



## IV577 - February 2023

# Feminist Anti-War Resistance abortion rights petition

28 February 2023, by **Collective**

But instead of stopping costly and senseless military operations in Ukraine where tens of thousands of Russians are dying, or instead of fighting poverty and developing effective programs to support childhood, motherhood and responsible parenthood, the Russian government together with the Russian Orthodox Church decided to force Russian women "to have at least four children" by various means. Over the years they failed to figure out how to encourage women to have children and decided to take the most ineffective and harmful route: gradually restricting the right to abortion, making access to it more difficult and threatening to take it out of mandatory medical insurance. [1]

## What restrictive measures have already been introduced or are proposed?

Since 2011, Russian hospitals have introduced so-called "weeks of silence": when a woman applies for an abortion, she is to put off the date of the procedure for a week or more in order to influence her decision during

this time. Often the silence week delays the abortion and women have it later - with greater risk to their health, as other types of abortion (up to and including surgery) have to be used if the deadline is delayed.

Since 2013, Putin has banned abortion-related advertising.

Since 2016, there has been an amendment that many experts consider inhumane: doctors are required to "show an image of the embryo and its heartbeat during ultrasound" to women who want an abortion.

The government encourages hospitals to send women to psychologists before having an abortion, or to develop special pre-abortion questionnaires in which women are asked accusatory and abusive questions. Many hospitals are also distributing illiterate and manipulative pamphlets with misleading information about abortion and its consequences. All of this has one goal - to discourage women, to frighten them and to stimulate their feelings of guilt. Russian health workers in some regions are being trained in "pre-abortion counselling with traditional values in mind", and women at consultations are asked to fill in questionnaires with questions along the lines of "Are you ready for a posthumous encounter with the soul of

your child?"

Patriarch Kirill, speaking in the Federation Council, proposed a ban on abortions in private clinics. He suggests that the increase in the number of illegal abortions (which threatens to increase women's mortality rates) should be ignored.

The Duma has proposed a ban on online sales of medication for abortion (the safest). Hospitals and pharmacies have been experiencing problems with the availability of oral contraceptives and pills since March.

In the summer, the State Duma announced a draft law banning abortions under the compulsory medical insurance scheme.

Deputy Prime Minister Tatyana Golikova proposed a ban on abortions before the age of 18 without parental consent.

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has proposed to oblige married women to obtain their husbands' consent for abortions. The number of interested statements from representatives of the ROC has generally increased. For example, Mikhail Vasilyev, rector of the church at the headquarters of the Strategic Missile Forces, suggested a non-trivial solution to the problem of women who

do not want to send their sons to die in the war. It turns out that you just need to avoid abortions and have more children—then parting with just one of them will not be so sad!

The State Duma will consider an amendment to prohibit the promotion of “voluntary abortion and the Freudian ideology of the child”.

But the truth is that all these measures to restrict the right to abortion will not only fail to bring the Russian government any closer to its desired demographic goals but will also cause undeniable additional harm to Russian women and thus to Russian society as a whole. Studies prove that the number of abortions has nothing to do with the birth rate: in 20 years, thanks to public awareness and contraception, the number of abortions in Russia has almost halved, but it has not resulted in any demographic growth. Fewer abortions do not mean more children. Russians are “dying out” not because of abortions, but because of low living standards, poverty, involvement in military operations, a sense of insecurity, and the futility of raising children in their own country.

According to Alexei Raksha, a demographer, “fertility in Russia may drop another 10% in the next couple of years and then become the lowest it has been in 250 years” (source: Important Stories). This prediction is due to falling incomes and a growing sense of uncertainty about the future.

Obstructing access to free abortions or to abortions in general is a blow to the well-being of society as a whole:

Prohibiting abortion or making it harder to access free abortion encourages the development of an underground market for health services. Clandestine abortions are unregulated and threaten the health and lives of women. When abortion was banned in the USSR under Stalin (1936-1955), female mortality increased significantly. Also, clandestine abortions are more likely

to result in serious illness, injury, infertility and in the worst case, death.

The inability to control their own bodies places women in a vulnerable position, particularly in situations of ongoing domestic or economic violence. An unwanted pregnancy that cannot be terminated may cause a woman to remain with a partner who is physically dangerous to her.

Unintended pregnancies lead to increased social orphanhood: children are left without parental care and without a positive experience of family life.

Unwanted pregnancy and inability to have an abortion makes already poor people even poorer: the poorest category of people in Russia are single mothers with two or three children. According to different data, women who already have a child most often have an abortion. Many of them when interviewed say that they have had an abortion because they cannot afford to have a second child.

But none of that matters to the Russian parliamentarians: they are interested in the welfare of women and mothers only when there are upcoming elections. In other cases, the Russian government just makes a show of presenting itself; it introduces the title of “heroine mother” for mothers of many children instead of providing them with real social and material support.

We, Russian women, are not your incubators and not your property. To every parliamentarian trying to score political points on the topic of abortion, we want to say:

Fight your own battles, give birth to your own children!

We demand:

- Repeal all discriminatory amendments regarding the reproductive rights of women and girls;
- Preserve access to free

abortion at state clinics;

- Retain the right of non-state clinics to provide abortion services;
- Include free contraceptive programmes in the MHI for women in difficult life situations;
- Remove representatives of the ROC from the topic of reproductive rights and women’s health: women themselves, as well as doctors and experts, but not priests, should be the ones to assess what is going on;
- Stop wasting money on militarism: this money could go to health care and support children and motherhood.

We do not live, love and give birth to children for you and your demographic tables and political ambitions. We have a right to choose and to reproductive justice—to both abortion and maternity. We have a right to a peaceful and free state in which it is not frightening to give life to a new human being. By banning abortion, you will not encourage us to have more babies. Many pregnant women are now leaving Russia to give their child the citizenship of another country. As long as the situation in the country is as it is and human rights are not respected, you will not be able to do anything about the birth rate. You don’t own us and you can’t exploit us: the falling birth rate is society’s reaction to the country’s policies. Russians are not dying out because of abortions; they are dying out because of you! And it is impossible to solve this problem in the two weeks Putin has outlined.

We recommend the government to adopt a few “weeks of silence” to reflect on this impossible task.

# China's New Left: The Revival of Lost Traditions

27 February 2023, by **Gregor Benton**

Several new-left organisations, some inspired by the legacy of Maoism, others by that of Chinese Trotskyism and other revolutionary currents, have sprung up in recent months and years among students in China, Chinatown, and the diaspora and in Taiwan. The setting up in mainland China of Trotskyist study groups by young people calling themselves "Revolutionary Communists" is already a reality, though not yet a matter that can be discussed in detail given present conditions in China, which are especially dangerous for the leftwing critics of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Other migrant and ethnic Chinese leftists in the diaspora and Hong Kong have got into touch with anarchists and Trotskyists (both Chinese and non-Chinese) and their organisations. In China and the Sinophone, critical-Marxist reading groups have been set up on campuses in many Chinese cities. They include groups dedicated to the study of Chen Duxiu, founder of the CCP in 1921 and of the Chinese Left (Trotskyist) Opposition in 1931; student societies calling themselves "Maoist Marxists"; [4]

*China Labour Bulletin* is a non-governmental organization based in Hong Kong that supports and engages with the workers' movement in China, where it aims to hold the official trade unions accountable to their members and involve workers in them so that they become truly representative. It was founded by Han Dongyang, a onetime railway worker in Beijing who helped set up the Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation during the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989. [10] The two countries will hold nuclear tabletop exercises in February this year in a scenario of North Korean nuclear attacks for their joint nuclear planning.

## A hotbed of nuclear tension that periodically escalates

North Korea has been developing a program to miniaturize nuclear weapons. And the Korean peninsula is also a hotbed of nuclear tension that periodically escalates although international attention is focused on Ukraine and Taiwan [3]. The Korean peninsula shares land or sea borders with China, Russia and Japan, while the US has established its largest network of overseas military bases there. Last December, the International Viewpoint article "The geopolitics of crisis" of Pierre Rousset pointed out the following two points related to the situation of the Korean Peninsula until last November:

1. The Korean peninsula is a hotbed of nuclear tension that periodically escalates.
2. The alternation between moments of relaxation or tension often relates to factors "internal" to the peninsula and not, or not much, to the geopolitics of the great powers.

The state of crisis manifested itself last year in an unprecedented number of ballistic missiles launches by North Korea, particularly in October-November. [11] However, from November last year to January this year, another principal factor "internal" surfaced. It was unprecedented hardline approaches toward North Korea of South Korea which was defined as "principal enemy" by North.

## Repeated retaliatory actions between North and South Korea

The following are the retaliatory actions taken by North and South Korea between November and December last year.

1. In response to North launches of November 2, South Korea fired 3 test missiles to North Korea across the Northern Limit Line (NLL) [13] Then its state media boasted of success toward developing its first military spy satellite. In response to it, after three days, South Korea released a clearer photograph of the Kim Il Sung Square area in Pyongyang taken by the medium-sized satellite "National Satellite-1".
3. On December 26, five North Korea unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) crossed into South Korea and South Korea responded by scrambling jets and attack helicopters. [14] As part of its response, the South Korea military also sent UAVs into the North to photograph its military installations.

The current Korean crisis will go back a long time from the standpoint of the military programs developed by North Korea. But it should be noted that South Korea's hardline approaches toward North Korea last year are unusual. And the unprecedented retaliatory actions of South Korea were followed by a series of presidential remarks which were also unprecedentedly extreme and provocative.

## **“Eye-for-an-Eye” revenge politics of Yun Seok-yeol**

After a series of retaliatory actions against North Korea last year, South Korean President Yun Seok-yeol instructed officials on December 28 to firmly retaliate against any North Korean provocations without having fears just because the North has nuclear weapons. [16]:

Our military must become a powerful one that instills impenetrable fear in our enemy and firm confidence in our people.

In order for us to attain peace, we must make overwhelmingly superior war preparations.

Last year, Yun has spoken and actually conducted his “Eye-for-an-Eye” revenge politics. He takes the position that the country’s actions are all correct even if its retaliatory measures violate the Korean Armistice Agreement and other inter-Korean agreements. These remarks and actions obviously went beyond South Korea’s conservative positions in the past.

## **North and South Koreas pushing**

## **ahead with ICBM development**

First of all, it is a violation of the Armistice Agreement to fly unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) over the Military Demarcation Line (MDL). Also, flying a manned aircraft for survey to the vicinity of the MDL meant a flight to an area designated as no-fly zones. It was also a violation of the September 19 Military Agreement which was concluded by former South Korean President Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong-un. While both South and North Koreas have repeated violations of the Korean Armistice Agreement and other inter-Korean agreements, the countries are pushing ahead with ICBM development. Currently Russia, the US, China, France, India, the UK, Israel, and North Korea are the only countries known to have operational ICBMs. Meanwhile South Korea is about to join one of those countries by developing solid-fuel space vehicles that can be diverted to ICBMs at any time for “space development”. On December 15 last year, the North’s Academy of Defense Science succeeded in the “static firing test of high-thrust solid-fuel motor” with a thrust of 140 ton-force at the Sohae Satellite Launching Ground. [18] The test flight was conducted the day after the Yun Seok-yeol’s unprecedented “Eye-for-an-Eye” remarks. In response to that, North Korea also conducted unusual military actions immediately after the test flight: launching of ballistic missiles to Japan Sea before and after the New Year.

## **South Korea seeks independent nuclear armament**

The runaway train of Yun Seok-yeol cannot be stopped. On January 11, he said at a policy briefing that Seoul could either build nuclear weapons or have them redeployed to the country to counter Pyongyang. [20]

Since 2018, Kim Jong-un had selected conflict instead of reconciliation with South Korea, accelerating his dictatorship. In recent years, top leaders of both North and South Koreas have been talking too lightly about war and nuclear weapons. Especially recently, Yun Seok-yeol’s unprecedented hard line position will foreshadow an unexpected crisis situation with the nuclear arms race as another principal factor “internal”, which is opposite to the abolition of nuclear weapons. It also may raise the ghost of the pro-nuclear consensus among the elites which had already prevailed in other East Asian countries. Regardless of the energy output the nuclear tests, heightened and intensified regional tensions in this area will endanger geopolitical stability which may trigger unexpected nuclear weapons also in other parts of the world. Even with a small nuclear weapon explosion, the humanitarian impact on the region’s complex geopolitical relations is enormous.

7 February 2023

# **8 January: Contradictions and alternatives in the struggle against fascism**

**19 February 2023, by José Correa Leite**

**From fantasy to**

## the real Brazil

But it wasn't the real Brazil. Because the real Brazil is also militiamen, religious fanatics, landowners and their *jagunços* [paramilitaries], ultra-neoliberal businesspeople, gold miners... all expressed by the acronym BBB which symbolizes in the Federal Congress the parliamentarians representing the interests of "beef, bullets and the Bible". 40% of those consulted by Atlas Research on 10 January 2023 believe that Lula did not win the presidential elections in October and 37% say they are in favour of military intervention to invalidate these illegitimate results - even if only 10% are in favour of installing a military dictatorship. Vladimir Safatle is right when he notes that what happened on 8 January is the "principle of reality".

It is therefore right that various analysts describe 8 January as "Lula's second inauguration". The fanatical *Bolsonaristas*, who encouraged the ransacking of the Praça dos Três Poderes in Brasília, did what they had long promised to do and gave Lula the welcome they thought he deserved. An exemplary action of the fascist gangs. But according to the Atlas poll cited above, only 18% of respondents approved of the *Bolsonarista* invasion of Congress. The attacks of 8 January are an unavoidable event, a synthesis of multiple and contradictory trends, on which the population as a whole is forced to vote - the Quaest poll on Bolsonaro's popularity on social networks shows that it fell to its worst rating in four years, from 40% the previous week to only 21% on 9 January. In the 11 January Datafolha poll, 93% of respondents condemned the attacks and most advocated the arrest of those involved. In the 13 January Ipsos poll, 81% of respondents condemned the attacks - while 9% fully approved and 9% partially approved of them. The raids were both a shock to institutions of state power that believe they are removed from disorder and a practical experiment in Bolsonaro's fanatical militancy for immense masses of Brazilians.

The newspapers compare 8 January 2023 in Brasília to 6 January 2021 in Washington. However, beyond the

desire to deny the election results and reveal the challenges posed to liberal political systems today by illiberal or neo-fascist movements, comparisons have limits. Bolsonaro had already left office and Lula had been sworn in as president, while Trump was still in power and the US Congress had yet to recognize the election result. The US fascist mobilization was aimed at Congress keeping in power rather than Biden. The Brazilian insurrection is a widespread destruction of the seats of the three powers - the Alvorada Palace, the Federal Congress and the Federal Supreme Court - whose significance is that of a coup d'état, seeking to create a situation of chaos, civil war and government bankruptcy, which would justify the intervention of the Armed Forces. And the tradition of civilian control over the military places 6 January in a completely different structural framework from that of 8 January: Brazil's last military dictatorship ended in 1985 but it retained the militarization of the police force and a special status in public service for the military.

Fortunately, the institutional response in Brazil - including from conservatives - has been much healthier than that of Republicans in the United States. The fact that Lula managed a crisis of this magnitude to his advantage when he had barely a week in office and that he rallied the political authorities around him says a lot about his political capacity. But it also expresses the fear of the Brazilian elites in the face of disorder and the presence of people in the streets.

The immediate reaction of the left and progressivism has so far been fairly unified, judging by the number of demonstrations that were held across the country on 9 January. It is necessary to fight against complacency and connivance towards political violence and the militarization of society; to offer no truce or amnesty to those involved in the coup attempt; to make Bolsonaro and his friends responsible for their actions; to dismantle the fascist core power that has been installed in the armed forces and other organs of the state; to fight for withdrawal of the military from political life and the demilitarization of the police, politics

and society. It seems that the meaning of "authoritarian rubble" has resurfaced in the consciousness of the left 34 years after the promulgation of the 1988 Constitution.

## The contradictions of Lula's government

But this major event in national life raises an inescapable question: how could an action like that in Brasília be organized without the federal government being informed beforehand and being able to react?

The explanation offered to us until now was that of the collusion of the government of the Federal District with the demonstrators. As a result, the former justice minister and security secretary of Jair Bolsonaro's federal district government, Anderson Torres (who was providentially traveling to the United States), became the prime suspect in the plot that led to the assaults. Also on 8 January, Lula decreed a federal intervention in the public security organs of the Federal District (DF) until 31 January. Then, in the early hours of 9 January, the judge of the Federal Supreme Court (STF), Alexandre de Moraes, dismissed the pro-Bolsonaro governor of the Federal District, Ibaneis Rocha, for 90 days and ordered a series of measures aimed at the total liquidation within 24 hours of the camps in front of the barracks throughout Brazil, the arrest of the demonstrators and the search for the financiers of these actions. On the 9th, more than 1,500 demonstrators were arrested in Brasília. Social movement initiatives in defence of democracy and against any amnesty for putschists took place throughout the country. On the 10th the STF judge, Alexandre de Moraes, ordered the arrest of Anderson Torres, who allegedly met Jair Bolsonaro in Miami on 7 January. On the 11th, a National Force, composed of police officers from different States and not soldiers, was responsible for the security of the Esplanade, access to which was closed.

The DF government's complicity with



the protesters seems obvious. But this only represents the surface of events. As investigations progress, it seems that 8 January was the plan B for Bolsonaro's supporters. The draft decree found by the federal police at Anderson Torres' home shows that Plan A proposed by Bolsonaro's entourage was a coup d'état, to establish, with the support of the armed forces, a "state of defence" of the Superior Electoral Tribunal and change the result of the 2022 election. [21] This would have put the military in the position of moderating the power of a second Bolsonaro government. If Plan A has not been executed, it is because it has not obtained the support of the majority of the operational commanders of the troops, probably not that of the Army Commander. As this becomes known, Plan B turns out to be an alternative to Plan A.

The problem arising from the lack of prior reaction of the federal government is related to the characteristics of the Lula government and the challenges it faces. It was formed as a democratic front government that brought Lula and Alckmin to federal power - a government of the PT and its progressive allies (with the exception of the PSOL, which did not agree to participate in the new executive), including Marina Silva and Sonia Guajajara, and going as far as Simone Tebet and the liberals. [22]

This leads a part of the left to recognize itself in the dynamics of this front and to seek to level its challenges around, essentially, the idea of neutralizing the ultra-neoliberal pressure of the markets and "Faria Lima" [high finance]. The problem is real, and the concern is correct, but it leads a part of the left to a delusional economism: in an article entitled "De-Bolsonarize Brazil. How?" of 11 January, Elias Jabbour asserts: "*Bolsonarismo* will only begin to disappear when a certain consensus in our society is reached around the need for accelerated economic growth, industrialization and the construction of the material foundations of a Brazilian welfare state." [23] It is worth asking on which planet the perpetrator is when well-being is declining all over the world.

The struggle against contemporary fascism is a broader struggle to find meaning and perspectives, projects that cannot be reduced to economic demands or policies that thwart the social atomization of the popular masses.

The composition of the government, however, seeks to respond also to two other interconnected characteristics. On the one hand, moderation in the treatment of *Bolsonarismo* and its organized core in a sector of the command of the Armed Forces, indispensable because of the important role that the military reservists have obtained in recent years. José Múcio was appointed to the Ministry of Defence, supported by the pragmatic Flávio Dino in the Ministry of Justice, in an attempt at a transitional pact with the military and the significant sectors of the right that are anchored in the institutions of the state. To this end, Lula has brought into government moderate people who are particularly inclined to strike deals with supporters of Bolsonaro or, at least, with many conservative anti-PT sectors. This turns out to be the great contradiction of the events of 8 January, as Bolsonaro's Plan A comes to light and the complicity of certain sectors of the armed forces with the attacks becomes evident.

