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## From Ukraine to Palestine: The Poisons of Denialism

30 April 2023, by **David Finkel**

A question has bedeviled the left: Is it possible to support both the Ukrainian and Palestinian struggles, and oppose imperialism, at the same time? Actually, the question should be reversed: How is it possible for a genuinely internationalist left *not* to support both of these struggles for self-determination and national survival?

Obviously, the degenerative bloody spiral in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Russia's drive to destroy Ukraine are both international emergencies. Beyond that, the situations are very distinct of course. I will argue, however, that there are also important parallels and connections.

On the face of it, the biggest difference lies in the stance of U.S. imperialism and its allies – giving massive military support to Ukraine's war of defense and applying economic sanctions against Russia, while at the same time, for more than five decades now, enabling the Israeli state's drive to crush the Palestinian people's aspirations for survival and self-determination.

For some of the left, sadly, global struggle revolves *only* around the crimes of U.S. imperialism and its allies – to the point that not only the role of other imperial oppressors, but

the agency of real people and oppressed peoples fighting for their own freedom, fades to irrelevance. From that point of view, for the left to simultaneously support both Ukraine *and* the Palestinian struggle seems like a hopeless contradiction.

The hypocrisy of Western rhetoric about the “rules-based international order” and “democracy against authoritarianism” is, of course, overwhelming. But this is neither new nor surprising in the light of centuries of colonial and imperial history.

For those of us striving to be consistent anti-imperialists, the starting point isn't which imperialist camp happens to be stronger or “the main enemy” in some global schema, but rather *the rights of nations and peoples and their legitimate struggles*.

That's why I begin this discussion with a vital parallel between the Ukrainian and Palestinian struggles – the *denial* of Ukrainian nationhood by Vladimir Putin, calling it an artificial creation of the godless Bolsheviks, and the *denial* of Palestinian nationhood by all the Israeli and Zionist movement ideologues who maintain “there was no such thing as Palestinians” (Golda Meir) and “there was never a Palestinian state.”

### Ideologies of Denial

Are we equating Ukraine and Palestine? Certainly not – *denialism* is what we're talking about. In each case it's about denial of the right of self-determination. This kind of twisted ideology has consequences, up to and including de-humanization that paves the road to mass murder.

In the case of Palestine, denialism facilitates a myth – absurd on its face and long discredited, but still widely circulated – that the native Palestinian population was mostly comprised of recent arrivals drawn by the prosperity generated by Zionist settlement. Although factually vacuous, it serves as a convenient ideological backstop for the continuing confiscation of Palestinian land and property for the sake of “rebuilding the Jewish homeland.”

This narrative stretches across time and politics from the Labor Zionist Golda Meir to the present Israeli Finance Minister, the extreme religious-nationalist Bezael Smotrich: **“There's is no such thing as a Palestinian nation. There is no Palestinian history. There is no Palestinian language.”**

Rightwing U.S. Christian nationalists pick up the theme: “There's really no

such thing as the Palestinians,” says former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee.

This attempted erasure of the Palestinian people’s reality reached its climax, at least in U.S. circles, with the publication of a screed by Joan Peters (or ghostwritten for her), *From Time Immemorial* (1984). It was debunked *in toto* by Norman Finkelstein, and discredited by scholars including Israeli historian Yehoshua Porath who called it a “sheer forgery,” but as a useful Zionist narrative it has continued to circulate.

Peters’ thesis took a new lease on life when its falsehoods were lifted, without attribution, by Alan Dershowitz for his 2003 book *The Case for Israel*. (Norman Finkelstein returned to the exposure of both Peters and Dershowitz in his 2008 book *Beyond Chutzpah*. Dershowitz denied attempting to pressure University of California Press not to publish Finkelstein’s book. Among other things, in retrospect the affair illustrates some aspects of Dershowitz’s character that ultimately drew him to Donald Trump.)

For many liberal (Jewish and other) friends of Israel, the brutality of the Occupation when it’s impossible to ignore becomes a cause of alarm and handwringing, but the idea that Palestinians are something less than a “real” nation serves as a partial anesthetic. They can rationalize the “violence on both sides” as the result of Palestinians’ unreasonable “rejectionism” (i.e. refusal to accept the theft of 80 percent of their homeland).

It also has debilitating consequences for Israeli politics, as we’ll see below.

In the Ukraine war, Putin’s claim that Ukraine is naturally part of “the Russian heartland” is historically ridiculous, but since it’s promoted by powerful state propaganda doesn’t need to be backed up by facts. The myth puts a gloss on Moscow’s annexationist claims on the provinces of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson, as well as Crimea.

In his July 2021 essay “On the Historical Unity of Russians and

Ukrainians,” Putin wrote regarding the “time bomb” planted in the Soviet Union at its founding:

*“The right for the republics to freely secede from the Union was included in the text of the Declaration on the Creation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and, subsequently, in the 1924 USSR Constitution. By doing so, the authors planted in the foundation of our statehood the most dangerous time bomb, which exploded the moment the safety mechanism provided by the leading role of the CPSU was gone, the party itself collapsing from within.”*

Back in April 2008 at a NATO summit in Bucharest, **Putin reportedly claimed:** “Ukraine is not even a state! What is Ukraine? A part of its territory is [in] Eastern Europe, but part, a considerable part, was a gift from us!”

The noted scholar of European history, Donald J. Trump, was reported to have exclaimed in an August 2017 briefing that Ukraine “wasn’t a ‘real country,’ that it had always been part of Russia.” (*Washington Post*, November 2, 2019, “A presidential loathing for Ukraine is at the heart of the impeachment inquiry”)

Denial of Ukraine’s nationhood helps enable the most ignorant and dishonest sectors of the global left to label Ukrainian nationalism as led by “Nazis” worthy of extermination, while more pacifist-oriented elements regard Ukraine’s territory as bargaining chips to be negotiated in order to stop the carnage.

If Ukraine is regarded as an artificial construct — regardless of what Ukrainians may think — how much then should it really matter if Donetsk is part of Ukraine, or Russia, or semi-independent? Thus we see, for example, how CodePink and allied groups calling for “peace” systematically refuse to answer the simple question, “Is Ukraine a ‘real country’ and does it have the right to defend itself?”

This refusal makes it more comfortable for pacifists who sympathize with Ukrainians’ suffering, but don’t understand the popular depth of Ukraine’s resistance, to plead

for “peace negotiations” that would amount to Ukraine’s territorial amputation. They also seem blind to the reality that such a “peace” would lead to massive re-arming on all sides for a next, bloodier round.

The issue here isn’t what terms the Ukrainian people might decide to negotiate — which is their right, and theirs alone — but the political and moral bankruptcy of “peace” advocates lecturing them about the need to surrender.

Whether or not western imperialist powers, which we know are infinitely treacherous, will ultimately move to impose some “solution” in the name of “realism,” remains an open question. For the left, that shouldn’t affect a principled defense of Ukrainians’ right to determine their own future.

## The Main Differences

The parallel denials of Palestinian and Ukrainian nationhood and rights to self-determination don’t mean that these struggles themselves are identical. Obviously, Ukraine is not Palestine — and much less is it Israel, as Ukraine’s president Zelensky claimed when he was hoping to get more support from that quarter:

*“In 2020, Zelensky took Ukraine out of the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and, in a speech to the Knesset, he linked the existential right of the Ukrainian nation to that of the Israeli nation, both fighting an enemy bent on the ‘total destruction of the people, state, culture.’ In a passionate response, the Palestinian university of Haifa professor Asad Ghanem accused Zelensky of reversing the role of occupier and occupied. While expressing Palestinian support for the Ukrainian people’s resistance to the brutal Russian invasion, he said that Zelensky’s words were a ‘disgrace when it comes to global struggles for freedom and liberation.’”* (Liz Fekete, **Civilisational racism, ethnonationalism and the clash of imperialisms in Ukraine,** *Race & Class*).

Geopolitical pundits can explain all the differences between the war in Ukraine and the so-called Palestine-

Israeli “conflict.” At their core, however, the differences between these modern states and nations are clear enough. Please note: we say “modern” states and nations, because we are not speaking here of wars of European kingdoms and state borders from past centuries, let alone the medieval Kievan Rus or the myth-encrusted history of ancient Israel. All of these are of interest, but belong to separate discussions.

The main difference between Ukraine and Israel is that *the modern Ukrainian state was not founded on the dispossession and the land of another people*, whom it expelled *en masse* and proceeded to impose a brutal occupation regime with colonial and apartheid-like features.

On the other hand, the big difference between Ukraine and Palestine is that Ukraine is a nation-state with the well-demonstrated capacity to defend its territory against an imperial invader. Being in the middle of Europe has also enabled it to get necessary military assistance. Palestinians do not have state institutions, or an army, or any strategic military option to win their freedom.

More than that, Palestinians have no great-power friends, and U.S. imperialism in particular is entirely indifferent to their fate as long as things stay relatively “quiet” (i.e. invisible). In fact, Palestine is essentially collateral damage in every international crisis, including the present war in Ukraine.

The Palestinian people attract a great deal of important global popular solidarity, but no support from “geopolitical” actors in the region or anywhere else. They are an essentially unarmed population confronting, on their own, the enormous power of the Israeli colonial state.

For its own reasons, of course, U.S. imperialism assists Ukraine’s war while simultaneously enabling Israel’s crushing of Palestine. That’s an illustration of cynical great-power policy, but no reason for the left to simply turn that policy inside out. The widely acclaimed heroism of the Ukrainian people, and the generally unrecognized heroism of the

Palestinian people, are equally deserving of solidarity from those of us who oppose *all* imperialism and colonialism. That’s all the more important now.

## Reactionary Feedback

A further parallel is that the invasion of Ukraine and the disaster in Palestine cannot be separated from the internal political crises in Russia and Israel respectively. In each case, the regimes’ efforts to crush another nation feed directly back into their own societies.

Too many liberal “friends of Israel” can’t grasp the reality that the Jewish-supremacist amalgam of rightwing nationalism and religious extremism in the new Israeli governing coalition represents the authentic destination toward which political Zionism has been heading for a very long time.

One can have a long and complex discussion over whether a different destination was possible – if the post-1967 Occupation had been quickly ended – but that possibility is long dead, along with the zombie “two-state solution.”

While Israeli military and settler murders are a daily reality in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, at the same time an unprecedented confrontation has exploded in Israeli politics over the government’s peremptory move to seize control over the nomination and powers of the country’s judiciary. Israeli state president Herzog’s warning of “civil war” shows the extent of the crisis.

The “reform” threat has brought hundreds of thousands of Israeli citizens (almost entirely Jewish) into the streets, blockading highways and ports, openly calling the government scheme “fascist.” They see the fight as a life-and-death struggle to save Israel’s democracy. With capital fleeing the country, [Amjad Iraqi of the Israeli online +972 magazine](#) calls the spreading revolt, ironically, “one of the most impressive BDS campaigns ever witnessed.”

Democracy does exist, for Israel’s Jewish citizens; to a much more limited degree for the country’s Arab

citizens; and not at all for Palestinians in the Occupied Territories who live under military-apartheid conditions. A movement for Israeli democracy is inevitably strangled so long as the denial of Palestinian nationhood remains in place either openly or by default.

For prime minister Netanyahu, judicial “reform” means exempting himself from criminal prosecution on multiple corruption charges. Netanyahu is effectively a captive of his religious-extremist coalition partners, for whom it’s about seizing control of “Jewish identity” issues and removing any (weak) restraints on murderous military and settler assaults on Palestinian towns, unlimited settlement expansion, and power to ban Arab-led parties from future elections (as parliamentary electoral commissions have previously attempted but been overruled by Israel’s Supreme Court).

Palestinian and progressive critics have accurately pointed out that the fight to “save Israel’s democracy” is essentially over maintaining a *status quo* that’s already lethally anti-democratic for Palestinians. Given such limitations, its prospects for substantive success are clouded — although the prospect of weakening judicial authority is causing serious capital flight, while Israel’s supreme protector, the United States government, now seems seriously concerned by the implications of Religious Zionist cabinet ministers’ overtly genocidal appeals. Both these factors are bad for business and “stability.”

One interesting comparison between Israel and Russia has been the public indifference of most of their populations – in the Israeli-Jewish case, to the disaster unfolding in the Occupied Territories, and in Russia’s case to the horror in Ukraine.

For many years now, most of the Israeli-Jewish public has been conditioned to ignore the facts of the Occupation, even when they’re freely available. In Russia, state media and police repression keep the war’s brutality hidden. The degree of freedom inside Israel makes possible a civic arousal, while inside Russia the



invasion of Ukraine has been accompanied by the disappearance of the remaining vestiges of democracy.

The Putin regime is now the global mothership of white Christian Nationalism, for which it is so admired by much of the MAGA faction of the U.S. Republican Party. As is widely discussed, Russia is moving increasingly toward some form of fascism, a trend which is only likely to accelerate unless its invasion is defeated. (We've discussed this trend in Zakhar Popovych's recent article "[Russia's Road Toward Fascism?](#)")

As for the impasse of Russian society itself, it's deepened by the catastrophe of Putin's war of choice. As sociologist Boris Kagarlitsky writes:

*"The year that has passed since the beginning of the war has clearly shown that the political system needs a radical change. An alternative to reforms can only be the growing disintegration of state institutions and the degradation of an already sick economy, which does not suit anyone. But the only way to change course is to remove Vladimir Putin from power."* ([On the First Anniversary of the War.](#))

## Prospects

Indeed, any prospects of a democratic future for Russia are inseparably connected to the outcome of the war - in particular, they depend on the defeat of its imperialist, annexationist ambitions in Ukraine. Ukrainian democracy is equally dependent on the war's results - but in its case, on the victory of its resistance to the invasion. And the outcomes of these events will have ripple effects for all of

us.

While Ukrainian labor and left forces are fully engaged in the war, they are also forced to resist the Zelensky government's anti-worker policies. A Ukrainian victory would open the possibility (there are no guarantees) of permanently overcoming the cycle of oligarchic factional politics that dominated the country following its 1991 post-Soviet independence. On the other hand, a tragic defeat or amputation of Ukraine is more likely to shatter its emergent national unity - and bring on a resurgence of far-right forces.

For Israel, preservation of its *formal* democracy depends on its *substantive* expansion. That means first of all, a movement that confronts the reduction of Arab citizens' rights - and apartheid-colonial rule in the Occupied Palestinian Territories - in law and practice. This requires nothing short of a political revolution to shatter the doctrine of the "nation-state of the Jewish people" that the current governing coalition is guiding toward its ultimate unspeakable conclusions.

As under any other ethno-religious regime, Jewish supremacy and democracy will not peacefully coexist. The violent settlers who carried out the pogrom in Huwara, and commit daily atrocities that don't make the international headlines, understand this perfectly. No doubt they will rush to join the "national guard" that Netanyahu has gifted to the extreme racist cabinet member Itamar Bem-Gvir.

The question for Israeli society is whether it can confront the consequences of the Zionist

movement's denial, from its very inception, of the Palestinian nation. That struggle requires assistance from the outside, through the BDS (boycott/divestment/sanctions) and other actions of solidarity for Palestinian rights.

At the same time, Russian denialism of Ukrainian nationhood can only be defeated on the battlefield, and that requires international solidarity, including weapons, with Ukraine's war for survival. Russia and NATO may be waging an element of a "proxy war" - which thanks to Putin, NATO is winning - but what's of decisive importance is that Ukraine is fighting a *people's war* that every left force should support.

Contrary to Biden's shambling rhetoric, the issues in this war aren't about global states standing for "democracy versus authoritarianism." That's a struggle that exists not between states but *within* every society, including (especially) our own. Let alone is it about the pious fraud of a "rules-based international order," where the United States makes the rules and gives the orders.

The left must not be diverted: First and foremost in Ukraine and Palestine, the struggle is about the rights of peoples and nations, and the poisonous consequences when those rights are denied.

*On the unfolding Palestine/Israel crisis, I highly recommend the Israeli online magazine +972. See the [Ukraine Solidarity Network](#) for its mission statement and many useful references.*

*Source: [Against the Current](#). No. 223, March/April 2023.*

# Four years of ultraliberal break-up and attacks on rights in Greece

29 April 2023, by [Andreas Sartzekis](#)

Although Mitsotakis controls most of the media and locks up the state apparatus, he is worried.

In this climate, the date and form of the elections are an issue: they will be proportional - with a minimum threshold of 3% to have deputies - but, unless a coalition government is agreed, should lead to second elections which will be based on an ND law giving the first party a bonus of 20 to 50 deputies. These second elections would take place at the beginning of July: Mitsotakis hopes to deprive some 220,000 young seasonal workers who will have gone to work in the tourist areas of their vote. It should be noted that the polls put Syriza well ahead among young people...

This electoral manoeuvre is one of the countless anti-democratic and anti-social attacks of this extreme right-wing government, the worst since the colonial junta for many Greeks, to the point that it even worries the European authorities about its methods, for example with the affair of the innumerable wiretaps, which Mitsotakis is trying to cover up. As the economic situation is not much better for the population than it was under the memoranda, all the reasons are there for this radicalized right to fall on 21 May, especially as during these four years, the popular struggles have never ceased.

But here we find a familiar situation: to bring down the right, what alternative is there on the left? Let us look back at the four years of this government fighting against workers, migrants and young people.

## A government with a fascist composition

This government has often been described as a Chilean-style government, ultra-liberal and ultra-repressive. The comparison is true: it took the cynicism of Mitsotakis to put fascists in key positions just a few years after the murders of the Nazi group Golden Dawn. Certainly they were "recycled ND", but two of them had been ministers in 2011 (ND-PASOK-Laos government) under the label of the fascist group Laos. As soon as it was elected in 2019, ND thus cajoled the voters of the fascists and, after the conviction of the Nazi murderers in 2020, it let them act in prison, so much so that one of the leaders of Golden Dawn was able to present candidates for a reconstituted fascist group, which the polls give as 3 or 4%...

As for the fascist ministers, their role is important in the government: one is the Minister of the Interior and manufactures measures so that "never

again will the left come to power" (his own words); the other is in Development and puts all his weight behind privatization; the third is in Health where he is systematically breaking up the public hospital system to the benefit of the private sector: in most hospitals in the Athenian region, 50% of the post-operative beds are not functioning because of a lack of personnel...

But let's make no mistake: the ministers of the "classic" right have nothing to envy to the ministers of the extreme right. Whether it's in education, with the university police and the gifts to public schools, in labour, with an anti-union law that breaks the eight-hour day to give employers free overtime, in culture, with a Disneyland conception of sites and museums or attacks on artists' rights... But also a murderous migration policy and a minister who denies against the evidence that refugees are often pushed out to sea.

Focusing on racism has been and remains a priority for Mitsotakis: his election campaign started in front of the wall being built between Greece and Turkey, to set the tone.

26 April 2023

Athens

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

# "Fascism is likely to return under the most innocent appearances"

28 April 2023, by **Franco Turigliatto**

The Italian far right acts with a certain tactical skill, so much so that some, even on the left, have not yet fully understood the dangers, because they interpret fascist phenomena from old representations of the past, forgetting what an intellectual like Umberto Eco had lucidly pointed out: "Fascism is likely to return under the most

innocent appearances. Our duty is to unmask it, to point the finger at each of its new forms - every day in every part of the world." [1].

## The brutality of anti-migrant measures

The most brutal behaviour of Meloni, Salvini and the Minister of the Interior Piantedosi was demonstrated in the

tragedy of the migrants on the beach of Cutro in Calabria: they allowed, even wanted, the massacre of migrants to happen, they used it to further strengthen the measures against the migrants themselves and the rescue ships of NGOs; they blamed victims for the deaths of their children, abused survivors, denigrated the dead, and turned their backs on the grief and the legitimate demands of the victims' relatives. And as if that were not enough, a few days later, they participated in the unbridled birthday party of the leader of the League (Salvini).

## **Economic and anti-social measures**

Added to this is a long list of economic and social measures: the cancellation of the so-called citizenship income that will starve hundreds of thousands of families, laws that will increasingly guarantee precarious work, a tax "reform" that reduces the progressive dimension of personal taxes, to the benefit of the rich. The aim is to achieve a flat tax, a reduction in corporate taxes and ultimately the cancellation of the tax used to finance public health. The government has withdrawn the crazy project of a bridge over the Strait of Messina, a seismic zone par excellence. It is, of course, participating in the race for imperialist rearmament. Finally, the parliamentary right rejected the European Certificate of Filiation, i.e. the European Union's proposal to guarantee the recognition of children's rights throughout the Union. It is clear that a strong mobilization against these government policies should have already been put in place by the unions. That did not happen.

