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Lula's great comeback, a balancing act

31 March 2023, by **Gabriella Lima**

Indeed, Lula's return is accompanied by three major challenges: to bring concrete improvements in the living conditions of the population, to recover the country from the economic and social crisis in which it is plunged and to put an end to the threat that the far right continues to represent in Brazil. Let us take a look back at the first two months of the government.

A narrow victory in a polarized electoral context

It was in a context of economic, political and social crisis that the October 2022 election took place. This multidimensional crisis is not new, however: it is part of a sequence opened by the popular uprisings of 2013, which led to the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff (Workers' Party, PT) in 2016 and the rise of the far right in its Bolsonaroist form.

But it was accentuated during the Covid-19 pandemic: Bolsonaro's denial led to the death of more than 700,000 people, the Amazon rainforest was in flames, indigenous peoples were driven out by illegal gold panning, members of the LGBTQIA+ community were attacked and killed in the street, as well as black and poor populations crammed into favelas,

regularly victims of militarized police interventions resulting in the death of dozens of innocent people. The pandemic also marked the great return of mass unemployment, hunger, the shift from poverty to misery for thousands of families forced again to live on the streets, not to mention unprecedented inflation rates.

Despite this catastrophic record, Bolsonaro still managed to win support from the army, evangelical churches, several sectors of the employers as well as the adherence of a significant part of the population to a neo-fascist political project that he did not manage to implement by legal means during his mandate.

In this scenario, where it became urgent to take power away from Bolsonaro, Lula was the only one to measure up to the challenge. In fact, Lula and the PT were already capable of blocking Bolsonaro during the pandemic, if the party had decided to mobilize and support the impeachment protests. However, while the entire left, social movements, trade unions and even the right took to the streets despite the high risks of spreading the virus, the former metallurgist preferred to opt for a tactic that aimed to keep the far-right president in power, isolate him politically and kill him slowly, in order to construct an electoral scenario in which a weakened Bolsonaro would

have faced a Lula built up as a hero and a symbol of the struggle for democracy.

It was therefore a question of building the conditions for an electoral victory by ruling out the possibility, for the employers' circles, of presenting a third liberal candidacy capable of defeating Lula. The bourgeoisie tried it, without success, by turning to the former Bolsonaroist Minister of Justice and public figure of the "Lava Jato" operation, Sergio Moro [1] who could have embodied opposition to the other two candidates, had his popularity and credibility not been widely damaged since then. With Bolsonaro in the race, however, there was no space for a third strong candidate.

Thus, the 2022 elections took place in an extremely polarized context where employers found themselves making a choice between Lula and Bolsonaro. At the same time, Lula was faced with a dilemma: unite with the entire left and present a social programme that met the urgent needs of the population, while seeking the support of the business circles with which he has always allied.

The contradictions of Lula's

government

To see a broad pro-Lula front emerge from left to right was therefore not surprising. First of all, because Lula has always led a government of class collaboration. It was precisely to seal his commitment to the bourgeoisie that he appointed as vice-president Geraldo Alckmin, who, it should be remembered, had supported the institutional coup against Dilma Rousseff in 2016. Few lessons have been learned at this level. Then, it should be remembered that part of the Brazilian employers turned their backs on and gradually dissociated themselves from Bolsonaro following his attempts to destabilize democracy over the past year. To cite just one example, we can mention the organization of a Bolsonarist demonstration on May 1, 2022 as part of a fierce anti-democratic campaign whose two main demands were the abolition of the Supreme Court and a reform of the electoral system. Two months later, a manifesto in defence of democracy was published and supported by industrial and banking employers' associations.

If tactical unity with the right was necessary in the mobilizations in defence of democracy, its prolongation in the government was a serious mistake for several reasons. First, the historic moment that Brazil is experiencing requires that all forces be deployed to roll back the threat of the extreme right. To do this, there are no shortcuts: radical social measures must be taken in order to concretely improve the material conditions of existence of the population and weaken the Bolsonarist social base. Then, we must keep in mind that the rise of the extreme right emerged thanks to a political crisis, flowing from the loss of confidence in the PT governments. At this historic moment, when the danger of a rise of the far right is still present, we cannot afford to reapply the same recipes in the hope of obtaining a different result. In the end, broad unions composed of the right and the left contain contradictions: the most left-wing sectors will try to tilt the government's policy to the left while the liberal sectors will try to position it as far to the right as possible.

These contradictions are already finding expression in this first quarter: while a real and considerable increase in the minimum wage would have been necessary to allow a huge part of the population to get their heads out of the water, the increase in it remained marginal, even derisory, barely compensating for the increase in the cost of living. Added to this is the fact that interest rates are among the highest in the world, at nearly 14 per cent, thus cutting off credit to the population. The example of monetary policy is very representative of the contradictions of the government: the Brazilian Central Bank, which sets these rates, is an independent body whose president is not elected in the same temporalities as the federal government.

However, its current president, Roberto Campos Neto, is nothing more than a loyal Bolsonarist and the grandson of a notorious technocrat of the military dictatorship, Roberto Campos, former Minister of Planning from 1964 to 1967. The Bank's "autonomy law", adopted in 2021, crystallizes the separation between this institution and the government, and allows Campos Neto's mandate for a period of four years. For his part, Lula does not hesitate to publicly denounce the indecent rise in interest rates, without revoking this law allowing the confiscation of the Central Bank by financial circles, which are among the largest sectors of the bourgeoisie to have supported him [2].