On the other hand, this beginning of the presidential term has always been, in the eyes of Lula and the PT, a space to "buy" the governability of the legislature by paying the price demanded by the deputies and senators of the *Centrão* - the bloc of conservative parliamentarians that participates in every government - by offering them ministries with large budgets. The two objectives are linked: conciliation with Bolsonaro's non-*Bolsonarista* supporters, who are to a large extent in the three *Centrão* parties drawn into the government (the MDB, Kassab's PSD and União Brasil). These represent, officially, 9 of the 31 ministries (including the strategic Ministry of Communications), which has already earned Lula a minister from União Brasil linked to militiamen from Rio de Janeiro at the Ministry of Tourism. [24]

## The reality of events

However, facts have their own lives. Lula was able to take advantage of the circumstances that arose, but he must also try to anticipate them. The enormous violence unleashed by the demonstrators on 8 January, worthy of classic fascist gangs, was repudiated by the vast majority of the population and political leaders. It seems to have isolated and significantly weakened militant *Bolsonarismo*. Governors elected in the wake of Bolsonaro's first-round vote - such as São Paulo's new governor, Tarcísio de Freitas, a possible political leader capable of inheriting conservative sectors - had to travel to Brasília to disavow "terrorist acts" and the actions of "vandals" (as the press calls them) and to show their solidarity with Lula. Even Valdemar Costa Neto, president of the PL, to which Jair Bolsonaro is now affiliated, criticized these acts. *Bolsonarista* encampments were dismantled throughout the country, on the direct orders of the STF.

Lula seemed, in his speech on the night of the 8th, to have abandoned the comfort zone of the conciliatory policies that have guided him since his release from prison, both with regard to his strategy of alliances and his electoral campaign and the establishment of the government. After decreeing intervention in the DF's security organs, he called out the fascists as fascists, criticized Bolsonaro, recalled the deforestation of the Amazon and its importance for all of humanity, singled out "evil agribusiness" that destroys forests and poisons food and declared that he will attack the financiers of the putschists. This is at least a partial break with the strategy of seeking a transition in alliance with *Bolsonarismo*, even without Bolsonaro's approval. Throughout the week, Lula made other points, including not trusting the military and that the role defined by the constitution is not that of being a "moderating power".

But "evil agribusiness" is the dynamo of Brazilian exports and the heart of the oligarchic power apparatus that is

the Brazilian state. Moreover, his “pact” is to seek an agreement with the armed forces – which Bolsonaro has tried to turn into a pillar of support for his government. The 1988 Constitution preserves the role of the military in the political order. Lula and his closest advisers and ministers are seeking the path of broader alliances and conciliation. Can they initiate breaks, even if only occasionally? How can they do this while maintaining the three pillars of their moderate political strategy: a democratic façade of government, a transition agreed with the military and conservatives, and the cost-effective integration of the *Centrão* into the governance pact?

## How to fight Bolsonarismo?

The political contradictions are implacable and those that underpin the Lula government appeared in force on 8 January. José Múcio is the military’s ambassador to the government, and his inaction or complicity appears to have played a central role in the protesters’ unfettered occupation of the Praça dos Três Poderes. Múcio came out of the episode rather discredited, but Lula spoke openly about the problem and reaffirmed his confidence in him, no doubt taking into account the continuity of dialogue with the military sectors. At the same time Lula’s reaction was to confront the putschists and, to do so, he relied on another figure who has proved central, the STF judge, Alexandre de Moraes.

Moraes has a two-decade political-legal trajectory linked to São Paulo’s PSDB and former governor Geraldo Alckmin. He was the Minister of Justice under Michel Temer, who appointed him to the STF. But over the past four years he has clashed harshly with the Bolsonaro government to “fight extremism.” This led the former president to ask the

Federal Senate in August 2021 for Moraes’ impeachment – without success. Moraes is leading an investigation into “anti-democratic acts” and another into “digital militias,” targeting one of Jair Bolsonaro’s sons, Carlos Bolsonaro. It was Moraes who ruled Brazil’s electoral justice in 2022 with an iron fist, creating draconian procedures to outlaw fake news on social media during the campaign. And he took equally severe measures against various *Bolsonarista* initiatives. He became the icon of legal activism against the *Bolsonaristas* – necessary... but worrying because of its concentration of power.

Senator Flávio Bolsonaro, another son of the former president, reportedly said that “the pacification of the country requires the classification of the investigations that [target the Bolsonaro supporters] are led by Alexandre de Moraes at the STF”. Moraes later said – on 12 December during the validation of the result of the election of Lula and Alckmin – that “this ceremony attests to a total and indisputable victory of democracy and the rule of law against the anti-democratic attacks, disinformation and hate speech uttered by various organized groups already identified, that will, I guarantee, be held fully accountable so that this does not happen again in the next elections.”

All this seems to have been brought to light in the last two days, with the revelation of the failed coup A in Anderson Torres’ project and the putschists’ call for sanctions. On 13 January Bolsonaro’s appointed attorney general, Augusto Aras, under pressure from 79 members of the Federal Public Prosecutor’s Office, asked the STF to include Bolsonaro in the investigation into the authorship of the acts of the coup, which Alexandre de Moraes immediately did.

De-Bolsonarizing Brazilian society requires measures that we do not address here, such as the resumption of the autonomous organization of civil

society and the reoccupation of the streets by social movements, the regulation and democratization of digital platforms and networks that feed and profit from the activism of the radical right, policies aimed at increasing the confidence of popular sectors in their own strength, and an economic system that breaks with the extractivism and agribusiness generated by all the forces in power over the last forty years. It also requires international alternatives. The political capacity of *Bolsonarismo* was built by articulating itself on the world terrain with conservative nationalist forces that are at “war against modernity.” No democratic victory will be final if it is not projected as an alternative for all humanity and for the fabric of life of the planet.

However, a decisive democratic struggle has begun. This is an opportunity to confront impunity, violence, disregard for life (the criminal deaths of the pandemic being the most egregious case), militarization of society and its control by militias – linking it all to the criminalization of the coup activities of Bolsonaro and his associates. The mobilization to hold the putschists accountable can – and, in our view, must – catalyse a process of popular self-organization under the banners of the left. Such a coup against Brazilian fascism, if consolidated, will also put traditional conservatism on the defensive side and strongly influence the strategic balance of power.

To seize this opportunity, the Lula government and the Brazilian judiciary must navigate areas they have not frequented in recent decades. It is also necessary for the institutionalized left to emerge from its inertia, by reviving its – forgotten – capacity to take advantage of popular self-organization. We must all look for ways to do this. The next period will be anything but peaceful!

13 January 2023

# To defend pensions against Macron, the perspective of the renewable strike

18 February 2023, by **Léon Crémieux**

Last week, two days of action were announced by the national inter-union coordination: a day of strikes and demonstrations on Tuesday 7, and demonstrations on Saturday 11 (without calls for strikes). Tuesday 7 was of the same order as the day of action on January 19 in terms of the number of demonstrators, but with a lower number of strikers than January 31. These lower rates for a third day of strikes in 20 days obviously testify to the question of the effectiveness of repeated strikes while the government remains totally bent on its determination to pass in force to adopt its counter-reform. But on the other hand, the massive character of the demonstrations has continued to manifest massive popular opposition and a clear understanding of the consequences of this reform.

Saturday 11 February, with 2.5 million people in the demonstrations, according to the union count, was a clear confirmation of this popular rejection. In a large number of cities, often small and medium-sized, the turnout was even higher than on 31 January, even according to police figures. In Paris, the police announced 963,000 demonstrators, the highest figure announced not only since the beginning of the movement, but also the highest in decades for a social mobilization.

These two days have therefore confirmed the clearest phenomenon of the social and political situation of the country: Macron and his government remain totally isolated and the population, the workers, overwhelmingly support the mobilization movement against this project.

Every new debate on the issue of the bill sees ministers announce untruths, making erroneous calculations which

they themselves are forced to disavow. This is the case with Elisabeth Borne's promise that "the reform will make it possible to revalue the pension of retired workers, artisans and small shopkeepers who were on the SMIC (minimum wage): they will receive nearly 1200 euros per month", voluntarily suggesting that 1.8 million pensions would be concerned. In the end, the disavowal came directly from the Minister in charge of the reform, Olivier Dussopt "to tell you whether it will concern 10,000, 20,000, 30,000 people, I do not know". The same applies to the inclusion of years of apprenticeship in the calculation of years of full pension, which only concerns young people who were in apprenticeship after 2014. So many inaccuracies and little lies completely discredit all government communication.

The government's shock arguments are the most caricatural. Budget Minister Gabriel Attal dares to declare that "the system of distribution [of pensions] must be saved from bankruptcy". Many very detailed articles have demonstrated the indecency of such arguments, when we remember the destabilization of the pay-as-you-go system because of reductions in social contributions. Employers' exemptions from social security contributions amount to 85 billion euros in the 2021 Social Security budget. In addition, the government requires the departments concerned to show the rating agencies and the European Commission its exemplary nature on public accounts, by amortizing every year by 17 billion euros the capital of its debt. Finally, it is paradoxical to see the deputies of Renaissance castigate the deputies of the NUPES who, by refusing the reform, would like to "create an unbearable debt of 160 billion euros". These 160 billion would supposedly

correspond to a cumulative deficit over 20 years of the deficit of the pension system, in the most pessimistic hypothesis of the COR (Pensions Orientation Council). Eight billion euros per year of a hypothetical deficit projected over 20 years, a burden qualified as unbearable, while the Social Security budget is more than 700 billion euros each year and the deficit of the State budget is in 2023, 165 billion euros. This budget deficit does not prevent the government from having programmed an increase in the military budget of 100 billion euros over the period 2024-2030 and from having abolished in the 2023 budget the contribution on the added value of companies (CVAE) which represented an annual revenue of 9.7 billion. It should also be remembered that the aid paid by the budget (in expenditure or exemptions) to companies represents 157 billion euros per year. It is therefore obvious that the issue at stake in this whole debate is that of the distribution of wealth, starting with the resources of taxation and the distribution of public expenditure. The demonstrations, especially in small and medium-sized cities, saw a massive popular participation, expressing not only the rejection of the pension reform, but giving voice to discontent, to exasperation faced with inflation, the increase in the cost of living, especially food and energy, and with the liquidation of public services, starting with hospitals and schools. All this while the CAC 40 groups listed on the Stock Exchange announce expanding profits, and the enrichment of a tiny minority in the face of the precariousness of the greatest number: 80 billion euros (including 56 billion in dividends) were distributed to CAC 40 shareholders in 2022; and Emmanuel Macron can be proud that Bernard Arnault, who recently accompanied him to Washington, has



become the proprietor of the first fortune in the world, with 213 billion dollars.

The situation regarding mobilization is obviously not simple. The government totally ignores the will of the majority that is expressed in the streets. On the other hand, it seeks to establish its legitimacy by a parliamentary agreement with the Republicans, the only possibility of obtaining a majority in the Assembly and the Senate. All dialogue with the unions has been closed for several weeks but, on the other hand, Elisabeth Borne and her ministers are negotiating with the traditional party of the right. The class contempt shown for the popular will further deepens the determination against this reform but also reveals the political approach of the government: to repeat Sarkozy's tactic in the autumn of 2010 which, in order to raise the retirement age from 60 to 62, resisted a series of strikes and demonstrations that were on a level equivalent to what we are seeing today: between September and mid-October 2010, there were seven major days of strikes and demonstrations, with a trade union front identical to the one of today, and with major strikes. From October 12, the SNCF, the RATP, ports and docks and refineries went on strike: 18 days of strikes at the SNCF, 12 refineries blocked with a third of service stations lacking fuel. At the time, the inter-union coordination limited itself to calling for days of mobilization, more and more spaced out and leaving the movement without perspective on the evening of October 19. Sarkozy and his minister Woerth thus succeeded in passing a disavowed reform. He even allowed himself the luxury of congratulating the union leaderships on November 16, 2010 on TF1, the main television channel: "Tribute must be paid to the trade-union forces in our country, we have made this considerable pension reform without violence. (...) The French people can be proud. They manifested their difference, their concern, but with respect for each other. (...) The unions were responsible." The UMP paid for it two years later by leaving the presidency and the parliamentary majority to the Socialist Party, which not only did not go back on the Woerth reform but added the Touraine

reform of gradually increasing the number of annuities.

The question of a renewable strike, of a general strike to make Woerth and Sarkozy yield, was already raised in the demonstrations and in the unions. But a large part of the inter-union coordination was opposed to it, such as François Chérèque, general secretary of the CFDT at the time who, on September 23, declared to Agence France Presse: "Those who want to radicalize the movement, who call for a general strike want to enter into a political approach (...). But the strength of this movement is that it is not political, but social. We have a quiet strength, let's use that strength." Bernard Thibault, general secretary of the CGT, avoided a frontal response by declaring on September 10 in *Le Monde*: "The more intransigence dominates, the more the idea of renewable strikes will gain ground," he thundered on Friday, September 10. All in all, the inter-union coordination did not oppose the renewable strikes by sector, but allowed them to take place without trying to strengthen them, to expand them by organizing a calendar to develop the confrontation. The combative initiative emanated, in 2010, from a large number of unions and militant activists who set up coordinations, interprofessional general assemblies, especially in Toulouse, Rouen, Marseille and in the 92 department in the Parisian region, in particular to solidify strikes and organize blockades.

So the question is very present today. Two important differences with 2010, concerning the policy of the union leaderships, are noteworthy: first, all the unions are clearly in favour of withdrawing the bill defended by Elisabeth Borne; this was not the case in 2010. The other difference is precisely the experience of 2010 and its failure, a failure of which the union leaderships are also aware.

On 7 February, the co-general delegate of Solidaires, Murielle Gilbert, declared: "We will not be able to win if we do not move towards a real renewable and a generalized blockage of the economy. Big demonstrations won't be enough." Solidaires has concretely proposed to

prepare for March 8 by putting into perspective the renewable strike from this date. The aim was clearly to link together the strike and the feminist demonstration on March 8, International Women's Day, in the calendar of the battle against the pension reform, knowing that the CGT, the FSU and Solidaires were already engaged in a unitary approach for this date.

The national inter-union coordination, as a whole, partially took into account this proposal. In its declaration of 11 February entitled "The Inter-union coordination is ready to harden the movement", it declares: "if the government and parliamentarians remained deaf to the popular protest, the inter-union coordination would call to harden the movement by bringing France to a halt in all sectors on March 7 ... and will take advantage of March 8th... to highlight the major social injustice of this reform towards women." Obviously, this announcement is in line with the proposal of Solidaires, calling for preparations in all sectors for a general strike, renewable from March 7. Already, the CGT railworkers' federation is calling for a renewable strike for this date, as well as the inter-union coordination of the RATP. Solidaires is expected to make a general announcement in the coming days. It is more than likely that more calls in the same direction will come out in the coming days. There could then be established a clear and interprofessional timetable for renewable strikes from 7 March. This date is, moreover, the end of the winter school holidays, also opening the possibility of a mobilization in high schools and a strengthening of the movement that has been initiated in the universities. The scenario could then be different from that of 2010.

The essential question is obviously that of the confidence among workers that it is possible to win, that it is worth it to go on strike from March 7 in order to make Macron give way. And the social movements will have to manage carefully the next 25 days, because although they can help in different industrial sectors to prepare a global movement at the beginning of March, they can also more widely give rise to a feeling of resignation in the

population.

The government and its media supporters are well aware that a new stage is opening.

Macron no longer seeks to convince; he seeks more to weaken or even divide the movement. First, by addressing essentially the "reformist" unions, CFDT, CGC and UNSA in particular, in order to dissociate them from the "hardliners" of the renewable strike. Up until now the trade union front has held and CFDT general secretary Laurent Berger has himself repeated that the government would bear full responsibility for the hardening of the movement.

On another note, the media and the government are seeking to shift the spotlight to the parliamentary debate, which runs until Friday 17 February in the National Assembly. Accusing the NUPES, and particularly La France Insoumise of turning the debates into a shambles, of blocking them by the tabling of 11,000 amendments. The Macronist deputies, allied on this terrain with the National Rally, have begun reacting hysterically to the slightest minor incident of which the deputies of the NUPES are supposedly guilty, such as playing with a ball made by strikers bearing in effigy the image of Olivier Dussopt, the minister

responsible for the reform. Similarly, the government is screaming blue murder because of a doll bearing the effigy of Elisabeth Borne hanging from a gallows during the 11 February demonstration. However, the social demonstrations of the last fifty years have seen slogans, placards and various dummies caricaturing and covering with invective presidents and ministers. The aim, obviously, for the Macronists, is through these diversions to loosen the vice in which they have put themselves.

Moreover, the most recent sessions of the Assembly have also seen the Macronist and Republican deputies ganging up as a last resort to cancel a majority vote deciding in favour of meals at one euro for all students in university restaurants. Similarly, they could not prevent the adoption by this assembly of a Socialist bill for the renationalization of EDF, an almost exclusive producer of electricity in France, and the exit from EU rules concerning the price of electricity. Obviously, this vote will be challenged by the right-wing majority in the Senate, but all these events testify to the feverishness of the Renaissance group (Macron's party) in the Assembly. In a minority, they are increasingly dependent on the group of the Republicans to get measures

adopted; they face the hostility of their own electorate in their constituencies and fear for their future in the next legislative elections.

So the social and political climate in France may be on the verge of a turning point. Politically there is a lot at stake: to defeat Macron, to improve the relationship of forces in favour of the popular classes and to give confidence in an alternative that can put an end to the attacks of neoliberal capitalism and satisfy popular needs. Beyond the question of pensions, there is a window that can open and a fear that can arise on the side of the capitalist leaders. The acrimonious offensive aimed at discrediting the NUPES and flattering the far right, which is compatible with liberal policies (as the Meloni government in Italy clearly shows) expresses the beginning of such a fear. The construction of a real anti-capitalist political front in the heat of the movement against Macron's reform could make a real leap forward. This will depend first of all on the ability to maintain the mobilization, anchor it and prepare in the maximum of sectors the renewable strike. Not letting the movement be defused over the next 25 days will be decisive in this regard.

*12 February 2023*

## **We Say: War on War!**

### **17 February 2023, by Russian Socialist Movement (emigration branch)**

For us Russians who oppose Putin's aggression and dictatorship, it has been a year of horror and shame over the war crimes committed daily in our name.

On the one-year anniversary of this war, we call all those who yearn for peace to turn out for demonstrations and rallies against Putin's invasion.

Unfortunately, not all the "peace" rallies taking place next weekend will

be actions of solidarity with Ukraine. A large part of the left in the West does not understand the nature of this war and advocates compromise with Putinism.

We have written this statement to help our comrades abroad understand the situation and take the right stand.

## **A counterrevolutionary war**

Some Western writers attribute the war to causes like the collapse of the USSR, the "contradictory history of the Ukrainian nation's creation," and geopolitical confrontation between nuclear powers.

Without denying the importance of these factors, we are surprised that these lists overlook the most important and obvious reason for what is happening: the Putin regime's desire to suppress democratic protest movements throughout the former Soviet Union and in Russia itself.

The 2014 seizure of Crimea and hostilities in the Donbas were a response by the Kremlin to the "revolution of dignity" in Ukraine, which overthrew the corrupt pro-Russian administration of Viktor Yanukovich, as well as to Russians' mass demonstrations for fair elections in 2011-12 (known as the Bolotnaya Square protests).

Annexing the Crimean Peninsula was a domestic policy win for Putin. He successfully used revanchist, anti-Western, and traditionalist rhetoric (as well as political persecution) to expand his social base, isolate the opposition, and turn the Maidan into a bogeyman with which to frighten the population.

But the popularity boost that followed the annexation was short-lived. The late 2010s saw economic stagnation, an unpopular pension reform, and high-profile anti-corruption revelations by Alexei Navalny's team that dragged Putin's ratings back down, especially among young people. Protests swept the country, and the ruling United Russia party suffered a series of painful defeats in regional elections.

This context has driven the Kremlin to place all its bets on conserving the regime. The 2020 constitutional referendum (which required rigging unprecedented even by Russian standards) effectively made Putin a ruler for life. Under the pretext of containing the COVID-19 pandemic, protest gatherings were finally banned. An attempt was made to poison extra-parliamentary opposition leader Alexei Navalny, which he miraculously survived.

The popular uprising of summer 2020 in Belarus confirmed the Russian elite's belief that the "collective West" is waging a "hybrid war" against Russia, attacking it and its satellites with "color revolutions."

Of course, such claims are nothing more than a conspiracy theory. Social and political discontent in Russia has been growing due to record social inequality, poverty, corruption, rollbacks of civil liberties, and the obvious futility of the Russian model of capitalism, which is based on a parasitic fossil-fuel oligarchy appropriating natural resource rents.