## **The CGIL and its contradictions**

The national congress of the CGIL, Italy's largest trade union (with over 5 million members) and a history of being a class-struggle union, could have been a good opportunity. To

everyone's surprise, CGIL Secretary Landini invited Meloni to the congress, believing it necessary to listen to what the President of the Council of Ministers had to say and thus giving her a certain authority and credibility in the eyes of the workers. She vigorously defended her ultra-liberal programme, which gives the central role to the capitalist enterprise, the only one capable of producing the country's wealth. Meloni acted skilfully, aware that the greatest danger to her neo-conservative project comes from the working class and its ability to engage in large-scale social struggles, as is currently the case in France and Britain.

At the end of the congress, Secretary Landini had to highlight the deep divergences between the positions of the CGIL and those of the government, and he proposed a strategy of social mobilization to defeat government policies. This is not the first time he has made these promises of struggle, without the capacity or the real will to build effective strikes and demonstrations, and not just symbolic actions.

In any case, we will soon have the opportunity to verify it. Indeed, the leadership of the CGIL seems to be unable or unwilling to understand the qualitative change in the political and institutional framework determined by the arrival of the extreme right in power. Meloni is not a right-wing bourgeois government like the others; It is something more and different, even if it works in the continuity of the liberal choices of the bourgeoisie while pushing them to the extreme and preparing an even stronger offensive against the workers' movement. We are therefore faced with a great and difficult contradiction between the objective and potential strength of a large trade union organization which, even in the most recent social mobilizations, has proved decisive in guaranteeing their mass dimension, and its political and trade union orientations which, subordinated to capitalist logics, have so far weakened the possibilities and availability for the widest possible mobilization. as would have been necessary.

## **Elly Schlein at the head of the PD: a false alternative**

On the political front, all the attention of recent weeks has focused on the PD (Democratic Party) congress with the surprise election of the young Elly Schlein as party leader. Schlein defeated the traditional candidate of the apparatus, Bonaccini, president of the Emilia-Romagna region, who has a liberal orientation and is strongly linked to the business world. Bonaccini won the members' vote but was defeated in the second round on the broad public vote that includes the preferences of supporters.

The vote for Schlein, victorious especially in the big cities, expresses the demand of an electorate and a political sensibility for a more combative and more left-wing PD on the themes of civil rights as well as social rights. However, her victory can in no way be compared to what happened with Corbyn in the Labour Party. Schlein was Bonaccini's deputy in the government of the Emilia-Romagna region. Her success is now widely used by some media and by the same historical leaders of the PD to revive the role of a party presented as renewed and capable of leading the opposition to the government.

This operation to revitalize the PD creates a lot of hopes and even illusions among so-called leftists that will probably not materialize because, in a party that was born as a manager of the capitalist system, the room for manoeuvre of the secretary, beyond propaganda, is quite narrow. Schlein is certainly strong on the question of civil rights and on certain social issues, but she is very weak on the substantive economic issues and, of course, on the crucial question of the management of the capitalist system and the country's military alliances. She is unlikely to play a significant political role in the evolution of class confrontation in the workplaces. In other words, Schlein's PD will not be the one to build the alternative to the current social and political system.

## Contradictory dynamics

This context produces two partially contradictory political dynamics: on the one hand, it facilitates collaboration between the PD and Conte's M5S (Five Star Movement) and increases the possibilities of carrying out a unitary policy but, on the other hand, it accentuates the competition between the two parties to embody and be at the head of the

opposition to the government.

For its part, the alternative left does not find itself in an easy situation either: the social context is very complicated and, despite a few positive social demonstrations, the reconstruction of strong movements of struggle remains somewhat uncertain. The radical left is therefore likely to have less political space, given the credibility and illusions of certain social sectors for the project of the new alliance between the PD, the M5S

and the satellite party Sinistra Italiana (Italian Left).

A major national mobilization in support of the GKN factory, which has returned as a symbol of the struggle against capitalist relocations, is planned for Saturday, March 25 in Florence. Good news to boost morale and continue the fight!

March 2023

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

## Tokyo Rainbow Pride back again: more than two hundred thousand joined in solidarity with LGBTQI people

**27 April 2023, by Mi-hyang Pak**

Tokyo Rainbow Pride (TRP) including "Pride Festival" and "Pride Parade" was held on April 22 and 23 in Yoyogi Park of Shibuya Ward, one of the largest green spaces in Tokyo. A total of 240,000 people joined the events with the theme "Press on till Japan changes".

Since 2012, TRP has been held in April. It is not held in June like the Pride-related events of other countries because of Japan-specific circumstances such as weather conditions and Japanese workers' consecutive holidays.

Shibuya Ward is one of the most popular areas of Tokyo and pioneered with same-sex marriages and civil partnerships conferring comparable legal status in 2015. The move in Shibuya Ward was totally different from then prevailing Japanese attitudes to sexual minorities. In the same year, Setagaya Ward, which is located next to Shibuya Ward, also started issuing certificates to same-sex couples that recognize their partnerships as equivalent to marriage.

After 2015, other local governments followed suit and more than half of local governments in Japan have established a partnership system. In 2003, Kamikawa Aya was elected to the municipal assembly in Setagaya Ward. She was Japan's first openly transgender public official. In March 2021, the Sapporo District Court said the Japanese government's failure to recognize same-sex marriage was unconstitutional. Sexual minorities whose existence had been ignored have definitely gained official recognition.

In the last 10 years, the number of participants in Tokyo Rainbow Pride has increased by 53 times. On the other hand, sexual minorities in Japan still face discrimination in their workplaces and in their lives despite raising awareness of LGBTQI people in the Japanese society, causing many to hide their sexual identities.

Most of the problems remain unsolved in the society. Partnership system is not legally binding and does not guarantee the same rights as those of married man and woman couples. Japan still does not recognize same-

sex marriage as a country. And the country has no law to prohibit discrimination against LGBTQI people. The Japanese government still does not recognize the existence of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and nonbinary people and even denies their dignity as human beings. Campaigns for the rights for LGBTQI people have been stonewalled by incumbent Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and conservatives in the Liberal Democratic Party. Japan is the only G7 member that has not recognized same-sex marriage/enacted the anti-discrimination laws for LGBTQI people.

At this year's Tokyo Rainbow Pride, ambassadors from the US, the UK, and the Netherlands participated in the events asserting the rights of sexual minorities. Japanese activists are also urging the government to enact anti-discrimination law before G7 Hiroshima Summit.

Along with Tokyo Rainbow Pride, Tokyo Liberation March was held on April 22 in the same Shibuya Ward. The event was planned separately



from Tokyo Rainbow Pride in order to make a wide range of anti-discrimination claims such as intersectionality (various forms of discrimination and social exclusion) and compound discrimination.

The event was organized mainly by LGBTQI and sex workers. Shibuya Ward has a long history of excluding homeless people when turning a park near Shibuya Station into a

commercial facility. About 200 activists and various minorities who resist discrimination and exclusion walked the streets of Shibuya claiming against LGBTQI discrimination, exclusion of homeless people, gender inequality, poverty and inequality, and discrimination against foreign residents in Japan.

## Solidarity, not

## exclusion!

A society where LGBTQI people and oppressed can live with dignity is a society where all people can live with dignity. All oppressed people must unite to institute the equality laws that prohibits all forms of discrimination.

26 April 2023

# Solidarity with Sudan

26 April 2023, by **Collective**

## Statement from the MENA Solidarity Network

*updated April 19, 2023*

Resistance Committees, trade unions, women's organizations, and grassroots campaigns in Sudan are urgently appealing for solidarity and peace as rivalry between factions of the ruling military junta has turned into a deadly war in the capital Khartoum, neighboring cities of Omdurman and Bahri, and other major towns across the country. According to international media and eyewitness reports, fighters from the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces militia have engaged in gun battles and exchanged shell fire in crowded city streets, hitting schools, hospitals, and residential neighborhoods. The SAF was reported to have also attacked RSF positions with MiG and Sokhoi fighter jets.

Tens of thousands of civilians have been trapped by the fighting, including hospital patients who had to be evacuated under gunfire and hundreds of school children in Khartoum who were besieged in their classrooms. The UN said on Tuesday 18 April that at least 185 people had been killed and eighteen hundred injured. By the following day,

confirmed deaths had risen to nearly three hundred. Meanwhile, Sudanese organizations reported that water and electricity systems were failing or inaccessible across parts of the capital.

The revolutionary movement in Sudan shows there is an alternative to this carnage. On 19 April, a list of forty-two Resistance Committees, trade unions, and workers' and women's organizations issued a statement calling for the "civil revolution forces" to take the initiative with a "[comprehensive political strike](#)." According to Sudanese activists contacted by Middle East Solidarity, among the demands being raised in Sudan are calls not just for a ceasefire, but for the demilitarization of Sudanese cities and residential areas. Resistance Committees are also leading practical support on the ground despite the danger, organizing medical aid and food supplies.

What we think: our governments are complicit in this bloodshed, not bystanders

The two warring sides in this conflict are rival factions in the military junta which seized power in October 2021 from the civilian politicians who were their "partners" in the Transitional Government set up in the wake of dictator Omar al-Bashir's fall in 2019. They have been armed to the teeth and given intelligence, diplomatic and

financial support by regional powers Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt and Israel—all staunch allies of the major Western governments (and recipients of huge amounts of Western aid and arms). Both sides in the war have also courted Putin in Russia, who hopes to secure access to a new naval and military base in Sudan as a result.

Far from taking effective action to isolate the military and militia coup leaders, the US and British governments have repeatedly pushed Sudanese civilian movements towards negotiations with the military and militia leaders. The British government repeated this call in another statement issued on 15 April. This is in contradiction to the clear position adopted by the Resistance Committees and most trade unions and major civil society organizations, which reject any attempt to legitimize the military coup through negotiations.

### Take urgent action now:

- Send a message to the Sudanese authorities via the Sudanese embassy in your country and by making a statement on social media, calling for an immediate ceasefire and the creation of safe passages to evacuate the wounded and provide emergency supplies.
- Call on the British, US, and other foreign governments to halt all arms



transfers, military and diplomatic support to the Sudanese Armed Forces, Rapid Support Forces, AND the regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, UAE, Israel and Egypt which are fueling the conflict. They must rush humanitarian supplies to Sudan, confirm that they will cancel Sudan's debts once the military junta is replaced by a democratic civilian government, and that the military and militia leaders responsible for this bloodshed will not benefit from diplomatic immunity or be accorded any legitimacy whatsoever.

- Rush donations for medical supplies to the Sudan Doctors Union—UK appeal below. Circulate the detailed report on the critical situation for Sudanese health services that is included below.

- Share the messages from Sudanese organizations below widely—support their calls for a ceasefire, humanitarian aid and the demilitarization of Sudanese cities and residential areas.

- Join peace protests organized by Sudanese activists abroad—keep up to date via our Facebook page.

### **Health services, medical professionals and hospitals attacked**

The ongoing clashes in Sudan have had a severe impact on the country's healthcare system, as hospitals and medical staff have come under attack. The United Nations has reported that more than 180 people have been killed and eighteen hundred injured, while eyewitnesses have reported a large number of corpses in the streets.

Hospitals and healthcare institutions in Khartoum and other Sudanese cities have been subjected to shelling with artillery and firearms, causing extensive damage and forcing some facilities to shut down completely. This shelling constitutes a clear violation of international humanitarian law and agreements that stipulate the protection and neutralization of healthcare institutions from targeting.

The closure of pharmacies has made it difficult for women to obtain feminine care supplies and pads, as well as to

reach hospitals for pregnant women or those about to give birth. Additionally, a pregnant woman and her father were killed in front of a hospital while trying to seek medical care and the child was miraculously rescued, while a number of doctors and healthcare workers were injured and killed.

The Sudanese Doctors' Union has established online channels to help citizens seeking medical care by publishing online phone numbers for volunteer doctors across all specialities to provide help via phone calls and WhatsApp groups. They are also coordinating with resistance committees across the country to establish medical rooms for injury possibilities and to be prepared for any emergency.

The international community must compel the conflicting parties to cease targeting healthcare facilities, to open safe passages, and to allow ambulance vehicles to pass through. Additionally, humanitarian organizations should take urgent action to evacuate the wounded and provide medical supplies to those in need. The protection of healthcare workers, patients, and facilities must be a priority to ensure access to medical care for those who need it most.

## **Call for solidarity with the Sudanese people: The Alliance of Demand-based Campaigns**

*April 20, 2023*

Before the current catastrophic descent into the heavily armed battles between Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), having its roots in the Janjaweed militia, the democratic transition in Sudan had already been stumbling in the military and paramilitary power struggle, and the humanitarian situation had already been dire, with sixteen million of the Sudanese population in need of urgent aid.

Now, civilians in the Capital districts and Darfur states are unprotected from heavy artillery and denied access to medical care, drinking water, electricity, and food supplies. Moreover, attacks on WFP and UNOCHA facilities and workers were reported in Darfur and against hospitals in Khartoum. The assaults, together with the run-out power sources and medical supplies, took thirty-nine Khartoum hospitals out of service, leaving only twenty hospitals with minimal operational capacity. Civilians in the Northern and Kurdufan states are under similar threats.

The rejection of war by the Alliance of Demand-Based Campaigns (TAM) is based on our fundamental position of human beings' right to live safely and the right to life. TAM calls on Sudan friends, peace lovers around the globe, and the democratic world to solidarize with Sudanese people and support their aspirations expressed in Sudan's revolution slogan; freedom, justice, and peace.

We demand:

- An immediate ceasefire
- Immediate humanitarian aid
- The demilitarization of Sudanese cities and all civilian-inhabited areas.
- The restoration of the path towards a democratic transition and support for the civil government once it takes place by canceling Sudan's debt, establishing economic partnerships, and providing diplomatic support.

Furthermore, calling on your governments to prevent foreign interventions that provide arms, and logistic and intelligence support can help to avoid sliding into a civil war and a completely failed state.

### **The Alliance of Demand-Based Campaigns (TAM)**

Office of External Relations

*Read an interview with Khaled Taha from TAM [here](#) in the recent issue of Middle East Solidarity magazine*

#### **What you can do:**

- Download this statement [here](#)
- Read more on the background [here](#).
- Send a message to the Sudanese

authorities via the Sudanese embassy in your country and by making a statement on social media calling for an immediate ceasefire, and the creation of safe passages to evacuate the wounded and provide emergency supplies.

- Call on the British, US and other foreign governments to halt all arms transfers, military and diplomatic support to the Sudanese Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces AND the regional powers such as Saudi

Arabia, UAE, Israel and Egypt which are fueling the conflict. They must rush humanitarian supplies to Sudan, confirm that they will cancel Sudan's debts once the military junta is replaced by a democratic civilian government, and confirm that the military and militia leaders responsible for this bloodshed will not benefit from diplomatic immunity or be accorded any legitimacy whatsoever.

- Rush donations for medical supplies to the Sudan Doctors Union—UK

appeal [here](#).

- Share the messages from Sudanese organizations detailed [here](#) widely—support their calls for a ceasefire, humanitarian aid, and the demilitarization of Sudanese cities and residential areas. support their calls for a ceasefire, humanitarian aid, and the demilitarization of Sudanese cities and residential areas.

- Join peace protests organized by Sudanese activists abroad—keep up to date via our [Facebook page](#).

# War Clouds Thicken Over Taiwan, What Should the Left-wing Standpoint be?

25 April 2023, by **Liu Xiang**

On 8-10 April, in response to the Taiwan president Tsai Ing-wen's meeting with Kevin Maccathy, speaker of the US House of Representatives, Beijing launched a war drill against the island. This is on top of the last August war drill when Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan. This article was written to promote debate among the international in relation to the question as posed in the title.

Over the last year, the 'left-wing' voices on the war in Ukraine have often been criticized and hotly debated. Although 'left-wing' is a broad concept and there is no unified position among the various trends, some of these voices still cause resentment towards the entire label, especially among those who do not pay much attention to the detailed classification of left-wing ideology.

One reason for this dilemma is that the Western left-wingers have a tradition of prioritizing criticism of the imperialist camp to which their own countries belong. To adhere to this principle on all anti-war issues would certainly be dogmatic and erroneous. But the leftists in the Chinese-speaking world follow this tradition is an even more problematic way - they insist on 'prioritizing criticism of the

U.S.-led Western imperialist camp' while neglect 'to which their own countries belong'. The Western left-wingers stick to this position not only because the U.S. is the strongest and most belligerent, but also because fighting the 'enemy at home' is more effective.

The most likely location for the next major war is undoubtedly Taiwan - as I am writing this article, the CCP has conducted a new round of military exercises and announced it 'continues to maintain the island siege and further pressing posture'. The leftists in the Chinese-speaking world certainly need to speak out about Taiwan. But how can we avoid taking a bad position? Perhaps we our standpoint should base on some principles that anyone with a conscience would understand.

## Principle 1: Taiwan should never be ruled by the CCP

It is often said that the Taiwan issue is complicated, but one thing is very

simple and clear: the CCP is a very bad ruler. This can be argued in many ways - human rights, social equality, financial capability, religious freedom, women's rights, self-determination of ethnic minorities, political freedom, corruption, freedom of the press, freedom of speech, academic freedom, workers' rights, judicial justice, economic vitality, environmental protection, animal rights, social trust, business environment, LGBT rights, child protection ... Even if the CCP is not the worst government and Taiwan's current government is not the best in the world, the former replacing the latter would undoubtedly be a disaster. And it will never be the choice of 23 million Taiwanese, no matter how polls or votes are taken.

If someone wants to start a debate on this principle, the left is certainly worth responding to, because such a debate can be turned into advocacy and education for left-wing ideas.

However, if someone disagrees with this principle but wants to skip the debate about it to talk about other aspects of the Taiwan issue, it is a waste of time to argue with them, whether the other side calls itself left-wing, right-wing, chicken-wing or any

other wings.

Only if both sides agree that Taiwan and other small islands under the rule of the Republic of China (ROC, the official name of Taiwan) should not be ruled by the CCP, it is constructive to discuss other related issues – such as what is ‘China’; the 1992 Consensus; which empires Taiwan historically belonged to; anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism positions ...

So is there any possibility of unification under the premise that this principle is satisfied?

Article 1 of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) states: ‘The socialist system is the fundamental system of the People’s Republic of China. The leadership of the Communist Party of China is the most essential feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics.’ Constitutional recognition of the ‘fundamental system’ and ‘the most essential feature’ means that the CCP will never give up or share the ruling position of the PRC on its own initiative. The example of Hong Kong clearly demonstrates that Taiwan will necessarily be ruled by the CCP if it becomes part of the PRC (the so-called ‘reunification’). What if both sides of the Taiwan Strait give up their existing state names, form a new state and democratically elect a new government together? Because of the huge demographic differences between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait and the deep roots of the CCP in the mainland, it is very unlikely that the results of such an immediate election would satisfy the Taiwanese. Therefore, I do not see a workable unification plan right now.

As for future unification or not, I do not think it is a matter of principle for the current left-wing position.

## **Principle 2: War should be avoided whenever possible**

There is no good war in this world. No matter how glorious and just the causes are claimed, the process of war inevitably involves brutal killings,

civilian casualties, destruction of nature, etc. War is a barbaric solution that should be eliminated with the development of civilization. Even if the nature of imperialism and other drawbacks of human society dictate that ‘no war’ is still a utopian ideal, there are still many tools to prevent war between nations – such as government hotlines, disarmament conferences, arms control treaties, etc. So there is always a chance of avoiding a particular war.

Specifically with regard to Taiwan, as long as Taiwan is not going to be taken over by the CCP, it is acceptable to not take actions that would overly irritate the latter in order to avoid war. Such actions include: declaration of a new state of Taiwan, development or deployment of nuclear weapons in Taiwan, large-scale third-party military presence in Taiwan, developing a plan for an active attack on the mainland, etc. If there is an anti-war movement in the Chinese-speaking world, it should also call for commitments to ‘no first shot’ from all parties and arms control negotiations.

