



## IV580 - May 2023

# For true liberation of LGBTQI people in China

31 May 2023, by **Yong-hui Hong**

The center is neither the first nor the largest organization for sexual minorities in China. But it represented China's LGBTQI movement in the political, economic and cultural center of the country. The center continued to advocate rights for LGBTQI people, including same-sex marriage even after a nationwide crackdown on human rights lawyers and activists that began in 2015.

On the other hand, its activities had been scaled back in the past few years. In recent years, Xi Jinping has seen the rights of LGBTQI people as "western values" and has detained activists. The oppressions are in stark contrast to neighboring Taiwan, which became the first country in Asia to recognize same-sex marriage in 2019. [1]

### Past oppression of LGBTQI people

Originally, LGBTQI people in China has never been explicitly protected from discrimination. Also, the Chinese government had shown an ambivalent and fickle attitude toward the topic. The Constitution of the People's Republic of China provides for equality under the law. But this is no explicit mention of sexual orientation or gender identity. And there is no

anti-discrimination provision for sexual orientation or gender identity under Chinese labor law. It was not something that happened just recently. And the ambivalent and fickle attitude of the government sometimes had changed to full disapproval.

Oppression of LGBTQI people has escalated since Xi Jinping was elected president of China by the National People's Congress in 2013. Three months after the election of Xi Jinping, officials were arrested at the Beijing Queer Film Festival. And two months later, the Beijing Independent Film Festival was obstructed by Chinese authorities and canceled. The Independent Film Festival, then in its 11th year, had been obstructed by the authorities before. However, it was the first time that it was forced to be cancelled. In 2020, Shanghai PRIDE was forced to end its activities. It is one of the longest-running gay pride groups in China and had been operating for about 11 years. The [official website of the Beijing Queer Choir](#) existed around October last year. But it is closed at the time of writing. The Beijing Queer Choir was founded in 2008, the same year that the Beijing LGBT Center was founded. It was as if Xi Jinping has been in line with Putin's policies. Since last year, Putin has repeatedly made

discriminatory remarks that appear to be aimed at sexual minorities in speeches related to the invasion of Ukraine. Russia and China currently stand together against the "common enemies".

### Xi Jinping wary of "western values"

The "common enemies" of Chinese and Russian dictators are "western values". In China, tightened surveillance and censorship of the people have forced multiple LGBTQI-related organizations to shut down and the events to cancel under the pretext of "national security". [2] And political pressure also extended to social media. In July 2021, many WeChat accounts associated with LGBTQI movements attended by university students were blocked and then deleted without warning. The accounts were deleted unilaterally while the students were exercising their right to freedom of expression and freedom of speech. [3] Social networking services such as LINE, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram, which are commonly used in other countries, cannot be used or strictly restricted in China except when using overseas roaming or VPN services. It is due to the very strict

internet censorship system known as the "Great Firewall". In effect, people in China are being forced to use WeChat, Weibo, Renrenwan, and Oasis instead of LINE, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram respectively. State surveillance and intelligence gathering by Chinese authorities are conducted not only in mainland China but also in other countries. When a friend of the present writer who lives in the country other than China criticized the Chinese government on WeChat, he received a warning call from a Chinese public security officer the next day.

## The only way to win true liberation

The Chinese government has achieved certain results in "people control" aiming at "national security". In recent

years, the Chinese government has succeeded in monitoring the conversations, behavior, and purchase history of all Chinese citizens by using exclusive Chinese social media. It shows Xi Jinping's strong sense of unease, which is overly wary of the influence and values of foreign countries. At the same time, there is a "consideration of what Xi Jinping wants" in the name of loyalty by the "national security faction" that increases power and interests within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Especially during the pandemic, the Chinese government has continued privatization of public social services. [4] It has exposed women and other marginalized groups to further precarious conditions and exploitation. Against this, feminist and LGBTQI activists have led local and overseas struggles against gender-based violence. Also, the people in China launched a massive struggle across the country.

As a result, the people won their first battle against long-term pandemic policies of the country last year. The struggle across China made the Xi Jinping regime back down from its dictatorial policies to some extent. The oppressed proletariat has no country. We socialists should strongly support and empower their struggles for their basic human rights of the oppressed. Our horizon is international solidarity to overthrow the Chinese bureaucratic capitalist system and also to abolition of Xi Jinping's dictatorial rule from which the political regime draws its power. [5] We are the class that does the work of the world, and can revolutionize it. We can win true liberation. [6] It is the only way to fulfill the demands of oppressed people joining ongoing struggles for democratic reforms and revolutionary socialism.

31 May 2023

# Khan Against the Generals

29 May 2023, by Tariq Ali

This marks a dramatic escalation of the political war between the PTI and the Army, along with its favoured politicians and the government it manoeuvred into place after removing Khan from office last April. The new administration is essentially a coalition of Pakistan's dynastic parties led by Bhutto-Zardari and the Sharif family. Since it was installed, Khan has repeatedly accused the US of orchestrating the congressional coup against him - motivated by his refusal to support their interventions in Afghanistan and Ukraine. Large numbers of anti-American protesters have taken to the streets, demanding his reinstatement.

Usually, Pakistani leaders can only be forcibly removed from office once they have lost some degree of popular support. If they haven't, the choices are limited: exile abroad or judicial murder. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was

executed after a 4-3 vote in the Supreme Court; Nawaz Sharif was whisked off to exile in Saudi Arabia; Benazir Bhutto was assassinated in mysterious circumstances at the start of an election campaign. But Khan? Every opinion poll shows him sweeping the country at the next general election. On 8 May, a nervous Army leadership - by no means unified - and a Sharif government fearing a political wipeout, took the decision to arrest Khan by sending in a team of Rangers while he was in the High Court dealing with an old corruption case. He was immediately dragged off to a squalid prison.

Before long, the Chief Justice ordered his release and reprimanded those who ordered the raid. But what happened on 9 May was dramatic. PTI supporters in their thousands launched frontal assault on the Army, invading cantonments in Lahore and

Rawalpindi and destroying a model plane in Mianwali. The residence of the Lahore Corp Commander was firebombed. According to police, the leader of the attack was 34-year-old Khadija Shah: one of the most fashionable clothes designers in Lahore (daughter of a former Finance Minister, and granddaughter of Asif Nawaz, a former Army Chief of Staff) who has become something of an icon for the masses of women participating in the recent demonstrations.

In Mardan, an old town in Pakhtunkhwa province, there was another event that stunned the nation. At a huge public meeting demanding the immediate release of the PTI leader, a mullah took to the platform and described Khan as a 'paighamber' - or 'prophet'. This was blasphemy of the highest order. Every Believer, regardless of sect, accepts the Prophet Muhammed as the final Messenger of

God. Was the poor mullah overcome by emotion, or was it a deliberate provocation? We shall never know. The microphone was switched off; the anguished crowd began to chant 'death, death, death'. The others on the platform seized the mullah and he was hacked to death. Problem solved?

Khan's criticism of the Army and its constant interference in Pakistani politics (of which he himself took advantage not so long ago) has sparked a serious crisis. Those in uniform have been humiliated. The last taboo has been broken. Even in previously ultra-loyal areas like Punjab province, activists have been marching on the barracks. The Army has responded with mass arrests and announced that political prisoners will be tried in military courts. This draconian move is backed by much of the government, which - stupid and short-sighted as ever - has tried to expel PTI parliamentarians, a decision revoked by the Supreme Court. Sentences for dissenters are likely to be stiff: possibly a few hangings of those without elite connections in the hope of deterring future offenders.

Whatever anyone might think of him, Khan is the first political leader in the country who has publicly denounced the Army and insulted its Generals, going so far as to name the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) officer who allegedly organised the effort to assassinate him. How will the military respond to this unprecedented challenge? General Zia offered Bhutto exile, which he contemptuously refused, before Supreme Court judges ordered his hanging. Khan, too, may be offered exile or a military trial. The temptation to accept the former will be strong (his two sons already live in London with their mother), but a lot will depend on the advice of his current wife, Bushra Bibi, who masquerades as a spiritual leader of sufi persuasion, but is as proficient as any other politician at taking 'gifts' from billionaires. The most notorious of these is like a character from a Mohsin Hamid novel: Riaz Malik, a self-made man who has bribed every major politician and General in the

land. This is hardly a secret, and Khan's own dealings with him are the subject of a High Court trial, currently suspended. This involves the Qadir Trust, of which Imran and Bushra are the key trustees, and which, it is alleged, was set up with Malik's laundered money: millions of pounds were uncovered by Britain's National Crime Agency and returned to Pakistan. It was, some say, handed back to Malik, who provided a much larger sum, much of it earmarked for a 'spiritual' Sufi university in London and Allah alone knows what else. Did the entire PTI cabinet sign off on this project without being allowed to open 'the sealed envelope' containing the details? I honestly don't know. (How long do we have to wait for a Netflix series?)

The function of a military court, meanwhile, would be to bar Khan from politics forever. The judges would probably refrain from executing him; not for moral reasons, but because it would risk unleashing a civil war of sorts. Khan remains popular among a layer of officers, junior and senior, which combined with his mass support means his opponents must tread carefully. At this stage, the military leadership cannot restore order by falling back on traditional sacralisations of the Army. Its legitimacy crisis runs too deep.

Throughout this century, and half of the previous one, political life in Pakistan has displayed all the characteristics of a permanently diseased organism. Commercial capitalism, foreign aid handouts, state-backed industrial monopolies, illegal import-export deals and money-laundering schemes: together, they have created a continuous crisis. Predators fight for the spoils of power and refuse to accept bureaucratic impositions such as paying tax. Every mainstream politician works hard to cultivate the art of clientelism, gathering around them a following of loyal dependents. The latter can make various offerings to those lower down the ladder, often by skimming public funds off elephantine military budgets. Percentage commissions remain

highly popular within the ruling elite.