If there's one thing we can blame the "collective West" for, it's its longstanding pandering to Putinism, including on the Ukrainian issue. For decades, European and American elites have sought to do "business as usual" with Putin's Russia, which has allowed a dictatorship to emerge, redistribute wealth upwards, and conduct foreign policy with complete impunity.

## **Conceding to Putin will not lead to peace**

Invading Ukraine was an attempt by Putin to repeat his 2014 Crimean triumph—by securing a speedy victory, rallying Russian society around the flag with revanchist slogans, finally crushing the opposition, and establishing himself as hegemon in the post-Soviet space (which Putin's imperialism views as part of "historical Russia").

Ukrainians' heroic resistance thwarted these plans, turning the "short, victorious war" of the Kremlin's dreams into a protracted conflict that has worn down Russia's economy and busted the myth of its army's invincibility. Backed into a corner, Moscow is threatening the world with its nuclear weapons while simultaneously urging Ukraine and the West to negotiate.

Moscow's rhetoric is parroted by certain European and American leftists who oppose supplying arms to Ukraine (to "save lives" and prevent a nuclear apocalypse). But Russia is not willing to withdraw from the territories it has captured, a condition that Kyiv and 93% of Ukrainians consider non-negotiable. Must Ukraine instead sacrifice its

sovereignty in order to appease the aggressor, a policy that has very dark precedents in European history?

## **Saving lives?**

So is it true that Ukraine's defeat, an inevitability if Western aid is withdrawn, will help prevent more casualties? Even if we accept the non-obvious (from a socialist perspective) logic that saving lives is more important than fighting tyranny and aggression, we believe that this is not the case.

As we know, Vladimir Putin has laid claim to the entire territory of Ukraine, asserting that Ukrainians and Russians are "one nation" and that Ukrainian statehood is a historical mistake. In this context, a ceasefire would merely give the Kremlin time to rebuild its military capacity for a new assault, including by forcing yet more Russians (mostly poor and ethnic minority) into the army.

If Ukraine continues to resist the invasion even without arms supplies, it will lead to innumerable casualties among Ukrainian soldiers and civilians. And terror, the horrific remains of which we saw in Bucha and elsewhere, is what awaits any the new territories seized by Russia.

## **Multipolar imperialism**

When Putin speaks about getting rid of American hegemony in the world and even about "anti-colonialism" (!), he is not referring to the creation of a more egalitarian world order.

Putin's "multipolar world" is a world where democracy and human rights are no longer considered universal values, and so-called "great powers" have free rein in their respective geopolitical spheres of influence.

This essentially means restoring the system of international relations that existed in the runup to World Wars I and II.

This "brave old world" would be a

wonderful place for dictators, corrupt officials, and the far right. But it would be hell for workers, ethnic minorities, women, LGBT people, small nations, and all liberation movements.

A victory for Putin in Ukraine would not restore the pre-war status quo, it would set a deadly precedent giving “great powers” the right to wars of aggression and nuclear brinkmanship. It would be a prologue to new military and political catastrophes.

## What would a victory in Ukraine for Putinism lead to?

A Putin victory would mean not only

the subjugation of Ukraine, but also the bending of all post-Soviet countries to the Kremlin’s will.

Within Russia, a victory for the regime would preserve a system defined by the security and fossil-fuel oligarchy’s rule over other social classes (above all the working class) and the plundering of natural resources at the expense of technological and social development.

In contrast, the defeat of Putinism in Ukraine would likely lend momentum to movements for democratic change in Belarus, Kazakhstan, and other former Soviet countries, as well as in Russia itself.

It would be overly optimistic to claim that defeat in war automatically leads to revolution. But Russian history is replete with examples of military setbacks abroad that have led to major

change at home—including the abolition of serfdom, the revolutions of 1905 and 1917, and Perestroika in the 1980s.

Russian socialists have no use for a “victory” for Putin and his oligarch cronies. We call on all those who truly desire peace and still believe in dialogue with the Russian government to demand that it withdraw its troops from Ukrainian territories. Any call for peace that does not include this demand is disingenuous.

*- End the war! Stand in solidarity against Putin’s invasion of Ukraine.*

*- End the draft! Russians are not cannon fodder.*

*- Free Russian political prisoners!*

*- Free Russia!*

*15 February 2023*

# The corrupt one-man regime killed us in Turkey

16 February 2023, by **Sanem Oztürk**

On the seventh day of the disaster, as national and international rescue teams are still struggling to find survivors under the rubble, the common popular feeling is unimaginable rage, pain, abandonment and chaos. And of course, an unimaginable solidarity of people.

Destructive neoliberal greed, the governmental mentality that prioritizes profit over lives, fatalism about science, which perceives development as cement, concrete and construction, have combined in Turkey. The two earthquakes affected 10 cities and nearly 15 million people. To date, the death toll has reached 25,000 in Turkey, 4,000 in Syria. Tens of thousands of people have been injured or disabled; millions have been left homeless.

## Twitter, a means of survival

The main means of survival has been Twitter, no one can deny that. People under the rubble shared their exact location, asked for help, tried to reach their relatives or help via Twitter. Civil initiatives and citizens organized and extended their help via Twitter. People expressed their anger and support via Twitter. And yes, they criticized and blamed the government as harshly as possible on Twitter. After all, the government is responsible for corruption and nepotism in the country’s most important institutions. Construction companies, Erdoğan’s staunchest supporters, owe him a lot. Add to that the lack of oversight, the 2018 Construction Peace Law (which essentially consisted of the

government allowing buildings without a license), this monumental destruction was inevitable. Unhappily, we knew all this. What we did not know was that the lack of resources, knowledge and coordination within the public institutions that were supposed to manage the crisis was on this scale. The blocking of Twitter by the government on the third day of the earthquake was the only solution to silence the voices of the opposition. It literally committed a crime against humanity by blocking the only chance of survival.

## A centralized and corrupt regime

For the AKP government and President Erdoğan, loyalty has always taken precedence over competence.

So much so that the warnings of scientists three years, one year, or even three days before the earthquakes, were in vain.

Bureaucracy and the crazy level of centralization in public policies have always been debated in Turkey, but today millions of people are affected at the same time. The “one-man regime” killed tens of thousands of people as authorities waited for that man’s instructions every step of the way. He appeared on television 25 hours afterwards, even after some international rescue teams had arrived in the area. These teams were stuck at airports, excavators didn’t work, aid waited in trucks, miners from all over Turkey who have expertise in search and rescue, were immobilised for days, as were the volunteers, as if time had stopped while awaiting the directives from one man.

## **Volunteers working tirelessly**

Fortunately, some municipalities controlled by the CHP, the main opposition party, opposition parties such as the Workers’ Party of Turkey (TİP), the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), political organizations, civil initiatives and feminist groups did not wait for this directive. Until the seventh day, they provide the most coordinated assistance. As President Erdoğan insults and threatens critics and blames his administration at every stage since his first television appearance on 7 February, volunteers are working tirelessly for survivors. Imagine how many thousands of people would still be alive if the rescue teams and supplies had been there in time, not 48 hours later. In addition, the airport, the city hospital and the highway, three sources of pride for Erdoğan, were demolished during the earthquake, which aggravated the situation.

We know that millions of people need food, clothing and shelter. Millions of people need psychological help. The perception of what is “normal” for the

people of Turkey and Syria has changed in many ways, and the problems go beyond survival. For example, serious hate speech is present and is beginning to take on physical manifestations. As the disaster area is also a densely populated refugee area, rage against the system, the government and the feeling of powerlessness easily turns against looters and the refugee population, sometimes in the form of physical violence, due to hateful tweets organized mainly by nationalist party leaders. In addition to building and extending our solidarity with the survivors of the earthquake, we are compelled to remind everyone, at every opportunity, that we were all under this rubble. We will heal our wounds and seek justice together, with our solidarity.

The wounds caused by Erdoğan and the AKP are, on the other hand, beyond healing. They must go. They have to go.

*13 February 2023*

# **Biden’s State of the Union Turns from Neoliberalism to New Deal Liberalism**

**15 February 2023, by Dan La Botz**

Biden reported to Congress that “we have created a record 12 million new jobs, more jobs created in two years than any president has ever created in four years.” That, “Today, COVID no longer controls our lives.” And that “two years ago (a referenced to the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the Capitol) our democracy faced its greatest threat since the Civil War. Today, though bruised, our democracy remains unbowed and unbroken.”

“Unemployment rate at 3.4%, a 50-year low. Near record low unemployment for Black and Hispanic workers,” said Biden. “We’ve already created 800,000 good-paying manufacturing jobs, the fastest growth in 40 years.”

Biden listed dozens of programs passed during his presidency to improve the economy, deal with climate change, create jobs, protect consumers, and better the lives of veterans, the elderly, students, and children.

At one point, Biden baited the Republicans for proposals to abolish Social Security and Medicaid (which some have) until they shouted “No,” one even shouting “Liar.” Biden then debated them from the podium and ended saying, “Stand up for Seniors.” When the entire Congress was on its feet applauding, he said, “Sp we agree, “We will not cut Social Security. We will not cut Medicare.”

Looking to the future, Biden said, “...I’m so sick and tired of companies breaking the law by preventing workers from organizing. Pass the PRO Act because workers have a right to form a union. And let’s guarantee all workers have a living wage.”

Biden called for higher taxes on corporations and the wealthy, many of whom pay little or none. “I’m a capitalist,” said Biden. “But just pay your fair share. Pass my proposal for a billionaire minimum tax.”

Regarding education, he proposed, “providing access to pre-school for 3- and 4-year-olds.” And, “Let’s give public school teachers a raise.” He called for reducing student debt and



more grants for working-class college students.

Biden introduced his invited guests the parents of Tyre Nichols, the young black man recently beaten to death by police officers, and talked about the need for, "Equal protection under the law; that's the covenant we have with each other in America."

Turning to questions of gender he said, "Congress must restore the right the Supreme Court took away last year and codify Roe v. Wade to protect every woman's constitutional right to choose. Let's also pass the bipartisan Equality Act to ensure LGBTQ

Americans, especially transgender young people, can live with safety and dignity."

In terms of foreign policy, Biden talked about his success in uniting NATO to defend Ukraine and preparing the United States to better compete with China. But he also referred to the shooting down of the Chinese spy balloon—"if China threatens our sovereignty, we will act to protect our country. And we did." One can see an inter-imperialist conflict on the horizon.

Biden's remarkable performance virtually assures his nomination as the

Democratic Party candidate for president and the content of his address, speaking directly to the needs of the country's working people, represents a shift to the left in direction for the party. This is not Senator Bernie Sanders' progressive agenda of free education in all public colleges, doubling the minimum wage, government health insurance for all, and one hundred percent renewable energy. And immigrant rights advocates criticized his lack of improvements in the immigration system. Still, Biden's agenda has for the moment taken the wind from the sails of the progressives.

# Pensions: women on the front line, women in struggle!

14 February 2023, by **NPA - National Feminist Commission**

## An unfair reform for women

The current system for calculating pensions is already unfavourable to women: while the wage gap between women and men is around 22% on average, the pension gap is over 40%! This phenomenon of widening income inequalities is largely linked to the incomplete, interrupted and time-consuming careers that many women have. They account for 80% of part-time jobs and much of parental leave taken to raise children.

The government itself acknowledges in a report that the reform will force women to work an extra seven months compared to an average of five for men because of the increase in the minimum statutory retirement age from 62 to 64.

About 20% of women are already obliged to work until 67 to avoid the discount [25], compared to about 10% of men. Increasing the number of

years of contributions required for a full pension will mechanically increase the number of people obliged to work until 67, including a majority of women and all employees who are particularly affected by casualization and precarious jobs: immigrant workers, racialized people, LGBTIs...

The government plans to make additional proposals on family rights in 2024... the worst is to be feared!

As for hardship, its recognition is already lamentable in view of the consequences on health and life expectancy of the working conditions and working hours of a large number of employees, but it is even more poorly evaluated and taken into account for the most feminized jobs.

## Women mobilized against pension

## reform

Already in previous battles, the injustice aggravated by the changes in the calculation methods had been important arguments to convince against government reforms. The previous reform of 2019 (not implemented) was particularly violent from this point of view. Feminist associations, trade unions, ATTAC and in particular its Gender Commission have constantly denounced these consequences. The Rosies' performance made a lot of noise. [26]

Today, we are once again obliged to raise our voices on this subject. In the demonstrations, signs are flourishing denouncing the inequalities in pensions and the aggravation that the reform will bring if it passes. Specific leaflets, assemblies of the first concerned as feminist and/or LGBTI collectives, often in connection with the [Feminist Coordination](#)... women and gender minorities are specifically organized to mobilize in several cities.

Women, including young people, are particularly present in the demonstrations.

On 15 February, at the initiative of *Politis*, a broadly-based public meeting will bring together many feminist activists from the trade union, political and associative left to denounce the reform project. With 8 March approaching, the link between the international day of struggle for women's rights and the mobilization against pension reform is becoming obvious.

## Building the general strike and the feminist strike

The work plan announced by the

entire joint union group raises the prospect of blocking the country from 7 March and renewing the strike on the 8th. These dates are rather far in the future - it will be necessary to keep up the pressure to get through the holiday period and maintain the mobilization.

But it is also an opportunity to build the strike in the sectors most concerned. Among them, the cleaning sector, personal services, care homes, health... there are not enough strikers in these workplaces. Those on the front line of the COVID pandemic, those forgotten by the Segur wage negotiations, those who earn very low wages, have split shifts, are shared between several employers, are little or not organized by the unions to defend themselves.

We need to convince people that,

despite the difficulty of "abandoning the users" to go on strike, the issue is essential! Not only for our pensions but also to put a stop to the government's devastating policy, so that public services regain their essential place, so that socially useful jobs are recognized and revalued.

These are essential societal choices that concern the whole population and have consequences first and foremost on women, both as employees and as users. All these questions are at the heart of the women's strike of 8 March, supported by trade unions, associations and feminist political organizations. With its reform, the government is attacking the working classes, and women in particular. We are building the necessary fightback, with women on the front line of the struggle!

# Malaysia after GE-15: 'A Government with No Direction'

13 February 2023, by **B. Skanthakumar**

*Sivarajan Arumugam, Secretary-General of the Parti Sosialis Malaysia (PSM—Socialist Party of Malaysia), spoke with B. Skanthakumar in Kuala Lumpur on 27 January 2023 on the general election; the PSM's participation in that campaign; its assessment of the new government; and the PSM's plans in the months ahead.*

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**There were a number of surprises in the GE-15 result: the decimation of the Alliance/Barisan Nasional (BN) that had dominated government between independence in 1957 and up to 2018 [27] ; the failure of Pakatan Harapan (PH) to secure a simple majority despite the public outrage over grand corruption in government; and dramatic gains for the conservative Parti Islam**

**Se-Malaysia (PAS—Malaysian Islamic Party). What is your reading of these developments?**

Shortly before the general election then opposition Pakatan Harapan (PH) led by Anwar Ibrahim's Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR—People's Justice Party) performed badly in a number of state elections, which were won handsomely by the party of the incumbent prime minister. However, in GE-15, the PH emerged as the single largest bloc with 82 seats; although far short of a simple majority in parliament.

Two surprises from the result are: the Barisan Nasional - which had done so well just months before and dominated Malaysian politics for decades with a two-thirds majority - had its worst-ever performance; and that the Perikatan Nasional (PN—National Alliance) - led by the Malay chauvinist

Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (BERSATU—Malaysian United Indigenous Party) - and particularly its constituent Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS—Malaysian Islamic Party) did so well, including outside its traditional stronghold.

This new PN coalition vote grew from disenchanted BN supporters and first-time voters from the majority Malay community. Many liberal commentators have understandably been alarmed by the electoral share of PAS, interpreting it as indicative of Islamist radicalism among young rural Malays. PSM thinks that the choice made by the majority of these new voters was shaped by disappointment over the corrupt practices of Barisan Nasional that their community had traditionally supported; and uncertainty as to whether PH, the other opposition alternative, would uphold Malay privileges. The

messaging by PN reinforced these sentiments, with wide use of social media (especially TikTok) to propagate race-baiting [directed against the ethnic Chinese and Indian minorities].

Theirs was a vote of protest against BN, rather than an endorsement of PN. This was what we picked up in our grassroots political work among the Malay community. We observed that even though many voted for the Malay chauvinist PN, they don't necessarily share the extreme fundamentalist ideas of its leadership. The Malay masses want to ensure their 'rights' are protected, rather than harbour hatred against the non-Malays.

### **What was the PSM's participation in this election campaign?**

The PSM is a small party. 2008 was our breakthrough year, when we secured one seat in parliament representing Sungai Siput; and one seat in the Selangor State Assembly representing Kota Damansara. We lost the state seat due to coalition problems in 2013; but held onto the parliamentary seat until 2018. Compared to previous elections, in GE-15 the opposition was very crowded with multiple parties and coalitions. There was disunity within the opposition such that a common candidate could not be presented against the ruling Barisan Nasional, leading to 3, 4, 7, and even 10-cornered fights in some constituencies. This fragmented the opposition vote to the advantage of the incumbent.

In this context, the PSM was in no doubt that a win would be difficult. Our goal was to achieve some progression as compared to the past, for a better foundation for the next election. Secondly, we also wanted to focus on non-traditional areas for the PSM: to develop new contacts, fly our flag, and raise our profile.

We selected one parliament seat (Rembau) in Negeri Sembilan state; and one state seat (Ayer Kuning) in Perak state. Both our candidates are locals, born and bred in those areas, with wide networks. We have been working with communities in these electorates for some time now, which is why we chose to stand as a means

to strengthening our base there.

In comparison with other political parties, the PSM raised issues which they did not. The main theme of the PH coalition was the focus on government corruption, and to promise to jail dirty politicians. We highlighted the core issues of common people like affordable housing, environmental problems, health-care, workers' rights, etc. We organised media conferences outside hospitals to draw attention to the lack of facilities. Similarly, we exposed longstanding local environmental issues. As a percentage of the vote share in the election, we could not secure more than one to three percent; but we were received well by the people, which is more important to us. We will continue to work with the people in these areas.

### **The PSM tried to reach a pre-election agreement with the PH. Why, and what happened?**

In early 2022 in preparation for GE-15, we conducted discussions with civil society organisations (CSOs) in several states like Johor, Penang, and Selangor. We asked them what they expected of PSM in the upcoming general election. While they appreciated our political ideas and grassroots work, they were frank that a vote for the PSM was not in their view useful - as we are not part of a national coalition that can bid for power across the country. So, rather than waste their vote, they preferred to support an opposition force that had a real chance of winning against Barisan Nasional and forming a new government. The CSO perspective was that PSM should discuss an electoral pact with Pakatan Harapan to minimise splitting the opposition vote.

The PSM has been clear since the formation of Pakatan Harapan (PH), that it has no interest in joining that coalition as a permanent partner, but only to have an electoral pact before polls. There are too many political differences: PH is pro-capitalist, although described by some as centre-left. Our interest in negotiating with PH was to avoid contesting in seats where they were standing candidates, and for them to do the same where we stood. So, we began exchanging

communications with PH along these lines, which initially appeared to be fruitful. However, to our extreme disappointment, and at the very last moment, PH said that the seats we requested could not be allocated to us - and worse, no other seats were offered to us.

What we then did, was not to contest in the five or six seats that had been requested - where PH selected its own candidate - and instead identified two other seats, that were previously not in play. Although PH had not been fair and reasonable to us, we did not want to contest in the seats under negotiation. This would have been seen as sour grapes. We sacrificed the constituencies where we had a good base and which were advantageous to us. Instead, we stood in two seats held by the government, where there was no PH incumbent. It should be clear from this experience that PSM did its best to satisfy the expectation of our allies and partners; which has been dishonoured by PH.

### **Following GE-15, the new PH government is now governing Malaysia in coalition with Barisan Nasional, principally its leading constituent the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), with a two-third majority in parliament. Two months on, what is the character of this new government, and what is your assessment of its direction?**

Shortly after the new government was formed, PSM described it as one without direction. Usually before an election there is a manifesto, which can be a point of reference once a government is formed, to point out the promises made. However, the 'unity' government of Pakatan Harapan and Barisan Nasional is not based on any pre-election common programme nor a memorandum-of-understanding, that sets out its plans in government. Instead, what exists is a post-election agreement on how to manage the alliance and divide positions in government. The people don't know what is the direction of this government, which is a combination of contradictory ideologies and political backgrounds. This is a question that we keep posing to the new government: "what do you stand for"?

