



## IV573 - October 2022

# The Economy Key as Midterm Elections Approach

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

In some ways, the U.S. economy is strong, with the unemployment rate of 3.5 percent near historic lows and employers continuing to hire. Though it is also true that a couple of million workers, mostly men, have not returned to the workforce since COVID declined. While employment has been strong, the inflation rate of 8.2 has undermined workers' purchasing power. Rising food, fuel, and housing costs are affecting both the middle and working classes. In response, workers are organizing.

The latest Gallup poll says that today 68 percent of Americans approve of labor unions, the highest figure since 1965, giving unions a new buoyancy. Union have won more representation elections than at any time in the last twenty years, bringing more than 40,000 workers into the unions, though in 2021 total union membership still continued to decline. The two most visible organizing campaigns—Starbucks and Amazon—continue. Over 6,500 workers at 250 corporate-owned Starbucks stores have voted to unionize, an impressive achievement, though there are altogether 15,444 Starbucks stores with about 350,000

workers. The Amazon campaign, however, suffered a stunning defeat this month at a plant in Albany, New York that employs 950 workers, losing by two-to-one.

Union organizing has been accompanied by an uptick in strikes among fast food workers, Starbucks employees, nurses and other health workers, school teachers, university teaching assistants, and many others. Among office workers in the private and public sectors, while there are not many strikes, there are tussles between bosses and workers over returning to work in the office. After more than two years of working at home via Zoom, many workers are resisting returning to the workplace, demanding hybrid arrangements—a couple of days in the office and a few at home each week—or simply working from home.

COVID has had lasting effects on the working class. Sixteen million people of working age in the U.S. suffer with long COVID and between 2 and 4 million of them are unemployed. Nationally COVID cases are not rising at the moment, though 350 people still die each day, but public health officials are concerned that only 14.8

million Americans have gotten the latest booster, leaving the rest vulnerable. Then too, there are new variants that are causing concern about a possible COVID surge this winter. Many federal programs to help those with COVID have ended.

As the country has recovered from the last waves of COVID, the social movements have not been very active, with the exception of the women's movement. Over the past spring and summer, little was heard from Black and Latino movements despite or perhaps because of the increasingly difficult economic situation. The Supreme Courts Dobbs decision that overturned Roe and ended federally protected abortion rights drawn a new generation of women of all races into activism to protect reproductive rights. Much of that energy has been directed toward the mid-term congressional elections to prevent the Republican Party from outlawing abortion nationwide.

Unfortunately, the uptick in labor activism and the new fight over abortion are not big enough yet to affect politics.

*23 October 2022*

# The Crash after the Sugar Rush

30 October 2022, by **Ashley Smith, Michael Roberts**

**The mainstream media is filled with stories about inflation, stagnant growth, and the danger of global recession. What is the state of the world economy from the advanced capitalist ones to the developing and underdeveloped ones?**

The major economies are slowing down fast after post-COVID “sugar rush” recovery of 2021. They are now heading towards a new slump in 2023, caused by falling profitability (record profit margins in 2021 are now heading south). This will reduce investment growth. At the same time, global supply chain blockages still remain much higher than before the COVID slump. That means inflation that took off after 2020 and was accelerated by Russian invasion of Ukraine and sanctions by Western states will not subside to anywhere near pre-COVID levels for some time, if ever.

Central banks in their attempt to control high inflation by hiking interest rates and tightening money supply are causing a collapse in property prices, increasing corporate and public debt servicing costs and so will induce an investment slump. The strong dollar is spreading that collateral damage to the rest of the world, in particular to the poor underdeveloped economies of the so-called Global South, which now face rising dollar debt costs, falling revenues, and collapsing currencies.

**Adam Tooze recently wrote an op-ed in The New York Times that described the crisis of global capitalism very well. But he seemed to have little explanation for it. What is causing the current stagflation? Is it just the result of Covid and disruptions of supply chains, or something deeper?**

This is crucial. It is not enough to know how a crisis in capitalist

production has developed, but most important, why. Otherwise, we cannot gauge what will happen and whether another can come along. Capitalism as a mode of production is failing to develop the productive forces necessary to meet the needs of billions on this planet, and yet is also cumulatively beginning to destroy the ecosystem of the planet itself.

Investment growth in better technology, public services, and basic goods and services has been slowing for decades. Indeed, since the global financial crisis the major economies have been in what I have called a Long Depression, characterized by low investment and productivity growth, driving stagnant real wages for the majority. Only the very rich have gained (hugely) from the speculative booms in financial asset and property that has replaced productive investment.

But those bubbles are now beginning to burst. The COVID slump damaged the major economies irreversibly: trend growth since COVID is lower than before the pandemic, and in turn, the ten years before the pandemic had slower growth than before the global financial crash. There is what economists call hysteresis in the major economies, or if you like, an economic long COVID.

The brief economic recovery in 2021 is quickly fading and economies are returning to a slump that would have happened in 2020 without the pandemic intervening. Only this time, the recovery has been accompanied by accelerating inflation to 40-year highs. So, only a severe slump will cap and reduce inflation rates. Central banks seem determined to apply the shock therapy of tight monetary policy to achieve this.

**Specifically, what is the Marxist explanation for inflation and inflation today? How does it differ**

**from other explanations?**

The mainstream economic explanations are basically two-fold. The first is that too much money is chasing too few goods; to use monetarist Milton Friedman’s aphorism; “inflation is always a monetary phenomenon.” The second is that rising inflation is caused by rising costs, in particular when labor markets tighten so workers can force up wages. Then a wage-price spiral ensues. This is the Keynesian explanation. The monetarist theory blames money and central banks, the Keynesian blames workers. But both theories are wrong theoretically and empirically.

Throughout the period from the 1990s to 2019, inflation rates stayed very low and even fell and yet money supply and credit growth rocketed. That is the lie to the monetarist theory empirically. Rising inflation in the last two years is not due to rising money supply growth—on the contrary, the latter is falling. The monetarist theory makes a fundamental theoretical error is assuming that money drives prices, whereas it is the other way round.

The wage-cost theory has also proved empirically incorrect. In the 1970s, unemployment rose and workers lost bargaining power, but inflation rocketed. The so-called Phillips curve that supposedly found a correlation between low unemployment and high inflation was falsified. It is the same now. Many economies have had very low unemployment (at least officially) and yet up to the COVID slump, inflation was also very low. Indeed, central banks struggled to get inflation rates up to their targets.

So, what is the Marxist explanation for inflation? It must start with looking at what is happening to value in a commodity. The price of a good or service is made up of the use of machinery and raw materials (what

Marx called constant capital) and creation of new value by labor in production. Capitalists are engaged in the accumulation of capital (profits), so they are continually trying to reduce the costs of labor (wages) by the introduction of technology that is labor-shredding.

But in so doing, that tends to lower the growth of new value relative to the total price of a commodity. So, price inflation tends to slow over time. But other factors come into play. First, the prices of raw materials can rise sharply (that has happened now). And second, the monetary authorities can vary the amount of money supply in an economy. The latter can counteract the tendency for slowing new value growth to lower inflation rates and increase money prices.

What that tells you is if economies go into a slump, new value growth will slow to zero or fall—so deflationary. And if the monetary authorities also continue to tighten, then inflation rates will drop away. We shall see.

**In your explanation of the current crisis, you argue that it is the product of an underlying crisis of profitability, a drop in the rate of profit, which leads to low investment in the real economy. This sometimes confuses people who point to the fact that corporations are sitting on large amounts of money. Others claim that this is the result of price gouging that boosts corporate profits. What is the difference and relationship between profitability, the mass of profits, and price gouging today?**

Huge profits have been made by very large companies, particularly in energy, tech, and media. And there has been what some call “price gouging” by companies that have monopolistic power like the energy majors and utilities. But for the vast majority of companies, competition is fierce in their markets and the rising costs of raw materials and now interest rates are eating into their profitability.

So, when we read about the huge profits of energy, tech, and media companies, particularly in the US,

these are the minority. Average profitability (relative to capital invested) is near seventy-year lows. Already some fifteen to twenty percent of companies do not make enough profits to cover their debt servicing costs—we can call them “zombie companies,” the living dead of corporate capital.

It is most important not to assume that inflation and profit rises are primarily due to price gouging or monopoly fixing, as that suggests that if we capped prices and broke up monopolies, capitalist production could proceed smoothly and inflation-free. Such measures like price caps may appear temporarily beneficial to working people, but capitalist crises would not disappear, and the cost of living crisis would continue.

Only public ownership and control, not just of “natural” monopolies but also of the major strategic companies and financial institutions, within a plan for investment, employment, and climate control, can achieve the end of inflation without a slump.

**One of the points Tooze makes is that the uncoordinated hikes in interest rates are putting the world at risk of a major recession. How much of a danger are we in? And could a more coordinated approach to monetary policy avert that danger? Is such coordination even possible?**

Uncoordinated hikes? So, it would be okay if they were coordinated? I think not. Rising interest rates globally, driven by falling bond prices and central bank interventions is in a sense already coordinated as each country must follow the other or see a collapse in their national currencies.

A recession would not be avoided by coordinating monetary policy unless it were to stop and reverse these rises. The so-called Plaza Accord in 1985 where it was agreed to reduce the strength of the dollar had little effect on the economic growth of the major economies. And such an accord is not very likely now.

If there were to be coordination, it should be over a global plan for investment, climate control, and

poverty reduction. And there is no chance of that.

**How are the interest rate hikes impacting different sections of the world economy? What are they causing in the advanced capitalist countries? What impact will they have in the Global South, especially the most indebted ones? Are we headed for massive sovereign debt crises yet again?**

Many underdeveloped “emerging” economies are already heading into debt distress and default (Sri Lanka, Zambia, Pakistan). The IMF is expecting lots more of their credit to be dished out over the next year, putting many poor countries deeper into debt and under the fiscal discipline of the IMF.

This can only mean even more austerity for these countries. But such a situation is also likely to apply to advanced economies as governments cut back on post-COVID spending and try to reduce rising debt levels, both private and public.

**You have argued that we are in a long term global depression characterized by recessions and weak recoveries followed by weak recoveries. One of the reasons for this is how states have propped up uncompetitive corporations, the so-called zombies, with low interest rates and bailouts. In the late 1970s, Paul Volcker’s sharp interest rate hikes eventually tamed inflation and triggered the long neoliberal boom but at an enormous price of bankruptcies, unemployment, and a massive debt crisis throughout the Global South. Could the central banks do that again and through such so-called “creative destruction” open a new round of capitalist growth?**

The “creative destruction” or “shock therapy” of the Volcker kind in the late 1970s was avoided in the global financial crash of 2008. Indeed, the then-Fed chair Bernanke adopted the opposite policy of expanding money supply and credit to the capitalist sector to bail them out (he has just been honored with a so-called Nobel prize for this).

After that, companies were drip-fed near zero interest credit alongside low inflation to enable them to grow—but grow very slowly. A long depression replaced “creative destruction.” By 2019, a new recession was pending. Now, in 2022, credit injections are not on the agenda; on the contrary, given high inflation. Instead, central banks are looking to apply “shock therapy” to inflation.

**It seems like the structures of global capitalism that have developed under the hegemony of the US during the neoliberal period are coming undone. Both problems in global supply chains exposed by Covid and increased geopolitical tensions, especially between the US and China as well as Russia, are leading to states and companies retreating from globalization as we have known it. Is this true? Is the drop in world trade temporary or is there an emergent pattern of blocification of the world economy developing?**

Mainstream economists are divided on whether “globalization” is over. By this term, they mean expanding world trade without tariffs and quotas and increased financial investment globally. But since the global financial crisis, world trade in goods has grown slower than GDP growth (which has been slow enough), while capital flows globally, particularly to emerging economies, have dropped off.

Some argue that globalization of services trade will replace this and so globalization is not dead. I don't find

any evidence that the much small services trade sector can replace declining goods trade, especially with the US-China tensions and trade barriers increasing and sanctions against Russia and Iran etc. likely to accelerate not decline.

The Great Moderation and period of globalization look over. That means more intense rivalry and conflict, not just in trade and investment. As Marx said, capitalists act like brothers against labor, but like hostile and squabbling brothers among themselves.

But globalization in another sense is alive and kicking; namely, the imperialist bloc led by the US is applying new measures to weaken any resisting forces and nations that oppose the interests of the bloc. The imperialist bloc is coming up against increased opposition from resisting powers that are not prepared to accept US hegemony. But I am not sure that this will mean a coordinated opposition bloc. The opposition still seems very disparate.

**Finally, the most powerful states and their central banks' policies will have a devastating impact on workers and oppressed nations. This seems like class war and old fashioned imperialism. What should labor movements and oppressed nations be demanding now? What should the left be agitating for in the short term and long term?**

In the short term, we must fight

against the rising cost of living. We must support trade union battles, the only defenders of workers in their workplaces. We must fight for a decent living wage and for wage rises to meet inflation rates to sustain real incomes at the very least. We need to oppose all interest rate rises and further measures to cut government spending on services and welfare and/or raise taxes for the majority.

Inflation can be controlled and reduced if we have control of the banking sector and strategic sectors of the economy. We need to replace the market in energy etc. with democratic state planning for social need, for climate control, investment in technology and proper jobs.

We need to end all the destructive wars that we have seen in the Twenty-First century in Iraq, Afghanistan, Ukraine, sub-Saharan Africa; and more to come perhaps in central Asia. Not only does this mean the loss of lives and livelihoods of hundreds of millions, but it is also a massive waste of resources and a huge hit to the environment.

So: no cuts in living standards; no cuts in government spending for the people; no more wars; for a planned publicly owned world economy democratically controlled by the institutions of the people and not by profit-making billionaires and the capitalist market.

28 October 2022

Source: [Spectre](#).

# **“The slogan ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ seeks to bring people together for equality and freedom”**

## **29 October 2022, by Diego Moustaki**

**Can you introduce yourself and tell us about the collective you are**

**part of?**

I am Iranian. I arrived in France five

years ago and I am part of the feminist, queer and anti-capitalist collective that was spontaneously

formed at the time of the revolt in Iran a little over a month ago. On 19 September, three days after the death of Mahsa Amini, we gathered in front of the Iranian embassy in Paris to show our solidarity and to make the voices of our sisters and brothers heard in the streets of Tehran and also in Kurdistan.

**So it's a very spontaneous collective. Can you tell us how you learned of Mahsa Amini's death? What was your collective reaction, your individual reaction?**

The morality police had been behaving very, very violently for a long time, especially towards women but also towards all people in the public space. They were always controlling the way people dressed. There were already many events broadcast on video where women were violently arrested and ordered to dress according to the dress code. This time, not only was there violence, but the death was clear, and Mahsa Amini's family opposed the official version of the authorities. The majority of the population does not support the police of the Islamic Republic who control dress and private life. The population has been subjected to this for decades, and the anger built up over 43 years has exploded.

It was the women first of all who expressed their anger and their demands for freedom of movement over their bodies. Beyond the symbolism of the veil in the Islamic Republic and the uprising, the movement is spreading to the point where we talk about a revolution...

This regime is a set of repressive behaviours, it is a tyranny towards women, gender minorities, ethnic minorities. We talk about minorities not only because of the numbers but because they are minoritised. They don't have a place and are always subject to repression justified by religion.

The resistance that is taking place here, which was very spontaneous at the beginning, is beginning to be organised.

On 19 September, we took part in a rally in front of the Iranian embassy in

Paris, then a few days later at the Place des Innocents towards Châtelet, and in a feminist action called by an international feminist group called "Feminists for Jina". This was a performance-type action. Then, on Sunday 9 October, the demonstration on Place des Fêtes brought together at least 2,000 people. What is important is that this demonstration was called by a coordination of left-wing and feminist groups. Because, on the same day, at the same time, at the Trocadero, a demonstration was held for Iran with very ambiguous slogans and this was recuperated by the royalists and the right-wing parties who declare themselves to be opposed to the Islamic Republic today.

**In the resistance that is taking place today in France, but also in Britain and Germany, what weight and responsibility do you have to maintain a left-wing and anti-capitalist resistance?**

For us, the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom" has something very progressive about it. The people who are currently fighting in the streets of Tehran are giving their lives for this. We also hear the slogan: "No to tyranny, no king or [spiritual or religious] leader". This is another voice from Iran that has nothing to do with what the parties that want to take it over are saying.

The latter present themselves as the legitimate alternative to the Islamic Republic in the event of the victory of the current revolution, whereas they have ideas that are opposed to the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom", which is a progressive slogan, which seeks to bring people together in favour of (wage) equality and freedom. In addition, in previous uprisings, there were trade union movements of workers, teachers and public transport drivers: a succession of struggles in different sectors in Iran. Today, it is a feminist cause that is starting, but all these movements are linked.

How can this royalist party declare itself the alternative to the Islamic Republic, which has a history of repression against workers and under whose regime there was total inequality among the Iranian

population? The royalists were against the revolution, especially in 1979. For them, the idea of revolution is a left-wing idea that leads to anarchy and destabilizes the country, helping separatism. So there is a need to mobilize and show ourselves against this kind of party.

It is frightening! 1979 must not happen again. At the time, there were several left-wing parties that fought to overthrow the monarchy and then it was the Islamists who regained power and repressed the parties that had overthrown the monarchy. We do not want yet another monarchy.

We who know the history of the Iranian uprisings, the political history - from the constitutional revolution [editor's note: in 1905] to the 1979 revolution - as well as the history of the struggle of women in Iran, which is more than 170 years old, feel responsible and committed to defending our values so that there is no going back after a revolution.

**What are the perspectives for the mobilization in France? How can we establish links with Iran?**

Concretely, we are still in the phase of filtering the internet. Iranians have become experts in VPN. We try to keep links with our comrades and our families. We try to give them tools; they make videos, observations in their cities and in their neighbourhoods. There are many networks that come together to complement this work of information from Iran. We try to be connected to this independent network rather than to the big media.