This stranglehold of financial circles on Brazilian monetary policy, however, does not date from Bolsonaro. In his first term, Lula appointed Henrique Meirelles, who had chaired BankBoston internationally, as head of the Central Bank. In particular, he was one of the first to publicly declare his support for Lula's candidacy for the 2022 presidential elections, seeing in him the guarantee of a continuation of this policy.

A strong social

agenda to move from promises to reality

Still, despite this historic policy of class collaboration, a new PT government still offers high hopes for the working class, who expect a lot from Lula in terms of renewed purchasing power, access to employment, the right to housing, massive investments in health and education in particular. This new government also offers a more favourable framework for the left and social movements to take to the streets and make heard the demands stifled by the previous government. Lula did not miss the boat, by making a historic entrance to the inauguration ceremony, surrounded by activists from social movements that have become the target of Bolsonaro. Some figures of these movements also take part in the government, such as Anielle Franco – sister of Marielle Franco – appointed Minister of Racial Equality, and Sonia Guajajara, figurehead of the Association of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (APIB) and MP elected by the PSOL in Brasilia, who took the head of the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples, becoming the first indigenous woman minister in the country's history.

These investitures give significant visibility and recognition to historically oppressed categories of the population and restore hope and capacity for action to these movements. For them, getting the former trade unionist elected and ensuring that he could take up de facto functions were the first two challenges. He must now succeed in implementing his programme. There is also the permanent struggle against the extreme right, which must be pursued relentlessly. In this regard, Lula reaffirmed his commitment after the coup attempt of January 8, naming the neo-fascist putschists and taking severe measures to punish the culprits.

However, it is clear that Lula's support for the camp of the oppressed and exploited remains for the moment more symbolic than material. We have

already mentioned the rise in interest rates and the small increase in the minimum wage, despite the fact that the government is working at the same time with the trade union confederations to develop a new policy for wage increases. In the current government configuration, adopting ambitious social measures inevitably involves confronting the interests of one's own allies. As we mentioned earlier, Lula winks at both the left and the right.

On the one hand, the former metallurgist walks hand in hand with the Landless Movement and appoints environmental activist Marina Silva as head of the Ministry of Environment; on the other hand, he entrusts Planning to former presidential candidate Simone Tebet, who embodies the interests of agribusiness and large landowners. The challenges are therefore as great as the hopes because we cannot redistribute wealth while preserving the interests of a privileged minority.

Lula certainly took a step toward redistribution by rightly revoking a law enacted under the Temer government that introduced a cap on public spending. But this is still insufficient if we do not put in place a major tax reform that will finally make large fortunes, inheritances, profits and dividends taxable. This is the only way to fight against social inequalities and release the necessary means to guarantee quality public services to the population. In Brazil, one of the most unequal countries in the world, more than 60 per cent of taxpayers subject to income tax earn less than R\$ 6,000 per month (about €1084).

While, during the electoral campaign, Lula promised to exempt this layer of wage earners from income tax, this measure currently only applies to incomes below R\$ 2640 (about €477).

In the same way as the economic questions, other social and environmental questions remain open. Just like the issue of safeguarding the Amazon rainforest, the protection of the Yanomami peoples is extremely urgent. Through its actions and commitments, the government has earned trust and support on the international stage. Nevertheless, the provision of food and care to the victims of the massacre of indigenous people is not sufficient if it is not accompanied by a repeal of the law of presumption in good faith, facilitating the illegal gold panning that is the main cause of the Yanomami genocide. This law, which was promulgated in 2013 by a PT deputy, stipulates that simple declarations on the legality of the origin of gold are sufficient to market it, while it is estimated that about 30 per cent of the gold sold in Brazil comes from illegal gold panning.

In the education sector, it is urgent to withdraw the counter-reform known as "new high schools" which, by lowering the level of training necessary to be able to teach in high schools, degrades the working conditions of all teachers. The refusal of the new Minister of Education, Camilo Santana (PT), to touch this reform, shows not only a contempt for education workers, already underpaid and paying the price for the scarcity of resources in the sector, but also a continuity of the policy of Michel

Temer, by whom the reform was proposed in 2017.

Mobilization as the only way to win significant victories

In the end, if Lula's re-election is synonymous with hope, we cannot have any illusions about the implementation of a programme of radical reforms that will lead to significant improvements in the living conditions of workers and poor people. On the contrary, it is up to the left and social movements to take advantage of the space opened up by this new political sequence to win victories. The mobilization in the streets, workplaces and places of study will serve to put pressure on the government not to give in to the demands of the right that is trying to achieve its neoliberal agenda. For its part, the radical left must maintain its political independence in order to participate in and support popular movements in defence of a programme of rupture with any form of class collaboration.

Democratic and social struggles are also essential to eradicate any legacy linked to Bolsonarism, because if an electoral victory was necessary, the fight against the extreme right is absolutely not over. Only permanent popular mobilization can make it possible to roll it back for good.

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Banking crisis in Switzerland: socialization not monster colossus!

30 March 2023, by BFS/MPS

No socialization of

pay for your crises!