It was only on January 19 that Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim announced his 'Malaysia Madani' vision - based on six pillars: sustainability, prosperity, innovation, respect, trust and compassion. These are vague ideas without specific policies or programme. We have yet to see what this means in practice. When we look at his Cabinet of Ministers, we have no confidence that others in his government are committed or capable of applying these values. The Prime Minister has his own thinking, but cannot apply his ideas across the coalition.

In the previous Pakatan Harapan government (2018-2020) there were good people, but they were not nominated to contest this time around. Some of the ministers who have been appointed this time have no background in their subject areas, which makes them dependent on bureaucrats who are no better than employers' when it comes to workers' rights.

Let's take the minimum monthly wage that was recently raised to RM1,500 (USD352). This new minimum was to apply to all workers across the board. But recently its implementation has been postponed, following lobbying from employers'. Instead, the government is now going to bring 500,000 foreign workers, probably from Bangladesh and Nepal, where their employers will be given an exemption to pay minimum wages for six months. Of course, this will negatively affect the market wage rate for local workers.

Another example, the Ministry that was formerly in charge of housing, had a national policy to increase

access to affordable housing. But in this new government, that Ministry has dropped housing from its title and is now known as the Ministry of Local Government Development. Housing is now subsumed by 'development'. The approach of the new Ministry is to look at housing from the perspective of consumerism, de-emphasising it as a human right.

### **What are the PSM's plans in 2023?**

In May 2022, we launched a five-pillar programme: (1) Empowering Social Security; (2) Job Guarantee Scheme; (3) Housing as a Human Right; (4) Reinforcing Public Healthcare; and (5) Immediate action to tackle the Climate Crisis. We have developed specific policies under each pillar ([online here](#)). The main campaigns in 2023 will be for a guaranteed monthly pension for all those over 65 years of age. We will launch this with a signature campaign during the upcoming [Hindu] festival of Thaipusam. Another campaign will be for abolition of the contract work system within the public sector. Our front organisation Jaringan Pekerja Kontrak Kerajaan (JPKK—Government Contract Workers Network) and the National Union of Workers in Hospitals Support and Allied Services will lead this struggle - and beyond the healthcare sector into other public services. There are also campaigns on food security and job security. There are state elections in Negri Sembilan, Selangor and Penang expected in mid-2023. We are considering standing in these three states. These elections provide a platform for us to promote the party and its ideas. We hope to make gains in Selangor where we have a long record of grassroots work.

### **The PSM has recuperated the concept of Marhaenism in its political work. What does it mean, and why have you done so?**

Marhaenism is a Malay-language word with roots in Indonesia during the Sukarno-era. Instead of restricting ourselves to the term 'working class', it incorporates the popular classes who are at the centre of our political programme, and is a better reflection of the communities of the poor with whom we work.

It is a rationalisation for why the PSM which is a left or socialist party is present among non-proletarian classes of indigenous peoples, farmers, the self-employed, small business operators etc., and takes up issues of housing and so on, which are not related to workplace conflicts. These are groups that do not mobilise on the basis of the relations of production, but rather as members of affected communities, for e.g., on land rights, housing, environment, food security, etc.

We develop solidarity among these diverse groups - who do not organise as wage workers nor have a working-class consciousness - as well as with the working class, by using the broad term 'marhaen' as short-form for the working people. By using this concept, we find that we can organise more widely and in larger numbers. Hence in 2022, we brought together the peoples' movement that we lead, formerly known as JERIT (Jaringan Rakyat Tertindas/Oppressed Peoples' Network) as Gabungan Marhaen - an alliance of poor communities, workers, unions, non-governmental organisations, leaders and activists.

7 February 2023

## **When the Pope denounces economic colonialism**

**12 February 2023, by Paul Martial**



This is the fourth time the Pope has visited Africa, visiting two countries scarred by political violence, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudan. It is a religious visit but also a political one, especially since in the DRC the leaders cannot ignore the country's 40 million faithful.

## Money and networks

The Catholic Church is one of the most successful institutions in the DRC. Its power is based primarily on its social network. Indeed, during colonization, it was responsible for education and health. It has thus developed a network that continues to this day. It is in charge of 30% of schools, 45% of hospitals and nearly 2,500 charitable institutes. With its 41 dioceses and 1,000 parishes, it covers the entire country. The "church's" land holdings remain the largest in the country. It is easy to understand what is at stake in the Pope's visit for the political authorities. On this occasion, they did not hesitate to ruthlessly expel the thousands of vendors installed on the main boulevards of the capital Kinshasa.

## A political player

The bishops have often played a mediating role in the democratization processes of African countries since the fall of the Berlin Wall. They

presided over the national conferences that introduced multiparty politics in the 1990s.

In the DRC, the Catholic Church has a long tradition of opposition to the government. In 2016, the National Episcopal Conference of the Congo did not hesitate to call on the population to take to the streets to prevent a modification of the Constitution wanted by Joseph Kabila, allowing him a third term and thereby continuing the economic predations revealed by the "[Congo Hold-up](#)" affair.

The question of the reliability of the polls is a major issue for the Vatican. The Pope recalled this during his meeting with the Congolese authorities. Even the church in Gabon, known for being particularly conciliatory with the government in power, has taken a position on the importance of respecting the will of the voters. Moreover, on the continent, the organization "Turn the page", which fights for the respect of political changeovers, is widely supported by church structures.

## Denouncing violence

It is therefore with a certain credibility that the Pope can denounce "economic colonialism" by crying out "take your hands off Africa! Stop suffocating Africa: it is not a mine to be exploited or a land to be robbed." If this trip had any merit, it was

certainly to draw attention to the suffering of the people of the DRC and Southern Sudan who are victims of militias. In the east of the DRC there are more than 120 armed groups that can racket and martyr the population with impunity. Responsibility for this situation is shared between politicians who manipulate and exacerbate inter-community conflicts, the government which turns a blind eye to the complicity of its army with certain militias, and the authorities of border countries such as Rwanda or Uganda which support certain fighters such as those of the M23.

If the Pope's latest remarks on homosexuality, despite his retractions, are highly condemnable, they should not overshadow his stance against any form of criminalization on a continent where 27 countries out of 54 repress same-sex relations. As well as his call for the conversion... of religious people to welcome members of LGBT communities, while most prelates, in a nauseating competition with other religions, continue to spearhead the stigmatization of homosexuals.

With or without the pope, we make our own the proclamation of the prophet Isaiah who calls (in chapter 58 of the Old Testament) "to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke"... especially those of patriarchy and capitalism.

9 February 2023

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

# Living with Georgia as PM

11 February 2023, by **Dave Kellaway**

## There aren't any poor people today

Tonight a TV programme is going out on RAI3, the third state channel, ironically entitled, "There aren't any poor people today." It gathers up-to-

date official figures showing that there are five and a half million people in absolute poverty and a further eight million eight hundred thousand people in relative poverty. Altogether, this adds up to 23% of the population. Many millions just above these thresholds are at risk of becoming

poor and are being hard hit by the cost of living crisis.

Another video from just a few weeks ago featured a young trainee engineer. She had just finished a traineeship but had been offered the princely sum of 750 euros a month for a follow-on job, which she has publicly



rejected online. It is quite common, particularly in the South, for people working in hospitality to earn even less than that per month. Often, this is done without a contract and with no security. Another recent report estimated that Italy was losing the equivalent of 1% of its GDP as a result of a “brain drain” of its young graduates who are emigrating.

Against this backdrop, Giorgia Meloni has unleashed an ideological offensive similar to the one we heard at the time of Osborne’s austerity offensive. The “strivers, not shirkers” abuse has been translated into Italian as “layabouts who prefer to stay on the sofa all day.” Ministers have denounced graduates for not taking waiter/waitress jobs. The safety net of the Citizens Income program has already been ripped apart. Stricter conditions have been introduced, where you have to accept practically any job, irrespective of your qualifications and skills, and you cannot refuse a job if it requires significant travel.

Traveling by car has become much more expensive as the government recently reinstated fuel duty. One of the most frequent moans I heard this time in Italy was about the soaring cost of petrol which reached £2 a litre. Public transport for working people outside the big cities is even worse than in Britain. Meloni intends to phase out Citizens Income entirely by 2024, replacing it with payments to employers who hire new employees. Poster from left showing how her government is attacking people’s living standards

As David Broder explained in his article in the Nation magazine, the notion that this post-fascist leader is implementing any sort of populist welfare program that some nostalgic fascists might appreciate is far from reality. Indeed, her economic policy is very much in continuity with the last Draghi government. The EU-linked National Plan for Resilience and Recovery (PNRR) has passed through parliament, and both corporations and smaller-scale businesses are very happy with the direction of travel. This plan mostly helps businesses through subsidies and handouts for digitalisation or infrastructure. Tax changes, such as the new flat tax, will

disproportionately benefit the hard-right government coalition’s social base: small businesses, independent professions, and many self-employed people. Even with a 3% reduction in tax, PAYE payers are still paying more proportionally than the “independents” paying the new flat tax.

Along with neoliberal orthodoxy and continuity, there is room for an ideological offensive to further solidify government support. The ideas of Meloni’s party, the Fratelli d’Italia, have been reflected in the names of the ministries. So the word ‘Birthrates’ has been added to the Equal Opportunity and Families ministry, while the Ministry of Business has the tag “Made in Italy” added just to emphasise nationalist ideology. The Education Ministry includes the words “and merit.” This is part of the culture war that Meloni is keen on pursuing. Left-liberal ideology has supposedly occupied whole areas of Italian civil society and must be challenged head-on. Education needs to focus on preparing young people for the job market with fewer humanities and philosophy classes and more science and technology classes. We hear the same refrain from Tories here.

## The Meloni playbook

Meloni’s playbook says that it’s important to use events to start ideological fights. An anarchist named Alfredo Cospito is currently in prison but has been put on the notorious 41-bis regime, which was set up to limit Mafia bosses’ ability to manage their affairs from inside prison. It severely limits contact with other prisoners and even prevents reading books. Demonstrations, some physical attacks on Italian embassies, and scuffles with the police have given Meloni an opportunity to make portentous declarations about defending the “democratic” state against terrorism. Alfredo Cospito

Her justice ministers—from her party—have gone further by accusing the Democratic Party (PD) of bowing down to the mafia. The ministers used

state-confidential information to reveal that Cospito had met with a Mafia boss in prison to discuss “campaigns” against 41 bis. The PD MPs had only gone to visit Cospito as a humanitarian gesture and had no knowledge of these meetings. The PD even supports 41 bis. Clearly, using 41 bis against this anarchist, whose external support is a caricature of the Red Brigades base, is entirely wrong. New hard-line measures brandished by the government against “illegal” raves also fall within this drive to increase repressive measures.

Meloni has received plaudits for her complete alignment with a pro-NATO foreign policy despite her historic dalliance with Putin, who has cultivated material and ideological links with post-fascist and hard right parties throughout Europe. She has differentiated herself from Salvini and Berlusconi, her coalition allies, who even today have a much softer line towards Putin. In this way, she has reassured Western allies that a post-fascist victory in Italy will not jeopardise pro-imperialist stability.

The new prime minister is enjoying a political honeymoon. The very latest polls put her at 30.1 percent, which is 4 points higher than in the September general election. Her allies continue to lose support; the Lega (Salvini) and Forza Italia (Berlusconi) are both at around 7%. Why is she doing so well?

- the relative cohesion of the coalition so far
- the support of business,
- the acquiescence of the mass media – she is now dubbed ‘Meloni, the centrist’
- the weakness and division of the official opposition
- and tepid response of the trade union movement, limited to token demos
- she looks like a political change from the cobbled together national unity governments which obscured any differences between parties

We could add some other elements. Meloni looks different from previous prime ministers. She is younger, a woman, and does not speak like the lawyers or professors who normally reach this position. Indeed, her social background is also more modest. Despite being a full-time politician for many years, the fact that her party was not part of the mainstream means people may think she is bringing something new and different. Just like Berlusconi, the Lega, and the Five Star movement before her, at the beginning of their arrival in governments, these new parties and movements benefited from not being like the previous political caste. She has been lucky too, with the relatively stronger economic growth in Italy compared to, say, Britain. Capturing a big Mafia boss does no harm either.

## Forces

However, moving forward, there are bigger problems. If the cost of living crisis gets worse and the economy falters or the pension reforms provoke revolts, she could be in difficulty. The solidity of the coalition helped her get into power, but internal disputes could eventually cripple her. The very success of the Fratelli d'Italia creates problems. Within the coalition, the relationship of forces has completely changed over the last few years. Meloni now has twice the support of the other two partners combined. If the upcoming regional elections in Lombardy and Lazio confirm this tendency, the junior partners might get restless. Paradoxically, greater success for the Fratelli could destabilise the coalition.

One of the institutional changes that the coalition wants to push through is differentiated autonomy. This basically increases the power of the regions and weakens the centre. The real risk is that the richer regions keep a bigger slice of the cake and the poorer South loses more than it already does. People like Salvini and the Lega are enthusiastic supporters of this legislation; he hopes it will staunch its continued loss of votes as he spins it as the road to northern autonomy. Traditionally, of course, fascists and post-fascists are naturally centralists. Hence the possibilities for

disagreement on this question are great.

The other big constitutional reform is the proposal for a more presidential republic, with a form of the French model being proposed. Such a radical change requires a bigger majority, and the opposition may find greater unity in opposing it. Both sets of proposals represent the underlying dangers of this government. Capitalist power in Italy has always found the 1948 constitution's excessively progressive values a constraint on its own interests. It would like to restrict some elements in order to carry out structural changes it sees necessary for strengthening its control over society and profit-making.

Sinistra Anti-Capitalista, a revolutionary group in Italy, has defined the government in these terms:

The real issue is not the exact definition we give to this government (its degree of fascism) – since we are in a very different context to the past. Rather it is understanding how the political forces making up this government are operating in an international situation where the right is in the ascendancy and much of it has fascistic aspects. The Fratelli d'Italia and its allies do want to re-invoke the reactionary past. But above all these forces are carrying their classic role of organising the division of the working class through the use of racism, nationalism, reactionary ideology, patriarchy and repression. (Sinistra Anti-Capitalista, 22 Jan 2023)

## The opposition

What is the political opposition to the government doing?

While the new government has been establishing itself, the PD has been consumed with an internal battle over who its next leader should be. It is historically similar in some ways to the British Labour Party since it has

influence over the biggest trade unions and defines itself as defending the interests of labour and progressive values. Just like Labour, it is essentially social liberal rather than traditionally social democratic since it has participated in recent governments with the M5S (Five Star Movement) and Draghi and has put itself forward as the best partner of Italian business.

Unfortunately, its subservience to those corporate interests has not brought it many political rewards. It has not recovered from its poor showing in September, declining by another two percentage points to just above 17% in the opinion polls, narrowly overtaking the M5S. Many of its usual voters deserted it at the last election for abstention or to vote for the M5S, who at least seemed to be defending wholeheartedly the Citizens Income, which was a gain for the working class.

After the war, 8% of Italians were members of political parties; today, there are less than 2%. Election turnout has dropped from 90% to 60%. The historical forerunner of the PD, the Italian Communist Party, was the largest mass party in Europe, with several million members and huge political and especially cultural influence in society. The PD has lost 7 million voters over the past 16 years. In 2008, it still had 800,000 members; today, it has around 50,000 to 100,000. When they first opened the election of their leaders to primaries, they got 3 million people to vote; today it will be a great success if they get to a million.

A letter to the Corriere delle Sera by a member got to the nub of the problem:

We are spending weeks talking about nothing: should we change our name? Who should we make an alliance with? All this talk without dealing with the central question: whose side are we on? Are we with the exploited or the exploiters? With the warmongers or the pacifists? With the ecologists or the polluters? Don't they realise Veltroni's (earlier reformist leader) politics of 'but also' is the origin of



There is a slight similarity to the debate between the Corbyn current and Starmer but in Italy, the left of the PD is softer and less linked to actual struggles. The battle for leadership is between four contestants but is likely to boil down to a duel. On the one side is Elly Schlein who is more green, younger, a feminist, and more liberal on immigration and human rights. She wanted the leadership vote in the primary to be totally online but was defeated. The leftist currents generally support her.

On the other side is Stefano Bonaccini, a two-time governor of the PD stronghold of Emilia Romagna and the favourite. He represents the area and has the support of many local leaders, and he puts himself forward as the leader who knows how to administer and get things done. Like Starmer he is keen on working with business; at a recent conference, he accused his opponents of being scared to utter the word "business." He is supported by the reformist wing and the left-leaning Christian Democrats who came into the PD.

Both do a great deal to change the old apparatus and go beyond the currents. However, this contest has seen the continuity of these currents, which have lined up on one side or the other. The basis of such coalitions is more about making sure your team gets a share of the slots on the electoral lists

and other jobs rather than any real political differences. Schlein hopes that while she may be able to pick up votes from the non-members in the primary, she will lose among the membership.

Whoever wins, the key issue for them is to decide whether to ally with the M5S or with the pro-business centrists, which include former PD leader Matteo Renzi. The Schlein people are the most vehemently anti-Renzi and more open to linking up with the M5S, who have made a shift to the left. Bonaccini is Renzi's old friend, and he is more open to forming an alliance with the centrists, though he won't say much about it right now. Neither side is going to organise any real class struggle in opposition to Meloni. The PD's influence on the major trade union, the CGIL, will also be negative. Winning the top job is not a very secure post; there have been at least eight since the end of the Communist Party!

As for the M5S, Conte has saved it from completely disintegrating. The last election saw it lose half its voters from the previous general election, and over the course of the parliament, many of its MPs went to different parties. Significant leaders like Di Maio split and formed new ones. By focusing on the defence of the Citizens Income, which it had brought in, and distancing himself from the Draghi government it had participated in, Conte managed to stop the slide.

M5S is a peculiar political phenomenon since it regularly shifts from the right to the left and the centre without permanently defining itself. It remains, of course, a party that is pro-bourgeois and pro capitalist

but it is a much less reliable business partner than the PD. The tragedy for the left was that its progressive policy stances at different times captured significant layers of voters who saw themselves as left-leaning or progressive. A number of people I know have voted for them. Ill-informed people on the left who dismissed the M5S as some sort of fascist-type group got it completely wrong.

Forces to the left of the PD have struggled to recover the space they had won in the days of Rifondazione Comunista. Today, it barely gets more than 1% in elections. The Union Popolare electoral coalition, led by ex-Naples mayor Di Magistris, was a step forward at the last election as it brought together Poder Popolare (Peoples Power) and what was left of Rifondazione, along with some radical trade unionists. So far, it has been incapable of building an organisation that can bring together class struggle activists in an ongoing way, between elections. You can see this just by visiting its website, which is empty of local activities or discussion, whereas its components do have up-to-date active websites. There is a small minority organising opposition inside the CGIL, and there is a network (Risorgiamo) of activists built up around workplaces such as GKN near Florence, which are fighting to keep their factories open.

As a result, the Meloni government continues to pose a serious threat to democratic gains and working-class living standards.

7 February 2023

Source: [Anti\*Capitalist Resistance-><https://anticapitalistresistance.org/living-with-georgia/>].

## The Far Right in Ukraine

10 February 2023, by **Stephen R Shalom, Taras Bilous**

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New Politics (NP): How would you

assess the influence of far-right forces in Ukraine? We have seen claims that, on the one hand,

suggest that Ukraine is a Nazi state, or, on the other hand, that the far right is an insignificant

**factor in Ukrainian life. What is your assessment?**

**Taras Bilous (TB):** Basically, their electoral influence is abysmal, it is small, but they use their strengths in other fields, like on the streets, to try to influence policies. Their extra-parliamentary influence should be neither diminished nor exaggerated.