**How can you be reached here in France?**

We are a small and recent team with limited resources. If there are isolated people looking for a collective to defend their values, they can reach us via a Facebook group called "Coordination des groupes de gauche et féministes". We also have an Instagram group: "leftistfeministcoord". They can contact us via these pages or follow us. For future actions, we thought it would be useful to identify ourselves more clearly and state what our



principles and values are and make them available to people. To raise some money for our mobilisations, we are planning to organise an event in a lecture hall and to set up a fund,

because for the moment our funding comes from our personal funds. We are planning a new demonstration because it is here that we can have the freest political speech, and it is

also a support for the struggle in Iran.

28 October 2022

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

# Twentieth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party: the tipping point

28 October 2022, by **Pierre Rousset**

The tipping point can also be understood in a more general sense. Under his previous terms of office, Xi Jinping's China benefited from exceptionally favourable conditions for its growth and international expansion, to become the second biggest world power, far ahead of Russia. That is changing. It was at the heart of the market globalization that is flatlining today and is not recovering from the blow of the Covid-19 pandemic. Out-of-control inflation and financial instability raise fears of a full-blown recession. The United States is back in the Asia-Pacific after a long period of impotence in this region. The inter-imperialist conflict is sharpening on all terrains, including that of high technology (semiconductors). In this context, internal tensions are becoming increasingly difficult to manage.

Nothing indicates, at the end of the 20th Congress, that Xi Jinping has taken the measure of the problems, while he is busy consolidating his grip on the state. The ability of the regime to steer economic development has long been an important asset in China's take-off. However, the new political regime shaped by Xi now risks proving to be a dangerous handicap.

## Internal monolithism

Deng Xiaoping's reforms initiated in

the 1980s and 1990s aimed to engage post-Maoist China on the capitalist road by ensuring the "bourgeoisification" of a section of the bureaucracy and, on the other hand, by providing the country with a stable political regime, for the benefit of the elites. Collegial functioning at each level of leadership and the regular renewal of governing bodies would, *inter alia*, prevent the concentration of power in the hands of one man.

During his first two terms, Xi Jinping worked to establish a governance that was opposed on every point to that which Deng had promoted [1]. The 20th Congress of the CCP was an opportunity to complete what can be called a political counterrevolution in capitalist China. Xi is beginning his third term as head of the CCP, whereas previously no one could remain in office for more than two successive five-year terms. While placing his relatives in key positions, Deng was content to be chairman of the Central Military Commission. Xi is chairman of the commission, party secretary-general and president of the People's Republic.

With seven members, the Politburo Standing Committee is the core of power within the CCP. It traditionally had to incorporate a minimum of factional pluralism and the designated successor to the Secretary General. The question of succession does not arise, since Xi intends to ensure other mandates - he now wears the habit of a triple Number 1 for life.

Li Keqiang sat (without weight) on the standing committee as Prime Minister. He has not been renewed. He is close to Hu Jintao, the previous general secretary of the CP - the same Hu who was (apparently without his consent) pulled from the podium by two men in black during the closing session of the congress - a rather strange sight in a ceremony where everything is meticulously organized. Moreover, Xi wants to marginalize in the country's governance the administration (another counter-reform) that Li embodied. Although the party's pre-eminence had previously been assured, the plurality of centres of authority gave flexibility to the system and allowed the people to address more than one interlocutor. The authority of the party must henceforth be exclusive.

Xi Jinping's main rivals have been asked to retire and are not being reappointed to the new 205-member central committee, which has been renewed at 65 percent. Usually, the age limit for election to a party leadership is set at 68 (Xi is 69 and is preparing to live for many more years at the head of the CP). Wang Yang (67) was nevertheless ousted despite being chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (a body composed of "democratic parties", i.e., categorical fronts of the CCP, which allows informal exchanges); For Beijing watchers, he was considered too liberal economically.

However, we must be careful not to

rationalize factional conflicts within the party apparatus too much. These are often struggles over power rather than orientation. Or at least we must avoid raising them to a confrontation between “reformists” (Li Keqiang, Wang Yang and so on) and “conservatives”, expecting the former to fight the latter. The hopes placed in Deng Xiaoping to democratize the country for the benefit of the population proved dramatically illusory with the bloody repression of social movements in 1989. Since then, three blocs have formed around General Secretaries Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping. None ever questioned the dictatorship of the party over society or considered the possibility of an organized political opposition, even if the first two could tolerate individual dissent [2].

Xi’s peculiarity is to have purged the rival cliques or factions, as he purged the army and the secret services. The 20th Congress was an opportunity to complete his stranglehold on the party-state apparatus.

## The liegemen

The list of the seven new members of the Politburo Standing Committee shows how personal loyalty to Xi is what matters most to reach the holy of holies. In addition to Xi Jinping, it includes, in order of protocol:

**Li Qiang** (63 years old). Party secretary in Shanghai, a metropolis that has been the springboard for many national careers, he enters for the first time. Particularity: it was under his authority that the especially brutal and rigid implementation of the Zero Covid policy had disastrous economic consequences and provoked strong popular resistance. A notorious incompetent, but no matter, he is a familiar companion of Xi (he was with him in 2004-2007 in the province of Zhejiang of which Xi was then the boss).

**Zhao Leji** (65 years old). A linchpin of the police state that has put its powers at the service of Xi. He headed the party’s main anti-corruption watchdog, the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, and headed the Organization Department, which

oversees the appointment of all senior officials.

**Wang Huning** (67 years old). A former academic, he is Xi Jinping’s chief ideologue, his advisor on ideology, propaganda and international politics. A follower of “neo-authoritarianism”, he advocated a strong and centralized state to counter foreign influence and opposed the principle of collective leadership (defended by Deng).

**Cai Qi** (66 years old). Party secretary in Beijing, his entry into the standing committee came as a surprise to Beijing watchers. He was a leading advocate of Xi’s “Zero Covid” policy and oversaw the 2022 Winter Olympics.

**Ding Xuexiang** (60 years old). Little known to the public. Xi Jinping’s confidant, he was his political secretary in 2007 when the latter led the party in Shanghai and followed him, becoming private secretary and gatekeeper when he took over as head of the country.

**Li Xi** (66 years old). A long-time member of Xi’s inner circle. He rose through the ranks of the party in various provinces. He is now party leader in Guangdong (where Canton, Guangzhou is located), being responsible for the development of the Greater Bay Area, Xi’s master plan for an economic power that integrates nine Chinese cities with Hong Kong and Macau.

When it comes to personal power, Xi Jinping is often described as a new Mao Zedong. This is a misreading. Not only do they belong to two different historical eras, but the team that came to power in the CCP in 1935, during the great retreat of the Long March, was not made up of liegemen, far from it. Mao was able to bring together proven cadres, strong personalities, often at the head of army corps, from various backgrounds. Several of them had even opposed him in the multiple factional battles that had torn the CCP apart.

## Constitutional enthronement

Constitutional changes have been introduced to further elevate the personal status of Xi Jinping and his “thought”. The congress approved amendments, including the “Two Establishments” and the “Two Safeguards,” aimed at placing Xi at the heart of the party and his political thought as the underlying ideology. Criticizing Xi or questioning the validity of his speech becomes an attack on the Constitution!

Xi’s cult of personality has reached delusional heights, like Mao’s at the dawn of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1969). The resolution adopted at the November 2021 plenary meeting of the Central Committee already affirmed, concerning Xi, that the present times represented “the most magnificent epic in the history of the Chinese nation over millennia,” with “socialism with Chinese characteristics [having] entered a new era” since he came to power. That his “thought is the quintessence of Chinese culture and soul” and his presence at the “heart” of the party “is of decisive importance (...) to promoting the historical process of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”

At the origin of Mao’s cult was the desire to oppose a Chinese authority to the cult of Stalin, which was used to regiment the Communist International, but once one has such a weapon in his hands, one also uses it to settle scores or strengthen his hand in factional struggles, whether they have a political content (they often did have at the time) or not. As for “thought”, Xi’s is not a continuation of Mao’s. Although he never managed to learn a foreign language and did not travel as so many Asian revolutionaries did, Mao read what he found in translation, and was exposed to multiple intellectual, Chinese, regional or Western influences. His official works are rather boring, but many internal party documents were made public during the Cultural Revolution and are much livelier. Not being a sinologist, I hesitate to venture into this field, but some

consider that he had a conception of history imbued with Taoism; he was always convinced that societies evolve only under the impact of their internal contradictions and therefore of social struggles. Invoking contradictions can obviously lead to better or worse, as illustrated by the story of the Great Helmsman.

## Masculinism

The Standing Committee of the Political Bureau did not include any women; this remains the case. However, since 1997, there was always one in the PB (and even two, for a short time). A quota system had been established requiring the presence of at least one cadre at all lower levels of leadership, which contributed to a small but steady flow of female candidates.

Today, the Politburo (24 members) is entirely male, Sun Chunlan, known as the Covid Tsar, was neither re-elected nor replaced. According to "Guardian" journalist Emma Graham-Harrison, in more than 70 years, she was one of only three women to have risen so far in the party apparatus on the basis of her own activity, without being the wife of a powerful man or a "propaganda tool"! [3] However, it was rumoured that another woman would be integrated into the Politburo (the names of two candidates were circulating). On a list of 205 members of the new voting central committee made public on 22 October, there were only 11 women.

The CCP has nearly a hundred million members, but less than a third are women, and this proportion declines at every stage of the hierarchy. When Xi Jinping began to systematically crack down on civil society organizations, he specifically targeted feminists who yet posed no danger. In general, Xi's hardening of power is accompanied by a truly reactionary evolution on so-called social issues. To increase the declining fertility rate, he exerts pressure on young people who resisted his injunctions. Under these conditions, it is feared that reproductive rights will one day be called into question. As Graham-Harrison concludes, quoting a lecturer "One thing that is safe to say is that

without women leadership, women's issues will be underrepresented."

## Problems remain

Xi Jinping has been re-elected but the problems facing his regime remain.

Two figures illustrate the extent of the socio-economic transformations during the previous period:

- China and the United States account for more than half of the world's billionaires, with 1,058 for China (32.8% of the world total) and 696 for the United States (21.6%) [4].
- The same applies to companies in the Fortune Global 500 (2020). In the lead, China with 124 companies (24.8% of the total) followed by the United States with 121 companies (24.2%). [5].

China's internal economic dynamism is exhausted if we believe the following data, partly taken from an article by journalist Helen Davidson. [6]

- *A fall in gross domestic product growth.* After doubling from 2012 to 2021, growth is slowing sharply to the point that, for the first time in thirty years, it has been lower than that of the Asia-Pacific region.

- *Social inequalities.* During the same period, according to World Bank figures, gross national income per capita also doubled to \$11,890 in 2021. Last year, the CCP said it had eradicated absolute poverty in the country. Nevertheless, income inequality remains high and the Covid outbreak has had many implications for Chinese workers, especially those migrating to cities far from their home villages. As the level of social protection is very low, households are led to save as much as possible. The structural unemployment rate has exceeded 5% since 2019. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, in 2019 it reached the record level of 19.9% for the 16-24 age group.

- *The crisis of the real estate market.* The real estate sector has captured a large part of investment. According to economist Mary-Françoise Renard, in the strict sense, it represents 14% of GDP, but 30% if we include the sectors concerned upstream (cement

or steel for example) and downstream (decoration, furniture). [7] There is a great deal of interdependence between these sectors, which weakens them in the event of difficulties. That is precisely what is happening today. Urbanization and the need to own property in order to marry have stimulated demand, but also encouraged speculation and overproduction. The housing crisis has profound social consequences: many people have invested their savings in buying apartments that may never be built or in new cities that will remain phantoms. It is affecting the entire financial sector and a debt crisis is looming. The national government or local governments sometimes intervene massively to prevent the bankruptcy of developers, but this does not solve anything in substance.

- *The demographic crisis* is taking shape in China, as in much of East Asia. Despite all its efforts, the government has not succeeded in reversing the downward trend in birth rates. By 2021, it fell to its lowest level in 61 years, with young people denouncing the high cost of living, unequal gender roles, stagnating career prospects and a lack of maternity services. Fewer and fewer people are getting married every year.

## Inter-imperialist conflicts

Joe Biden's Asian refocusing and Russia's invasion of Ukraine are bad news for Xi Jinping. It is not possible to elaborate on this issue in the context of this article, but the period of triumphalist expansion of Chinese power seems to be over. Xi has failed to get Putin to bend his hard-line policy which risks having significant consequences for Chinese influence in Eastern and Western Europe.

The Philippines, after the return to power of the Marcos clan, is strengthening its ties with Washington. In the South Pacific, Beijing had signed a strategic agreement in the Solomon Islands - they nevertheless joined the so-called "American Partnership for the Pacific" initiative on 20 September in which fifteen states in the region are already participating, including the Cook



Islands and Papua New Guinea [8].

Despite considerable investment, China is unable to catch up in the key area of high-end semiconductors. Joe Biden is now doing everything to prevent him from acquiring or developing certain advanced technologies. However, the degree of

interdependence of economies remains such that the Sino-US “rift» is not self-evident. The transnational companies of the Western bloc take a very dim view of the strengthening of the political control exercised by Beijing on investment, but do not want to reduce their profits by relocating their production to the United States as Biden demands.

Xi Jinping has broken all channels of cooperation with Washington, including on health and climate change – areas that should escape the logic of confrontation between powers. His “thought” does not go so far as to assimilate two of the major crises threatening our world.

## One-Man Show Disrupted by a Nobody

26 October 2022, by **Au Loong-Yu**

What was dramatic was that halfway through of the last day of the congress Hu Jintao, the former president of the country, was seen unwillingly led away to the exit of the hall, leaving a lot of puzzles behind. The [BBC reports](#) that:

The two most likely reasons for his departure are that it was either part of China’s power politics on full display, with a leader representing a former time being symbolically removed, or that Hu Jintao has serious health problems.... However, if he was led away at the end because of ill-health, why did this happen so suddenly? Why in front of the cameras? Was it an emergency?

On Monday 24th, a further [news update](#) showed that before Hu Jintao was led away, his files were taken away by Li Zhanshu, the former member of the Standing Committee of the Politbureau. When Hu tried to take back his files Xi Jinping called someone to his side and talked to the latter. Soon Hu was escorted away. This showed that the official explanation for Hu being escorted out of the hall was because he was unwell was untrue.

### Reform from above always a myth

Certain liberal/neo-liberal dissidents, domestically or abroad, once argued that there was a struggle between the “reformist faction” and “conservative faction” within the CCP and put their hope of change on the former. Although without much proof, they put their hope in this or that party leader, for instance, Hu Jintao, only to be bitterly disappointed afterward.

After Xi Jinping took power in 2012, some continued to seek salvation in the premier Li Keqiang, but Li exhibited no signs of fighting against Xi. Despite this, when the Taiwan newspaper United Daily News [reported](#) in this August (soon withdrawn) about a supposed “insider’s news” that while Xi would get his third term as president of the country and also as chairman of its Military Commission, Li would be promoted to the post of party secretary. This suspicious report again raised hope among many, but soon got disappointed again.

At least since 1989, we see no circumstantial evidences that serious political factions have formed within the party leadership. Political factions would require a more coherent ideology or agreement over basic principles. In contrast, there have always been cliques around individual leaders, and because of this there

must have been differences in approaches, but these are not political factions, at least not yet. Cliques fight among themselves for power or over certain decisions yet to be made.

There have been three most powerful cliques since 1989, each grouped around a successive top leader; Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping. It seems that, however, they have no serious difference over one basic principle among themselves – the party must tighten its screws over the whole nation further in its rapid rising up, even if some of them, in different periods, might opt for a slightly more dovish version.

Whereas the two predecessors of Xi might tolerate, in practice, individual dissidents (as long as they are not very well known), Xi’s more hawkish approach went so far as to ban this as well. Regardless the small differences, all three share a consensus of never allowing an organized opposition to exist, either realistically or potentially, because this is the first prerequisite of their Orwellian state.

### Xi’s red gene and his blue blood cronies

Xi’s third term does signify new development however. The congress passed the Resolution on Party Constitution amendments according to

which “the congress resolved that another amendment, which enshrined “developing fighting spirit, strengthening fighting ability”, be added to the constitution. The resolution further elaborated the point saying:

By adding this point, it would encourage the whole Party’s historical self-confidence...and helps to pass down its red genes.

The term “passing down the party’s red genes” had already been used multiple times in the past ten years by the party or Xi himself. This congress reiterating the same term signifies a dangerous trend, since 2012, is now finally consolidated by Xi’s third term – the “second red generation” taking over all power by building an autocracy around Xi.

Xi began his first term in an unfavourable situation compared to his predecessors. Both Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao were appointed as top leader by two very powerful leaders, namely, Deng Xiaoping and Chen Yun, in that order (with Chen nominating Jiang and Deng, Hu). It is this which earned Jiang and then Hu the CCP’s style of “legitimacy” – being blessed by Deng or Chen.

Xi, in contrast, was selected as Hu’s successor, for the first time, by 400 top party leaders in 2007 because by then both Deng and Chen were long dead. According to a Japanese reporter from the Asahi Shimbun (well known for its connection to insiders news in China), Hu invented this CCP-styled “election” with his agenda to get Li Keqiang elected as top leader, but was sabotaged by Jiang Zemin who got enough votes for Xi instead. Jiang’s success was based on Xi’s special advantage over Li however – Xi is the “second red generation”, hence genzhengmiaohong (which basically means “blue blood”), while Li is not.

How far this is true is unclear, but what we do know is that after the fall of the Berlin wall the most reactionary old leading cadres had tried very hard to pass their power to their children,

with the pretext that only this measure could enable the party to survive in a period when the Soviet bloc was collapsing, claiming the “children of the revolutionary cadres would never betray their parents”. Their plan worked quite successfully.