Old-style corruption still rules the roost, but the emergence of the internet has made life a lot easier by eliminating paper transactions and allowing the rich to conceal their hidden spoils. Not that too much is hidden these days. People can see what's going on, and have lost hope in politicians and their cronies. Khan is the exception for three reasons. He is no longer the incumbent; he is enough of a foreign policy maverick to deny the US the total subordination it demands; and he has capitalized on the country's dire economic conditions. Pakistan is now hopelessly dependent on the IMF, experiencing non-stop inflation, and suffering from a corrupted and useless education system that weaponizes religion to prevent children from learning anything useful (the polar opposite of medieval Islam, which produced countless scholars, astronomers, mathematicians and scientists).

The PTI was complicit in all these failures, but it has the advantage of no longer being in office. At present, two of its factions are preparing for Khan's departure from frontline politics. One is led by Shah Mehmood Qureshi, who has served in virtually every government over the last few decades and would be the safest bet for the Army; the other by Jehangir Tareen, who was once a marginally more radical figure and retains a strong middle-class power base. Whether the PTI can exist without Khan remains an open question. The Army hopes that things will revert to business-as-usual once they've dealt with him, and the governing parties will no doubt open their doors to defectors. It must be stressed that none of Pakistan's political outfits, let alone its military, aims for even a modest change in social relations. They're not in the business of creating a new society. When people take to the streets to demand one, their only response is repression.

22 May 2023

Source NLR [Sidecar](#).

# Schrodinger's Fascism and The Brown Feast

28 May 2023, by Onur Danaci

This trend started with war in Syria, crystallized in political bombings killing our comrades, and cemented after a self-coup succeeding a failed military-coup. It found its perfect expression in a regime where capitalists and their state execute their overt crimes under day light and in plain sight. Analysing the ongoing elections suffers from the same bipolar fate.

In one hand, there is apparent voting fraud and voter suppression in an election made under an authoritarian regime right after a massive earthquake. It seems voting irregularities could swing vote shares 2-3% in each direction (5%!). It would be disrespectful to thousands of political activists who organize a campaign to become electoral observers against this ongoing fraud not to mention them. They scream at the top of their lungs about the crimes they're witnessing while being physically attacked - especially out of big cities - and call for a recount. In such circumstances it is impossible to use the voting data as given, and construct a proper Marxist analysis. Despite the global far-right, as a boy who cried wolf, keep using similar concerns as a main talking point. These obviously lead to a mass demoralization in the ranks of the opposition. This was exemplified by a high-schooler committing suicide in Istanbul subway with a note stating she couldn't survive under this misogyny and poverty, and elections were her last hope.

On the other hand, the promises by the main opposition of a rose garden without thorns didn't materialize. Their material analysis of the Turkish society and the state were unfounded, and their polls showing Kilicdaroglu leading Erdogan by a 52+% margin were unfounded. Their ship has holes on the main body and is slowly sinking. In an act of despair, at the moment, they are negotiating with the

Devil (far-right nationalists having 5.3% of the presidential votes and enjoying the king-maker statue), while pleading to Kurdish & Turkish socialists to come to their rescue with their organizational capacity - especially in the ballot box. I will try to summarize the fallout of the parliamentary election, and the first round of the presidential election leading to runoff, and the actors in both sides in a few points.

First, the ruling party (now "party-state") of AKP has always been an intra- and inter-class coalition materially, politically, and in cadres of the state bureaucracy. Although having a vague islamist ideology and agenda, it has always been a pragmatic and plastic force. The 2001 economic crisis led to the demise of the previous ruling coalition of center-left (DSP, predecessor of main opposition CHP), center-right (ANAP), and far-right (MHP), despite erecting the spine of neoliberal orthodoxy (to be used by AKP) to mitigate the crisis. AKP, splintered from the traditional islamist-nationalist Refah party, rode the wave of the small-business owners' protests to get the 68% of the parliamentary seats despite having 34% of the votes in Nov. '02. It had the following coalition actors 2002 - early 2010s: conservative small and large business owners seeking to extract as much as possible from the peoples and nature of Anatolia via harsh labor discipline (monopolization of all human interactions), pro-EU large business owners (both conservative and secular), pro-EU liberals, remnants of center-right parties, and the cadres of the pro-US islamist cabal of Fethullah Gulen in the state bureaucracy (especially in security apparatus). This coalition used the economic boom of the neoliberal-orthodoxy erected by the previous coalition, the political aspirations of the masses (Turks equating EU with freedom and prosperity, Kurds demanding peace

and collective rights), as well as the support of both EU and the US to leverage against the opposition and to purge the Turkish judiciary, bureaucracy from their rivals (nationalist, pro-Eurasian, secular). Meanwhile, they purged the organized labor via local networks of gangs and religious cults. This coalition came to a halt when EU aspirations failed, and the crisis of 2008 burst the bubble of neoliberal orthodoxy. This led the core of AKP to have its interests diverge from the rest, and seek a material basis elsewhere: extractivism, construction bubble (both condo gentrification and Herrenvolk autobahn infrastructure), arms manufacturing (aggressive foreign policy). When material interests diverged West leaning small & large business owners (both conservative and secular) and their liberals drifted one by one. Slow erasure of coalition and its base became more apparent by 2013 Gezi uprising, 2013 corruption trials (Gulenists), 2015 elections & dissolution of Kurdish peace process and 2016 coup attempt (Gulenists).

Second, the 2014 Kobane protests of Kurds and 2015 elections (Erdogan lost and Left-Kurdish alliance became 3rd biggest party) triggered a fault line in the warring capitalists and state, and formed an unholy political alliance in the far-right: gang of August 10 (as in gang of December 10 of Louis Bonaparte in 18 Brumaire). AKP now allying hitherto purged nationalists (different factions of Kemalist, pro-Eurasian, etc), far-right parties of MHP, and Hudapar; a fascist coalition giving life buoy to Erdogan, but also forcing him to surrender. The latter, aka Kurdish Hezbollah, not related to the one on Lebanon, is rather known as state's terror machine against Kurds in 1990s and holds a place in collective memory for their carnage against Kurds, women & children. This coalition kept Turkey and its ruling classes active in all foreign wars: de-facto invasion of

Rojava and Northern Iraq, proxy wars in Libya, Caucasus, West Africa, Ethiopia and Sudan, a booming war industry (e.g, drones in Ukraine), aggressive oil drilling in Eastern Mediterranean and Black sea, arms & drug smuggling via affiliated maffia. Inside, this faction ensured the worst form of labor discipline: closed-circuit factories during Covid, replacing China in supply-chain crisis by currency manipulation and refugee exploitation (especially in labor intensive textile), and making sure it runs smoothly by surveilling a worker's each minute through a network of gangs and religious cults ('tariqat'). Making sure Kurdish municipalities are not governed by elected officials via regular purges. When this coalition led to 70% official (200% unofficial) inflation and the worst cost-of-living crisis since 1915s, it triggered a massive backlash in youth movement in big cities, the biggest strike-wave (both official and wildcat) since 1980s, and the biggest surge of socialist left since the 1990s. They didn't stick as Covid was a good cover, and the main opposition coalition had other plans.

Third, a coalition formed by CHP (Kemalist & social-liberal), Iyip (a splinter from far-right with center-right undertones), and Saadet (ex-Refah, islamist-nationalist with social undertones). They found a narrow window in 2019 local elections as the currency crisis ongoing since 2017 led to anger in populace in the big cities, and both the pull of this coalition within security bureaucracy and the hard-work of grass-roots electoral observants (OyVeOtesi) led to fairly less fraud comparing to 2018 election that was hacked. Erdogan's loss in Istanbul triggered renewal of election,

and lost with an even higher margin. Through this, more Western leaning cadres dissociated from AKP, and two parties DEVA (liberal islam) & Gelecek came, and with the addition of another traditional center-right party (Democrat) they formed the notorious Table of Six (TOS). Instead of taking the initiative and keeping this political momentum TOS passively banked on slow erasure of party-state's electorate due to economic crisis. This erasure was slower in periphery comparing to the countryside (AKP strongholds) as the party-state was able to bribe the electorate through "election economy", and small concessions as bumping minimum wage. The party-state took its political lesson from 2019 election to make sure ongoing economical crisis didn't lead to mass unemployment, keeping voters at bay. On the ideological front, it consolidated its base through nationalist gestures such as opening Hagia Sophia as a mosque, and extravagant displays of military might with a message of "you can be hungry for a day, but you can't afford to lose your country". This could be countered by mass politics, but TOS sabotaged youth and labor movement's protests and direct-action, prescribing them to wait. Told them "they're going anyway" not to spook the capital & security apparatus cadres who can ensure a smooth transition (e.g, no electoral fraud). But that obviously failed, because the party-state was able to consolidate the security bureaucracy. They openly displayed how high the stakes are for both the TOS and Turkish/Kurdish left by soldiers randomly firing real bullets and gas cannisters towards empty streets in the Kurdish cities. As Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair described the protests of Seattle 1999, a generation can surprise and

overwhelm the capitalist state only once with the same tactics. State developed new methods for electoral fraud, especially in the countryside and Earth-quake hit area, in order not to be overwhelmed by grass-roots organizations such as OyVeOtesi again. Meanwhile TOS totally failed in electoral security. Now they have no option but to dismiss fraud allegations as 'conspiracy theory' in order to keep electoral turn-out stable while appealing to the same grass-roots organizers (whom they dismissed) to defend the ballots. At the same time, TOS has to cut a deal with the newly emerging (even more!) far-right forces (Ata coalition, Zafer party, Sinan Ogan and Umit Ozdag). These new forces have been instrumental for the party-state at deflecting the blame and anger in political crises triggered by Covid, cost-of-living, and lastly the earthquake towards the blameless refugees. They organized multiple pogroms with the help of the party-state's troll army.

To sum up, Turkish democracy is in peril, more so than ever. All the different hues of brown got the highest percentage of the votes in their history. This brown feast is served both to those in power and in opposition. It's as if the splintered far-right in Turkey is multiplying by mitosis cell division. The wait and see approach of TOS failed dramatically. Second round of presidential elections is precarious. Kilicdaroglu has to win, or at least not to lose with a small margin. But he is already in a rock (fascist coalition of AKP) and the hard place (fascist coalition of ATA). The Turkish and Kurdish left is holding their nose for now.