**NP: Is it the case that the far right has the ability to block policies it doesn't like by threatening violence?**

**TB:** The most significant example of this was the so-called "protest against capitulation," the protest against peace initiatives in late 2019 after Zelensky was elected president. This was an effort by the nationalist right to stop the initiation of the peace process. There had been an agreement that there would be a troop disengagement at three points of what was then the line between Ukrainian forces and Russian/separatist forces in Donbas. Then people from around the Azov movement, and from the National Corps Party, staged a campaign there, at one of these points, presenting this disengagement as if it represented some kind of gain for the Kremlin, as if Ukrainian troops alone were called upon to withdraw and leave their positions. But this wasn't what the disengagement required; it required both sides to pull back.

But even in this case, which was so crucial for the right, where they tried to achieve their maximum mobilization for this activity, they didn't succeed in achieving their point of view because Zelensky intervened personally. He traveled to that line of forces and engaged in heated discussions with some Azov members, and eventually Ukraine did carry out this disengagement, which was a prerequisite for resuming the meeting in the "Normandy Format" with France and Germany as mediators between Ukraine and Russia. So even in this case the right was unable to block governmental policy.

It's not only a matter of how much effort the far right puts into their campaigns that determines whether they succeed. It's especially a question

of how their positions align with the broader position of Ukrainian society in general, because when their demands contradict the position of the majority of the society, it's much harder for them to push them through; on the other hand, when they support the position of the broader population, then they have more chance of influencing government decisions.

Some of the Western leftist press made it seem as if Zelensky retreated on his policies under the pressure of the far right. But they didn't succeed in thwarting his peace initiatives, which were favored by the majority of the Ukrainian population and for which Zelensky felt he had a popular mandate. On the other hand, the polls showed that the majority of Ukrainians, while supporting the peace process, rejected some specific political demands pushed by the Russian side. And here Zelensky had to backtrack.

In those policy areas where the positions of the far right did not coincide with the views of liberals and national liberals, the far right wasn't successful in fulfilling their pressure on the government. For instance, on gender policies or LGBTQ issues, where the right found itself in the minority, it wasn't able to influence governmental decisions

**NP: Could you say a bit more about the behavior of the far right towards feminists and LGBTQ people? And what is the role of the Ukrainian police and security forces in dealing with this?**

**TB:** Far-right groups before the war actively tried to disrupt different events promoting women's and LGBTQ rights. Here we could see that the reaction of the State and the police was heavily dependent on whether the event had a lot of international coverage, like for instance, the Pride parade in Kyiv or the 8th of March women's demos. In which case the authorities and the police tried to prevent these far-right attacks. However, at lesser-known events in the provinces, in some smaller cities and towns, they were also actively attacked by the far right, and then the police were usually quite inactive, standing by and doing

nothing. So in these cases the far right was more successful in attacking and disrupting these events.

There was a general phenomenon of the far right infiltrating the security services and law enforcement, but it's hard to measure to what extent this occurred. We know some prime examples, for instance, the local head of the Kyiv police came from an Azov background. When we had confrontations between leftist and far-right activists, we often saw the police greeting some from the far right, showing that they were familiar with each other. This again implied that there were some connections. But actually it seems that this wasn't so widespread.

Even in those cases where the police do nothing to prevent attacks on feminist and other progressive events, it doesn't automatically mean that they do this because they feel affinity for the attackers or that they have some connections to them. The police are not doing their primary job, which is to protect peaceful gatherings, but not so much because they are on the side of attacks, but because abstaining and doing nothing cause them fewer problems. Defending an LGBTQ event (for example) can lead to far-right attacks on the police, which can lead to police injuries. Therefore, to avoid a fight with the far right, it is easier for them to simply do nothing. The arrest of the far right will lead to other far-right mobilizing, organizing a picket outside the police station, and generally putting pressure on the police. The police want less trouble, so it's often easier for them to insist that the organizers cancel their event, than to fight the far right. Of course, this is the failure of the police to fulfill its duty to protect freedom of assembly. They behave similarly in cases of conflicts with high-ranking officials or other persons who may create problems for them.

The situation was improving, however, after the removal of Interior Minister Arsen Avakov, who was widely seen as a patron of the National Corps and other far-right groups. After he left office in 2021, there was a series of arrests of far-right activists, and we could feel a general improvement in the situation, and there were trends

showing that far-right influence in the security services was shrinking.

But the situation might be different in the case of the so-called municipal guards. These are paramilitary structures that were created in some cities as assistants to police law enforcement, in many cases with rather dubious legal status. The far right tried to present this as a way to employ veterans of the war.

The far right infiltrated the municipal guard in Kyiv and some other places, and actually played major roles. They were accountable to the local authorities, to the municipal leadership, to the mayors, but at the same time they had this very questionable legal status. So this was an opportunity for the far right to gain more influence. In other cities, though, the far right wasn't present in creating the municipal guards. Instead they were usually comprised of some kind of athletes and were just loyal servants to the local elites, almost in a feudal way.

**NP: What was the relationship between the Ukrainian left and the Ukrainian far right before the war?**

**TB:** Well, obviously, our attitude was directly opposed to them, and we were in perpetual confrontation with them. But we can say that the war in Donbas, when it started in 2014, contributed to the decline of the strength of leftist movements, and in the streets the far right grew more powerful, while the left was in decline. Actually in these confrontations with the far right, the best outcome was usually a draw. But in recent years there was some reversal of these trends, and there was a revival of the street antifa movement and some anti-fascist victories on the side of the left. So there were some signs that the situation was reversing direction.

**NP: Turning to February 2022, how has the full-scale war affected the influence of the far right?**

**TB:** It is not an easy task to answer this question, because with the war political life in Ukraine has been put on pause. It's quite complicated to predict what the situation will be after the war given that it's so dependent

on the war's outcome.

So what changed with the war? Lots of the far right, the majority of them, went into the military. Some remained, and sometimes they did some controversial things behind the lines — but they were usually criticized for this by general public opinion. So, for instance, when the far right did its usual stuff and tried to attack and discredit a feminist protest in Lviv against domestic violence, it actually rather backfired because they didn't find some huge popular support for the activity. On the contrary, the coverage was favorable to the feminist activists and to supporting organizations, including ours, including from one popular YouTube blogger, and in some mainstream media. So we can say that far-right activity of this sort isn't very much tolerated behind the lines.

This is actually very important, because it was precisely the weakness of resistance to the far right, the uncritical attitude towards them in the mainstream media and from a significant part of the moderate public, that was one of the main advantages of the Ukrainian far right. They skillfully used the halo of "heroes" they had won on the Maidan in 2014 and in the war in Donbas to protect themselves from criticism.

In fact, if you evaluate the power of the Ukrainian far right in absolute terms, it has never set a record. Everyone knows about their electoral weakness, but even if we talk about street mobilizations, the Polish far right is definitely stronger than their Ukrainian "colleagues" in this regard. It's enough to compare each year the largest street marches — [October 14](#) in Ukraine and [November 11](#) in Poland — to understand this. In terms of the scale of violence, the Ukrainian far right also pales in comparison to what the [Russian far right did in the 2000s](#), often under the cover of the Russian special services. In fact, Ukrainian neo-Nazis acted before the Maidan in the shadow and under the great influence of Russian neo-Nazis. The main difference in the Ukrainian situation after the Maidan is not in the absolute power of the far right, but in its relative power compared to other political actors, as well as in the

uncritical attitude of the mainstream moderate public towards them.

But in recent years, public opinion about them has changed, and this was one of the reasons why the anti-racist and anti-fascist antifa group Arsenal (Kyiv) dared to come out of the deep underground and challenge the far right again. In 2014-2018, in the case of clashes between the left and the right, public opinion was not on our side. But during the struggle in the summer of 2021, the far right became the "bad guys" in the media. And it seems that after the war this trend will continue because the far right will no longer be able to defend themselves from criticism as before.

**NP: But why won't their war-time heroism, for example at Mariupol, enable them to deflect criticisms?**

**TB:** It protects them. But only as a military unit. This does not transfer to the far right as a political actor.

Over the past years, Ukrainian society has come a long way in establishing the position that heroism at the front cannot be an indulgence for those who commit crimes and human rights violations in the rear. And although on some other issues during the full-scale war there was a worsening of the situation, on this issue I do not see a rollback.

Also, after this war, there will be veterans from all sectors of the population and on both sides of political conflicts. Now there are military volunteers even among the Roma, the most discriminated-against group in Ukrainian society — despite the fact that participation in the war goes against their own traditions. If in 2018 the far right managed to stage a series of pogroms against Roma without serious consequences for themselves, now this will no longer be the case.

But there is one category of people who will not be able to protect themselves in this way — the pro-Russian residents of Donbas and Crimea. Therefore, it is necessary that international organizations take an active part in the protection of human rights in these territories.



**NP: Let's turn to the question of the Azov regiment. How significant are they? Are they an independent military force? Do they have their own far-right symbols? And, to ask about an issue that's been raised on the US left, is US military aid to Ukraine actually arming neo-Nazi units?**

**TB:** The Azov regiment was integrated inside the National Guard and inside the official structures, but it still retained some level of autonomy. There were some steps to control it by Ukrainian officials, like to change its leadership, but it still retained its links with its founders like Andriy Biletsky, and it even had its own Sergeant School.

The majority of original Azov regiment were in Mariupol, and lots of them were taken prisoner. Some were exchanged in prisoner swaps, but the majority are still in Russian captivity, and the commanders are interned in Turkey. Nevertheless, the regiment has been replenished with new people and continues recruiting. I don't know how much they managed to restore the structure.

What is more important after the full-scale invasion, the people associated with the Azov movement also set up a number of other units, like territorial defense units, for instance, which were connected to the Azov movement, using the Azov brand. The largest of them, the Kyiv Azov Special Operations Forces unit, was turned into an assault brigade at the end of January. So in general, compared to 2014 or 2021, in absolute numbers now far more far-right individuals have joined the military, and far more people are serving in the units they created. But at the same time, in relative terms, they play a smaller role in the war than in 2014, because the army in general has grown and modernized much more.

But it's important to understand that not only far-right individuals serve in the units created by the far right. (On the other hand, you can also find the far right in "regular" units). It's difficult to determine the percentages, but apolitical or centrist people often serve in far-right units, motivated by the high level of training and

discipline in these units. When you join a fighting army, you first think about your chances of survival, the conditions of service, the competence of the officers, and the reliability of your fellow soldiers. Political views recede into the background. What will happen to these units and the people who serve in them after the war depends on the results of the war and the general political situation in Ukraine.

What I see with my own eyes is that the situation today is not comparable with 2014. Back then the level of State control over the military units that were created was minimal. Everything was very chaotic. I even know the story of how in 2014 one volunteer stole an entire armored personnel carrier and took it from Donbas to Western Ukraine. Today, however, there is strict control over the distribution of weapons, more control over these separate units, and from what I know, none of the recently founded smaller units enjoys a level of autonomy comparable with Azov in previous years. So actually, the situation is qualitatively quite different from what it was eight or nine years ago.

To illustrate this stricter state control over military units and over arms distribution, let me refer to my own experience. My previous battalion was disbanded, and I was transferred to some other one in our brigade. When the battalion was disbanded, it was discovered that several Kalashnikovs were missing. This triggered an immediate reaction from law enforcement. The military prosecutors office started an investigation and opened criminal cases against the officers who were responsible for the control of weapons in that battalion. This shows that the State tries to control very strictly where all the armaments and equipment goes, and that it's not going to some unauthorized individuals. This is one of aspect of the stricter state control over different armed units.

Regarding this notion of the West arming Nazis, and so on, the weapons are distributed more or less evenly among different units. So there might be some far-right people, people with far-right beliefs, in some units, but

they are not specifically given this weaponry. Moreover, given the stricter control I described, this means that the weapons are going to be confiscated after the war, taken back by the State.

So more or less all the people who joined the armed forces are more or less equal in their access to different weapons. And obviously it's not the case that heavy weaponry from the West is being directed to far-right units. It's that ordinary units are getting the weapons, and maybe they have some people with far-right views, as well as people with all other beliefs, in their ranks. So there's no specific arming of the right.

Regarding the right-wing symbols, back in 2015, under pressure from the authorities, Azov removed the Black Sun from its insignia and tipped the emblem at an angle to distance itself from the far-right symbols. Last year, the departure from far-right symbols continued – the newly created Azov units use [three swords](#) instead of the symbol of the Azov regiment. The [new brigade uses a symbol](#) created on the basis of the previous emblem, but it has almost no resemblance to the Wolfsangel.

On the other hand, in the army now many soldiers and even lower-ranking officers wear various non-statutory military patches. It's a popular kind of merch that people buy at the military shops, it's not controlled in any way. They are often humorous, or have inscriptions on them like "[Russian warship, go fuck yourself](#)." But sometimes there are far-right symbols on these patches, like the Wolfsangel or Totenkopf. I have encountered cases where people wore patches with far-right symbols but had absolutely no understanding of its origin and meaning. One guy took off the Black Sun symbol when an anarchist from my former unit explained to him what it signified and showed him the Wikipedia article. Of course, those who started using these symbols in Ukraine understood well what they meant. But now if you see a guy with a Totenkopf, he might think it's just a skull and bones. So just because people use such symbols doesn't indicate that people are supporting their far-right meaning.

**NP: Volodymyr Ishchenko, in a recent [article](#) in *New Left Review*, has argued that Ukraine in wartime, unlike other anti-colonial struggles, has become increasingly neoliberal, not more democratic, not more state interventionist, and not less corrupt. Do you think he is correct, and are these indications of the growing strength of the far right?**

**TB:** Starting with the latter question, I don't see any relevance of the far right to this question. But regarding the first question, there are two separate aspects: one is about anti-democratic and authoritarian tendencies and the other is about social and economic policies. Regarding anti-democratic trends, actually we can't say that all previous national liberation movements were immune to that. On the contrary, war usually evokes more authoritarian and less democratic tendencies, and this applied to many of the liberation movements in Asia and Africa, just dictated by conditions. So, yes, obviously the war creates possibilities for authoritarian trends, and it can be used by the State authorities, by the government. But whether this will lead to more authoritarianism will heavily depend on the course and outcome of the war. And it's unclear how the far right will react to this, whether they will, in a way, try to adapt to this, to support it, or whether they will, on the contrary, fall victim to confrontation with the government. So actually there's a lot that is unspecified, due to the unclear outcome of the war.

Regarding social and the economic

policies, again, we can't say that we have a clear picture, because on the one hand you have neo-liberal mantras and the liberalization of labor relations and labor markets. But on the other hand, there are objective reasons that push the Ukrainian Government - even though it speaks about privatization - to have undertaken a number of nationalizations in strategic sectors, nationalizing some big enterprises, factories that link to the military, to the energy sector, and so on. In addition, in the course of postwar reconstruction funds will be distributed via the State. So the percentage of the GDP that is concentrated in the hands of the State will clearly rise, both because of these nationalizations and the control of the reconstruction funds. So we cannot say that there is some very clear and one-sided tendency.

I have a [thread on twitter](#) about the class nature of the Zelensky government and I argue that it represents primarily the interests of middle bourgeoisie, or the classic bourgeoisie as opposed to both the working class and oligarchic capital. So on the one hand they are very eager and highly active in pushing neoliberal anti-labor legislation. But at the same time they are also interested in subduing the power of the oligarchs. Actually the war has already disrupted the level of oligarchic influence. So again, the outcome of the war will heavily influence both politics and the economy. And despite their neo-liberal ideology, they have been forced to carry out some steps that are contrary to their ideological

positions in order to create a war economy.

**NP: Finally, I'd like to ask you this. There is broad support in Ukraine for resisting the Russian invasion, from left to right. But in what ways does the left position on the war differ from that of the right in terms of goals and strategy?**

**TB:** There are some pretty obvious distinctions in our and their visions of the future of postwar Ukraine. Obviously, the left wants a more socially-oriented, more pluralistic, more democratic, more inclusive country, while the far right, libertarians, and conservatives, stand for some opposite positions.

And then we have the question of self-determination, and it becomes a bit more complicated. When we go on to consider the issues of Crimea and Donbas, in the left camp there isn't a single position, but a spectrum of visions. We also do not have a consensus on the European Union and NATO.

The full-scale Russian invasion partially smoothed over the former conflicts between the various leftists in Ukraine, because on the most important issue, the absolute majority of the Ukrainian left took the same position - support and participation in the resistance. But the issues that divided the Ukrainian left in the past still haven't disappeared.

8 February 2023

Source: [New Politics](#).

## A Chinese Spy Balloon Shot Down Foreshadows Future Conflicts

9 February 2023, by **Dan La Botz**

The balloon, 90-feet wide, its electronic equipment powered by solar panels, was one of a fleet of such balloons used by China to spy on other

countries. This was not a unique event. There have been 20 to 30 such global balloon flights in the last decade and another was flying at the

same time in February over Latin America, according to the U.S. Defense Department.

The balloon floating in the jet stream at 60,000 feet was spotted by civilians over Montana at the beginning of the month, leading immediately to demands that it be shot down, but President Biden hesitated to do so, he said, while it might harm civilians. Republicans seized the opportunity to attack Biden. "The China balloon flying over the U.S. is a direct assault on our national sovereignty," tweeted Texas Governor Greg Abbott on February 3. "Biden's refusal to stop it is a dereliction of duty. From flying balloons to open borders, Biden has no regard for our national security and sovereignty."

For some time the United States government has seen China as the greatest threat to its security, as it reiterated in a national security report on April last year, though it stopped short of predicting a military conflict. The report sees China as a greater threat than Russia, Iran, or North Korea, because of its push for "global power." The report says, "China increasingly is a near-peer competitor, challenging the United States in multiple arenas — especially economically, militarily and

technologically — and is pushing to change global norms."

In June of this year, NATO also named China in its "Strategic Concept" paper. "China is substantially building up its military forces, including nuclear weapons, bullying its neighbors, threatening Taiwan ... monitoring and controlling its own citizens through advanced technology, and spreading Russian lies and disinformation," said NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. "China is not our adversary, but we must be clear-eyed about the serious challenges it represents."

The U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation recently announced, "The counterintelligence and economic espionage efforts emanating from the government of China and the Chinese Communist Party are a grave threat to the economic well-being and democratic values of the United States." In January the FBI raided a Chinese police station in Brooklyn used to spy on Chinese in the United States. Officials in Canada, Ireland, and the Netherlands have told China to shut down its police operations in

their countries.

The friction between the two nations has grown as China created and militarized new islands in the South China Sea, violated international human rights norms in its suppression of democracy in Hong Kong and of the Uighur people in Xinjiang, and threatened Taiwan.

The United States has long been the world's dominant imperial power, having the largest economy and spending the most on its military. The U.S. GDP is 23.32 trillion dollars compared to China's 17.73 trillion. According to the Institute for Policy studies, "The United States still makes up the lion's share, with its \$801 billion in 2021 representing 39 percent of the world's military spending. That's more than the next nine countries combined," one of which is China. The U.S. has encouraged Japan to arm itself and used the Russian war on Ukraine to strengthen NATO. One doesn't need a spy balloon to see conflict on the horizon.

6 February 2023

**“Our country does not deserve this cruelty - we stand in solidarity with our people with all our strength”**

**8 February 2023, by Workers Party of Turkey**

So far, the TİP Disaster Coordination Center has received more than 1500 calls for help. The number of calls reveal the severity of the situation we are facing.

- > In many neighborhoods of the Hatay province, especially in Defne and Samandağ, as well as in provinces Kahramanmaraş, Gaziantep and Adıyaman, people have been left to their fate in the harsh winter conditions.

- > In these areas, many buildings, old

and new, subcontracted via state tenders under the AKP government - public institutions such as hospitals, dormitories, hotels, AFAD and municipality buildings- collapsed. The pro-government construction companies, and the ministries and directorates which awarded these tenders to them are responsible for the death of the young, the children, and the patients. We demand the prosecution of those who caused the death and suffering of thousands of citizens.

- > Against all the protests of Hatay residents, experts, and environmental activists, Hatay Airport was built on the Amik Plain, and is now unusable. With the cities' highways and viaducts damaged, it is now impossible to reach Hatay, and tens of thousands of people cannot receive aid.

- > Institutions such as the Turkish Armed Forces and AFAD are tasked with search and rescue and providing food during emergencies. However, under the AKP rule, they have been

systematically disempowered, their staff and personnel reduced, and thus they have been rendered useless in search and rescue operations. Besides, many specialized, volunteer search and rescue groups were not allowed to get involved because they couldn't get the necessary certification issued by the pro-AKP bureaucracy.