This principle also means that if the Taiwan War breaks out, the party that ‘fires the first shot’ should be condemned in the strongest possible terms – whether it is the CCP launching a forced unification for any reason, or the United States or Taiwan launching a ‘pre-emptive strike’ to prevent a possible forced unification. Of course, once the war starts, the complexity of anti-war position becomes greater. Under what conditions should there be a cease-fire? Should the attacked side extend the war to the other side’s territory? Should we support the military intervention of third-party? I am afraid that the debate on these issues will make it difficult to stick to some simple principles.

Although they are both Chinese-speaking, the tasks of left-wingers in the mainland and Taiwan are not the same. While Taiwan side has effectively given up on forcefully retaking the mainland territory claimed by the ROC, the PRC keeps emphasizing that it will not give up on forced unification, and that the latter’s capacity for war is far greater than the former’s. In other words, the left-

wingers in the mainland have a greater responsibility to oppose a war initiated by their own rulers. However, because of legal restrictions such as the Anti-Secession Law, it is unrealistic to expect everyone in the mainland to have the courage to speak out publicly against forced unification. We can discuss taking what anti-war actions is low-risk for mainlanders. However, there should be a minimum standard for the left-wingers in the mainland to not sing the praises of forced unification and to not take side with the CCP in the imperialist struggle for hegemony.

## **Principle 3: Taiwan has the right to defend itself militarily**

Although I oppose an arms race, I have to admit that Taiwan’s ability to deter is one of the key reasons why the war in the Taiwan Strait has not broken out. If the ROC disbands its military forces, forced unification would certainly occur, even though the CCP no longer has the need to wage war.

In fact, there is a conflict between Principle 1 and 2 above: should Taiwan accept the CCP’s rule in order to avoid war? Taiwan’s long-standing strategy in this regard has been to strengthen its defensive capabilities so that the other side cannot achieve its goals easily through war. This strategy has certainly created a harmful regional arms race, but it has in turn prevented war and the CCP’s takeover.

However, Taiwan’s economy is not large enough to sustain such an arms race permanently, and even now it is no longer able to accomplish deterrence with its own military alone. The war in Ukraine has proved that the Western style weapons equipped by the ROC army are capable of defeating the Soviet style weapons equipped by the CCP army, but it also has showed that a small country need a constant flow of foreign aid to survive in a war with bigger opponent.

The Taiwanese left is faced with a dilemma on this issue: on the one hand, it needs to oppose its own government's excessive militarism, lack of investment in social welfare, and becoming a cash cow for Western military industries; and on the other hand, it has to face its country's need to fight against aggression as a vulnerable party. How to find a balance between the two requires careful consideration.

Constructing a position on this issue is relatively simple for the left-wingers in the mainland –their priority should be recognizing the right of self-defence of the ROC. If they keep taking about the problems of Taiwan's social welfare system, it is like the Russian left tells that the Ukrainian government should stop buying Western weapons in order to avoid excessive debt.

But does Taiwan's right to self-defence include third-party involvement? U.S. involvement is certainly motivated by its own interests and a major confrontation between the U.S. and the PRC would be harmful to humanity in general, but from Taiwan's perspective, America's commitment of military protection is indeed essential to prevented war and the CCP's takeover. In the case of an invasion by the CCP, if Taiwanese public opinion does not oppose third-party involvement – such as the provision of weapons, supplies, intelligence, etc. – in my opinion the left should not oppose it in principle. Of course, it is also important to avoid a direct war between the two nuclear-armed powers – China and the United States, because the devastation of such a scenario would be incalculable. But

such a scenario is no longer just a Taiwan issue, and how to construct a position on it would

To conclude, regardless of where one is on the left, the above three principles should be the basis for discussion of the Taiwan issue. The latter two involve the extreme circumstances of war and may be criticized as 'too idealistic', but it is always useful to discuss them before war begins. The left forces of the mainland and Taiwan, who are next to the crater, are both very weak. Their positions on the Taiwan issue run the risk of leaving a lasting bad reputation if they are not careful; this is also why we should have more discussions before the situation is irreversible.

23 April 2023

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

## Conflict between putchists in Sudan

24 April 2023, by **Paul Martial**

They were together to overthrow the civilian government that emerged from the Sudanese revolution that ended the regime of Omar al-Bashir. Almost three years later, the existing rivalries between Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, head of the regular troops, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and the paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by Mohamed Hamdan Dogolo, known as Hemidti, have turned into an open and deadly conflict.

### A war that spreads

The two factions are fighting over strategic locations in Khartoum, the Sudanese capital, with heavy weapons. The RSF are trying to seize the official media, the presidential palace and the airport. The SAF, on the other hand, does not hesitate to use the air force to bomb the FRL camps located in the various residential areas.

The inhabitants have no choice but to stay at home and hope that the shells do not hit their homes. Already dozens of civilians have been killed and hundreds injured.

Fears that the conflict will spread throughout the country are confirmed. Fighting is taking place in several other major cities, in Port Sudan, Kabkabiya in North Darfur, El Obeid in North Kordofan, Zalingei in Central Darfur and also in El Geneina, the capital of West Darfur.

### Paramilitary power

The FRLs originate from the Janjaweed. These militias were widely used by Omar al-Bashir to spread terror during the Darfur conflict twenty years ago. This led to Bashir being indicted by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity. Under Hemidti's leadership, the Janjaweed helped build the paramilitary group RSF. The latter

maintain control over the country's gold mines, allowing their leader to be one of the richest men in Sudan. The RSF also acted as border guards. They were involved in human trafficking. They arrested and sold migrants who tried to cross the border to Libyan militias. At the request of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab States, the RSF played the role of mercenaries in the war in Yemen against the Houthis, in return for payment.

If Hemidti, for the past few months, has not ceased to criticise the coup d'état of which he is one of the authors, and calls on civilians to support him, no one has forgotten that the RSFs were responsible for the massacres of the sit-in of 3 June 2019, where more than a hundred demonstrators were assassinated, and remain largely involved in the repression against opponents.



## What is at stake in the conflict

Paradoxically, it was the agreement to hand over power to civilians, negotiated for months between the military and part of the democratic forces, that set the conflict alight. A first framework agreement had been signed. This agreement left some sensitive issues unresolved, including the integration of the RSF into the SAF. Burhan proposed a gradual integration while Hemidti, on the contrary, aimed at integrating the

FRLs as such. This allowed him to remain a key figure in Sudan. He never hid his ambitions to be at the head of the country. A sort of revenge for this former camel merchant from Darfur. At the same time, part of the SAF staff, led by General Shams el-Din Kabbashi, was not happy with the negotiation process with the civilians. Finally, the Islamist officers never forgave Hemidti for what they considered to be a betrayal. Hemidti had refused to support Omar al-Bashir to the end when his power wavered under street pressure in 2019.

The unfolding events can also be seen as a confirmation of the relevance of the position of the resistance committees. They have always refused to negotiate with a military power that has not ceased, since the country's independence, to carry out coups and to betray its own commitments.

Let us recall that Burhan and Hemidti justified their putsch to avoid the country falling into chaos.

19 April 2023

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

## Making the movement a political force in France

23 April 2023, by **Léon Crémieux**

This does not mean that we have entered a revolutionary crisis, not even a pre-revolutionary one, but a phase of social and political instability whose outcome can hardly be predicted. As such, it raises a series of political questions and paradoxes.

### A global revolt

The massive rejection of the postponement of the retirement age to 64, with a law imposed by several institutional diktats including Article 49.3, which allows the government to force a bill through the National Assembly without a vote, the prolonged popular mobilization on an undoubtedly unprecedented scale, are obvious manifestations of the social crisis. Demonstrations, because this movement, around the question of retirement at 64, crystallizes a deeper crisis. The popular classes have been attacked for several months by the consequences of inflation, the rise in the cost of living in general, food and energy in particular, the effects of Covid. Added to this are longer-term attacks that have led to the immiseration of the public health

system, public housing, difficulties of daily life, low incomes, problems of stable employment, transport, the schooling of children, care for the elderly. All these difficulties are experienced just as much in popular neighbourhoods as in small peripheral towns. They all reflect the will of capital to further reduce the share of value added devoted to the popular classes, directly through wages, indirectly through compulsory levies and redistribution.

All these concerns of daily life have been reflected in the demonstrations since January, even if pensions are the point of crystallization and the sole basis of inter-union action. The constancy of the rejection of Macron's law cannot be understood without considering all the anger that is found in the current movement. It is therefore, generally, the living conditions of the popular classes that determine the unfailing popularity of support for strikes and demonstrations and even blockades. Macron's political isolation obviously corresponds to this social reality as he is the representative of a society where the wealth produced is captured for the

profit of the capitalist class, whose wealth, through the companies it owns or through other assets, has continued to increase in recent years. 5% of households own 95% of industrial assets. Macron finds relative support, apart from the capitalist class itself, only in a part of the upper layers of the salaried workers, managers, the liberal professions, basically those who link their prosperity to the capitalist system, who have hardly suffered from Covid, are not attacked in their standard of living by inflation and have no fear of the raising of the retirement age. The cleavage over pensions is clearly a class divide: it brings together those who can only live on their wages or social incomes and suffer attacks on social protection and all systems of redistribution.

**The political expression of the movement is limited by the**

## Intersyndicale

We can say that the unity forged around the national *intersyndicale* (inter-union coordination) since January has allowed the construction of the movement, its vigor, especially in small towns usually less mobilized in social movements. But this *intersyndicale*, if it has until now brought together all the unions, has voluntarily limited itself, to maintain its unity, to the demand for the withdrawal of the measure of retirement at 64, the only common basis. It can therefore be said that in the country a general, complete united front of the trade union and political organizations of the workers' movement has been built, reflecting and strengthening the movement.

But everyone also understands that this obligatory self-limitation of the inter-union rank and file (let us not forget that the CFDT supported the Touraine reform of 2014 and the gradual transition to 43 annuities) means that this movement does not take the political place which, objectively, corresponds to its depth, to its radicalization. It is not that those who demonstrate, the activists in strikes and blockades, the participants in the hundreds of demonstrations, do not express all the demands that underlie this movement, but that the self-limitation of the *intersyndicale* limits its passage to a political stage. Objectively, the movement challenges power, the organization of society by the parties and the capitalist class, puts forward the main social demands. It weakens the intellectual and political hegemony of the ruling class, which has lost the battle on the question of its reform (even if it succeeds tomorrow in imposing it) but the movement does not produce its own political expression to collectively advance another policy, other social choices for the benefit of the working classes. In this we can say that the content of the demands of the *intersyndicale* is not the emanation of the level of consciousness, but is well behind it; On the other hand, the movement does not have the strength to create its own structures capable of shaking up the *intersyndicale*.

## Achieving the unity of the exploited

Revolutionary Marxists have been confronted many times with similar situations, often in the midst of confrontations at another level, in revolutionary or pre-revolutionary crises. The elaboration by the Communist International of the tactic of the united front and the promotion of the slogan of a "workers' government" at the third and fourth congresses in 1920/1921 reflect this concern.

The tactic of a united front must allow the widest unity of the exploited to be set in motion. This does not mean the arithmetical addition of unions and parties, but mobilization, starting from fundamental needs and, through collective action, struggle, the advancement of consciousness, the questioning of capitalist hegemony. In this, the alliance, in the realization of the united front with reformist organizations materially and ideologically linked to capitalist neoliberal politics, is, paradoxically, necessary to achieve unity, but this must not be at the expense of action itself. "The historical problem is not to mechanically unite all the remaining organizations of the different stages of the class struggle but to rally the proletariat in the struggle and for the struggle. These are absolutely different, sometimes even contradictory, problems" explains Leon Trotsky in "Fascism - What It Is and How to Fight It."

In the early 1920s, at the heart of crisis situations, the problem facing Communists was that of coexistence with important Social Democratic parties, in several advanced capitalist countries, especially in Germany, and to elaborate a revolutionary policy. The aim was indeed to create a movement, a process which sets in motion and, starting from struggles over demands, unites the exploited and leads to a revolutionary confrontation. It was paradoxical to seek unification with the Social Democratic parties with which the Communists had just split during the

First World War, the Russian Revolution and the revolutionary crisis in Germany of 1918/1919. "If we could have united the working masses around our flag, or on our current slogans, neglecting the reformist organizations, parties or trade unions, it would certainly be the best thing. But then the question of the united front would not even arise in its present form. The reformist group tends to peace with the bourgeoisie. But in order not to lose its influence on the workers, it is forced, against the deep will of its leaders, to support the partial movements of the exploited against the exploiters" Trotsky told French Communists in 1922, a year after the Tours Congress.

## The "workers' government"

At the time, the congresses of the Communist International debated the question of the "workers' government." The International Committee of December 1921, and then the Fourth Congress of the CI, in November 1922, detailed this question, and the Resolution on the tactics of the CI precisely explains that "the slogan of the 'workers' government' is an inevitable consequence of the whole tactic of the united front." In the movement of the exploited and oppressed made possible by a united front tactic, the outcome is a workers' government, on a revolutionary program of confrontation with the bourgeois state. The resolution therefore lists the various scenarios of "workers' governments" which can reflect the alliance between the Communists, and Social Democrats, warning in particular against a liberal workers' government as in Australia, or a social-liberal government as in Great Britain, both of which are only "governments camouflaged as a coalition between the bourgeoisie and counter-revolutionary workers' leaders." But the Congress deemed possible the participation of Communists in governments that organize confrontation with the bourgeois state and begin to fulfil revolutionary tasks. The best-known example is the KPD decision in January 1923 to build a KPD-SPD

government in the Länder of Saxony and Thuringia, a decision hampered by the Fischer-Maslow left opposition.

As an extension of what Gramsci then elaborated on hegemony, it appears that the slogan of a workers' government can translate, in an algebraic or more concrete way, in propaganda or practical situations, this idea that the oppressed and exploited must break the political and cultural hegemony exercised by the bourgeoisie in civil society. which allows it to complement its power beyond the economic sphere and the coercive political state, to legitimize itself by hegemony in the institutions structuring society, unions, churches, parties and so on. Creating a new hegemony, that of the exploited and oppressed, in the movement of struggle, is therefore a challenge, affirming a project for the whole of society, questioning capitalism, starting from the satisfaction of the needs of the popular classes and the demands of democratic struggles and struggles against oppression, affirming it to confront the coercive state and tackle exploitation.

## Reclaiming the power of the exploited and oppressed

These tasks had been elaborated by the Communists in the early 1920s, years of revolutionary incandescence. But, once again, the context of the struggle for pensions and the problems it raises can underline both the importance of a united front tactic - understanding that its dynamic must extend its base of social demands - and the place of the slogan of government of the exploited and oppressed, which in this case would first mean the positive manifestation of the claim of the working classes to stand as candidates for power, not by delegation in the current institutional frameworks, but by their ability to organize themselves at all levels of society. This obviously goes hand in hand with the ability to converge, in opposition to capitalism, all struggles acting against exploitation and

oppression.

The many demands expressed in this movement have not materialized in structures bringing together activists, the organizations that have been animating the struggle for three months. The link has not been made with social concerns which, crystallized around the question of retirement at 64, are not reduced to it. In a word, to use a political terminology, this movement has indeed achieved a front of the trade union organizations, a mass uprising of the popular classes, but in the absence of structures that bring together political energy, expressing the demands present in this movement.

Let us remember that four years ago it was the *gilets jaunes* who manifested, in smaller numbers, a similar anger, also crystallizing the most precarious layers of wage labour, especially in rural and peripheral regions. The anger and the demands were the same. "We revolt against the high cost of living, precariousness and misery. We want, for our loved ones, our families and our children, to live in dignity. 26 billionaires own as much as half of humanity, this is unacceptable. Let us share wealth and not misery! Let's put an end to social inequalities! We demand the immediate increase of wages, social minima, allowances and pensions, the unconditional right to housing and health, education, free public services for all... We are strengthened by the diversity of our discussions, at this very moment hundreds of assemblies are developing and proposing their own demands. They affect real democracy, social and fiscal justice, working conditions, ecological and climate justice, and an end to discrimination.!" (Assembly of the Assemblies of Commerce).

It was socially, too, a class revolt, explicitly targeting the exploiters, as do the demonstrators at the current mobilizations. We find this social anger in local struggles against public housing companies, concerning rents or energy prices, those in the popular suburbs suffering discrimination, high unemployment rates, the disappearance of public services, transport difficulties. It is also found in the broad united call for the

feminist strike of 8 March 2023: "Still paid a quarter less, concentrated on the lowest paid and part-time jobs, more and more women are unable to make ends meet. Instead of punishing companies that discriminate, instead of increasing wages and pensions, fighting against gender-based and sexual violence against women, this government and employers want to impose a violent and unfair pension reform."

The appeal of the 2021 Earth Uprisings also expressed this popular anger, "which brings together young people rebelling against the ecological catastrophe and farmers who refuse to make the land a market... After having enclosed and privatized the commons, the capitalist market and its institutions are now precipitating the ravages of biodiversity, climate change and social atomization."

## Faced with the illegitimacy of those who govern us

The current social anger, strikes and demonstrations are therefore the product of all these social demands. The immense majority is faced with a regime that rests on an institutional legitimacy, the "democratic" rules that allowed the election of a president, a national assembly. And as these rules, themselves, are not enough, there are all the legislative artifices allowing the regime to escape the absence of a majority - in a system designed to ensure a presidential majority - to escape the pressure suffered by the deputies in their electoral constituencies.

Therefore, to the social question is added an obvious democratic question: how can a president who has received the assent of only 20% of the electorate, and a parliamentary minority which has received the assent of only 11.97% of this electorate have the arrogance to claim legitimacy to impose a law rejected by an immense majority of the population?

This dual situation, social crisis and democratic crisis, raises a directly political question: How to impose the needs, aspirations, choices of those who express themselves through strikes and the streets against the pension reform, those who lead the battles targeting the capitalist system, to affirm a force capable of imposing its legitimacy in the face of a minority and illegitimate regime?

## The danger of the far right

Moving in this direction is also a vital need in the face of an aberrant situation. Three months after the beginning of a social movement that fights an attack emanating from neoliberal capitalism, a social movement organized by the trade union movement and with the participation and support of the anti-neoliberal left, the far right appears to be largely taking advantage of the current social crisis, while it obviously refuses to put forward any demand for measures that would attack the interests of the capitalist employers. Like its Italian colleagues of Fratelli d'Italia around Meloni, the French far right is only biding its time hoping that the absence of a powerful popular anti-capitalist dynamic will make it appear as an institutional alternative in 2027, while taking advantage of the criminalization and demonization of the left wing NUPES alliance by the government.

The isolation of this extreme right can only advance if a front of the popular classes is built, a trade union, social and political front which traces a bridge between the pension movement and all the social, democratic and environmental demands of the day, structured around measures which challenge the power of capitalist groups. The foundations of such a front exist in the social struggles that are being waged in the social, feminist, ecological and anti-racist fields, because capital structures and restructures exploitation and oppression for its own benefit and generalizes its power within society as a whole. We are in one of the moments where the task is to "destroy one hegemony and create a new one" as

Gramsci put it.

In civil society, the hegemony of the ruling class is asserted, which in ordinary times finds allies in the reformist leaderships of the workers' movement. But there are times when this hegemony can be challenged by social struggles, when a political identity of the exploited and oppressed is asserted, overcoming their divisions. We are in a moment when this political identity could assert itself, expressing the fight for its own hegemony. It is therefore a political hegemony of the exploited and oppressed that must be built, a hegemony corresponding not only to their social weight - by bringing together all the struggles against exploitation and oppression - but above all by directing these struggles around the questioning of the system that structures this exploitation and oppression, the capitalist system.

Interior Minister Darmanin's violent repression of ecological protests in Sainte-Soline is indicative of the great fear of the convergence of the social struggle around pensions with that of the ecologist struggles. Similarly, Darmanin and Macron have everything to fear from a convergence with the struggles of the popular suburbs over public services, racism and police violence. The positive convergence of these struggles does not exist today. To move in this direction, it would be necessary to build and assert a social and political front, around urgent social demands, outlining the perspective of what could be a society of the commons, managed by and for the exploited and oppressed, structured from businesses, neighbourhoods and localities, taking charge of the organization of society for the satisfaction of popular needs.

## For unity in the service of combat

To speak of a government of the exploited and oppressed implies at the same time starting from the current situation, to consider the social and political organizations that engage in current struggles, which organize social struggles. It would obviously be

up to them to come together to define, to debate what could be a program of satisfaction of social needs, of breaking with the current system. This touches on a key problem of these weeks: the need for the convergence of social and political forces to break down the current mutual ignorance.

