on in my transition, and until recently the only people I have truly been myself around are fellow trans people from the queer movement. And even then, I've only presented as a woman in small gatherings of trusted friends and partners. But I decided that this time, at the camp, I was going to take a leap into the unknown: I was going to dress, present, live as the woman I really am, for the duration of the camp. I was going to introduce myself to my comrades.

It is a general point with me, that I do not take leaps into the unknown very

often. I am one of those people who are very easily caught and stuck by indecision when it comes to big choices. I am a woman, but a fearful one. I want to show my face: I want to be known and thought of and spoken to and loved as a woman, but I am afraid. I am a woman, but most of the time I am silent and hidden, buried deep in the closet. So what led me to take a leap, for once?

Two things. Firstly, I was impressed by the Fourth International's approach to identity issues. Not just their historical involvement in the feminist movement, but also the ongoing commitment to racial justice, feminism and queer struggle that I could see

upheld in the various sections of the international. Of course, historical and programmatic commitments, while inspiring and appealing to a closeted trans woman like me, would not alone have been enough to convince me to bare myself so truthfully and openly.

It was the second thing that was decisive. It might seem small to you, reader, but it was simply getting the chance, a few months before the camp, to meet some members of the Danish section who introduced themselves with they/them pronouns. Here they were, some gender dissidents just like me, clear and queer among their fellow comrades without a worry. It occurred sharply to

me, right then and there, that if I was just a little bit braver, I could be like that!

Well, that decided it. With a good deal of panicked, excited sincerity, I told those comrades about myself, I mean really, truly about myself, and told them that I wanted to come out at the camp. They were supportive and cheerful, and looking forward to knowing the real me when we met again in France. And so, I had now committed myself. I won't lie: It was a decision I would worry and fret about as the camp drew near. This was natural, obviously. I was about to come out to about two hundred people, and across multiple language barriers too! Would I get tangled up in explaining myself? Would there be misunderstandings? Would some people turn out to be bigots? I had reason to be more than a little nervous: A depressing number of times in my years on the left, I have seen how easily some supposedly progressive "comrades" have dropped the act and morphed into reactionary dogs when challenged by actually-existing trans people with ideas and opinions.

However, I was also buoyed by a kind of feverish anticipation. The simple prospect of cutting the bullshit, dropping my boyish disguise and being totally honest seemed so radical, so wonderful, so liberating, that I could not wait to get to France. Besides, I knew full well that to be openly myself at the camp was a political commitment, not just a personal one. I am both a militant in a battle for my own civil rights and a socialist, and I feel it is my duty as a transgender socialist to do my best to bring together the causes of trans rights and socialism into one struggle. I firmly believe that the perspectives of trans people are valuable, and that the socialist movement is lessened by their absence, just as it is lessened by the absence of black perspectives or disabled perspectives. If the patriarchy tries to turn gender into a binary of bitterly opposed frontlines, then gender rebels like me are well positioned to show how these frontlines are vulnerable to permeation, sabotage and mutiny. We cannot be quiet, not when we have so much to give, so much to talk about,

so much to teach. And so, I felt compelled to raise my voice: A woman's voice, loud, sharp and liberated.

As the fateful date approached I made some preparations, like telling the other members of the Scottish delegation, and coming out to a few comrades I had already met. Their support and acceptance was a welcome boost, and it really cemented my resolve and confidence to know that they would have my back during the camp. And when, after the long journey down to the campsite, the time finally came to commit to things and reveal my true self, it was good to be able to take the first steps with some help from comrades. I remember, on the first morning of the camp, speaking with my delegation, airing out some last-minute nerves and making absolutely sure that, in the event of any exclusion or bigotry, I could count on them to help me assert my right to be there as the woman I am.

Thankfully though, all that worrying was completely needless. I got so hung up on potential issues and fears, only for them to dissolve the moment I walked out into the sun in a dress and began introducing myself. I don't think I was prepared for how natural it all felt, as if I had been doing this my entire life. Whether it was a comrade who had previously met me as a "boy", or whether it was someone entirely new, things went so smoothly that I was a little bit shocked. But only a little bit, because the dominant emotion I felt was joy - pure, riotous, joy.

This wonderful feeling would develop into a deep sense of fulfilment as the days passed. Yes, as one of a handful of trans women at the camp, I was in an extreme minority, but it hardly felt that way. On the contrary, the blanket response of my sisters was to welcome and include me, and as I spent time participating in the women's discussion spaces, learning, sharing ideas and helping to plan actions, I came to realise some things: chiefly, that this was the first time I properly felt a part of a women's movement.

I am a feminist. The problem is though, that the feminist movement in

Scotland and the UK is in a parlous, disorganised state compared to the women's movement in the rest of the world. Feminism in these gloomy islands can't boast of mass, vibrant, militant women's strikes and demonstrations in the way that Argentinian or Portuguese or Polish or Chilean feminism can. In addition, the feminist movement here is so riven by culture war junk and middle class transphobia, that it feels pretty difficult for a trans woman like me to feel safe or welcome taking part in what little we have. There is that constant worry with the movement back home, a lingering fear that solidarity is something that can easily be revoked when the sister doesn't fit some arbitrary biological or social norm.

I had no such worries among the women at the camp. Here I experienced live, determined, militant sisterhood, a sisterhood ferocious in combat yet caring and inclusive towards its own, a sisterhood committed to mass revolutionary struggle. And I was welcome implicitly, no questions asked! As I sat in meetings surrounded almost totally by cisgender women, I felt utterly at ease, a circumstance which honestly surprised me. I reflected that, were I in a similar setting in the UK, I would be a lot more nervous and on-edge, the familiar fear gnawing at me and making me wonder whether my inclusion might suddenly be subject to withdrawal on some bigot's whim. But here, among revolutionary socialist women, I was as much a woman as any other, a comrade to be loved and supported.

And this love and support helped me realise something else, too: The sheer difference which living in an honest manner makes to my ability to express emotions. I've long been aware of how enforced masculinity has marked and scarred me in various ways. Throughout childhood, I was conditioned, punished and harassed into acting and thinking like a boy by various forces, whether they be the ways patriarchal society moulds the minds of children to adopt certain gender roles, the way kids learn to laugh at girly "faggots" and "trannies", or the way an overly emotional child is relentlessly bullied for being "soft"

and "effeminate", too much of a "crybaby". This prolonged campaign against the personality of the child induces a painful kind of alienation- Confused and afraid, bombarded by the world around you, the easiest response is just to give in and try and fit the role as well as you can, even if it means doing as the oppressor wants and shutting away parts of yourself. Sure, it might make you less of a target, and you might be convinced that it's better to try and be "normal" and "just like the other boys", but it never, ever, feels right. Even though you can't put your finger on what's wrong and why you feel so at odds with yourself, you simply cannot ignore the pain, no matter how much you scream at yourself to shut up and conform. It's hard to be at peace when you're mutilating yourself.

This is something that you gradually confront as you begin to wake up and process the fact that you've been brainwashed, but you really do not realise the extent to which your identity has been dulled by living a lie until the burden of the lie is gone. It's something I've been approaching as I've shared my womanhood with loved and trusted friends, but the scale, duration and public nature of my doing so at the camp, and in front of so many cis people simultaneously,

affected me in ways I hadn't prepared for. It shook me, but in the most wonderful way possible. Living so naturally and freely as a woman was like coming home to myself. Suddenly, I was so much less inhibited and so much more confident in expressing my feelings and emotions. Years of self-censorship and self-scrutiny have led me to mentally check myself in countless ways whenever I'm with other people, but here I didn't need to think about how I acted and expressed myself at all- Everything just flowed naturally.

So here I was, accessing those alienated parts of my personality that had been walled off and hidden by a childhood of having to be a boy. Here I was: A confident, affectionate, goofy, relaxed woman, perfectly at ease among her sisters and comfortable in her own skin. It felt so good to throw all the old defense mechanisms, all the nerves, all the congealed boy shit- in short, all my chains- right into the trash. How lightly you breathe when you aren't chained down!

This is what made the Youth Camp so special for me. I think it speaks to the way that the Camp functions as a space for a kind of pre-figurative politics, a way of testing out some

elements of socialism via collective, co-operative living. The ability to express yourself exactly as you wish to at the Camp, there among your fellow militants, is a miniature of that limitless expression of the human personality that will be the right and freedom of everyone under socialism. I may be back in Scotland now, and I may be remaining quite closeted for the time being, but I nevertheless see the camp as marking an important milestone in my transition. It has inspired me, and given me strength and determination. I have had a sample of full, liberated womanhood, and I want it every day of my life. Yes, the world will not always receive me as enthusiastically as my comrades have done, and yes, the struggle for freedom will be long and difficult, but I also know what's at stake and what's to be won, if only I, we, all of us women dare! And I know that it can only be so through collective, revolutionary sisterhood. We will go forward over the corpse of the patriarchy, arms linked and voices raised as one.

*Our bodies, our choice!*

Every woman a sister, every sister a revolutionary!

*8 September 2022*

# Climate Change and Environmental Injustice: Jackson, Mississippi

**14 September 2022, by Dan La Botz**

The storms and the flooding were the result of climate change, which is accelerating as a result the use of coal and oil to fuel our capitalist world economy and is affecting us all—but unequally. As in Jackson, the results of climate change often fall most heavily on working people and the poor. Climate injustice or environmental racism, as it is sometimes called, is a result of the economic system and the political decisions that are similar in many cities throughout the country.

But let's look at the case of Jackson, an extreme version of many typical problems.

In the nineteenth century, Mississippi was one of the wealthiest American states. In 1860 Mississippi's plantations and its 430,000 Black slaves produced a million bales of cotton. The slaveholder class was fabulously wealthy while most other whites lived in poverty and Blacks were slaves. After the U.S. Civil War

abolished slavery in 1865, white planters remained in control of the land. Slavery was replaced by share-cropping—which became debt peonage—and Black people continued to work the land and produce cotton. Whites violently attacked the Black population, took over all political power, and by the 1880s had established the Jim Crow system: Black people were denied the right to vote, were racially segregated, and lived under the threat of lynching. Not



until the Civil Rights Movement of 1954 to 1968 did Black people succeed in forcing an end to legal segregation and recovering their political rights and civil liberties.

Yet, the former slave states of the South remain the poorest in America. Mississippi is the poorest of all with 18.8% of its residents living in poverty and 15 percent food insecure. It has the highest child poverty rate. It has the second lowest educational levels in the country (after West Virginia), is among ten states with least affordable housing, and is ranked as among the bottom five in health care.

Jackson, once somewhat better off, has suffered a dramatic decline in the last forty years. In 1980 it had a population of just under 203,000, about half white, but tens of

thousands of whites fled, undermining the tax base so that city government could no longer maintain social services, like the water system. Today individual incomes in Jackson average \$23,714 compared to a national average of \$62,518. Residents are often unable to pay their water bills and collectively owe millions of dollars.

The mayor of Jackson is Democrat Chokwe Antar Lumumba, a self-described socialist and revolutionary who has worked alongside Cooperation Jackson, a network of cooperatives and worker-owned, democratically self-managed enterprises. But Lumumba has had to deal with the state's rightwing Republican governor Tate Reeves and the majority Republican legislature,

both of which have neglected and punished Jackson. Now the governor wants to privatize the water system.

It will take billions of dollars to repair Jackson's water system, and the Democratic congress recently passed a budget with funds earmarked for such programs, but it will take months if not years to get money to Jackson.

As Ms. Olugbala-Aziz, a local resident says, "We're not asking for mansions, we just want to live and have the normal stuff, running water, clean water."

The climate crisis, affecting everyone but especially the poor, must be fought at the national and global level—and by all of us.

*13 September 2022*

## **Erdogan and the Syrian opposition: Failing the Syrian people once again**

**13 September 2022, by Joseph Daher**

The main Syrian opposition, recognised by international and regional states, as well as armed opposition groups in the North West have [defended](#) Turkey's policy and condemned all attacks on Turkish symbols, including the flag.

This position, reflective of a more general reactionary policy by opposition groups, has contributed to the defeat of the Syrian uprising as the Turkish AKP government scrambles to remain in power.

### **Turkish interests before anything else**

The Syrian National Army (SNA), which acts as an armed proxy for Ankara in Syria and is [guilty of many human rights violations](#), the National Coalition for Syrian Revolution and

Opposition Forces (Etilaf) and the Syrian Interim Government's Defence Ministry welcomed Turkey's support and [denounced](#) the flag burning perpetrators as "prejudiced and ignorant people who do not represent the values of the revolution."

These statements demonstrate the continued dependency on the Turkish government, and reinforces that the opposition's existence is more linked to Turkish interests, than the Syrian people. The SNA and armed opposition groups have already participated in multiple Turkish military interventions, particularly against areas controlled by the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES). It is dominated by the Democratic Union Party (PYD), which is labelled a terrorist organisation by Ankara.

These SNA has also assisted in the Turkish occupation of conquered lands

in the country, while Syrian opposition bodies have supported these actions. This includes the [invasion and occupation](#) of the Afrin region since the beginning of 2018, which led to massive violation of human rights and the forced displacement of approximately 137,000 people, predominantly Kurdish residents.

Under Ankara's command, the exiled opposition and armed opposition groups justified their involvement by claiming that the Kurds were actually allies of the Syrian regime and that it was important to keep Syria united against separatist groups such as the PKK/PYD. Videos of Syrian fighters emerged during this period showing [racist and hateful rhetoric](#) against the Kurds, as well as slogans in favour of Saddam Hussein and Erdogan.

Civilian homes, agricultural lands and stores in Afrin are continuously looted by these same armed opposition

groups.

In recent months, as Erdogan increased his threats about a new military invasion in Northern Syria, in the cities of Tel Rifaat and Manbij – the Aleppo governorate controlled by the Syrian Democratic forces – [opposition groups also stated their readiness to participate in it.](#)

## Erdogan's strategy

In reality, the actions of these opposition groups reflect their long-standing inability to formulate a credible, democratic, and inclusive alternative or act as representatives of the protest movement's initial objectives.

Moreover, Ankara has no intention of challenging the Syrian regime. Erdogan's [declaration](#) on 19 August reflected this. He stated that, "Ankara is not eyeing Syria and that Syria's territorial integrity is important to Turkey", while adding that their "main contention is the fight against terrorism in northern Syria". In other words, Erdogan has no desire to oppose, let alone threaten the Syrian regime.

A few days later, the foreign minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu, [stated](#) that,

"Turkey has no preconditions for dialogue with Syria but any talks should focus on security on their border".

Ankara's move towards normalisation with Damascus is motivated by two main objectives. Firstly, Erdogan seeks to gain votes ahead of the Presidential elections in 2023, notably by accelerating the forced return of Syrian refugees to Syria.

Over the past two years, there have been signs of a rise in racist and xenophobic attacks against Syrians in Turkey. Thousands of Syrians have already been deported, while Erdogan announced in May that the government was working to return one million Syrian refugees to the areas under Turkish security control in northern Syria.

Turkish willingness to attract foreign funding in the areas under its control in the North West Syria also serves this objective. Furthermore, the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), as well as the IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation, have played a key role in assisting the consolidation of Turkish control and occupation of Syria's territories, not to mention providing services to fighters of the SNA.

Secondly, Erdogan hopes to

undermine Kurdish aspirations for autonomy in Syria through military interventions, while continuing its repression at home. His recent, declarations that "it is necessary to finish what has been started," refers to an extension of the thirty kilometres wide "security zone" repeatedly conquered by the Turkish army and its Syrian armed proxies in 2016, 2018, and 2019.

In this context, Ankara's nationalist overtones and the threat of a new military operation in Syria allow it to position itself as a unifying leader and to revive the nationalist sentiment of the electorate. A card that has already been brandished in the past, especially during previous military incursions into northern Syria.

While it is important to always remember that the violent crushing of the Syrian uprising lies at the feet of the Syrian regime and its allies - Russia and Iran, the opposition also authored many of its own failures. Similarly, there should be no illusion about Ankara's policies; they have constantly served Turkey's political interests which run against those the Syrian uprisings.

26 August 2022

Source [The New Arab](#).

**“Total, BP or Shell will not voluntarily give up their profits. We have to become stronger than them...”**

**12 September 2022, by [Andreas Malm](#)**

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**As left-wing activists in the climate movement, we sometimes feel stuck by what can be seen as a lack of strategic perspectives within the movement. How can we radicalize the climate movement and why does the movement need**

**a strategic debate in your opinion?**

I share the feeling, but of course it depends on the local circumstances – this Belgian “Code Red” action, this sort of *Ende Gelände* or any similar kind of thing, sounds promising to me, but you obviously know much more about it than I do. In any case, the

efforts to radicalize the climate movement and let it grow can look different in different circumstances.

One way is to try to organize this kind of big mass actions of the *Ende Gelände* type, and I think that's perhaps the most useful thing we can do. But of course, there are also

sometimes opportunities for working within movements like Fridays for Future or Extinction Rebellion for that matter and try to pull them in a progressive direction as well as to make them avoid making tactical mistakes and having an apolitical discourse. In some places, I think that this strategy can be successful. Of course, one can also consider forming new more radical climate groups that might initially be pretty small, but that can be more radical in terms of tactics and analysis, and sort of pull others along, or have a "radical flank" effect. So, I don't have one model for how to do this - it really depends on the state of the movement in the community where you live and obviously the movement has ups and downs (it went quite a lot down recently after the outbreak of the pandemic, but hopefully we'll see it move back up).