On Sunday evening [19 March 2023], the Swiss Federal Council, the heads of the National Bank and the Financial Market Authority (Finma) as well as the two presidents Axel Lehmann (CS) and Colm Kelleher (UBS) announced that Credit Suisse would be swallowed for three billion francs. However, the takeover was only possible because the Swiss Confederation issued guarantees to UBS amounting to 209 billion francs. The public sector will contribute nine billion to the losses of CS and 200 billion will be made available to the two banks in the form of loans, half of which will be guaranteed by the federal government and half by the SNB. This means that any loan defaults will be taken over, which will become particularly likely if the financial crisis that began in the USA after the bankruptcy of the Silicon Valley Bank continues to spread. The consequences of private rip-offs will thus once again be paid by wage earners with their tax money. In addition, more than 10,000 bank employees will be laid off in the next few months, including dozens of CS trainees who will not be taken on by UBS.

The board of directors and the managers of CS, on the other hand, have nothing to fear, even though they have run a global financial group into the ground and made losses of 3.2 billion Swiss francs in the last ten years. In the same period, CS has paid out dozens of billions in bonuses. So much for "corporate responsibility". The height of cheek is that CS announced immediately after the takeover by UBS that it would continue to pay out bonuses. The next round of "enrichment at the expense of the general public" is already scheduled for 24 March.

The bourgeois rule of law is a farce

It is also remarkable how little regard the Swiss authorities have for their own rule of law when their friends in the private sector are in trouble. As in

the case of the rescue of UBS in 2008, the Federal Council decided to bail out CS by means of emergency law, overriding parliament and the population. The Competition Commission, which in liberal logic should control such mergers and combat the formation of monopolies, was demoted to observer status. And the shareholders' right was unceremoniously cancelled in order to prevent a veto by the bank shareholders.

The protagonists and the bourgeois politicians justify this undemocratic manoeuvre by the need for stability of the financial market, which would be endangered by an uncontrolled collapse of CS. The Swiss authorities would have had no other option than to save CS with public money, because otherwise they would have risked a global earthquake on the financial markets.

Capitalist constraints - and not vague elite circles, as conspiracy narratives would have us believe - are taking the population hostage, as they did when UBS was rescued in 2008. Financial market stability is also just another word for guaranteeing corporate profits and enriching the rich.

A long-announced downfall

The downfall of CS is the end of a long chain of scandals, corruption and self-inflicted speculation in recent years.

- In the Spygate affair of 2019, it became known that the then CS CEO Tidjane Thiam had the head of asset management Iqbal Khan spied on for fear that he would take confidential information to his new employer (UBS).
- In 2021 and 2022, CS speculated and made billions in losses when the US hedge fund Archegos (2021) and the financial firm Greensill (2022) went bankrupt.
- In the "Suisse Leaks" of 2022, journalists revealed how CS to this day courted dictators and criminals as clients and helped them hide and launder their money.
- Finally, CS's criminal practices led to it being convicted in several cases

and ordered to pay fines and damages amounting to billions of euros because it had neglected its duty of care and thereby enabled money laundering and tax evasion.

All this led to clients withdrawing their money from CS, to the bank having liquidity problems despite its existing equity capital, and finally to the danger that it would no longer be able to meet its current obligations. And despite all these scandals, both CS president Lehmann and the Swiss authorities had the cheek to claim at the press conference on 19 March that it was mainly "rumours on social media" that were to blame for the collapse of CS.

Concentration of capital

It is not only the socialization of losses that is typical of how economic crisis situations are dealt with in capitalism. Every crisis also leads to a further concentration and centralization of capital. Dying industries and companies are eliminated, but at the same time new investments are made by means of direct or indirect state aid. Companies are bought up and their market shares absorbed. This allows the "rulers of the market" (here: UBS) to concentrate even more wealth and power in their hands. They constantly try to increase their productivity (increase in the production of goods or services within a given time) as well as their profitability (profit rate).

The takeover of CS will now create a financial colossus that will be all the more "too big to fail". The assurances of the Swiss authorities that the enlarged UBS will have to increase its equity capital again and that the state regulations of the financial market should be tightened once more do nothing to change this. The fact that these regulations remain paper tigers for big banks is shown precisely by the collapse of CS, which, according to the requirements imposed on banks since the financial and economic crisis of 2007/08, should not have happened at all.

For the socialization of the financial sector!

The Federal Council has shown that it is in principle possible for a government to act quickly and raise billions when there is a fire and, for example, the demise of one of the country's biggest climate sinners, CS, is looming. Climate Strike Switzerland therefore rightly asked in the social media whether our livelihoods are not also "too big to fail"? At the same time, the behaviour of the Swiss state shows that it is not a neutral entity that can be used to bail out banks or save the climate. Civil states, including parliament and government, came into being in the 19th and 20th

centuries to enable private companies to compete as profitably as possible, and not to provide wage earners with a life that is as carefree and work-free as possible, in harmony with the environment. This is still the case today.

Therefore, it is the completely wrong approach when left parties now call for getting even with the bourgeoisie in the National Council elections - i.e. within the bourgeois parliament - in autumn. What we need is the building of a social counter-power: we need a broad social movement that breaks with the rules of the game of the ruling classes and strategically targets the private property of the corporations.