23 May 2023

## What kind of trade unions do we need?

27 May 2023, by Terry Conway

This wave has involved members from a whole range of trade unions and

many thousands of individual workers, overwhelmingly in the public or

formerly public sector. There has been some limited activity elsewhere, most

notably among Amazon workers in Coventry.

There are many positives about what has taken place. Strike action has brought many younger workers into action for the first time—people who have been sold trade unions as a route to cheap insurance rather than a place to organise collective action. And there is nothing like a dispute with your employer to create a cauldron of education about how capitalism actually works, destroying many of the myths people are sold day by day.

Despite sharp attacks from the mainstream media and politicians, the demands of different unions for decent pay increases to prevent so many workers from having to choose between heating and eating have been met with strong support from the public. Attacks on terms and conditions central to many of the disputes are also unpopular, especially when share holders and managers continue to celebrate rising profits ripped off the backs of workers.

This is no surprise when other sections of the working class, be they workers in unionised work places, those dependent on benefits, retired people, or students, can see that those who are striking are effectively fighting for us all. Everyone knows many other friends and family members who are struggling, including in jobs or industries where, not that long ago, this would not have been what people expected.

The launch of the very popular “[Enough is Enough](#)” campaign with the potential to link struggles around wider issues like housing and the right to food with strike solidarity seemed very positive towards the end of last summer. However, the initiative was effectively strangled at birth by its primary movers, who, after organising a series of very impressive rallies and a mammoth mailing list, did nothing to allow local supporters to get in touch with each other and build on the ground.

And it’s not only “[Enough is Enough](#)” where the bureaucracy has tried to keep a tight rein on what does and does not happen. The disputes themselves have generally been run in

a very top-down way, with stewards and workplace representatives often treated as stage armies rather than the subject of the action.

The fact that Labour under Starmer has failed to back the strikes has also done nothing to strengthen the movement. There have been a small number of left constituency Labour Parties whose banners have appeared on the big demonstrations that have happened over these months and on some local picket lines, along with an equally small number of left MPs and doubtless many individual party members out on strike or involved in support work, but this is completely eclipsed by the fact that the Labour leader forbade members of his Shadow Cabinet from supporting workers in struggle. This, together with so many of Starmer’s pronouncements, makes clear that his only concern is not to garner popular support but to clearly position himself as a safe pair of hands for capital.

And none of this is helped by longer-term factors such as the fact that trade union organisation in Britain has not recovered from the massive defeats of the 1984-5 miners’ strike and the wave of deindustrialisation that followed, leaving trade unions and their workplace organisation of shop stewards networks demoralised and hollowed out.

The fact that Britain has the most developed and reactionary trade union laws in Europe—even before the Minimum Service Bill comes in—also completely shackles the trade unions. The depth of the economic and social crisis in Britain was enough to win ballots for action for many unions last summer. Given all these factors, we are reaching a stage where some actions are stalling and others are in danger of leading to defeat.

Several unions have had to re-ballot as reactionary laws mean that mandates only last for six months. Even where these have been won, e.g., by rail unions, the lack of any apparent strategy to win from the leadership means that demoralisation could set in. In the civil service union PCS, one of the biggest and historically militant departments, the [Department for Work and Pensions just missed the](#)

[threshold for further action.](#)

Health worker action is fragmenting. It’s certainly true that the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) has been transformed from an organisation that never took industrial action to one in which members rejected the government’s offer of a 5 percent pay rise—way below existing inflation—against the advice of their leaders. In the run-up to the RCN conference, General Secretary Pat Cullen said that only a double-digit offer can stem a campaign of strikes through Christmas, but the RCN needs to win another ballot before it can strike again.

Meanwhile, two other large unions, UNISON and GMB, which organise health workers across a number of different grades, have accepted the government’s offer, while Unite members have rejected it. There has also been action by junior doctors, whose previous dispute in 2015/16 was sold out by its then leadership and has been replaced by a more determined team.

In this context, the development of the “[Health Workers Say No](#)” campaign, bringing activists together across unions, is a small but significant step forward, but there needs to be a much wider discussion about arguing for industrial trade unionism as well as for grass-roots control of disputes.

For the struggles in the NHS as well as those in education, the question of funding for pay increases, as well as for the services more generally, is key. In this context, there is a weakness in the fact that most union leaderships, with the exception of the [National Education Union](#), are not taking up this question centrally.

The worst situation among workers who have taken sustained action is that faced by postal workers. These workers struck for 18 days in 2022, but now the supposedly left wing union leadership is recommending acceptance of a deal that is a complete disaster. It will significantly increase the amount of outdoor work, cut sick pay, and force people with caring responsibilities off the job—all for a 10 percent pay rise over 3 years.

And at least 400 union activists have been suspended or dismissed by management during the dispute, and the union just claims that this will be 'reviewed' when members sign up for the deal. Historically, postal workers had a proud tradition of unofficial action—walking out or at least making a believable threat of doing so—to prevent worsening of terms and conditions and management bullying at the local level. But the last decade of privatisation - and the failure of the union to effectively fight this—has seen a serious undermining of the workplace strength on which such militancy depended.

But the CWU leadership has adopted a problematic approach all the way through the dispute, where much of their main focus in media interviews was about how badly 'the business' was being run by then Chief Executive Simon Thompson. There can be no doubt that Thompson was a hated

bully boy and that workers celebrated when he was forced to stand down. But there is no indication that with Thompson gone, the other negotiators changed tack at all. The victimisations and the revisions of duties—often involving unachievable delivery targets—imposed in December remain.

And if this rotten deal goes through, management will quickly come back for more. That's why the launch of a Postal Workers Say Vote No group is a very welcome step—but one with a hard job to do because it is also clear that to defeat these changes there would need to be a serious escalation of action—something rather unlikely to happen when not a single current member of the postal workers executive voted against recommending acceptance of the deal. The longer-term task, as a [recent interview on the A\\*CR website](#), pointing out among other things the

dissatisfaction of many activists with the way the General Secretary has conducted the dispute as well as the way many of the employers in Higher Education are trying to force workers, whose conditions have been fundamentally undermined over the last decade and more, to cave in by implementing salary deductions of up to 100 percent for the marking and assessment boycott the union is now carrying out,

The issues explored here are part of the context in which two conferences are planned later in the summer—one in [London](#) and one in [Manchester](#)—to discuss rank-and-file organising strategy. These are welcome initiatives, and it is important that both are strongly supported and that if ongoing structures result, there is cooperation between them.

23 May 2023

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

## The Short History of the Nation Alliance and Its Performance in the 2023 Elections

26 May 2023, by [H. Deniz Sert](#)

Under the leadership of Kemal Kılıçdaroglu, the CHP has maintained a voter share of around 25-28% for many years. It seemed unlikely that they would be able to defeat the overwhelming majority of the ruling Islamist conservative AKP, led by Erdogan, and the nationalist right-wing Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), which had settled in the 45-50% range as part of the Nation Alliance. Kılıçdaroglu, the leader of the social democratic and secular CHP, assumed that the general political inclination of the Turkish people leaned towards various right-wing political representations. Based on this assumption, he designed the Nation Alliance as a platform for an alliance with more right-leaning parties.

The Good Party (İyi Parti or İYİP), led by Meral Akşener, emerged as the second major partner of the alliance after splitting from the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), which had traditionally been the main party of nationalists in Turkey and the second party for center-right voters. İYİP recruited significant figures from the MHP ranks, aligning nationalism with a more centrist right-wing politics, declaring its loyalty to a liberal-economic program, and primarily targeting urban, young, and center-right voters.

The other minor partners of the Nation Alliance were the Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi) and the DEVA Party (Deva Partisi). The Felicity Party represents the main Islamic tradition of the National Outlook (Millî Görüş)

movement, founded by Necmettin Erbakan, and embodies a more traditionalist line of Islamic politics with more pronounced Islamic tones. The DEVA Party, led by Ali Babacan, one of the founders of the AKP who served as the Minister of Economy for three terms, is a newly established party that embraces a more centrist-right and reformist Islamic approach. Another former member of the AKP, Ahmet Davutoğlu, who claims to represent a moderate form of Islamism and has held positions such as Foreign Minister and Prime Minister, is also part of the Nation Alliance with his Future Party (Gelecek Partisi).

The Kurdish Movement, which represents almost 10% of the voting population (including Kurds,

progressive democrats, and socialists), has been excluded from this alliance due to the reaction it might provoke among nationalist-conservative voters in Turkey and objections from nationalist cadres, primarily IYIP. However, they are considered implicit supporters from outside the alliance. As mentioned earlier, the main actor in this anti-Erdogan alliance is the CHP, and the alliance itself constitutes a political hybrid that includes right-wing, nationalist, and Islamic political elements from the former AKP and MHP cadres.

The Nation Alliance faced its first significant test in the 2019 local elections and achieved a partial victory. Joint candidates were nominated at the local level, and the majority of big cities, including Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir, came under the control of the Nation Alliance. In Ankara, Mansur Yavaş, a former member of the MHP who gained the support of center-right and secular voters, became the mayor. In this election, Ekrem Imamoglu, who had roots in the CHP and enjoyed widespread appeal among various segments of society, ranging from center-right to social democrats and Kurds, emerged as the prominent figure and became the new mayor of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. The significant loss of Istanbul by the AKP, which had held control over the city's administration since the local elections in 1994 and had built its movement on that foundation, provided a significant morale boost to the Nation Alliance. Despite the repeated election, the AKP's defeat in Istanbul by a significant margin provided the Nation Alliance with a strong sense of morale and motivation, making the idea of defeating Erdogan more apparent to the public in the upcoming 2023 general elections.

As the 2023 general elections approached, one of the most significant sources of tension within the Nation Alliance was determining who would be the presidential candidate. There was extensive discussion, particularly about Ekrem Imamoglu, as he was considered one of Erdogan's substantial rivals and capable of attracting votes from Erdogan's voter base. It was also mentioned that Mansur Yavaş would

appeal to the center-right voters and pose a strong challenge against Erdogan. The leader of the main opposition, Kılıçdaroglu, who made the alliance possible, aimed to position himself as the leading candidate to defeat Erdogan in the 2023 elections and end his own political career with a presidency.