Finally, it's obviously extremely important to have our own political organizations that kind of act as vessels for continuity and for accumulating experiences, sharing them and exchanging ideas. Our own organizations can also be used as platforms for taking initiatives within movements or together with movements.

**For some of us, our first big climate action was during the COP 15 in 2009 in Copenhagen. Now we are in 2022 - what do you think are the lessons that the climate movement has learned since then?**

The COP 15 in Copenhagen was a turning point. I was very active in the run-up to COP 15 and was part of the group that organized the big demonstration there. But the sense that most of us had in the movement after COP 15 was a general sense of failure. Of course, the COP itself was a massive failure, but we also realized that the demonstrations and direct actions didn't really have an impact. The movement realized that the focus on the COP summits that we had had up until then didn't really make sense at all, and it was largely after that that you saw a decisive turn towards opposition to fossil fuel projects, blockades, climate camps and things like that.

I think that this strategic turn will

have to be reinforced, particularly given the fact that this year's COP will be held in Egypt and next year's COP will be held in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. These two countries are both completely inhospitable to dissent - it's impossible to organize anything on the ground there and so this is different from the most recent COP happening in Glasgow. The climate movement will have to organize things in other places - we can't bring activists to Sharm El Sheikh in Egypt, this resort town where the summit will happen. So, these two upcoming COPs should be occasions for the movement to pull off mass actions at various places around the world at that time, targeting fossil fuel projects.

I was at the COP 26 in Glasgow last November. Again, there was a very big demonstration - something like 100,000 people, - again, there was an alternative "people's forum", and I had a sense of déjà vu. This is something that we've been doing for a long time and it doesn't really get us anywhere. One very brilliant comrade in the climate movement in Portugal, João Camargo, expressed in discussions around Glasgow and in a piece he wrote that we need to decisively turn our backs on the COP process because it's so useless. As I said, the upcoming two COPs really should be just an opportunity to escalate the struggle in which we engage regardless of COPs.

**Carrying on with the strategic and tactical issues, in your talk the other day you mentioned the question of the role of the workers and the workers' movement as they are (and they are obviously very different in the different countries). You elaborate a lot on how to block the most destructive fossil infrastructures and companies; how do you see that in relation to the workers - not only in these sectors but more generally - and the workers' movement as you know it - be it the Swedish example or other countries?**

I think I phrased this a bit unfortunately the other day and I came across as too dismissive of trade unions. That wasn't really my

intention. My concrete experience over the past few years in relation to trade unions has been pretty limited, but my sort of horizon is northern European and in Sweden the trade unions are completely indifferent to the climate issue probably more so than in even in Norway and Denmark. Swedish unions are totally ignorant and uninterested and also totally incapable of putting up a fight for their members interests. We have no strikes in Sweden any longer. This is probably an exception rather than the rule, but the level of class struggle in Sweden is so low that from my point of view it's extremely hard to imagine that all of a sudden organized labor in Sweden would rise to the occasion and become an important player in climate politics.

In Germany, which is where I have a little bit more concrete experience of climate activism to an extent, the situation is a little bit more complicated. On the one hand, with the Fridays for Future movement in 2019, which was stronger and larger in Germany than anywhere else, you had a moment in the autumn of 2019 when you had a trade union component to these strikes and the big public sector union called on its members to join. On the other hand, you have a very negative experience from the struggle around coal in Germany - which is really a key struggle in the whole European field of climate politics - where the big trade unions have resisted calls for an immediate or even early phase-out of coal and have been very retrograde in clinging to coal.

Out of this experience a position has emerged that has been articulated by my dear friend and comrade Tadzio Müller, who has been sort of a key organizer, strategist and thinker of Ende Gelände. He now almost says that he considers the working class in the global North to be more or less part of the enemy - he thinks that the organized working class is so invested in the existing economy that it will just defend coal and similar things like it has in general. Then there is an opposite position which is very forcefully articulated by another friend in common, Matt Huber, in his recent book *Climate Change as Class War. Building Socialism on a Warming*

Planet: he says that the only hope for climate politics is to activate the forces of organized labor and that it's only by turning towards the working class - including by taking jobs in the industry, something like the old industrial turn that we had in the 80s - that we can make any progress on the climate front. So the organized working class is the only conceivable subject of a climate revolution. So these are like polar opposites and here I find myself advocating a kind of centrist position between these two. I cannot accept the idea that the working class is part of the enemy - not even coal workers - but on the other hand I don't really believe in the idea that organized labor will be the prime mover of the climate front. I think the prime mover of the climate struggle will be and is a climate movement that isn't defined around class. I think there are three routes for someone to be interested in the question of climate: 1) having some kind of personal experience of adverse weather which is becoming more and more common; 2) having knowledge of the severity of the crisis without having personally experienced it, which isn't very hard to get by and doesn't require a PhD or any university degree; 3) being animated by solidarity with people who suffer from climate disasters around the world. I would think that these are the three main routes into the commitment to climate struggle and none of these routes necessarily pass through the point of production. So it's potentially a funnel that draws people into the climate movement from various points along the landscape of class society.

The movement that emerged in 2019 was largely defined not along the lines of class or race or gender, but rather of age. It was primarily a youth phenomenon - with Fridays for Future in particular - and there is a logic to that because the climate crisis has a very distinct temporal aspect: it's young people who will have to deal with this through the rest of their lives while old people have perhaps benefited from the fossil economy and won't see as much of the damage. I think this needs to be theorized and to an extent accepted and understood that the age component of the climate struggle will be significant in the

coming mobilizations. I think that Matt Huber and others who argue along similar lines as he does are correct insofar as the climate movement needs an alliance with the working class and with segments of organized labor to amass sufficient strength to turn these things around. The climate movement has to make sure that its politics are compatible with working class interests and can converge with those interests. But that's something else than putting all eggs in the basket of an industrial turn or proletarianization of the climate movement, which I think would be a strategic dead-end. Now the promise of the Green New Deal and of all these kinds of initiatives that we've seen in recent years - which haven't come to fruition unfortunately, but that doesn't mean that they're useless or doomed - that the climate transition goes hand in hand with improving the standards of living for workers and strengthening the bargaining power in the political position of the working class is something that needs to be pursued further.

When it comes to the concrete tactical questions about relating to workers when you are having a blockade, again, from the German experience I think it would be a massive mistake - a workerist error if you like - to prioritize good relations with the coal workers over having an effective blockade that temporarily damages the interests of these workers because you close their mines for a few days or something like that. There have been numerous initiatives to try to establish contact and dialogue with coal workers in Germany and it's been very unsuccessful, particularly in the east where the coal workers rather tend to move towards the far right - the Alternative für Deutschland, AfD - as a defense of their interests because the AfD wants to continue with coal forever and doesn't believe in the existence of the climate crisis. Then again, we definitely shouldn't give up on the idea that the type of transition we want to see has to ensure that workers in sectors that have to be dismantled completely get equivalent or better jobs, preferably in the places where they live so they don't have to move. This should be a key component of the transition. But eventually you can't expect workers in the fossil fuel

industry itself to take the initiative for closing down that industry - it's a basic Marxist insight that their immediate day-to-day class interest is of course to keep their jobs. So the initiative to close that industry down has to come from the outside and the blockade is a manifestation of this: we're coming from the outside and we want to shut this sector down because it's necessary. But you don't want to make these workers your enemies and you don't want to consider them the enemy - you want to tell them that unfortunately they are employed in a sector that has to be shut down but that we are demanding that the transition ensures that they get equivalent or better jobs where they live.

I really felt the mistake I made the other day - coming across as too dismissive of the trade unions - when I was at this workshop about eco-unionism, where I heard several cases - some of them I knew about - of workers in factories actually proposing a conversion of their production. We've had a comrade in the Swedish section of the Fourth International (FI) who has been doing absolutely heroic work in the metal workers' union in the auto industry for decades; he has been trying to establish the idea that auto workers can save their jobs by proposing a conversion of their plants to something like electrical boxes or wind turbines or whatever it is that could be used for the for the transition. Unfortunately, he just hasn't made any progress because he's so isolated and the trade union bureaucracy has such complete control. I have sort of followed his efforts for two decades, and he's banging his head against the wall of trade union bureaucracy trying to get somewhere with this idea. I've sort of lost faith in it because it hasn't produced any results; but in cases where it does produce results, I'm obviously extremely excited and happy to be proven wrong. Nothing would make me happier than the spreading of these kinds of examples of workers in factories having ideas about the transition.

**A glimpse of hope from Belgium then. It's not like the trade unions are very green and climate friendly**

- well, they say they are but in reality they're not, as demonstrated for instance by their position in favor of the extension of the airport in Liège to build a hub for Alibaba's activities in Europe - but still, in the 2019 Youth for Future movement, we saw a new group called Workers for Climate that was created by grassroots and left-wing unionists. What's more, the main unions - including the bureaucracies - sent delegations to the demonstrations, and the most progressive wings of the CSC union, organizing for instance the retail workers but also the aviation branch, officially covered the workers who would strike. It's very symbolic, but still it was made public and the workers received the information that they could go on strike and be covered by the union.

This is a universe away from Sweden, it would never happen there - but it's great!

Another thing: in the Belgian public transport sector, there is a real interest in the climate issue. This reminds of the [statement by Naomi Klein](#) that railway workers on strike are actually struggling for climate. There may be some sectors of the working class and some unions in some countries that could more easily be reached regarding the climate issue.

My limited understanding of Belgium is that you still have a fairly significant industrial manufacturing sector and a working class that every now and then engages in some serious battle for its interests. So you have some class struggle happening in Belgium - we have nothing in Sweden, absolutely nothing! But where there is class struggle happening, of course the potential exists for workers themselves taking initiatives or for the climate movement drawing them in or for convergence or productive interaction, and this should be taken up. It's exclusively a question of the level of intensity of the class struggle. At the COP 26 for instance, there was this strike happening in Glasgow by garbage collectors, and Greta Thunberg approached them and expressed her support for their strike,

and they joined the big march. That's just one example of how these things can play out. Sweden is perhaps an extreme case, but the problem is that generally I think that the intensity of working class struggles is very low compared to what it was in the 80s, 70s, 60s - not to mention of course the 1920s. If the climate issue had exploded in the 1950s and 60s, it could have played out completely differently. Now it has exploded in a moment of doldrums where the working class is historically quite weak.

One last example of how at some point we could find another potential, in Belgium at least: during the last general strike before the pandemic, in February 2019, the airspace was shut down and there were no flights at all for 24 hours. This shows what unions are still able to do and how they could potentially change things for real. On another note: now there is a huge energy crisis which is also part of the reason why there is a very high inflation in several countries, and this is a major topic which is being discussed within the labor movement in general and which also mobilizes people to demonstrate. Could there be a point of convergence here, where we can easily highlight the need to solve the energy crisis for environmental reasons as well as for social reasons?

Absolutely. I guess that two demands should be efficient in that situation. First, roll out renewables as fast as possible, also because they're now cheaper than fossil fuels actually, so the cost of a unit of electricity is lower if it comes from wind and solar than if it comes from any fossil fuel in Europe. There should be massive public investments in order to deploy renewables as fast as possible. Secondly, in this situation of rising energy prices, it should be seen as fundamentally perverse that private oil and gas companies are swimming in these insane superprofits and you should be able to whip up some kind of public anger about these.

Definitely. In France - but probably also elsewhere - there has been a proposal from the

parliamentary Left to implement a special tax on these profits - and even a limited number of Macron's MPs, who usually act as loyal soldiers for his authoritarian neoliberalism, seem to be inclined to agree on this idea. Now these are immediate demands, but you also put forward transitional demands to be taken up by the climate movement, i.e. demands that enter in direct contradiction with the ongoing capital accumulation. What are some of these demands?

One of them is the demand for not a single additional fossil fuel installation or infrastructure. This can apply to an airport, a highway or a gas terminal or oil pipeline among other things. Another transitional demand - and obviously none of this is my invention, it's something that is being discussed more and more - is nationalizing the private energy companies and taking over oil and gas and coal companies and forcing them to do something different, to stop their extraction of fossil fuels as fast as humanly possible and perhaps instead roll out renewable energy or even engage in carbon dioxide removal - that means taking down CO2 from the atmosphere in one way or another. But these are only two dimensions, they are not the only ones and again, it depends on where you find yourself. In some countries, the oil and gas and coal sectors are already nationalized - there, you would have to formulate this differently.

You mentioned carbon dioxide removal (CDR), which is a great opportunity to discuss geoengineering. You warn a lot about solar geoengineering and Naomi Klein also does, and we can fully understand why when we see the nightmare it could be when we read or hear about that. Yet in the media in general there is not much writing about that - then again, you say you fear that it might come out all at once - and we seem to hear much more about carbon dioxide removal. Why is that? What's your take on solar geoengineering? And what's your take on carbon dioxide removal - given the state of things now, is it



**becoming unavoidable as a necessary yet insufficient part of the solution, to be deployed next to massive reductions of emissions?**

This is a massive field which we can talk about for hours. I have a research project on this topic with a Belgian colleague from Lund university, who is also a friend and comrade, Wim Carton. We have a research grant and this coming autumn we will do research with a whole team of interns - made up of students from my Master's program in human ecology - on various aspects of carbon dioxide removal. We will write a book with Verso in the spring, which would be about both carbon dioxide removal and solar geoengineering and whose working title right now is Overshoot. Climate Politics When It's Too Late. I spent the past couple of months writing about solar geoengineering and trying to understand it. This might sound bizarre but I'm trying to use psychoanalysis to understand solar geoengineering because it has the component of repressing a problem as in the Freudian model of repression, where you push something out of the conscious so that it appears not to exist, but under the surface it's bubbling and sooner or later it explodes.

CDR and solar geoengineering need to be distinguished as they work in different ways. You're absolutely right that solar geoengineering isn't much talked about. Some vulgar Marxists have sort of anticipated that big fossil fuel companies would promote solar geoengineering as a way continuing with business-as-usual. That has not happened: neither ExxonMobil nor any other big fossil company say anything about solar geoengineering, nor is there any government that's advocating it and there's no far right party advocating it - although during the Trump era there was this expectation that he would soon flip over into advocating solar geoengineering, none of that has happened. On the contrary, carbon dioxide removal, which works very differently, is something that all the big oil and gas companies say that they are planning on doing as part of their net zero propaganda, and you can see far right parties - someone

here on this camp mentioned Berlusconi the other day - advocating in favor of planting trees and things like that, and there are also a lot of startups and capitalist companies who see carbon dioxide removal - perhaps particularly direct air capture - as a new line of business where you can produce commodities and make profit from them. So you have this sort of the burgeoning field of business opportunities in CDR that doesn't exist in solar geoengineering because that doesn't produce any new commodities that you can sell.

There are many differences between them but another one is that CDR, just as you suggested, is going to be necessary because the concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere is already too high. We need to get CO<sub>2</sub> down from the atmosphere, back under the ground, locked into subsurface storage - where it was originally before it was taken out in the form of fossil fuels and set on fire. The only way to do that on a massive scale seems to be to use some kind of advanced technology - planting trees is not going to be enough because you can't return carbon to the passive part of the carbon cycle, under the ground, just by planting trees. Planting trees affects the active carbon cycle, but to get it back sequestered under the ground, where it's locked out geologically from the active carbon cycle, you need something else. A technology like direct air capture has promise in this respect because it can actually capture CO<sub>2</sub> and mineralize it, so you turn it into stone under the ground.

There are now plants on Iceland doing that and it's essentially a proven technology, but the problem there in our analysis - Wim and I wrote an article about this in Historical Materialism - is that this technology is being captured by private interests who don't see any profits potential in taking the carbon and burying it underground, because that means that you essentially put a resource out of the business cycle. What they can do instead to make profit is to capture the CO<sub>2</sub> and turn it into a product such as synthetic jet fuel or they can use it in fertilizers or capture CO<sub>2</sub> and sell it as fizz to Coca-Cola - this is what Climeworks, one of the big direct

air capture companies, does. When you use it as a commodity, then you can make a profit, but that's just recycling the carbon because it doesn't actually put it under the ground. So if you want to put it under the ground you need to sort of liberate this technology from the compulsion to make profit - that's our view.

Solar geoengineering on the other hand is a very different story because it comes with so many dangers of messing with the climate system. The biggest risk, of course, is what is known as the termination shock: if you do solar geoengineering, you have this sunscreen but you continue to build up CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere; what happens is that all of this CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere is just waiting to exercise its radiative forcing - its impact on the climate; - so if the sunscreen is taken down for some reason, boom, all of a sudden this accumulated CO<sub>2</sub> creates an enormous rise in temperatures. (Picture boiling water on which you put a lid and it continues to boil, it burns hotter and hotter, and then you take away the lid and the whole boiling water comes out of the pot.) That could lead to the most unimaginably disastrous spike in temperatures and there are all sorts of other dangers with geoengineering. Therefore, solar geoengineering isn't something that people on the left should advocate for, and here I part company with someone like Kim Stanley Robinson for instance. He's a novelist who wrote a great novel called The Ministry for the Future, probably the best climate fiction so far, but he advocates in favor of solar geoengineering - which forms a big part of that book - from sort of a left-wing perspective. A colleague of mine, Holly Jean Buck, does the same thing in the US: she's written about solar geoengineering, and she says that this is something that the left should look upon as a potentially useful technology.