The weakness of local assemblies, of self-organizing structures in this movement should not prevent us from taking steps forward. The indispensable autonomy of the social movement vis-à-vis political parties cannot lead, as it does today, to the absence of broad common initiatives based on the social and democratic demands for which both are fighting. Contrary to what the NUPES essentially does, the issue is not limited to an institutional, parliamentary struggle, coupled with support for social struggles, and waiting for this to translate into electoral support in 2027 or in the event of dissolution. The parliaments of Popular Unity (currently dormant), if opened widely, could have helped in this task. This should be concretized now, not only by the realization of national and local meetings bringing together parties, unions and associations, but also by a joint activist effort to build national and local unitary structures to advance this convergence within the struggle. This obviously concerns common tasks on issues of repression and response to the actions of the far right, in defence of democratic rights. But it also concerns the need to converge, beyond the rejection of the pension changes, common social demands in a programme of struggle. It is necessary to give a meaning, a political orientation to the social struggle, a political orientation that is built in the dynamics of the current social movement.

Similarly, we are at a time where the evidence of social demands and the evidence of democratic demands are combined. The current situation puts back on the agenda democratic demands such as those we put forward when the Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste (NPA) was created (and which were re-established during the *gilets jaunes* movement). It is not a question of fighting for a simple cleansing of the "excesses" of the



Fifth Republic but of advancing a series of concrete demands: "An expanded political democracy requires breaking with the institutions of the Fifth Republic and their hyper-presidentialism, abolishing the presidential function. To demand full proportional representation, the election of a constituent assembly, the abolition of all the bodies, such as the Senate and the Constitutional Council, which further confiscate democracy. To establish rotation and strict term limits, parity in any elected body. To

develop a full citizenship of resident-workers based on integral birth right. These new democratic conquests cannot be thought of without profound, emancipatory mobilizations, inventing new forms of democratic practices...."

The slogan of a constituent assembly is therefore clearly on the agenda, not as a simple passage to another Republic, as if the state could change its class nature in favour of the passage to another number of Republic. It is not only a question of

bringing down institutions that fragment, laminate, scatter, "puzzle-like" all the social dynamics of the popular classes, but of putting forward a process of popular self-organization that explicitly fights delegation and is a tool for breaking and not cleaning up the bourgeois state. The movement carries the seeds of dynamics that can go in this direction. It is up to us to stimulate them, whatever the outcome of the current phase of the movement.

21 April 2023

## "Cop City" Must Be Shut Down!

22 April 2023, by **Malik Miah**

The large police training center, to be constructed on forest land owned by the city, has garnered national attention from Democratic and Republican supporters of "fighting crime" by giving police more weapons and powers. The Biden Administration is behind hiring tens of thousands of cops with little community oversight.

On January 18 police raided the campground occupied by demonstrators and shot and killed Manuel Esteban Paez Terán (known as Tortuguita). Since his death there have been nonstop demonstrations, with many arrested and charged with "domestic terrorism."

Officers involved in the shooting claimed that Teran fired the first shot, hitting a state trooper in the abdomen and prompting them to return fire. Teran's family said a private autopsy found he was shot 13 times.

A March autopsy report contradicts the police allegations. The report said Teran was sitting cross-legged with hands in the air at the time. The protester's family said that the released results of an autopsy they commissioned proves the killing was premeditated.

Police claim there was no body camera footage of the incident.

Following the fatal shooting, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security released a bulletin, obtained by ABC News, saying that since the shooting, suspected domestic violent extremists "have cited the incident as justification for violence." Joint Effort to Stop Cop City

Movements for police reform and restructuring, along with environmental groups such as Defend the Atlanta Forest, strongly oppose Cop City. The police have responded with armed force against environmentalists.

Some activists have fought back against the police violence with rocks and fireworks, and a few have thrown Molotov cocktails at or near the center's site.

Arrests have been random. For example, a law student from North Carolina at the protest was charged with "domestic terrorism" and has not been allowed to attend her law school classes. So much for being presumed innocent. She was not the only one. Many of the arrest warrants issued had a designation of "domestic violent extremists."

Yet there is no such designation in federal law. It's why those who led the January 6, attempted insurrection, and

invaded the Capitol building with the aim of keeping Donald Trump as president, were charged with other criminal charges — mainly misdemeanors.

Terrorism, under the federal criminal code, is only charged for those allegedly tied to foreign groups designated as such (for example, ISIS and Al Qaeda). Forest Protectors

One of the groups behind the protests, "Stop Cop City," has demonstrated against the training facility for months. They say the center is further militarizing the police and will threaten the lives of marginalized people.

They pointed out that police have been raiding the forest for over seven months, destroying material by trashing camps and water supplies and threatening the lives of forest defenders. As the result, Tortuguita was murdered.

In a statement to an ABC news affiliate they concluded: "Protesters are only leveling the playing field & preventing future violence by disabling the economic machine of the Atlanta Police Foundation that seeks to sterilize all life within the Weelaunee Forest."

Other groups, like Defend the Atlanta Forest, have argued that the center will impact forests that are a vital part of the community.

Atlanta has one of the highest percentages of tree canopy in any major U.S. city, according to environmental advocacy group Trees Atlanta, and is home to wetlands and important migration sites for birds.

"The Atlanta Police Department seeks to turn 300 acres of forest into a tactical training compound featuring a mock city," the group said in a statement on their website.

"We refuse to let our forest be bulldozed in favor of the police and sold out to Hollywood." (Georgia has a growing film industry because of large tax incentives and impressive landscape.)

Neither the city of Atlanta nor the police department have responded to ABC News' request for comment on the accusations.

The center is expected to cost \$90 million and take up over 85 acres, with the "remaining portion of the 265-acres property as green space," according to the center's website, impacting a forest in Atlanta. The first phase of the training center is scheduled to open in late 2023.

It is city-owned property in unincorporated DeKalb County that is within the larger South River Forest, or "Weelaunee" as it's called by the land's Indigenous people.

Both the Democratic Atlanta mayor and Republican Georgia governor have argued that the new center will help officers "set a national standard for community engagement, neighborhood sensitivity and devotion to the civil rights of all citizens by law

enforcement," the center's website reads.

The Democratic mayor signed off on the expanded center in 2021, in the wake of mass protests organized by the Black Lives Matter Movement and local reformers calling for a radical restructuring of the policing system.

The mayor along with the governor, not surprisingly, have called protesters "outsiders" and charged them as "domestic terrorists." State of Emergency

Governor Brian Kemp declared a state of emergency on January 26 in response to ongoing protests in downtown Atlanta relating to Cop City. Kemp ordered the state's defense department to mobilize up to 1000 state National Guard troops to be called up to active duty "as necessary."

Authorities arrested six people on January 21 when demonstrations over the proposed training ground for the Atlanta Police Department. Protests started peacefully, escalated to involve shooting fireworks, smashing windows and igniting a police cruiser once protesters reached downtown.

Kemp's state of emergency declaration, according to local media reports, came as Atlanta braced for more protests against the facility, as well as potential unrest following the release of body camera footage of the fatal beating of Tyre Nichols by five Memphis, Tennessee police officers.

On March 5, more than 30 people were arrested after police said a group of "agitators" launched an attack on officers using commercial-grade fireworks.

Atlanta Police Department officials say that after attending an event near the site of the soon-to-be policing center,

a group of people changed into black clothing and entered the construction area. No officers were injured during the incident. According to police, some of those arrested sustained minor injuries, and several pieces of construction equipment at the site were destroyed.

After attending a music festival near the site of the soon-to-be police center, a group of people the police called "agitators" approached the officers. Twenty-three of the 35 protesters arrested, ranging from ages 18 to 49, were charged overnight with felony domestic terrorism. Atlanta Police Chief Darin Schierbaum claimed the charge reflects the "very violent" nature of the attack.

Police noted that 21 of the suspects charged with domestic terrorism were from out of state, some from as far away as Utah, Colorado, Arizona and New York. Two protesters charged are from other countries.

No officers were seriously injured during the protest. What the police and officials tell the public is mostly pro-police propaganda.

The opponents of "Cop City" remain vigilant and determined. They're gaining multiracial national support from both those demanding fundamental police reforms and environmental activists fighting to save the forests.

It is ironic that they are facing the same charge of domestic terrorism made against Martin Luther King, Jr. (who was from Atlanta) in fighting segregation across the South in the 1950s and 1960s before Jim Crow laws were overturned.

Cop City must be shut down!

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

## Fortress Europe: more migrants dying in the Mediterranean

**21 April 2023, by Dominique Pierre**

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) announced on Wednesday 12 April that at least 441 people died while trying to reach Europe; the toll was further increased at the beginning of April with the death of twenty people in the sinking of their boat off the coast of Tunisia, according to the Tunisian coast guard.

The UN agency is also investigating several cases of missing boats where there is no sign of survivors, no debris and no search and rescue operation has been carried out.

## **Mediterranean graveyard**

These frightening numbers are falling and becoming commonplace, “usual”. Who remembers the 250 people found on a beach in Calabria on Sunday 26 February? They had a name, a family, a country of origin. But for some of them, whose bodies will never be found and whose relatives will never be informed, their history and identity

disappeared on that Sunday in February in the anonymity of the turbulent waters of the Mediterranean, swallowing up their dream of a better life in Europe.

The refugees using this deadly Mediterranean graveyard route are mostly from Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea and Pakistan and a growing proportion of Tunisians, sometimes making the crossing with their families. The deep economic crisis, which has been coupled with a political crisis since the coup d’état of President Kaïs Saïed in 2021, has pushed many Tunisians to leave their country in any way they can. In addition, President Saïed’s xenophobic rhetoric against sub-Saharan Africans has triggered a wave of expulsions.

## **Tougher laws in Italy**

The IOM believes that delays in search and rescue operations are to blame for 127 of the 441 deaths at sea. For

years, sea rescue NGOs have deplored both the lack of European resources and the growing obstacles imposed on them by certain countries, including Italy. The Italian Parliament passed a law with a decree, signed on 2 January 2023, which obliges humanitarian ships to carry out only one rescue at a time, and then to immediately reach a port of disembarkation, which is often far from the rescue area. A few days after the adoption of this law, on 7 January, the humanitarian vessel Geo Barents was detained for 20 days in a Sicilian port and forced to reach the port of Ancona in Italy, some 1,500 km away, after having carried out only one rescue.

NGOs such as SOS Méditerranée and Médecins sans Frontières denounced the decree as contrary to the principle of helping anyone in distress at sea. But EU governments and institutions are doing nothing to prevent the Italian Prime Minister’s criminal policy; it is a matter of public concern.

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

# **Two Shootings Symbolic of American Malaise of Fear and Hatred**

**20 April 2023, by Dan La Botz**

The first incident happened on Thursday, April 13, in a quiet suburban neighborhood in Kansas City, Missouri when Ralph Paul Yarl, a sixteen-year-old boy, went to pick up his younger brother and accidentally went to the wrong house. Yarl, an excellent student and musician, stood waiting for a while at the door. Then Andrew Lester, an 85-year-old retired aircraft mechanic, came to the door, and shot Yarl in the head. The boy, wounded and bleeding went to three houses where he was turned away

before a woman called for help and aided him.

Police did not immediately arrest Lester, who later turned himself in and was released on a \$200,000 bond. He was charged with first-degree assault and armed criminal action, both felonies. Lester later said, he was afraid that the boy was going to break into his house, though police said there was “a racial component” to the shooting. Lester pleaded not guilty and may use Missouri’s “stand your

ground” law which permits one to defend himself, or the “castle law” (so-called based on the old saying that “A man’s home is his castle”) which permits the use of arms to stop intruders to defend himself—though Yarl never threatened Lester and never crossed the threshold into his house. Remarkably, doctors believe that Yarl will have a complete physical recovery.

The second shooting occurred on April 15 in Hebron, New York, 208 miles

north of New York City and 60 miles north of Albany, the state capital. It is a quiet rural town with a population of just 1,800 people. There, a group of young people driving in two cars were looking for a friend's place when they drove into the driveway of the wrong house. Realizing their mistake, they turned their cars around and were driving off when the 65-year-old homeowner and owner of a small contracting business named Kevin Monahan stepped out on his porch and fired two shots, one of which killed Kaylin Gillis, a young woman 20 years old, an honors student, a competitive cheerleader, and an aspiring artist.

Sheriff Jeffrey J. Murphy, who happens to know Gillis' family, said "There was no reason for

Mr. Monahan to feel threatened," Sheriff Murphy said, "especially as it appears the vehicle was leaving."

Neither man had anything to fear. But a 2019 study by the journal *Nature*, found that "most research comparing gun owners to non-gun owners suggests that ownership is rooted in fear." Many say they own a firearm for self-defense, but those most likely to own guns are among the least likely to face victimization. These two old white men, living in fear, and at least on Monahan's case filled with hatred by the conservative news he watched, had nothing to fear from these two young people, and yet struck out at the young black man and the young white woman.

We don't know the political views of these men, but Monahan, a small

business owner, and Lester, a highly skilled worker, both white, are typical of the Donald Trump's voting base. And young people like Yarl and Gillis, though we don't know their politics, are like much of the voting base of the progressive Democrats. The shots were a kind of dramatization of the national sickness of fear and hatred stoked by the right.

Following the shooting of Yarl, 1,500 of the 1,800 of his classmates at Staley High School, both black and white joined what they called a "unity march," carrying signs that read, "Justice for Ralph." Yes, justice for Ralph. And for Kaylin, And yes gun control. but we must also stop to the right which is stoking fear and hatred.

20 April 2023

## A bleak future for the Sahel

19 April 2023, by **Paul Martial**

Jihadist fighters in the Sahel are advancing inexorably, to the extent that countries on the west coast of Africa, previously spared, are under attack. This is the case for Ghana, Benin and Togo, which has just renewed its curfew in the north of the country. The juntas that took power in Mali and then Burkina Faso on the pretext of improving the security situation are hardly doing any better than their predecessors.

### Different tactics

The putschists in Mali decided to intensify military operations against jihadist groups with the help of mercenaries from the Russian company Wagner. As a result, the number of civilian deaths in 2022 doubled. One third of the victims were murdered by the Malian army and its Russian auxiliaries.

Burkina Faso has taken a different path. The junta there organised the enlistment of civilians into the

Volunteers for the Defence of the Fatherland (VDP). The result is not very convincing, as these VDPs tend to focus on the Peuhl community, accusing them of terrorism. In the village of Ouahigouya, for example, the military and the VDP have massacred teenagers and children in atrocious conditions simply because they were Peul.

In Mali as in Burkina Faso, the strategy remains the same. Use military force to settle the crisis. It is the same strategy that the French army, with Serval and Barkhane, has employed... with the success that we know.

Of the three countries, Niger is perhaps the one that is doing best. The fact that it managed to settle the Tuareg rebellions in the 1990s has created a peaceful situation. Another element is the authorities' stated willingness to engage in dialogue with all armed groups, including those of the Islamic State. The aim is to attempt a political resolution of the

conflict.

### Identical repression

The war situation in all three countries is the alibi for restricting democratic freedoms. In Mali, criticism of the junta is considered a crime. For example, the African Social Democratic Party is threatened with dissolution because its president, Ismaël Sacko, made "insulting remarks about the transitional authorities" during an interview with RFI. Omar Mariko, one of the leaders of the radical left, is still living in clandestinity. The press is obliged to support the patriotic effort and the slightest criticism is seen as treason. The government of Burkina Faso also acts in the same way. It recently expelled two journalists following the report on the Ouahigouya massacre of civilians. Human rights activists are forcibly incorporated into the VDP.



Niger is also not left out of this repressive cycle. Abdoulaye Seydou, coordinator of M62, a platform of civil society organizations, was arrested.

Behind the repression lies the survival of these regimes which, unable to honour their promise of improved security, maintain pressure on the population.

## Suffering of the populations

The Sahel is experiencing an increase in refugee populations. They are caught between the regular forces and the various armed jihadist or community groups. Each group carries out reprisal policies by attacking civilians who, according to their ethnicity, are supposed to belong to a particular camp.

Some towns, such as Sebba, Dori and Djibo, are under blockade by the jihadists. Food crises are looming throughout the region. Estimates of the number of people suffering from

hunger amount to more than 40 million. The educational situation is not good. The jihadists have forced the closure of more than 11,000 schools in the territories they control. Hundreds of thousands of children are thus left without schooling, jeopardising their future. Living together in the Sahel is becoming increasingly difficult. But despite the difficulties, it is still possible to find harmony between communities.

*Translated by International Viewpoint from l'Anticapitaliste.*

# Polarization and protest in Ciudad Juárez

18 April 2023, by Dawn Marie Paley

"Beginning on March 27, when the tragedy happened, hundreds of migrants began to gather outside of the National Migration Institute," said Gerónimo Fong, from the Movement Against Militarization in Juárez. By mid week last week, the protest camp was quiet, with just a handful of people present among a lot of tents set up on the sidewalk in front of the National Migration Institute (INM).

According to activists, rumors that the US will let people cross the border are spread regularly and migrants—mostly Venezuelans, but also people and families from Central America—move toward the border.

"The rumors that the door is being opened for migrants have been constant," said Fong. "Every so often the rumor spreads and some of the migrants go and hand themselves over in the United States, only to be deported," said Fong in an interview last week.

Activists in the city are calling what happened in the INM facilities a "state crime" in which all three levels of government participated. A federal judge in Chihuahua has requested Francisco Garduño, the head of the INM, and the organization's delegate in Chihuahua state, retired admiral Salvador González Guerrero, appear

before the court.

## Allied organization

Compañeres in Juarez have been organizing and coordinating together with migrants in an especially intense way in the weeks since the fire.

First, they arrived at the scene of the tragedy to assist with basic necessities. Later, they met with migrants to determine how best they could lend political support. It didn't take long for them to articulate a support network and begin to protest together, something that has historically been difficult as most of the migrants in the city are there only temporarily.

Local activists alerted others that President Andrés Manuel López Obrador would be travelling to Ciudad Juarez on March 31, and migrants expressed a desire to speak with him. That day, a peaceful demonstration was called at the Colegio de Bachilleres, near the central park in the city's downtown, where López Obrador participated in a private event related to his social programs.

"We got in front of his truck to speak to him and ask him to address the migrants," said Cony Gutiérrez, an

activist and resident of the city. But instead of listening or speaking with migrants, the president accused the people gathered of having been sent by Maru Campos, the conservative National Action Party (PAN) governor of Chihuahua.

"No, the Movement Against Militarization has no relation with political parties," Gutiérrez told Ojalá. But López Obrador's words shifted media coverage of the action, obscuring the demands of the migrants and imposing instead the theme of confrontation between political parties.

Gutiérrez, like many in Juárez, is herself a migrant. She arrived in the city from a rural community in 1992, and worked for years in the maquilas before starting university. She has been involved in activism for decades, accompanying mothers of women who have been killed or disappeared, and working with migrants in the city. Her political clarity and commitment have been sharpened in the streets of one of the most hostile cities in the Americas.

"With his words and his gestures, the president eliminates our political agency, as women, by saying we're pawns of someone else," said Gutiérrez.

Following the confrontation with the president on the last day of March, activists and migrants in Juárez organized a series of vigils, a Way of the Cross procession and other political actions to demand justice and remember the 40 people killed in the detention center.

## In the face of xenophobia, direct action

The shutting down of the US border for people seeking asylum began before the pandemic, and it led to the streets of Juárez filling with people who are migrating being increasingly stuck on the Mexico side of the border. The first to be exposed to this system were from Central America and Haiti. More recently, since Title 42 was expanded, there are many Venezuelans.

Cruz Pérez Cuéllar, the mayor of Juárez, who was a PAN activist before joining the Morena Party, has been accused of promoting xenophobia

against migrants. Two weeks before the fire, Pérez Cuéllar said that, with respect to migrants in the city, "The truth is that our level of patience is running out."

Pérez Cuéllar is in charge of the municipal police, who have an increasing role in policing migration. Well before the fire there had been accusations of violent raids and harassment against women migrants.