In 2007 the “second red generation” and their cronies (themselves not necessarily blue blood) first succeeded in transforming themselves into a “revolutionary aristocracy” and “kingmakers”. Since 2018 they further succeeded in overthrowing the rule laid down by Deng Xiaoping that the top leader of the nation could only serve two terms.

With the 2022 party congress they, through Xi’s dictatorship, are now able to grasp all power in the country, at the expense of other ruling cliques. If there is one single moment which symbolises this event, it would be the moment when ex-President Hu Jintao was shown the door of the congress hall, unceremoniously bundled out by officials.

Forget about all illusions of “gradual reform from within the establishment”. Xi will only further deepen and refine the Orwellian state. From his perspective, this is even more necessary now the economy is encountering serious problems. Any democratic transformation has to come from the toiling classes. Yet, with such a level of state control it is very difficult for social protest to rise up and to sustain itself. The severe lockdown under Covid pandemic which resulted in widespread violation of basic human rights (like locking up people in their own homes), and the fear of repression in general, has also created a very depressed mood across Chinese society.

## Peng’s one man protest

But this Congress will go down in history forever with a single person protest as its backdrop,. It was another and earlier moment which symbolizes the people’s hatred against Xi and his red gene buddies. On the morning of 13 October, Peng Zaizhou, or Peng Lifa, staged a one-man protest

at the Sitong bridge in Beijing (see [report](#)). He is reportedly a science and technological worker.

He hung two banners over the bridge, one with the words “We want food, not PCR tests. We want freedom, not lockdowns. We want respect, not lies. We want reform, not a Cultural Revolution. We want a vote, not a leader. We want to be citizens, not slaves,” The second banner was even more radical, calling for “boycott of schools, strikes to oust the dictator, traitor Xi Jinping.” He called for a day of action on 16 October. Nothing happened on that day, rather he was arrested on the day of his protest.

On top of hanging banners he also posted a detailed “action program” and a “toolkit” for political actions. He called for a “non-violent and popular colour revolution” – not to topple the CCP regime but to oust Xi Jinping. His ambition was that a reformed government would do the following:

- introduce party democracy to allow the election of party leaders
- implement (national wide) universal suffrage
- restrict the power of the government
- lift the ban on organisation political parties
- disclose officials’ personal assets and saving
- protect the market economy

Peng makes reference to Liu Xiaobo and his “[Charter 08](#)”, showing he is following in the footsteps of Liu’s liberal programme. What is different from Liu is that the latter was never keen on agitating for strikes and widespread social protests. In general, after the crackdown on the 1989 democratic movement, both the liberal and the “new left”, although bitterly opposing each other, shared the common ground of rejecting the working people as the agent of social change altogether. Instead they saw social protest as dangerous in general so reform must come only through the party. This leads both sides to see themselves as merely lobbyists of the CCP.

Liu was a bit different because he went on to publicly campaign for a liberal/neo-liberal transformation (prioritising “market reform” over the struggle for democracy however) and

because of this he was jailed and later died in prison. Liu had not publicly agitated for national strike to bring down the top party leader - this difference between the two men makes Peng quite special.

Calling for strikes and public attacks on the top leader are very serious crimes in China. Demanding the disclosure of officials' personal assets is also a slap on the face for Xi - he was just boosting his "overwhelming victory" on eradicating corruption to the Congress. Peng's demand for the disclosure of officials' personal assets would expose Xi's hypocrisy - isn't this measure a more efficient way of getting rid of corruption than executing corrupt officials?

## Voices from below

Peng himself must have prepared for the worst to come to him when he started his plan of action that day. But what is worth attention is not only this brave act. Once the pictures of his banner was posted in social media (the only outlet where the public could voice out now, even if they only last a very short period of time), it was echoed by many netizens. Soon the support for him was further spread to Hong Kong and other parts of the world, where college students, especially those Chinese overseas students, began to reposting Peng's banners.

All these actions of re-posting Peng's slogans ended in a few days. Below are three online posts from people on the Mainland that are worthwhile quoting at length:

**Qianfenghugang:**

This valiant effort is excellent, but not many people will response to his call and take to the streets....I am now studying in a college, people around me do nothing but focus on their lessons provided by the communist bandit university, and play online games when they are free. Take the lock down in the campus as an example, they are frustrated by the lock down, but no one came out to protest. People

who did that, or just sending letters to the president of the university's email address (to complain), would be punished....

The communist bandits use examination as a measure to control the students there - who do not have much free time to concern about the social events. People may break the campus regulation, or act against the counsellors there, but the campus and the counsellors have the power to punish them as well..... I am not interested in the curriculum, and I hate the campus's highly repressive way of management, and every day I have been thinking of all kinds of things in relation to China. If ever there are people willing to mobilise and charge, , against the tower offline (acting against the authorities in real life - Au), I will come out in support of them.

**Piaoliushhe:**

He (Peng) is not the first person.... to demand freedom. Several months ago there were big charges against the tower in Shanghai, Zhejiang, Yiwu and Wuhan. They were all eventually brought under control, but these will not be the last. The rapid economic downturn is visible, and the instability entails expensive cost to maintain stability, and there is always an upper limit to this kind of spending. For those who want to resist, do so. For those who do not have the courage to resist, they can at least tangping (literally "lying flat", a popular counter culture in relation to the official ideology, for instance boycotting the life style of working hard to climb up the social ladder—Au), refuse to comply, decline to consume and to work hard, refuse to get married and have children, so as to accelerate the collapse of this rotten society.

**Fameidebaozi:**

I am in despair about people like Li Keqiang (former premier) and Wang Yang (former member of the Standing Committee of the Politbureau). Surely we should not have cherished any stupid hope in anyone inside the Communist party in the first place. Anyone wants change must bleed oneself to do it..... My previous stupid idea is simply a joke.

## A reactionary clique promoting 'modernisation'

Xi boasts of his success over controlling the Covid pandemic and vows to continue his zero Covid policy. It is true that Covid is under control. The party is good at delivering results if by results you mean imposing control - it is a control freak. It has perfected its tools of social and political control since 1949, and they have now been upgraded to a 21st century digital version.

Yet it also faces a dilemma. Its commitment to industrialisation and modernisation allows it to significantly improving its grip over the country and enrich itself from this. But on the other hand the same process is raising the cultural level of the country, empowering people to communicate immediately over great distances, allowing a bigger proportion of people to be increasingly aware of the crimes of the party. Since the lockdown over Covid even the middle class is beginning to question the legitimacy of the party.

Another dilemma the party now faces is that its modernisation project is led by a ruling clique which still carries strong pre-modern political culture - an incredibly arrogant top leader and slavish conformism for all those under him (of course never a "she"). This constitutes the best recipe for making great mistakes.

Take the lockdown policy as an example. Xi's success in 2021 has long turned sour. Lockdown should only be the first step in dealing with a pandemic. It is meant to buy time for

the invention and mass production of an effective vaccine, and to earn the trust of the public. In these two endeavours Xi failed miserably. Managing a modern society without unnecessary pain and social cost is much more complicated than imposing control, but the former is something that Xi is ignorant of.

Now his overdoing of the lockdown has resulted in the backlashes of widespread discontent, no wonder

Peng's first slogan "we want food, not PCR tests" won the heart of many people.

A second backlash is that when more and more countries have been opening up after vaccinating a great majority of the population, China still closes its door. The fact is that the domestically produced vaccine does not work well, and people do not trust the party. Even if Beijing chooses to open up

China in the future this could be dangerous to people's health. On the other hand, continuing a zero Covid policy will further hit the economy hard. But Xi and his "second red generation" continues to believe in their omniscient. Precisely because of this, China is now entering the most dangerous period.

25 October, 2022.

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

## A new "pink wave" in Latin America?

25 October 2022, by **Franck Gaudichaud**

There was a rather long period of a "golden age" of these progressive governments, with social advances facilitated by a very favourable economic context, which made it possible to have policies of redistribution of extractive rents (minerals, oil, agribusiness) without radically challenging the power of the dominant classes.

We then entered a very harsh period marked by coups d'état and institutional coups or even by the return of the right through elections, and a brutal rise of reactionary and conservative forces. It also sanctioned the strategic limits of the progressive thrust, of "reforms from above", in a context accelerated by the collapse of the Bolivarian process due to external sanctions but also for internal reasons ("Bolibourgeoisie", corruption, rentier economy, etc.).

Since 2018, we have witnessed a return of what some refer to as a moment of "late progressivism" with the election of Lopez Obrador in Mexico and, in the process, the return to power of left-wing Peronism in Argentina. embodied by Cristina Kirchner. In Bolivia, we saw the return to power of the MAS (Movement towards socialism) in 2020 with new figures and a clear electoral victory against the reactionaries. We can also cite Honduras and the surprise election of Pedro Castillo in Peru. This

dynamic has been reinforced by the important election of Gustavo Petro, rather on the centre-left, and his running mate Francia Marquez, very committed in particular to the struggle of the Afro-Colombian community from which she comes, in a country dominated by one of the most violent oligarchies on the continent. The future of this "late progressivism" is also obviously being played out in the elections in Brazil in October, where Lula is in a favourable position after the first round, but also where Bolsonarism appears to be well implanted in broad sectors of society and in the structures of the state.

It should be noted that this new period is taking place in a very degraded setting, marked by the pandemic, high inflation, the impact of climate change in the Americas and a deep economic crisis (with "extreme" cases such as in Haiti and Venezuela ). It is also characterized by the resurgence of popular movements: in 2019, there were major mobilizations and uprisings in Chile, Colombia, Haiti and Ecuador, mobilizations with multiple factors, often interclassist, very powerful and radical, where feminist movements, indigenous movements and radicalized youth have occupied an important place. This youth is at odds with a whole part of the political system, with parties, whether right or left, as evidenced by a record

abstention rate of more than 50 per cent in several countries. These ruptures "from below" nevertheless find it difficult to emerge politically, in the absence of large anti-capitalist organizations capable of fueling them and offering outlets (as the Chilean experience has just reminded us).

It is a context of turbulence, where the right and the far right are on the offensive, often allied with the conservative current of the Evangelical Churches, with the big landowners and big business, with the support of a media field totally under the orders of capital. State reaction, repression and arbitrariness can also be embodied in *sui generis* forms, as is the case in Nicaragua with the Ortega clan .

In the background, an inter-imperialist confrontation is also playing out, which is gaining momentum, between the United States, which remains the "master" at the geopolitical and military level, and China, whose economic presence is in full expansion.

Translated by International Viewpoint from [L'Anticapitaliste](#) - magazine n°139, October 2022.

The text is based on a video interview made at the NPA Summer University and available in full on the Youtube channel of L'Anticapitaliste.



# First wave of mobilization around wages in France

24 October 2022, by **Léon Crémieux**

Inflation and the cost of living have clearly become the first concerns of the working classes and the population in general, with firstly the explosion of energy bills, but also food prices, rent and all basic necessities. And through these mobilizations, once again, the reality of French capitalism has been illuminated.

## Total Energies

It was the TotalEnergies group that crystallized popular anger in this period, for several reasons. This group emerged from two nationalized companies (Elf and Total) privatized in 1994. It is now the biggest French company in terms of turnover but hardly ever pays corporation tax in France, having paid nothing since 2019. Developed with state support since its inception, it is the fifth largest company in the world in the energy sector, one of the main contributors to GHG emissions, with an international development policy that accommodates the Putin regime, dictatorships such as Burma and devastating projects for the environment and populations such as the oil project on the shores of Lake Albert, with a 50° heated pipeline through Uganda and Tanzania and the deep water gas exploration pipeline off South Africa. All this while it claims to be developing exclusively towards renewable energies.

It has largely stood out for its superprofits: 18.8 billion euros in the first half of 2022 (multiplied by 3 compared to the 1st half of 2021), while the 70% of employees who use a car to go to work have seen fuel prices increase by 20% since January 2020. It also emerged that Total CEO Patrick Pouyanné had seen his salary increase by 52% in 2022. Champion of French capitalism, the company has also paid

out around 2.62 billion euros in exceptional dividends this autumn and its boss will receive 1 million euros in dividends in 2022. And many CEOs of the CAC40 companies far exceed the 5.9 million of Pouyanné, including Bernard Charles (Dassault Systèmes) with more than 44 million euros received in 2021, or Carlos Tavares (PSA / Stellantis), with 19.5 million euros!

In any case, the remuneration of the bosses of the CAC 40 doubled between 2020 and 2021 to reach 8.7 million on average and Pouyanné has become the symbol of a system where each crisis sees inequalities worsen and the “trickle-down” of the wealth produced goes from the exploited to the exploiters. And the salaries of the big French bosses are often much lower than those of their German counterparts, 15.4 million (+83%) on average for the bosses of the Dax (the German equivalent of the CAC 40). In England, 13.5 million euros (+143%) for the 100 FTSE bosses.

## The day of 29 September

As a reminder, in a note of 23 September from DARES, the Ministry of Labour announced that over one year, the basic monthly wage “had increased by 3.1% for the tertiary sector, 3.0% for industry, and 2.6% for construction”. And therefore, with inflation “#in constant euros and over the same period, [the basic monthly wage] fell by 2.9%, 3.0 % and 3.4 % respectively for each of these sectors (tertiary, industry and construction).”

Similarly, for civil servants, with an increase of 3.5% in the index point (which is used to calculate remuneration) in July 2022, the total

increases from 2010 to 2022 were 4.7% in the face of cumulative inflation of 20.4%. – a 15.7% decrease compared to the 2010 wage!

29 September was a day of national strike action, with a strong mobilization especially in energy, nuclear power, transport, national education, car manufacturing, agri-food and social services. The CGT trade union federation demanded a minimum wage of 2,000 euros gross, wage increases at the level of inflation, the reintroduction of the sliding scale of wages, the indexation of wages and pensions to inflation and real wage equality between women and men. Solidaires, another federation, had a similar platform. A more precise translation in many strikes of wage increases and no bonuses, of 10% or better 300 to 400 euros for all wages.

Demonstrations were much more numerous than the previous days of January and March 2022. The unions announced 250,000 people in the streets.

From 27 September, the employees of five Total and two Exxon refineries went on strike. A very well supported strike at more than 70%, called by the CGT, the biggest union federation in the refineries at Total and Exxon followed by the FO federation among the 3000 operators, for increases of 7.5% at Exxon, 10% at Total. The strike was renewed every day by general meetings of the strikers and became the reference point for the movement for wages. This renewable strike movement had been prepared by the union, a member of the FNIC (National Federation of Chemical Industries), an oppositional union in the CGT affiliated to the WFTU (World Federation of Trade Unions).

Faced with the issue of wages and the

refinery strike, the government tried to play several cards. First, saying that large companies and Total in particular should negotiate increases. Exxon agreed to negotiate and on October 10 obtained agreement from the CFDT and the CGC for a 5% general increase and a 3,000 euros bonus. Stuck on an inflexible position (no negotiation before November for the 2023 obligatory annual negotiations (NOA), then no new negotiations without stopping the strike), under pressure from the government, the management of Total advanced the 2023 NOA. On 14 October, it obtained the signing of an agreement by the CFDT and the CGC, which had never called for a strike. Finally, the management granted 5% on 1 November plus a bonus of at least 3000 euros and 2% individual measures. The striking operators and the CGT have rejected this agreement and continue the movement.

Refiners have the ability to block supplies to depots and gas stations. In a few days, partial paralysis set in and the management of Total and the government have done everything to break the strike. First, by claiming that the agreements are in the majority (which is true at the level of the whole of TotalEnergies, but not at all in the striking refineries) to allege that the CGT is trying to continue a minority strike. Then, by claiming that operators earn 4-5,000 euros and are privileged. Fake news relayed extensively by the media while, outside the refineries, operators working staggered hours 7/7, often with decades of seniority, displayed their pay slips of between 2,500 and 3,000 euros. After having waged a media campaign to set motorists against strikers, prime minister Borne, with the opposition Républicains party criticizing the inaction of the government, launched the weapon of the requisition of the strikers. Symbolically, several Exxon and Total operators will be requisitioned to "unblock" the refineries. If resumption is voted for at Exxon, the strike will continue in all Total refineries until October 20.

## The 18 October

The problem is that, after 29 September, the refineries were the only sector on ongoing strike and the inter-union has not set any new date to continue and amplify the mobilization on wages. This was due to several factors: union fragmentation, with only the CGT, Solidaires and the FSU involved in the appeal for the 29th; the orientation of the CGT confederal leadership which initially wanted to prioritize the search for a common front against the pension reform and the search for an alliance with the CFDT and the UNSA.

The trigger for a new day on 18 October by the CGT, Solidaires, FSU and FO was finally determined by the continuation of the strike in the refineries and the provocation of the government with the requisitions of the strikers of the refineries. Although announced less than a week in advance, this new day of strike action involved as big a mobilization as that of the 29th with often bigger demonstrations in the cities and a more combative atmosphere, even if the teachers were not mobilized much in such a short period of time.

Similarly, many SNCF centres were on strike despite the lack of preparation and reporting obligations before going on strike. But the attempts to renew Sud Rail militants and combative CGT activists were not followed beyond 48 hours. Only the energy sector, with the employees of 10 nuclear power plants, launched a renewable strike the day after the 29th. Remaining isolated, the refinery strikers returned to work on 20 October.

But it is clear that a slow fuse has been lit on wages and purchasing power. CGT, Solidaires, FSU and FO have called for a new day of strike action on 10 November (spanning the All Saints' Day school holidays) and Solidaires, CGT for an intermediate day of mobilization on 27 October.

## What next?

Many inter-union appeals have been set up, particularly in transport and vocational education. Albeit in a

chaotic way, a central mobilization can be built on wages and purchasing power. But this will impose strong unitary pressure for grassroots mobilization and popular mobilization initiatives linking wage demands to all other purchasing power issues. There are already axes in this direction in the platforms of the CGT and Solidaires: reduction to 5.5% or abolition of VAT on basic necessities, increases and indexation to inflation of pensions and all replacement income, including unemployment benefits, downward control of rents and so on. the reduction of fuel and energy prices by abolishing taxes and draining the revenues of public transport companies, development of public transport networks and free access to local and regional networks.