I don't think it is useful, I don't think we should ever advocate it, but we should prepare for it because it's so likely that it will start; the likeliness does not come from any aggressive sponsorship, so far like we said it's almost never talked about, but there is a logic to it which is that there is only one known technology that has a

potential to immediately reduce temperatures on earth. Carbon dioxide removal would have effect over decades, and likewise, if we were to stop emissions now you wouldn't see a drop in temperatures - you would see the temperatures rising more slowly and then perhaps flattening out. If you are in a situation where you feel we are in a total emergency and we have to do something and reduce temperatures, the only thing you can do to accomplish that is to shoot sulfate clouds into the atmosphere. It's the only known technological option for doing this. With every summer, with every new season of disasters, my feeling is OK, when will the order be given to implement geoengineering? When will things break, when will the system snap and when will there be a sudden real sense of emergency that - as in during the pandemic - we have to do something and when will there be this moment where governments start looking around: "what can we do? The American West is on fire", or becoming a desert, or the entire Europe is burning or whatever? And then there is only one thing you can do.

If we are in such a moment and the planes take off, I'm not saying we should for instance shoot down those planes or sabotage them or something like that. But we should think about what a left strategy in such a moment would be because it looks increasingly likely for strictly logical structural reasons. There are more and more signs that part of the sort of bourgeois intelligentsia is moving towards this. For instance, there is a think tank called the Paris Peace Forum which aspires to be like the World Economic Forum in geopolitics - they have put together a commission on overshoot which is chaired by Pascal Lamy who was previously chairing the WTO, and he said a few months back that we need to look into geoengineering, that there is no other way... You know this guy?

**Yes, he is or used to be a neoliberal member of the Social-Democrats in France, he was EU commissioner for trade and then he went to the WTO...**

Right. Another sign is that about a

year ago the US National Academy of Sciences put out a long report advocating a national research program into geoengineering, and I think that it's far more likely that Biden and the Democrats initiate moves towards this than Trump and the Republicans. So this is something to closely monitor and prepare for.

**This leads us to the question about the state. Many people and many leftists say that the climate and more generally the ecological disaster is a reason why we need to take up the question of the state and not only focus on something like local alternative societies, because it's so global and so bad and it will require so many investments and decisions and so on, that you need to find something as a state to act. But then of course there is the question of what kind of state we are thinking of. You talk about it a bit in in your book on the pandemic - it would be interesting to explore that question.**

Fundamentally, I think that the observation is correct that this crisis, however it's dealt with, is going to be dealt with by the state. Solar geoengineering would be an incredibly extreme intervention into the whole planetary system and it would be carried out by some states. Carbon dioxide removal on a large scale obviously requires massive involvement from the state. Emissions reductions also require the state because the reductions will have to be so big and quick and comprehensive that no other agent than the state can conceivably do it. Here we should point out that all scientists who advocate carbon dioxide removal and/or solar geoengineering are perfectly clear that none of this will work without massive emissions reductions. Those who advocate solar geoengineering nowadays never say that we can do this instead of emissions reductions, they say that we have to do both at the same time; the question is "is it really likely that both happen at the same time?" They think so, I think that's an optimistic illusion. What I mean here is that there is no serious way out of the climate crisis without massive emissions reductions, and they have to be extraordinarily

fast and deep and radical.

Now in whichever path states follow, I think states will undergo changes into their character. If you have a state that is implementing solar geoengineering, that state will become extremely powerful because it will rule the climate of the planet, so you would have all sorts of dangers of authoritarianism and extremely centralized control over climatic conditions in other parts of the world. There are all sorts of scenarios: solar geoengineering might cause monsoon failure in India or some other very bad side effect somewhere in the global South. But the state that does geoengineering - it could be the US for instance - will probably continue regardless and thereby exercise incredibly centralized power over humanity.

Now a state that undertakes massive emissions reductions could also change character. it might be authoritarian because it needs very forceful steering of the economy and of society if you're going to have these rapid emissions reductions. But there could also of course be a deepening of the democratic substance of that state: for instance if you nationalize private fossil fuel companies, what you do is that you essentially extend the democracy to the sphere of energy production. In other words, you put it under public control and take one sector of the economy into the hands of the democratic polity, which in a way pushes against the limits of bourgeois democracy which says that democracy is this strictly political sphere and that the economy is a sphere that runs itself and should not be intruded. If you take over the energy sector and put it inside the political sphere then you sort of extend democracy into the economy. I think that a real transition requires this kind of deepening of democracy and that it can take on potentially something like a rupture, a revolutionary change in the sense that if you are ever going to accomplish this you probably have to defeat a very important part of the class enemy because it's not like Total or BP or Shell will voluntarily give up and say "OK, take our companies and we will never again have any profits and we're just going out of business and dying

voluntarily". That's not how it works usually in history. So if we are going to accomplish that, we need to become stronger than them which is a very tall order because they are so much stronger than us right now. So we need to become stronger than them and if we were to defeat them, then that doesn't necessarily mean total social revolution but it's a change in property relations that could perhaps set in motion a process that goes beyond the current order of things.

**Apart from the question of the state and of local initiatives, there is the question of the role of the individual. There is an important, frequent narrative put forward by corporations and governments that it's essentially the responsibility of the individuals to solve the ecological disaster, but there is also sometimes pressure in the activist circles to live and act differently and maybe sometimes even to solve this question by individual or small changes on the scale of the individual or the community. What is your impression about this?**

It is a question that always pops up and that we struggle with all the time. Generally, I think it's important to point out that individual lifestyle changes will never be the solution and that what you can do as an individual has extremely limited effect. Buying into this whole narrative that I as a consumer can change things by shopping differently is to capitulate to a bourgeois narrative about society that is fundamentally false. First of all, you as a consumer can affect extremely limited change on your own. And you acting as a consumer is fundamentally unequal in the sense that it's the richest consumer that has the most influence: you don't want to base your politics on your affluence. A working-class consumer might have no capacity - or no time - to buy the more expensive, more ecologically sustainable alternative. Bill McKibben was at my university once and he was asked the question "what's the most important thing I can do as an individual?" and he said "stop being an individual, join with others and do things together, that's the only way to change things", and that's correct.

On the other hand, the idea that what you do as an individual doesn't matter at all is the opposite mistake. This isn't about impact but it's about credibility: if we advocate ecological war communism or a total transformation of society, it would be hypocritical of me or anyone arguing along these lines to make no changes in their own lifestyles and just go on flight binges or eat endless amounts of meat for instance. Saying that it doesn't matter what I do as an individual so I can do anything but I'm all for a total change of society is not a way to make yourself credible. You need to practice what you preach just at least a little bit.

Now there is this saying by Adorno which you might have heard: "there is no good life in a bad one", which is sometimes translated as "there is no right life in a wrong one". To me, this means that if you're stuck inside in a system that is fundamentally rotten it's extremely difficult for you to purify or purge yourself and live in a completely sustainable fashion. That's virtually impossible, unless you go out and live on your own as a hunter-gatherer in the forest to escape from the dirt of capitalist industrial civilization. We cannot strive for complete purity, it's impossible because you want to be part of society and you want to affect change in that society - you don't want to stand isolated outside of it. And as long as you're inside of it, which again is a prerequisite for changing it, then you have to make concessions to the society in which you live. This has always been the situation with our struggles: the workers have a relation of dependence to their employers and receive wages from their employers; they fight against their employers but they're still in a relation of dependence and can't just escape that dependence. In the same way, we are locked into a system that makes us consumers of fossil fuels and we can't just parachute out of it completely.

This means for each and one of us that we need to negotiate this in our own lives and make decisions balancing what's the right thing to do. And here the thing that most often comes up is flying because that's the worst thing you can do as a private consumer in terms of emissions, and it's also an act

that is hard to resist sometimes because for instance if you want to go to North America for some reason - there might be a political reason for you to go there - then there is no other option than flying. Last December I needed to go to Egypt because that's a country I have connections to. And for the first time in human history you can't get on a boat on the northern Mediterranean and cross to the southern Mediterranean - there are no boats to Egypt! That's bizarre because that's how people have traveled for millennia for instance between Egypt and Italy - but it's not there any longer because an entire capitalist society has enforced aviation is the only mode of transportation that is available. What do I do then? Do I sit home and say I can't go to Egypt because there are only flights? No, that's not what I did, I took a flight to go there. On the contrary, when I discussed about how I were to come here to this camp [in central France], I was first told that speakers are asked to take the cheapest transportation to the camp, which in my case would have meant flying here but that wouldn't have felt right - I try to avoid flying within Europe. And then I was alerted to the bus of the Danish delegation leaving from Copenhagen, so of course I took the Danish bus because that's a much better thing to do. But I think that there is no general rule for how to deal with these things in individual lives other than try to avoid excessive emissions and try to avoid emissions-intensive choices when possible. Of course you have to weigh this against other factors - the political projects you're involved in or family affiliations and so on. In any case, we need to abandon first the idea that my individual actions are what's going to change society and secondly the idea that you can become pure and free of sin and guilt in this society.

**In your interview with Stathis Kouvélakis for Hors-Série, you added another argument about how consumers don't have control about how things are produced, about the global chains of production and so on, and that's another important issue for us as Marxists.**

Yes, for instance the steel sector

which is crucial when it comes to emissions – there is no way that a consumer of final products really can make an impact on choices in the steel sector because steel is an input into other commodities, and as a consumer when you buy a car or whatever it is you don't get into contact with the steel industry directly, you cannot boycott it.

**One word on Sweden where you come from. What's the state of the climate or ecological movement besides Greta Thunberg and what are the challenges for the Left in the country?**

Well, Greta is an anomaly because the climate movement in Sweden is extremely weak. Sweden is generally a graveyard for social movements and Greta became famous in Sweden because she first became famous in Europe. She was kind of discovered by the Swedish media all of a sudden – “so there's this Swedish girl who's becoming very famous in Europe so we need to cover her here as well”. But Fridays for Future as a movement was always weaker in Sweden than in Denmark, not to mention Germany or even Belgium. We never reached the stage where you were – at some point in late 2019 there were a couple of fairly big demonstrations in Stockholm but still far from the influence and the magnitude seen in other countries. There are initiatives here and there. At the time this interview is published there will have been a small scale Ende Gelände type of thing in late August against a cement company on Gotland, an island to the east of Sweden. There was a massive flop in early June: an attempt by activists in Stockholm – I was part of it in the beginning – to establish a campaign called “Pull the Plug” during a summit which took place in early June and didn't receive any media attention. The summit was called “Stockholm+50” because in 1972 there was an important UNEP summit there that was sort of a milestone in the development of international environmental politics – so the idea was that 50 years later, the Swedish government and UN would have a 50 year anniversary summit. We wanted to make actions at the same time, but the only thing that eventually

happened was a march between various apartments where CEOs of oil and gas companies and banks in Sweden were living. We were going there outside of their apartments, burning some Bengal fires, chanting and so on – a great idea, but there were only 100 people. 100 people after half a year of attempts at mobilizing: a complete failure. Embarrassing even.

And then there is the question of the Left. There is the Left Party, which is the former Communist Party, and our FI section dissolved itself as a party – we used to be the Socialist Party and now we are called Socialist Politics – largely to be able to work inside the Left Party. Now the Left Party has a new chairwoman since a couple of years, Mehrnoosh Dadgostar, who goes by the name Nooshi. She has abandoned the climate politics of her predecessor Jonas Sjöstedt. He was an auto worker who used to work at the Volvo plant in Umeå in northern Sweden and was very close to some of our FI comrades because the largest metal workers union in northern Sweden is led by members of the Swedish section. He sort of started the process of inviting us into the Left Party in the years when Podemos and Syriza were interesting left-wing forces. He wanted to open up the Left Party and make it more that kind of party and suggested that we work together. He had a personal commitment to climate politics and he made it a profile issue of the Left Party. But Nooshi's strategic project is to win over working class voters from the Sweden Democrats – the far right – back to the Left Party. Now I'm simplifying a bit but she kind of has the idea that the working class is essentially the white working class in old industrial or postindustrial towns in rural areas, and that in order to win back these voters from the Sweden Democrats we have to tone down our climate politics and our anti-racism. Our current – Socialist Politics – and quite a few others within the Left Party are of course dissatisfied with this turn – this is a controversial line that she has taken. She's styling herself as an old-fashioned Social Democrat, very pro-industry – she likes to go to construction sites and put a helmet on and take photographs

of herself posing as a worker, this kind of workerist attitude...

**This sounds similar to the short-lived experience of Sahra Wagenknecht's Aufstehen in Germany.**

Yes, it is that sort of thing. You have this tension all the time: should we be against “identity politics” and just go for hardcore class issues or should we have a broader understanding of class and the revolutionary subject. And unfortunately she has a very clear tendency towards the former position in this debate.

**One last word about Code Rouge, the action we've already mentioned at the beginning of the interview. As Gauche Anticapitaliste, we are members of a quite large coalition – with organizations such as Greenpeace for instance – which is planning an important action of civil disobedience in the beginning of October. The goal is to block a big infrastructure from Total...**

Oh, wonderful!

**We agree with you! (Total bought the main Belgian oil company Petrofina 20 years ago by the way.) We aim at mobilizing more than 1,000 activists for this action. It's really ambitious – we would like to accomplish something like Ende Gelände, which is very inspiring. We are working hard to make it a success...**

Do you have dates for this action already? Where will it be? Is there a website?

**Yes, it will take place during the weekend of 8-9 October. There is a website which is <https://code-rouge.be/> (in French and Dutch). The place has not been disclosed yet – we'll disclose it at the last moment to have more chances of success in this confrontational action.**

Of course, it makes sense. Perfect! Unfortunately I can't make it on these dates, but if I could I would definitely join!

July 2022

# The establishment of an absolutist regime in Tunisia

11 September 2022, by **Dominique Lerouge**

The Constitution of 25 July 2022 establishes a regime in which the president has most of the powers. [1] Placed under his direct authority, the government no longer needs to obtain a vote of confidence from the legislature. Furthermore, the president can now submit laws directly to parliament. He will also have the possibility of remaining in power after his term of office expires.

This system should be completed before the end of the year by the election of a legislative assembly, as well as an assembly of representatives of local authorities, whose mode of designation and role remain unknown for the moment. If the whole system is put in place, it will be the end of the period opened by the “Tunisian Spring” of 2011.

## The main features of the new regime

- Autocratic: on this point, Saïed goes even further than Ben Ali because he has simultaneously the executive, constituent and legislative powers.

- Authoritarian: for the time being, freedom of expression continues to exist, but there is a worrying decline in press freedom and a growing police crackdown. Cyber-harassment and

physical threats against opponents by supporters of President Kaïs Saïed are also on the rise. “We are still far from the ferocious repression exercised under Ben Ali. We still enjoy freedom of expression. We don’t have thousands of prisoners of conscience like in Egypt, but the foundations of absolute power are there”, denounces Amna Guellali, from Amnesty International. [2]

- Populist: relying on the paralysis of the parliamentary regime put in place after 2011, Saïed attributes to himself an almost messianic power to embody the “people” as well as an almost divine mission of redemption. His policy involves bypassing or eliminating all intermediaries between him and the people, particularly the political parties, which he considers to be ‘dying’.

Contrary to Ben Ali, who spared the “elites” and sought to include them in the mafia-like networks of the party in power, Saïed launched a permanent war against them, resonating in particular with the state of mind of a large part of the youth and the most disadvantaged.

- Violently opposed to all political parties: this hostility affects the parties that were in power after 2011 (including Ennahdha), those that were

not, as well as the pre-2011 nostalgic party led by a former deputy secretary general of Ben Ali’s party.

- An Arab nationalist dimension: unlike Ben Ali, who bowed down to Western powers, Saïed claims to be a member of the Arab and Muslim culture, which he believes is the authentic culture of the Tunisian people. He exalts national sovereignty in the face of “foreign interference” accused of organising “plots” that prevent the people from truly expressing their will.

- Omnipresent religious references: of course, Kaïs Saïed is not an “Islamist” in the sense of an affiliation to a Muslim Brotherhood-type party. But he is deeply pious and religious and openly claims to be part of Tunisia’s Islamic heritage. Since his election in 2019, Saïed has, for example, relied on the Koran to defend the maintenance of inheritance inequality between men and women. Article 5 of the new constitution also states that Tunisia is part of the Islamic *Ummah* [community of believers]. In contrast to Ennahdha’s political Islam, Saïed’s is more of a state Islam that could develop into a form of theocracy.

8 September 2022

Translated by **International Viewpoint** from ***l’Anticapitaliste***

# Italian elections - heading for a Meloni far right government?

10 September 2022, by **Dave Kellaway**



For southern migrants to the north like this man the service station represented his social promotion, his entry into a degree of prosperity and modernity. For many migrants their wages earned in the booming factories allowed them to buy cars and travel back south to see their families in August. The future looked bright. In the 1970s Almirante, the neo-fascist leader of the MSI (National Social Movement) stopped at Cantagallo for a bite to eat. He managed the pasta course but when the workers there noticed he was there they brought him the bill and told him to leave before the second course. Almirante left. Thanks to the mass radical upsurge of the Hot Autumn in 1969 working people had not only won better living standards but had a sense of themselves as political protagonists.