"The police, be they municipal, or state level, can put [a migrant] in jail just for being in the street or for getting on a bus, that's been the policy since López Obrador took office," said Graciela Delgado Ramírez, an activist in the city. "Here there's a wall, but it's not like Trump's wall. Here the wall is made up of people, where the National Guard, the police, and the bus stations won't let anyone through."

Delgado Ramírez is 63 years old and has been fighting for social justice in Ciudad Juárez for decades. She told me the mood in Juárez is different from what it was like prior to the arrival of thousands of migrants.

"The mayor and his team have taken it upon themselves to create an environment of xenophobia, which hasn't always existed here," she said in an interview with Ojalá. "People, especially on social media, are expressing a lot of hate against the people who are on the bridges, or elsewhere... Even so, there's many people who have responded with solidarity."

In the last weeks, migrants in Juárez have occupied two abandoned buildings, cleaning and organizing them to host those arriving to the city, so they don't need to be in the streets.

"They are in a very vulnerable and difficult situation, where it might seem like it's only possible to think of one's self, and they've taken over two spaces," said Gutiérrez. "That represents an incredible level of organization, and that, to me, is political."

April 15 2023

Source [New Politics](#), originally [ojala.mx](#)

# Abortion at the Center of American Politics

17 April 2023, by **Dan La Botz**

Every Republican candidate and politician make the restriction of abortion a major plank in their platforms and a slogan on the stump. The attack on women's right to abortion is an attack on women's health, on their family planning, on their careers and income, and on their full equality in American society. And there is also the question of whether the courts will be guided by science or by religion and politics.

The Republican strategy may ultimately prove a mistake since it has led women, independents, and Democrats to vote against them in larger numbers and created a new generation of young feminist activists.

Recent contradictory rulings on the use of mifepristone, the abortion pill, by two federal judges, one in Texas and one in Washington State, has now brought that issue before the Republican dominated and anti-abortion Supreme Court. Mifepristone now accounts for over half of all abortions and its elimination would have an especially devastating impact on women who live in the 13 states that have banned abortions and who can now illegally access the pills by mail-order—but without the support of a local physician. Abortion bans and restrictions have the greatest impact on Black, Latino, and low-income white women who do not have resources to travel to other states for abortion services.

Meanwhile in Florida the Republican dominated legislature passed and Governor Ron DeSantis signed a ban on abortions after six weeks of pregnancy, a date by which many women don't yet realize that they are pregnant. A candidate for the Republican presidential nomination, he has now set the standard for Republican legislation on abortion.

Polls, however, show that 61 percent (Pew poll) to 85 percent (Gallup poll) support women's right to abortion, though many Americans believe that there should be some restrictions on late-term abortion. In state referendums in the November 2022 elections, Kentucky rejected further abortion restrictions, Vermont

restored abortion rights, Michigan made abortion a constitutional right, as did California. Kansas rejected abortion restrictions in August of 2022.

Evangelical Christians are the driving force behind the abortion issue. The National Evangelical Association states that "abortion on demand for reasons of personal convenience, social adjustment or economic advantage is morally wrong, and [the NEA] expresses its firm opposition to any legislation designed to make abortion possible for these reasons." Some state and federal legislators, including a few who are Evangelical preachers, have called for making

abortion a crime. "The taking of a life is murder, and it is illegal," said Louisiana State Rep. Danny McCormick.

The abortion issue is fundamentally about patriarchy, about preserving male supremacy and female inferiority. The Republicans, the defenders of "traditional families and family values," not only oppose abortion, they also opposed contraception, as became clear in a July 2022 vote on the Right to Contraception Act, when 195 Republicans voted against.

The Democrats and Republicans position could not be more different.

The Republican Party platform states that "the unborn child has a fundamental right to life which cannot be infringed," while the Democrats supports access to "safe and legal abortion." The Democratic Socialist of America supports women's right to abortion and has campaigned to defend it. Feminists in the far left in the United States historically raised the slogan, "Free abortion on demand!" Beyond the immediate issue, the Supreme Court's decision could set a dangerous prejudice if health care is determined not by scientists and doctors, but by politics and religion.

16 April 2023

## Homophobic hate in Uganda

16 April 2023, by **Paul Martial**

What has mobilized parliamentary activity in Uganda is not the rampant inflation or massive youth unemployment, nor the deplorable state of schools, hospitals and health clinics, human rights abuses or the ravages of the consequences of global warming in the countryside, but homosexuality which is said to be a terrible danger for the country.

### One of the worst LGBTIphobic laws in Africa

In the midst of this homophobic turmoil, there has been a race to the bottom in terms of repression. The initial draft provided for a ten-year prison sentence for same-sex sexual relations. After the debates, the parliament tightened things up considerably. Of the 529 MPs in the House, 389 were present and only two voted against. This means that more than a hundred parliamentarians chose to stay away from the debate by choosing the empty chair policy. On the opposition side, the National Unity Platform welcomed the law.

The law adopted provides for life imprisonment or the death penalty in certain cases. It also obliges anyone, including family and friends, to report any gay or lesbian person they know to the authorities and prohibits renting to same-sex couples.

Homosexuals are no longer the only ones in the crosshairs as those who "promote" homosexuality are potentially guilty. This is a vague notion that allows for the repression of human rights activists who defend homosexuals. SMUG (Sexual Minorities Uganda), an anti-discrimination organisation, was already banned in August 2022.

### Anti-gay rants

Obviously, homophobic policies in Africa are dressed up in an anti-colonialist discourse. Homosexuality is said to have been introduced by the colonists and the decadent West. This discourse denies the reality that homosexual practices existed long before colonisation. The terms referring to it are found in many African languages such as Kirundi, Kiswahili, Hausa, Herero, Xhosa, Bafia

or Wawihé.

In fact, in most African countries, the repressive legislative arsenal against homosexuality dates back to the colonial period.

African homophobes who take offence at the solidarity of anti-discrimination activists in Western countries should put their own house in order. As Fox Odoi-Oywelowo, one of the two MPs who courageously fought this law, said, "Last year I was told that these Pentecostal communities spent over \$26 million in East Africa to - again - promote this anti-homosexuality law." One of their actions is to organize Prayer Breakfasts across the country every Saturday, to distil the hatred of homosexuals, which is widely echoed by the country's Muslim community leaders.

### The solidarity imperative

The promulgation of this law depends on the signature of President Yoweri Museveni. In 2014 he had already initialled a similar law and his

homophobic comments leave no doubt about his intentions unless there is strong international pressure. Indeed, the approval of this measure could lead to a significant loss of Western aid to the country. The European Union and the USA have expressed their deep disagreement with a law that does not respect the African

Union's declaration that "every individual has the duty to respect and consider his fellow human beings without discrimination".

Solidarity mobilizations must be extended, in conjunction with gay rights organizations both in Uganda

and across the continent. We must demand that France, like the European Union, commit to systematically offering refugee status to all people persecuted because of their sexual orientation.

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

# Russian opposition activists are threatened with expulsion from supposedly neutral Kyrgyzstan

15 April 2023, by **Kamila Eshalieva**

Yulia and Ilya Kuleshov were among the first Russian citizens to move to Kyrgyzstan last spring, just after the invasion of Ukraine. The couple had been publicly active back in St Petersburg - Yulia ran a foundation that helped victims of sexual violence, while Ilya was involved in urban improvement projects - but they no longer wanted to live and work in Russia.

"We didn't know anything about Central Asia, but we really wanted to visit the region. We were told that Kyrgyzstan is an 'island of democracy', so we decided: we need to go there," Yulia recalled. They also knew that the influx of Russians to other countries such as Georgia had become a source of tension.

Officially, Kyrgyzstan has taken a neutral stance on Russia's war in Ukraine - as the president, Sadyr Japarov, said two weeks after the invasion. Following the Kremlin's announcement last autumn of a partial mobilisation, Japarov [also said](#) that Russians in Kyrgyzstan should not fear extradition to their homeland.

"We do not see any harm [from newly arrived Russian citizens]. On the contrary, we see a lot of benefits," he said. Kyrgyzstan appeals partly because Russian is widely spoken, housing is relatively inexpensive and

the registration system for foreign citizens is simple.

For some Russians, the country is a temporary base before they move on elsewhere; for others, it's become their second home.

After arriving in Bishkek, the Kyrgyz capital, the Kuleshows - who had long dreamed of having their own space for political and cultural events - rented a large two-storey house in the southern part of the city. They created a meeting area called "[Red Roof](#)" (after the colour of the building's roof tiles) on the ground floor, and a communal living space on the floor above.

Red Roof quickly became an important hub. New arrivals from Russia found help integrating into life in Kyrgyzstan, while locals made friends with the newcomers. People came to learn about Kyrgyz culture, hold musical evenings and masterclasses, write letters to Russian political prisoners and discuss the fallout of the invasion.

"I enjoyed interacting with people who were in the same position as me, as well as with locals who were eager to connect and talk," said Anton Vakhranov, who moved to Bishkek from Moscow with the help of a relocation programme for Russian activists. He had found his first

months in Bishkek difficult - he didn't know anyone in the city - but Red Roof soon became a place "where he felt comfortable".

But on 23 March, Red Roof suddenly announced it was closing due to pressure from law enforcement officials. As the Kuleshows have discovered, Kyrgyzstan is in the midst of its own democratic decline.

## Detention and warnings

On the evening of 24 February 2023 (the first anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine), Russian and Kyrgyz residents, including Yulia and Ilya, hung yellow and blue ribbons on a street in Bishkek. The next morning they planned to lay flowers in a park in memory of the victims of the invasion.

As soon as they arrived, Yulia said, they were surrounded by men who claimed to be park employees, but then showed identification cards from Kyrgyzstan's State Committee for National Security (GKNB). According to Yulia, they detained the group without explanation, confiscated their phones and threatened them with criminal charges of "inciting ethnic hatred".



The attitude of the police changed only when the activists' lawyer arrived. The detainees received a fine for "violating the conditions of their stay" in the country, with the police describing the incident as "a conversation about preventing provocations aimed at drawing Kyrgyzstan into the conflict between Russia and Ukraine."

A few days later, the police detained several Russians living at the Red Roof centre. Yulia said they were given a warning: "One more violation and everyone will be expelled from Kyrgyzstan."

The officers also admitted they had a "dossier" on each member of the community, and produced folders containing personal data and photographs.

"It turned out that they had been collecting this [information] for a long time. There was even a folder with photos of me and my daughter," said Yulia. She believes Red Roof had been under surveillance - she repeatedly noticed men standing outside the house, photographing those who entered and left.

The police also forbade them from dealing with "hot topics" including political prisoners, feminism and LGBT issues, and warned that Yulia would be expelled from Kyrgyzstan if she took part in the city's International Women's Day protest, only grudgingly allowed to go ahead in the first place, on 8 March.

Yulia said that she and her husband are "in limbo" and do not know what to do next. Ilya is involved with some local urban improvement projects, while Yulia is writing a Master's thesis at the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek. "We can be deported at any moment if we continue to do what we consider important and interesting," she said.

"Everything can be considered a violation. If I feel bad because of the war in Ukraine, I should keep quiet, otherwise I am 'inciting ethnic hatred'," Kuleshova explained. "But I have no reason to stay here under these conditions. We have already lived under such a regime in Russia,

and we know what it can lead to."

openDemocracy contacted Kyrgyzstan's parliamentary ombudsman for human rights, but did not receive a response.

## Clampdown on anti-war protests

Kyrgyzstan's reputation as a "island of democracy" in a generally authoritarian region has been bolstered by the regular mass protests against corrupt, autocratic rulers over the past 20 years. This strong vein of public criticism of state officials has often been seen as a check on the accumulation of power.

Indeed, current president Japarov [came to power](#) after protests broke out over election results in the country in 2020 - the opposition politician was freed from prison during the chaos.

Yet for the past three years, [reports](#) by the US non-profit think tank Freedom House have ranked Kyrgyzstan as "not free", replacing its previous status as a "partly free country".

Last October, for example, more than two dozen activists and politicians were arrested after they opposed the [Kyrgyz government's decision to transfer a much-disputed reservoir to neighbouring Uzbekistan](#). Many are still in prison, facing charges of "attempting to organise mass riots".

Shortly afterwards, Kyrgyzstan's Ministry of Culture blocked the website of Radio Azattyk (the Kyrgyz service of US-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty), a leading source of news and comment in the country. A Bishkek court later [upheld the decision](#), refusing to recognise the block as illegal.

In November, prominent investigative journalist Bolot Temirov was [expelled](#) from the country, after he published an investigation into alleged corruption by relatives of the head of the GKNB, Kamchybek Tashiev. The latter denied the allegations against his family.

Russian activist Raushan Valiullin, who arrived in Bishkek after Russia's September mobilisation, has

personally experienced this crackdown on peaceful protests - something he's familiar with from home, where he combined opposition activities with his job as a history teacher in Tatarstan.

He volunteered for Russian opposition leader Alexey Navalny's campaign to become Moscow's mayor in 2013, opposed Russia's deeply unpopular 2018 pension reforms and has been detained more than once for participating in protests. When he finally decided to leave Russia, following the invasion of Ukraine, he chose Kyrgyzstan because of its anti-authoritarian reputation.

"When we were choosing a country, I put a big exclamation mark in front of Kyrgyzstan," says Valiullin. "To me, it seemed the most democratic country in the region. The people know how to put insolent rulers in their place. I was attracted to it."

On 21 January this year, rallies were held in dozens of cities around the world in support of Navalny and other Russian political prisoners. More than 30 people, including Valiullin and his family, gathered in the centre of Bishkek, near the landmark Kyrgyz National Philharmonic building.

While demonstrators in other cities carried placards and banners, this was not possible for Russia's new emigres in Kyrgyzstan - only Kyrgyz citizens were allowed to participate by police in the rally.

Valiullin said that police officers approached his group, even though they were not chanting anything, and asked them to move to another location. When they did so - to Bishkek's Gorky Square - police told them to disperse after asking if they were Kyrgyz. "They said: 'Since you are Russians, there's no reason for you to protest here,'" Valiullin explained.

For more than a year, city authorities have banned protests and rallies in a number of locations in the centre of Bishkek, including near the Russian Embassy - a move that is in breach of Kyrgyzstan's Constitution, according to human rights defenders.

"After the start of the war, Kyrgyzstan declared its neutral position. Then the authorities began to limit the activity of citizens – of Kyrgyzstan and other countries – who wanted to protest what was happening in Ukraine. There have been administrative proceedings, and fines against them," Kyrgyz human rights defender Dinara Oshurahunova told openDemocracy.

Oshurahunova believes there are risks for any activist who speaks openly against Russia's war – regardless of their citizenship.

She added: "Rallies in support of Russia have been ignored [by the

authorities]. No measures were taken against those who participated in them."

The facts seem to uphold Oshurahunova's claims. Soon after the invasion last spring, several rallies against Russian aggression were held in Bishkek. All ended the same way – with the detention of activists. But this did not happen at rallies held in solidarity with Russia, including a concert that went ahead without official permission.

"If law enforcement wasn't previously looking into Russians [in Kyrgyzstan],

they are now," said Oshurahunova.

Bishkek police chief Azamat Nogoibayev has said that demonstrations have not been banned in Bishkek – and that the fact there are fewer protests means there is a "stabilisation" in the country.

"The protests haven't stopped, we just limited the places where you can hold them. It's inconvenient for city residents – they complained, especially those who live and work in the centre," Nogoibayev told local media on 31 March.

[Open Democracy](#)

## Comrade Bishop

14 April 2023, by **François Coustal**

At the age of 87, Bishop Jacques Gaillot has died. To pay tribute to him, the French Bishops' Conference has just declared: "Over and above certain positions that may have divided people, we remember that he was above all concerned about the poorest and the peripheries."

Let's charitably overlook the term "'peripheries". But it is true that on a number of so-called 'social' questions – notably the recognition of divorce, the marriage of priests, the use of condoms to combat the spread of AIDS, the ordination of women and the rights of homosexuals – Bishop Gaillot expressed progressive opinions which were absolutely contrary to the dogmas maintained by the Catholic Church.

His public and even media stances were felt by the clerical establishment as provocations. Until the sanction: in 1995, the Vatican withdrew his position as bishop of Evreux. The clerical imagination being apparently limitless, he was then appointed honorary bishop "in partibus" of the diocese of Partenia. A diocese theoretically located in Mauritania but, in reality, a purely phantom diocese insofar as there are no longer

any churches or Catholics there... for centuries! Now a bishop without a diocese, Mgr Gaillot was to make Partenia the symbol of the struggle of the "sans". [2]

In fact, beyond his personal characteristics, Bishop Gaillot's interventions were part of a very specific moment in the history of the Catholic Church where, in the wake of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the liberation struggles and social fights had managed to make their way through: the movement to establish worker priests, the "preferential option for the poor" at the origin of liberation theology, the investment of many activists of the Young Christian Workers (YCW) and Catholic Worker Action (CWA) in worker trade unionism (CGT and CFDT) the involvement of Christians in supporting national liberation struggles (Algeria, Vietnam), the political radicalization to the left of "progressive Christians" with, in particular, the creation and development of the United Socialist Party (PSU), etc.

But this very specific moment was also relatively short-lived (on the scale of the history of the Church). Even when

sanctioned, Mgr Gaillot remained faithful in his own way to this Church, without denying or even weakening his convictions. But without weighing in, even in the slightest way. For since then the Church has taken an increasingly reactionary course, its latest notable achievement being the official and resolute support of the Catholic hierarchy for the homophobes of the Manif pour tous...

But rather than raising (without any real expertise in the matter!) improbable theological debates, activists of the social movement and the radical left can, in order to pay tribute to him, retrace a few episodes in the life of this rather unusual bishop. In fact, this exercise amounts to evoking some of the main events that marked the development of the most diverse social movements during the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century. For the man who has sometimes been called "the bishop of the homeless" – "homeless" as in undocumented or homeless – has rarely missed an opportunity to put his status and notoriety at the service of the struggles of the most exploited and discriminated against sectors of the population.

A few dates inevitably come to mind, starting with 1989. Under the impetus of the radical left - in this case, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire - a collective was set up to organise a counter-summit at the beginning of July on the occasion of the official ceremonies commemorating the Bicentenary of the French Revolution. Under the slogan "debt, apartheid, colonies, enough is enough", the counter-summit wants to give back to the excluded the place they deserve by assuming the heritage of the sans-culottes: a demonstration to denounce the summit of the rich, the debt that crushes the people, apartheid in South Africa and the existence of the last colonies (notably French). Among the initiatives of the counter-summit, there is a big concert at the Place de la Bastille (with the singer Renaud, the Mano Negra, as well as the South African anti-apartheid singer Johnny Clegg) and a demonstration. But also a press conference gathering the main personalities supporting the campaign: Alain Krivine, the writer Gilles Perrault, Catherine Sinet, Jack Ralite (former communist minister), Georges Wolinski (assassinated in January 2015 in the offices of Charlie Hebdo), the cartoonists Loup and Siné, the emblematic leader of the Carnation Revolution Otelo de Carvalho, trade union representatives from the CGT, CFDT and FEN. As well as Mgr Gaillot...

The invasion of Kuwait by the armies of the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in August 1990 served as a pretext for the constitution of a vast imperialist coalition (35 states) under the aegis of the United States, with the participation of the United Kingdom and France. In January 1991, this coalition led to the "Desert Shield" operation, i.e. the invasion of Iraq. In the autumn of 1990, many initiatives were taken within the French left to oppose the coming war. This was notably the case with a manifesto entitled "Appeal of the 75 against the Gulf War" which demanded "the

withdrawal of all French, American and British troops". Among the main signatories of the appeal, we find Mgr Gaillot, alongside Gilles Perrault, René Dumont, the journalist Denis Langlois and the author Thierry Jonquet. The appeal was at the initiative of a large-scale unitary demonstration in January 1991, a few days before the start of the invasion. The slogan most often used - "What bullshit war is" - is a reference to the poem "Barbara" by Jacques Prévert.

In 1994, Mgr Gaillot became involved with the homeless (and the poorly housed) during the occupation of a building on rue du Dragon, in the 6th arrondissement. This occupation, which, by definition, transgressed the generally accepted legality, led to an increased visibility of the issues of poor housing and gave considerable media coverage to the association "Droit au logement" (led in particular by Jean-Claude Amara). At the same time, a new association was created to bring together the struggles of the homeless: "Droits Devant! Among its founders were Professor Albert Jacquard, the singer Jacques Higelin, Léon Schwartzberg and Mgr Gaillot.