- > In the aftermath of the massive earthquake of 17 August 1999 in northwestern Turkey almost 25 years ago, the "earthquake taxes" collected nationwide were not spent on preparing for earthquakes and ensuring the safety of the citizens, but on roads and bridges that the AKP has built in order to generate political gains and enrich pro-government

contractors.

- > Our country was hit by two very severe earthquakes during the coldest days of winter. Effective search and rescue in the earthquake region, especially in Hatay, Kahramanmaraş and Adıyaman, is virtually impossible. Besides, there is a lack of food and water supply. Our citizens are trying to rescue their relatives from the rubble by digging with their hands, while those who survived struggle in the freezing cold.

- > Our country has been facing a great challenge for hours since the two devastating earthquakes. But the state, the government institutions, specialized experts, means for transportation and sustenance are

nowhere to be seen.

The people of our country do not deserve to be abandoned to such despair, nor do they deserve the remorselessness of the government.

We will never forget and never forgive those who abandoned our people to this fate.

We have mobilized with all our power to stand with our fellow citizens who have been left to fend for themselves in these harsh winter conditions.

**Our people will heal their wounds through solidarity.**

Our fellow citizens will never be alone and helpless.

7 February 2023

## New popular resistance in Latin America

7 February 2023, by **Claudio Katz**

The pandemic interrupted this escalation of mobilisations in a limited way, which neutralised the short conservative restoration of 2014-2019. That period of renewed coups failed to deactivate the prominence of the popular movements.

The 2019 rebellion in Ecuador inaugurated the current phase of protests, which has repeated the traditional pattern of transmission. Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Peru and Haiti have been the main centers of recent confrontation.

The political effects of this new wave are very varied. They have disrupted the general map of governments, recreating the significance of progressivism. This aspect has prevailed in the bulk of the geographical area. At the beginning of 2023, presidents of that type prevail in the countries that bring together 80% of the Latin American population (Santos; Cernadas, 2022).

This scenario has also facilitated the continuity of governments harassed by

US imperialism. After enduring countless onslaughts, the demonised presidents of Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua remain in office.

The cycle of military and institutional coups sponsored by Washington in Honduras (2009), Paraguay (2012), Brazil (2016) and Bolivia (2019) has also been partially counteracted. The recent coup in Peru (2023) faces heroic opposition in the streets.

This rebellion has obstructed, until now, the disguised intervention of the marines in devastated countries like Haiti. The same popular struggle dealt heavy defeats to the outrages attempted by the recycled neoliberal governments of Ecuador and Panama.

But this great intervention from below provokes a more virulent and programmed reaction from the ruling classes. The enriched sectors have processed the past experience and exhibit far less tolerance for any challenge to their privileges. They have articulated a far-right counteroffensive to subdue the

popular movement. They aspire to resume with greater violence the failed conservative restoration of the past decade. This complex scenario requires evaluating the forces in dispute.

### Revolts with Electoral Effect

Several uprisings in the last three years had immediate electoral translations. The new mandates of Bolivia, Peru, Chile, Honduras and Colombia emerged from large uprisings that imposed changes of government.

This sequence was first verified in Bolivia. The uprising successfully confronted the gendarmes and overthrew the dictatorship. Añez threw in the towel when she lost her last allies and the middle sectors that initially accompanied her adventure.

Corrupt management of the pandemic strengthened that isolation and



diluted the civil continuity attempted by the centre-right candidates. The rebellion from below imposed the return of the Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement for Socialism/ MAS) to the government and several people responsible for the coup were tried and imprisoned. The conspiracy continued in its bastion of Santa Cruz and it is currently being decided whether it will persist or be crushed by forceful official reaction.

A similar dynamic occurred in Chile, as a result of the great popular uprising that buried the Piñera government. The spark of that battle was the cost of transportation, but the rejection of the 30 pesos of that expenditure led to an impressive feat against 30 years legacy of Pinochetism.

That outpouring led to two electoral victories that preceded Boric's win over Kast. [28] The great increase in electoral participation with anti-fascist slogans in popular neighbourhoods enabled this achievement, in the country emblematic of regional neoliberalism.

Due to the significance of Chile as a symbol of Thatcherism, the election, within the framework of the Constituent Assembly with a huge popular presence in the streets, of a progressive president, aroused enormous expectations.

A more dizzying and unexpected sequence was recorded in Peru. Popular weariness with right-wing presidents surfaced in spontaneous protests led by young people stripped of their rights. That uprising followed the health tragedy of the pandemic, which enhanced the ineptitude of the ruling bureaucracy.

Castillo became the beneficiary of popular discontent and Fujimorismo could not thwart his arrival at Government House. [29] The teacher unionist's talk of redistributing wealth created the expectation of cutting the oppressive succession of conservative governments.

In Colombia, the massive rebellion forced the establishment to resign its direct management of the presidency for the first time. Several million

people participated in huge, imposing demonstrations. Massive strikes met with fierce repression and succeeded in overthrowing a regressive healthcare reform. As in Chile, they were later extended to express the enormous malaise accumulated over decades of neoliberalism.

That annoyance translated into the electoral defeat of Uribe [30] and the improvised ultra-rightist who tried to prevent Petro's victory. [31] With that victory, a centre-left leader rose to the presidency, avoiding the terrible fate of assassination suffered by his predecessors. He is accompanied by a person of African descent, representative of the most oppressed sectors of the population. [32]

In the same vein is the triumph of Xiomara Castro in Honduras. Her victory was a result of the sustained fight against the coup endorsed by the US ambassador in 2009. That coup began the long Latin American cycle of lawfare and parliamentary judicial coups.

The 15-point advantage that Xiomara obtained over her opponent neutralised the fraud and proscription attempts. In a dramatic context of poverty, drug trafficking and crime, the heroic popular struggle led to the first female presidency. Xiomara began her management by repealing the State secret management laws and the delivery of special zones to external investors.

However she must deal with the suffocating presence of a large US military base (Palmerola) and a Washington ambassador who intervenes quite naturally in internal debates on peasant settlements as well as laws to reform the electrical system (Giménez, 2022).

## Victories of a Different Kind

In other countries, the rise of progressive leaders was not a direct result of popular protests. That resistance did operate as a background for social discontent and the inability of the dominant groups to

renew the primacy of their candidates.

Mexico was the first case of this modality. Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) came to the presidency in 2018, in a harsh confrontation with the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party /PRI) and Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party / PAN) castes supported by the main economic groups. AMLO took advantage of the wear and tear of previous administrations, the division of the elites and the obsolescence of continuity through fraud. But he acted in a context of less impact than the previous mobilisations of teachers and electricians.

Unions in Mexico have been very affected by the reorganisation of industry and were not the determining factor in the current political turn. AMLO maintains an ambiguous relationship with his Cardenista historical legacy, but he inaugurated an administration that was far removed from his neoliberal predecessors. [33]

Nor was the arrival of Alberto Fernández (2019) in Argentina an immediate result of popular action. It did not reproduce the arrival of Néstor Kirchner (2003) at the Casa Rosada, in the midst of a generalised rebellion. Previously, the right-wing Mauricio Macri suffered a resounding setback in the streets, when he tried to introduce a pension reform (2017). But he did not face the periodic general uprising that shakes Argentina.

The main movement of workers on the continent is located in Argentina. Its willingness to fight has been very visible in the 40 consummated general strikes since the end of the dictatorship (1983). Unionisation is at the top of international averages and is linked to the striking organisation of piqueteros (unemployed and informal).

The struggle of these movements has made it possible to sustain State social aid, which the ruling classes granted under great fear of a revolt. The new forms of resistance — linked to the previous working class militancy — facilitated the return of progressivism



to the government.

In the last three years, the disappointment generated by the non-fulfillment of Fernández's promises has led to great rejection, but with limited protests. There were important victories of many unions, frequent concessions from the government and prominence in the streets, but the action of the popular movement was contained.

In Brazil, Lula's victory has been an extraordinary achievement, in a framework of unfavourable social relations for the popular sectors. Since the institutional coup against Dilma Rousseff [34], the control of the streets had been captured by the conservative sectors that anointed Bolsonaro. The labour unions lost leadership, the social movements have been harassed and militants of the left adopted defensive attitudes.

Lula's release encouraged the resumption of popular action. But that impulse was not enough to reverse the setback of the context, which allowed Bolsonaro to retain a significant mass of voters. The PT resumed mobilisation during the electoral campaign (especially in the Northeast) and revitalised its forces during the victory celebrations.

In a context of great division between the dominant groups, fed up with the ex-captain's outbursts and Lula's cohesive leadership, Bolsonaro's defeat has created a scenario of potential recovery of popular struggle (Dutra, 2022). The fear of this breakthrough induced the military high command to veto the rejection of the verdict of the polls that Bolsonarism favoured.

But the battle against the ultra-right has only just begun and in order to subdue this great enemy, it is imperative to win back the confidence of the workers (Arcary, 2022). That credibility was eroded by the disappointment with the model of pacts with big capital that the PT developed in its previous administrations. Now a new opportunity emerges.

## Three Relevant Battles

Other situations of enormous popular resistance in the region did not result in progressive electoral victories, but in major defeats for neoliberal governments.

In Ecuador, the first victory of this type was recorded against President Lasso, who tried to resume privatisation and labour deregulation, together with a plan to increase tariffs and food prices as dictated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This outrage precipitated a confrontation with the indigenous movement and its new radical leadership which promotes a strong programme to defend popular income.

In mid-2022, that clash recreated the battle waged against the aggression launched by Lenin Moreno to increase the price of fuel in October 2019. [35] The conflict was settled with the same results as the previous struggle and with a new victory for the popular movement. The gigantic Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador/ CONAIE) mobilisation entered Quito in a climate of great solidarity, which neutralised the rain of tear gas triggered by the cops.

In 18 days of strikes, the experienced indigenous movement defeated the government's provocation by imposing the release of leader-activist Leónidas Iza (Acosta, 2022). CONAIE also won the repeal of the state of emergency and the acceptance of its main demands (freezing of fuel prices, emergency bonds, subsidies to small producers) (López, 2022).

The government ran out of support when its insulting speech against indigenous peoples lost them credibility. It had to give in to a movement which once again demonstrated its great capacity to paralyse the country and neutralise the attacks against social gains.

Another victory with similar relevance was achieved in Panama in the middle of the year, when the teachers unions

converged with transport workers and agricultural producers in rejecting official increases in gasoline, food and medicines. The unity forged in developing this resistance added the indigenous community to the protest movement, which paralysed the country for three weeks. The protest marches were the most important in recent decades.

This social reaction subdued a neoliberal government that had to go back on its adjustment plans. President Carrizo could not satisfy the business chambers that demanded greater toughness against the protesters.

This victory was particularly significant in an isthmus that has experienced tremendous growth in the last two decades, taking advantage of profits generated by the administration of the Canal for the dominant groups. Inequality is staggering, in a country where 10% of the richest families have incomes 37.3 times higher than the 10% of the poorest (D'Leon, 2022).

The US invasion in 1989 put in place a neoliberal plan which complements this asymmetry with scandalous levels of corruption. Tax evasion alone is equivalent to the entire public debt (Beluche, 2022). The victory in the streets dealt a severe defeat to the model that the Central American elites present as the path to follow for all small countries.

The third case of an extraordinary popular resistance without electoral derivations occurred in Haiti. Gigantic mobilisations once again occupied centre stage during 2022. They confronted the economic looting policies implemented by a regime managed from the offices of the IMF. That body led the increase in the cost of fuel that unleashed the protests, in a country still torn apart by earthquake, rural exodus and urban overcrowding (Rivara, 2022).

Street marches by no means take place in a political vacuum. There have been no elections for six years, with an administration that dispenses with the judicial and legislative power. The current president survives simply with support provided by the

embassies of the United States, Canada and France.

The current misrule is prolonged by the indecision that prevails in Washington when it comes to consummating a new occupation. These interventions, in the guise of the UN, the Organisation of American States and the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti, have been recreated over and over again in the last 18 years with disastrous results. The local servers of these invasions demand the re-entry of foreign troops, but the futility of these missions is obvious.

This type of imperial control has in fact been replaced by the general spread of paramilitary bands that terrorise the population. They act in close complicity with business (or government) mafias that compete for the spoils in dispute, using the 500,000 illegal weapons provided by their Florida accomplices (Isa Conde, 2022). The assassination of President Moïse was just a sample of the sorts of disaster generated by gangs managed by different power groups. [36]

These organisations have also tried to infiltrate protest movements in order to break up popular resistance. They sow terror, but have not managed to confine the population to their homes. Nor could they recreate hopes for another foreign military intervention (Boisrolin, 2022). The rebellion continues, while the opposition looks for ways to forge an alternative to overcome the current tragedy.

## Resistance-focused approaches

The sequence of resistance in the last three years confirms the persistence in Latin America of a prolonged context of struggles, subject to the usual pattern of ups and downs. Successes and setbacks are limited. There are no historic victories, but neither are there defeats like those suffered during the dictatorships of the 1970s.

This stage can be characterised with different denominations. Some analysts observe a long cycle of

contestation of neoliberalism (Ouvina, 2021) and others highlight the preeminence of actions of popular resistance that determine progressive cycles (García Linera, 2021).

These approaches correctly hierarchise the role of the struggle and the consequent importance of the popular subjects. They provide perspectives that go beyond the frequent disregard of the processes that unfold from below. In this second type of view, a great ignorance of social struggle and a biased investigation of the geopolitical trends from above predominate. They especially study how conflicts are resolved in the exclusive field of powers, governments or the ruling classes.

This last point of view tends to prevail in the characterisations of progressive cycles, as processes merely opposed to neoliberalism. Its democratising political impacts, its heterodox economic paths or its autonomy from US domination are highlighted.

But with this approach, the different positions of the dominant groups are evaluated without registering the connections of these strategies with policies of control or submission of the popular majorities. They omit this key information because they do not value the centrality of the popular struggle in determining the current Latin American context.

This distortion is very visible in the biased use of categories inspired by Gramsci's thought. These notions are taken to evaluate how the capitalist classes manage articulating consensus, domination and hegemony. But it is forgotten that this cartography of power constituted for the Italian communist a complementary element of his evaluation of popular resistance. Rebellion was the pillar of his strategy for the conquest of power by the oppressed to build socialism.

An updated application of this last approach for Latin America requires prioritising the analysis of popular struggles. The modalities used by the powerful to expand, preserve or legitimise their domination enrich, but do not replace, this evaluation.

## Comparisons With Other Regions

When investigating the resistance of the oppressed, the Latin American peculiarities of these struggles are perceived. In recent years, popular action has presented similarities and differences with other regions.

In 2019, a strong trend towards the emergence of a new wave of protests was observed in various parts of the planet, led by outraged young people from France, Algeria, Egypt, Ecuador, Chile or Lebanon.

The pandemic abruptly interrupted this irruption, generating a two-year period of fear and confinement. This reflux was in turn accentuated by the force of right-wing denialism that challenged health protection. In this framework, the difficulty of articulating a global movement in defense of public health emerged, focused on the elimination of vaccine patents.

After this dramatic period of confinement, the protests tend to reappear, prompting the warnings of the establishment of the proximity of post-pandemic rebellions (Rosso, 2021). They especially fear the outrage generated by high fuel and food prices (The Economist, 2022). This dynamic of resistance already includes a significant resurgence of strikes in Europe and unionisation in the United States, but the leading role of Latin America continues as an outstanding fact.

Everywhere the subjects of this battle bring together a great diversity of actors, with the significant relevance of young precarious workers. This segment suffers a higher degree of exploitation than formal wage earners. They suffer from job insecurity, the lack of social benefits and the consequences of labour flexibility (Standing, 2017).

For those reasons, deprived of the traditional arenas of negotiation and facing a very diffuse boss counterpart, s/he is particularly active in street fighting. In different countries they are pushed to impose their demands

through the State.

Migrants, ethnic minorities, indebted students are frequent actors in these battles in central economies, and the mass of informal workers occupy a similar centrality in peripheral countries. This last segment does not integrate the traditional factory proletariat, but forms part (in broad terms) of the working class and of the population that lives from its own labour.

The piqueteros in Argentina make up a variety of this segment, which given the loss of work in the places that centralised their demands has forged its identity by blocking streets. From that battle sprouted the social movements and different varieties of the popular economy. An equally relevant role is played by the peasant sectors that forged the MAS in Bolivia and the indigenous communities that created the CONAIE in Ecuador.

The links of these Latin American struggle movements with their counterparts in other parts of the world have lost visibility due to the deterioration of international coordination. The last great attempt at that connection was the World Social Forums, sponsored in the past decade by the alter-globalist movement. The Summits of the Peoples as an alternative to the meetings of governments, bankers and diplomats have stalled. The battle against neoliberal globalisation no longer has that centrality and has been replaced by more national popular agendas (Kent Carrasco, 2019).

The great vitality of the movements for struggle in Latin America is due to multiple reasons. But its progressive political profile, far from chauvinism and religious fundamentalism, has been very significant. In the region it has been possible to contain the reactionary tendencies to generate confrontations between peoples or wars between oppressed nations which have been sponsored by imperialism.

The Pentagon has not found a way to induce in Latin America the bloody conflicts that it managed to unleash in Africa and the East. Nor could it install an appendage like Israel to

perpetuate those killings or validate the enduring terror of the jihadists.

Washington has been the invariable promoter of these monstrosities to try to maintain its imperial leadership. But none of these aberrations have prospered so far in its “backyard” due to the centrality that organisations for popular struggle maintain.

For this reason, Latin America persists as a reference point for other international experiences. Many organisations of the European left seek, for example, to replicate the unity strategy or the redistributive projects developed in the region (Febbro, 2022). But all the peoples of the continent are currently facing a dangerous far-right enemy, which we will analyse in the next text.

## Summary

The popular uprisings contained the conservative restoration, recreated progressive scenarios and faced the redoubled counteroffensive of the right. They had immediate electoral effects and caused the precipitous departure of right-wing presidents in Bolivia, Chile, Peru, Honduras and Colombia.

In Mexico, Argentina and Brazil, social discontent did not provoke equivalent protests, but it did lead to similar victories at the polls. In Ecuador and Panama, important victories were achieved in the streets against neoliberal outrages, and in Haiti a sustained resistance to the chaos imposed by the elites and their imperial partners persists.

The analysis of this struggle is frequently neglected by studies exclusively focused on the form of domination by the oppressors. The evaluation of this resistance clarifies similarities and differences with other regions.

12 January 2023

Translated from *Punto de Vista Internacional* and annotated for *International Viewpoint* by David Fagan.

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# Pensions: The trial of strength to make Macron give way

6 February 2023, by **Léon Crémieux**

Virtually everywhere - 270 rallies were held in large, small and medium-sized towns and cities - the demonstrations were larger than on 19 January. Even the Interior Ministry's figures of 1.27 million are the highest in 30 years for a day of protests. It is a real mass uprising of the working classes, with a greater number of workers from the private sector, most often strikers, clearly present in the demonstrations. The mass character of this day of protest is also reflects all the opinion polls that register a growing rejection of the government's counter-reform project - by more than 80 per cent of workers, majority support for the strike movement, and the broad majority feeling that it will be necessary to go beyond strikes and block the country's economic activity in order to force Macron and Borne to withdraw their proposal.

High school and university students were present: 300 high schools mobilized, including 200 that were blockaded, with the police obviously determined to use violence to break the blockades. If we add the participation of dozens of university

institutions, 150,000 young people were mobilized, according to the figures of youth organizations this was three times more than on 19 January.

"We are united and determined to force the withdrawal of this pension reform project": concludes the declaration of the eight union confederations which has just announced two new days of mobilizations, on 7 and 11 February. This joint union declaration is important on two levels. First, maintaining the trade union front between unions that have often been divided in recent years in the face of government projects. Then, and this is a precedent for more than ten years, the union leaderships agree to impose a pure and simple withdrawal of the government project, which is based on two pillars: the raising of the minimum retirement age from 62 to 64 years, and the rapid passage to a minimum of 43 years of paid contributions in order to obtain a full pension.

It is clear that we are therefore heading towards a major political and social confrontation in the coming weeks.