Later on, the journalist wandered down to speak to the lorry drivers who were working that day. They were eager to talk about the exhausting schedules they now had and the cut-throat, increasingly unregulated logistics sector. Comments were made about the Albanian drivers who would supposedly work for 12 hours at a stretch. Asked about their voting intentions for the 25 September general election, a significant majority said they were going to vote for Giorgia Meloni, the leader of Fratellid'Italia (Brothers of Italy), who was the youth leader in Almirante's party. The latest poll on September 6 credits Giorgia Meloni with 25% of the vote within a 46 to 28% right wing majority which means she becomes Prime Minister. Meloni's rise and the probable victory of a right wing coalition anchored to the hard right is mostly a consequence of the defeats and demoralisation of the workers' movement and the political bankruptcy of what used to be its social democratic majority party, the PD (Democratic Party).

## Declining political engagement

Since the last general election in 2019, there have been three governments. The first was a lash-up between the two populist parties, the Lega (League, formerly the Northern

League in favour of Lombard autonomy) and the M5S (the Five Star Movement started by comedian [Beppe Grillo](#)). These parties had emerged after the collapse of the two-party Christian Democrat/Communist system in a sea of scandal and corruption in the 1990s.

The first Conte Government collapsed when the Lega leader, Salvini, made a move to have more influence but was faced down with the help of the Italian president, Matterella. The latter organised for the PD, the sworn enemy of the M5S, to join them in the second Conte government. A year or so ago this went the same way as the first one and the Euro banker, Mario Draghi was drafted in to form a national unity government. All the mainstream parties joined this....except Meloni's FdI whose ratings went from 4% to today's 25%.

Although polls registered majority support for Draghi the frustration and alienation of many Italians remained acute. The main policy achieved by the government was the European Union financed 200 billion euro post-Covid national recovery and resilience plan (PNRR). Not much of that money is going to maintain peoples' living standards, mostly it is infrastructure and 'modernising' changes to make Italian capital more efficient and profitable.

Meloni has benefited from this reality and from a general perception that all the other parties were involved in the continual chopping and changing of alliances in order to hold on to their privileges and power. Draghi - to the clear dismay of the key capitalist establishment in Italy and Europe - threw the towel in on his government in July when Conte made a sudden 'left' turn in defence of the M5S's signature citizen's income policy and refused to fully endorse the government. So this is what led to the vote on 25 September.

The shift that the Corriere journalist eloquently indicated in his article is also about general involvement in politics. After the Second World War 9% of Italians were members of political parties. Today the figure is down to 1%. Local party branches - both left and right - were real

community hubs. For example, in the town, I know well the local CP branch was a social and political meet-up point for all the left, not just CP members. The party would run summer 'fetes' with political/cultural discussions, music and food in the centre of town and in the periphery villages. Today the party office is a supermarket and they may be the odd regional festival. The daily CP newspaper, Unita, closed down in 2014. Parties today are fluid and liquid. The M5S operates mostly online for its discussion and voting. Members, sympathisers and voters are assimilated and participate in primary elections to decide on candidates but there are a lot less structured political debates about ideals or policies. Parties of both right and left are areas for careerists to compete for salaried positions, privileges and positions of power.

In the post-war period democracy and one of the most progressive bourgeois constitutions meant 93% of people voted. I remember how astonished I was in the 1980s to see the sheer numbers voting in all types of elections compared to Britain. Today the figure is down to 73% and falling. All the polls currently are pointing out the high level of abstention and the lack of interest in the election. I asked my niece, who is a graduate with an admin job in the private sector, who she was going to vote for and she said they were all the same and only looked out for themselves. She also saw little point in the trade unions.

## How much of a threat is Meloni to democracy and the labour movement?

A lot of the commentary in the mainstream and left press here has been about the threat Meloni poses. People have noticed that the election in September coincides with the centenary of Mussolini's march on Rome when the fascists took power. If Meloni becomes Prime Minister, should we expect new restrictive laws against free speech, assembly or union rights? Will it be a signal for an

outbreak of physical attacks by fascists against left or progressive activists?

It is important to get the right balance in assessing the political consequence of a Meloni victory. First of all, there has already been neo-fascist participation in Italian post-war governments – Berlusconi had Fini in one of his governments. Secondly, although her party may well be the biggest single political party and will certainly be so within the right-wing coalition it will still be reliant on an alliance with two other right-wing parties in order to form a government. It is not even close to getting a majority big enough to govern alone. Thirdly, the second biggest party in the right-wing coalition, the Lega, is just as racist on migrants or on culture war issues like gay or trans rights. On the ideological issue of protecting white national (catholic) Italian identity against the migrant or 'Islamic replacement' threat, there is little difference between the FdI and the Lega. Fourthly, although it has retained the fascist era tricolour flame emerging from a coffin (i.e. a symbolic continuity with Mussolini) on its electoral symbol there has been a campaign similar to that of Le Pen to detoxify her political current of openly fascist policies and elements.

Although there are comings and goings between openly fascist militants from Forza Nuova and CasaPound and her party with some even ending up on electoral slates, she is careful to distinguish FdI from them. Investigative TV programmes have uncovered some 'private' fascist anniversary celebrations so there is a degree of ideological continuity. At the same time, Meloni has gone out of her way during the campaign to defend her mainstream pro-Western Bloc credentials, her criticism of Putin on Ukraine and her willingness to work with the European Union. To a degree Salvini is much softer on Putin, questioning the effectiveness of sanctions.

Exaggerating the imminent fascist threat is a big part of the PD's electoral playbook. Letta, the PD leader, wants the election narrative to be a showdown between Meloni's threat to democracy and progressive

ideas and his party's robust defence of them. He even tried to get the TV debates to be limited to a duel between both parties. As some of the Italian radical left media have commented this allows attention to be diverted from the PD's total support for Draghi and his neo-liberal programme. It allows the PD to avoid any examination of their contribution to the conditions which allowed Meloni to win more support. Just as with Le Pen, Meloni has won some support from the sort of working class voters that formerly voted en masse for the PD and its predecessors.

Nevertheless, Meloni does represent a real threat of a drift towards Orbán-style populist governments. Salvini recently praised Viktor Orbán's family policies as the most advanced in Europe! Along with Salvini as the new Home Secretary, she will launch a renewed assault on migrants trying to cross the sea to Italy. Like the new British PM, she will try and forcibly repel the boats. Although she is not arguing for the repeal of abortion legislation Meloni is in favour of making women's choices more difficult. In the Marche region (Ancona) the FdI governor has intervened to delay the procedure for women to decide and anti-abortion counsellors are being proposed to 'assist' the decision-making process. As prime minister, she would propose axing the citizen's income welfare payments which, while insufficient, does represent a real benefit for working people. Her coalition would support the regressive 'flat' tax that the Lega is championing. At the moment she is presenting herself as a figure of fiscal rectitude, agreeing with Draghi's budget spending limitations.

Her government would continue the steady erosion of anti-fascist historical understanding that used to be the consensus in Italy. So in answering questions about the fascist period she says that although the racial laws and political bans were wrong Mussolini did some good things. Fascist repression during the liberation war is increasingly being 'balanced' by exaggerating acts of violence committed by communists following the war in North East Italy. In 2018 Meloni declared that the celebration

of [Liberation Day](#), also known as the Anniversary of Italy's Liberation from Nazi-Fascism on 25 April, and [Festa della Repubblica](#), which celebrates the birth of the Italian Republic on 2 June, should be substituted with [the National Unity and Armed Forces Day on 4 November](#), which commemorates Italy's victory in World War I. She said that Liberation Day and Festa della Repubblica are "two controversial celebrations".

In many ways, the real threat of Meloni is how she will favour what we have identified on this site as forms of creeping fascism. Already the post-fascist hard right has captured a majority inside the right wing coalition, to the extent that [Silvio Berlusconi](#) and his Forza Italia party are presenting themselves as the moderate wing of the alliance. The political centre of gravity has moved to the right, as it has done in Britain following Brexit.

Meloni's proposal, supported by her coalition partners, for the people to elect the president – to create a semi-presidential system like in France would be a serious attack on democracy. It would require a big majority for the right-wing coalition as it requires changing the constitution. Parties with a fascist or a populist heritage obviously favour a more presidential system

One big mistake I have seen on Italian social media and TV in confronting Meloni is to sneer at her lack of intellectual qualifications, that she is not sufficiently educated to be Prime Minister. Her very appeal to a number of voters is that she does not come over like a lawyer, professor or manager, like most other politicians in Italy, even if she has been a professional politician for many years. During the campaign, she has gone out of her way to appear both as an incumbent Prime Minister and as someone who is accessible and not confrontational. In Cagliari the other day when an LGBT protester got on the stage she prevented a violent removal by security and talked calmly with him. When a single dad wrote to her about her position opposing gays and single people adopting children she agreed to go and eat a pizza with him. So far her campaigning has led to

an increase in polling support.

Salvini has accepted that if the FdI gets the biggest vote within the right wing coalition then she will get its support to become Prime Minister. This is a huge change in the relationship of forces on the right over the last few years. Salvini was seen as the front-runner before. His hamfisted manoeuvres at ending the first Conte government, his lack of clarity on Covid measures, his party's material assistance from the Putin regime and his participation in the Draghi government have all weakened his position viz a viz Meloni.

The chances of a hard-right victory in the election are greatly aided by the new electoral system which was brought in by the left of centre parties. It combines the first past the post system of 37% with a proportional system for the rest with a threshold of 3% for a single party to get into parliament. You cannot split your vote between different parties for the first past the post and the proportional contests. It obviously pays to have a strong coalition for the first past the post part. Given that there is no corresponding coalition of the anti-right wing forces then the right-wing coalition will win a large majority of the first past the post seats. The big reduction in the number of constituencies – down to 400 for the lower house and 200 for the Senate weakens democratic representation and gives minority parties even less chance of parliamentary groups.

## The Democratic Party - a prop for the establishment

Letta's PD was the most enthusiastic supporter of the Draghi government and places its campaign in the continuity of this framework. This is the poster it put out following the fall of Draghi (see right)



It reads: Italy has been betrayed, The Democratic party defends Italy, Are you with us?

The PD was so keen on the national unity government that it tried to do everything to form an electoral coalition with small bourgeois 'centrist' parties like Carlo Calenda's, Azione. To great fanfare, it proclaimed this new alliance. A few days later the engagement had been broken. Letta wanted to have a bit of a left face too so wanted the Greens, a pro-European group and one of its left satellite groups, Sinistra Italia, SI (Italian Left) to come on board too. Calenda did not want to be in a coalition with a group like SI which had opposed the Draghi government. He then jumped into the arms of Renzi, the ex-PD leader but now with his one mini group, Italia Viva.

Ironically Calenda had previously said he would never ever work politically with Renzi. But he needed the automatic entry into the elections that Renzi's party would give him, otherwise, he would have to find enough activists to collect 40,000 signatures. So this new coalition is desperately trying to talk up a so-called 'third pole'. It hopes to draw voters from the PD who dislike linking up with any left grouping to its left and to moderate voters worried about Meloni/Salvini. Currently, this group has over 6% and is only behind Berlusconi by a couple of points. Unless it gets above 10% it will have little influence, it would require the right-wing alliance to do a lot worse than expected so that a new government coalition could be put together.

Even if the current hard-right coalition wins there is still a possibility that its unity might not survive a crisis and it will be Draghi time again. Berlusconi can turn on a sixpence if it is in his interests. Unsurprisingly one of his main electoral proposals is around making it harder for the law to pursue fraudsters like him.

The PD for its election campaign has taken out of the back drawer some progressive measures that it made little effort to put forward or implement during its recent period in government. It is proposing that teachers get paid at the European average level and that there should be more investment in schools. It is also supporting laws against homophobia

and same-sex adoption.

## M5S - can the rump bite back?

With around a third of the vote and 339 MPs in 2018, the M5S seemed to be achieving its aim of removing the political caste and completely disrupting the political system. Today the rump led by Conte has 159 MPs. Its MPs have continually split off to the right and left over the last 5 years. For a party that claimed to be neither left nor right it has actually governed with Salvini's right wing and then the PD's moderate left. For a party that proclaimed it was doing politics completely differently, it soon found its MPs did not like the stringent rules on only two terms and on handing over a big chunk of your salary to the party to use as funds or to help start-up businesses. The final big split was former leader, Di Maio, who has a new party Impegno Civico (Civic Engagement) which has joined the PD coalition. If you thought these people could not sink even lower, Beppe Grillo even concocted a little show of distorted and deformed figurines of Di Maio and other 'traitors' on his website.

However, the electoral programme Conte puts forward has 'left face'. It defends and calls for increases in the citizens' income and puts forward a shorter working week. In some respects, it is as left-wing at least on paper as the PD. Several progressive people I know have said they will vote for this. Indeed the left wing and satellites of the PD were quite keen on including the M5S in the coalition. Even the radical left Unione Popolare (Peoples Union) of Luigi Di Magistris were keen on dealing with them. It does seem that the 'left' turn is having a positive effect on their polling – they are outscoring the Lega and Forza Italia with 15%.

## Is there a real left alternative?

In early July before the elections were called [Luigi Di Magistris](#), the former radical mayor of Naples came to speak



to a smallish crowd in Cava dei Tirreni where I was staying. The sound system was terrible but he did well to pitch his message about the need for a left alternative, including in elections. Luigi Di Magistris

Once the elections were called he set about organising a left coalition, modelled rather on Melenchon's French coalition which did well in the recent parliamentary elections there. The main forces are a small group of MPs called ManifestoA who came out of M5S, the remaining forces of [Rifondazione Comunista](#) - the last independent political current to the left of the PD to have parliamentary representation in 2008 - and Potere al Popolo (Power to the People), a left group formed in 2017. It finds some support too from the rank and file trade union currents (Cobas).

The first major challenge was to actually get on the ballot. You need 37,000 signatures if you do not already have representation in parliament. Given this was a snap election called over the summer holiday season this was quite a tall order. The government refused to allow digital signatures despite this becoming more used now within the notoriously cumbersome Italian administration. People also had to submit the signatures to the local authorities where they resided. Many people are on holiday in August. Some

offices were actually closed! If you include the sweltering heat this was not an easy task. Already it has been a small political victory that the signatures were collected and it shows there is a political space for such a current.

The three central planks of the Union Popolare platform are:

- build peaceful international relations, no to military spending and no to war.
- a minimum salary of at least 10 euros an hour, extend the citizen's income, stop precarious and informal work, and abolish the Jobs Act (this took away some labour rights)
- a real ecological transition through huge investment in renewables, a plan for water security, stop property speculation and the big useless infrastructure projects like TAV (high-speed rail link in Piedmont), popular control of common goods, starting with water and essential services such as health and education

As can be seen, it takes a left pacifist position on Ukraine, refusing to support the resistance of the Ukrainian people. Within the coalition, there are currents in Rifondazione which support the Donbass 'republic'. There has been some adaptation in the way demands around Covid inquiries are raised to those No Vax people and

others who saw public health measures as repressive.

What is important is that the campaign goes beyond a grouping of the leaderships of the different groups and can begin to develop a movement that can be useful and dynamic inside any opposition that will develop against the anti-working class policies of whichever government emerges from the September 25 election.

Nevertheless, the overall thrust of Union Popolare is favourable to building a fighting alternative to the PD's management of the capitalist system. We have to oppose the false argument that the fight is just with stopping the neo-fascist Meloni and therefore the only 'useful' or tactical vote is to back Letta and the PD. Unfortunately, leading writers at the daily communist newspaper, IL Manifesto, argue along those lines. Prominent members of a left-wing trade union opposition like Cremaschi also support the slate. The comrades of SinistraAnticapitalista (Anticapitalist Left) have called on people to vote for it. At the moment the polls give the UP 0.7% which suggests it will be difficult for it to get past the 3% threshold necessary to get into parliament.

8 September 2022

Source [Anti\\*Capitalist Resistance](#).

# The Taiwan Strait Crisis: Geopolitical Conflicts and the Right of the Taiwanese to Self-Determination

9 September 2022, by **Pierre Rousset**

President of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi is, in the Washington order of protocol, the third person in the state, after President Joe Biden and Vice-President Kamala Harris. Her stopover in Taiwan, on 2 and 3 August, as part of an Asian tour, therefore had

significant political weight and it was to be expected that Beijing would react.

This visit was not, it seems, unanimously approved of in the ruling circles of the United States, the general staff deeming it inappropriate

and Joe Biden choosing to show some distance [3] - which may have encouraged Xi Jinping to raise his voice by ordering, among other things, military exercises of a scale and aggressiveness a good notch higher than on previous occasions; in fact, far greater than most observers had

anticipated. Indeed, as Taiwanese journalist Brian Hioe notes, missiles were fired over Taipei, the People's Army Naval Air Forces penetrated further into the Taiwanese Air Defense Identification Zone and its maritime space. .

More significantly, Tokyo and Seoul were directly implicated. Missiles hit Japan's Exclusive Economic Maritime Zone, which the Japanese Ministry of Defence denounced as a deliberate act [4]. The Chinese Navy also maneuvered not far from the disputed islands of the Senkaku/Diaoyutai archipelago. [5] It did the same off the South Korean peninsula, in the Yellow Sea and in the Gulf of Bohai.