In addition, the question of a different distribution of wealth produced is obviously and massively raised in society. This concerns wages and all social incomes, but also the entire tax system and redistribution. On this issue, while the budgets for Health and Education are cut to the bone, a group of economists in Lille has just precisely calculated the total amount of public aid to companies: in 2019, it amounted to 157 billion euros, the biggest budget item, i.e., 1/3 of the state budget, twice as much as the national education budget. Moreover, while employers protest against the "crushing" weight of compulsory levies, it appears that each year the increase in aid to companies is accompanied by a reduction in all compulsory levies. This obviously does not include legal "tax optimization" and the use of tax havens, nor tax evasion itself.

## The 16 October march

The fight over wages and social incomes is therefore directly linked to an anti-capitalist struggle against the high cost of living. In this sense, the march initiated on 16 October 16 by the NUPES ("Nouvelle Union populaire écologique et sociale", an alliance of left wing parties) goes in the direction of this indispensable popular regrouping linking the battles for wages and all other demands

concerning the cost of living, the fight against higher rents and increases in transport, energy and food prices, all these items that make the increase in the cost of living for ordinary households much higher than inflation as calculated by INSEE.

The 16 October march brought together tens of thousands of demonstrators in Paris, at the call of the parties of the NUPES (la France insoumise, the Greens, the Socialist and Communist parties), the Nouveau parti anticapitaliste and many associations, and despite the refusal of the CGT, the FSU and Solidaires to join, many activists and union flags were present and a call by several hundred union officials for participation testified to the positive reception of this initiative in activist circles of trade unionism. The coming weeks and months must, especially locally, converge all these initiatives, obviously avoiding the positions of “dominant power” that la France

insoumise may have taken for the preparation of 16 October. But it would be salutary if unitary initiatives of a common social and political front could be built in the cities.

Because, alongside the conflicts over wages, the return of parliament has confirmed both the pressure of the far right and the will of the Macron-Borne government to push through, considering itself as a de facto majority that can impose its policy despite its failure in the legislative elections last June.

In many European countries, institutional parties are forced to form parliamentary alliances, making compromises to form a government majority. For opposed reasons, Macron’s party (Renaissance) and les Républicains, despite their neoliberal proximity, have not sought the formation of such an alliance. Thus, any parliamentary vote ends with a dictat from the government, requiring

the other parties either to let the bill pass, or ally to force the resignation of the government.

The French Constitution, with its article 49.3, allows the government to pass without a vote each year the Finance Bill (PLF), the Social Security Financing Bill (PLFSS) and one bill per parliamentary session. The minority government of Elisabeth Borne has already used its two jokers for the PLF and the PLFSS by not integrating amendments voted for by the majority of deputies (for example that of a tax on superprofits). Both the NUPES and the Rassemblement national have presented motions of censure of the government that are destined to be voted down. In any case, the defeat of the government and its employers’ policy can only come from social mobilizations that must continue to be developed in the coming weeks.

*21 October 2022*

## Reproductive rights for all

**23 October 2022, by Anyanwu L**

When discussing reproductive health concerns, it’s important that socialists carefully consider the social and economic impacts of race, class, gender, and sexuality as they relate to the lived experiences of those who continually are marginalized and left out of conversations.

As folks raise funds and gather in places like Washington, D.C. for reproductive rights demonstrations, we should consider who is not present at these particular rallies and raise the question of how we can make our movements more expansive to include those trans, queer, and poor working-class people who do not have the means to travel. We should think about how most people have been miseducated about bodily autonomy and care. Many have to make the difficult decision to either show up to an organizing meeting/demonstration

or feed their families.

The socioeconomic barriers are but one struggle that we must contend with on the Left. We must acknowledge all the ways that international efforts to dehumanize and intentionally create campaigns that target individual groups have been a strategy of the right. As we organize for reproductive rights, it’s important that we consider all the ways that trans, queer, and working-class folks are desperately needed at the table.

Those of us on the Left have to be intentional about giving space to those trans, queer, poor and working-class folks, whose procreative and reproductive freedoms have been attacked on various fronts by liberal and conservative constituents alike. Those of us who believe in a socialist politics from below need to identify

and continue to stand in solidarity with the most vulnerable folks. Folks usually identify abortion access as a singular organizing tool when conversations of reproductive rights arise. What needs to be included in that conversation is how the reversal of Roe v. Wade will inevitably affect all struggles for self-determination and bodily autonomy, including but not limited to gender affirming access to healthcare, same sex marriage, increasing the carceral state apparatus, and housing issues.

Reproductive rights struggles have to transcend the stereotypical idea that the struggles center and only affect persons with uteruses who identify as women. A reproductive rights struggle from below requires organizing strategies that show the connective tissue to other issues. Reproductive healthcare should include gender

affirming care that doesn't de-sex trans and queer folks and that addresses body dysphoria as a residual effect of a cis-heterosexual, white, patriarchal, capitalist system that upholds and legitimizes only the things that support systematic assimilation.

Advocating for the Supreme Court to uphold the 1973 decision is not enough. There has to be consistent conversation that addresses all the cleverly deceitful ways that politicians and right-wing advocates have actively been working to eliminate access to reproductive healthcare for poor working-class people, queer and trans folks. The Hyde Amendment of 1976 is one example of how attacks on reproductive healthcare have been

occurring after social victories have been won. This particular amendment took away poor working-class women's access to abortion by eliminating the option for Medicaid to pay for the procedure. The Hyde Amendment had devastating consequences on poor working-class families, as it forced unwanted pregnancies and compromised the sexual wellness of vulnerable communities.

We have to advocate and push movements and discussions to consider the importance of offering free abortions on demand and advocate for a reproductive healthcare system that includes the struggles of all humans, regardless of one's

socioeconomic status or identity. Fighting for access for abortion rights as a singular issue, without acknowledging the other related reproductive struggles, leaves the organizing efforts vulnerable and open to manipulative attacks from the right. As we learn lessons from the past, we must be clear that including queer and trans folks having access to safe and free reproductive healthcare, without being interrogated or left out of the conversation, is crucial to building our movements.

*Published by [Tempest](#) with the note: This article was originally published in the local newsletter published by GRS, copies of which can be requested by [writing@sosocialistspublic@gmail.com](#).*

## Reflections on “In Her Name”: The Meaning of Iran's Uprising

22 October 2022, by **Catherine Z. Sameh**

I was privileged to be included in this group. In what follows, I offer some salient points from our collective discussion by way of my individual, post-event reflections.

### Continuities and Ruptures

Feminist activism in Iran is not new. The current uprising is the latest chapter in well over a century of feminist and women's rights activism in Iran. From the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-11 to the revolution of 1979, from the One Million Signatures Campaign of 2006-2009 to the Green Movement of 2009 to the economic protests of 2019, women have always been present as key social actors.

They have struggled alongside larger sectors of society, and autonomously, for democratization and gender equality. In the years and decades

following the revolution, women pushed back against a discriminatory legal structure at odds with their enormous presence in society.

What is unfolding now reflects a break with the reform-oriented struggles of the last several decades. The ramping up of surveillance of women's dress by the morality police under hard-right president Ebrahim Raisi, profound mismanagement of the COVID pandemic and the economy by the government, deepening socio-economic hardship, inflation, sanctions against and isolation of Iran — all have combined to gather the population's widespread immiseration and anger under the sign of Amini's death.

Most important is the fact that women, most of them young, are leading this movement, that gender justice and women's liberation are at the very heart of its demands, and that protesters are demanding an end to the Islamic Republic and any new

forms of patriarchal authoritarianism.

### Against Compulsion

The first feminist demonstration in the weeks following the 1979 revolution was in response to Khomeini's imposition of the mandatory hijab. In the decades since, an end to compulsory hijab had not been the central or most pressing issue around which feminists have organized.

In periods of reform governments, particularly under Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), surveillance of women's dress and hijab loosened, and issues like citizenship status, rights in marriage and divorce, and custody of children became more pressing and potentially winnable.

The corporeal tactics of the current protesters — burning their hijabs in the streets, cutting their hair in public



and online, sitting in cafes without hijabs and mandatory loose clothing — are now most decidedly a demand to end compulsory hijab in Iran.

These are not protests against Islam, nor are they against the choice to wear hijab. They are about a refusal to be conscripted into a state regime that sacrifices women's bodies and lives in the name of national sovereignty and security. Women with and without hijab are protesting together, and there is widespread belief in the society that hijab must be voluntary.

Compulsory hijab in Iran is a material and symbolic weapon that constructs gendered forms of citizenship through surveillance, forced allegiance and violence, as are the actual and suggested bans on veiling and other forms of Islamic dress — from India to France to the United States.

Self-Determination and Feminism

While central to the uprising, an end to compulsory hijab is not the final frontier of the movement and its aspirations. This is a remarkable upsurge that unites many sectors of society — women, youth, ethnic and religious minorities, students, [9] labor unions, artists, queer people — who are utterly fed up with politics as usual.

It is deeply feminist in that it dreams of vast, systemic change and an end to patriarchal authority and political structures that violently militate against the freedom and democratic participation of everyone.

Women in Iran have struggled for feminism and gender equality for over a century, but often their particular visions and specific demands have been sidelined through an “after the revolution” politics. In the current struggle, a struggle for the self-determination of Iranian people, women's and feminist issues are the heart and soul.

Protesters are putting their bodies on the street to demand their bodily and political freedom. Women are no longer willing to defer their autonomy to a future that will never come.

Women's freedom is the sign under which this new world-making unfolds. Jin. Jiyan. Azadi. Zan. Zendegi. Azadi. Woman. Life. Freedom.

## Transnational Solidarity from Below

As I write, we are heading into a weekend (October 1 and 2) full of global demonstrations of solidarity with the Iranian people.

The October 2 demonstrations are specifically a call from Iranian feminists — some of whom were active in the One Million Signatures Campaign — to stand with them. Not to speak on their behalf, but to stand with them in support of the movement in Iran and against patriarchal authoritarianisms everywhere.

The protesters are asking for international solidarity. Not intervention, but solidarity. Not sanctions, but solidarity. As transnational feminists, we must build these visions of solidarity from below and not concede ground to the so-called anti-imperialist posturing of Raisi (or Putin or any other patriarchal dictator), nor the interventionist politics of so-called targeted sanctions.

Feminists around the world, from Afghanistan to India to Sudan, have been inspired by the movement in Iran, writing statements of solidarity. [10] They are linking the feminist uprising in Iran to their own struggles for self-determination and bodily integrity, and an end to patriarchal nationalism and authoritarianism — be it Islamic, Hindu, secular or otherwise.

Many feminists in the United States, Iran and elsewhere are connecting the movement in Iran to the struggle for abortion and reproductive justice in the United States. These kinds of robust connections around differently located but connected struggles around bodily autonomy, democratic participation, and self-determination

are precisely what transnational feminist activists and scholars have been building for decades.

## The Feminist Future is Now

This is a moment to deepen and renew this political and intellectual tradition. Whatever the outcome of this uprising, the breathtakingly courageous Iranian women and their many-gendered comrades are an inspiration to a world in crisis.

They are refusing conscription into patriarchal authoritarianism and forms of national belonging that are built on violence, surveillance, securitization, gender-differentiated citizenship and belonging, and a drive towards multiple forms of death.

They are building on a deep and long history of feminist struggle, and at the same time creating something new. Finding each other in the street, these protesters — like so many protesters around the world — want a different world.

They want a world free from militarized violence, from state and national politics that organize and divide people along lines of inequality and oppression, from gender violence and discrimination, from incarceration, from the many forms of socio-economic immiseration, precarity and isolation.

They long for a feminist world of love and care, of unity and solidarity, a world that affirms women and life and freedom. In the face of enormous state repression and violence, they are building such a world.

NOTE: “On September 27, a song by Iranian musician Shervin Hajipour “broke” Persian social media. He is singing of the mass protests that began in Iran following the death of Jina (Mahsa) Amini. It went viral — viewed 40 million times within 48 hours.”

Source: November-December 2022, [ATC 221](#).

# Mahamat Idriss Déby consolidates his power in Chad

21 October 2022, by **Paul Martial**

When Idriss Déby was killed on the frontline by rebels in April 2021, his son Mahamat took power in a Transitional Military Council composed of fifteen generals. This was an unconstitutional manoeuvre, since it was the President of the National Assembly who was to ensure this transition. By convening an 'inclusive and sovereign national dialogue', Mahamat Déby seemed to be responding to an old demand of the opposition, that of ensuring a broad debate to re-found the Chadian state on a unitary and democratic basis.

## Simulacrum of a dialogue

Prior to the DNIS, a pre-dialogue was held with the politico-military groups in Doha, Qatar. The disappointing results gave an insight into the motives of the ruling junta.

For example, the issue of the army was hardly discussed. Yet it plays a decisive role in the country's politics. Déby senior had ensured himself an exceptional longevity in power thanks to its control. He transformed it into a praetorian guard with a staff and elite regiments composed on ethnic grounds. Déby has made Chadian soldiers the auxiliaries of France's armed forces during its interventions in the Sahel, thus making himself indispensable.

In fact, the DNIS had only one function: to endorse the power of Déby's son. From now on, Déby will be able to run in future presidential elections, in contradiction with the

recommendations of the African Union; the transitional period is extended by 24 months; the Military Transitional Committee is dissolved, giving Mahamat Déby carte blanche to run the country.

## Opponents to Déby's rescue

The DNIS profoundly restructured Chad's political space. Thus, some opponents joined the Déby camp. Among them, Gali Gatta Ngothé, an opposition deputy who chaired the DNIS, and Saleh Kebzabo, a historical opponent, who has just accepted the post of Prime Minister of a new government that wants to be of national unity. This will not be the first time that opponents join the Déby clan only to leave a few years, sometimes a few months, later, once their role as stooge has become useless. Kebzabo, in this respect, is a key player. With his notoriety and his extensive address book, he will allow Mahamat Déby to obtain the good graces of the African Union and more broadly of the Western camp - despite his denials when he came to power.

The remaining opponents, the politico-militaries of FACT (Front pour l'alternance et la concorde au Tchad) and the CNCR (Coordination nationale pour le changement et la réforme), thus find justification for boycotting the DNIS and continuing the armed struggle. Dozens of civil society and political organisations such as the Wakit Tamma coalition (which could be translated as 'the hour has come')

and the Transformers party are calling for a mobilisation for a Chad that is truly a state governed by the rule of law. <sup>[11]</sup>

## A complicit silence

France refused to condemn Mahamat Déby's putsch, unlike Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea, which experienced similar situations, on the grounds that Chad was a special case. The particularity conferred on Chad is explained by its role in the fight against jihadists. This oil state spends 30-40% of its resources on an army of nearly 50,000 for a population of 16 million. This plethoric army has a double function: to protect the regime in place against armed rebellions inside Chad, and to participate in the fight against terrorism in the region. Chadian troops were in Mali with the French as part of Operation Serval, in Cameroon and Nigeria against Boko Haram and are participating in the G5 in the Sahel.

The availability of seasoned soldiers, especially in Sahelian combat, is a valuable asset for France. All the more so as they are always on the front line, recording many losses in their ranks. We can thus understand France's great leniency towards the new Chadian government, which is considered essential for the country's stability, and so much the worse if it is done at the expense of the most basic needs of the population.

18 October 2022

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

# Racist Remarks by Los Angeles' Democratic City Council Shock Nation, Reveal Rifts in Democratic Party

20 October 2022, by **Dan La Botz**

A secretly-made recording published by The Los Angeles Times revealed that the four people involved, all Latinos, made derogatory remarks about Blacks and indigenous Mexicans from Oaxaca during a secret caucus to discuss redistricting. Redistricting takes place throughout the country after each national ten-year census and is conducted by state governments and in some places, such as Los Angeles, by city governments that redraw congressional and local electoral districts. Districts are sometimes redrawn to give more weight to one or another political party or ethnic group. These districts may also contain political plums: jobs public institutions such as universities, public hospitals or airports.

In this secret meeting, the goal of the four was to reduce the weight of the black vote, and increase the weight of the Latino vote and thereby the Latino politicians' political power. In the meeting Council President Nury Martinez, says, referring to the Latino District Attorney George Gascón, "Fuck that guy...he's with the Blacks." She referred to the Black child of one of the council members as a "changuito," that is, a little monkey, and said the child needed to be beaten. She also referred to Oaxacans

as short, dark, and "feo," ugly. Others at the meeting either joined in the racist remarks or failed to challenge them. As outrage spread, two council members resigned their posts and the labor leader stepped down from his position.

What lies behind this racist language and rising tensions between Latinos and Blacks? Working together in the labor unions and in political coalition within the Democratic Party from the 1980s into the 2000s, both Blacks and Latinos made gains in labor and political power. But throughout this period, the Los Angeles Latino population has kept growing, while the Black population has been shrinking as gentrification and competition with Latinos for housing drove many Black people to move to Riverside and San Bernardino to the east and led some to leave the state.

Changing demographics thus led to political tensions. Los Angeles, the country's second largest city after New York, had four million inhabitants; 13 of its 15-member city council are Democrats. Half of all Angelinos are Latinos but they hold only four of 15 council seats, while whites who make up 28 percent of the

population hold six seats, and Blacks, who represent almost 9 percent, are overrepresented with three seats. Asians, 12 percent of the population have 2 seats, proportional to their population.