In August 1995, Mgr Gaillot "repeated" his activism in favour of peace and disarmament: he embarked on the Rainbow Warrior, a boat chartered by Greenpeace to denounce the French government's decision to resume a campaign of military nuclear testing in the Pacific.

In 1996, the defence of undocumented migrants against the persecution of the government (Alain Juppé) constituted a new field of commitment: with Professor Léon Schwartzberg, Mgr Gaillot organised the "occupation" of the church of Saint-Bernard, in the east of Paris by several hundred African undocumented migrants, in order to draw attention to their situation and demand their regularisation. In reality, this "occupation" had been

largely negotiated with the parish priest (and even the archbishopric). It was going well until the government decided to expel them, thus offering to the stunned world this appalling image of a member of the "forces of order" smashing the church door with an axe... Among the personalities who took turns to accompany the undocumented migrants and who immediately found themselves in the streets of the 11th arrondissement to demonstrate, we find once again Alain Krivine, Stéphane Hessel, Léon Schwartzberg, Ariane Mnouchkine and Emmanuelle Béart. And, of course, Jacques Gaillot.

Most of the initiatives and positions we have just recalled date back to the decades that saw the emergence and development of "social movements". But we can also recall that, despite his age, Jacques Gaillot had in no way given up the fight: we thus find him among the signatories of the marches against austerity organised by the Front de Gauche in the mid-2010s or, much more recently, in the spring of 2022, in support of the camp organized by the DA L(homeless movement) at the Place de la Bastille .

In conclusion, let us add that Mgr Gaillot did not limit his commitments to the field of what is commonly called "social movements": he has sometimes courageously ventured into the realm of politics, even party politics. Thus, in the spring of 2002, alongside the journalist Daniel Mermet, the writer Dan Franck and the film-maker Ken Loach, Jacques Gaillot was one of the personalities - actually quite rare, but of quality! - to support a brand new presidential candidate, Olivier Besancenot...

Jacques Gaillot, "bishop of the homeless, the undocumented, the unemployed": present!

*Translated by **International Viewpoint** from **Gauche Ecosocialiste**.*

# The Ireland of Memory and the Ireland of Reality - Biden's Visit to Ireland

13 April 2023, by **Joseph Healy**

Biden makes his Irishness clear and has always made relations with Ireland essential to any relationship with the UK, especially concerning the North of Ireland. Indeed, commentators have said that the real special relationship, turbocharged since Brexit, is between the US and Ireland. Ireland is English-speaking and provides a bridge to the EU, with many US multinationals headquartered in its capital, Dublin. Most of the presidential visit will be in the Republic with an address to the Dail, only the fourth president to do so, and ancestral visits to Counties Louth and Mayo.

The trip to the North of Ireland was meant to include an address to the Stormont Assembly, but as the DUP has frozen its operation, that is now impossible. The official reason for the trip is to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, which the US played a large part in securing, both through the chairmanship of Senator George Mitchell and the support of President Clinton. There is an irony in the DUP blocking the Stormont Executive functioning as they also refused to support the Good Friday Agreement, which was signed in their absence.

Much has changed since the Good Friday Agreement was signed. In the North, the demographics have altered, and Sinn Fein is now the Assembly's largest party. It is clear to all that the days of Unionist hegemony and of "A Protestant parliament for a Protestant people", as the Northern statelet's

first PM, James Craig, said in the 1920s, are long gone. The Windsor Framework has demonstrated the limitations of Unionist power and that the British government sees them as a hindrance and wants to get a deal with the EU. The Holy Grail for the Brexiteers and the Tory government is a trade deal with the US, and Biden made clear that there was no hope of that unless peace was declared with the EU and the Irish border situation defused.

In the North of Ireland, apart from the DUP, most parties are happy with the region being in the EU Single Market and benefiting from that. Sinn Fein, and now the SDLP as well, are pushing hard for a border poll, and most observers think that with the major political shift in the North of Ireland, that will happen soon. This could not have been foreseen when the Agreement was signed 25 years ago, but the trajectory is towards reunifying Ireland, and both the Americans and the British are aware of this.

In the South, Biden will address a Dail, where Sinn Fein's leader, Mary Lou Mc Donald, is the opposition leader and, with her party running at 35% in the polls, widely regarded as the next Taoiseach. In Washington this year, at the St Patrick's Day celebrations and events, Mc Donald was feted and appeared everywhere, almost upstaging the Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, while Jeffrey Donaldson, the DUP leader, was ignored and

sidelined.

The wind is blowing in Sinn Fein's direction, and the Americans are keen to have a good relationship with the possible new government. Apart from Brexit and relations with the EU, the US will also be concerned with the debate on NATO and neutrality in Ireland. The Irish government has put out feelers about whether Ireland, neutral since its foundation, should join NATO like Finland and Sweden. There has been no groundswell to do so for geographical and historic reasons. Geographical because Ireland does not share a border with Russia and still regards Eastern Europe as distant. Historic, as Ireland has always considered its traditional neutrality, particularly about wars involving the UK, as important. Sinn Fein has been one of the leading voices in the pro-neutrality camp, and Biden will likely seek to assure them that there will be no pressure from the US to join NATO.

So in many respects, Biden's visit occurs at a critical turning point in Irish history and is also significant in that he could be the last US President of Irish heritage at a time when US foreign policy's foremost focus is turning away from the Ireland of memory and towards the Indo Pacific region, and as Irish American identity slowly declines and the US becomes a demographically very different country.

12 April 2023

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

## "Peace plan" and "need for negotiations"?



**12 April 2023, by Jacques Babel**

Xi Jinping visited Moscow at the end of March for a warm meeting with Putin. Macron and Ursula von der Leyen (President of the European Commission) visited China in early April. At each of these meetings, the powerful earnestly assert that they want to do everything possible to bring about a “de-escalation” in Ukraine. But it is clear that all this remains in the purely symbolic domain... whereas the serious and concrete discussions between the “big players” concern the agreements and economic power relations between them!

## **What Chinese “peace plan”?**

The twelve-point “Chinese peace plan” was launched just after China abstained on a UN resolution demanding the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine, and as the terrible war entered its second year. On studying it, one is forced to note that it is a superb balancing act: Xi Jinping’s teams generally assert that the sovereignty of states must be respected within their borders, without ever having condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine or raised the question of troop withdrawal. The two sides are put on a equal footing on the need to resume dialogue and a ceasefire as soon as possible, but the responsibility of the United States and its allies is heavily emphasized. The main axis of pressure on Moscow is a

dry denunciation of any nuclear drift that only the Russian authorities have brandished.

Beyond that, the points addressed by the Chinese plan consist of declarations of principle on the necessary protection of civilians, the need to reduce the logic of the Cold War, the manoeuvres of the military blocs and the fight against remilitarization... but fail completely in terms of concrete proposals. All in all, one is led to believe that China is trying to adopt the posture of a “reasonable” power in the eyes of world public opinion, refusing, unlike the others, to throw oil on the fire - but placing itself in a power relationship where the interests of the people are the last concern.

## **Without justice there can be no peace**

The Putin regime continues to press for the weapons that China seems cautiously to deny it, and Sergei Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister, has curtly rejected any option for a rapid ceasefire in Ukraine in the name of Russia’s fundamental interests.

And it is this issue that remains an unthinkable one for those who see themselves as “the peace camp”. Indeed, even if the rejection of Nato is understandable in the long term, in the short term what is inescapable for

the peoples of the whole region, starting with the Ukrainian and Russian peoples, is the affirmation of a fascist, imperialist and colonialist Putinian power.

No Ukrainian, Kazakh, citizen of the Baltic States, Russian or Belarusian opponent, etc., can believe that the war in Ukraine could be eliminated by an agreement leaving parts of the Ukrainian territory under the control of Putin’s regime, and above all against the will of Ukrainians. None of them can forget that in the autumn of 2022 Putin simply proclaimed the annexation of four regions of Ukraine, of which he occupies only a part today, in addition to Crimea in 2014 - and that his power keeps denying the very legitimacy of an independent Ukrainian state!

From this point of view, the declarations of the Brazilian president Lula, stating that if the Ukrainians want peace they should forget Crimea, tend to put the responsibility for the continuation of the war back on them, in disregard of the right of peoples to self-determination - which plays such a significant role for the peoples of Latin America - instead of emphasizing the necessary (although obviously not sufficient) condition of qualitatively weakening Putin’s power if we want a just and lasting peace in Eastern Europe.

*11 April 2023*

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

# **Battle for pensions: The discordances of the movement**

**11 April 2023, by Léon Crémieux**

But, isolated, Macron hopes to be able to loosen the grip of a social movement which, even though less powerful in recent weeks, is now creating a political crisis in the country.

Renewable strikes have clearly marked time in recent weeks, among waste collection and treatment workers, in refineries, at the SNCF. Only the agents of the IEG (electricity and gas industries) maintain a movement of selective cuts. The sectors which, since the beginning of March, had engaged in the stand-off to block economic life by putting all their forces into it have called on the other sectors to join them for a month, not wanting to renew the episodes of "proxy strikes." But real objective difficulties have accumulated in many sectors of the working class - and even among university and high school students up until today - and the choice made by the inter-union coordination of the rhythm of a one-day weekly strike, means sticking to the less mobilized sectors at the risk of not playing the role of a driving force to build renewable strikes with the most combative sectors.

This choice clearly corresponded to a compromise with the position of the CFDT confederal leadership, committed to maintaining the inter-union coordination around the rejection of retirement at 64, the call for strikes, demonstrations and even blockades, but opposed to a tactic of paralysis of the country's economic life. The broad union unity, made possible by the popular rejection of retirement at 64, and helping to consolidate this rejection, has until today had as its corollary this moderation in the confrontation. This does not prevent the multiplication of blocking actions, strikes which often involve CGT, Solidaires, FO, FSU and CFDT teams, helping to maintain, beyond the national days of action, a climate of prolonged mobilization.

The political paralysis of the government has led it for the last ten days to clearly play the card of police repression, violence, the card also of denouncing the "violent far left". In this movement, Macron appears, with Darmanin (his Minister of the Interior), as the defender of order to

comfort a shaky electorate, also hoping to sow division in the inter-union coordination and lessen the unfailing support within the population for mobilization and even blockages. On the last two points the failure is total, but Darmanin nevertheless pushes the police to go on the offensive, covering all the violence, the use of weapons and ammunition of war. This choice of increasing repression, which was manifested in Sainte Soline on March 23 and in the charges against union demonstrations, reinforces the determination within the movement. To the rejection of the social injustice of retirement at 64, to the refusal of the institutional violence of 49.3, is now added the refusal of police violence. This rejection has led to strong protests by many associations, first and foremost the League of Human Rights (LDH).

The LDH was at the heart of the denunciation of the behaviour of the police in Sainte Soline, providing audio evidence of the blocking of first aid teams by the police. The LDH is also at the initiative of a campaign for the prohibition of BRAV-M, weapons of war. This democratic action has just led G rald Darmanin to take a step that no Minister of the Interior had dared to take by directly threatening the LDH, saying that he "was going to look at" the subsidies it receives. Under Macron and Darmanin, policy shifts follow one another, calling into question democratic and social rights that have existed for decades, through declarations and bans on demonstrations and even on the right to strike.

Faced with powerful strikes in refineries and waste collection, the government had multiplied requisitions of strikers to break the movement. French law authorizes requisitions in the event of "manifest disturbance to public order". The prefect of the department of Seine Maritime had requisitioned personnel from the Total Energies refineries because of "the foreseeable increase in traffic for the Easter weekend". The administrative tribunal had already denounced bans on demonstrations at the last minute. Now it has just judged that these requisitions "carried a serious and manifestly unlawful

violation of the right to strike". Obviously, the government is testing how far it can push the interpretation of the laws and wants to prepare the ground for two new laws tabled by the Republicans in the Senate, limiting the right to strike in refineries and public transport. In the register of democratic rights, the Republicans, the National Rally and Macron's deputies have just adopted, in an accelerated first reading, in the Senate and the National Assembly an "Olympic Games" law which, under the guise of security, establishes in a sustainable way control, filtering and mass surveillance devices in public places and transport by video surveillance with algorithmic behaviour analysis tools, which can be stored.

France is thus at the forefront of new techniques which could very easily be new tools against the rights of assembly and demonstration, as well as the criminalization of actions in public buildings.

In recent days, the consequences of the mobilization over pensions have therefore shifted to questions of democratic rights, but the movement is also itself polarized by the decisions of the Constitutional Council of April 14th. This institution, whose members are appointed by the President of the Republic and the Presidents of the National Assemblies and the Senate, serves in particular as a censor of laws, judging their total or partial conformity with the constitutional rules. So the Council will make known on April 14th its decision concerning the Social Security financing law which contains the attacks on pensions and the passage of the retirement age to 64 years. It will also decide whether or not to launch a procedure for a shared Initiative referendum on a project fixing the retirement age at a maximum of 62 years, proposed by the elected representatives of NUPES. If the Council ratifies the law, giving it a veneer of legitimacy, it can be signed into law by Macron.

Macron is not out of the woods, however. The first question will obviously be that of the social movement and its ability to overcome this new obstacle and to do so while

maintaining its unity. But for Macron, the question of the continuation of his five-year term will arise in any case.

On the social dialogue with the unions, after having despised the union leaders, the Prime Minister does not have the means of asking them to accept the reform of retirement at 64 and to move on to a new stage of discussion on social issues. Even the CFDT is not ready to do so, given the relationship of social forces that the movement has built. Borne does not have the means either to find, within the National Assembly, a stable majority alliance, as Macron has asked her to do. The Republicans, weakened by their position on pensions, find no interest in being the sticking plaster of the Borne government. The latter's days are undoubtedly numbered, and Borne herself does not believe in her future in her post, but the parameters will hardly be changed in the event of a change of Prime Minister.

The inter-union coordination is calling for a new day of action on April 13th, but without advancing any other perspective for the movement than to await the decisions of the Constitutional Council. Reinvigorating the relationship of forces would require giving specific deadlines, such as a national demonstration or the preparation of a new wave of renewable strikes.

Another problem is increasingly evident. Although in essence the movement is a class movement, bringing together, in action or in support, the vast majority of workers, with in the background the refusal to continue paying for the maintenance of a system that attacks the working classes, there does not emerge in the movement the expression of demands that go beyond the question of retirement at 64. The broad dynamic created by the unity of all the unions has as an immediate limit the impossibility of going further than the

question of retirement at 64, since the CFDT, even on the question of pensions, had already accepted the Touraine reform of 2014 which has led to 43 annuities in order to have a full pension. Therefore, the inter-union coordination does not put forward any demands on the financing of pensions either, such as the end of exemptions and the increase in employers' contributions, nor of course going back on the Touraine reform and that of Woerth in 2010, which decided on retirement at 62.

Similarly, at the confederal level, there is no common inter-union position on other urgent social issues, which are very much present in the demonstrations, on unemployment benefits or the fight for wages and against price increases. The role played by the national Inter-union coordination has served as a point of support in towns and cities, but it has also limited the extension of the platform by local inter-union structures. This might seem like a secondary question, which has not prevented the development of a mobilization of undoubtedly unprecedented depth. But everyone understands that the relationship of class forces can only be maintained if, in the consciousness of those who participate in the movement or support it, the question of who we are confronting is clearly posed.

The question of retirement at 64 is not the whim of a delirious autocrat, it is decidedly a class political choice that corresponds to the interests of the capitalist groups which have successfully imposed identical reforms in other European countries. It is therefore a question of challenging the distribution of wealth and the choices made in the interest of the capitalists, choices made all over Europe by the parties supporting liberalism, including far-right parties similar to the RN, such as Meloni's Fratelli

d'Italia, which imposes a full pension at age 67, within the framework of the budgetary requirements of the European Union. It is not possible to combat the RN's deceitful presentation of itself as a defender of pensions without basing the movement on a platform that questions the capitalist choices of the government and puts forward demands in line with the interests of the working classes. Absent from the movement, silent about any political platform for the defence of pensions, apart from pro-natalism and anti-immigrant measures, the RN is positioning itself to reap the fruits of a social mobilization which, objectively, targets the capitalists.

Macron and Darmanin, on the other hand, never cease to sketch the outline of possible bridges towards the Republicans and the far right, while criminalizing and demonizing the NUPES. Moreover, during a by-election in Ariège, the second round saw a common front of the party of Macron, the Republicans and the National Rally, behind a socialist candidate opposed to the NUPES, in order to beat the candidate of la France Insoumise.

The situation is obviously also made difficult by the lack of construction of a common social and political front at the heart of this movement, by the very absence, outside the National Assembly, of a broad unified political initiative making it possible to conduct a debate and to put forward unitary proposals to build, in towns and cities and nationally, unitary structures on the social and democratic issues of the day, in line with the social mobilization.

The strength of the movement and of the tens of thousands of activists who structure it may be strong enough to overcome these obstacles in the coming weeks.

*Sunday 9 April 2023.*

## **Socialist Solidarity with the Workers in Iran**

# speaks to the 53rd congress of the CGT

10 April 2023, by **Sara Salemi**

First of all, I would like to thank the CGT for this invitation, thanks to which I am able to address you. I represent the association "Socialist Solidarity with the Workers in Iran" which collaborates with the French inter-union collective in support of workers in Iran, of which the CGT is a member.

Of course, the person who should have addressed you at this congress is Reza Shahabi, a member of the leadership of the Vahed, Union of Workers of the Transport Authority of Tehran and its Suburbs, who was a guest at the preceding congress. But he has been imprisoned since May 2022, in the prisons of the Islamic Republic.

Here is now the message that the Vahed union has addressed to the 53rd congress of the CGT.

We send greetings to the participants in the 53rd Congress of the CGT, which is taking place from March 27 to 31, 2023 in Clermont-Ferrand. Our warm greetings to all the workers in France, who have always been pioneers in the struggle against the capitalist world order, and who are at the present time engaged in a decisive struggle against the regressive laws of the French government.

We bring our support to the struggles that you are conducting for your rights. The brutality of the police against the workers who are protesting shows that when capitalist profits and anti-worker laws are at stake, there is no substantial difference between the capitalist states of the world. They show that their response to our protests is based on repression.

Three of our well-known activists, Reza Shahabi, Daoud Razavi and

Hassan Saïdi, had already visited France at the invitation of the French trade unions, including the CGT, to participate in public meetings of these unions. Reza Shahabi was invited to the 52nd congress of the CGT in Dijon. They have all three been imprisoned for several months now.

As you know, since September last year, following the assassination of Jina (Mahsa) Amini, our country is experiencing nation-wide protests, known throughout the world as the "Woman, Life, Freedom" uprising.

The independent trade unions in Iran, including the Union of Workers of the Transport Authority of Tehran and its Suburbs (Vahed), have supported and will continue to support the struggles of women, young people and oppressed peoples in our country. We have firmly condemned the repression, the assassination of demonstrators, the heavy sentences of imprisonment and in particular the death penalty against demonstrators. We demand the unconditional release of all detainees and political prisoners.

We do not expect anything from capitalist states and powers which seek only their own interests.

We rely only on the strength of the working class in Iran and on the support of workers' movements in the world, like yours, dear comrades in France!

Victory to the working class in France, in Iran and in the world!

Long live international workers' solidarity!

Tehran March 27, 2023

Union of Transport Authority Workers of Tehran and its Suburbs (Vahed)

Now I will present to you as briefly as possible the current situation in Iran.

After six months of virulent clashes, the "Woman, Life, Freedom" uprising is running out of steam in the face of a ferocious repression which amounts to a crime against humanity, with 469 dead, including 60 children and adolescents, more than 19,000 arrests, disappearances, acts of torture and rape, dozens of death sentences, 4 executions, ... and finally the wave of gas attacks that have hit schools for girls throughout the country. But despite the winding down of the insurrectional demonstrations, anger continues to grow in the face of this bloody repression and the worsening of increasingly unbearable social conditions. The fight continues in different forms and the aspirations of women and men in revolt remain irreconcilable with the dictatorial capitalist regime of the Islamic Republic.

This uprising is the continuation and culmination of the struggles that have been engaged in for a long time. I will cite the most important and most recent ones, the mass movements of Winter 2017/2018 and then that of Autumn 2019, whose slogan was "bread, work, freedom". They reflected the frustration of a large number of overexploited workers and of the unemployed who are neglected under an extreme ultra-liberal order ruled by a theological dictatorship. They were bloodily repressed. Then there was the great social unrest of workers and pensioners in 2021/2022, with more than 4,000 protest actions for subsistence demand, followed by several waves of repression and arrests of union activists.