According to Brian Hioe, by attacking these two countries, which are very much integrated into the US military system in the region (witness in particular the importance of the US bases on the island of Okinawa), Beijing was carrying out preventive action in order to give a warning to other Asia-Pacific states willing to help Taiwan. This warning could prove premature and encourage them to stick together in the face of Chinese threats, in the opinion of the journalist Brian Hioe. [6]

On the one hand, the current crisis is more actively involved than the previous ones in a dynamic of strategic conflict between China and the United States; on the other hand, the "Taiwanese question" finds itself more than in the past at the heart of the geopolitical reconfigurations that involve all the powers of the region, including India and Japan. [7] This process of recomposition has begun, but it is far from complete. Questions of power are in fact not homogeneous throughout Asia. Although India responds "present" to the anti-Chinese front called for by Washington, it refuses to do the same towards Russia, with which it maintains deep and historic relations of cooperation. [8] Japan-South Korea cooperation is under tension, particularly given a colonial past whose memory was revived by the previous Prime Minister, the late Abe Shinzo, and an accumulation of successive treaties, as evidenced by the Japanese journalist Karen Yamanaka for North-East Asia -

namely Japan, South Korea and the USA. [9]

The fourth crisis in the Taiwan Strait has nevertheless remained, for the time being, carefully calibrated. The invasion of the island was, at that point, never on the agenda. There was no mobilization of resources and troops on a scale comparable to that which preceded the invasion of Ukraine. The Taiwanese continued their daily activities as if nothing had happened [10] Beijing quickly let it be known that its major naval air manoeuvres would end after five days.

However, although "calibrated", the exercises in early August are part of a rise in geopolitical conflicts between the United States and China, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. They probably signify that the stakes have been raised and that the era of a regional balance maintained under tension thanks to "ambiguity" has come to an end.

## **Towards the end of the status quo ante based on "strategic ambiguity"?**

Taiwan is de facto an independent state, but it has never declared itself as such, Washington carefully avoiding explaining how far its support could go in the event of an open conflict. Since diplomatic relations were re-established with the People's Republic in 1979, the United States has "acknowledged" that for Beijing, Taiwan is a Chinese province, but has not endorsed this position. [11]. The diplomatic texts leave room for various interpretations (which China are we talking about?) [12], the Chinese and English versions may differ.

For its part, in recent years, the CCP has constantly reiterated its interpretation of the "One China" policy (which has led to Taiwan being excluded from UN international institutions [13]) and maintained its territorial claims, regularly conducting routine military exercises in the Strait,

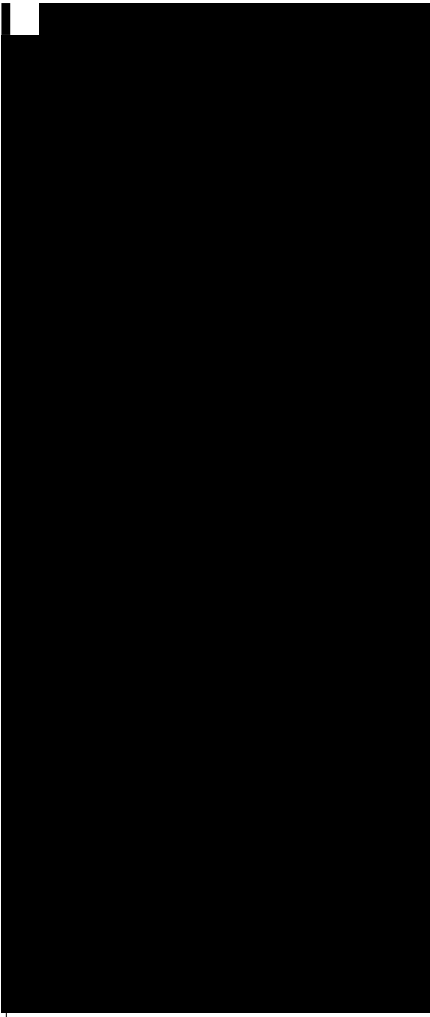
but without engaging in a showdown.

For many analysts, this policy of ambiguity retains all of its "virtues". It allows the United States to give Taiwan the means to defend itself, without saying whether US naval air forces would be committed further in the event of a conflict. In their eyes, today, overtaken by the recent events that followed the arrival of Nancy Pelosi, the hardening of the Xi Jinping regime and the discussion in Washington of the law entitled Taiwan Policy Act, the conditions for its reimplementation should for the good of all be brought together again by the governments concerned [14]. The proposal is common sense, but without wishing to prejudge the future, it would involve a real reversal of the dynamics that are underway.

Eric Chan, a senior specialist working for the United States Air Force and non-resident fellow at the Global Taiwan Institute. [15], for its part, seeks to situate the fourth Strait crisis historically. It is necessary to take with a large pinch of salt the cries of alarm regularly launched in the USA on the coming global military superiority of China, which opportunely serve the interests of the Pentagon (hungry to obtain budgetary increases) and of the military-industrial complex; but that is not Chan's point. He goes back over the succession of events since 1989 and the massive repression of popular movements in China, which have built up the CCP's feeling of vulnerability in the face of Washington: the Gulf War (1991), the third crisis in the Taiwan Strait (1996), the "accidental" bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade (1999), the Sunflower Movement in Taiwan (2014, see below) and the change of orientation gradually implemented by Xi Jinping after his accession to power (end of 2012): militarization of the South China Sea (2015), crushing in Hong Kong of the mobilizations against the law of extradition of local residents to mainland China (2019-2020) - all without paying a price on the international level, to conclude:

I believe "strategic ambiguity" is increasingly moribund for multiple





Taiwan (Harpoon air-to-sea missiles, Sidewinder air-to-air missiles, logistical support for the surveillance radar program, etc.). At the same time, Washington and Taipei have decided to enter into formal trade negotiations, with the aim in particular of guaranteeing the resilience of supply chains, especially for semiconductors. These commitments are obviously denounced by Beijing.

However, disagreements are emerging between senior military officials and President Tsai regarding the island's strategic preparation. The latter must resolve a difficult equation: to show firmness without worrying the population or bearing the responsibility for a possible escalation, while the country needs a large influx of labour to support the development of its economy and must reassure immigration applicants.

## The relevance of the anti-war struggle

It is useless to try to find out who began to upset the previous "equilibrium in ambiguity". Xi Jinping himself contributed to this, when he proclaimed loud and clear that under his presidency (therefore in the near future), the island would be reconquered, by force if necessary. The Taiwanese are today hostage to a geopolitical conflict that is beyond them. The recent Strait crisis is not the cause of the rise in geopolitical tensions between the United States and China, but rather its consequence. In this global context, the Taiwanese issue certainly retains a specific importance due to its location in the heart of an ultra-militarized South China Sea and its economic weight, like its technological success, which is out of all proportion to its size (23 million inhabitants).

From provocation to provocation, from sanction to sanction, an infernal spiral of militarization and a new arms race are engaged. Washington is sustainably strengthening its military presence off Taiwan. The Japanese government is aiming to complete its

rearmament (including nuclear) and is actively participating in major naval air exercises with the United States, which is strengthening its cooperation with Australia. China participates in Siberia in major military manoeuvres with Russia. Each power considers the actions taken by its adversary as aggressive and its own as defensive.

For its part, the Indian government has denounced the "militarization of the Taiwan Strait" by Beijing. An unresolved conflict over the delimitation of borders in the Himalayas opposes for a long time India and China, where military tension is recurrent. They are also engaged in a struggle for regional influence which is crystallized particularly in Sri Lanka. However, this would be the first time that New Delhi has intervened in these terms with regard specifically to the Taiwan Strait [16].

Not so long ago - in 2014 in particular, when Xi Jinping was already in power - Beijing and Washington had a complex relationship of competition and collaboration [17]. Seeking to predict the future is proving to be particularly uncertain today, but it is hard to see how we could return to such a geopolitical configuration now!

While Xi Jinping has made the reconquest of Taiwan a real marker of his presidency, in the United States, the bulk of the political class is united on this issue. Nevertheless, it seems difficult to predict how the crisis of regime that the United States is going through may affect Washington's policy in the South China Sea.

Taipei has become a very popular place to visit among elected American politicians, especially members of the Republican Party (which supported Democrat Nancy Pelosi's initiative). These trips can take a frankly strange turn, like that of Senator Marsha Blackburn, an avid follower of Donald Trump. She spoke of Taiwan as an independent country during a meeting with President Tsai Ing-wen (who steers clear of such remarks), a veritable diplomatic blunder, and she also went to the Memorial Hall of Chiang Kai-shek, while the host country's ruling party, the Democratic

We have thus entered a "grey zone" between war and peace, where Beijing relies on maintaining a constant military threat, rather than on diplomatic agreements, to dissuade Taipei from declaring independence. This is currently taking the form of a latent drone warfare, first with civilian drones, then military. On September 1, for the first time, Taiwan shot down a Chinese drone near Lion Island, a Taiwanese defence outpost not far from Xiamen on the Chinese mainland. A few days later, a military drone, accompanied by eight aircraft, entered Taiwan's air defense identification zone, without crossing into Taiwanese airspace.

Taipei's Ministry of Defense warned in late August that Taiwanese forces would retaliate if Chinese aircraft or ships crossed the 12 nautical mile limits. Their readiness for conflict is probably uneven. The military budget is steadily increasing (by 12.9 percent next year, for a total of \$415.1 billion). The Biden administration has just announced a \$1.1 billion arms sale to

Progressive Party, considers (with good reason!) that he imposed a particularly repressive regime of dictatorship on the island [18]

Few Taiwanese today say they want a formal declaration of independence under the present circumstances. Could the US far right be trying to strengthen the "ultra" camp? That would be playing with fire.

The conflict between what has become the second world power (China) and the established power (the United States) has entered a new phase. The question that we are posed today is not to "choose sides" in the face of such a confrontation. Its consequences will be disastrous for humanity, giving in its turn (after the invasion of Ukraine by Russia) a powerful boost to the climate crisis.

The reinforcement (where it exists) and the reconstitution (where this is not the case) of a large unified anti-militarist movement is more than ever on the agenda, with in particular in perspective the demilitarization and denuclearization of conflict zones, starting with the South China Sea. [19]

In North-East Asia (in Japan and South Korea), South-East Asia and South Asia (jointly involving Pakistanis and Indians) such movements exist. Mobilizations against global warming should, when this has not yet been done, actively integrate the anti-war dimension, the latter thus regaining in return a truly international dimension.

## The necessary solidarity with the Taiwanese

Finally, and this is not the least

important question, the geopolitical stakes must not make us forget solidarity towards the Taiwanese.

The complex history of the island is quite distinct from that of mainland China [20]. The Chinese Communist Party, at the time of Mao Zedong, recognized its independence for a long time, before this question became a key issue in its fight against the Kuomintang (KMT) (Kuomintang) of Chiang Kai-shek. [21]

In the past, the island was only very briefly and unequally integrated by a Chinese imperial dynasty - moreover, an ancient suzerainty (real or legendary) never, by itself, justifies a present territorial claim. The uninhabited reefs and islets of the China Sea were used by all the fishermen of the region and the "discovery" of a Chinese coin of venerable age (perhaps conveniently buried there by nationalist historians who unearthed it) does not change anything, does not in any way justify Beijing's "taking possession" of this entire maritime zone.

Taiwan is not a "rock" (an unfortunate expression of Noam Chomsky during a recent interview, in contradiction to comments he had previously made [22]), but a country. What matters is the *current* feeling of the people who do not see themselves as part of Xi Jinping's China. Not only do opinion polls point this out [23], but contemporary history confirms it:

When Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang retreated to the island with arms and baggage, it imposed its dictatorship on the local population. When China made its bourgeois counter-revolution, the CCP and the KMT, yesterday sworn enemies, became two complicit totalitarian parties - complicit in the oppression and exploitation of the

island population. In 2014, the signing of a Sino-Taiwanese free trade agreement sparked a student-led revolt known as the Sunflower Movement (or 318 Movement), with the occupation for 24 days of the Legislative Yuan (Parliament) and a demonstration of support by half a million people. A process of democratization was then initiated in depth, despite the repression, which finally led to the establishment of a bourgeois democratic regime more democratic than those in force in many Western countries.

Xi Jinping initially hoped to regain ascendancy in Taiwan by using KMT networks, raising the prospect of major economic gains and proposing a "one country, two systems" solution like the one that had been established in Hong Kong after the retrocession of the former British colony (1997): formally integrated into the People's Republic, Taiwan would certainly lose its sovereignty in certain important areas (foreign and military policy, etc.), but would preserve its political and legal regime, its civil Liberties. A promise that lost all power of conviction when Xi himself tore up these agreements to engage in a policy of forced "normalization" which resulted in the establishment of dictatorial control by Beijing over the "special administrative zone" (the official name of the Hong Kong territory). [24]

Unable to convince the population of the island by using carrots and a few sticks, Xi Jinping is now resorting to crude military threats. He recognizes himself, in doing so, that the Taiwanese really have no appetite for his regime!

\* What is now footnote 10 has been added for clarification 9 septembre 2022, 17:50.

## Why did Rejection win? Some Considerations on the Defeat of the New Text for the Chilean

# Constitution.

**8 September 2022, by Bruno Magalhães, Pedro Fuentes**

This question needs to be answered in the most precise way possible. The explanation for this negative result gives us a lesson, an apprenticeship in how to continue facing the coming challenges that will arise in Chile and in other Latin American countries. Certainly, this result cannot be explained by a single cause, but by a combination of them. In this brief text, we express some elements that we consider should be taken into account.

The first element lies in the character of the government of Gabriel Boric, which does not represent the aspirations arising from the popular mobilisation of 2019. It should be remembered that at a time when the people were mobilising to end what remained of the old regime, expressed in the demand for the resignation of former President Piñera, Boric voted in favour of a constitutional agreement with the right-wing in order that constitutional reform could be agreed to. The proposal for a new constitution thus born was known as the "Kitchen Pact", as the agreement was made behind the backs of the masses mobilised in the popular councils (cabildos) organised throughout the country. But, only in the first plebiscite did a majority of 80% of the voters approve the start of the constituent process and reject the proposal of the Mixed Constitutional Convention (between parliamentarians already in office and new constituent deputies), opting for a constituent assembly with more powers and which began its work from the so-called "blank page", without the provisions of the Pinochet Constitution.

During the constituent process, which had unprecedented characteristics such as gender parity and representation of indigenous peoples, the elections that brought Boric to power were held and that somehow foreshadowed last Sunday's defeat. In

the first round, the former student leader was defeated by the far-right candidate (José Antonio Kast) and his victory in the second round was directly related to the more than one million voters who had not gone to the polls in the first round.

From the formation of his government to the present, his policy has been one of conciliation with the ruling classes, without confronting them with any concrete measures (which would need to be radical) to solve the problems that Chile is going through. The government wore itself out in between an inflation rate of 13% and an increase in the cost of the basic food basket that does not take into account the value of wages. As a result, his current approval rating is less than 30%.

Consequently, his policy towards the new Constitution was contradictory, hesitant, and his support was timid. Consistent with his conciliationist policy, he expressed his reservations and, together with leaders of the former Concertación, he raised the need to make changes to its regulations. In this context, the Rejection vote is also a vote of punishment against the government for its inability; that is, it is not a conscious vote of support for the right. It should be noted that an important part of the old Concertación, including the Socialist Party, supported Rejection.

In addition, the constituent deputies that were elected did not carry out a constituent process that was attractive to the population. The election of the deputies was the result of the Chilean mobilisation process. There was a majority of voters for independents and leftists and the right did not gain even a third of the seats, a proportion that would give veto power to this camp according to the 2019 Pact.

In the country where the popular councils multiplied in 2019, the constituent process represented a disconnect with these expressions of popular organisation; those elected by the people somehow became disconnected from the people who elected them. They did not open a popular constituent process, that is, a popular consultation process with the councils of 2019, with the grassroots organisations of Chilean workers. The Chilean constitutional process searched for a course that would organise popular power, a real alternative power to the old parties of the right and the Concertación. But this was not done; discussions were confined to the constituent deputies and small sectors of the vanguard, precisely when faced with an unprecedented compulsory vote that brought more than 85% of voters to the polls, generating a negative result. This did not mean a rejection of all the advances of the new constitutional text, but rather it would have been better to prioritise those aspects closest to the working class, which would close the doors to the neoliberal model and open them for a new national economic model of the country, a concrete model.

Neither can the impact of the media disinformation campaign against the new Constitution be downplayed; it used fake news and the actions of small unrepresentative groups to set the tone of the campaign in favour of Rejection.

Despite the defeat, it is also a fact that the days of the old Pinochetist gang are numbered and that a new constituent process will soon open, in which Boric has yet again erred and marked his place in Parliament and in the parties of the regime. In order to respond to this situation, it will be necessary for the mobilised vanguard and the organisations of the working

# **Biden, Trump Trade Blows as Midterm Campaign Begins; the Left at the Margin**

**7 September 2022, by Dan La Botz**

Speaking on September 1 from Independence Hall in Philadelphia where both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were written, Biden told the American people, "As I stand here tonight, equality and democracy are under assault.... Donald Trump and the MAGA Republicans represent an extremism that threatens the very foundations of our Republic." (MAGA refers to Trump's slogan "Make America Great Again.") Earlier Biden had called their views "semi-fascism." He delivered the speech on the eve of Labor Day weekend, the date when national election campaigns begin.

Only a few days before Biden's speech, Trump had demanded that either he be made president at once, since he had actually won the 2020 election, or that a new election be held.

The former president faces serious legal threats with investigations in Georgia for interference in the election and a federal investigation into 11,179 documents 18 of them marked top secret and 54 secret that he illegally took from the White House when he left office. He could be charged with the felony of obstruction of justice. Trump has called the U.S. Department of Justice and the FBI, "vicious monsters" for searching his home. His supporters have rallied around Trump, and polls show that 40

percent of voters support him and 10 percent believe the use of violence would be appropriate to change the government.