In L.A., as in many American cities, there is a struggle among social classes and ethnic groups for scarce resources that takes place through municipal politics and principally within the framework of the Democratic Party. Labor union officials work with politicians to try to make gains for their particular constituencies within the system, often at the expense of other working-class groups. While Blacks and Latinos often form political coalitions, they tend to live in separate neighborhoods and to compete for jobs, housing, and public services. Political alliances often fail to reduce social tensions. Meanwhile the capitalist class retains a powerful hold on finance, industry, and services, even when forced to make concessions to workers.

If workers in Los Angeles are to make significant economic and political gains, they will need to overcome their differences and establish genuine working-class unity.

*16 October 2022*

## Against the far right in all its forms

19 October 2022, by **Andreas Sartzekis**

The trial, which began in July and could lead to an extension of the

sentences from 2020, has become more serious, with provocations by

supporters of the defendants in the courtroom (Nazi salutes without police

intervention).

## The fascist danger remains

Of course, the danger of Chryssi Avgi's reconstitution is not for tomorrow, if only because, for the past two years, its leaders have classically divided, between a Kassidiaris, a former leader of the assault groups who founded his group, a Lagos, an MEP who was among those responsible for the 2013 murder of the anti-fascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas, and a Michaloliakos, the führer who is currently less provocative than the other two.

But it is clear that the fascist danger remains, and Kassidiaris is trying to use the trial as a platform to "express the voice of [his] fellow citizens with a strong party, like the ones that now dominate throughout Europe". However, the ground remains fertile in Greece for the constitution of a far-right party that could one day bring

together Nazi killers and fascists gradually recycled through the far-right Laos party that governed with the right and Pasok in 2011 and then through New Democracy, where they are pushing a police state line by occupying key positions: Ministry of the Interior, Development...

A symbolic case is that of the Minister of Health, lawyer Thanos Plevris, one of the "recycled", son of Greek Nazi ideologue Kostas Plevris, a sinister admirer of Hitler and author of pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic books, with passages such as this one: "Jew and human being are two contradictory notions, one excludes the other." For such writings, Father Plevris was put on trial, defended at the time by his son, who still did not hesitate in 2009 to protest against the attempt to prevent him from preaching National Socialism. So we don't believe him for a moment today when he talks about the "bestial" attitude of his father, himself a lawyer defending Lagos, who, in front of Fyssas' mother, gave her the Nazi salute in court...

## In the streets

## against the brown plague

In the face of all this, some people are demanding that groups or individuals with criminal convictions be banned from standing for election. Above all, it is necessary to fight against the extreme right-wing policy of Prime Minister Mitsotakis, between the systematic use of police violence and the policing of society, and his sought-after links with the extreme right. A rally of a few hundred antifascists took place on 7 October in front of the court, in support of Magda Fyssas who was testifying that day and reminded the president: "My son is not dead, he was murdered"... For Pavlos, for Loukman, for the Egyptian fishermen and for the other victims, and against the persistent danger, the antifascist fight goes on!

19 October 2022

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

## No, the West Didn't Halt Ukraine's Peace Talks With Russia

18 October 2022, by [Taras Fedirko](#), [Volodymyr Artiukh](#)

It's hard to disagree with Eagleton about the importance of a progressive vision for ending the Russian invasion. Any such vision, moreover, should follow the example of Eagleton's article in being critical of both the reasons for and the forms of western support to Ukraine. But his vision is based on faulty assumptions about Ukraine and Russia, and takes a narrow if not tendentious interpretation of the evidence of British influence on Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelensky. This would be of little interest had these assumptions and the shaky arguments they lead to not been reverberating across the British, European and

American left for some time now. At best, they don't help the task of developing a leftwing policy on Russia's aggression in Ukraine. At worst, they ultimately reinforce the ultra-conservative division of the world into 'spheres of influence', shoring up the legitimacy of the use of force in international disputes and increasing the danger of global inter-imperialist warring down the road. So what precisely is wrong with these takes?

Eagleton is among many leftwing commentators to assume that since before the invasion, Russia's leadership has preferred to achieve its

goals in Ukraine through diplomacy (and is thus willing to reach compromises preserving the core interests of the parties involved) rather than force. If peace was possible in the war in Donbas, so the argument goes, it's possible in the battle for Ukraine; if diplomacy had been pursued more vigorously, the war could have been averted. Eagleton [follows others](#) when pointing to Russia's insistence on implementing the Minsk II Accords in Donbas, and the Russian proposal of western security in December 2021, as proof of this preference for diplomacy. But in doing so, he takes the Kremlin's statements at face value, ignoring that



the logic of Russia's behaviour regarding Ukraine and the 'collective West' more broadly is driven by territorial expansion and the opportunistic use of violence.

First, the Minsk Accords, concluded at gunpoint after Russia's military interventions in Ukraine in summer 2014 and winter 2015, weren't a magic recipe for peace, but a tool of Russian military-diplomatic pressure whose meaning and use changed over time. While in 2014-2017 the implementation of the Minsk Accords could have led to a negotiated reintegration of Donbas into Ukraine under international supervision, the international situation and Russia's intentions have changed. In fact, by late 2021 Russian authorities had all but integrated the breakaway republics into the Russian political, military and economic space, precluding any meaningful possibility of the region's peaceful reintegration into Ukraine. Whilst the Ukrainian leadership pursued a ceasefire in Donbas from the summer of 2020, the Kremlin used it as a bargaining chip to put pressure on Zelensky's government and to create a flimsy pretext for an invasion. Zelensky's last-ditch attempts to return to the negotiations in late 2021 were rejected by Putin, who tore up the Minsk Accords by recognising the independence of the breakaway regions. Thus, instead of a roadmap to future peace, the Minsk Accords had largely become a military-diplomatic tool in the hands of Russian leadership to legitimise regime change and the dismemberment of Ukraine.

Even more so, Russia's 'security guarantees' proposals published in December 2021 were little more than a diplomatic and ideological smokescreen. Even moderate Russian commentators admit this was an ultimatum meant to justify the invasion rather than honest diplomacy. Russia's foreign minister insisted all provisions, including the rolling back of NATO infrastructure to the 1997 borders, should have been met "as a package" within an impossible timeframe of weeks not months, and that the Kremlin might decide not to trust even the "written guarantees". Given that NATO didn't have a mechanism for such written

guarantees - and even if it had had it, it would have been impossible to adopt it within weeks - Russia's proposal didn't sound like a bonafide negotiating position. Nevertheless, the US and Europe made efforts to take Russia's security preoccupations seriously, agreeing to make concessions in the areas of arms control and limitations on military exercises. Additionally, Joe Biden promised Putin that no missiles would be placed in Ukraine - the concern cited by Putin months before the invasion. Moreover, Putin's aide reached an agreement about Ukraine's non-accession to NATO with Zelensky before the invasion, but the Russian leader rejected this deal. Finally, numerous analysts and moderate politicians claimed the Kremlin started preparing for a regime change and dismemberment of Ukraine in early 2021, which corroborates our thesis that Russia's proposals couldn't have been made in good faith, although they were taken seriously by western governments.

Eagleton moves smoothly from the Kremlin's putative willingness to negotiate prior to the invasion to the negotiations that began after Russian troops invaded Ukraine. These peace negotiations opened in Belarus in late February 2022 with a Russian demand of Ukraine's total capitulation. By early April, with the parties now meeting in Istanbul, they reached a compromise: a framework agreement that envisioned that in return for Russia's retreat to its 23 February positions, Ukraine would abandon its territorial claim over Donbas and Crimea and commit to not joining NATO. Ukraine would also receive security guarantees from western states. This agreement set out broad principles rather than specifics about the exact territories Ukraine would be giving up on in Donbas. This would have been decided at a meeting of Zelensky and Putin. The deal, however, collapsed, and we might never know what would have happened had it not. But was it ever feasible, and did it collapse due to British interference, as Eagleton claims?

There is evidence to the contrary on both counts. After the Russian withdrawal from Kyiv and northern

Ukraine in late March, Johnson made a surprise visit to Kyiv on 9 April. He reportedly told Zelensky that Britain and other western states weren't ready to provide security guarantees to Ukraine along the lines of the Istanbul framework agreement. The crucial evidence of Johnson's intervention comes from an article in the Ukrainian outlet *Ukrainska Pravda*, which cites an anonymous source from Zelensky's immediate circle:

Johnson brought to Kyiv two simple messages: Putin is a war criminal, he needs to be pressured, not negotiated with. And second, even if you [i.e. Ukraine] are ready to sign agreements about [security] guarantees, we [the U.K.] are not. We can sign them with you, but not with him [Putin], he's anyway [not going to stick to it].

Because this article is almost the only source routinely cited as a proof of nefarious western interference, it's worth looking at the evidence more carefully. We spoke with its author, the political journalist Roman Romaniuk, to get a clearer picture of the political context navigated by the Ukrainian negotiating team.

Romaniuk disagrees with Eagleton's interpretation that Johnson halted the peace deal. "Johnson was one of the people whom Zelensky listened to - not because of a dependence on him, but because of relations of trust", Romaniuk told us. Britain's prime minister hadn't come to Kyiv to order a termination of the peace deal; this was advice at best, and as such, his scepticism about Russia's trustworthiness wasn't unique. There were strong concerns within Zelensky's closest entourage that the Kremlin wouldn't stick to an agreement for any longer than it suited its interests. The risks of signing the Istanbul agreement were high for Ukraine: key provisions, to do with the status of Donbas and Crimea, couldn't be agreed until a later meeting between the presidents of the two states. Zelensky and his

negotiators' most important worry about the Istanbul agreement was, Romaniuk said, that "Ukrainian society might not accept such a deal". While we don't know what public opinion was regarding the possible deal in early April, in a [survey](#) conducted in mid-May, 82% said that "under no circumstance should Ukraine give up on any of its territory even if it leads to the continuation of the war and threatens its independence". (A more recent survey [shows Ukrainians continue to reject territorial concessions to Russia](#)). With Ukrainian officials and commentators speaking out against the deal at the time, Zelensky must have understood that he had no mandate for territorial concessions to Russia.

As Romaniuk's article makes clear, Russian terror in towns and villages in northern Ukraine compounded the Ukrainian side's scepticism about the viability of the deal. The extent of the Russian crimes near Kyiv wasn't revealed to the public until early to mid-April, but Zelensky had been briefed about them as early as mid-March. His negotiators were thus aware that if the Istanbul agreements were signed, Zelensky and Putin would be meeting in person at a time when Ukraine would be talking about the execution and torture of civilians in Bucha, Irpin, Borodyanka and other northern towns.

Zelensky, Romaniuk says, had been

sceptical about Russia's willingness to stick to any peace agreements from the start. Evidence suggests this concern was justified. The very decision to start the war, the way in which it was fought and the Kremlin's assumptions that underlay its military planning - too often ignored in leftwing debate - are crucial to estimating the chances of diplomatic settlements and the behaviour of all parties. Since at least mid-2021, Russia's leadership has signalled that it has [stopped recognising Zelensky's government](#) as the legitimate leadership of Ukraine. The invasion only hardened this stance: Zelensky's administration was called a 'Nazi' government, Ukraine was denied statehood, and its borders were violated. This background was not conducive to successful talks.

While talks continued in Belarus and Istanbul, Russia's leadership kept repeating that it would reach the goals of its military campaign: 'denazification' (regime change) and 'demilitarisation' (the destruction of Ukraine's military potential). The reality on the ground showed Russian troops [wouldn't have withdrawn from the newly occupied territories](#) in the south and east of Ukraine, and were making preparations for lasting rule. Negotiators from the Russian side had been low-ranking politicians that had no power to sign any deals and [no direct line to Putin](#), which was a signal to the Ukrainian negotiating team.

Like the Minsk agreements in the last years before the invasion and the December 'security guarantees', Russia's approach to the March negotiations likely wasn't genuine. Its [recent escalation](#) only proves the Kremlin prioritises territorial gains over diplomacy and [treats negotiations as a way to buy time to strengthen its armed forces](#).

The freezing of the March negotiations was a result of a complex interplay of different factors primarily related to Ukraine's and Russia's internal politics and the dynamics of the military operations. Focusing on a magic turning point when everything could have gone otherwise, commentators ignore that in Russia's repertoire, diplomacy has consistently been subordinated to the use of force. We therefore shouldn't fetishize peace talks, but ground a leftwing vision of the war and the opportunities for ending it in a realistic analysis of the interests, resources and strategies of the parties involved. With this vision, we need to ask: what kind of peace would be progressive and serve the interests of the people of Ukraine? As Ukrainian leftists have repeatedly emphasised, it isn't just any peace Ukrainians want - and they certainly don't want that which comes with occupation.

17 October 2022

Source [Novaramedia](#).

# What is the significance of the Saudi oil decision?

17 October 2022, by **Gilbert Achcar**

This decision, which called for the reduction of oil production in order to maintain the level of prices, caused a major international uproar, especially in the United States, not because of its actual impact on the oil market as much as for its significance regarding the US-Saudi relationship. This is because OPEC production during the

months preceding the meeting was already below the previously set ceiling due to the inability of many countries to increase their production for technical reasons, while other countries, including the United Arab Emirates, want to increase their production after having invested in strengthening their extractive

capabilities.

In fact, the biggest consideration in determining oil prices is not OPEC or OPEC+, but rather the fluctuations in supply and demand in the global market. From this angle, OPEC+, by its last decision, contributes to the reduction of global oil consumption by

helping to push the global economy towards the recession that threatens it due to a number of factors. Among these are the effects of the great global crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemic, in particular the contraction of the Chinese economy due to Beijing's insistence on practicing a policy of zero Covid through lockdowns, a policy whose cost to the Chinese economy has become prohibitive and to which there is no way out in the foreseeable future except by abandoning it. The problem is that the virus is constantly mutating, while the continuous lockdowns prevent the creation of mass immunity in response.

Of course, the Chinese problem is compounded by the crisis resulting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, whose economic consequences are worsening, not only at the expense of Russia, but at the expense of the European economies in particular. The Russian economy has benefited from the rise in fuel prices, especially gas, resulting from the escalating European boycott, which has partially compensated for the losses it incurred as a result of the war and other sanctions imposed on it, while Europe is the region primarily affected by that rise in prices. The Russian invasion put Europe in an embarrassing position, as it did not want to appear to be financing the Russian war machine, even though it was aware that Russia would still find customers to buy its fuels by virtue of the nature of the market for those materials.

The OPEC+ decision serves the Russian interest in that it is in line with Russia's having to reduce its fuel production for several reasons, including the gradual blockage of European markets and the technical problems caused by the sanctions. But what about the interest of the Saudi Kingdom, which has the upper hand in the decision to reduce output, since it means reducing its production in the first place, given that it has the largest production margin? Evidence indicates that its decision, for which

Mohammed bin Salman is fully responsible, contradicts its true interest for several reasons. The decision will exacerbate the tendency of the global economy to stagnate, and thus its outcome in the medium term will be a greater reduction in demand than would have occurred otherwise, by exacerbating consumers' fear of the economic crisis.

Moreover, this behavior of the kingdom contradicts the behavior that it used for several decades, after it nationalized its oil industry half a century ago, namely, complicity with the United States, its protector. The latter relied on the kingdom to run the global oil market in line with its interests, a practice that culminated in the oil price war that the kingdom launched against Iran and Russia in 2014. This played an important role in intensifying pressure on Tehran, leading it to sign the nuclear agreement in the following year, and in increasing the weight of Western sanctions on Russia, imposed on it following its annexation of Crimea and its military intervention in eastern Ukraine.

With the OPEC+ announcement, the kingdom is taking a decision that serves the Russian interest par excellence. Indeed, it appears as if it stemmed from an explicit desire to support the Russian position in the Ukraine war. This has two consequences. The first is that the Saudi decision reinforces the European feeling that the dependence on hydrocarbons is a source of multifaceted harm, including great environmental damage and political harm, since these fuels have become more than ever a political weapon in hands in which Europe no longer has any confidence. This will accelerate European endeavors to dispense with hydrocarbons through the development of alternative energy sources, both renewable and nuclear. Europe's tendency to eliminate hydrocarbons had begun to grow under the pressure of the environmental issue, and the Russian

invasion of Ukraine has given it a strong impetus, which the Saudi decision will only help accelerating.

In the United States, the Saudi decision was interpreted as a stab in the back and a siding with Russia in the war in Ukraine. US President Joe Biden himself expressed his disappointment with Riyadh's decision, and is facing pressure within his party from those who call for punishing the kingdom by withdrawing US military protection, including the withdrawal of the Patriot air defense system supervised by the United States inside the kingdom. What increases the impact of the Saudi decision is that the US president had retracted his declared campaign position on the Saudi crown prince, and visited the kingdom and met him a short while ago, placing the strategic interest created by the Ukraine war over the moral stance regarding the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi.

A conviction has become firmly established among Democrats that Mohammed bin Salman, by his decision to put pressure on oil prices to rise, thus exacerbating the general rise in prices, actually wanted to enhance the chances of the Republicans in next month's congressional elections. The Republicans are indeed focusing their campaign on high prices, which they attribute to Biden's economic policy, and they have described the Saudi decision as a sign of the US president's failure in foreign policy, a broad headline under which they put the Afghan retreat and the inability to deter Vladimir Putin from invading Ukraine. It is no secret to anyone that the current Saudi regime prefers the Republicans and strongly hopes that their friend Donald Trump will return to the White House in two years.

11 October 2022

*This article originally appeared in Arabic on [Al Quds](#). Translation by automatic means, with editing for [New Politics](#).*

# The Fight for Abortion and Reproductive Justice after Roe

16 October 2022, by **Camila Valle, Emily Janakiram, Holly Lewis, Sherry Wolf**

**Camila Valle:** I know people are probably thinking about what just happened to our right to abortion and reproductive healthcare in the US, which other speakers will go into tonight, but I wanted to start with a historic victory in a different part of the world: that of the Argentinian abortion movement, which won legalization at the end of 2020—and not just legalization, but free abortion as part of their socialized healthcare system.