UBS and CS have invested billions in

fossil fuel, climate-damaging companies and projects. As a result, the two big banks have caused twice as much CO2 emissions as the rest of Switzerland. The banks must therefore be deprived of their decision-making power over investments. The banking sector must be expropriated and put at the service of society and the socio-ecological restructuring of the economy.

We will not pay for your crises: Expropriate CS and UBS!

For the socialization of the financial sector and an ecological-social restructuring of the economy and society!

20 March 2023

Translated from sozialismus.ch.

Maintaining real wages: a sabotaged fight in Germany

29 March 2023, by **Jakob Schaefer**

Against this background, it is not surprising that the demands for higher prices have increased significantly in recent months, albeit against the wishes of the trade union leadership. For example, the public services union Ver.di is demanding a 10.5 per cent increase, with at least 500 euros, for employees in the federal and municipal services; it has demanded 15 per cent for postal workers and the EVG (the larger of the two railway unions) is asking for 12 per cent, with at least 650 euros. The duration of each agreement would be 12 months.

Little long-term protection for wages

Left-wing trade unionists have always criticized the fact that real wage losses are hidden over the long term.

This happened in the autumn in the chemical industry and later in the metal and electronics industries. Recently, the Ver.di trade union concluded a collective agreement for the employees of the Post Office which, because of the two-year duration of the agreement, will lead to a loss of real wages (depending on the monthly salary) of between 5 and 7.5 per cent (which will be even higher if the inflation rate exceeds 8 per cent).

The deception is further facilitated by the "sweet poison of one-off payments". The government decided in the autumn that an inflation compensation bonus of up to 3000 euros would be exempt from social security contributions and taxes. The unions are thus buying themselves an agreement that they present in a favourable light to their members, but for which the one-off payment is not taken into account in the wage scale and therefore does not contribute in

the long term to the protection of real wages.

The agreement at the Post Office is particularly unfortunate for two reasons: on the one hand, employees had carried out warning strikes (strikes of a few hours and demonstrations) with a high turnout and then voted 86 per cent for a full strike in a vote of Ver.di members at the Post Office. The members were motivated and ready to fight. Secondly, this group has made an operating profit of over 8 billion euros in each of the last two years.

Strong bureaucratization

The fact that the union bureaucracy is holding back the struggle in this way is not only due to a politically explained fear of conflict (the

bureaucracy is ideologically very much integrated into the system). There are also material reasons for this. On the one hand, it is the material privilege enjoyed in Germany by the top ranks of the trade union apparatus, which are financed by the members' fees. On the other hand, high-level bureaucrats - especially in the public service unions - are at the same time materially corrupted in the state services (e.g. in the supervisory boards of public companies).

The vote of Ver.di members at La Poste on the outcome of the

negotiations is still ongoing, but it will be more or less impossible to get the 75 per cent negative vote needed to reject the agreement.

What is devastating is that the outcome of the negotiations at La Poste will have a disastrous political impact on collective bargaining in the public sector (which is "not making a profit"). The decisive negotiations there will take place at the end of March and the trade union left fears a similarly bad result.

Left-wing trade unionists are calling for the rejection of the agreement at

La Poste and hope that trade unionists in the public services and railways will realize that this cannot continue. We need a different wage policy, we need a different union leadership, basically we need completely different unions.

This is also why we look to France, because we see things there: whoever fights can lose, whoever does not fight has already lost.

22 March 2023

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

A never-ending crisis in Libya

28 March 2023, by **Paul Martial**

There is intense diplomatic activity around organizing elections in Libya, which are then constantly postponed for lack of consensus. The 36th session of the African Union sent Sassou-Nguesso, the dictator of Congo-Brazzaville, to organise a national reconciliation conference. As for the United Nations, its special envoy Abdoulaye Bathily is trying to set up a panel of key figures to define the rules governing future elections.

A divided country

There are two opposing poles of authority. On the one hand, the Government of National Unity (GUN) in Tripoli led by Abdel Hamid Dbeibah and recognised by the United Nations, and on the other hand, the one in Sirte, led by Fathi Bachagha and defended by Marshal Khalifa Haftar at the head of his Libyan National Army. The two sides are supported by different rival militias with their own agenda. Both governments benefit from foreign support. Turkey and Qatar support the GNU, while Field Marshal Haftar can count on the Russians who have dispatched mercenaries from the Wagner company, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The war has become

more deadly through the massive use of heavy weapons including aviation and the use of new technologies with the appearance of drones.

This regional conflict attracts many Sudanese, Chadian and Syrian fighters. Although it is difficult to count the exact number of mercenaries, most experts estimate that there are around 20,000, half of whom are Syrians.

Neither war nor peace

At the beginning of April 2019, Haftar tried to seize Tripoli by force. He was counting on some militias to rally or at least refuse to fight. He believed that the superiority of his weaponry would allow him to defeat the GNU. Considered a poor strategist, Haftar will not deviate from his reputation. Not only will all the militias defend the Libyan capital but the Turkish government of Recep Erdogan will send armed drones that will be decisive in this battle.