After it became certain that Erdogan would be the candidate of the Nation Alliance and that the general election would be held on May 14 instead of June, the pressure on the Nation Alliance regarding its candidate increased. The candidate put forward by the alliance's second party, IYIP, were Imamoglu and Yavaş. Kılıçdaroglu implied and claimed that his Alevi identity posed a psychological barrier among Sunni, center-right voters, and pushed for one of the alliance's candidates to be one of these two names. IYIP's claim also served as a cover to conceal their long-term political plans. It was alleged that Erdogan specifically highlighted these two names to eliminate potential rivals in the post-Erdogan period and facilitate the transition to a parliamentary democracy process. As the deadline for announcing the candidate approached, IYIP made a strong maneuver by withdrawing from the negotiation table, alleging that Kılıçdaroglu was pressuring the People's Alliance to assert his leadership. This move by IYIP resulted in an unexpected public reaction. After Akşener's strong statement, the party took a step back, and negotiations with the alliance accelerated within 48 hours. IYIP accepted Kılıçdaroglu's candidacy with the condition that a political campaign led by Imamoglu and Yavaş, and if the election is won, the two would be appointed as Vice Presidents to Kılıçdaroglu with specific duties.

Before the election, Muharrem Ince, the leader of the Nation Party, who was one of the political rivals capable of attracting voters from the People's Alliance's voter base, withdrew from the candidacy. As a result, Turkey faced an electoral landscape where three presidential candidates would compete: Erdogan (People's Alliance), Kılıçdaroglu (Nation Alliance), and Sinan Ogan, a former MHP member

who targeted the votes of the radical right (Ata Alliance). On the evening of May 14, contrary to the expectations of the polls, the anticipated outcome did not occur. Erdogan received 49.5% of all votes, Kılıçdaroglu received 44.9%, and Ogan received 5.17%. There was no winner in the first round of the election. Although the AKP experienced a partial decrease in votes, the party obtained 35.6% of all votes. CHP once again received around 25% of the votes. The unexpected rise came from the MHP. Initially predicted to receive around 5-7% of the votes, the MHP made a significant jump to 10%. As a result, the People's Alliance, which included more right-wing, nationalist, and even paramilitary Islamist figures in its ranks, gained a significant majority in parliament compared to the People's Alliance.

Since 2015, there has been a consolidation of authoritarian politics and, following the pandemic, an intensified economic crisis, which has led to a significant increase in Islamic, but particularly nationalist, votes. The political reflection of this has been seen in the Cumhuriyet, Millet, and Ata Alliances, with the total vote share of the MHP, IYIP, and Zafer Party, representing different political representations of more radical (racial) and more central nationalism, reaching approximately 22%.

The Nation Alliance, unable to secure a parliamentary majority, aims to compensate for the defeat by winning the two-candidate presidential election on May 28th. Kılıçdaroglu, who is operating in a fragile balance and receiving support from the Kurdish movement from the outside, has resorted to a nationalist discourse in order to attract the votes that went to Sinan Ogan in the second round and convince the voters who did not participate in the first round. He has hastily announced the deportation of Syrian refugees back to their country, while trying to be more cautious on the Kurdish issue. On the other hand, Sinan Ogan's short-term negotiations with Erdogan and Kılıçdaroglu after May 14th indicate that it is possible for nationalist demands, excluding the political representation of the Kurdish movement, and anti-immigrant sentiments to shape Turkish politics.



# Lula: from the “democratic front” to the “national unity” government

25 May 2023, by **Ana C. Carvalhaes, José Correa Leite**

With the election of Arthur Lira as president of the Chamber of Deputies and Rodrigo Pacheco as president of the Senate on February 1st, 2023, both supported by Lula, the institutional political design of Lula’s third term was completed. “Without Lira and Pacheco, we would not be here today. They were largely responsible for the transition,” said Finance Minister Fernando Haddad on April 7, referring in particular to the approval of a constitutional amendment before the inauguration, which guaranteed a budget for basic measures in the first year of the administration, such as the R\$600 (US\$ 120) Family Benefit Program. He added. “This is a very fair recognition (...). I don’t think they will be lacking [now], especially with the fiscal recovery agenda, which is a state policy and not government policy”.

The elected government has been adopting the indispensable measures for rebuilding the public institutions that have been dismantled in recent years, especially in the indigenous and environmental areas, notably in the Amazon region. The Judiciary is deepening its investigation of anti-democratic acts committed by radical Bolsonarism and is investigating a spectacular corruption scandal that strikes at the heart of Bolsonarism – the “jewels of Arabia”. Initiatives to reconstitute smoother relations between the “democratic front” and the military are advancing; the disobedient Army Commander has been replaced and members of the Armed Forces involved in the January 8 acts will be tried as civilians. The government’s actions are beginning to gain fluidity, in some cases in the face of dramatic situations, such as the genocide of the Amazonian Yanomami people, encouraged by the previous government. There is still a feeling of great relief in the progressive spheres

of society: we have gone from free fall into the abyss to a firm ground.

The harsh reality of the correlation of social forces, however, removes any illusions that we are facing a “left-wing” government. The administration moves rather slowly, conscious not only of its parliamentary limits, imposed by the agreements with Centrão, but also of the contradictions within the “democratic front” between progressives and liberals. That was the case of the public friction between the PT’s president, Gleise Hoffman, and the Minister of Finance, around the new fiscal targets regime. (The new fiscal rule is already going through parliament, to replace the ultraliberal Spending Ceiling of 2016, by which Temer made it a constitutional rule that public spending and investment should only grow in direct proportion to the previous year’s inflation.)

The transmutation of the elected government from a “democratic front” into a government of “national unity”, hostage to the right and determined not to mobilize its bases, is the framework within all the disputes will take place in the coming years. Everything indicates that we have entered a period of lowered political expectations, after years of permanent stress with the neo-fascist offensive. The social left and the working people need orientations that do not tie them to the current limits – compromising the struggle for democracy, for popular demands, and for the recomposition of the left. Orientations that, on the contrary, enhance the possibility of mobilizations for systemic changes in Brazil.

## A government of “national unity”

Lula presented himself, during the campaign, as the democratic embodiment of the rejection to Bolsonaro and the defence of the institutional order, backed by his immense electoral support. Upon taking office, he constituted a “democratic front” government among progressives, leftist sectors, and liberals who supported him in the first and second rounds, within a moderate strategy of rebuilding the federal state apparatus. These forces share between them the political core and the social and environmental sectors of the federal administration.

But the government was, from the start, also formed with parts of the so called Centrão (literally Big Centre, the political representation of the Brazilian regional oligarchies [7] in a physiological governability pact. MDB, a federation of oligarchs from rural Brazil, Gilberto Kassab’s PSD, and Luciano Bivar’s União Brasil (a great-great-grandson of the dictatorship party, Arena) also joined the central government. Each of these groups was given three ministries, including some of those with the largest budgets and strategic value, such as Communications and Mines and Energy. Their ministers have extensive records of all kinds of reactionary right-wing practices, as shown by the scandals that have already erupted in Tourism (whose incumbent had militiamen from Rio de Janeiro as electoral agents) and Communications. These choices have already charged an ideological price with the politicized sectors of public opinion.

This traffic of support is far from

restricted to Lula's initiatives and the federal government. The case of Gilberto Kassab (former mayor of São Paulo) is particularly relevant because he co-governs, in fact, the main state won by a Bolsonarist, São Paulo, where he is the right-hand man of Governor Tarcísio de Freitas, of Republicanos party and Bolsonaro's former Minister of Infrastructure. Freitas is a retired military man from Rio de Janeiro that had already had a prominent position in Rousseff's governments, before becoming a key figure in Bolsonaro's field. A stranger in the territory where he ran for office, he had to hand over a good part of his government to Kassab, heir to the conservative political machine of PSDB. The physiological coexistences multiply: federal deputy Antônio Carlos Rodrigues (former minister of Dilma and now in Bolsonaro's party) was elected on February 8 as the coordinator of the São Paulo caucus in the Chamber of Deputies, with the support of the PT, in a gesture to try to divide the PL base (Liberal Party, Bolsonaro's family party). Working with conservatives is the norm in the PT's political action, in what they are calling a "democratic insurance".

The design of the current government is the culmination of the strategy that Lula had been pursuing since he left prison in November 2019, and that was already evident in 2021, when he refused to call the street mobilizations for "Fora Bolsonaro" (see the article [Quo vadis Lula? https://fourth.international/en/latin-america/382](https://fourth.international/en/latin-america/382)). It was a dangerous strategy, which was almost wrecked in the second round of 2022 by Bolsonaro's electoral strength and manoeuvres. The support of the most globalized bourgeoisie, the Federal Supreme Court (STF) and US and European governments, and the hesitation of the Armed Forces, finally guaranteed him victory by a small margin and assured the inauguration. It was a decisive victory to recompose the perspectives of liberal democracy in the globalized world, a contest against a vast conservative constellation of illiberalisms, authoritarianisms, religious integrisms and neo-fascisms, that we see being fought from the US to the UK, from Italy to Israel, from Iran to Peru and India.

And more: Lula 3 government is becoming, strictly speaking, a Lula-Alckmin-Lira government, that is, the apportionment of the federal state machine among three sectors: 1) the reformist progressivism in all its shades (including the moderate left of the PSOL represented by Guilherme Boulos and Juliano Medeiros); 2) the "party" of big financial capital and globalized business; and 3) broad sectors of the conservative or reactionary physiological right (Centrão) symbolized in Arthur Lira, who negotiates, always for vested interests, with the "democratic front." And, on the surface, Lira carries more weight than Alckmin, because the forces he represents are not as visible.