I don't have time to go into the full history of the fight—I have an essay in the latest issue of *Spectre* that goes deeper into this history for those interested—so instead I wanted to touch on two main points that I think are crucial in thinking about the lessons we can draw on and be inspired by as we begin a new phase in the fight for abortion and reproductive justice in this country.

First, I want to argue that the Argentinian abortion movement's building of its own infrastructures was critical for its victory. I think there's a tendency on the left in the US, at least one that I have felt, especially when it comes to the issue of abortion, to counterpose the building of independent infrastructures, which often provide direct material and affective support, such as helping people get abortions, and the idea that we should demand things from the state (i.e., our right to abortion codified into law). The experience of Argentina, as well as that of other countries such as Mexico, actually shows that you can't do one without the other.

In Argentina, the National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion was extremely multifaceted:

there was of course the legislative aspect that folks may be most familiar with—they presented their bill to the government for debate and voting many many times over the course of years, until it was finally passed and became law—but there was also so much more, and I don't think we would have seen that victory without these other components. To name some examples, there were networks that distributed abortion pills, that accompanied people through their abortions, there were networks that taught medical professionals how to perform abortions since it wasn't part of their formal training, there were networks of teachers who developed comprehensive sex education curricula, artists and journalists and photographers who debuted public exhibitions about abortion, there were mass tablings, marches, occupying workplaces, bringing the issue to the unions, going out into the streets, and whole systems in place for mass meetings, assemblies, etc., to discuss the campaign, demands, and have political debates.

Ruth Wilson Gilmore said about abolition: "it requires that we change one thing: everything." And I think that's a very useful sentiment and one that the Argentinian movement really lived up to in its own way. Every single place, every single platform, every single person became a tool to raise public awareness around the issue, to raise the organizational level of our side, and to strengthen the fight.

Abortion is so stigmatized in society, it is a source of so much shame and guilt, it is not something we are often taught about, it is kept from us, and we have to take seriously that part of

our role is to make everything about abortion and abortion about everything.

To win a demand like the legalization of abortion, on such a scale, the state has to feel that it is in its own interest to concede our demands—that what would happen if they didn't would be much worse. And part of that is showing that we don't need them and, actually, if they want to remain relevant, if they want to have any control over the situation, they need to give us what we want.

I think this is fundamentally tied to a certain understanding of how people radicalize, particularly around this issue. People join the movement through personal experiences and collective struggle, people change their minds through collective struggle. People's horizons about what is possible are raised. The idea that somehow we will be able to do all that without talking about the specificities of abortion and, frankly, without engaging with and helping people seeking abortions—which is an argument I have heard—I think is a failing strategy. It's not the only thing we should do, of course, but it should be an important part of what we do.

This brings me to the second point I wanted to touch on briefly, which is the development, generalization, and integration of demands around abortion within and into the broader left in Argentina.

In the 1980s, after the overthrow of the civic-ecclesiastical-military dictatorship, Argentina went through a process of formal democratization, which the feminist movement was very much part of in its own way, including a sector that was focused on abortion.



In the context of this period of popular participation and activity to rebuild the country, there was a society-wide mobilization of human rights organizations, unions, LGBTQ groups, student movements, etc., and by the end of the 1990s, abortion started to develop a different kind of profile, thanks in large part due to these coalitions and collective experiences of political development.

In 2001, the country experienced a profound economic and political crisis that precipitated a new chapter of struggle in Argentinian society—for democracy and against traditional political parties, politicians in general, austerity, and the external debt. During this period, neighborhood assemblies were built and they functioned both as mutual aid networks and as political organizing spaces.

An abortion assembly was also created by parts of the feminist movement, and it was through this experience that abortion was able to move out of its silo. Abortion activists, who were involved in the abortion assembly, brought abortion to the fore of every single meeting, action, and so on, and established itself in each one of the other assemblies. At a certain point, the abortion movement became fully integrated into all the other assemblies and movements and it was no longer really necessary to have just one specific grouping raise the question of abortion. Abortion became a pillar of all the fronts and all the coalitions—just as everybody had to be against the external debt, austerity, discrimination, everybody had to be for abortion.

To close, I want to end with what I think is one of the key lessons in this: that collective experiences of democratization can help bring marginalized issues like abortion to the fore, both in society more broadly and within the left in particular. We should ask ourselves, as people who identify as being on the left, if we count certain movements, certain organized groups of people who do a lot of great work, as part of the left, with us? And why or why not? What are the political and strategic implications of this?

**Sherry Wolf:** I'm really glad that we started on such a positive note from Cami about how activists in Argentina led a struggle from dictatorship to democracy and then a massive victory for reproductive justice. She brought together the experience in a real way, showing how mutual aid was politicized and political organizing was tied to aid.

For my remarks, I was asked to talk about some of the lessons of the eighties and nineties. I want to forefront three key points to hammer home about that period of the abortion wars. One, I think that there was never a heyday of a united reproductive justice movement.

It has always been a struggle riven with divisions and debates among left and moderate and right wings that have had to battle it out occasionally uniting in explosive actions, but more often dividing over issues of race and class and strategy.

Second, when the left has argued and organized for a strategy and tactics of agitation and direct action and confrontation with anti-choice bigots and people who attack our bodily autonomy, it created a bridge for new activists to join our side, we made gains and marginalized the right.

And lastly, our movement is in an abusive relationship with the Democratic Party, whose elected leaders, including many who identify as progressives have really been selling out the left, women, trans people, and gender nonconforming people for decades. And I believe like all abusive relationships, it must end.

I came of age in the early eighties, just as the left went into precipitous decline. I don't think it was a causal connection, but they were synchronous. The huge upheavals and the movements of the late sixties and early seventies were in the rear view mirror. Almost the entirety of the US left had entered the Democrats via the Jesse Jackson Rainbow Coalition and his successive campaigns for president in 84 and again in 88. Jackson functioned in obviously similar ways to Bernie Sander in 2016 and 2020. Jackson, of course, did not build the profile of socialism, which

Sanders did. But like Sanders, once Jackson lost in the primaries he threw his support for the Democrats' nominees. In doing so he brought the thousands of enthusiastic left wing campaign activists behind first Walter Mondale and later Michael Dukakis—about whom nothing interesting has ever been said.

I give you that as a *mise-en-scène* because it frames what was happening during the 1989 to '92 period. That's where you see the contrast between losing and winning strategies. Those years were a pivotal moment. In the late eighties and early nineties, there was a wave of far-right activism against reproductive services at precisely the same time as queer activists were taking to the streets to fight for access to HIV and AIDS research, drugs, and resources from a hostile federal government.

I was active in New York's ACT UP in those years. Queers were very much under siege then as now. The rights of LGBTQ+ people and our rights to bodily autonomy were under attack at the same time as abortion came under assault. So, the Right in this country, then just as now, was responding to our militant assertion of control over our bodies and our health.

The anti-abortion movement was largely led by white men in groups like Operation Rescue. It was led by Randall Terry, a 20-something used car salesman, I kid you not, from upstate New York who built a dedicated and fanatical following of violent misogynists and racists. There's no other way to describe Operation Rescue.

Between 1977 and 1989, 77 family planning clinics were firebombed, 117 were targets of arson, 250 received bomb threats, 31 were invaded by the bigots, and more than 200 were vandalized. As one of the popular chants of our clinic defense movement said, they "pray by day bomb by night, that's the tactic of the right to life." Not an exact rhyme, but the meter works.

The Right's tiny minority really stood in stark contrast to the ideas about abortion and women held by the majority of people at the time. Then,

like today, an unwavering majority supported Roe in every region of the country, among every age group, both political parties, and even inside of the Catholic church.

Nevertheless, abortion rights hung in the balance during George Bush Sr.'s administration. When the Supreme Court was considering Webster v. Reproductive Health Services in 1989, half a million people traveled to Washington DC and marched and demonstrated in support of abortion rights and reproductive service access. That really made a difference in the Court's decision to preserve abortion rights. When Roe was widely perceived as about to be reversed, they stood back from the abyss.

So mass action not only galvanized public consciousness on a mass scale, but it also tipped the decision making of the Court in our favor. It was clear to the Court that they would have no legitimacy in the eyes of the American public if they ruled the way the Right wanted them to.

Even though the Right in the form of Operation Rescue ideologically lost in the Court, it was not going to give up. They actually went on the offensive and did so effectively in Wichita, Kansas in 1991. They laid siege to a city in which none of the prevailing organizations, not the National Organization for Women, not Planned Parenthood, not National Abortion Rights Action League, which is what it was known as at that time before it became NARAL Pro-Choice America. When Operation Rescue declared their "Summer of Mercy," most of the progressive organizations, the liberal organizations, the NGOs, and service providers like Planned Parenthood argued against any kind of mobilization and to rely on court injunctions instead.

There were no protests. As a result, the clinics were shut down for weeks in Wichita. The Far Right was emboldened and planned more such sieges of cities and clinics. That was a wake-up call for a lot of us on the left. We established networks to prepare a response. So, when they announced in January of 1992 that they were going to lay siege to Buffalo, we went into motion.

There were key groups like Women's Health Action Mobilization (WHAM!) in New York City, which was basically an offshoot of ACT UP NY. I was a part of both of them, as were others. Both ACT UP and WHAM! mobilized alongside socialists and others that formed groups like Reproductive Rights National Network and Buffalo United for Choice. Through all these various networks, thousands of people converged on Buffalo to defend the clinics against the Right.

I will never forget the image of gay men in drag beating the right wing bigots with their purses and shoes. They were the drag guerrilla action group Church Ladies for Choice, whose motto was, "we are for free abortion on demand and practical shoes." That was perhaps one of the lighter moments in what was in fact a pitched battle between the Left and Right.

There were fights that took place outside of the clinics. There were confrontations that hundreds of people took part in, and we won. It was recognized in all the newspapers. All the headlines about it told the truth; no clinics were closed, and no doctors were driven out of the abortion business. Mainstream Buffalo turned its back on operation rescue.

After our victory in Buffalo, people started to refer to Operation Rescue as Operation Fizzle. Really it was, it was a really a tremendous victory for our side. After that, we would go out into the streets and chant against the Right, "Pray, you'll need it; your cause has been defeated." It really felt like we had the wind in our sails and we were confident to take on the Right.

When the Democratic Party planned to hold their convention in New York City that summer to nominate Bill Clinton, the right wing said they were going to embarrass the Democrats and lay siege to New York City's clinics. But now we had the wherewithal to mobilize against the wishes of the leadership of the Democratic Party and protest against the Right. I don't have the time to get into a detailed account of the promises and the betrayals of the Democrats. I think a lot of the people here already know them—from false promises to sign a

Freedom of Choice Act to codify abortion into US law by both Clinton and Obama to the decades of voting to deny federal funding to get access to abortion, and on and on. The fact is that expecting to advance reproductive justice through the Democrats has been proven a failed and bankrupt strategy time and again.

On the other hand, small groups of leftists, not just socialists, but others including anarchists, and radicals in groups like ACT UP and WHAM!, came together and were able to mobilize to change mass consciousness, keep the clinics open and shift the balance of power.

Today, we need to learn the negative lessons of a failed orientation on the Democrats and the positive lessons of mass strategic action and organizing to figure out how to build a new movement for reproductive justice.

We have the numbers on our side to build mass defiance, not retreat into the underground, but resistance to turn this back. We were able to do this before and they've done it in other countries coming from much more harsh conditions. We have had nearly 50 years of abortion and tens of millions have had a legal and safe abortion. We have to fight this. Clearly nobody's coming to save us, but us. It's time to get serious about organizing a new resistance to unjust laws.

**Emily Janakiram:** This week we've seen one of the most heinous rollbacks of our rights in the last fifty years—the overturning of Roe v. Wade and Planned Parenthood v. Casey, the two Supreme Court cases which established that abortion is part of a constitutionally protected right to privacy and barred states from outlawing it. We now have total or near-total bans on abortion in twenty-six states. The right now has their eyes on a federal abortion ban, and the Clarence Thomas' opinion calls on the court to strike down protections for birth control, homosexuality, and same sex marriage.

In recent years, the sort of re-branded anti-abortion movement has distanced themselves from outright saying they want abortion patients to be

imprisoned, instead claiming that “abortion is a form of violence against women”, that pregnant people are being duped and preyed upon by “the abortion industrial complex”, and the most dangerous place for a Black child is the womb. Of course, this is nothing more than PR.

America is one of the most dangerous and expensive places in the world to give birth and to raise a child, particularly for impoverished Black and Brown people who will be the most severely affected by these bans. This is only going to get worse, as people are forced to carry high-risk pregnancies such as ectopic pregnancies and healthcare providers choose to let pregnant people die rather than risk jail for performing an abortion.

In the states where abortion is now illegal, self-managed abortion is also criminalized and in some cases, the patient giving themselves an abortion subject to criminal charges. It will be Black and Brown people, Indigenous people, and undocumented people who will be disproportionately impacted by police violence for attempting to perform their own abortions. The police are the most trusted weapons of the state in violently protecting capital and profit.

If you think about what Marxist feminists have been saying for a long time now—that birthing and raising children is labor, labor on which capitalism depends—then the criminalization of abortion is a form of strike-breaking in the face of declining birth rates, as more and more people are refusing to perform this labor under such barbaric and dangerous conditions. And of course, the police have always been an essential tool in strike breaking.

This is what they mean by “it’s not your body,” which is something we hear at clinic defenses a lot – most notably, in a video that went viral on social media of a young man in a “America First” hat yelling “Not your body. Your body is mine, and you’re having my baby.” Our bodies exist to produce workers and to create profits. This is why we also anticipate that birth control will be next on the chopping block, as the right positions

hormonal birth control, the morning after pill, and the copper IUD as “abortifacients.”

These days abortion rights organizers these days refrain from using coat-hanger imagery or bloody violent imagery because such imagery casts abortion as inherently dangerous and violent, which is a right-wing talking point. Self-managed abortions can absolutely be done safely, especially with the advent of the abortion pill. Self-managed abortions are safer than, for instance, home births. If we are afraid of clinic closures and a return to dangerous back-alley abortions which will kill pregnant people, we need to remember that it is the police who have always made these abortions so dangerous.

I was at an SMA training that said patients shouldn’t take the abortion pill vaginally because it can be detected. It is the threat of imprisonment that keeps abortion seekers isolated, afraid, and unaware of the resources that do exist to help people safely self-manage abortions as well as travel to obtain them. However, the criminalization of “aiding and abetting abortion” will ensure that safe self-managed abortions become dangerous and traumatic, that information and resources to perform them safely will remain inaccessible, and that abortion seekers will have no one to turn to and no one to help them, except for the most brazen and unscrupulous of opportunists.

This ruling comes as the police have unprecedented powers of surveillance and detention, especially with the kind of unholy alliance of big tech and police. We’re already seeing platforms like Instagram removing mentions of the word “abortion.” The police – or really, any kind of anti-choice vigilantes with a credit card – have the power to check your search history, your text messages and emails, your period tracker apps to spy on people who may be getting abortions. Njera Keith and Kristina Brown, two Black reproductive organizers with the group 400 and 1 in Arizona, were just arrested for distributing abortion resources and information to their communities. This is why each and every one of us needs to be prepared

to “aid and abet abortion.” Though of course we cannot blithely accept the closure of clinics as a foregone conclusion. They must not only be defended, but expanded to meet unmet demand. Aspiration abortion in clinics remains an essential demand, and one that ought to be a center piece for struggle ahead.

One of the reasons the Right has been so successful in mobilizing their base around abortion rights is that they’ve recognized abortion as inherently political and recognized its centrality to the sociopolitical agenda they’re trying to actualize. They’ve recognized that abortion on-demand has the power to weaken the patriarchal, capitalist state. The right has returned to nineties style tactics of clinic harassment and clinic invasions. Many Operation Rescue figures, like Fidelis Moscinski, are active in what is now called “Red Rose Rescue.”

Across the country, Red Rose Rescuers storm the waiting rooms of abortion clinics and give roses to patients who are waiting for their appointments in an attempt to shame and intimidate them. In New York City, the Archdiocese of New York hosts Witness for Life, a city-wide campaign of clinic harassment which hosts Fidelis as a figurehead, where antis march to a nearby Planned Parenthood. There is a sizable cop presence at these actions, not to help patients enter the clinic safely, but to escort and insulate the antis. We often witness them talking and joking with the antis amicably, even as they march right up to the clinic doors.

The Archdiocese isn’t the only such group in New York—Love Life, an evangelical group which carries out clinic harassment campaigns across the country, opened an office here about two years ago. The anti-abortion right calls New York “the abortion capital of the world,” and encourages their base to travel here to “the heart of the evil.” We can anticipate that, as New York and other liberal cities become “Abortion sanctuaries” now that Roe has been overturned, these groups will start traveling here with greater numbers and aggressiveness. They are well-funded and well-mobilized.

It's no coincidence that this ruling comes after waves of unprecedented labor organizing, tenant organizing, and anti-police organizing that most of us haven't seen before in our lifetimes. This isn't about *The Handmaid's Tale* or anything, it's about class struggle. If we're going to win free abortion on demand, we need to similarly position abortion- not "choice"- as an unapologetic good and an essential component of our liberation from the ruling class, as central to our struggle as workers. As Cami mentioned it takes both mutual aid efforts, like supporting abortion funds and distributing abortion pills as well as a mass movement of civil disobedience, strikes, sit-ins, walkouts, as the abortion struggle was won before across the globe.

**Holly Lewis:** I'm going to give historical overview of reproductive organizing in Texas in the past few decades. Hopefully this will help synthesize some of what others have said into a Texas context that might lead to political assessments and solutions rooted in regional particulars.

In 2009, I was involved in the creation of a group called Project ABC (All Bodies Count) in Austin, Texas. The point of the group was to organize around the idea of bodily autonomy as a political issue, bringing together abortion rights activism and trans activism, particularly trans activism surrounding access to competent medical care. We organized to fight for abortion rights for trans and gender nonconforming folks, as well as for cis women. And we wanted to educate everyone including doctors about trans issues and needs.