Despite the battalions of "experts" and commentators who, in all the media, seek to support and explain the merits of this reform, despite the Macronist and Republican ministers and deputies who occupy the television studios, the rejection of the reform, far from weakening, has continued to increase in recent weeks. Yet Macron did not hesitate to invite ten editorialists from ten media (*Le Monde*, *Les Echos*, *Le Figaro*, BFM-TV, RTL, among others) to "inculcate" the elements of language capable of distilling effective propaganda on the pension reform. Each additional explanation has only increased hostility.

This is especially the case among women, who have understood that they would suffer even more from this reform. While employed women have in France, on average, a salary 22 per cent lower than that of men, they have a pension 40 per cent lower, mainly because of discontinuous and incomplete careers, since they are most likely to work part-time and have to periodically stop work to take care of children and domestic tasks in the family, and they represent the bulk of single-parent families. The change to

retirement at 64 and the requirement of 43 working years would have the mechanical effect of making it even more difficult for them to obtain a full pension and would reduce to nothing the gain of two annuities (only one in the public sector) allocated per child which made it possible to retire at an earlier age. The precarious and low-skilled workers and those who are too worn out by physically arduous jobs also know that they would be the biggest battalions unable to be still in employment between 62 and 64 years old.

Contrary to what Prime Minister Elizabeth Borne explains, the massive and growing rejection does not come from a lack of pedagogy, but from the population's understanding of the content of the reform. Women, those who have long working lives and the most precarious will suffer more from the harmful effects of this reform. All this makes even more unbearable the haughty arrogance of ministers like Darmanin and Attal, among others, professional politicians since leaving university, daring to castigate those who do not want to work longer and have the nerve to claim to speak, in front of the strikers, for "the France that wants to work".

Moreover, as had been the case in previous broad movements in defence of pensions, the government's fallacious arguments have been largely dismantled and fought by activists in the trade union and social movements, with a broad supply of arguments from anti-neoliberal economists.

Thus, Macron and Borne still claim to want to "save the system endangered by demography". According to them, the growth in the number of pensioners and the decline in the number of actively employed would jeopardize the system. Ironically, it is the official figures detailed by the Pensions Orientation Council (COR) and the interventions of its president Pierre-Louis Bras - former Director of Social Security and General Inspector of Social Affairs - which take apart the official argument. He declared on Thursday 19 January before the Finance Committee of the National Assembly:

Expenditure on pensions is globally stabilized and even in the very long term, it decreases in three out of four hypotheses... so, expenditure on pensions is not getting out of hand... And in the only hypothesis adopted by the government, it will decrease very little, but a little in the long term. Pension expenditure is not getting out of control, but it is not compatible with the government's economic policy and public finance goals,

These goals are well known; they are those of respecting the convergence criteria of the European Union and achieving a public deficit of 2.9 per cent of GDP in 2027. Bruno Le Maire has committed to this in the "budgetary trajectory" transmitted last summer to the European Commission, which is itself committed to applying the reform of the pension system to in order to reduce its share of public spending. It should also be noted that the real problem that appears in the report of the COR on the financial evolution of the pension system does not come from expenditure but from revenues, and in particular from employee and employer contributions of the 2.2 million employees of the national, local government and hospital sectors, which represented 22 billion euros in revenue in 2021. In the figures of the public wage bill communicated to the COR by the Ministry of Public Accounts, it is surprising to note that the overall workforce of these two public services remains, roughly, identical until 2027 with a virtual freeze of salaries. So, there are no hiring projections (apart from 15,000 hospital workers) or salary increases for these 2.2 million civil servants. This would mean, if these figures were real, an 11 per cent drop in the real salary of civil servants by 2027. The shortfall for the pension system by these figures would be roughly 3 billion euros per year, an important sum in the system if civil service salaries follow the projections used for all salaries. It is therefore a deliberate underestimation by the government of the resources of the Pension Fund that is expressed by the figures communicated to the COR, with the aim of justifying financial imbalances by 2027. [37]

The government is dramatizing the accounts of the pension system in order to once again make workers pay for the return to the Maastricht criteria of public spending, qualifying as irresponsible those who are ready to let so-called deficits widen in this way. It is therefore necessary to underline the interest of the report of the Lille researchers of the IRES. In 2019, they estimate the total of aid to companies, budgetary expenditure, reduction of social contributions, tax exemptions and other "niches" at 157 billion euros, which represents 6.4 per cent of GDP, more than 30 per cent of the state budget. The total aid to enterprises accounted for only 2.4 per cent of GDP in 1979. Thus, if we are concerned about the balance of the social security system, which is supposed to be based on employer and employee contributions, it should be noted that in 1995 enterprises accounted for 65.2 per cent of social security financing. The share fell to 46.9 per cent in 2020, "thanks" to reductions in contributions aimed at "lowering the cost of labour". In the 2023 budget, the amount of exemption schemes is 85 billion euros [38].

The government has obviously understood that it is facing the double hostility of the entire trade union movement, 80 per cent of workers and the population in general, and that it will no longer be able to convince. Therefore, it wants to move quickly, with two objectives: to try to discourage workers and exhaust the movement by proclaiming that any mobilization is and will be useless ("the postponement to 64 years old is no longer negotiable" declared Elizabeth Borne last Monday), that the reform will quickly be voted, and without any change in it, so that there will be no adjustment on the fundamental points. However, it does not want to appear isolated in the National Assembly and the Senate.

By including its reform in the draft amending law on the financing of social security (PLFSS), Article 47-1 of the Constitution, through institutional manipulation, will allow it to move quickly, limiting debates in the Assembly to 20 days and all debates to 50 days. The government thus arrogates to itself the right, if the vote does not take place within the allotted



time, to legislate by ordinance and decree, passing over Parliament. It also has, if necessary, article 49-3 which allows it to pass in force without a vote by making it a question of confidence in the government. So, go quickly, while seeking to seal the agreement with the leadership of the Republicans, whose deputies and senators can give it a majority in both chambers. But even in this camp of the Macronist right and the Republican right, things are not yet settled. To date, 16 Republican and related deputies out of 62 refuse to vote for the project and Macron's allies in the Assembly (Edouard Philippe's Horizon - 29 seats - and François Bayrou's MODEM - 51 seats) affirm several disagreements, not wanting to leave the role of majority maker to the Republicans alone (Renaissance, the party of Macron and Borne, has only 169 seats out of 577 and must gather 289 votes to obtain majorities). There will therefore be negotiations that will be particularly animated as all these MPs see themselves at odds with a good part of their own electoral base, which is also hostile to the reform.

The challenge for all these parties and their elected representatives is their positioning in the context of the next elections (presidential and legislative) of 2027. In the government, Bruno Lemaire, Minister of Economy and Finance, is putting his credibility on the table against Gérard Darmanin, Minister of the Interior, as a candidate to succeed Macron within the presidential party. There are too many crocodiles in the swamp of capitalist neoliberalism. Each current of the majority is therefore likely to play its own game on this bill, weakening the posture of false serenity of the government, which is already destabilized by the popular mobilization.

Moreover, Macron's camp is playing a dangerous game by constantly trumpeting in recent weeks that its reform was democratically legitimate since the candidate had announced it during the 2022 presidential campaign. This bluster is all the more repulsive, in the trade union movement and among left-wing voters, because Macron only obtained his victory, despite his programme,

thanks to the parties of the NUPES and the trade union movement which had called to vote for him to block Marine Le Pen. Macron had won support for his political programme from only 20 per cent of registered voters in the first round. This contempt for those who voted for him in the second round would undoubtedly have the consequence, if ever a disastrous identical configuration were to recur in 2027, that the "republican barrage" behind a candidate of the Macronist right against Marine Le Pen would no longer have the slightest effectiveness.

On another level, the Macronist leaders and their mouthpieces in the media are bluffing themselves by claiming for weeks that the trade union movement is so weakened and divided that it will neither be able to unite nor act effectively over time, thinking that the social forces will quickly fall back into resignation and apathy. At worst, they envisage a renewal of the 2010 scenario. At the time, faced with Sarkozy's pension reform project, raising the retirement age from 60 to 62, the united protest was exhausted with seven months of demonstrations and strikes that had never paralyzed the economic life of the country or prevented the passage of the reform. And to try to ward off another scenario that would be more perilous for them, they raise the spectre of possible "blockages" in transport or fuel supplies, claiming that this will quickly discredit and paralyze strikes. I

This is an attempt to erase the fact that in 1995, millions of workers blocked by three weeks of strikes gave remarkable support to the strikers of the SNCF (railway workers) and the RATP (public transport in the Parisian region). To erase also the fact that in recent days, a majority of workers have become convinced that it will be necessary to block economic life to obtain the withdrawal of the project. It is the belief that we can be strong and determined enough to win that can be the best element in fostering broad popular support for strikes paralyzing transport or fuel distribution. Moreover, unlike today, in 1995, the strike in transport was mainly a strike "by proxy", railway workers and RATP

drivers being the tip a little too solitary of the confrontation; moreover the confederal leadership of the CFDT was opposed to the strike and in support of the plan of Prime Minister Alain Juppé. Nevertheless, although Juppé was "standing fast", he had to back down and withdraw his plan. There are therefore two more favourable factors today: a broad trade-union unity, a rise in the power of several sectors of workers... and also a third one, which is precisely the experience of 2010, shared by many teams of union activists.

Thus it is possible to do as well and even better than in 1995, avoiding the mistakes of 2010. In the standoff that is beginning, there may undoubtedly be a marginal erosion of the right in parliament but, at worst, the government still has the weapon of 49-3 and the passage by decrees and ordinances if, at the end of March, the time for debates is over before the final vote. So, beyond a possible political crisis due to the pressure on the right, the decisive element to win, to force Macron to withdraw his project, will be the economic blockage and the conviction in the ruling class that this reform is not worth the candle of industrial and commercial paralysis. The MEDEF (employers' organization) itself did not think in the autumn that this reform was essential now, being more focused on that of the Unemployment Insurance which results in February in a 25 per cent reduction in the duration of benefits.

The timing imposed by Macron and Borne requires both organizing a massive movement of demonstrations and rapidly creating a favourable relationship of forces for the strikers. The parliamentary process will not be completed by the end of March. Therefore, the debate on the best way to move towards one or more ongoing strikes while maintaining the massiveness and unity of the movement is at the heart of many discussions and the compromise represented by the decisions of the inter-union coordination on the evening of the 31st reflects these contradictions.

The leadership of the CFDT is determined to maintain the trade union front but it conceives the action

as a battle of opinion, winning the majority of the population to the refusal of the reform and obtaining its withdrawal through popular mobilization, massive demonstrations... and by persuading MPs not to vote for the text. As a result, having a rhythm of successive mobilizations, a work of conviction, lobbying elected representatives... without embarking on ongoing strikes, particularly in sectors that would block economic life for several days or weeks. However, to have as a guideline only this strategy would lead to the failure experienced in 2010.

This is why a large part of the activists and the most combative teams highlight the need to organize, to prepare the all-out strike. This is what guides the tempo set by the CGT chemical workers' federation with several days of strikes of increasing duration in the first half of February, especially in the oil sector. It is an identical tactic that we find in the CGT Energy, the CGT Ports and Docks, the CGT and Sud Rail at the SNCF. All these unions have planned at least two days of strike between 6 and 8 February.

The decision of the inter-union coordination to hold a one-day strike on 7 February and a one-day demonstration on a Saturday on 11 February is a compromise between these two positions. In addition, despite the massiveness of the last two days of strikes, there is a difficulty in pacing the rise of strikes in the public service, energy and transport, a difficulty evidenced by a small decline in the number of strikers in these sectors. Similarly, including at the SNCF, the general assemblies are not massive, not reflecting a dynamic thrust of the strike.

But in fact, many activists think that a real strengthening of forces in these sectors would require not wearing out the mobilization by repeated staggered strike days but a clear proposal of a calendar, building an intersectoral confrontation for which it is worth conducting strikes of several days. All these parameters are all the more difficult to manage coherently as the different tactics also reflect divisions in the trade union movement, including within the CGT on the eve of

its confederal congress. These centrifugal risks reinforce the need to build general assemblies of strikers, as well as inter-sectoral and inter-union coordination structures in cities and industrial zones, to create a unitary and combative local dynamic. This is beginning to be done and sometimes extends to other structures of the social movement such as the Peasant Confederation.

In several sectors, there will be attempts to continue the strike after 7 February, and the demonstrations of 11 February, a Saturday, in all the towns and cities in the country, will surely be massive and popular with, in particular, the presence of those who could not go on strike and/or demonstrate on 19 and 31 January. In any case, the coming days will have to be used to convince ourselves and to convince others that victory is possible and that we must give ourselves all the means to achieve it.

The political stakes of this movement are important for several reasons. Those who demonstrate and strike are motivated by the attack on pensions, but also by the attacks carried out by the government against unemployment benefits, vocational training and obviously the loss of wages represented, after the Covid years, by inflation and low wage increases. So it is the whole capitalist policy of Macron and his government that is called into question. This motivates people all the more to win on pensions and all the reasons for anger appear clearly in the placards, slogans and discussions in the demonstrations. As important as it is to keep a united front centred on the withdrawal of the Macron-Borne project, those who are in the movement understand that the outcome of this showdown will be an improved relationship of forces in case of victory, a deteriorated one in case of failure, in the face of the employers and the government. It is all the more important that this class issue emerges, this relationship of forces to be established for a different distribution of wealth, that there is a major challenge to make credible the anti-capitalist demands for the financing of the commons, Social Security, health, housing, wages. This is taking place also in the context

where the month of February will see day after day the publication of the annual results of large French companies which promise, overall, to exceed those of 2021 [39].

There are therefore several issues within this mobilization for the anti-capitalist left. The NPA is trying to take its rightful place in this by pushing for unity of action with all the political forces of the workers' movement opposed to the reform, while seeking to build common initiatives of the entire workers', trade union, associative and political movement, as the LCR took its place in 2005 in the fight against the European Constitutional Treaty.

Another battle is being fought in this movement between anti-capitalists and the far right. The Rassemblement National is again trying to surf in the media on popular discontent in order to appear, complacently helped by these same media, as the real opposition to Macron, and it proclaims its opposition to the pension reform. But the far right knows that it is persona non grata in the union demonstrations (and it moreover denounces the unions that called to vote Macron against it) and, in the Assembly, the RN remains speechless on the battle of amendments to counter the project, leaving this space to the NUPES. It must be said that the RN, on the substance, shares the "need for workers to make efforts to finance pensions". The RN has put in the closet, after being rapped on the knuckles by the liberal economists of its entourage, its programme of 2017: the return to retirement at 60 with 40 years of contributions. Except for working lives started before the age of 20, where its programme maintains the return to the retirement age at 60, the RN is discreetly pronouncing itself in favour of retirement at the full rate between 62 and 67 years with 42 or 43 years of work. Basically, they agree with Macron, even though they loudly denounce the Macron project of raising the retirement age to 64 years. There is no need to look in their programme for the slightest demand for social justice, for the distribution of wealth by attacking the capitalists, for a fiscal and budgetary policy that puts an end to handouts to big business. Their solutions for pensions,

apart from a raising of the retirement age for workers, lie in a pro-natalist policy and the end of handouts to

...immigrants! Challenging the place of the RN in this mobilization is therefore done not only in the streets but also by denouncing the duplicity of

its posture.

3 February 2023

# Strike wave continues to build across Britain

## 5 February 2023, by Terry Conway

This not only involved people withdrawing their labour and mounting picket lines at their own place of work, but often participating in vibrant demonstrations and rallies in city centres. The action had two targets - on the one hand to further disputes about pay and working conditions with their own employers, and on the other hand opposition to the even harsher anti-trade union laws the Tory UK government is rushing through the Westminster parliament.

Six unions took action on 1 February. The civil service union, PCS, was the first to call out over 100,000 members across 124 UK and devolved government departments. Workers in many of the employing departments had previously met the ridiculously high turnout threshold in a postal ballot for strike action under the existing reactionary anti-union laws. PCS members in those departments have been involved in rolling action since late December. The union is reballoting members in other departments where workers had voted for action but missed the turnout threshold by a small amount.

The University and College Union (teachers in further and higher education), UCU, called out 70,000 members in the university sector on this day as part of 18 days of action to take place across the next two months, following the failure of the latest discussions with the 150 employers to come up with an offer that would in any way restore the decimation of pay over the last 12 years of Tory rule. The increasing casualization of the sector is also driving militancy. (UCU members in further education in England and

Wales were not called out on strike on 1 February 1 though they are in dispute over pay. In at least one college, and probably more, they took brief solidarity action. Scottish College teachers in the EIS union have fought bitter but successful strike battles in recent years and gave logistical support to their members in Schools and Universities involved in the current disputes). In some universities, UCU members are also in dispute over the decimation of their pension scheme.

The train drivers union ASLEF brought out the majority of its 21,000 members on 1 February employed in over a dozen train companies. ASLEF will hold further action after failing to reach agreement with the employers on pay and conditions - this will be its seventh day of strike action. The transport union RMT also brought out their driver members on 1 Feb and the other day ASLEF are striking. This seems like a lost opportunity from the RMT who in many ways has been the backbone of the strike movement since last summer as the majority of their members are not drivers, but carry out other roles. The RMT are balloting members on a new offer but rejection is expected.

For these transport unions - and their passengers - what is at stake in these disputes, which for the RMT has involved strike action over nine months, also includes major jobs losses. The proposals that many trains will be driver only has huge safety implications and will also make trains even less accessible for disabled people many of whom are dependent on assistance to access and leave the services.

The other union that took major strike action in England and Wales on 1 February is the NEU, the main school teachers' union in those countries, demanding a fair and fully funded pay increase. The NEU announced the result of their ballot on 16 January. They succeeded in getting strong enough results to bring all their members out in Wales but in England only teaching members struck as not a high enough proportion of school support staff returned their ballots. The second largest teachers' union in England and Wales, the NASUWT, had voted overwhelmingly for strike action but failed to meet the turnout threshold. Some NASUWT members have joined the NEU in order to strike and over 40,000 new members joined the NEU union since they announced their ballot results and programme of strike action.

Schooling in Scotland is separate from that in England and Wales and the school teachers' union there, EIS, is involved in a different pattern of industrial action with one day national strikes in January followed by a rolling programme of one day action during January and February covering two council areas at a time. This will be followed by two days of all out strikes across the whole of Scotland on 28 February-1 March. This dispute is with local government employers and the Scottish government of the Scottish National Party (SNP) - supported by Greens. The EIS is the major union in Scottish schools, particularly primary, but three smaller teacher unions have also voted for strike action. Picket lines at schools and attendance at local rallies have grown significantly during the action and the predominantly female membership of

EIS is becoming increasingly combative – a complete two day shutdown of Scotland's schools is very likely.

Despite the fact that the mainstream media, very often hand in hand with the UK government, have attacked the strikers over months and desperately tried to find supposedly 'ordinary members of the public' who will rail against them, the strikes remain hugely popular.

## Popular support for strikes

There are many reports of both parents and pupils joining picket lines outside schools in support of those who work there. University students in support of UCU's strike action also joined pickets and demonstrations at campuses across Britain and student strike solidarity groups are beginning to become a feature of campus life and also starting to raise the issue of the impact of the cost-of-living on a million students, which is largely invisible presently.

Marches on 1 February were greeted with bus and car horns tooting in support and people coming out of workplaces and houses and cheering and clapping. Increasing numbers of working class people recognise that the cost of living crisis is an attack on all of us, in work and out of work, and across generations.

The reports of turn out on the demonstrations, was impressive. 40,000 in London, 9,000 in Oxford, 7,000 in Bristol, 1,000 in Cardiff, 500 in Swansea, 2000 in Leeds, 4,000 in Manchester, 1,000 in Glasgow, 700 in Nottingham at the indoor rally and many more marching, 2000 in Leeds, 4,000 in Manchester and smaller numbers in other places. For many other protests, reports just say thousands marched.

What was as important as turnout was the mood – certainty that the pay claims put forward by the unions are completely justified and that the services that the workers provide as well as their wages have been devastated by more than a decade of

austerity. People are clear that the 'minimum service bill' – the formal name of the anti-trade union bill – is a very sick joke in a country where understaffing and overwork means services are failing apart, especially in the NHS and existing laws are so draconian. UK unions face very restrictive laws hampering strikes – they must hold postal ballots not electronic ones, high proportions have to vote, disputes can only be against individual employers not the controlling body like governments, and 14 days notice has to be given of strikes. Defiance would lead to courts seizing union funds and prosecuting officers and members.