There is now a consensus that it is impossible for one side to win militarily. But, in the absence of

political will to make peace, the country has been in a state of low-intensity civil war for two years. This situation has led to the perpetuation of militias that are becoming increasingly fragmented. They tend to cultivate their power, control territories and engage in a whole range of lucrative activities, most of which are illegal. Civilian populations, primarily migrants, are victims of this latent conflict where the rule of law disappears in favour of force.

The diplomatic "at the same time"

France officially supports the GUN and all peace initiatives that emanate from the United Nations or the African Union. But the Macronian concept of "at the same time" applies since Paris supports Marshal Haftar. Diplomacy is caught between several requirements: to comply, on the one hand, with the decisions of the international community, which leads to supporting the government in Tripoli, but also, on the other hand, to maintaining its relations with the UAE - considered strategic in the region.

Indeed, since 2009, French troops are

stationed in this country. About 650 soldiers of the three branches are present there. Another element: the government of Chad, another strategic country for France in the Sahel, maintains very close ties with Haftar. Finally, the Quai d'Orsay, in line with its African policy, unofficially sees in Haftar the strong man capable of

bringing order and stability to the country. This remains the main objective for Paris, as it would allow border control to avoid infiltration of jihadist fighters on the continent and to effectively prevent immigration.

The French intervention in Libya in

2011 destabilized the Sahel. It also made Libya a strategic issue. Thus, the numerous foreign interferences have put any prospect of peace at risk, despite the will of the majority of Libyans.

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

Los Angeles School Employees Strike and Win

27 March 2023, by **Dan La Botz**

Angelinos could see themselves in the strikers. The school workers—an ethnically diverse group, white, Black, Latino, and Asian—had the support of most parents and of the general public who recognize that after three years of the COVID pandemic, two years of working with no contract, and the rising rate of inflation, school employees needed a raise. Some school workers' pay was so low that they couldn't afford to pay the rent in Los Angeles' expensive housing market.

So SEIU Local 99 called a three-day strike—a demonstration of power. The brevity of the strike meant that parents didn't suffer too much disruption to their lives, making it easier for them to support the workers. And during the strike, the school district, school workers and teachers provided food to parents for their children, 80 percent of whom depend upon the school for lunch every day. The city also opened 30 recreation centers with free child care for children in first through fifth grade (ages 6 to 11).

Shortly after the strike, the district and the union reached agreement on a 30% wage-gain—lifting some from \$15 an hour to \$22 per hours. Workers average annual salaries will go from \$25,000 to \$33,000. Workers will also

receive retroactive pay of \$4000-\$8000, depending on job classification and years of service, as well as a \$1,000 bonus for each worker employed in 2020. And workers will have fully paid health care benefits for those working at least 4 hours a day.

"You don't even know how happy I am," said Erika Rioverde, who has worked in the L.A. schools for nine years. "Finally, something is changing."

Max Arias, head of Local 99 told the media, "This has the potential for transformational change. We want this to be a spark to rethink our schools, our values around education. When 65,000 education workers are telling the parents that we need to do this to improve the conditions, that's powerful."

Los Angeles' new progressive mayor Karen Bass, pressured the district to negotiate with the union and intervened in the negotiations herself. "I am grateful that we were able to find an agreement to move forward today," she said. "I am hopeful that this is the beginning of a new relationship that will lead to a stronger school district and a better future for its workers and students in the years ahead."

The school workers victory is also important for the L.A. teachers who will themselves soon enter contract negotiations and may have to strike.

Since 2018, the United States has seen a resurgence of the teachers and school employees union movement with hundreds of thousands of teachers walking out on strike from one end of the country to the other. Teachers have often engaged in short strikes—two-thirds of them under five days and some for only one day or even half a day. These strikes are giving a whole new generation of teachers and other school workers the experience of strategizing, of building solidarity, and of winning.

The Democratic Socialists of America, the largest left group in the United States with tens of thousands of members nationally, mobilized its comrades in Los Angeles to support the strike. DSA has encouraged its members to become teachers and to become active in the teachers unions and in some places they have become officers in the union. This forms part of DSA's long-term strategy of transforming itself into a working-class organization and, some argue, eventually a working-class political party.

26 March 2023

Faced with social anger, Macron replaces legitimacy with police batons

26 March 2023, by **Léon Crémieux**

But, above all, a real political crisis is now added to the social crisis, a regime crisis, from which Macron is not certain to be able to escape, because it is his legitimacy, his claim to continue to lead the country in the next four years that is at stake. The legality of his formal institutional legitimacy is becoming more and more in contradiction with a popular legitimacy that is totally lacking.

For ten days, the authorities have been pretending to ignore this reality, to ignore the rage and anger of millions of women and men in this country. As one young protester said: "Up until now he didn't give a damn about us, now he doesn't even care about democracy."

Since 16 March every evening has seen, in hundreds of towns and cities, often in small towns, spontaneous demonstrations, with or without the presence of the unions, demonstrations of anger against 49.3 and against Macron's contempt for the people.

After the 49.3, the rejection by the National Assembly on 20 March of a motion of censure that would have led to the rejection of the law and the resignation of the government (the motion obtained 278 votes, 9 votes short of an absolute majority, something that had not been seen since 1992) was further proof of the isolation of the President and his parliamentary minority, and an additional reason for popular anger. Out of 61 deputies of the right-wing Les Républicains, 19 voted for the motion of censure, well beyond all predictions.