At the time, no one in the medical field, from general practitioners to Planned Parenthood, were culturally competent when talking to trans and non-binary people. When I asked my own doctor about the competency of other doctors about trans issues on a scale of 1-10, he said, "Zero or less than zero." One of the few doctors in town who billed herself as oriented towards trans care, routinely misgendered and deadnamed clients. Already then, we were preparing people for what to do if Roe fell, how to find abortion services, and how to

access basic healthcare, just as we were trying to figure out ways to get people access to trans health care. We were forced then to do what Cami addressed and that is combine fighting for abortion care and helping people get abortion care. This particular group dissolved in the debate around those questions. But there was a ton of energy around queer and trans politics at the time in Texas and it was always tied to reproductive struggle. In Texas, I don't think you can disentangle queer and trans politics from abortion politics. From the right-wing perspective, we're all a big lumped up threat to a particular type of family, to a particular gender regime.

Then in 2013, there was a fightback against what was called "The Texas War on Women". The Republicans were voting to impose extreme regulations on abortion, which would - and did - close many clinics. After that summer the number of clinics in Texas dropped from two dozen to five. To stop it from passing, Democratic Party state senator Wendy Davis filibustered the legislature and became an icon of the Texas movement. This was, of course, very frustrating for those of us who were socialists because we knew the Democrats would siphon the momentum and donations from the movement into some sort of doomed strategy...

Activists responded to Davis's filibuster by physically occupying the capitol building for a week. That's where the real history was made. It's very difficult for me to imagine this now because, comparatively, it's been crickets since Roe fell. But it was a really spirited fight. People were confident, inspired, and determined to win. When the state police told us we couldn't bring tampons into the building, we just threw tampons everywhere to the point where they banned tampons and they searched us for tampons when we went through the metal detector. There was a festive, spirited atmosphere. It felt like we had all the momentum. Like we were bound to win.

Then the Democratic Party and Planned Parenthood said, "party's over and now we're not going to occupy the capitol anymore, and we

have to finish this fight in the courts." When they said this, most of the masses followed their lead. A thousand or so of us stayed, then state police were brought in to crack open heads. There was blood on the shiny terrazzo floor as they dragged people away. After that, we tried to organize, but it was very difficult.

The other thing we encountered was the difficulty activists had at the time making the connection between abortion rights and trans rights and the Black struggle in response to the murder of Trayvon Martin and racist police violence, which would later evolve into the Black Lives Matter Movement. We pointed out the connections, but people just didn't get it. What was missing was an argument about violence and bodily autonomy and reproductive freedom under capitalism, and how to build a collective fight. This underscores a point for today. When we don't make the connections between the right's attack on critical race theory, the attacks on trans rights, and the attacks on abortion, we fail every time.

So where are we now? Nine years later, we have a situation where the Democrats' strategy of relying on Democrats and legal arguments has failed. We now face criminalization. One thing that is not helping us build a united struggle is our public employees union. They are refusing to take an active position on all of this. They're not organizing members to resist or refuse arresting the parents of trans kids. They're not organizing workers around refusal to turn people in for abortions. So that's where we're at. We fail because we're not making the connections between building labor power and fighting oppression. Organized workers could stop this.

Instead, doctors now face a 100 year sentence for performing abortions in Texas with no exceptions for rape or incest. This goes into effect on July 24th. The right has plans to go after anyone outside of the state that interferes with its bans. They are planning to charge doctors in states like New York for aiding and abetting murder if someone gets an abortion at clinic in New York.



One of the things that we need to do is recognize that this is going to be a long fight. But not in the way the Democrats are saying it's going to be a long fight. They say that to lower our expectations. They say, "lower your demands, don't ask for too much." We need to say the opposite. It's going to be a long struggle. So, be prepared to organize and fight for the long term for a whole programme of reproductive justice. We will not win this in a day of getting out into the street. It's going to be a lot of getting out into the street. It's also going to be a lot of types of organizing that are creative and distinct from "out into the street" politics. So, we have to rebuild our networks, build our infrastructure of dissent, and plan for a long-term struggle.

The struggle will look different in different states and regions. The right has managed to send the issue to the states. This creates different conditions and issues in Texas, New Mexico, Louisiana, and New York. The right has created a situation that is uneven by design. So, we need a broad strategy to build a national movement, but we have to be aware of context and differences in our situations.

We need to pay extra attention to particular locations and come up with demands and tactics that address them. Only a national movement that attends to the particularities of each state and that builds solidarity among deeply interrelated attacks on all workers and oppressed people can defeat the right and win reproductive justice.

### **Wrap Ups**

**Holly Lewis:** I'll try and address some of the issues and themes raised in the discussion. First of all, we have to recognize that we here in Texas have trained doctors who are completely ready and willing to perform abortions and distribute medication. They are standing there in front of patients, turning them away and saying, "you have to go because I'm facing 100 years in prison. I'm facing a life sentence in prison if I give you this abortion right now."

So, training people to give abortions

(as is sometimes mentioned as a solution) will not address the problem. The real challenge here is how do we protect health care providers from imprisonment? How do we make sure that they are not arrested or how do we de-arrest them if they are arrested? How do we organize to make sure that doesn't happen? That's our challenge in Texas. That was my point that we will need different strategies and tactics depending on what state we're in—Texas, California, New York, or wherever. In some states and regions, clinics will need to be built. There may be clinics that need to be built on borders. And there might be organizations established to help with such projects.

And we need to be listening to one another. Over the past decade, we've kind of like very quickly naysayed one another. Now, we need to fully hear one another out. I also think we need to talk about the difference between building up a movement and winning abortion for the first time and building a movement after losing abortion rights. This is kind of unprecedented. It's the difference between climbing up a mountain together and falling back down a mountain.

So, while we can learn and apply many lessons from our own past and from other countries, we are going to have to be attentive to the particularity of having lost a right. We have to understand how and why we lost it and how we can ensure that we never again suffer such a setback. That entails building a fundamentally more radical movement to win much deeper and more permanent change.

I also want to clarify something that I said about my union. I am not generalizing to the whole union movement. I was speaking very specifically about my union and what it is doing or not doing in Texas. Other unions have taken excellent positions. You would think you could rely on the Texas State Employees Union to help stop the arrest people seeking or providing abortions and also defend service workers from being forced to collaborate with cops separating parents from trans kids or blocking trans people from getting healthcare.

Instead, the union has said, while we

oppose all these attacks, we don't want to alienate our members who are anti-abortion and anti-trans. We have to fight to get our union to stand in defense of workers and in solidarity with people who are in the line of attack from the right and the bosses. But the same must not be said of all unions. Some have taken excellent positions.

That's my biggest point. We have to be careful not to overgeneralize from the particular and yet at the same time get an overall picture. If we do this we can build specific fights as part of a general movement for reproductive justice.

**Emily Janakiram:** In the discussion people expressed a lot of fear and realization about the enormity of the fight we are now in. It's particularly frustrating, when you think that just two summers ago we saw what seemed like an unprecedented mass mobilization against the police. But it was co-opted by the Democrats and kind of frittered away. We have to be on guard and not let this happen again with the emerging movement for reproductive justice.

I want to be hopeful that it's not going to happen this time. First of all, the Democrats are exposed in a way they haven't been before. They have repeatedly promised to defend abortion rights, positioning themselves as our only choice to protect "women's rights", and failed to deliver and failed to even try. As a result, there was real frustration with them that was palpable in the demonstration in New York. We had 20,000 people pour out into the streets voicing disillusionment with the Democrats, challenging the legitimacy of the Supreme Court, and really questioning the whole bourgeois establishment.

I think this is an expression of the kind of consciousness opened up by the pandemic and by the 2020 uprisings. It's also been intensified by increased labor organizing and the huge strike waves that have been in this country. There is a cumulative process of radicalization going on. People are talking about class and about the police in ways that they never have before.

But, again, we are in a serious fight. People have been talking about how this measure is sending us “backwards”. But the Supreme Court and the ruling class are actually trying to usher in a new age of control over us. This is a new, horrifying future they are trying to move us into. They are imposing new restrictions on our reproductive freedom that are unprecedented. Their decisions repeal all sorts of our civil rights and also expands the police powers to surveil and control us. And tech companies are joining in all of this, handing over our data to the police.

The last thing I’ll say is that abortion rights will be much easier to win when we make people realize that abortion is part of a larger struggle to control our autonomy and our destiny. It is part of a multiracial class struggle. Just as Sister Song’s essential reproductive justice platform states – we must win the right to free abortion on demand and also the right to have and raise children in safe circumstances. That is part of our right as workers as well as women and all people who can get pregnant.

I want to stay optimistic for a long, hot abortion summer, where we will keep having abortions, keep teaching people how to have abortions, and also have a strike wave the likes of what no one has ever seen. That is my hope and wish that I will be working to see it become reality.

**Sherry Wolf:** A few quick points. One, let’s have a little bit of humility and acknowledge that for a number of years in a lot of parts of this country that are directly impacted there are groups like Sister Song and Mississippi Reproductive Freedom Fund and, of course, New York City for Abortion Rights as well as Chicago for Abortion Rights. We need to collaborate with everyone doing the work.

In that effort, we have to figure out how to combine mutual aid and political organizing and direct action. We need to dynamically politicize service provision and connect activism to service provision. That will strengthen the whole effort to both address people’s immediate needs and build a movement capable of winning

back a right we have lost and expanding it.

For socialists, we can start to have these conversations and network at Socialism 2022 in Chicago over Labor Day Weekend. Maybe we can use it to help organize a pledge of resistance or a pledge of defiance against abortion bans in this country with people saying that they will spread information about self-managed abortions via pills. We can talk about how to help centralize and coordinate expression and give language to the defiance and organize it.

I also want to say something about Black Lives Matter and its impact. While it as a movement is not now in the streets, it has had a huge impact on people’s consciousness and their willingness to organize and fight. There is no doubt that it was part of giving workers at Amazon in Staten Island to organize as well as workers at Starbucks to organize 160 shops.

That said, we cannot expect one summer of mass struggle after four decades of defeat and retreat to transform the empire. It won’t and it would be naïve to think so. That rebellion was a key part of the process we are going through, but we have to be sober about our situation. We do not have already existing networks and organizations of any substantial size to mount the struggle we need for the coming years.

One of the problems we face is that the largest organization in the country has largely been absent from the field of battle. And that of course is the DSA. Their members have of course been out, but as an organization it has yet to play a leading role. They are tailing this moment. And that’s unfortunate, but it can also change.

The left must raise its game. Tens of millions of people, actually more than a hundred million people, agree with us. We don’t have to do the map and figure out mathematically how many of these people need to be mobilized. We need to do things that shift mass consciousness through consistent argument through things like pledges, politics, agitation, propaganda, as well as actions.

Small numbers of people in this circumstance can have an enormous impact. ACT UP, remember, never had an action larger than 7,000 people. But it had an enormous impact on masses of people. It had a strategic orientation and a concentrated number of people committed to do something, despite all their debates and disagreements. I remember those debates! 400 people in a room every Monday night; it was a trial! It was a challenge! But somehow we managed to move things in the right direction.

Small, radical voices can shift things. Let it be known, for example, that the demonstration in New York City that Emily talked about was organized by tiny handfuls of far left—NYC for Abortion Rights, Left Voice, Socialist Alternative, and Tempest. Yes, at the last minute Planned Parenthood signed on and emailed out the information about the demonstration.

But the lead, the initiative, was taken by small numbers of the left. It caught the mood and people came out in huge numbers. Because the leadership was the revolutionary left and leftist, it meant that you had trans Black activists who were speaking about taking action, fighting back, resisting, defying, and saying fuck the Supreme Court and not one call “to march today, vote tomorrow, and here’s where you register.” So, radicals shifted the politics of the march.

We have to think in those terms rather than cry in our beers and worry about how small we are. Small cogs move bigger wheels. When you have a strategy and something coherent and consistent that connects with large numbers of people you can galvanize a movement of people looking for what to do.

**Camila Valle:** I want to build off what Sherry was saying about the role of the left. I agree with her point that the largest socialist organization, the DSA, didn’t lead on this and should have a robust strategy and political analysis of reproductive justice in this country and abortion in particular.

But I also want to underline that leftists should be embedded in reproductive justice work. If you want to take the lead on this question, you

have to be doing abortion work. You have to actually know what you are talking about. I say that not to chastise anybody, but to point to the fact that there are a lot of organizations that are already doing this work and it won't be without challenges to integrate the "traditional" left — which for the most part does not and has not organized around abortion — within that. There will be tensions in that process. Abortion must become more central to the left. Leftists need to know what

misoprostol is, they need to know the menstrual cycle. Socialists have to be able to talk about abortion specifically. It is not enough to be a socialist.

I agree with what Emily said about criminalization and the impact and the legacy of the Black Lives Matter movement. Our state institutions are trying to control us as tightly as possible in part as a response to the BLM uprising and the general public consciousness against policing, surveillance, state violence, and the

carceral system. Our liberal institutions, particularly the Supreme Court, have lost so much legitimacy. People are actually beginning to talk about abolishing the Supreme Court. It is on us to organize this growing radicalization and fight for reproductive justice and with it a profound transformation of our society.

23 September 2022

Source [Spectre](#).

## "It's not a protest movement, it's an uprising: we don't expect anything from the regime"

15 October 2022, by **Antoine Larrache, Soheyla**

### **What are the origins of this mobilization?**

There have been so many things before. To get to the point, there are the poor living and working conditions, the lack of individual and collective freedoms, a very serious economic crisis which has been going on for a very long time and which is getting worse day by day. This goes hand in hand with an increasingly brutal repression of any protests. It all came together to help spark the present struggle; all it took was one drop to overflow, and it's come to this.

The question of women is of course primordial. The way in which the Islamic Republic treats women and in particular the dress code it imposes on them, particularly wearing the hijab, galvanizes all the issues around them. It's something very striking, it was a significant trigger.

### **Is the mobilization carried out by women or is it broader?**

It's much broader now, it concerns all layers of society, all age groups. Of course, it started with women and young people, but now it is spreading, although the core remains made up of university and high school students.

The whole population is now contributing to this movement. It has spread to the most popular social strata. Yesterday, in the poor neighbourhoods of Tehran, very important movements broke out.

### **What demands are people fighting for?**

I take the liberty of saying that this is not a protest movement, it is an uprising: nothing is expected from the regime. The slogans relate to the overthrow of the regime: "down with the dictatorship", "down with the supreme guide." The political regime is directly targeted, the people aspire to overthrow it.

### **Are there any links to the Arab uprisings?**

Definitely. Some of the roots of the discontent that is the same. It's the same everywhere: poor living conditions, poor economic and social conditions, social injustice, political and social repression and so on. All of this contributes to the emergence of popular movements.

But there are also "Iranian specificities": we are dealing with a theocratic regime, an Islamic

dictatorship that imposes Sharia law on women and men citizens. This attacks collective and individual freedoms, particularly those of women. The regime in place tries to make women half of men. It represses women's rights to the point of controlling their dress, and forces them to wear the Islamic veil in public. And it is not by chance that the last straw was the murder of a young girl while in the custody of the morality police. All this explains why the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom" has become a central motto of the movement.

### **Are there self-processes of self-organization?**

Absolutely. It is both sporadic and more or less organized, as in universities, by student associations for example. In the street, people gather, chant slogans, discuss, but the forces of repression intervene. Demonstrations are organized simultaneously in several parts of a city, which helps to disperse and disorganize the repressive forces.

### **Is the mainstream labour movement involved?**

The leaders of the main organizations have been imprisoned for six months.

They were involved in the mobilizations that took place at that time in all the small and medium-sized towns, where there were demonstrations, especially by teachers. It shook the country, with demonstrations, sit-ins, strikes. Bus drivers in Tehran, for example, were mobilized. Imprisoning leaders makes them invisible on the streets, but the political connections exist.

**What role does solidarity play**

**here?**

It is very important. Fortunately the solidarity movement is extremely widespread, all over the world and in all countries, including Western ones. I would like the radical left to be more present, because there is a kind of recuperation of the movement by right-wing groups and royalists. The presence of the radical left is important to help combat this orientation.

**Breaking news (12 October):** Since Monday 11 October, workers at the Asalouyeh petrochemical complex and refinery in southern Iran have gone on strike and blocked the main road. The strike is in support of the ongoing uprising. In 1979, the general strike, particularly that of oil workers, was an important element in making the revolution possible and bringing down the Pahlavi dynasty.

*9 October 2022*

## State of affairs in Brazil

**14 October 2022, by Eleonora Gosman**

Sunday, October 2, left a strange aftertaste: the 48.4% of votes obtained by Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the ten-party coalition *Federação Brasil da Esperança* [Brazil of Hope alliance] was not enough for him to win the Presidency as had previously been expected. With 43.2% of votes in the electronic polls in his favour, President Jair Bolsonaro revealed the real project of the plans designed in 2018 by his mentor, then as now, Steve Bannon. Another fact, arising from the elections, activated alarms: the composition of the National Congress, where Bolsonarism will have a strong presence.

Not only will the new Senate house several former ministers of the current government; the candidate of the extreme right will also be able to count on the Chamber of Deputies to sanction laws in accordance with his own group interests and the faction of the owners of economic power that supports him.

But, at the same time, Bolsonaro's resurrection had a strong impact on sectors of society that reject the current head of state's strident figure. "We consider it essential to avoid that re-election, due to the [president's] authoritarian temperament and his aversion to dialogue with all segments of society," according to the just-published manifesto from the "Breaking Down Walls" group. They

also argue that it is this principle that leads them to declare their "unconditional vote" for Lula da Silva in the October 30 ballot. The association, created two months ago, includes among its members prominent personalities from the economic and financial establishment, who have been joined by several intellectuals.