The mainstream media in Britain are making a great deal of the fact that more than twice as many workers took strike action against attacks on public sector pensions in 2011. But the situations aren't comparable. Most workers knew at the time that the action in 2011 was no more than a token protest. 1 February is part of a wave of action over seven long months for some unions – and one that may well not have crested.

In Scotland and Wales, the devolved governments of the SNP (with Green support) and Labour (with Plaid Cymru support) have tried to make better pay offers than the Tory UK government, so some strikes have been avoided in one or both of those countries. Formally all four of these predominantly social democratic influenced have parties are sympathetic to union demands and the right to strike. However they do not have the legal or fiscal powers of the UK government and the social democratic parties are trapped within the constraints of UK devolution. Unless they can break free from that constraint, they will ultimately be part of the problem rather than the solution.

## Action to come

While six unions struck on 1 February that doesn't include all those currently engaged in industrial action. No health unions were on strike that day but the four main ones will be taking action in England between 6-10 February. The nurses' union, the

Royal College of Nursing, RCN will strike on 6-7 February. For most of its 100 year history the RCN had a ban on strikes, so the current action marks a significant change. Ambulance workers from the GMB and Unite unions will also strike in England on 6 February, while the third union, Unison, is calling out its ambulance workers out on 10 February in England. The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy is striking on 9 February. So there is only one day that week when no health workers will be taking action. Junior doctors in England in the BMA union are also balloting on strike action over pay and the strikes could follow in March. In Wales, the GMB have suspended their action in order to put a new offer from the Welsh government to their members.

Two other groups should be mentioned. Postal workers in the Communication Workers Union, CWU, took 18 days of strike action over pay and conditions in the run up to Christmas. In fact they had two separate ballots – no-one I have spoken to understands why – a few weeks apart. Under existing anti-union laws their mandate for action on pay ran out and they have had to re-ballot. The first was on pay, the second on conditions – where management are generally trying to drive up productivity, force van drivers to become self-employed and turn Royal Mail into a parcel delivery company like Amazon.

Under existing anti-union laws their mandate for action on pay ran out and they have had to re-ballot. Unfortunately the reballot results are not expected until 16 February, and 14 day notice to the employer needed of the intention to strike means that strikes on this issue cannot be resumed until early March. In the meantime they have announced a strike over conditions on 16 February, in a situation where local management are unilaterally imposing changes.

The fire fighters' union, FBU, announced the result of their UK-wide ballot for industrial action on 30 January with a magnificent 88% voting yes on a 73% turnout. They have given the employers and the governments 10 days, until 9 February, to make an

improved offer that they could put to their members. The FBU is relatively small with a membership of under 35,000 but in a very strategic position..

Meanwhile for all the unions that were out on 1 February, that day was only one of a series, in different patterns according to the union and or industry. There is some discussion about another day of co-ordinated action perhaps in early March - and those of us particularly involved in campaigning against the anti-union laws are demanding a national demonstration against the new law. At any rate, there is no doubt that morale is higher after 1 February than before. Over a million workers currently have mandates for strike action but 1 February was the first coordinated day across Britain - many are looking to a greater level of coordination in future.

## **Are unions in Britain up to the task ahead?**

The history, pattern and traditions of trade union organisation in every country varies. An unusual feature in Britain is that there is a single UK-wide trade union federation, the Trade Union Congress, TUC, to which almost all trade unions are affiliated; 98 in all. There are exceptions. The RCN is not affiliated to the UK TUC - and originally was much more of a professional association than a trade union. On the other hand there are smaller unions - the Industrial Workers of the World UK, the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain and United Voices of the World, which see themselves as more democratic than traditional unions and often target the overlapping groups of workers in the gig economy and migrant workers, and are also independent of the TUC. In Scotland there has been an independent centre for trade union organisation for over a century - the STUC - but membership largely overlaps with the TUC's, there is mutual recognition and the STUC largely functions as the unitary trade union organisation in that country.

Amongst unions affiliated to the TUC

there are significant differences. Some are industrial unions who organise in a single industry while others are general unions which recruit in many spheres. Many unions exist in the whole of the United Kingdom including the north of Ireland while some also recruit in the Republic of Ireland. EIS the teaching union that only organises in Scotland was mentioned earlier and there is also a small education union that only organises in Wales. Strangely the Artists Union of England only supports artists living there.

Traditionally most industrial unions were affiliated to the Labour Party whereas those that organised in white collar jobs or the public sector were less likely to be. Affiliation allows unions to input formally into the Labour Party's policy making. But it has also often allowed many union leaders to argue against strikes on the basis of 'don't rock the boat'. This caution applies not only when Labour is in government but also in the run up to a general election on the basis of presenting kicking out the Tories as being the most - sometimes the only -important thing. But given that the TUC itself takes the same approach, such arguments have an impact on unions not affiliated to Labour too.

The level of workplace organisation varies enormously. Before the historic defeat of the 1984-85 Miners' strike there was a significant growth and co-ordination of shop stewards - elected representatives in workplaces and indeed amongst sections of workers doing the same job. These activists acted as a voice of members in disputes with management but also as a conveyor belt of union messaging to the members and as a challenge to ideas of social partnership where union full-timers were attempting to spread these.

But after the defeat of the miners' and other key strikes that layer of militancy was seriously weakened by industrial and political defeat, including massive redundancies and closures across industry. Nor was it possible to recruit significant new, younger activists even in the expanding public and service sector given that the overwhelming majority of union leaderships were pushing

either social partnership or a 'service' model - join a union to get cheaper insurance etc - or a combination.

The shift to the right was not universal but smaller and more militant unions like the RMT and FBU were unable to shift the overall balance of forces. The number of days lost to strike action fell to historic lows - along with the number of union members, especially in the private sector. The proportion of UK employees who were trade union members fell to 23.1% in 2021. This represents the lowest union membership rate on record among UK employees for which we have comparable data. In 1979 the TUC claimed a membership of 13 million, in 2022 just 5.5 million.

The strikes of the last seven months have begun to turn the situation around - recruiting more union members, motivating more activists and giving many the first taste of their collective power. The fact that the Tory UK government - who are often directly or indirectly responsible for pay levels- are both so intransigent and so hated impacts the dynamic. Where some employers in the private sector have settled with double digit pay settlements after no strike action or relatively short disputes, there is no sign of movement in these big public sector strikes thus far.

This means that despite the fact that Labour are miles ahead of the ruling Tories in the UK wide opinion polls, any attempt to use "don't rock the boat" rhetoric is not going to have a significant effect on combativity. A wider social movement in solidarity with the strikes is also beginning to develop, often drawing inspiration from the Miners' Support Groups that existed in the 1984-85 (and were depicted in the popular film 'Pride'). Local trade union organisations - Trades Councils - have been marginal for decades but may start to play a larger role.

In many unions, including those currently taking strike action, full time officers, rather than people elected by lay members, have the main say in how disputes are run and when strikes are declared. Left caucuses in most unions are weak and fragmented - often spending as much time arguing



with each other as with either the employer or the union bureaucracy, and showing virtually no focus on how to involve new activists radicalising in the workplace.

This means there is a need for two strategic debates. On the one hand

there is the need to discuss how to win the current strikes - a subject on which there is a significant amount of agreement on the radical left around slogans of escalation and co-ordination. But beyond this, and whether or not we succeed in all cases in beating back the assault on our living standards, our working

conditions and our right to organise, we need to stand back and consider how to remake our trade unions so that workers ourselves decide how and when to take action not those who we employ who should be there to help implement those decisions not to stymie or blunt their effectiveness.

## In the face of repression and crisis, organizing solidarity

4 February 2023, by **Correspondents l'Anticapitaliste**

At the end of the demonstration, at the Place de la République, addressing the international community, the Peruvian spokesperson for the Memory against Impunity Coordination, which organized this Parisian demonstration in solidarity, said: "It has been 52 days since Dina Boluarte took office as President of Peru. At least 57 people have been recorded dead (56 of whom are civilians), hundreds injured and thousands arbitrarily detained. We wish to denounce once again our rejection of the violation of human rights that we have been experiencing for 7 weeks in Peru" [...] Similarly, on Friday 27 January, at the Maison de l'Amérique Latine in Paris, Tica Luiza Obregón, former vice-president of the Lawyers of Peru, launched a live appeal for solidarity from all democratic organizations in the world, during the meeting organised by France Amérique Latine and the association Peruvians United for a Constituent Assembly. The National Coordination Committee for Human Rights (CNDDHH - Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos), a recognized Peruvian organization, had described the government's repressive response to the protest demonstrations as "crimes against humanity" on Thursday 26 January.

### The situation is

### worsening in Peru

The capital Lima has just recorded the first death in a demonstration on Friday 27 January. Since the *toma de Lima* (taking of Lima - the march to Lima by citizens from the southern Andean provinces and from all over Peru) on 19 January, since the occupation of the National University of San Marcos on Saturday 21 January by armed police and tanks knocking down the gates of this venerable university - the oldest in Latin America - and the 200 humiliated student prisoners, new waves of citizens gathered in Lima (at the call of a national student coordination) for a new march on 24 January to make heard what for weeks more and more popular masses have been demanding from the revolt of the provinces of the Southern Andes, Puno, Apurímac, Cuzco, Arequipa, Ayacucho: "Resignation of Dina Boluarte! Immediate closure of the Congress! Elections now! For a Constituent Assembly!"

As the spokeswoman for the Coordination Memory against Impunity said in Paris on Sunday:

Those who are protesting have demands that have been historically rejected, absence of the state, the lowest poverty

indices, the lack of support for agriculture, the disastrous consequences of exacerbated extractivism, among others....

Peru continues to fail to understand itself as a nation-state "of all bloods" (in the words of the great Peruvian writer José María Arguedas). Faced with the negation of the other, the thousands of citizens who have arrived in Lima demand to be listened to and denounce this omnipresent racism and the imposition of "order" by force. There is no sincere dialogue about who we are (i.e. the multiple identities that exist in Peru) and what we want as a country in a democratic way. The only path that has been opened is that of repression and the murder of our compatriots. This authoritarian attitude of the hegemonic political class in the Parliament is verified by the refusal and prohibition to use the path of a citizen referendum to know if we agree or not with a new Constitution, accusing those who demand the debate for a Constituent Assembly of being "violent".

Out with Dina Boluarte and close



For the past 10 days, demonstrations have not stopped in Lima and throughout the country, carrying these demands.

## The response of the regime

According to some analysts, brining forward the general elections could lift the lid of the pressure cooker a bit. Right-wing sectors (fujimorists) believe that it would be in their electoral interest to favour elections in the last quarter of 2023. However, the ultra-discredited Congress has just opposed this, although it is due to review this position at the end of January. Faced with the first protests in December 2022, it had brought

forward the planned 2026 elections to April 2024, but the necessary 2nd confirmation vote has not yet been held.

Repression is the only response of Dina Boluarte's government. It is stepping up the militarization of the country (sending a contingent of 500 armed men to the southern provinces), launching militarized operations to clear the roads, announcing a high bonus for the "heroic" national police authorized in Lima to try to break up any demonstrations with tear gas grenades, shotguns and batons. Dina Boluarte herself, present at the meeting of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), denounced (without naming them) the states that criticized her government (albeit very timidly and in a purely verbal manner) and supported the "violent" ones (Bolivia, Mexico, Colombia, Chile). This certainly shakes up his government a bit. In just over a month, 8 ministers have already resigned, 4 of whom explicitly disagree with the police violence used. These shocks lead him to reinforce his alliance with the military and police apparatus, thus leading to the militarization of the country and transforming it more and more into a civil-military government.

The right and the extreme right, the hegemonic press, are rallying around Dina Boluarte. Giving in to the demands of the demonstrators by forcing her to resign would be a destabilizing factor for their regime. They also need to gain time to adopt counter-reforms that will allow them to control the electoral processes and the institutions that organize them, while relying on the governmental repression against the protesting sectors.

## International solidarity

The attacks against the Peruvian people, the deaths, the wounds, the beatings, the humiliation, the slander are wounds for all of us, those who aspire to a just society, free from exploitation and oppression. This is why we must take up the struggle in solidarity with the Peruvian people, as the Paris demonstration on Sunday 29 January and the meeting on 27 January have begun to do.

2 February 2023

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

# Memphis Police Charged with Beating Man to Death, Protests Nationwide

3 February 2023, by **Dan La Botz**

Three days later police released video tapes showing the officers, who had stopped Nichols for a traffic violation, dragging him from his car. Though Nichols cooperates, they beat him for three minutes with their fists and nightsticks, attempt to tase him, spray his face with pepper gas, and repeatedly kick him in the head. Black people were once again deeply hurt and angered. The next day there were small demonstrations in cities across the country, some blocking streets, bridges, and highways. In response

the Memphis Police Department disbanded the Scorpion police unit of which the officers had been a part. Several firefighters and paramedics who stood by as police beat Nichols are also being investigated.

Many people were horrified by the tapes and politicians expressed their indignation. President Joe Biden said, "Like so many, I was outraged and deeply pained to see the horrific video of the beating that resulted in Tyre Nichols' death. It is yet another

painful reminder of the profound fear and trauma, the pain, and the exhaustion that Black and Brown Americans experience every single day."

New York Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez sent an email to her supporters calling for changes in policing in which she said, "Tyre Nichols should be alive. At least 1,176 people were killed by law enforcement last year – a record. Billions of dollars in trainings, body cams, and reforms

haven't stopped it. In fact, it's gotten worse. That has only been rewarded with more funding at the expense of schools, hospitals, housing, and more. We must grow out of this cycle together."

Similarly, Senator Bernie Sanders tweeted, "Tyre Nichols should be alive. Yes, the police officers who brutally murdered him must be held accountable. But even their conviction on the strongest possible charges cannot bring Tyre back. We must do everything in our power to end police violence against people of color."

Former president Donald Trump, whose racist rhetoric has encouraged violence against people of color, who advocates law and order, and who has told police to treat people in custody roughly, but is now running for president again and looking for Black

votes, said the "horrible" attack "never should have happened."

The case resembles that of George Floyd whose murder by police in Minneapolis set off the Black Lives Matter national protests in the spring of 2020 in which somewhere between 15 million and 25 million people participated. BLM was an expression of opposition to white racism and violent white cops. In the case of Floyd's murder and several earlier police killings of civilians, the officers had been white. But in this case, all five policemen were African American.

A young Black woman speaking to a radio reporter said, "This is not about race, this is about the police." But it is also about race, because even whatever the race of the police, Blacks and Latinos will suffer the brunt of the

violence. As Amber Sherman, a young Black activist working with the Nichols family explained, whatever their race, police "are indoctrinated into a practice that sees Black people and brown people as less than."

As some experts say, police departments typically have a culture of machismo and an attitude of contempt for Black and Latino people. Police often see their role as keeping the people in fear and meeting out violent punishment.

In 2020, the far left called for abolishing or defunding the police, unpopular slogans that isolated the left from the broader society. No clear demand beyond reform has yet emerged from this most recent murder.

29 January 2023

## Ukraine's government shaken by corruption

2 February 2023, by Jacques Babel

Before the war, the country was already highly corrupt. It was ranked 122nd out of 180 on the corruption perception index of the NGO Transparency International. While martial law enacted at the beginning of the war stifled the right to strike - without blocking all protest movements - a free press remained, allowing scandals such as rampant corruption to be exposed.

### Lavish lifestyles and privileges

For example, in late January the investigative online media *Nashi Groshi* (Our Money) revealed that contracts signed by the defence ministry shamefully overcharged for the purchase of food for the army, leading to the dismissal of a deputy defence minister. In the following days, the deputy minister of infrastructure was dismissed, arrested in the act of taking bribes for the

purchase of equipment, including electrical generators. In the wake of this, other senior officials such as the deputy prosecutor general and the governors of the regions of Dnipro, Kherson, Kyiv, Soumy and Zaporijia, and even the deputy head of the president's office, who is very close to Zelensky, were dismissed for their lavish lifestyles and privileged behaviour - such as holidays in the sun abroad - which were totally out of keeping with the hardships suffered by their compatriots.

These issues are obviously very sensitive both in terms of public opinion and the maintenance of cohesion in the resistance to the Russian invasion, but also from the point of view of the Western allies who are providing massive aid to the Ukrainian state in this war. They promote the interests of capitalists and the private sector against the social rights of the workers and the population, but they know that direct and visible corruption is not

acceptable for the credibility of their model.

### Solidarity with the social movements

In a very difficult situation, the trade union and social movements were sometimes able to express their anger and their own aspirations. For example, the miners of the Novovolynsk No. 9 mine in the west of the country mobilized in August and succeeded in having the appointment of a new, corrupt director invalidated. An environmental movement is taking action against an oligarch's plans to build a ski resort in protected mountains; students in Lviv and other universities are refusing to allow them to be closed down to be used as refugee centres, seeing the shutdown of higher education as an enemy victory. Unions are also mobilizing for the payment of wage arrears and against the dismissal of workers

volunteering for the front. All these social movements need our solidarity as well as our solidarity against Putin's war.

For his part, the Russian head of state has a very special attitude to corruption. When he is not instrumentalizing it, or even inventing

it to eliminate opponents, he legalizes it! For example, on 30 December he signed a decree exempting all civil servants who served in the war in Ukraine from having to declare their income, and made it legal to receive "gifts" on this occasion. And the Chamber of Deputies is also due to

vote on a law exempting all elected officials from providing tax returns. As for freedom of the press, let's not even mention it!

2 February 2023

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

# **Pensions: nothing to expect from the Parliament, let's build a hard and lasting strike!**

**1 February 2023, by NPA - Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste**

## **Growing anger**

"Chaos-provoking", "lazy". The provocations of a government that is less and less legitimate but still just as contemptuous have not dampened the determination. Despite the Prime Minister's refusal to accept the 64 years of age as a "non-negotiable" compromise, the mobilisation is taking root with massive demonstrations in all cities. It is growing with the addition of new demonstrators, notably from the educated youth and the private sector.

The government's strategy of smoke and mirrors has failed, as has the misleading "pedagogy" that would have us believe that women would not be penalized by the reform. Workers have clearly understood that this reform is neither fair nor essential.

Beyond that, the scale of the mobilization reflects a generalized frustration with the economic and social situation. Low pensions, low salaries, inflation, electricity bills: the anger is piling up and it is the whole policy of this government, considered unjust and authoritarian, that is contested.

## **Impose another choice of society!**

The Macron government would have us believe, like Margaret Thatcher in her day, that there is no alternative to capitalist options. Yet there is no shortage of money when the war-mongering Macronie allocates more than 400 billion to the army.

For us, increasing the indirect wage, the social contributions, would make it possible to finance the pension system. Retirement at 60 with 37.5 years of service in the public and private sectors, at the full rate, would only cost an additional 3% of the share of GDP devoted to pensions.

The issue is political. If we win, we will be able to impose these measures and many others on wage increases, job creation, public services... Beyond that, it is the power of the capitalists to dispose of the wealth created by our work that we could challenge. On the other hand, a defeat would lead to a new round of counter-reforms and social regressions.

## **Unity and radicalism: towards a general strike**

The parliamentary process will last until the beginning of March at the latest. There is nothing to expect from this institutional calendar where Macron and the right have all the cards in hand. Like for the victory against the CPE in 2006, it is by continuing and massively mobilization, even after the vote on the law if necessary, that we can win. [41]

For that, we need to remain united, from the bottom to the top. This is why the NPA is working everywhere to bring together trade unions and left-wing parties to demand the withdrawal of the reform. At the same time we also need to raise the balance of power, by multiplying mass actions, blockades, demonstrations, and by generalizing the strike. The new dates set by joint trade-union committee, on 7 and 11 February, must make this qualitative leap possible.

The strikes in the refineries from 6 to 8 February, the rail strike on 7 and 8

February, are important points of support to discuss in mass meetings continuing the strike everywhere it is possible. Not counting on certain sectors to strike on behalf of others the challenge is, in the short term, to go on strike everywhere and at the

same time.

The pension reform crystallizes the confrontation between the classes. Winning is vital for our social camp, to stop this project and to get rid of this

government. There is no other option than victory!

*1 February 2023*

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