## Confronting the January 8 putsch

Lula's alliances on the right were greatly facilitated by the Bolsonarist coup attempt, an opportunity that Lula deftly seized. It forced, on one hand, a large part of the conservative and reactionary constellation - which gave Bolsonarism muscle in the dispute for hegemony - to distance itself from its fascist core and move closer to the federal government. As an exposure of the most destructive face of Bolsonarism, the coup attempt also highlighted the limits of the current international articulations of the Brazilian post-fascism. On the other hand, it made it easier for the government to provisionally resolve the serious "military question": the unfriendliness, when not open opposition (or coups), of the high-ranking officers to Lula's government - its greatest vulnerability.

On January 21, Lula replaced the Army Commander with a General who poses as a defender of the Constitution. He also put under the media spotlight the genocide of the Yanomami people unleashed by the Bolsonaro government, walling him off from significant portions of international and national public opinion on an issue related to the defence of the Amazon - which, at the same time, unmask the reactionary positions of the military on the subject. Lula is thus in a position to adopt harder positions in defence of

the Amazon, his strategic international commitment.

As Jorge Almeida stated in an article analysing the coup attempt, this was "an opportunity for the government and the popular movements to take initiatives to clean up the far right within the institutions and to reduce its influence in society in general (...). In immediate terms, the government acted mostly correctly, within the limits of emergency measures that could be expected from a government with the purposes and alliances with right-wing liberal bourgeois sectors (including 2016 coup plotters)."

The aborted fascist insurrection of January 8 also gave conditions for the STF and the TSE (Electoral Justice) - key pieces in sustaining the government - to advance against the Bolsonaro hard core. Jair Bolsonaro has lost his immunity and, according to many analysts, will probably become ineligible; with the "Arabian jewels" scandal he may even go to prison. Figures such as former ministers Damares, Pazuello, Mourão, besides Flávio Bolsonaro (son 01), on the other hand, are senators; Eduardo Bolsonaro (son 03) and Ricardo Salles, deputies. They will count on the complicity of their "peers" to go unpunished for the next few years. This already seems to be assimilated by the "democratic front": a PT deputy, Washington Quaquá, posted his photo on social networks posing next to Pazuello, criminal manager of Health under Bolsonaro!

## Centrão as obligatory partner

Lula operates pragmatically within the established institutionality, as he always said he would. His force in the House consists of 140 of the 513 deputies (including the 12 from PSOL). Bolsonaro's PL elected 99 deputies. Among the 271 "independents", those affiliated to parties called to formally join the government, there are 143 deputies (59 from União Brasil, 42 from MDB and also 42 from PSD), more than the governing party. Still, 284 (nothing "guaranteed") is a far cry from the 308 deputies (and 49 senators) needed

to approve a constitutional amendment. In the Senate, of the 81 members (three per state), the government has 32, but including 16 from Kassab's PSD. Those who declare themselves as opposition total 27. The "independents" are 22 senators, 10 from the MDB, 9 from União Brasil, and 3 from the PSDB.

Arthur Lira was elected president of the Chamber of Deputies, with the support of both Lulism and Bolsonaroism. He got 464 votes, against 21 given to Chico Alencar from the PSOL and 19 given to Marcel van Hatten, from the ultra-liberal Novo party. The PSOL's own candidacy was an important initiative for the party to affirm its independence from the new government, but it comes at a trial of strength with Guilherme Boulos, deputy for São Paulo, the new leader of the party, who presented the nomination of Henrique Vieira, from Rio de Janeiro, as deputy leader of Lula's government in the House. (In other words, the PSOL is part of the government's parliamentary base).

Lira, who was an early ally of Bolsonaro, was one of the first officials to recognize Lula's victory and negotiated with him the approval of the Transition Constitutional Amendment, which maintained the R\$ 600 (US\$ 120) payment for the Family Benefit Program. Lira rotated toward the government as a result of the attempted coup of January 8, differentiating himself strongly from the "root Bolsonaroism". He has thus gained considerable leeway to negotiate second and third level positions in the executive branch, while maintaining his autonomy to dispute conservative positions against the government in the legislature. It has already told its allies that it has "framed the government"; this means that Centrão have increased their participation in the government and in defining the conditions for governability.

As Aldo Rebelo, a former communist turned conservative who was president of the Deputies' Chamber from 2005 to 2007, states, "in the previous [Bolsonaro] government, Arthur Lira was pointed out behind the scenes as the "Brazil Prime

Minister". In this government, he will continue to be so. This is because President Lula, with all due respect, has no votes in the Chamber. He only has the votes of the coalition that helped him get elected, the rest he will have to fight for. But, in principle, in this power struggle, the government always has the advantage. The government has the ministries, the Treasury, Bank of Brazil, Caixa Econômica, and other instruments of power. So it is always the government's advantage. Now, this advantage exists as long as the government gets it right, and does not make serious mistakes (...) It is like people say: marriage with the government is only in health and happiness. In sickness and in sadness, forget it." From the point of view of the Brazilian oligarchies, the current negotiations are nothing exceptional.

Senator Rodrigo Pacheco (PSD-MG), the Senate's former president, was reelected with 49 votes against the candidacy of Rogério Marinho (PL-RN), who achieved 32 votes. It was the open confrontation between the new ruling bloc and Bolsonaroism. The Senate was, together with the state governments, the body in which the extreme right was most strengthened in the 2022 electoral process. Lula's government threw all its weight into the dispute and the result allowed us to visualize the correlation of forces of the scheme of alliances articulated by the government.

## Choices already made

In the latest round of negotiations for the second level of government, not only a new batch of politicians from União Brasil, but also from Lira's Progressive Party, with which União Brasil will form a federation, went into government or kept their positions. PP, another of the derivatives of the old Arena, the party of the military dictatorship, has "supported" every government since its foundation in 1995. With the federation, União Brasil and PP will have the largest branch in the Chamber of Deputies, with 108 deputies, and the second largest in the Senate, with 15 senators. They will be in charge of

strategic state companies such as the Company for the Development of São Francisco River Basin (Codevasf) and the National Department of Works against Droughts in the Northeast (DNOCS, this one for Avante, a PP satellite organization, with seven deputies). Lula is also negotiating with Republicanos, the party of the most reactionary neo-Pentecostal pastors (which was part of the base of the Lula 1 and 2 governments and Dilma, until they supported the impeachment). It is the party of Bishop Marcelo Crivella (former mayor of Rio) and the Universal Church, bastion of religious fundamentalism, but also of former minister Damares Alves and former vice-president (general) Hamilton Mourão, now senators.

It was in an arm-wrestling match with Arthur Lira that Lula met his biggest defeat so far, accepting the pressure to keep in office the Minister of Communications, Juscelino Filho (União Brasil), accused of using an Air Force plane to go to São Paulo to participate in a horse auction. The PT president had asked for the removal of the minister and everything indicated that he would be fired at the meeting with Lula on March 6. On the same day, Arthur Lira, said at an event at the Commercial Association of São Paulo debating the tax reform: "We will have some time for the government to stabilize internally, because today the government still doesn't have a consistent base either in the Chamber or in the Senate to face matters of simple majority, let alone matters of constitutional quorum." Juscelino was not fired.

Lula's choices have already been made. He wants a quiet situation in the legislative assembly, paying whatever price is necessary for this. He is offering more money for congressional amendments than Bolsonaro (R\$46.3 billion, or \$9.2 billion) and is removing them from the calculations of the new public spending rules. [8] Lula needs to show service quickly, before the electoral honeymoon ends, in order to maintain a social majority that has proven to be electorally very narrow.

# Economy is a decisive field

Lula and PT members most dependent on popular moods (including the party's president, Gleisi Hoffman) seem primarily concerned with guaranteeing resources for redistributive policies and for what they consider development. They are aware that if it does not recover growth, employment, and income for the most vulnerable, the government will be in trouble faced with the only provisionally defeated right wing. But this "progressive" goal clashes head-on with the determination of the president and the economic team led by Haddad to demonstrate responsibility and reliability to financial capital. This is the spirit of the new fiscal rule project (or "framework", in neoliberal economic jargon) of constitutional amendments have already been solemnly delivered to the Senate and the House, which have to approve them by a two-thirds majority. In this strategy is revealed the main contradiction nurtured by the class conciliation government.

The government's idea is to replace the unworkable Spending Ceiling invented by Temer and the ultra-liberal right wing, never completely obeyed by Temer and Bolsonaro, by a new limiting but more flexible rule. In this rule, spending and state investments can grow at a rate of 70% of federal revenues. If tax collection grows 1% during a year, from July to June, the government can increase spending by 0.7% in the following period (not including the constitutional limits for Health, Education, University Hospitals, some funds for the environment, spending limits for parliamentary amendments, and other exceptions). However, expenditures are limited to a minimum of 0.6% of revenues and a maximum of 2.6%, with the commitment to zero public deficit in 2024 and to obtain a surplus (more revenues than expenditures) in the following years. It also establishes a range (band) within which the so-called primary result - the difference between the Union's expenses and revenues - can vary. For example, for 2025, the government is committed to obtain a primary surplus

of 0.5% of GDP (which today would be about R\$ 8 billion, or US\$ 1.6 billion), and the result may vary from 0.25% to 0.75% (the bands are of 0.25 percentage points less and more). If the primary result falls below the stipulated range (less than 0.25%, US\$ 800 million or less), spending can only be 50% of the total collected.

It is not necessary to be versed in economics or mathematics to understand that this is a new, more flexible Spending Ceiling. Like the previous ceiling, the new rule is based on the neoliberal idea that it is necessary to balance the accounts, with the GDP and tax collection as references, in order to guarantee a certain proportion between the public debt and the total wealth of the country measured by the GDP (the oft-repeated "GDP-debt ratio"). All this is done to guarantee that there will be enough cash flow or "savings" in advance to pay the instalments of the debt to the rentiers - those who live, in Brazil and abroad, on the income from the bonds of the country's debt.

From the economic point of view, given that the Central Bank (made independent under Bolsonaro) refuses to reduce the scorching basic interest rate of 13.75% per year, the government is left with the task of making the equation work by increasing tax collection. As it promised in its electoral campaign to lighten the tax burden on workers and the salaried middle class, for the time being the only ways left are (1) to end tax exemptions and reductions granted to domestic business sectors - which creates direct conflict with entire branches of capital; (2) to tax online gambling (the bets). Unfortunately, it did not cross the minds of the wizards who designed the flexible ceiling to tax the present completely exempt financial operations in Brazil, especially those in which the fortunes of millionaires and billionaires are invested, and the distribution of company dividends.