This isolation did not prevent Emmanuel Macron from speaking, on 22 March at 1 p.m on TF1 and France 2 (the two main TV channels) 24 hours before the new national day of

mobilization, with a posture of a president sure of himself, and insensitive to the anger of the street. A spectacular exercise in aristocratic contempt, to try to appear solid to his vacillating electorate, by presenting himself as firm and determined in spite of everything - an exercise in which he only succeeded in alienating the popular classes even more. Because once again, he said that his reform was justified, that he had been elected to implement it, and that, moreover, it had just been democratically adopted by Parliament, rendering social mobilization irrelevant.

This so-called democratic legitimacy has surely been the strongest irritating factor in recent weeks. The system of political representation, based on periodic elections of deputies, is far from real popular sovereignty, with choices taken democratically by the populations concerned. But the French Fifth Republic is in itself the European system that accumulates every possible defect of representation.

France has a really presidential system, where a single individual, elected by universal suffrage, has most of the executive powers, in terms of foreign and domestic policy, the government being simply his cabinet and the Prime Minister having only a secondary role, except in the case of cohabitation. (This possibility - a President and Prime Minister of different political sides - is ruled out, a priori and barring accidents, since the transition to the five-year presidential term, with the legislative elections quickly following the presidential election.)

In a second penalty for democratic rights, there are two chambers in France, the Senate and the Assembly.

The Senate, "an assembly of notables" is not elected by direct suffrage, but by 160,000 grand electors.

The third penalty is that the National Assembly is not elected by proportional representation, but by uninominal vote in two rounds, which does not reflect the reality of political currents and limits representation. Thus, the electoral system of France, "Homeland of Human Rights" ticks all the boxes of an insult to basic democratic rights.

Beyond these general considerations, the 2022 elections accentuated all these shortcomings inherent in the Fifth Republic.

Macron won only one vote out of five of the electorate (20.07 per cent). The presidential election taking place in two rounds, in the second round, opposed to Marine Le Pen, he won 38.55 per cent of the electorate. The additional votes came from voters, most often from the left, who voted for him only to block the far right. Obviously, the only real legitimacy of his programme amounts to 20 per cent! In the legislative elections that followed, the candidates of his alliance obtained in the first round 11.97 per cent of the electorate. These two figures, 20.07 per cent and 11.97 per cent, are the lowest in the history of the Fifth Republic.

At the end of all this, the deputies of the alliance around Macron obtained only 250 seats, whereas the majority is 289. In any parliamentary system, such a situation would have required a more or less long discussion to form a coalition agreement with one or more parties around a programme. This situation is customary in most European and other countries.

Macron had managed in 2017 to obtain 314 seats by a first hold-up on

the elected representatives of the PS (which had lost 216 seats) and some LR (which had lost 92 seats). He thought he could pull off the same trick, essentially with the LR, in 2022..... Not wanting to accept his failure and propose a real alliance, he preferred and still prefers to act as if he was in the majority and can pick up a few LR deputies in order to actually build a majority. But Macron has the weakest social base, the weakest electoral base in the history of the Fifth Republic.

All these reminders are necessary to understand the accumulated anger, the rage at seeing thus used, by political violence, all the artifices to impose an anti-social law.

The methods used to push through a reform rejected by the vast majority of the population have further accentuated the rejection of an undemocratic system and a president who has, in effect, usurped his legitimacy. Macron is the first president to try and pass a pension reform without having a parliamentary majority. And he is also the first to try and sneak through his reform by means of a PLRFSS (a bill for amending the financing of Social Security) which allows the use of article 47.1, limiting to 20 days the debates in the Assembly and to 50 days the whole procedure. And he is also the first to pass a law that heavily modifies the conditions of access to retirement by using the famous article 49.3. which allows a minority bill to be passed without a vote.

Macron therefore wanted to manipulate the institutions and twist the arm of the deputies in order to impose a project that was in a minority in the Assembly and in an ultra-minority in the country. The violence of these manoeuvres has provoked massive rage and anger among the population. More than 1200 spontaneous demonstrations took place throughout the country in the days following the use of 49.3. with at the heart of these mobilizations the anger against an authoritarian government, deaf to the largest mobilization since 1995 and which utilises a discourse worthy of the Newspeak of George Orwell : "a necessary and legitimate reform", "a

democratic process", "a law that the French people were waiting for".

Macron's political isolation keeps him all the more in a state of immobility, with week after week the hope that all this will pass, that the popular river will recede into its bed... So far he has not succeeded, and he himself has fanned the flames.

We are seeing the combination of anti-democratic institutions and a badly-elected President wanting to impose his will with institutional artifices, the combination of a reform that is socially unjust for the working classes and growing inflation, especially concerning food and energy, which multiply the anger.

All that is left to the government is the argument of law and order. The demonstrations are no longer part of political debate, a situation to which the government should respond by addressing the social and political forces that are engaged in it, but only of public order, and the weapon of police repression has become the only political response, with the attempt to stifle the movement with batons, tear gas and LBDs.

Macron and Darmanin, the interior minister, now present themselves as the defenders of law and order, facing a civil war led by far-left agitators. The last few days, after the use of 49.3 and the rejection of the motion of censure, have seen a wave of police violence, arbitrary arrests and bans on the demonstrations called by broad inter-union coordinations.