Some 69% of both Democrats and Republicans believe American democracy is in danger. While Biden talks about saving democracy, Trump is holding "Save America" rallies attended by thousands of loyal supporters at which he calls Biden "an enemy of the state" and attacks Democratic Party candidates as socialists. Trump called Biden's Independence Hall speech, "the most vicious, hateful and divisive speech ever delivered by an American president." He added, "Republicans in the MAGA movement are not the ones trying to undermine our democracy. We are the ones trying to save our democracy. The danger to democracy comes from the radical left, not from the right."

The radical left in the United States is actually small minority, though there are more socialists in Congress now than at any time in U.S. history. All of these socialists run as Democrats. There are altogether 535 members of Congress, 100 Senators and 435 representatives, of whom five are socialists: Senator Bernie Sanders and representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib, Cori Bush, and Jamaal Bowman. In New York state, there are three socialists out of 213

legislators, and few other states have any socialists in state-wide office. In primary elections this year socialist and other progressive candidates generally lost to moderates.

The largest socialist groups on the U.S. left, the Democratic Socialist of America which claims 94,000 members and the Communist Party with an estimated 5,000 members both run candidates as Democrats. The small far-left groups sometimes call for the creation of a labor party, while others run candidates as socialists, though few are elected, the almost sole exception being Kshama Sawant on the Seattle city council. The Green Party, with an estimated 50,000 members, runs candidates on its own slate, and has elected some candidates to local office, but it has no state or federal legislators. The last Green presidential candidate, Howie Hawkins, got only 0.2 percent of the vote in 2020.

Most leftists tend to look to the building of mass movement of workers, women, and people of color as the way to defend democracy, though they will vote for Democrats. Some 15 to 20 million people participated in the Black Lives Movement of 2020, and movements such as that must become political to change the balance of forces.

*5 September 2022*



# Strikes and solidarity - hot autumn in Britain ?

6 September 2022, by **Terry Conway**

One of the notable things about the long drawn out competition between Truss and former Chancellor Rishi Sunak, the last two left standing in the race, is how little their debates had to say about the issue animating the majority of people in Britain - the galloping rate of inflation meaning that millions of people are desperately worried about whether they will be able to feed themselves and those they live with and keep their homes warm on the depths of winter.

While the Tory candidates have been vying with each other as to who can put forward the most rightwing profile and policies on foreign, social and economic policy, thousands and thousands of trade unionists in Britain have been striking to defend their living standards and conditions.

Inflation on essential goods is extraordinarily high. Petrol and diesel prices, which impact some people directly especially in areas where public transport is scarce and also impacts on other costs has been rising since last autumn. In August 2022 food prices rose by 5.5 per cent from 4.4 per cent in July, while fresh food rose 10.5 per cent. And this is in the context that the number of households [using food banks](#) in Britain had grown significantly in the last decade, reaching more than [2.5 million](#) at the peak of the Covid pandemic. And it is not only people who are unemployed who use food banks - a [number of hospitals](#) have set up food banks for staff this year as has [one call centre for staff](#) in telecommunications - in-work poverty is being normalised.

This is bad enough, but it is calamitous when it is combined with what is happening with the prices people have to pay for energy - gas and electricity - in their homes. Britain seems to have a unique system

to set tariffs for this. Since 1 January 2019 there has been a 'price cap', a ceiling on what you need pay for each unit of gas and electricity used plus a maximum daily standing charge to be connected to the grid. Many people took little notice of this until earlier this year when in April the cap rose by a massive 54 per cent. From 1 October it will rise again by 80 per cent - and from here on in will change every 3 months rather than previously every six.

Such astronomical hikes are obviously hitting those on low incomes hardest - those not in paid work or on zero hours contracts in particular. One notable point of fury is that many people - usually those on lowest incomes have devices through which they pay for energy in advance - and the rates for this 'service' is higher than that for everyone else. Another concern is the level of the standing charge which means that even if you do not use a fuel at all your bills have gone through the ceiling. Over recent months the media has been full of heartrending stories of people who are already in desperate situations before the October hike - and terrified about what will happen on then.

But as the spread of food banks shows many in work are suffering too. There are [more than 1 million people on zero hours contracts](#) and more than [2 million people](#) paid at or below the minimum wage - a level well below what is needed to live on even before inflation. Many of the [8.2 million part time workers](#), even those on reasonable hourly rates, will be finding it hard to make ends meet. But in fact many workers in what are traditionally well paid jobs are feeling the squeeze too - hence the significant rise in strike levels.

Of course, taking industrial action is

the most effective way for trade unions to defend the pay and conditions of their members. But in Britain it's a habit that many trade unions have got out of for a long time as these [statistics show](#). A major reason for this is the draconian [anti-union laws](#) that workers in Britain face, the most restrictive in Europe.

## Tory anti-union offensive

The current laws were introduced by Tory governments through six acts of Parliament between 1980-1993 - but were not repealed by Labour when they were in office either. (Indeed Blair boasted that he was happy about them.) This means that in order to strike at least 50 per cent of those eligible to vote have voted and at least 50 per of those voting have voted to strike. Further in the case of 'important public services', at least 40 per cent of those eligible to vote must have voted to support the action. There are various other hoops in terms of notice to employers - and significant penalties in terms of substantial fines to trade unions.

But while the anti-union laws present a very significant hurdle so too has the political state of the trade union movement. The Tory government led by [Margaret Thatcher](#) consciously set out to eliminate trade union militancy not only through legal changes but through defeating the strongest unions industrially as well. The [1984-5 miner's strike](#) was the most emblematic of these, but there were other important battles such as the [1986 printers strike at Wapping](#)

When Thatcher came to power 13.2 million workers in Britain were members of trade unions and by 2019



this had halved to 6.9 million. [25].

And the problem went far beyond raw numbers. The average age of trade unionists has been growing - almost 40 per cent of union members are over 50 -and the rate of unionisation amongst young people is desperately low with less than one in ten 16-24 year olds being members of a union. At the same time and not surprisingly, the level of union involvement has fallen. In the 1970s and 1980s there was a strong layer of shop stewards - elected workplace representatives - in many unions whereas that has declined since the defeat of the miners' strike. Unions have been more likely to recruit on the basis of selling insurance than workplace organising.

Young people are more likely to work on the gig economy where traditional unions are unlikely to organise - and even beyond that they have not seen unions standing up for their members. But there have been some shifts. A number of small independent unions not affiliated to the unitary TUC have built themselves over recent years by organising amongst precarious workers including significant numbers of Black and migrant members from whom their activists are often drawn. [26] A few traditional unions have also made advances - notably the big Education union the NEU who organised a major campaign to make schools safe during the Covid pandemic and in the process recruited not only thousands of new members but hundreds of new workplace representatives.

Despite the hurdles the weak state of the trade union movement overall posed by this summer, huge numbers of workers were at breaking point and a significant number of trade union leaders - some relatively new and others more established had decided that, with a zombie government focused on an election campaign and a supine opposition, the responsibility for a fightback lay with them. We have therefore seen the greatest rise in industrial action in Britain for many decades over the last few months - and the wave is far from over.

## Transport

The rail union RMT was one of the first off the blocks, calling strikes for 3 days in June across most of the individual rail companies and network rail after voting almost 9-1 in favour of strike action on a 71 per cent turnout.

Their level of fury is not surprising given that during the pandemic, rail bosses took home £1m pay packets and rail companies made in excess of £500 million a year in private profits.

As well as demanding a fair wage rise, in a situation where the employers were not offering any increase at all and where many people's pay had been frozen for two or three years, the action was also taken against the threat of large numbers of compulsory redundancies. Management try to sell this as 'modernisation'- a pattern in many of the current disputes - but while this rhetoric is repeated without challenge by much of the mainstream media it's not cutting through to undermine remarkably high public support for the dispute.

The RMT is not a huge union with around 80,000 members but has a left-wing reputation, particularly under the leadership of Bob Crow who was general secretary from 2002 until his untimely death in 2014. Mick Lynch, the current General Secretary who took office in 2021 was not well known outside the union before the dispute, but that has changed dramatically during the summer.

Lynch has been widely interviewed by the media, with many confrontational pundits hoping to undermine the union's case. In fact, they have had the opposite effect as Lynch has responded calmly and clearly. The Independent columnist who responded that "Mick Lynch has done more for workers in two days than Starmer has in two years" was absolutely accurate. [27].

One of Lynch's constant messages is directed at the Tory government who have refused to get involved in talks involving the unions and the train companies. Lynch has written to current Transport Secretary Grant Shapps, saying: "Your government has

made the decision to use taxpayers' money to bail out private train companies from being liable for revenue lost because of industrial action on the condition the same companies comply with government instructions to hold down pay, cut thousands of safety critical rail jobs, introduce driver only trains and close ticket offices across the network." He continued the union had calculated that, including the previous and forthcoming industrial action, more than £120m of taxpayers' money had been used to "bail out" private train companies to date.

But as well as trying to paint itself as a disinterested observer by refusing to participate in talks, the Tories have certainly been quick not only to attack the unions in the media but to threaten further anti-union laws, including threats from Shapps to bring in fire and rehire against the transport unions. [28]

The RMT is one of three main unions organising the rail industry. It organises people in all grades in the industry. The other unions are Aslef which describes itself as 'the craft union for train drivers' and has around 21,000 members and TSSA which traditionally organises people who do administrative jobs and has around 18,000 members. After the June strikes, the RMT announced more dates for action on 27 July, 18 August and 20 August and were joined by TSSA members on these dates. At this point Aslef was very much doing their own thing with their biggest action on 13 August. [29] Looking to the future, RMT has called strikes for 15 and 17 September. Aslef will also be striking on the first of these while TSSA has called action for 26 and 27 September.

Rail is not the only important sector in which transport workers are organised - bus workers also play a significant role. Unite, one of Britain's largest unions with 1.4 million members, organises many of them. [The union points out "Since 2009, well over 3,000 local authority supported bus services have been cut or reduced. In London alone last year, 41 routes were cut. According to the Campaign for Better Transport, some areas are losing over 50 per cent - or even 100 per cent - of their council-

funded bus services. Others are cutting all weekend and evening services. And fares are often just too high for low waged workers.”

In the middle of June [Transport for London \(TFL\)](#) – the body responsible for bus, rail and underground travel in London – announced a six week consultation over proposals to cut sixteen bus routes, around 4 per cent of the network. Unite argues this would have seen a [loss of 800 drivers](#) and would also have significantly lengthened many people’s journeys. People were particularly angry about the potential impact on disabled people and on women travelling alone having to change buses – as well as the fact that it would have increased the cost for many travellers.

The union, together with local Trades Councils [\[30\]](#) passenger groups and some local Labour activists organised a high profile campaign over the summer including a number of marches in different parts of the capital including a [brief occupation of TFL’s office](#), and a mass responses to the consultation which forced the extension of the consultation.

TFL have always argued that the cuts they were proposing to bus services – and also to underground workers’ conditions were a result of a lack of funding from central government, however they did nothing publicly to either join the campaign of workers and passengers or launch their own. This was despite the fact that prior to the pandemic central government had ended all funding to them and only provided emergency funding during that period. No comparable capital city runs a transport system without central subsidy.

On 30 August, TFL and the government announced they had agreed a [funding settlement](#) albeit one that only lasts for eighteen months and where the money of 3.6 billion does not fill the gap. The settlement has been rejected by all the rail unions and it seems unlikely that Unite will not follow suit. Certainly the huge level of support from across the trade union movement and appetite for further co-ordinated action was evident at the massive rally organised by the RMT on August 31 with

speakers from all of the transport unions. [\[31\]](#)

While Unite’s campaign to defend London buses has primarily been on the streets and amongst communities, this is not to say that the union has not been organising industrial action. General Secretary Sharon Graham has been in office [for just over a year having been elected on a platform of taking the union back to the workplace](#). Her balance sheet of that time is that under her leadership 76,000 members in dispute have won “£150 million”.

## Buses, bins, docks...

Unite is a multi-industry union, organising across many sectors which poses challenges as well as opportunities. As well as their campaign against cuts in bus services in London, [2000 bus workers took two days of strike over pay towards the end of August](#). Bus workers elsewhere in Britain have been involved in industrial action, most notably a victory by 300 [First Direct workers in Manchester](#) who won an 8.9 per cent increase plus a lump sum payment in February after 8 days of industrial action

One strategy the union has adopted under Graham’s leadership seems to have been to ballot relatively small groups of workers where enough work has been done to be confident of a yes vote – and then try to build on that to spread action to other groups in similar positions. One high profile dispute won by the union was by [Coventry bin drivers](#) who won a pay deal worth up to 12.9 per cent after seven months of continuous strike action. The settlement also saw the dropping of [disciplinary action against shop steward Pete Randle](#) – the Labour councils’ attempt at victimisation was beaten back.

Over 1,900 dock workers at Britain’s largest container port of [Felixstowe](#) [took eight days strike action in late August](#) to demand a better pay deal than the 7 per cent on the table from a company raking in profits, receiving [international solidarity](#) from dockers

on the west coast of the US. 560 workers at the port of Liverpool [will strike](#) for two weeks from September 19 over the same pay offer. Again Graham focuses on the massive profits of their owner, in this case billionaire owned port operator MDHC who made £30 million profits in 2021.

## Postal workers

Friday 26 August saw the biggest strike yet of this summer of struggle when over 115,000 postal workers took action to demand a pay rise that covers the current cost of living crisis. Postal workers also struck on 31 August and will be out again on 8 and 9 September.

This follows the Communication Workers’ Union (CWU)’s recent ballot for strike action by postal workers, which saw members vote by 97.6 per cent on a 77 per cent turnout to take action. The union points out that this was the biggest mandate for strike action reached since the implementation of the 2016 Trade Union Act. It’s the first national strike on the post for twelve years in a sector where is a tradition of local unofficial action.

Rather than negotiate with the union, the management of Royal Mail Group decided to impose a 2 per cent pay rise on its employees through executive action, those same employees who were given key worker status at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Even worse, management is claiming – and too much of the rightwing media are repeating – that they have offered 5.5 per cent. Even if it were true, it would not meet the real costs workers are facing with inflation – but in fact it’s a blatant lie. It’s true that they have made an offer of 1.5 per cent but that is strictly conditional on postal workers agreeing to changes which would rip up their terms and conditions.

This is reminiscent of what is happening in other industries – notably transport – bosses are raking in huge profits for themselves and shareholders while trying to force even the most organised sections of

the working class to work in even more exploitative conditions. This is the context in which the CWU ran a second ballot to enter into a formal dispute with management over terms and conditions. Members voted by 98.7 per cent on a 72.2 per cent turnout.

As CWU General Secretary Dave Ward said

When Royal Mail bosses are raking in £758 million in profit and shareholders pocketing in excess of £400 million, our members would not accept pleas of poverty from the company. Postal workers would not meekly accept their living standards being hammered by greedy business leaders who are completely out of touch with modern Britain. They are sick of corporate failure getting rewarded again and again.

The fact that the other major section of the union in telecoms is engaged in a very similar battle against an imposed pay award – this time a flat rate of £1500 which again represents a real terms pay cut – sees the union campaigning together – and both sections came out on August 31. And a smaller group of the union's members, working for Post Office counters, face even more intransigent management who imposed a pay freeze for 2021-22 and a completely inadequate offer of 3 per cent plus a one-off payment of £500 for 2022/23. They were on strike on Friday as they have been several times already this summer.

## Patchwork

If the disputes in transport and those organised by the CWU and Unite have those which have shifted the political situation most clearly, they have not been the only ones worth noting. From 5 September, [criminal barristers](#) – not a group of workers from whom one would expect militancy – started indefinite strike action to demand a 25 per cent increase in their fees. But successive governments have [cut fees payable](#) for criminal legal aid work reducing value of the fees paid for this work by 30 per cent in the past 15 years. The impact has been sharpest on new entrants to the profession who can expect a median income of £12,200 a year for long hours at an hourly rate of £6.40 – below the minimum wage.

There have also been a number of unofficial walkouts including by [Amazon warehouse workers](#) in a number of localities across Britain. Both Unite and the [GMB](#) union organise some workers at Amazon and the latter is apparently preparing for official action [at one site](#)

## Inspiration

One of the noticeable things about this summer's picket lines has been the number of young workers taking action for the first time, challenging both the image and the reality that trade unions are a thing of the past. At a major rally organised by the CWU one of the platform speakers commented that he felt confident that this meant the future of the trade union movement was safe in their hands.

Pickets have also been larger than I

can remember for decades – no sign that people are intimidated by the anti-union laws that officially restrict pickets to six. And they have taken place in areas where they have not taken place for decades – in one case apparently since the 1926 General Strike. This increasing militancy is important because certainly for large groups of workers battling for adequate pay settlements to beat inflation their fight is likely to be a long one.

Another positive dynamic coming in particular from the CWU has been the launch together with a number of community campaigns and a couple of left Labour MPs of [Enough is Enough](#) campaigning not only around fair pay rises for workers but around slashing energy bills, ending food poverty, a decent home for all and taxing the rich. [\[32\]](#) This initiative has tapped into a rich seam of enthusiasm caused by revulsion with Tory and bosses attacks – and a frustration with the failure of Labour under Starmer to provide any leadership with more than 300,000 people signing up within days of its launch.