There is also a third theoretically possible measure: to get a tax reform through Congress that not only simplifies tax collection, but also combats corporate "tax planning" - a euphemism for the tax evasion manoeuvres of the bourgeoisie - which

would increase tax collection, together with a probable increase in taxation of the small and middle classes. The problem is that this is a gigantic challenge faced with a fragmented parliament with a right-wing majority. In the tax reform, a possible clash with the Centrão is at stake, therefore a threat to the composition agreements of the "democratic front". The vice-president of the Republic, Geraldo Alckmin, demanded that the reform be approved this year: "We have to do the tax reform. This tax asylum in which we live is not possible. Everything ends up in court. The best profession in the world is a tax lawyer. The value of the lawsuits is a fable and everything goes to court," said Alckmin, also Minister of Development, Industry and Commerce. The problem is that to reform the Brazilian tax system, any changes would provoke opposition.

In other words, by refusing to simply repeal Temer's Ceiling and mobilize against spending restraints, the government is creating a huge and dangerous trap for itself. The new fiscal rule threatens the government's own performance: the official IPEA (Institute of the Applied Economic Research) projects growth of 1.4% for 2023 and 2.6% for 2024 (for the IMF, the projections are 0.9% this year and 1.5% in 2024). Very low expectations for a country that is champion of poverty and inequality, with enormous requirements in health, education, transportation, environment, social security, and social assistance.

From a political point of view, it is a white flag towards the banking and bourgeoisie in general, which has not ceased to terrify society with its fears of "the PT's irresponsibility". But in yet another proof that it is not possible to please Greeks and Trojans - the Faria Lima [9] and the slums - at the same time, this commitment to market responsibility will limit immensely the State's investment capacity in the economy (read: in the social area), even more so in an international conjuncture that makes good export results much more difficult than it was during the first and second Lula administrations.

# The challenge of understanding, in order to confront, Bolsonarism

Everything becomes much more difficult and challenging for Lula's government because, despite the attrition and momentary defeat of Bolsonaro and the ultra-right, Brazil has shown itself to be divided. The deranged, coup-mongering Bolsonaro may be a (significant) minority of 20% or 25% in the polls, but he electorally drags almost half of the voting population. Bolsonaro and the ultra-right are not born out of the historical conservatism of Brazilian society. The social factory of neoliberal precarization, which was not born but grew geometrically after the 2016 coup, interacts organically with the root Bolsonarism, an expression of lumpen and low-ranking sectors of the bourgeoisie (retail trade, small/medium mining, freight carriers) that depend on plundering the labor force in a much more intense way, depredating nature, promoting the new ideologized selfentrepreneurs, and mobilizing the reactionary traditions in the culture wars against the left and social agendas. The problem is that this movement has conquered, as it has grown, more essential sectors of the Brazilian business community, such as most of the agribusiness, industry, and financial capital, with the same ultraliberal interests.

But to confront the monster, it is also necessary to understand how the left has fed it. In the space opened by Catholicism for neo-Pentecostalism and in the conciliation with the pastors promoted by the PT in its governments, the conservative offensive to make social reproduction more precarious grew. This offensive expresses itself in bigotry, misogyny, violence in general and against women in particular, homophobia, rabid transphobia, blatant racism - another point of unity of the current reactionary constellation that challenges globalism throughout the world. The absence of political-ideological mobilization by Lulo-PTism

encouraged, together with the policy set in motion in the Catholic Church by John Paul II, the mental counter-revolution that was already underway in Brazilian society: the evangelical population grew from 9% of the total in 1990, to 32% in 2020.

Neo-Pentecostalism comes along with popular entrepreneurship, individualism and competitiveness as values that spread through the social fabric, giving liberalism an organicity that it had never had until then in the country. The abandonment (by the majority left) of a political project's horizon with an equality and social justice utopia, citizenship and recognition of diversity, has provided a new type of conservatism to take root, a liability that will endure far beyond the lifetime of the present political protagonists. This is a central problem ignored by productivist and doctrinaire leftists, who treat the current wave of neo-fascisms as historical inertia or inevitability.

## The Workers' Party Legacy

The PT governments, nostalgic for the developmentalist imaginary that shaped them, and pragmatic before the agrarian elites. They were passive and conservative in the face of the three most strategic processes in the contemporary world: the enclosure of the "commons" of nature, with its entourage of environmental predation; the enclosure of the "commons" of knowledge, by the advance of digital technologies monopolized by platform corporations; and the deterioration of the geopolitical hegemony centred in the USA in growing inter-imperialist disputes.

Soy, timber, meat, oil, cellulose, sugarcane, iron ore... Each of these "economic complexes" are complexes of destruction of the country, its biome, and of the people who inhabit it and who should survive in only a subsidiary way in a rational society. They are "complexes" linked to processes of expropriation that force the miserable populations to accept them because they need to survive. This economic (and power) structure, treated by progressive economists and

politicians as a given to be managed, is a threat to the survival of humanity. They also introduced the country, in the name of technological innovation seen as unavoidable, into the society of algorithmic connections, which undid all the worthy efforts of the eight years of Lula's government to formalize labor relations. And they did not understand that, in the new technological base of capitalism, international dependence was changing shape, and business with China, after 2009 Brazil's main trading partner, was further deepening the country's subordinate role in the international division of labor.

PT never understood the collapse of the Soviet Union and its "socialism," the debacle of social democracy that became the "third way," and the disappearance of "third worldism." It remained frozen in the unipolar world view of the 1990s, carrying the illusion of a socialist China. It favoured, in the name of an ideology of progress, both the maintenance of the inertia of environmental predation (reduction of deforestation in the Amazon with expansion of agribusiness), and the production of a new and vast even more amorphous class of "self-entrepreneurial" proletarians, enslaved by platforms and run by neo-Pentecostal pastors.

This was the factory of Bolsonaro's post-fascism among poor people and decadent middle classes who assimilate the individualistic ideology, fall into the clutches of social media algorithms, and end up reconstituting their webs of sociability in neo-Pentecostal evangelical churches. It is very short-sighted, almost blind, to see post or neo-fascisms only as a political-ideological process, without seeing its material base, or to identify it generically with neoliberalism. This is, unfortunately, what Guilherme Boulos does, praising the Lula government for knowing how to "use, like few others, the commodities price boom, motivated by China's double-digit GDP growth, to boost Brazilian economic growth" (Sem Medo do Futuro, p.126). The social factory of fascistization of Brazil by "inclusion by the market" is still running full steam ahead and nothing indicates that it will not be answered now by the

national unity government.

## Political impasses already beginning

To govern with *Centrão* to face Bolsonarism is to walk on a tightrope all the time. The government's political articulation lives a situation of permanent saturation, since every initiative in Congress is used by some parliamentary group to try to improve its bargaining position with the government. On April 18, CNN Brasil released a video with new images from January 8, in which the chief minister of the Institutional Security Cabinet (GSI) of Lula's government, General Gonçalves Dias, seems to be facilitating the movement of extremists inside the Planalto Palace. In it, it is possible to see GSI soldiers opening the door, giving directions on the way inside the palace, and even serving water to the invaders. GSI had placed the video under a five-year secrecy. The next day, Dias was dismissed as GSI's head. It was the first resignation of one of Lula's ministers. Gonçalves Dias is one of the few military men who have a relationship of trust with Lula, having been responsible for his security from 2002 to 2010. Lula believes that Dias did not betray him, but was no longer able to remain in office. In a statement to the Federal Police on the 21st, Gonçalves Dias said that the government's lack of reaction on January 8 resulted from "a general blackout in the system due to a lack of information for decision making".

The release of the images and the general's resignation made the formation of a Inquiry Commission in the Congress (joint by House and Senate) inevitable. The government was trying to block the right-wing initiative on this Inquiry Commission (CPMI), whereby supporters of former president Bolsonaro wanted to accuse the Lula government of omission on January 8. But now they are already making circulate that the mentors of the acts would be infiltrated PT militants! With the CPMI, the government supporters are reacting and fighting to dominate it. If they succeed, they will seek to detail the movements of former president Jair

Bolsonaro and his supporters that led to the invasion of the headquarters of the Three Branches of Power, increasing the pressure to take him to prison.

Arthur Lira also installed in the House a CPI against the Landless Workers Movement (MST). This displeased leaders of the movement, a historic ally of PT and Lula. Government congressmen are now trying to deflate this CPI or prevent it from being installed, arguing that it has no defined object. Since 2003 the MST has been investigated in four congressional commissions. But this gives Lira and the conservative press more ammunition to pressure the government for "moderation" and to "fit" it even more into conservative governance. João Paulo Rodrigues, MST national coordinator, reacted to the calls for moderation by saying that the group will always defend Lula's government, but that it is not a "transmission belt" of the PT's administration, nor does it accept "any kind of leash or muzzle" on the organization.

The trumpeting also involves Lula's mistakes. He faced heavy artillery as result of his statements on the trip to China and the United Arab Emirates in which he said that both Russia and Ukraine were responsible for the war. The Brazilian president aspires to have a personal stake in a mediation in the war. But this is a minefield, involving relations not only with invaded Ukraine and invading Russia, but also with the United States and Germany, which support Ukraine, and China, Russia's ally. Lula has in effect taken the position of China, which in February presented a 12-point peace plan that does not require Russia's prior withdrawal from the invaded country.

The reactions of the United States and the European Union countries were strong and demanded from Lula a rectification. In a speech at Itamaraty on April 18th, Lula had to back down and affirm that the Brazilian position adopted at United Nations is one of defense of the inviolability of sovereign countries' borders. "At the same time that my government condemns the violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity, we defend a

political and negotiated solution to the conflict," he said. On his last trip, now to Portugal and Spain, Lula positioned himself more cautiously.