Obviously, the goal is to break the movement. The Union of Magistrates, the Union of Lawyers of France and the League of Human Rights have warned against the use of these methods by the police to hinder the progress of demonstrations and to intimidate demonstrators. They have protested against police violence, especially the abuses perpetrated by the BRAV-M (motor-cycle brigades for the repression of violent action) in Paris, a sad repetition of the motor-cycle police created by Raymond Marcellin in the aftermath of May 68, responsible for the death of Malik Oussekin in 1986.

Demonstrators find themselves mutilated following police violence: in Rouen, a hospital worker lost a finger and in Paris a Sud Rail activist lost an eye, following the firing of disencirclement grenades.

Such an attitude of the government, of criminalization of the movement, is being implemented while the day of mobilization on Thursday, 23 March saw, in many cities, the biggest demonstrations since the beginning of the movement, bringing together nationally 3.5 million people according to the unions, 1.08 million according to the police, a number equivalent to the big day of mobilization of 19 January 19, with even greater determination, with a fighting spirit. Medium-sized cities, in particular, saw impressive demonstrations: 40,000 in Nantes, 30,000 in Brest, 20,000 in Avignon, alongside the 800,000 people present in Paris. This date also saw the entry into the mobilization of young people attending high schools and universities, with more than 80 universities and 400 high schools blockaded and 150,000 young people counted by the UNEF students' union in the Paris demonstration. Young people are the first targets of police violence, the aim being to nip in the bud the spread of strikes and blockades.

Macron, in his televised speech, also managed to stir up the anger of the union leaderships, in the first place the CFDT and the CGT. Directly attacking Laurent Berger, the leader of the CFDT, Macron did not hesitate to affirm that he had never put forward any proposal concerning the financing of pensions.

In return, Berger and Martinez rewarded him with harsh comments ; "contempt, lies and denial," all unusual terms coming from union leaders. Especially considering that Macron had explicitly asked the union leaders to come to see him and to move on and accept the implementation of the law against pensions.

The fires in Paris and in several cities and the clashes with the police have most often taken place in night demonstrations bringing together young people unaccustomed to

demonstrations and even less to clashes. To see in these demonstrations only the actions of black blocs and the extreme left is obviously a political calculation, but has nothing to do with reality.

Alongside street mobilizations, blockades and the arrival of young people in the movement, strike movements are continuing: on March 23, the percentage of strikers among SNCF drivers, teachers (50 per cent on strike) and in the energy sector had risen sharply and renewable strikes continued at the SNCF, in oil refineries, ports and docks, waste collection and storage.

This Saturday, the clash with the government also took place in the big demonstration against the megabasins in Sainte Soline, which mobilized 30,000 people and was confronted with violent police charges, with more than 200 people injured.

At the end of this stage of the movement, the showdown continues with contradictory elements. Some sectors on strike, notably the waste sector and the refineries, and the multiple demonstrations in towns and cities, maintain the political climate of confrontation with the government. Similarly, the blockades of high schools and universities may also create a new climate in the coming

days. At the same time, there are no new strike movements in important sectors.

Macron and his government are still bogged down and unable to turn the page on this conflict, despite their posture. Moreover, they are also looking for a way out in terms of their parliamentary base, seeking to "expand the majority", that is to say, in fact, to create one, without a political agreement with the Republicans, but seeking to rely on the crisis of this party, which is torn between support and opposition to Macron.

The inter-union coordination still stands, with the demand for the withdrawal of the law and a new strike call for Tuesday 28 March. But at the same time, it is already itself putting forward the possibility of participating in the long process of the initiative for a referendum, launched by the elected representatives of the left.

Advancing this perspective now obviously does not correspond to strengthening the relationship of forces in strikes and in the streets. Everyone feels that the government is weakened, isolated, that the situation of the working classes faced with the rising cost of living and the pension reform has the potential to create a relationship of forces that may force Macron to back down on his reform. The cancellation of the visit of Charles

III was, in fact, a slap in the face for the government, showing its inability to curb popular mobilization.

Nevertheless, in the current situation, what is lacking is the building at the national level and in the cities of a common social and political front, defending an anti-capitalist alternative of social and financial choices in favour of the working classes, with a different sharing of wealth, a front relying on social dynamics to present itself as a direct political actor in the current situation. Even though the movement has not seen the development of structures of self-organization or massive general assemblies of strikers, tens of thousands of activists of the social and political movement are ensuring, in hundreds of towns and cities, the continuation of the movement for withdrawal now, through strikes and blockades, while relying on the existence of a national inter-union coordination.

They are the ones who are carrying this movement on their shoulders, they are the ones who built it and who are making it continue to this day. Maintaining the mobilization in unity and radicality will, once again, be the challenge of the coming days.

25 March 2023

Gary Lineker and the tweet that made the BBC tremble

25 March 2023, by Thierry Labica

Judging that its "impartiality rules" had been breached, the BBC decided to "withdraw" the former sportsman who had become the star host of "Match of the Day", its Saturday night football programme.