Britain traditionally has been a place where trade unions by and large have left what they see as politics to the Labour Party whether in government or in opposition. Union members have been told not to take militant action for fear that this will prevent the election of a Labour government. But in the face of the depth of the current crisis, and the further attacks we expect coming down the tracks very quickly under Liz Truss, a shift from this position from at least a significant section of the trade union movement could not come soon enough.

5 September 2022

# Thousands join as Don't Pay campaign gathers steam

5 September 2022, by [Kate Bradley](#)



Christine Farnish has [recently resigned](#) as a director of the energy regulator Ofgem, saying that she 'could not support' its decision to add thousands of pounds to household bills – and that Ofgem were protecting companies over consumers (surprise surprise). Energy companies and mainstream media outlets have released vacuous posts advising people on how to reduce their energy spending. Ovo Energy has recommended that its customers [cuddle pets for warmth](#) in place of turning on the heating. None of this addresses skyrocketing standing charges, and the fact many people have already taken every step they can to reduce usage. Will we see [more people](#) freeze to death this winter?

No political party has an adequate solution to the crisis. Rishi Sunak's £400 energy discount will be swallowed instantly by October's price rises. And the discount may not even reach those most in need – the cost-of-living support payments for benefits claimants this summer have already hit a stumbling block, with sanctioned claimants [unable to receive the payments](#). Labour's leaders are only suggesting they would [freeze prices](#) until April next year – a useless suggestion since they're not in power, and their other proposed measures would be inadequate to solve the crisis. Now would be a popular time to announce plans for permanent renationalisation if they're elected at the next GE. Yet this is something Starmer has repeatedly [ruled out](#).

Campaigns and organisations have taken the lead where politicians have failed, including Don't Pay UK, a grassroots group set up in June 2022 with only a [website](#). The website asks people who pay their energy bills by direct debit to pledge to cancel payments from 1 October to hit energy companies' revenues, forcing action over rising bills.

In July, the campaign made a splash, appearing in large mainstream media outlets like the Daily Mail and Good Morning Britain, as well as spreading through union branches and social movement organisations. Tens of thousands of people signed up to the pledge in the first couple of weeks. The numbers racked up on the

website's counter, growing by the minute. The counter now stands at over 110,000 people – and that's only people that pay by direct debit. Tens of thousands more have signed up to support it despite being pay-monthly or pre-payment customers. This week, [a poll by the i newspaper](#) found that more than 70% of the public are aware of campaigns to cancel their direct debit – a tactic mainly being pushed by Don't Pay – with up to 1.7 million people saying they are 'poised' to cancel their direct debit in autumn.

This surge has caused widespread alarm in the energy sector, with Ofgem [coming out](#) to warn people against joining the campaign. Certainly, not paying does carry risks: energy companies can put a 'default' on your credit report (making it hard to get future credit); they can get a warrant to break in and install a pre-payment meter without your permission; they can even disconnect your energy. But these don't all happen within a few weeks of not paying, and there has been a lot of scaremongering. It helps to remember that the consequences are there because the energy suppliers don't want you to stop paying your direct debit – it damages their business model and cashflow. Therefore, not paying collectively has power.

Many people who simply can't pay will have no other choice but to face these consequences. Don't Pay offers them the chance to do this in a crowd, with solidarity, local groups to turn to for mutual aid, and the chance to gain a lobbying voice with the government and energy companies through the leverage of non-payment. Equally, it allows generally better-off direct debit payers to fight collectively for lower prices for everyone, including those on pre-payment meters who are already 'self-disconnecting' because they can't afford energy.

The campaign has its critics on the left. Some are understandably worried about the risks of debt, and others are concerned that the organisers who started it are not widely visible, which can lead to questions about accountability. There are always difficulties with co-ordinating mass action democratically without existing organisations to work through, and

there are always risks to effective collective action. But these problems can be overcome.

Debt advisors, despite understanding the risks, have not been universally opposed to the campaign. There are debt advisors in conversation with Don't Pay: for example, organisers have worked with a debt advisor to produce a [podcast](#) to inform people of the risks of not paying (in England and Wales), so they can make an informed decision about how to participate. A respected industry specialist at Debt Camel has been supportive on social media of the need for informed collective action. Debt advisors know better than most people what the effects of this year's price rises will be if there is no action taken to reduce them: their services are already flooded, with [3.5 million energy accounts](#) already behind on payments.

Though new pledges have slowed slightly this week, Don't Pay has moved into more face-to-face methods of organising to build in local areas and reach people who are not habitually online. Millions of leaflets have been printed and distributed across the UK. I've been leafletting in Manchester, and had an unprecedented response: dozens of passers-by taking leaflets, some saying they've already heard of the campaign, and a diverse range of people asking for piles of leaflets to distribute more widely.

There are now over 250 WhatsApps based on postcodes that have been set up by local people in different postcode areas, with over 5000 organisers in them in total. My local postcode WhatsApp group is active and engaging, and I've already met a load of new people who are working together productively – including some people who haven't done any activism before. I also understand that Don't Pay is currently building towards structures that allow it to act more accountably and collectively.

Even if Don't Pay doesn't reach the million pledges they are aiming for, the potential of the networks it's formed could be massive. Could these groups take part in direct action against debt enforcement across diverse communities? Just as one

example, if bailiffs come to fit a prepayment meter, having 20 people in your postcode who could come to peacefully resist would be amazing. This could build on the brilliant work of tenants' unions who carry out [eviction resistance](#) actions, and [anti-](#)

[raid networks](#) who prevent people from being detained by immigration enforcement.

Even without a strike, the pressure Don't Pay UK has created is driving and shaping a more energised

conversation about the cost of living. If the strike goes ahead, the potential is huge.

24 August 2022

Source [rs21](#).

# Who was, what was Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev?

4 September 2022, by **Daniel Tanuro**

Revolution is the revolutionary power of the people self-organized in councils - the "soviets". By the time Gorbachev took office, power had long been in the exclusive hands of a layer of bureaucrats who lived like capitalists.

These parasites no longer even pretended to believe in socialism: their dream was to appropriate state property and pass it on to their descendants, to complete their metamorphosis and no longer be obliged to devoutly follow the dogmas of the "Marxist-Leninist" state religion (poor Marx, poor Lenin).

This clique of old men put Gorbachev in power to try to save the system from collapse. For they all knew: collapse seemed inevitable.

Gorbachev's plan was to introduce market reforms to boost the planned economy (*perestroika*) and democratic reforms to give legitimacy to the power of the bureaucracy (*glasnost*). It was not to break up the USSR or to restore capitalism.

Gorbachev failed for a variety of reasons (Afghanistan, Chernobyl, Reagan's arms race...). The atmosphere of the "end of the system" exacerbated the clan war within the bureaucracy, one could feel the curse coming on, each bureaucrat wanted to secure their power for the future, by any means available. Centrifugal forces grew, especially at the level of the federated republics.

But the bottom line is that the monstrous system of a collectivized economy functioning (very badly) in the service of a bureaucratic caste and at the expense of the working classes was impossible to reform.

There were only two solutions: either an anti-bureaucratic revolution with the reinvention of Soviet people's power; or the re-establishment of capitalism through the dictatorship of bureaucrats completing their mutation into capitalists and joining forces with international capital. After decades of totalitarianism and lies, the first solution had become infinitely unlikely.

The Chinese Communist Party quickly learned the lessons of Gorbachev: *perestroika* yes, *glasnost* no. And above all, no democratic rights for the Chinese. And above all no democratic rights for the nationalities of the Empire!

This is how the bureaucracy managed to keep power while transforming itself and China into a great imperialist power... at the cost of an iron dictatorship exercised by a police apparatus inherited from Stalinism, which employs the high-tech methods of Silicon Valley.

Putin too has learned his lessons. Rather than Gorbachev's "naive" plan, with its "*glasnost*", in 1988-1991 he should have cut off the heads, brought the Poles, the Balts, the Ukrainians and the Georgians to heel. Send in the

tanks, as in Prague in 1968 and Budapest in 1956.

For Putin, this dictatorship should have been installed from the start, because it was the natural complement of the appropriation of state property by the bureaucracy. The transformation of the bureaucrats into capitalist oligarchs would then have taken place centrally, under the leadership of Moscow, instead of in a chaotic, savage, fragmented way in independent republics.

Putin wants to turn the wheel of history backwards (as far as his army can) to give the oligarchs the Russian empire that he believes they should never have lost. An empire based on grain and fossil fuels. This is the meaning of the war in Ukraine and it is indeed an imperialist war.

Turning the wheel of history upside down defines the reactionary fantasy. In the age of imperialism, it always has the features of fascism. This is the meaning of the ideology that accompanies the war against Ukraine. It is not by chance that Dugin is a follower of occultism and an admirer of Evola. It is not by chance that Putin's crime is blessed by Patriarch Kyrill as a crusade against gays and lesbians, those "degenerates of the West".

What about the left? It is caught up in its history, in its stories.

Those who have not understood



anything about the bureaucratic phenomenon, those who do not understand that Stalin led a counter-revolution, those who think that the Gulag, the Moscow trials and the pact with Hitler "saved communism", are very lacking today. Their flawed political software pushes them to align themselves with Putin's "camp"

Some do it openly, others hypocritically, in the name of "peace, peaceful coexistence" (you sound like the Eurocommunists of the last century!) and the priority of the social problems of "our" workers "at home" (doesn't this phrase convey anything to you?). But in both cases, the result is catastrophic: a policy contrary to the rights of peoples, to internationalism, and therefore to

revolution, is pursued while draping itself in the red-brown flag of a so-called "Marxism-Leninism". "History is our book", said Marx. Getting the wrong book is dangerous. It's like taking the wrong turn. Dangerous. Especially when you think that the Book is sacred.

3 September 2022

## Macron between raï music and gas

3 September 2022, by **Abder Raphi**

Serious matters were discussed with the real decision-makers during his three-day visit in late August. Those who repressed the *hirak*, who arrested more than 10,000 people, imprisoned more than 300 prisoners of conscience, criminalized any activity linked to the *hirak* or in opposition to the government and its policies. Moreover, when asked about the serious violations of human rights in Algeria, Macron dodged, saying that it was a problem of Algerian sovereignty and that he could not interfere, but nevertheless that he trusted President Tebboune. Indirectly, he was responding to the associations of the diaspora that had presented him with a petition. It is obvious that economic interests come before human rights, which is in the nature of imperialisms that impose their power on the world.

### Imperialist geopolitics

Macron spoke mainly about gas, security in the Sahel and a mutual appeasement in relations so necessary for France's imperialist geopolitics. Although reducing Algerian gas supplies to France to 9%, Macron knows that the war in Ukraine is changing the situation and that Algeria is becoming a very coveted country for its gas and hydrocarbons in these times of crisis. Securing his back and putting Algeria back into an

energy supply system that secures Europe is his goal with the Algerian government. The question of democracy will be dealt with later. A "renewed partnership" was signed where, behind the classic language, there is an increase in gas supplies for France in order to guarantee energy security for the winter in the face of the uncertainties of the war in Ukraine. There is no question for Macron of letting Italy supplant France in this strategic trade.

It is obvious that France does not want to lose its geostrategic influence in the region. Aware that the old continent is losing its power in the face of US imperialism, Chinese hegemonic ambitions and the imperialist awakening of Russia, Macron and his imperialist technocracy are refocusing on the old colonial empire by seeking efficiency of interests and the emergence of new elites, especially among the youth. Islamism is complicating things in the Sahel despite French military interventionism, which has clearly failed. Macron's meeting with Algerian generals, deciders in the regime, is indicative of his desire to involve them in the security management of the Sahel region, not only to counter the Islamists and their arms supplies, but above all to seek stabilizing political solutions to the crisis in Mali and the Sahel as a whole. Macron noted the usefulness of the agreements between Malians signed in Algiers following an

Algerian conciliation initiative and phagocytized by the Islamist fractions. France does not want to let go of the Sahel, a vast and strategic territory for the mineral wealth it contains, and Areva knows something about this, as it has almost exclusive exploitation rights for uranium in Niger.

### A give and take relationship

In this old colonial empire, Macron talks about the future and thinks in generational terms, but French imperialist interests cannot be satisfied with abstract elucubrations. Total (electricity), Bouygues (telecommunications) or Areva (nuclear power and renewable energy) need concrete political geostrategy to amplify their superprofits in the African continent and in Algeria. Today, African despots are seeking to empower themselves and are demanding a share of the plundering of mineral resources for themselves and their children. The liberal IMF reforms that commodify all their mineral and agricultural resources have impoverished their populations to an unprecedented level, driving them into mass migration, while at the same time enriching the African bourgeois political and social elites who aspire to control these resources in order to better "privatize" them. Class relations are coming back to the

surface in an even more violent way and this creates political instability where putschist logics and social explosions are combined.

Algeria has not escaped this scenario despite the singularity of its history with France. The Algerian generals, a journalistic term for the military-bureaucratic bourgeoisie that is organically embedded in the state apparatus and exercises a monopoly of rare violence over power, freedoms and economic and social life, participate in this France-Africa in their own way. It integrates the capitalist interests of France by offering high market shares to French

companies, but demands a return both through sufficiently identified forms of corruption and through an international legitimacy that it hopes will be reinforced by France due to the divorce of the Algerian power from its population. Tebboune seemed quite satisfied with Macron's satisfaction, whose pro-Tebbounian language did not seem to be without ulterior motives.

Macron returned home with President Tebboune's assurance of a guaranteed supply for the winter (there is talk of a 50% increase). He was assured of the "interventionist" pledges of the Algerian power in the Sahel crisis and France's tensions with Mali during his

meeting with Algerian generals (the opacity is total for the moment) and he hopes for a psychological unblocking so essential to an "appeased" relationship with Algeria. The memorial section and a few more visas will suffice. The detainees of opinion, Article 87bis, the continued trampling of freedoms, the programmed extradition of undocumented migrants to Algeria, etc., all this does not fit into the rubrics of Macron's soft power. The generals will be able to continue to repress and to... get rich under the French umbrella.

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

## **Briefer on Pakistan's flood situation and Finance appeal by Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee (PKRC)**

**2 September 2022, by Farooq Tariq, PKRC**

### **The scale of devastation**

According to the official figure of National Disaster Management Authority, floods have so far claimed the lives of 1350 people. 1 million houses are totally or partially damaged leaving behind millions in need of urgent shelter. More than 50 million people displaced from their homes.

According to Sindh government report, more than 10 million (1 crore) people are homeless only in Sindh province. Livelihoods are also being heavily impacted - more than 1 million livestock - a critical source of sustenance and livelihoods for many families - have died, of which some 63 percent are in Balochistan and 25 percent in Punjab. Around 4 million acres of crops and orchards have also been impacted, including at least 304,475 acres in Balochistan, 438,274

acres in Punjab, 35,565 acres in KPK and 2.5 million acres in Sind Damage to infrastructure has further worsened the humanitarian situation, as the partial or complete destruction of over 3,000 km of roads and 220 plus bridges impedes the ability of people to flee to safer areas or to travel to access markets, healthcare, or other vital services, and restricts the delivery of aid to people in need.

More than 1,000 health facilities are either partially or fully damaged in Sindh province, whereas 198 health facilities are damaged in affected districts in Balochistan. The damage to roads and bridges has also compromised girls' and women's access to health facilities. Provisional data from provincial Education Departments show that at least 17,566 schools have been damaged or destroyed due to the emergency: 15,842 schools in Sindh, 544 in Balochistan and 1,180 in Punjab.

### **Underlying causes of this flood**

Pakistan produces less than 1% of global carbon emissions and yet it is one of the countries that bear the worst consequences of the climate crisis. For the past 20 years, it has consistently ranked in the Global Climate Risk Index as among the top ten most vulnerable countries in the world. Pakistan and other South Asian countries are the climate crisis hotspots.

### **Impact on farms, farmworkers and their rural workers**

The most affected are rice and cotton growing areas of Sindh and South Punjab. Almost half of the country's cotton crop has been washed away.

Similarly mango orchards, red chilli farms in Sindh are also under the floods. There is 85% loss in dates. The cotton crop in Saraiki Waseeb area has been hit hard. The standing sugarcane crop has also suffered damage up to 7% due to floods, despite it being a high water-consuming crop, which shows the intensity of the disaster small farmers and Peasant communities are facing.

In many areas of KPK, specially in the cities of Swat, Nowshera and Charsadda maize and rice crops are washed away due to the flashfloods. The small farmers, farm workers and Peasant communities have lost their lands and animals. Their houses have also been swept away with the flash flood. They are living under the sky without any roof or shelter.

There could be issues on next crop sowing as well. One is land which may take more time to dry. And other is lack of resources facing small farmers as they usually use proceeds from the previous crops to sow the next. They have lost livestock and crops. They are displaced. They would need help from the government and others to invest in the next season's crop. The other issue could be demarcation of land. As with floods, these are required to be done again altogether.

## Immediate needs on the ground and Relief efforts by PKRC

Millions of Pakistanis affected are in desperate need of aid as authorities say they have been "overwhelmed" by the scale of the disaster, with the country's climate minister calling it a "serious climate catastrophe".

To ensure the provision of relief and rehabilitation for flood affectees, the government requires over Rs 72 billion. According to the initial tender assessment report, over Rs7 billion is required in cash relief, while nearly Rs 9 billion is needed to provide non-food items, and nearly Rs2 billion has to be spent on medical expenses.

Saving cattle requires over Rs 9

billion, while buying equipment to speed up the relief process nearly Rs5 billion should be in place. Reconstruction of overall infrastructure and around 82,000 homes requires Rs 41 billion, Independent Urdu reported.