The "Woman, Life, Freedom" uprising moved the whole world and generated an unprecedented upsurge of international solidarity. Several trade-union organizations, both national and international, gave their support to



the risen people and condemned the brutal repression by the Islamic regime: the CGT, Solidaires, the FSU, the CFDT and UNSA in France, the different unions in Germany, England, Bangladesh, Canada, Denmark, Spain, the United States, Indonesia, Norway, Palestine, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, Slovenia,... and the International Trade Union Confederation.

Almost everyone, except the World Federation of Trade Unions. While almost all the conflicts in the world are covered by the WFTU, its silence on the events which have shaken Iran for more than six months is deafening. It is the same silence that it observed about the autumn 2019 movement and the bloody repression that followed. But when we know the close links that this organization has established over several years with representatives of the Islamic regime in Iran, we understand the reasons for this complicit silence.

Indeed, one of the vice-presidents of the WFTU since May 2022 is none other than the leader of a group named "House of the Workers" in

Iran. The principal activity of the "House of the Workers", together with the "Islamic Councils" in the workplaces, consists in controlling and repressing the workers' movement, to prevent the formation of independent trade unions, and to initial the agreement on the minimum poverty wage every year during the so-called "tripartite negotiations". A group that is not even a yellow union, but an ideological-political party linked to the Islamic regime, sits as a representative of Iranian workers in the WFTU. Its representatives participate every year at the international conference of the ILO, while the representatives of independent trade unions and workers' organizations are under lock and key.

The Vice-President of the FSM, Alireza Mahjoub, president of the "House of the Workers", is not only the leader and coordinator of repression of the workers, but has been personally implicated in beating up working-class activists.

Such a situation within a global workers' organization is inadmissible.

I will finish with the summary of a **"The Statement of Minimum Demands of Independent Iranian Unions and Civil Society Organizations"** that twenty independent trade unions and organizations of civil society in Iran have developed and published recently. It brings together in 12 articles progressive social and political demands which can only be accomplished after the disappearance of the Islamic Republic; but they already constitute a base for the development of a progressive and social pole on the left inside the country, confronting right-wing formations within the opposition.

Several trade unions, including the CGT, associations and individuals have given their support to this Charter. The text of this support is at your disposal at the stand of the International Space of the congress, if you would like to sign it.

*Long live the struggle!*

Long live the CGT!

Long live international workers' solidarity!

## Left Wins Victories in Chicago and Wisconsin as States become political battlegrounds - but Republicans expel 2 Black legislators in Tennessee

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

With politics polarized between left and right, political battles over the country's most important national issues—abortion, gun-control, race, and democracy—are being fought out at the local level. Democrats and progressives are winning many, but the results won't be clear until the presidential and congressional elections of 2024.

In Chicago, Johnson, a black mayoral

candidate and a former teachers union organizer who called for more social services to reduce crime defeated Paul Valls, a white candidate who favored school privatization and putting more police on Chicago streets. Johnson was endorsed by the teachers union and other public employee unions—and had the support of Senator Bernie Sanders—while Vallas was backed by the police union and the conservative construction workers' unions. Brandon

brought together an alliance of white progressives, union activists and Black communities to win a victory for public education and the city's people of color who constitute a majority of the population,

In Wisconsin, Protasiewicz, a supporter of abortion rights, defeated Daniel Kelly, an anti-abortion activist. Since the conservative majority on the U.S. Supreme Court ended national

abortion rights protections in 2022, state fights over abortion have become the new battleground. Both sides together spent \$40 million on the election making it the most expensive judicial election in the country's history. Protasiewicz's victory assured a pro-abortion rights majority on the Supreme Court that will likely abolish an 1849 law outlawing abortion.

The centrality of the fight over abortion at the state-level could also be seen in two contradictory judicial rulings on the abortion pill mifepristone, a medication approved by the Food and Drug Administration 23 years ago and used by millions of women since then. In Texas a rightwing judge, Matthew J. Kacsmaryk, an anti-abortion and anti-gay activist, overturned FDA approval and ruled mifepristone could no longer be used in any state. But only

hours later, another federal judge, Thomas Rice in Washington State, overturned that decision and said the FDA approval remained valid. With the two judges contradicting each other, the decision will now go to the U.S. Supreme Court with its anti-abortion majority.

In Tennessee, where a shooter recently killed three children and three adults in a Christian school, the state legislature refused to take any action to restrict guns. So three Democratic legislators carried out a protest in the state house against their colleagues for failure to regulate guns and protect children's lives, briefly disrupting the legislature as hundreds of parents and children protested outside. In response, the Republican majority expelled two of the representatives, Justin Jones and Justin J. Pearson, two young black

men, but not Gloria Johnson, who is white. She said her colleagues declined to expel her, "maybe it was my skin color." Few such expulsions had taken place since when just after the Civil War six members were expelled. In 1980 a legislator was expelled for accepting a bribe and in 2016 for allegations of sexual misconduct.

President Biden called the expulsions "shocking" and "undemocratic," and Vice-President Kamala Harris flew to Nashville to meet with Democratic legislators. Jones and Pearson come from Nashville and Memphis, the state's two biggest cities with large black populations. County Commissioners, who have the power to fill their spots may simply reappoint the two to the seats they held.

*8 April 2023*

## Pakistan Collapsing

**8 April 2023, by Farooq Tariq**

The two provincial parliaments, in the provinces of Punjab and Khyber-Pukhtoonkhwa, were dissolved by the former prime minister Imran Khan. His Party Pakistan Justice Party (PTI) held majority in these two house. He had hoped that the dissolution of two provincial parliaments would force the federal government to announce an early general election.

The caretaker governments in these two provinces have refused to call the elections, otherwise due within 90 days of assemblies' dissolution. This delay is in violation of the constitution of Pakistan. The pretext for the delay in elections is the lack of funds. But a popular perception is: the delay is a manipulation by the army. The army fears a PTI victory in elections. Ironically, in 2018, army was accused of rigging elections to secure victory for Imran Khan.

There is a great political maneuvering going on at judicial level. The chief justices of Supreme Court and Lahore

High Court are Imran Khan supporters. This has been manifested by the verdicts issued by the judges in several political cases.

Every time, the PTI moves the court, everyone knows the verdict in advance. For instance, a Supreme Court bench consisting of three judges, known for supporting Imran Khan, ordered on April 4 to hold elections in the Punjab province on May 14 this year. However, this 3 members bench was initially included nine judges. Those not supportive of Imran Khan were removed by maneuvering. The Supreme Court judges are issuing contradictory statements.

The judiciary is as divided as any other institution in the country.

The federal government and Punjab caretaker government has rejected the Supreme Court decision regarding elections on May 14. A public conflict between the Supreme Court and

federal government is aggravating the political crisis.

The state institutions are stuffed with pro-PTI as well as pro-Muslim League elements. The Muslim League, controlled by Sharif dynasty, is presently ruling in coalition with Pakistan People's Party (the party of Bhutto dynasty).

The Supreme Court has the power to remove the present government on the charge of contempt of court. However question is: who would take over a collapsing Pakistan?

The specter of military takeover is often in discussions. Pakistan's turbulent political history is marked by 32 years of direct military rule ever since independence in 1947. When not in power, military controls from behind. At present, the military establishment is posing to be "neutrals".

In fact, as stated above, the 2018

general elections that brought Imran Khan to power was rigged by the military establishment in his favor. When the military establishment withdrew the support from Imran Khan in early-2022, his government collapsed.

Imran Khan tried to find scapegoats for his downfall by blaming, firstly, the USA, then the military establishment and many others in his ever-changing narratives. He is ridiculed as a man of "U turns". His every new speech contradicts his previous one.

Imran Khan was replaced by a coalition government of Shahbaz Sharif, heading the Muslim League (after his elder brother and thrice prime minister Nawaz Sharif was banned from politics in 2018). When Mr Sharif tried to implement the conditionalities of IMF, Imran Khan regained popularity, by gaining negative support.

The IMF has become very unpopular in Pakistan among the masses. Whenever, there was an unprecedented price hike announced by the government, IMF was cited the reason. The only pretext to justify the IMF conditionalities by the PML-led coalition government is: 'if we do not meet the IMF conditions, Pakistan will go bankrupt'. Masses have already gone bankrupt, so is the state in real terms but a formal announce is been delayed in this regard.

Coupled with severe political crises, a new upsurge of religious fundamentalism is visible. For example, terrorist attacks by the Tehreek Taliban Pakistan (TTP) have increased manifold. The TTP is an off-shot of Afghan Taliban. They are attacking the police and military forces. They have safe havens in Afghanistan under a very helpful Taliban government.

Imran Khan in his last days of power,

released hundreds of arrested Pakistani Taliban, apparently, in his bid to hold peace dialogue. In fact, known as Taliban Khan, he and some of his military-backers sympathize with the Taliban. Now the security forces are paying the price of this strategy.

The economic crises are far more severe than the political crisis. The coalition government is implementing the anti-people conditionalities of IMF by raising the prices of oil, gas, electricity, general sales tax and every other consumer item.

The Pakistani Rupee is losing value almost daily against the US dollar and other foreign currencies. On 7th April, a dollar is fetching over 290 Rupees, up from 150, a year ago.

There are hundreds of containers full of imported goods lying at the Karachi port waiting to be cleared. Government has refused to clear the dues to be paid in dollars for these imported items.

There has been series of indirect taxation on almost all edible goods and daily consumer items during the last six months. There have been several min-budgets imposed on people, sometime announced without any prior notice.

Peoples are collapsing so is Pakistan under the huge economic burden without raising the wages or any compensations.

Pakistan is trying its best to fulfill the conditionalities of IMF to fetch the last instalment of 2 billion dollars of a 6 billion dollar loan negotiated by the previous Imran Khan government in 2019. This is 23rd time Pakistan has taken a loan from IMF.

Pakistan's external debt servicing rose by 70 percent in the first two quarters of 2022-23. Pakistan paid USD 10.21 billion in external debt servicing

during this period. This at a time when Pakistan witnessed the worst climate disaster during the year 2022. Instead of suspending the debts because of climate calamity, the IMF increased its pressure to pay more than the last year.

The foreign reserves are at a historic low. Pakistan's central bank foreign exchange reserves have dropped to \$4.2 billion due to recent external debt repayment.

To please the IMF and meet the conditionalities, Pakistan has increased the interest rate to record 21 percent. The wholesale inflation is at an unprecedented level: 37.5 percent, highest since 1973. The result is real disaster for working class and middle-class Pakistanis.

The inequalities are at historic high in Pakistan. Deregulation, privatization, liberalization, and lower progressive taxation contributed to this extreme inequality. According to one survey, the average income for the richest is more than 16 times the average for the poorest.

According to a report of OXFAM, the country top 1 percent holds more wealth than the bottom 70 percent of the population.

Pakistan's economy is expected to grow only 0.4 percent in the current fiscal year ending June 2023. By all measures, Pakistan performs poorly compared to other South Asian countries.

There is no hope among the people that things will improve. The ruling elite of Pakistan has miserably failed in solving the basic problems of masses like free education, health and employments. An alternative pro-people political and economic agenda is need of the hour. The progressive forces are weak but trying to fill the gap in some working-class areas.

## **A new crisis on top of a never-ending tragedy**

**6 April 2023, by Joseph Daher**

At least 8.8 million people were affected by the earthquake. The UN appealed for \$397 million to provide emergency assistance to around 5 million Syrians over a three-month period.

More than 30 states had delivered humanitarian aid to regime-controlled areas, with an estimated total volume of several thousand tons as of 25 February. In comparison, international humanitarian assistance to north-western Syria, in areas outside the control of the Syrian regime, was very limited and slow, even though these were the most affected areas. The first UN aid convoy only entered on 9 February, the fourth day after the earthquakes, through the Bab al-Hawa crossing. By 25 February, the total number of UN trucks had reached only 385, well below the average number of trucks entering the northwest before the earthquake, estimated at around 600 per month in 2022.

## **Controlling the organisation and distribution of humanitarian aid**

In the aftermath of the earthquake, the Syrian regime attempted to reassert the centrality of its power by trying to control, or at least influence, the organization and distribution of humanitarian aid throughout the country. In north-western Syria, outside the control of the Syrian regime, this policy was reflected in Damascus's belated approval, more

than a week after the earthquake, of the reopening of two border crossings controlled by the Turkish-backed Syrian interim government (Bab al-Salameh and al-Rai), through which the UN is allowed to deliver cross-border aid for three months.

The Damascus authorities also blocked an aid convoy of 100 trucks carrying fuel and a medical team from the Autonomous Administration of Northern and Eastern Syria (AANES) to the Syrian Democratic Forces-held areas of Aleppo (Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafieh) for several days. The Syrian regime only accepted its delivery after taking half of the aid portion. In regime-controlled areas, the Damascus authorities have sought to control the management of humanitarian aid through government institutions and regime networks, preventing any popular and independent initiative at the local level.

## **Breaking out of political isolation**

The Syrian regime also tried to work against its political isolation at the regional and international level. Syrian officials and their allies launched a new campaign calling for the lifting of Western sanctions, arguing that they had severely hampered emergency response and humanitarian relief operations. Most importantly, Damascus is instrumentalizing this new tragedy in a continued attempt to advance the process of normalization with regional and international actors through calls

for enhanced political and economic relations.

Once again, the United Arab Emirates is the main actor in pursuing these efforts, in a continued attempt to harmonize relations between Arab states and Syria. This is also part of a broader policy to reinforce a form of authoritarian stability in the region, which they share with other influential countries such as Turkey, Israel and Saudi Arabia, although differences exist on the means to achieve such a goal. However, the success of the normalisations of the Syrian regime is still limited, with only a few states in the region having consolidated their relations with Damascus and generally limited to collaboration in the humanitarian field.

While the priority today is to maximize the emergency humanitarian response for the affected populations in Syria, particularly in areas outside the control of the Syrian regime, these areas lack international support. These areas lack extensive international support, infrastructure and equipment. Practical solutions must be found to frame and organize a potential reconstruction process based on the interests of the local populations, not on strengthening the Syrian regime and achieving its objectives. Similarly, there is still a need to rebuild democratic and progressive networks that seek to unite and benefit the Syrian working classes at home as well as the millions of refugees.

*3 March 2023*

Translated by **International Viewpoint** from **Solidarités**.

# **Care Rights: A Major Agenda For the Left**



5 April 2023, by **José Soeiro**

## The crisis of care in the aftermath of the pandemic

The pandemic crisis has put care on the agenda. The public health emergency and the obligation to identify the occupations that are socially indispensable for the maintenance of our collective life have brought the centrality of care to the fore. But the identification of 'essential occupations' and 'frontline workers' has also revealed that many of the fundamental activities on which we truly depend are the least recognised, the most undervalued, and those that rely on workers who are often without any rights. The increased attention to care also resulted from a cruel reality that we have witnessed during this period in care facilities for the elderly - an "unimaginable human tragedy", to use the words of the World Health Organization, in a statement by the Regional Director for Europe in 2020. Almost half of the deaths in the first waves of Covid-19 occurred in nursing homes. The shortcomings, gaps and unsustainability of the current formal care model became more apparent than ever.

The pandemic also exposed inequalities in care work. While some occupational groups were elevated to the category of 'heroes' (e.g. doctors and nurses), others who are equally indispensable remained relatively invisible (cleaning and municipal waste workers). These groups saw their conditions of precariousness and exposure to the virus aggravated (domestic workers, home care workers, couriers) or emerged in the public arena as a "health problem" and "infectious outbreak" (as migrants with precarious housing conditions).

In any case, Covid-19 has broadened public awareness of the relevance and indispensability of so-called "reproductive work". António

Guterres, UN Secretary-General, echoed this observation: "The formal economy only functions because it is subsidised by unpaid female labour," he warned in an official message on 8 March 2021, stressing that "unpaid care has increased dramatically due to confinement measures and the closure of schools and nurseries."

Two years after the start of the pandemic, the European Commission announced a European Care Strategy to prioritise care in European and national policies, including in terms of investment. As part of this process, the European Parliament also adopted a report "Towards a Common European Action on Care" with the votes in favour of The Left.

The problem we face, however, predates Covid-19. For several years now, academic studies and international organisations, including the International Labour Organisation, have been warning of the existence of an international "care crisis" resulting from a combination of increased longevity and the number of people in a situation of dependency (which increases the volume of care required), and transformations in family and community structures that make them unable or unwilling to provide all that care. For objective reasons (the massive entry of women into the labour market or the extension of working hours) and subjective reasons (individual emancipation, new family models and demands for equality), it is no longer feasible (and wouldn't be desirable) to attribute all this care to unpaid work in the family context. This helps to explain the enormous expansion, particularly in European countries, of care professions, involving an estimated 6.3 million workers in Europe. However, the majority of care for dependent people is still provided by a huge amount of unpaid work, mainly by women, which has been grouped under the category of "informal care", provided by over 50 million informal carers across the EU, according to a study by the European

Commission 2021. 80% of care in the European Union is provided by unpaid carers, 75% of whom are women.

## A social organisation of care that reproduces multiple inequalities

Studying the social organisation of care for dependent persons (the elderly, the chronically ill, the disabled) has highlighted the need to consider the four corners of the so-called "care diamond" (the concept is originated by Shahra Razavi): I) the State, at national and local levels; II) the market; III) the community; and IV) the family. Different countries have different "modes of social organisation of care" (to use Helena Hirata's term) that give different relative weight to each of these four spaces and agents of the care diamond, favouring family responsibility, state intervention or liberal models that privilege the "care market". Comparative studies have highlighted national differences in the institutional variations of the welfare mix, in the prevalence of health or social assistance and its articulation, and in the role of the family and the community. The European reality is very diverse in terms of the modes of financing, the financial effort made by each national state, the type of regulation and benefits and services available, the criteria for referral and access to public care policies, as well as the more selective or universalist nature of these policies. In each country, however, the specific combination of different aspects of the "care diamond" coexists with common ways of devaluing care socially, economically and symbolically.

At the same time, there is a clear gender division of care work in all

countries, with women over-represented in both formal paid care and informal unpaid care. In some economic and social sectors, gender inequalities in employment, pay and pensions are blatantly reproduced. While there is a growing demand for public policies, reflected in the European Parliament's report, there is also a shift in several countries towards re-familialisation of care, which exacerbates gender and class inequalities. In fact, public policies call on 'informal carers' to take on this 'task', sometimes accompanied by a financial weakening of public systems. Thus, unpaid work, community structures and family care appear as a kind of compensation for the absence of coherent public policies and serious public investment in the provision of care for those who depend on it.

## **The indispensable approach of materialist feminism**

The debate on care - a topic that today appears in political discourses from all sides - is not new to the left, especially in its feminist tradition. In fact, its genealogy can even be found in the debates that Marxist feminisms, in their variants and different theoretical sensibilities, have been conducting since the 1970s on the subject of "reproductive labour". These debates aimed to unveil the forms of unpaid work on which the reproduction of society and the accumulation of capital depend (Silvia Federici's work is a good example), to measure the volume of such unpaid work (as Jean Gardiner did in the 1970s), to denaturalise and denounce the coercive character of this work, and to identify a "domestic mode of production" and its specific forms of exploitation (to use the terms of Christine Delphy, one of the pioneers of this reflection at the time).

The need for the left to have a broad view of labour has also been a central point of various Marxist-feminisms. For example, proposing the inclusion of all "production of living" (a term coined by Helena Hirata and Philippe

Zarifian) in the category of labour, or stressing the need to pay due attention to migrant labour that provides care through global chains that reproduce the international division of labour and mechanisms of domination between rich and poor countries. Nancy Fraser, as well, particularly in her most recent book (*Cannibal Capitalism*, 2022), insists on the need for an expanded concept of capitalism that gives due weight to all those processes, activities and relations that are often considered "non-economic" but are absolutely essential to the capitalist economy, including what is known as "social reproduction" or, if we wish, "social relations of care". Following closely the typology of Helena Hirata and Nadya Guimarães, these include I) unpaid domestic work, in which care appears as an obligation; II) market forms of care as a profession, including domestic service and all social care professions; and III) care conceptualised as "help", based on the reciprocity of community life. Both in terms of our claims and our political practices, it seems increasingly clear that the left must give care a centrality if it is to have a strategy of struggle and a project of anti-capitalist transformation.