## The vicious circle in which we move

Lula and Alckmin are working with the STF to close the regime's crisis, the chaotic interregnum opened in 2013. But they need *Centrão*, and they need it today much more than they needed it in 2013, because of the mistakes they made and the space they opened for reaction. In the past, Getúlio Vargas needed the agrarian oligarchies, who blocked his national-industrializing project, a crisis that escalated in 1954. Vargas won the arm wrestling at that moment, offering his own life, which gave a decade's survival to the national-developmental state, until the coup of 1964. The Lula government is in a trap, as Jean Marc van der Weid has analyzed.

These are not mere tactical choices, but rooted in the structural dynamics of the 1988' political system, overdetermined by world disputes between neoliberal globalism and conservative nationalism, that define whether Bolsonaro or Lula can become (again) president of Brazil. The PT's policy of "weak reformism", anchored on the electoral adherence of the disorganized masses turned clientele of public policies, depends, since 2006, on agreements with oligarchic sectors; it can neither formulate a project of rupture nor appeal to mass mobilization. These two are tasks for a left without the chains of "progressivism". Conservative governance, alongside the maintenance of the developmentalist economic model, chains progressivism to the defence of a certain status quo that we can summarize as the defence of the established political regime. That leaves an avenue for the extreme right to reconstitute its political force as the (deformed) expression of social non-conformism - which will be directed by it precisely against liberal democracy. The fate of the Nova República's regimen reveals itself to be structurally unstable in the critical

conditions of neoliberal capitalism that opened in 2008.

Lula could take advantage of the current framework to change important things, like the role of the military or the regulation of platforms - and they are trying to do so - although the PT has always preferred immediate social gains over strategic policy changes, an echo of the economism that marks Brazilian progressivism. Lula has already assumed, in principle, a fundamental commitment that confronts the government not only with the extreme right but with the conservatives organized in the centre right: the defence of the Amazon, without which the external anchor of his government will disappear. His government gives space for the agendas of the different social movements to resonate again, even if they are to be sent to the mysterious corridors of the bureaucracies of the ministries or of Congress.

We should support the government in all the positive initiatives it takes, although the past history of Lula and the PT indicates that they will be limited; there is nothing to indicate that it will undertake changes that could put the core of the government - co-government with the liberals - at loggerheads with the centre right. His agenda carries an unavoidable reactionary element, the conciliation with the great agribusiness exporters, enemies of humanity, which we can observe in small "details" in the entourage that travelled in advance of Lula to China.

Once the honeymoon of the majority of the population with the government is over, social dissatisfaction will return. And not in the Brazilian society of 2010, but in that of 2022. A political turnaround in the USA, with the return of the Republicans to the government in 2026, may change the mood of significant portions of the Brazilian ruling classes. Should this occur, reactionism and neo-fascism will try to marry this with popular dissatisfaction and, thanks to

unregulated digital platforms, they have the tools to do so, although no longer with the same ease as in 2018.

No one progressive likes to hear that after four years of Bolsonarism, the horizons of the hard-won Lula government are so problematic. We should contribute so that he can advance as far as possible. But the left can only do this if it advances popular demands from the movements and does not remain caught in the same trap of conservative governability that chained Lula and PT.

## Recovering the strategic horizon

We live in a time of disruptive global changes that have plunged the left into a great confusion. We cannot foresee all the consequences of the mutations, but we can visualize tendencies that mark our positions. This is what the socialists did, for example, in the 19th century regarding industrialization, and in the first decades of the 20th century regarding the perspective of wars and revolutions, as well as in the 1930s and 1940s regarding the tactics to confront classical fascism.

A first milestone, in the face of the fascisms and conservatisms that are sweeping the planet, is the task of qualifying the left with a strategic look at the struggle for political and social democracy on all fronts. It's necessary to refuse populist appeals to adapt to fleeting electoral victories, on the one hand, and, on the other, the temptation to replace the old "really existing socialism" with the Chinese or Russian model. There are no authoritarian alternatives to fascism. Democratic freedoms and rights matter, and matter a lot. They need to be anchored in processes of popular self-organization that cannot be treated instrumentally by this or that political force. To conquer governments without social ballast is not to conquer power, but to manage the established state and power.

A second milestone, in the face of a qualitatively more integrated, connected, and interdependent world, in which capital has become universalized and produces an environmental emergency, is to give centrality and new meaning to internationalism and ecologism. There is a concrete universalist heritage and a fundamental solidarity to be defended in the face of reaction, without which there is no political and social advance. It has a material, economic-environmental form. Overcoming inequality requires another economy, one that rejects the quantitative impulses of GDP growth, and promotes a fundamental redistribution of wealth and power. We need an economic proposal that is worthy of the intelligence, that breaks with the imaginative blockage established, in Brazil, by the nostalgia for developmentalism. Ecosocialism, degrowth of the rich, and economic de-globalization, accompanied by qualitatively superior regional integration, will not be driven by nationalist political forces, but in the name of all humanity and the defence of the web of life.

A third milestone is, in the face of the world of platforms, social networks, and big techs, to build anti-systemic social and political power. We see everywhere powerful processes of popular self-organization, but they do not crystallize into political tools independent of workers. A systemic alternative will be organized with a program that allows the world of work to embrace all its heterogeneity and build the social and political alliances necessary to challenge for state power. Throughout the world, women have been at the forefront of social and political change. On the other hand, the blind strategies of governmental disputes stopped accumulating social force four decades ago, destroying all the promises of the left that had reached the state apparatus. The construction of new social tools and strategies of struggle for power are inseparable.

*São Paulo, April 27, 2023*

# An Uneasy Alliance on the Left

24 May 2023, by **Metin Feyyaz**

For this reason, in the broadest sense, the left in Turkey supported the opposition presidential candidate in the presidential elections, while in the parliamentary elections, it entered the elections with a separate alliance under the name of "Labor and Freedom Alliance". "Labor and Freedom", constituted by the HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party, a left-wing party from the Kurdish movement), the TIP (Workers' Party of Turkey where our comrades of the Fourth International are active) and four other formations of the radical left.

## Candidate who could win or candidate who would change nothing

The Labor and Freedom Alliance was actually established long before the elections, although its primary purpose was defined as an alliance of struggles, not an electoral alliance, of course, the upcoming elections dominated the entire political activity of the Alliance.

The Alliance's initial strategy was to ensure that the opposition's candidate would not be "too" right-wing, especially since the Presidential elections would ultimately be between two candidates and would actually be a sort of referendum. Because, the internal debate of the "Nation Alliance", which consists of main opposition party social-liberal CHP and various right-wing alliance elements, was actually to put forward a nationalist, statist candidate under the name of "candidate who could win" and in the end for Kurdish movement this would mean a candidate which would change

nothing.

In the end, in order not to have to support a slightly less right-wing candidate against Erdoğan in the second round, Alliance stated that instead of nominating candidates themselves in the Presidential elections, they could support National Alliance in the first round if they nominate the current leader of the CHP, Kılıçdaroğlu. They aimed to create pressure during the selection process of the candidate. This strategy partially worked and although the dominant tendency was to nominate a right-wing candidate from within the CHP, the appeal of winning the Kurdish movement's support of around 10 percent in the first round also affected the CHP's nomination process.

But of course, in this case, it was not possible for the socialists and the Kurdish movement to nominate candidates in the presidential election and make their own propaganda. However, the situation is different for the parliamentary elections. The Labor and Freedom Alliance had to discuss its strategy for the parliamentary elections for a long time, and these discussions almost led to the end of the Alliance.

Turkey has a 7 percent threshold for representation in parliament, in which case minor parties or parties that only get regional votes are not able to be represented in the Parliament and this makes Alliances even more important because if you are in an Alliance, all the total votes in that Alliance will be counted in the threshold calculation. For the Labor Freedom Alliance, this situation brought up two different tactics; 1. Parties within the Alliance participate in the elections under the name of the Alliance with their own party names and lists, or 2. All components of the Alliance participate in elections under a single party name and with a single list. The

choice between these two tactics led to intense debates between supporters of TIP and HDP, the two major components of the Alliance, which led to intense discussion on social media which sometimes almost burned all the bridges.

## Birthing Pains

The main expectation of the HDP, whose thousands of militants are in prison or in exile abroad, whose elected mayors have been removed from duty and trustees have been appointed, was that Erdoğan would lose in the presidential election and the number of Labor Freedom Alliance deputies in the parliament would upset the balance between the other two parties. So that any party that would try to get something through the National Assembly would have to negotiate with the Labor and Freedom Alliance. For this reason, it aimed to get more deputies by entering from a single list instead of all the Parties entering the elections under their own names.

The second major component of the Alliance, TIP, is a party in the building process, its membership has increased more than tenfold in the last year and has received significant attention from the opposition public, especially thanks to the radical outbursts of its spokespersons against AKP representatives. For TIP, they chose to enter the election under its own name, as this election would be their first election, it would be the opportunity to explain themselves and their program, and to compile and gather their own support.

Although, after the discussions, Party decided that TIP entered the election in the Alliance but with his own name and list, while other components of the Alliance entered the elections under the name of Green and Left Party, but in some cities where it was



risky for Green and Left Party to get elected, TIP agreed to withdraw and support them.

However, about a week or two after this agreement, especially on social media and sometimes including party officials, skirmishes began. While Green and Left Party said that this election tactic would cause them to lose their deputies, TIP announced that it wouldn't, and they had withdrawn by mutual agreement in cities that may already be risky.

But the real reasons for the debate go back a little, there had been no effort to build an independent mass socialist political party in Turkey for many years, and TIP was running for the first time in many years without breaking the alliance and solidarity with the Kurdish Movement, but with its own independent program. As a result of the election, for the first time since the 1960s, a socialist party won 1 million votes and 1.7 percent (although it did not enter the elections in many cities) and brought the

number of its members to 50 thousand, making a significant contribution towards building a mass socialist party. Therefore, we can actually call these discussions the "birthing pains" of a new socialist center which is in solidarity with the Kurdish movement but with its own independent program. Of course, the wobbles that this new party may experience and other problems in the political line it will follow will be the subject of future struggles within the party.