Flood affectees need following ration items immediately:

- Clean drinking water
- Dry fuel such as wood, kerosene oil etc
- Dry eatables (As cooked food might perish or be only useful one time)
- Dry milk (for children) and boxes of liquid milk
- Linen sheets instead of blankets and duvets
- Stitched clothes which can be readily worn
- Plastic shoes as stitching of regular shoes is useless amid stagnant flood water
- Sanitary pads (with disposing wrappers) or cloth napkins for female affectees
- Raw food items such as rice, flour, and lentils for people stuck in homes due to flooding outside
- Dry ration such as roasted black chana and dates
- Dry fodder for cattle
- Tents

PKRC and Haqooq e Khalq Party are doing Flood relief work since 29th July 2022 and are in contact with affected communities in South Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan.

We are sending flood relief items, food rations to those who are in need of immediate assistance. Also have arranged medical camps with volunteer work by young doctors.

We need your immediate support, please send your donations to our sister organisation Crofter Foundation bank account. Crofter Foundation is a registered organisation in Pakistan.

Faternally,

**Farooq Tariq**

General Secretary

Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee

## To send donations through ESSF

The Crofter Foundation is one of the main partner of Europe solidaire sans frontières (ESSF) in Pakistan and Asia.

We transfer all of the donations we receive to our partners. The activity of our association is entirely ensured by its members, none of whom are salaried in any way. We assume our own operating costs.

### Cheques

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

ESSF

2, rue Richard-Lenoir

93100 Montreuil

France

### Bank Account:

Crédit lyonnais

Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux (00525)

10 boulevard Chanzy

93100 Montreuil

France

ESSF, account number 445757C

### International bank account details :

IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044 5757 C12

BIC / SWIFT : CRLYFRPP

Account holder : ESSF

### Through PayPal

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

### Through HelloAsso

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

Or go directly to:  
<https://www.helloasso.com/association/s/europe-solidaire-sans->

[frontieres/formulaires/1/widget](https://www.helloasso.com/association/s/europe-solidaire-sans-frontieres/formulaires/1/widget)

You can stay informed via the ESSF website-> regarding the use of the

solidarity fund.

Source **ESSF**.

# Continuity of Violence in the Philippines

1 September 2022, by **Alex de Jong**

A late surge in the campaign of Marcos' main rival, the liberal candidate Leni Robredo, was not enough to turn the tide. Over 31 million people cast their vote for Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., twice as many as for Robredo. It is true that fraud influenced the results of the general elections, which also saw members of Congress and Senate elected, but such irregularities cannot explain the gap between Marcos and Robredo.

The mass support for Bongbong is real — what needs explaining is how the son of the dictator became so popular. Since the overthrow of Marcos Sr. almost all Philippine presidents came to power as opponents of the incumbent. But Bongbong represents an unusual level of continuity. Those who wanted a continuation of the incumbent regime cast their vote for Bongbong and his running mate, Sara Duterte, Rodrigo's daughter.

## Duterte's Lethal Presidency

During his six-year term, Duterte maintained a high level of popularity. The bloody mayhem of his "war on drugs," the president's seemingly unpredictable behavior, violent misogyny and contempt for bourgeois respectability were not expressions of political incompetence, as some liberal critics thought. Rather the opposite: Duterte styled himself as an outsider to the establishment, coming to power by riding the dissatisfaction over thirty years of nominal liberal democracy in the Philippines and its inability to address concerns ranging from mass poverty to poor infrastructure.

Duterte successfully marginalized his opponents by branding them as representatives of a failed and hypocritical system that for decades failed to live up to its promises. In the words of three Philippine socialists, decades of neoliberal policies left millions "economically struggling and politically disillusioned," prompting disenchantment with the 1986 "People Power Revolution:"

"From the mid-1990s onward, a tide of resentment slowly emerged among the lower classes. Many became more sceptical of the version of events promoted by liberals, before eventually turning their back on them." [33]

After coming to power in 2016, Duterte was described by some as a "Bonapartist" figure — a political leader during, in the words of Friedrich Engels, an "exceptional period," "when the warring classes are so nearly equal in strength that the state apparatus, as apparent mediator, acquires for the moment a certain independence from the immediate (or, indeed, indirect) control of these classes." [34] Early on, it could seem as if Duterte, who engaged in populist rhetoric about the rights of working people and support for "the masses," did not represent established capitalist circles.

Duterte was even allied with the main current of the Philippine Left, the National-Democratic (ND) movement. This movement includes the underground, Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) as well as above-ground, legal social organizations and political groups.

Long before 2016, the ND movement

already cooperated with Duterte when he was mayor of Davao City. In mid-2016, Renato Reyes, the general secretary of Bayan (a coalition of ND mass organizations) referred to the newly elected Duterte as an "ally," based on "his track record and long-standing relationship with the revolutionary forces."

"It is the first time that we have this kind of an alliance with a sitting president," Reyes added. [35] The CPP used similar terms, referring to Duterte as a "friend" of the National-Democratic movement, with whom it was "forging an alliance" with great potential. [36] According to Luis Jalandoni, chief negotiator of the movement's diplomatic wing, "the relationship between the revolutionary movement and President Duterte" was "excellent." [37]

In a moment that seemed charged with symbolism, Duterte invited leaders of the ND bloc to the presidential palace where, their fists raised, they together posed for pictures. On Duterte's invitation, several prominent leaders of the movement served as members of his cabinet.

But this was not a situation in which the "warring classes" were "nearly equal in strength." Labor did not threaten capital. Since the crisis in the early 2000s, the number of Philippine workers covered by collective bargaining agreements has decreased by over 50 percent. Unionization rates have gone through a similar decline.



## False Promises

Duterte capitalized on dissatisfaction over increasing precarization by (falsely) promising to take measures against short-term contracts. Of the employed population, almost 40 percent work in the vulnerable, difficult to organize “informal” economy.

The most popular leftist candidate for Senate in 2016, National-Democrat Neri Colmenares, won almost 6.5 million votes — to win a seat, he would have needed over twice that number.

The Maoist guerilla movement in the meantime is far from threatening state power. After half a century, it is in its own words, still in the first, “defensive” phase.

It did not take long before Duterte’s alliance with the ND-left started to fray. Previously, Duterte had profited from the alliance. But once in power, he dropped his erstwhile allies, preferring to establish good relations with a stronger force: the notoriously anti-communist military.

Duterte’s populist rhetoric, such as his promise to end short-term contractual labor and his support for peace talks with the Maoist guerilla forces, disappeared.

As a relatively unknown figure on the national level, Duterte could seem to be a “mediator” in a more limited sense — not between capital and labor, but between different capitalist factions. However, it became clear that the supposed “outsider” in fact had strong relations with powerful representatives of the political establishment such as former president (and current member of Congress) Gloria Macapagal Arroyo as well as with the Marcos dynasty.

A few weeks after Duterte’s election, charges of fraud against Arroyo were dismissed, and a few months later Ferdinand Marcos was buried at the national cemetery, fulfilling a long-standing wish of his family.

Duterte’s regime was in many ways similar to that of previous presidents, rather than a “Bonapartist” regime or a dictatorship in the mold of that of

Ferdinand Marcos Sr.

Not only do Philippine presidents already have extensive powers, Duterte’s continuing high approval ratings meant he had no use to institutionalize a dictatorship or raise the autonomy of the executive branch to unprecedented new levels, a Philippine socialist remarked.

One thing that distinguished the dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr. from Duterte, historian Vicent L. Rafael writes, “was the former’s penchant for imprisoning his political enemies.” [38] There were about 70,000 recorded incarcerations under Marcos Sr. The number of political prisoners under Duterte was much lower.

Rather than mass arrests, Duterte used intimidation. The arrest of a high level critic, as Senator Leila de Lima, was an exception that was successful in intimidating others. And rather than closing down news-outlets like Marcos Sr. had one, Duterte used targeted legal harassment against a prominent journalist, like Maria Ressa. Walden Bello’s arrest in early August shows that the new Marcos regime will use similar methods.

Many of the techniques that Duterte used to strengthen his hold on power were similar to those of previous presidents. The left, the ND movement prominent among them, was targeted for repression. Duterte denounced legal activists as members of the underground CPP and hundreds of progressive activists have been killed.

Supporters of the Philippine section of the Fourth International also became targets, and several comrades were killed. [39]

The use of “red tagging” was not unique to Duterte nor was his use of death squads. During her presidency in the early 2010s, Gloria Arroyo used such tools when her position seemed to be threatened.

To maintain power, law expert Tony La Viña remarked, Duterte “weaponized the law and Congress, using legal instruments to justify moves to stifle critics. Duterte has also succeeded in packing both the House

of Representatives and the traditionally independent Senate with his allies, who voted on bills and resolutions based on his wishes.” His predecessors used similar techniques; “Duterte, obviously, did it better by being more ruthless. That’s really the difference.” [40]

Of the promises he made, Duterte only really held to one; to organize large-scale killings. This is the essential difference between Duterte and his predecessors. There were some 3,257 extrajudicial killings during the Marcos dictatorship. The number of such killings under Duterte is much higher — the victims of the “war on drugs” number in the tens of thousands.

The first victims were supposedly drug-users and dealers, but it did not take long for activists and government critics to also become targets. The threat of being included on one of the public lists of so-called “drug personalities” became an effective tool of intimidation.

It is a sign of the state of bourgeois democracy in the Philippines that these levels of state-sanctioned violence did not require Duterte to make radical institutional changes, let alone declare a dictatorship.

## Transferring Power

In an article published shortly after the elections, Philippine scholar and activist Walden Bello also pointed to disappointment with liberal democracy as a driving force behind the elections of Duterte and Marcos.

“Though probably inchoate and diffuse at the level of conscious motivation, the vote for Duterte and the even larger vote for Marcos were propelled by widespread resentment at the persistence of gross inequality in a country where less than 5 percent of the population corners over 50 percent of the wealth.

“It was a protest against the extreme poverty that engulfs 25 percent of the people and the poverty, broadly defined, that has about 40 percent of



them in its clutches.” [41]

This resentment is an important part of the explanation, but also raises especially the question why many of the poor, who have little to gain from the continuation of neoliberal policies, voted for Duterte and Marcos specifically.

Structural, constant poverty and the lack of a credible progressive alternative can lead to widespread feelings of resignation, and the search for an outside force, such as a benevolent leader, that can provide help to people whose back is against the wall. Hopes for such aid are often coupled with fear of instability that would upset an already precarious balance.

For an under- and unemployed sub-proletariat, which lacks reserves or means to defend to itself, and without experiences of collective power, any kind of instability first of all appears as a threat. Duterte and Marcos played on such feelings of despair and lowered expectations by promising a paternalistic, caring leadership.

The election of Marcos Jr. was hardly his own, personal achievement. It was not the election of a person “but a clan that has regained power,” as Pierre Rousset writes. [42] The election was the outcome of a project that lasted for decades.

The first steps of the Marcos dynasty back towards the presidential palace were taken in the nineties when the widow of the former dictator, Imelda Marcos, ran for president. Imelda, a skilled political operator, lost but her campaigns ensured that the Marcos name remained visible.

Respectable bourgeois politicians joined Imelda’s well-financed campaigns, helping the Marcos dynasty to rid itself of the stigma associated with the dictatorship.

With the help of billions looted during the dictatorship, the Marcos dynasty rebuilt its powers as members of the family were elected to regional and national seats.

Even the ND left played a small part in enabling the political career of Marcos Jr. In 2010, Marcos Jr. successfully ran

for Senate as part of a coalition that also included the ND movement. [43] The campaign provided the picture of Marcos Jr. sharing a platform with people who had been political prisoners under his father.

On Facebook and Twitter, bots, influencers and trolls harass critics of Marcos & Duterte, spread incredible stories about their accomplishments, and present the dictatorship as a golden age of the Philippines. The scale and reach of this disinformation machine shows there is considerable money and organization behind it.

Related to the role of the wealth of the Marcos dynasty is also the role of patronage. A practice rooted in the colonial past, patronage “provides an idiom for articulating demands from below” with “clients of whatever social class having traditionally called upon those in power to live up to their obligations.”

These “patron-client ties, bound by reciprocal obligations but also prone to disruption, reinforce social hierarchy and ongoing inequality between the two parties, narrowing the chances for popular democracy.” [44]

As the highest ranking patrons in the country, Philippine presidents use such ties to maintain the support of politicians by doling out jobs, positions, money.

Usually, these ties fray as a presidents near the end of their terms and clients look for new patrons. Duterte did not escape this dynamic, but much of his network was transferred to the new top-patron.

As Philippine socialists pointed out, “local leaders would not have risked their own positions had they not sensed that the ground was already shifting beneath their feet and that Bongbong was on course for a landslide.” [45] Duterte opened the door for Marcos Jr. His violence and intimidation helped further marginalize the opposition. Patronage, disinformation, widespread social despair and his association with Duterte brought Bongbong to power.

## The Left and its Options

A majority of the left-wing forces, from progressive liberals to socialists (including the ND-bloc), supported the campaign of Robredo. Robredo, who has a background as a human rights lawyer and whose personal integrity is recognized by many, was seen by some as someone who could not just be a “lesser evil” but be pushed towards some progressive reforms. For other left-wing activists, supporting the liberal candidate was a necessary emergency response to the prospect of a Marcos returning to power.

For yet others, most prominently the ND-movement, supporting one bourgeois candidate against another is their standard approach. The NDs and their activist networks are useful for candidates looking to mobilize people in the streets, and the mass-meetings of Robredo’s campaign would probably not have been so successful without them.

Still, it seems that the liberal camp had not forgiven them for their earlier support for Duterte and the ND candidates were treated rather coldly. In the 2022 elections, the ND bloc lost over half of its seats.

Only one opposition candidate was elected to the senate: Risa Hontiveros of Akbayan, a social-democratic group that has become closely associated with Robredo’s Liberal Party.

A part of the radical left took a different approach. The 2022 elections saw the first openly socialist presidential campaign in the Philippines, that of trade-union leader Leody de Guzman, with Walden Bello as his running mate. [46] Their campaign also endorsed a number of senatorial candidates, including Neri Colmenares and Risa Hontiveros.

The goal of the campaign was to bring “a revolutionary perspective to public attention” and build “the political and organizational infrastructure that will be needed to make such initiatives sustainable.”

Considering the difficulties facing

such an initiative, there were some positive signs. In 2016, running for Senate, Walden Bello gained a little over one million votes (2.41 percent). This year, socialist Senatorial candidate Luke Espiritu won almost 3.5 million votes (6.21 percent), while Neri Colmenares retained most of his support. It should be taken into account, however, that voters can choose 12 different senatorial candidates.

The campaign did bring socialist ideas and proposals for structural change to a national platform. But the results of 0.17 of the vote for De Guzman, and a similar result for Bello's vice-presidential candidacy must have come as disappointments for many of their supporters.

To move forward, there needs to be an open debate on what strategic orientation socialists should take. In any case, many of the forces that came forward to support Robredo will be essential to building a credible left-wing opposition.

## What to Expect?

It is too early predict what a Marcos presidency will look like in detail but we can expect a "Dutertismo without Duterte." Going by recent statements, the "war on drugs," having fulfilled its function, will at least for now be dialled back. Any hope for justice for the victims or punishment of the perpetrators will be in vain, and the "war" can be re-started whenever the president deems it necessary. We can expect the repression of progressive activists to continue.

The economic re-orientation towards China of Philippine capitalism, started before Duterte but gathering speed during his term, will also continue. During Duterte's term, Chinese investments were encouraged, and China's importance as a foreign market as well as foreign investor in the Philippines is rapidly growing. [47]

The Philippines remains a peripheral capitalist economy, exporting raw resources, agricultural products and some low-value-added goods, while much foreign investment goes to land speculation and low-wage sectors.

The growing economic ties with China will for the foreseeable future be combined with military and political links with the United States. Maintaining such links is a priority for Washington, which will ignore human rights violations by Philippine presidents in return for their allegiance. Inside the Philippines, U.S. support is also still seen as the only credible counter-weight to China's deeply unpopular encroachments on Philippine rights in the South-China Sea.

In the article cited, Bello looks forward to "millions realizing they have not been led to the promised land of milk and honey" when they see that Marcos is unable to meet their expectations. But that Duterte similarly broke his promises was not held against him. Duterte successfully blamed his failures on bureaucratic obstacles and especially on obstruction by his political rivals.

Will Marcos, like Duterte before him, be able to turn disappointment into his

advantage by directing it against his rival? Marcos has the advantage that compared to Duterte he made few concrete promises to begin with.

Will he succeed in keeping his capitalist allies united and rule through control of the existing institutions, or do away with the institutions of bourgeois democracy?

With such widespread support, a weakened opposition, and much of the capitalist class united behind him, the latter option does not seem necessary for Marcos Jr.

With a discredited political center, a left that is not seen as a credible alternative by many of the poor and oppressed, and widespread support for authoritarian politics, the Philippines offers a political landscape that is hardly unique in either the Global North or South. More peculiar for the Philippines is a tradition of widespread social resistance and extensive activist networks.

The position of Marcos Jr. seems secure — just as that of his father in the late seventies. And yet, some years later, he and his father needed to be evacuated from the country by the U.S. Air Force.

The same structural problems that brought Duterte and Marcos to power could be their undoing. But for these problems to stop producing monsters like the Marcoses and Duterte, much work in political organizing and building a socialist alternative will be needed.

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