Lula has thus become the only democratic alternative in the face of an eventual radicalisation of his adversary, a scenario that keeps important segments of the middle and upper class awake at night. These estates maintain influence over the citizenry as a whole; despite this, the massive vote for Lula comes from the most vulnerable social majorities (more than 50% suffer from food insecurity or hunger), aware of how many sacrifices, deaths and suffering they have suffered in the last four years on account of Jair Bolsonaro, a far-right upstart who showed his management difficulties during the pandemic.

In this context, Lula da Silva understood that the period until the end of October had become "a different election from the first round." To win, the PT leader said, "we have to define a new strategy that adds all possible forces to our side."

The dilemma in these elections is thus

presented as "democracy or the abyss", an expression that has in fact become the new election slogan. This is how Fernando Henrique Cardoso, former president (1996-2002) and former enemy of Lula, put it: he said publicly that the leader of the Workers' Party is the only candidate capable of preserving democracy and inclusion against an adversary who would represent the risk of an authoritarian drift. For the same reasons, presidential candidate Simone Tebet, who came third in the first round, expressed her categorical support for Lula.

In the turn of this senator from the pragmatic Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB) towards the PT leader, the negotiating capacity demonstrated by the one-time metallurgical worker weighed heavily. "Lula has experience and knows how to deal with the political class. He identifies very well with those to whom talks and with whom he deals. I recognise him as a democrat and the other [Bolsonaro], no." For her, "at this moment in Brazilian history neutrality is not possible." The same causes induced the only center-left party that had been left out of the Coalition of Hope, the Democratic Labour Party (PDT), to join the new Lulista campaign "unconditionally". And in this environment, the presidential candidate that the PDT



had carried for the first round, Ciro Gomes, was forced to express his support, under penalty of marching towards isolation and political death.

By gaining the support of these two former candidates, alleged owners of 8.5 million votes, Lula brings together a more than significant portion of these votes. Without a doubt, the chances are high that a majority of these voters will prefer the PT candidate against Bolsonaro; according to some analysts, those who were favourably disposed towards the president had already migrated to his side in the first round. A survey by PoderData on October 6 revealed that 92% of Tebet supporters prefer Lula.

It is precisely this conviction, that the Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva-Geraldo Alckmin team can come to power, that explains the wave of endorsements from the historical leadership of the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB, center-right): the former Minister of Justice Nelson Jobim, the former president of the Central Bank Armínio Fraga, the famous political scientist Ilona Szabó, the former Minister of Finance Pedro Malan, the creator of the Real Plan André Lara Resende, the former Minister José Serra and the former Foreign Minister Aloysio Nunes Ferrera.

Along these lines, another former head of the Central Bank, Pêrsio Arida, made public who he will vote for at the end of the month: "I decided to opt for Lula da Silva not only because of the mistakes that Bolsonaro made, but also because of the fear of what could happen to Brazilian democracy. I don't want it to die and what we have today is a setback for civilisation." Arida commanded the Central Bank during Cardoso's first term (1995-1998). He did not hesitate to underline the "ordeal" that part two of a Bolsonarist government would represent: "It will be a worse threat to human rights, the environment and democracy itself," he said.

The proclamations of these representatives of traditional politics largely reflect the uneasiness of a significant part of Brazilian economic-financial power. Those fractions of the upper classes do not lack reasons for

rejecting the current president, who fits the political prototype of the planetary extreme right. They see this alignment with former occupant of the White House, Donald Trump and with the god of the right-wing movement, Steve Bannon, as a potential risk because it is a global network that they do not command. Somewhat paradoxically, considering the rejection that the PT has aroused in recent times among these groups, they fear that this affinity will allow the current Brazilian head of state a certain unwanted independence, with a relative capacity to put into play himself the very class supremacy which is claimed by the owners of economic and financial power, something which does not admit discussion.

There is another factor that contributes to feeding this perception, and it is the president's indisputable alliance with the top echelons of the Armed Forces: the active and passive military command, who, together with admirals and brigadiers, had put together the Bolsonarist government project. All of them, occupying the highest ministerial positions, have exercised and still exercise their command.

## A firmer Lula

Lula da Silva, who governed Brazil between 2003 and 2010 and left the Planalto Palace with a popularity of more than 80%, had a lukewarm style in the months preceding these last elections. As defined by Flávio Dino, senator-elect for the state of Maranhão, the Lulista campaign lacked "emotion, seduction and magic." The electoral campaign headquarters, led by the PT, opted at that stage for a candidate without much presence and less exposed to probable attacks.

But these days the figure of Lula has changed radically. He was able to recover the charismatic style that has distinguished him as a leader. His will has made the magical politician resurface, after burying that very unattractive image of someone who is mired in moderation. As the founder of the PT, Lula has now decided to abandon his initial timidity and take

the leadership of the campaign into his own hands. As he himself announced: "From this moment on the alternative stops being ideological. I'm not going to talk alone with some guy because he likes me. We are going to dialogue with all the political forces that have a vote, representation, a political significance in the country."

But the actions are far from being limited to the superstructure. There is also a lot of interest in street demonstrations since, according to Dino, who is mentioned as the future Minister of Justice, these protests have a "strong psychological influence."

For now, a march by the National Union of Students (UNE) is already on the agenda for Tuesday, October 18. Bolsonaro decided to cut the budget for the Ministry of Education, especially those funds destined for federal universities. For the head of state, university education is not a priority; his objectives pass almost exclusively through his re-election.

And it is for this reason that he decided to spend large sums of money from the treasury on subsidies to parliamentarians and state governors: these are nothing less than 9,000 million dollars from the national budget destined to finance works and services of deputies and senators in their electoral districts. Even when this "praxis" is legalised, on this occasion the president, with the help of Parliament, decreed the secrecy of how that disproportionate amount was implemented. It is not known who received items, nor the amounts and their final destinations. And worse yet, to compensate for these excesses he had to cut spending on welfare policies: education, health and housing plans. These "excesses" can play against the ruler, who will have to face youth protests in which unions and social movements can participate.

## A story that began in 2014

The scandal of this "secret budget" should be investigated by the press with the same intensity that it dedicated to the case known as

"Petrolao", of 2006. Similarly, it should require the data from police actions to follow the route of the cash (suspected to be irregular) used by the Bolsonaro family to buy 51 properties. The truth is that the complaints about these acquisitions lasted just a couple of weeks in local press headlines. In its place we had the Lava Jato/Car Wash story, which presented Lula da Silva as allegedly corrupt for a purchase of an apartment on Guarujá beach, on the São Paulo coast, a purchase as would later be proven, never occurred.

Throughout these four years, there were 26 crimes carried out by officials from different Bolsonaro ministries: in Health, it was the case of the overcharged purchase of AstraZeneca vaccines; in Education, a group led by a former minister together with two evangelical pastors, who received money from governors and mayors in exchange for speeding up the transfer of budget items for different purposes.

None of these episodes involved labelling Jair Messias Bolsonaro as "corrupt" and a "thief"; neither did they affect the Liberal Party (PL) which he joined to make his re-election viable. The PL was not the target of accusations of "looting" public resources, as was the case with the PT. The truth is that this campaign of disqualification, deployed between 2014 and 2018, was the one that gave birth to the Brazilian extreme right movement, and largely explains the current polarisation, a new phenomenon in Brazilian society.

## All Support Has Value

Advised, without a doubt, by national and foreign experts, Bolsonaro has not hesitated to decree last-minute economic measures to subsidise the poorest. The same strategy is deployed these days, with the hope of closing the gap and surpassing the PT leader. At the beginning of the post-electoral week, in meetings with his cabinet, the president gave orders to look for actions "profitable" in these circumstances. He placed his

Economy Minister Paulo Guedes at the head of the team. All these decisions represent additional expenses, offset, as noted, by budget cuts in key sectors. Not to mention the consequences that "waste" may have in 2023; whether it is his turn to govern or Lula's, whoever's legacy it may be.

Bolsonaro fully entered the competition to show that he has as many or more new political backers than his adversary. Thus, he obtained the endorsement of the Agricultural Parliamentary Front [12], after meeting with the president of the bloc, Sergio Souza. This representative of large Brazilian landowners praised Bolsonaro at the meeting held at the Palacio de la Alvorada, the president's official residence. "The result of what has happened in recent years is very clear. Agriculture did not stop even during the pandemic. Agricultural activity is the great pillar on which this country is based and is responsible for development, generating employment and income, with legal certainty and, mainly, with the right to property." He later mentioned that the agricultural bloc in Congress "chose its place and it is the road to the right, with faith in God. Those are the paths of freedom."

Both candidates are, from a certain point of view, obliged to follow the demands of those actors newly joined to their respective campaigns. In fact, Bolsonaro has already been forced to promise a ministerial position to the governor of São Paulo, Rodrigo García, who is still active in social democracy but has just sworn allegiance to the president. Exotic commitments are also seen on the PT's side, which has established close relationships with renowned economists who were participants in the "Tucana [toucan]" era (a word that designates the PSDB. [13] Now, the PT is seeking the support of this party of the traditional center-right in the state of Rio Grande do Sul and are willing to endorse PSDB candidate Eduardo Leite, who is running for re-election in a race against Bolsonarist Onyx Lorenzoni, who is several lengths ahead of him.

There are 12 states (out of a total of

27) where the candidates for governor will compete in the second round. Half show a preference for Lula and the other half show a willingness to vote for Bolsonaro and campaign for him. And the former president has also hurled himself into a campaign to gain the support of evangelical pastors.

## Give and Take

Lastly, there are not a few who speculate about the room for manoeuvre that the PT leader will have if, as is likely, he governs his country for a third term. These days, polls after the first round suggest that Lula has the upper hand (in the first round they were right in Lula's vote but wrong regarding Bolsonaro's). To avoid pressure before the ballot, the former union leader refuses to give the names of those who could be part of his future government, especially in the economic area. Still, he made a promise: put "outsiders" in the cabinet. "Whoever wants to know my Cabinet is going to have to wait for me to win the elections," he answered a question from journalists. He immediately praised the decision of a group of economists from the PSDB to give him their full backing.

Speaking of them in a press conference he said that "these people know that I am the guarantee of the exercise of democracy, in a country in which my adversary demonstrates the opposite." On the demands that point to the fiscal surplus, he commented: "For me, fiscal responsibility does not have to be a law; it has to be in the leader's head."

He also celebrated the union with the historic leadership of the PSDB, of which he said: "We were together in the re-democratisation process that defeated the military dictatorship. And now we are together again and we are going to defeat Bolsonaro's authoritarianism, obscurantism and denialism. Together we are going to improve the country's economy and eradicate inflation."

*Translated and annotated by David Fagan for **International Viewpoint** from **Nueva Sociedad**, October 2022.*

# Sudan: “Give us back the keys to the country”

13 October 2022, by **Paul Martial**

## The Fall of Al-Bashir

The 1989 coup of Al-Bashir, supported by the Islamists of the Al-Turabi-led National Islamic Front (NIF) gradually plunged Sudan into a deep crisis. This new government engaged in a costly war against the populations of southern Sudan in the name of jihad, it imposed a retrograde morality on the way of life of the Sudanese and favoured the capture of wealth by the military hierarchy. It also exacerbated discrimination against the populations of the periphery, so much so that the country remains deeply divided between what academics call the "riparian elite", or greater Khartoum, and other neglected and despised regions.

Starting in 2010 demonstrations were organized against the economic crisis and they quickly took an anti-government political turn. The revolution of 2019 was nourished by these struggles. The power of the mobilization was such that the army had no other solution than to dismiss Al-Bashir and take power. A manoeuvre that was immediately contested by the revolutionaries, who demanded a civilian government. The ferocious repression was ineffective, the army was forced to come to terms. It accepted the creation of a sovereignty council composed of military and civilians, chaired by General Burhan, and a civilian government led by an economist, Abdallah Hamdok.

This government became doubly fragile, both in terms of the military and the population. On the one hand, it was pursuing a policy of purging Islamist militants in the senior civil service and beginning to dismantle the financial structures of the army; on the other hand, it was applying an austerity policy imposed by the IMF

and Western governments. The military made use of people's fatigue and even popular resentment against Hamdok's economic and social policies to seize power. General Burhan remained president of the Sovereignty Council and Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemidti, became his vice-president.

## The inglorious record of the military government

Since their coup d'état of 25 October 2021, the putschists have not been able to assert their power. Contrary to what they thought, the refusal by the population of the government of Abdallah Hamdok did not give them a social base. Especially since many remember the history of the country, which is used to oppressive and corrupt military governments.

The mobilizations are not weakening, despite the repression which has left dozens dead and hundreds of wounded and prisoners.

In an attempt to break the deadlock, the military initiated a manoeuvre. In their July 2022 declaration, they declared themselves in favour of a civilian government and the constitution of a Supreme Council, without really spelling out what it would be like. However, the Minister of Finance specified [14] that this Council would have the task of defending the sovereignty of the country and as such would be in charge of defence, foreign affairs and control over the country's central bank. In other words, the essence of the sovereign functions of the state.

This manoeuvre has not received any significant support in society [15]. It

aims to try to blame the blockade on opponents and let a civilian government manage a country that is economically drained. The latest United Nations report [16] gives the IMF's estimates. Real gross domestic product is estimated at only 0.3 per cent and inflation at 245.1 per cent in 2022. The average prices of sorghum and millet have increased by 150 per cent and 250 per cent respectively compared to 2021 and by 550 per cent and 650 per cent over the last five years. Shortages of electricity, fuel, foodstuffs and other commodities have dramatic consequences for the poorest populations, as indicated in the above-mentioned United Nations report:

"It is estimated that almost a quarter of the population is in a situation of acute famine during the lean season, from June to September. (...) Up to 11.7 million people (an increase of 2 million) are expected to be vulnerable, including 3.1 million in emergency situations".

## Weak support for the coup

The putschists rely more and more on Islamist militants [17]. In the era of Al-Bashir, the backbone of the state apparatus, but also of the public companies, was made up of Islamist adherents and sympathizers of the NIF. They thus followed a strategy of entry into the high administration advocated by its leader Al-Turabi [18]. During the revolution many of these senior officials were sacked. Gradually, with the coup, they were reinstated in their functions, thus demonstrating that the Burhan government is evolving along the path traced by Al-Bashir. Taking advantage of this openness, fundamentalist militants restructured themselves with the creation of a party: the Great Islamic Current [19].

Other supporters, more surprising at first glance, are some regional militias that fought the regime of Al-Bashir. In fact, he not only waged a war against the south of Sudan, which became independent in 2011; he also did so in Darfur, South Kordofan and the Blue Nile. For many years, the populations were attacked by the Janjaweed, led by Hemidti in the service of al-Bashir. They tried to carry out real ethnic cleansing against certain communities. In response, the latter formed armed groups fighting the soldiers of Hemidti. During the 2019 revolution, these militias joined the coalition of forces of change and participated in the civilian government of Abdallah Hamdok. Djibril Ibrahim, leader of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), remains the Minister of the Economy and Minni Minawi, head of a faction of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA), still holds the post of governor of Darfur. How can we explain that these two militias supported the coup? Many elements of an answer can be provided. First, their leaders do not believe in the possibility that civilians can conquer power and keep it, because of from the influence of the army and its history. Secondly, Hemidti, the former enemy, played a central role in the negotiations with these two militias. He counted on the division between Khartoum and the periphery. He defended the idea that the revolution was led by this riparian elite, who would only perpetuate the ostracism suffered by the populations of the periphery. Hence the idea of forming a bloc composed of leaders from

these peripheries, to establish a balance of power and, why not, one day accede to power. Lastly, these groups were sensitive to the need to be more on the side of the strongest, demonstrating the political inconsistency of most of the armed

groups in the region.

## **A heterogeneous government**

Divisions remain acute among the putschists. The most obvious is the one between Burhan, chairman of the council, military chief of staff belonging to the elite of greater Khartoum, and Hemidti, vice president, former camel driver, who managed to transform the Janjaweed into a paramilitary force, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) [20]. This two-headed government is condemned to work together because of the equilibrium of the political and military relationship of forces between the two leaders. Each of them has his sources of finance. The military hierarchy owns the largest banking institution, the Omdurman National Bank, as well as construction and agricultural enterprises [21]. The sources of funding for the RSF are gold mines [22], migrant racketeering [23] and the provision of mercenaries for the benefit of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates(UAE) in their war in Yemen [24].

Other divisions appear within the army itself, with the presence of Islamist officers close to the National Congress, which comes from the NIF, particular units such as the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), an intelligence agency and political police which has a wide autonomy with specific economic networks.

This heterogeneity is a source of weakness of the government and of instability. The exploitation of each other's weaknesses must not reach the fateful level where the entire edifice of

power could collapse. Each of the protagonists is well aware of this.

## **Sudan at the heart of geopolitical stakes**

The putschists benefit from the leniency of a large part of the countries of the region. Two days before the coup, Burhan had made a trip to Egypt. The green light given by his powerful neighbour was decisive. Historically, Egypt has been linked to Sudan since the latter was subject to colonization led by an Anglo-Egyptian condominium. The armies of the two countries have very strong ties. Egypt needs Sudan as an ally in its dispute with Ethiopia over the use of Nile waters with the construction of the Renaissance dam. There is also a border dispute between Sudan and Ethiopia, which claims fertile land in the Al-Fashaga area. Saudi Arabia and the UAE, although they condemned the coup, do not take a dim view of a strong and authoritarian central power that is a source of stability, an important element for these two countries. In addition, these two Gulf monarchies wish to continue to benefit from the help of RSF troops in their war against the Houthis in Yemen.

On the Russian side, they are trying to advance their pawns by resurrecting an agreement in principle reached at the time of Al-Bashir for the installation of a military base in the city of Port Sudan. A particularly strategic place:

"In Russia's eyes, Port Sudan is a key position in the centre of the Red Sea, a strategic corridor linking the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean via the Suez Canal and the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, choke points [