A violently anti-migrant policy

In the face of the outcry and the refusal of other sports presenters to take part in the programme in solidarity with Lineker, the BBC management quickly changed its mind, but did not spare itself a terrible

humiliation. Lineker was pointing to the bigoted rhetoric and anti-refugee measures of the Sunak government's current Home Secretary, Suella Braverman. In order to attack the right to asylum, justify her challenge to the European Convention on Human Rights and "push the boundaries of international law", Braverman has not hesitated to claim that "100 million" asylum seekers

could converge on the UK if her measures are not adopted.

Lineker is not the first to be concerned about this racist euphoria: in early January, 83-year-old Joan Salter, a survivor of the Holocaust, and one of Braverman's constituents, publicly challenged the minister that her language reminded her of the language used by the Nazis to justify the murder of her family. Braverman felt she had nothing to apologise for.

Braverman's plans follow on from ten years of a legislative onslaught on migration issues: the Hostile Environment Act from 2012 under then Home Secretary Theresa May, the 2014, 2016, 2021 Acts, and the 2022 Migration and Economic Development Partnership with Rwanda, which is intended to be a land of permanent deportation for

migrants risking their lives attempting to cross the Channel. And incidentally, it is in the light of this policy that the cooperation agreement signed between Darmanin and Braverman, and the embrace of Macron and Sunak on the steps of the Élysée in March 2023, should be read.

“Independence” of the BBC?

This little story is also an opportunity to revise the laughable fairy tale of the “independence” and “impartiality” of the BBC, run since 2012 by a former Tory elected official and chairman of a Tory association, Tim Davie, and chaired by a multi-millionaire, Richard Sharp (fortune estimated at £100 million), Sunak's former boss at Goldman Sachs, an adviser to the

same during the pandemic, and appointed by Johnson, whose collaborator he was in the London Town Hall. An “independence” that respects the tradition: if you think of the zeal with which the BBC's first Director General, John Reith, helped to break the General Strike of May 1926, and also of his undisguised admiration for Hitler and the Nazis, you will understand that at the BBC, “the 1930s” is a subject best avoided.

Finally, Lineker managed to say in one tweet what Labour's leaders will never say in a hundred. It is true that for Starmer, Reeves or Cooper, it is urgent to explain that the problem with the government is that it does not deport enough, not fast enough. Dark times.

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

Twelve years after the Fukushima nuclear disaster: for the world without nuclear power

24 March 2023, by Karen Yamanaka

Despite this situation, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and the Nuclear Mafia sponsored by the government are trying to keep the dangerous 45-year-old nuclear reactors running for decades to come and are planning to build new nuclear plants. And Fumio Kishida is also trying to shift about half of the reconstruction tax to the budget for large military expansion, which is an obstacle post-disaster reconstruction. It is time to remember Fukushima again for our future.

Slow recovery and lingering anxiety about radiation

Futaba Town is the last municipality to see an evacuation order lifted among other municipalities subject to the

orders in the wake of the disaster. Last year, the last evacuation order was lifted in the Town which hosts the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. However, not even 1% of the residents have returned to the Town. The final destination of contaminated soils transported to interim storage sites has not yet been specified. In addition, melted fuel debris has not even been sampled, let alone carried out. Under the situation, the Japanese government is planning to recycle the contaminated soils for public works. At least about half a century or more will be required for decommissioning of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. Until this summer, more than a million tons of treated water from the crippled Fukushima nuclear power plant will be released into the ocean. It is feared that further economic damages to fisheries and agriculture will be caused.

The Japanese government reluctant to abolish nuclear plants

The Fukushima nuclear disaster, as well as the Three Mile Island and The Chernobyl disasters, made us realize again that we cannot control the nuclear reactors. Twelve years ago, the radiation dose in a city of Fukushima was 1.2-1.3 micro Sv at the moment, 100-times higher than that of Tokyo. And coastal areas of the city were in horrible situation as though they might have been struck at ferociously by air bombers. [3]

Once a nuclear disaster occurs, it will take about half a century or more for

people to rebuild or reconstruct their lives while being frightened by radiation exposure under de facto decommissioning of nuclear reactors. And many workers will be compelled to suffer serious health deterioration for many years. Despite this situation, Fumio Kishida and the Nuclear Mafia began to call the "safety myth" again. Not only the Japanese government but also the governments of East Asia are reluctant to abolish nuclear plants. It is because of a strong link between nuclear power and nuclear weapons.

Hegemonic ambitions with nuclear armament

Having more nuclear power plants in the world could mean more nuclear weapons. And in the event of war, nuclear power plants will become nuclear weapons themselves.

In recent years, Japan and its neighboring countries have been promoting the nuclear power generation under the pretext of "stable energy supply" and "economic efficiency". Nuclear power and nuclear weapons share several common features. In fact, Japan and its neighboring countries have not even built a joint system against another nuclear disaster after the Fukushima nuclear disaster. It is because sharing information on nuclear power generation could mean sharing related information on nuclear

weapons.

Asia is the main region in the world where especially nuclear power generation are growing significantly. And most of the world's biggest nuclear power plants are in East Asia. Continuous operations of nuclear power plants in East Asian countries enable constant supply of fissile materials which is the key components of nuclear weapons. In East Asia, China ranks in third place worldwide in terms of its number of nuclear warheads. This year, North Korea had shifted from testing of nuclear weapons to training. And South Korea, which was defined as "principal enemy" by ethno-nationalist Kim Jong-un, began to take the highly unusual step toward independent nuclear armament. [