## **The right to care: a claim for the left**

Even before it can be translated into a set of concrete policies and a programme for economic transformation and the expansion of the welfare state, the centrality of care must involve the ability to project new social imaginaries by placing solidarity and interdependence at the centre of our practices, public policies and democratic choices. In other words, we must also conceive left politics from an emancipatory ethics of care. At a more programmatic level, care is also an important field in the struggle for equality, namely through a plan to transform the current social organisation of care, to prevent the mercantile colonisation of care, to fight individualist responses centred on the 'wellbeing industry' and to build a new pillar of social rights around care as a public good.

In recent years, several initiatives have emerged around the "care crisis" and ways to respond to it. In June 2021, a group of more than 100 organisations from different continents proposed the constitution of a "global movement to rebuild the social organisation of care" based on five fundamental principles: I) "recognise the social and economic value of care work (paid and unpaid) and the human right to care"; II) "reward and remunerate care work with equal pay for work of equal value, ensure decent working conditions and comprehensive social protection"; III) "reduce the burden of unpaid work on women"; IV) "redistribute care work within families and among all workers, eliminating the sexual division of labour between families and the state"; and V) "recover the public character of care services", reaffirming "the duty and primary responsibility of the state to provide public care services and to develop care systems that transform gender relations and women's lives". These five objectives, which underpin a global alliance of social movements, trade unions and organisations, provide a good platform for action and common ground for rethinking the care system in Europe.

The trade union movement and the parties of the left must give due importance to the organisation of all workers in these care sectors (social assistance, home care, domestic services, but also cleaning, personal assistance, etc.) and to their struggles, both for greater social recognition and for decent wages, stable contracts and the regularisation of all the migrants who provide much of the care in Europe. In fact, the professional care sector is characterised by much lower than average wages, temporary and part-time work, punishing conditions that lead to exhaustion of workers, lack of safety conditions, high turnover of workers, in addition to the challenges posed by the uberisation of work, also in this sector, and the low union strength of several of these categories.

In several countries, the left and the feminist and carers' movements have also insisted on the need to articulate this debate with the reduction of working hours, the feminist

transformation of family and community relations and the creation of a National Care Service, replicating in this area what was done, for example, with the National Health Service after the World War II in several European countries and after

the 1974 revolution in Portugal.

Basically, it is a question of defending the "right to care" and "care with rights", as the slogan of an ongoing campaign led by an alliance of

organisations in Portugal, Iniciativa Legislativa Cidadã (Citizens' Legislative Initiative). This seems to us to be a central agenda for the left today.

[Transform](#)

# Trump Indicted: What Will Be the Political Impact?

**4 April 2023, by Dan La Botz**

A Manhattan, New York grand jury has indicted former president Donald Trump on March 30, reportedly on 30 charges of business fraud and violation of election laws in the payment of \$130,000 in hush money to the pornographic film star Stormy Daniels before his election in 2016. This is the first indictment of a sitting or former U.S. president and will have serious political repercussions.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, a Democrat, carried out the investigation and brought the case before the grand jury. The specific charges will be revealed on April 5 when Trump's attorneys say he will turn himself in and he will be photographed, finger-printed, read his rights, and could be handcuffed.

This indictment is only one of Trump's many serious legal problems. Trump still faces charges for attempting to illegally overturn his electoral defeat in Georgia, for his role in provoking the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, for illegal removal of government papers and obstruction of justice, as well as other charges. This indictment will surely encourage other D.A.s to bring long overdue charges against Trump.

Trump claims that he is "the most innocent man in the history of the

country" and that the charges against him are the result of a "witch-hunt" by "radical leftist Democrats" and constitute "blatant election interference." In his typical demagogic style he called D.A. Bragg, who is Black, "a Soros-backed animal." Calling Black people "animals" is an old racist trope and alleging that Bragg is acting on behalf of Jewish businessman George Soros, a classic anti-Semitic argument.

Trump, who launched his campaign for the Republican nomination for president in 2024, remains the front runner in the Republican Party, supported by 51% of Republicans, ten points ahead of his rival Florida Governor Ron DeSanti despite the indictment. But 61% of all Americans say they do not want Trump to be president again. Trump could even if indicted and convicted still run for president and if he won take office.

(In 1920, Socialist Party candidate Eugene V. Debs who was in prison convicted of violating the Espionage Act of 1917 for an anti-war speech he gave which the government claimed would discourage military enrollment, ran for president with a button reading "For President Convict No. 9653." He won one million votes that year.)

Democrats have supported the

indictment as based on the law and the facts and have called upon the public to remain calm. The Republican Party has once more rallied around Trump, all afraid of the tremendous power he holds over the party's base. Republican House majority leader Kevin McCarthy, former Trump U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, Congressman Jim Jordan, and rightwinger Marjorie Taylor Greene, rushed to defend Trump. Republican Congressman Ronny Jackson of Texas, formerly Trump's personal physician, said, "These cowardly Democrats HATE Trump and HATE his voters even more," he wrote. "When Trump wins, THESE PEOPLE WILL PAY!!"

Before the grand jury's decision, Trump warned of "potential death and destruction" if he was indicted and far-right media platforms such as The Donald and 4chan, have since posted racist and violent attacks on Bragg and have called for "war," "civil war," "assassinations," "terrorism," and "chaos." There have been death threats against Bragg, U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland, and Stormy Daniels. So far there has been no rightwing violence and pro-Trump demonstrations in New York have been outnumbered by the many who hate Trump and what he stands for.

2 April 2023

# An isolated government, but a movement in suspense

3 April 2023, by **Léon Crémieux**

But the general feeling is, again, that of a moment of waiting, without either the movement or the government tipping the scales in its favour. This creates a certain climate of wait-and-see, giving way to deadlines external to the movement: a meeting without real purpose of the inter-union coordination on Wednesday, April 5, a deliberation of the Constitutional Council on April 14 which can validate, or not, the law imposed without a vote by the government.

A first fact should be noted: the passage in force of the government, on March 16, imposing with the use of article 49.3 its attack on pensions, has in no way demobilized the millions of workers who have been mobilized for three months, nor modified in the population the massive support for this movement, the rejection of the reform and the impressive isolation of Macron and his Prime Minister, Elisabeth Borne.

This situation is wearing them out, to the point that they can no longer make the slightest public appearance without running the risk of being confronted with popular anger under the eyes of the media. This isolation of Macron, his government and his parliamentary minority is reflected in the large number of parliamentary offices tagged with graffiti or walled off with breeze-blocks, in successive polls predicting a collapse in the number of Macronists who would be elected in the event of dissolution of the National Assembly.

The discredit of the regime has had repercussions on the party of the Republicans, guilty of supporting Macron in this social attack. Social crisis, democratic crisis and political deadlock are therefore cumulating, maintaining a situation of interrogation, of instability. It can be

resolved by a slow running down of the movement and a dull rise of popular resentment, but also by a new upsurge, such as the movement has experienced for three months.

## Violence

The most important fact of the last few days was undoubtedly the wave of police violence in Sainte Soline, near Nantes, on the Atlantic coast, a violence that reveals the feverishness of Macron and his government. For several years, the associations of ecological struggles and the Peasant Confederation, with the support of several unions and left-wing parties, have been mobilized against the construction of sixteen megabasins in the Deux Sèvres department, raised open-air reservoirs sinking to a depth of 10 metres, allowing the water table to be pumped in winter to create water reserves with a capacity of up to 260 Olympic swimming pools (650,000 m<sup>3</sup>).

The prefecture of the department and the government want to impose these projects, which correspond to the needs of large farmers for water-hungry crops, such as maize cultivated for animal feed. A broad front of resistance has been built in connection with networks denouncing the obvious risks of such basins, at a time of global warming, of the impoverishment of groundwater, to satisfy a mode of cultivation that must of necessity be questioned. In addition, these megabasins are synonymous with the impoverishment of rivers, of their biotope, but also the privatization of water, a resource for the common good, for the benefit of the operators of these reserves and for five per cent of the farmers of Deux Sèvres, with effects of considerable waste of resources, since the rate of

evaporation varies from 20 to 60 per cent, according to experts in scientific research.

30,000 people gathered on March 25, at the call of the broad network, "Bassines non merci" (Basins, no thanks!), Soulèvements de la Terre (Uprisings of the Earth) and the Peasant Confederation to march towards the construction site of one of these basins, that is to say a vast cavity covered with impermeable tarpaulins. To protect this mound, the demonstration was banned and 3000 gendarmes and police were mobilized. Invoking a climate of civil war and the "will to kill" of the demonstrators present, a deluge of more than 5,000 tear gas grenades, 89 de-encirclement grenades and 81 LBD shots fell on the demonstration. More than 200 protesters were injured, including by GM2L explosive grenades that release tear gas and project debris that could seriously injure people. All these munitions are classified as munitions of war by the Internal Security Code.

This did not prevent Gerard Darmanin, interviewed by the press, from lying, at first claiming that "no weapon of war" had been used, later having to deny this assertion himself, following police assessments. According to the latest information, two men are still in a coma, a young woman has a broken face, another has lost an eye. For several years, the League of Human Rights, Amnesty International, the United Nations Commission against Torture and the Council of Europe have published opinion after opinion expressing anxiety or denouncing the methods of intervention used in France during social demonstrations, in vain.

Macron and Darmanin, following on their predecessors, claim that police violence does not exist in France,



wrongly invoking Max Weber to hide behind the "legitimate violence of the state". What is certain in this dramatic episode is that it was not the construction site of a basin that the police were protecting. It was rather the swamp of Macron and his government and the fear of a social and political crisis that affirms its multiple dimensions and highlights that, in the question of basins as well as pensions, we are confronted with societal choices and especially with the absence of any popular sovereignty, any democratic control to challenge and oppose class choices that are made in the name of capitalist rules and interests.

Implicitly, a large majority of the population, the popular classes, refuse this mechanism and these choices. The fear is, of course, that this hollow refusal will turn into demands and political will for positive affirmation. It was therefore necessary to criminalize, suffocate and gas the 30,000 demonstrators present at Sainte Soline. The government panic went so far as to delay for three hours, according to the organizers present on the spot, the intervention of the SAMU (emergency medical assistance service) to evacuate one of the men now in a coma. Since then, demonstrations of denunciation of this violence have multiplied, several complaints have been filed, but the Minister of the Interior hastened above all to initiate a procedure for the dissolution of the network of Uprisings of the Earth, which organized the demonstration.

## Repression

Echoing the violence of Sainte Soline, recent days have seen the multiplication of bans on gatherings, "preventive" arrests around demonstrations, police custody, indictment of many demonstrators and even union officials, control of entry into universities by the police, as at the university of Paris Tolbiac, the intervention of the RAID (intervention group dedicated to cases of organized crime and terrorism) to put an end to the occupation of a faculty in Bordeaux. Here too, the obvious goal is to put an end to all the actions of blockades and occupations that are

multiplying to maintain pressure on the government and maintain mobilizations, as were the evening demonstrations in the days following 49.3.

This repression goes hand in hand with violent attacks on La France Insoumise, which is supposedly calling for civil war. While the National Rally remains totally within the institutional framework, hoping to reap the fruits of social anger in 2027, without questioning capitalist policies, LFI, and even the parties of the NUPES as a whole, provide an echo, with more or less force, for the social movement and its demands. And it is true that the fear of the government is that there will be created, which is not the case, a front of social and political forces, a junction making credible an alternative based on popular needs. Also, discrediting the NUPES is necessary to defuse such a perspective. "Better the National Rally than popular unity" seems to be the government's line.

In this context, the tenth national day of action, called by the inter-union coordination on March 28, once again demonstrated the strength of the mobilization. With more than two million people nationally, 450,000 in Paris, it was lower than on March 23 but in the high figures of the demonstrations since January, especially again in dozens of small and medium-sized towns. In addition to the demonstrations, there were dozens of actions to block ring roads, as in Caen, Rennes and Le Mans, oil depots, motorway tolls, airports such as Biarritz, and the Louvre Museum in Paris. There were 450,000 young people in the demonstrations, a figure almost equal to the 500,000 of March 23. But, nevertheless, this day clearly marked a pause in the strike action, with the end of the strikes of garbage collectors in Paris and Marseille and a clear decline in the civil service and in National Education. Similarly, at the SNCF, where 45 per cent of the drivers were on strike on the 28th, the movement is not so much renewable as determined by the days of action chosen by the inter-union coordination.

## Limits

The limits of this movement - even though it has seen the most important days of demonstrations in decades - are still present: no generalization of renewable strikes beyond a few sectors that can hardly stay longer on renewable strike, a low presence at general assemblies in the sectors on strike, and few intersectoral general assemblies, which had been at the heart of previous large mobilizations, as in 1995 and 2010. These limits exist despite the militant action of tens of thousands of activists, workers who are today at the heart of the movement in organizing demonstrations and blockades. There is also the contradictory role of the inter-union coordination. Such unity of all the trade union confederations is a first, it is on the scale of the profound disavowal of Macron's reform and has been until today a real support for organizing mobilization in many towns and sectors, even if today the question of clashes and the necessary denunciation of police violence is becoming a bone of contention in several departmental or local inter-union structures. Obviously, it is not the national inter-union coordination or the presence within it of the CFDT or UNSA that have hindered the establishment of local intersectoral structures or attendance at general assemblies of strikers. On the other hand, by setting the pace itself, the inter-union has based itself on the possibilities of sectors least able to enter into renewable strikes, to the detriment of a timetable of confrontation based on the sectors that are most mobilized in renewable strikes, in order to promote their extension. This was the case, if not by written agreement, at least in practice around March 7, with limited success. This has not been the case since then.

At the moment, all eyes are fixed on deadlines external to the movement itself. This is the case with the meeting between the inter-union coordination and the Prime Minister on April 5. This is a little manoeuvre by Elisabeth Borne to try to get out of the blockage in which she finds herself. Charged by Macron "to expand his majority", she knows that the only partner theoretically possible,

the Republicans, will express a clear rejection of what is not even an offer of a common contract of government. Therefore, in the field of the "social partners", she seeks to appear open to discussing new issues. But this is to consider that the question of pensions is settled and that the union leaderships accept a frontal defeat.

This is not the case today, even for the CFDT. Therefore, barring good or bad surprises, the meeting will be nothing but a facade.

During this time, in a revealing event, the government will debate the 2024/2030 military programming law,

which plans to increase the military budget to 413 billion euros, whereas the previous one was 293 billion. An increase of more than 100 billion euros, 100 billion that will go neither into social budgets nor into the financing of pensions.

April 2, 2023

## Switzerland: saving the climate or the bank? Their urgency and ours

2 April 2023, by **Myriam Grosse**

When it comes to Crédit Suisse, and not the future of humanity, there are suddenly extraordinary meetings of the Federal Council every day, special broadcasts every evening and a flexible use of laws and billions. That is the scandal. For years, CS has pursued profit at all costs, leading to corruption scandals, human rights abuses and the worsening climate crisis. Today, CS is being saved with public money. Or to put it more clearly: privatization of profits, socialization of losses.

### Crédit Suisse's repeated scandals

CS has been in structural crisis for a long time because of the pursuit of profit at all costs, short-termism and lack of regulation. Over the past decade, scandals have followed one after the other. For the exploitation of a gigantic gas field, the bank plunged Mozambique into a public debt crisis. The hosting by CS of funds from disreputable clients, including dictators, has been confirmed by the "Swiss Secrets" investigation. CS and its major Saudi and Qatari shareholders, who today refuse to absorb the losses, have massively

supported fracking, with catastrophic consequences around the world.

The crisis of CS demonstrates the functioning of the capitalist system, which saves banks rather than controlling them to ensure the welfare of the population. The only important parameter is the confidence of the markets, so as to continue making profits. And to reassure them, it is necessary to act quickly (before the opening of the stock exchanges on Monday morning!), which makes it impossible to exercise democracy, which takes time. The agreements reached during this crisis are not transparent. It is difficult to know their conditions, while the Swiss population becomes the guarantor of the risks generated by the takeover of CS.

### Crédit Suisse saved overnight... and with multi- billion dollars

Social injustice is clearly evident in this system where it is possible to save a bank, but impossible to finance the

minimum old-age pension (AHV) without increasing the retirement age for women (from 64 to 65 on September 25 last year). So yes, when we know that the Swiss National Bank can lend 50 billion Swiss francs to CS overnight and that Switzerland is unable to find \$13 billion per year to finance carbon neutrality in 2050, we can find that staggering.

However, transitional solutions to improve this system exist. Lending conditions must be fully transparent and any assistance from the SNB and the Confederation must be conditional on socially just and climate-sustainable guidelines. In the medium term, the best way to effectively regulate private financial actors would be to abolish banking secrecy, as well as the many tax privileges granted to individuals and companies.

I am profoundly, from the bottom of my heart, disgusted with this system. The government should work to democratize banks like UBS by placing them under the control of public authorities, employees and citizens rather than saving Crédit Suisse with impunity.

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# 27 March 23: "General strike" in the transport sector in Germany

1 April 2023, by **Helmut Born**

Since the beginning of the new century, there have been several collective agreements in the public sector. There are collective agreements for individual sectors as well as a collective agreement for the federal states. This is the result of deregulation, but also because of the austerity policy of the last 30 years.

The collective bargaining round for the federation and the municipalities is the one in which ver.di is best able to push through its demands. In the municipalities, the strongly organised parts of ver.di are the ones that were able to organise the necessary pressure in previous bargaining rounds. These include workers in local public transport, at the airports, in waste collection, at the public utilities, but also in hospitals or in day-care centres (Kitas).

Ver.di demands a wage increase of 10.5 % at least €500 per month. It was probably clear to everyone that this would not be easy, especially since the two big industrial unions IG Metall (IGM) and IG Bergbau Chemie Energie (IG BCE) reached very modest agreements last year without much activity.

## Negotiations without results

In the two rounds of negotiations so far, at the end of January and in February, there were no serious offers from federal and local government. As a result, ver.di stepped up its activities so that on every day in March there were one or more warning strikes in

different regions. [3] As a result, the collective bargaining round got a lot of media coverage and gained broad support among the population, even though trams and buses remained in the depots for up to 10 days and many day-care centres remained closed.

In February, the Railway and Transport Workers' Union (EVG) set out its wage demands for the year: a 12% increase in wages, at least €650 per month. The first round of negotiations ended after a few hours; the EVG leadership said they would organise strikes to reinforce their position. This is very unusual for this union, as within the spectrum of individual unions in the DGB (German TUC) it is considered rather tame and close to the board of Deutsche Bahn AG (German railways).

From mid-March, the idea circulated to organise a joint strike day in the transport sector at the beginning of the third round of negotiations in the public sector on 27 March. This idea was initially received with much scepticism, as it is very unusual in Germany for different trade unions to fight together.

This scepticism gave way more and more to concrete preparations, and on 23 March the leaders of the trade unions EVG and ver.di announced their plans for a common day of action at a press conference. It was clear that on Monday, 27 March, there would be a strike in many regions, more or less nation-wide, at the airports, on the railways, in the ports, on the canals and across local public transport. Afterwards, the public debates came thick and fast, some

media started a massive agitation against this strike. This was of no use, however, as public opinion largely supported it.

On 27 March, public transport throughout Germany came to a standstill. Airports had to cancel almost all flights, railway signallers made sure that nothing ran, lock keepers brought shipping traffic on the canals to a standstill, in the cities there were no trams or underground trains, only the buses of private bus companies ran. The feared chaos on the motorways and in the big cities did not materialise, as many employees took leave or, where possible, worked from home. Thus, considerably less traffic jams were reported on that day than on normal Mondays. The agitation of some newspapers - first and foremost the BILD newspaper - thus totally failed and this strike day was a complete success for ver.di and EVG.

According to Frank Wernicke, president of ver.di, 70,000 new members joined the union during the warning strikes at the post office and in the public sector. Trade union activists can argue credibly: when people fight, the trade union movement becomes stronger again.

PS: In the night of 29-30 March, the third round of negotiations between the "employers" on the one side and ver.di and the German Civil Service Federation on the other side was declared a failure by the unions. As a result, the Minister of the Interior, Nancy Faeser of the Social Democrats (SPD), announced that the "employers" would call for arbitration.