## Ukraine: Resisting creditors

23 May 2023, by **Éric Toussaint, Sushovan Dhar**

**Sushovan Dhar: What can be said about Ukraine's debt 15 months after Russia invaded its territory?**

**Éric Toussaint:** I must first of all insist that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is an unjustifiable and morally unacceptable act of aggression. Faced with this invasion the Ukrainian people are right to resist and deserve international support just like other peoples who are victims of aggression such as the Palestinians (who have been victims through the occupation of their land and continued aggression by the Israeli State for decades), the Afghans (victims of the intervention by the US and their allies from 2001 to 2021), the Iraqis (victims of the March 2003 invasion by the US and their allies), the Kurds, the Yemeni, and many others. Since the 1990s, Russia has turned into a capitalist country implementing a violent imperialist policy in line with those of the US and West European imperialist countries. Undoubtedly the list of aggressions by Washington and its allies is much longer than Russia's, but this does not give Putin a right to invade a sovereign country and slaughter its population. When he invaded Ukraine, he somehow restored NATO's legitimacy, which we must fight relentlessly to achieve its dissolution. Indeed we must take a stand against the policies and interests of all

imperialisms. We must fight the imperialism of the Russian capitalist power and we must fight NATO. In the present case we must support the Ukrainian people's resistance against invasion without entertaining any illusion about the objectives of the imperialist countries that support Zelensky's government as they stoke the war in their own interests.

Early 2023 Ukraine's external debt amounted to **\$132 billion**, approximately 75% of the country's GDP. If we add the internal debt, the total amounted to over 100% of GDP.

In July 2022, creditor countries backing Ukraine suspended debt repayment and in March 2023, [this suspension was extended until 2027](#). However, this measure does not concern all creditors: it excludes the IMF and private creditors, among others.

We must also keep in mind that during this partial suspension of repayment, interests continue to accumulate and will have to be paid on top of the stock on loan, which will have to be repaid to the last cent, according to signed agreements.

Indeed a large part of the financial aid granted by Ukraine's allies consists of loans, which means new debts. This is quite clear and outrageous, in the

context of so-called aid from the EU and EU members. For instance, the support package of up to €18 billion for Ukraine [announced by the EU in November 2022 will be transferred only gradually, and as loans to be paid back in full and with interest](#). [10] This announcement was later [confirmed in December 2022](#) (tweet by Charles Michel). Altogether, the EU and its 27 member states have up to now pledged to lend Ukraine some €55 bn over the coming years. The Ukrainian government is pleased with itself, but it is a 'poisoned gift' for the people since, according to current announcements, the repayment of the capital will begin in about ten years' time. This means that the government is encouraged to get into debt, on the one hand because of significant needs and on the other because repayment will not start while they are in office. The main burden of debt repayment will fall on another government and, inevitably, on the people.

For further information, notably on the accumulation of debt since Ukraine's independence in 1992, see "[Why should Ukraine's debt be cancelled?](#)" published in April 2022.

We can compare this with the Greek debt. In 2009, before the bailout loan by the IMF and the EU (the European Commission, Eurozone member States and the ECB) it amounted to [about 126% of the country's GDP](#); in early 2015 before the left-wing party Syriza came to power, it amounted to 180% of GDP; in 2020, it peaked at 206% and in early 2023 was about 171%. In absolute figures, the Greek public debt before any aid from the IMF and the EU was €301 bn; by 2015, after five years of loans from the IMF and the EU, it had reached €311 bn and in early 2023, it amounted to €356 bn. In short, EU and IMF so-called aid in the form of loans are poisoned gifts that keep a country under its creditors' thumb. All figures in the previous two sentences can be found at <https://countryeconomy.com/national-debt/greece?year=2009>. For a more detailed critical analysis of the indebtedness process in Greece from the 1990s to Syriza's arrival to power in 2015, see the report of the [Truth Committee on the Greek Public Debt](#) which I coordinated, particularly Chapters 1, 2 and 3.

For Ukraine as for Greece we have to conclude that so-called financial aid in the form of loans has a very high social and political cost: privatizations (often by foreign companies); lower wages; precarious working conditions; laws restricting the right to strike and to collective social agreements. Moreover, the debt continues to increase, providing convenient leverage for the creditors on the indebted country's government.

The US chose to duplicate what they had done with the [Marshall Plan in the late 1940s](#) to reconstruct their Western European allies' economy, [namely using grants not loans](#). Up to now they have committed themselves to providing some \$73 bn. // The financial aid that they provide in the form of grants is partly spent on purchasing goods and services sold by US companies. The US plays the part of the good financial cop next to the bad financial cops embodied by the EU, the IMF, the World Bank, the EIB (European Investment Bank) or the EBRD (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development). These supply loans to be repaid in full and with significant interest. So,

clearly, financial aid is increasing Ukraine's debt for the coming years.

The increase will amount to dozens of billions of dollars but will only gradually become perceptible. By my calculation, loans from West European countries (EU and others such as the UK), the IMF, the WB and the EIB will result in a debt increase of some \$50 bn.

**Sushovan Dhar: So what has been heralded as generous aid and a sign of solidarity largely consists of debts to be repaid by the Ukrainian people?**

**Éric Toussaint:** Yes indeed, quite clearly.

Let us take the case of the IMF. The IMF's loans to Ukraine since the invasion amount to slightly over \$15 bn (or 11.6 bn SDR – Special Drawing Rights—, the currency used by the IMF) to be paid in instalments. Like the World Bank, the IMF always demands full repayment even when an agreement has been reached with other creditors to reduce the debt. Moreover it enforces high interest rates that can reach 8% a year.

In general, for a 'small' loan, the IMF applies 2 % interest, then once the amount exceeds a certain sum, it applies 'surcharges' (see [Eurodad's guide regarding the surcharges applied by the IMF](#)). This induces real rates of between 4.5 % and 8 %, depending on each case. For the case of Ukraine, in 2021 Eurodad's Daniel Munevar made a [specific calculation of the surcharges that the IMF applied to Ukraine before the invasion](#).

Since the onset of war in February 2022, the IMF does not seem to be applying the suspension of payments, according to [the repayment schedule found on the IMF website](#).

It is highly probable that the Fund has managed to persuade a range of US-allied countries (the G7 + Belgium, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia and Spain) to pay contributions into a fund managed by the IMF and from which it withdraws the money that Ukraine should be repaying for the period of suspension of payments that runs until 2027. [11]

Note, too, that the IMF conditions the granting of loans upon the implementation of harsh neoliberal policies. In the case of Ukraine, since 2000, that country's government has signed loan agreements with the IMF on 18 occasions. Each time, the agreement results in the government sending a *Letter of Intent* wherein it defines its commitments in fulfilment of the IMF's demands. These letters of intent define a whole panoply of measures which go against the interests of the populations along with an enormous increase in debt.

Since 2000, the IMF has got the Ukrainian government to apply shock strategy, with typical neoliberal measures: the liberalization and promotion of foreign trade, liberalization of prices, reduction of consumer subsidies for the working classes, the degradation of a whole series of basic services. The IMF also encouraged the acceleration of the process of privatizing public companies. Each time, the IMF fixed a target for public deficit reduction. The IMF added precarity in the jobs market by facilitating redundancies in the private and public sectors. The effects of the policies recommended by the IMF were drastic. There was an extremely serious aggravation of poverty among the population. So much so that by 2015, Ukraine was the country with the lowest salaries, in real terms, of Europe.

**Sushovan Dhar: Does the IMF still implement neoliberal policies in spite of the war?**

**Éric Toussaint:** It does. For instance, the IMF has tried to take advantage of the war to get more privatizations of public companies than it had over the previous twenty years, for example Naftogaz, the public gas company. It will be a significant stake in the coming years. This can be deduced from the following passage: "Ambitious reforms will be required in the energy sector to enhance competition, improve market mechanisms, and reduce large quasi-fiscal risks." [12] (Source: IMF Executive Board Approves US\$ 15.6 Billion under a New Extended Fund Facility (EFF) arrangement for Ukraine as part of a US\$ 115 Billion Overall Support Package. Page 4.

<https://www.imf.org/-/media/Files/Publications/CR/2023/English/1UKREA2023001.ashx> accessed on 11 May 2023.

**Sushovan Dhar: And what of the aid provided by EU countries? You said it does not consist of grants but of loans, so new debts...**

**Éric Toussaint:** This is indeed the case. Most EU aid consists of loans with interest. In fact, the EU has followed the model of what it did with Greece from 2010: agreeing with the IMF to impose blatantly neoliberal and anti-popular measures.

EU aid is conditioned by an agreement between Ukraine and the IMF. In reciprocation, Ukraine's agreement with the IMF stipulates that the Ukrainian government implement structural (counter) reforms required of Ukraine to meet the conditions for joining the European Union. The IMF document of March 2023 states: "The program (sic) will comprise a two-phased approach: the first phase focuses on securing macroeconomic stabilization and undertaking critical structural reforms while the war is still ongoing; the second phase, once active combat has subsided sufficiently, will focus on further entrenching macroeconomic policies and embarking on a more expansive set of structural reforms to restore medium-term external viability, support sustained growth, and facilitate Ukraine's path to EU accession." [13] (*ibid.*, p. 4).

This means, in particular, increasing privatizations and enabling even more foreign investment in the sectors that whet the appetites of Western capitalists.

Among the goods that they covet are the enormous stretches of arable land. Let us recall that Ukraine is a bread-basket for Europe and the world. The plan is to develop the opportunity for foreign agri-business investors to acquire huge amounts of very fertile cultivated land.

**Sushovan Dhar: And how could Ukraine reconstruct after all the destruction it has suffered since February 2022 and that is not about to stop while repaying old**

**and new debts? What are the creditors thinking of?**

**Éric Toussaint:** Creditors are well aware that full debt repayment according to the set timetable will be impossible. Not only are they aware of this; they make sure it will be the case so as to use it as leverage. As often happens, the burden of the debt will be used as a bargaining chip at the time of peace, at a date that is impossible to predict. In order to persuade Ukraine to favour the interests of Western creditors, it will be given the carrot of an agreement to reduce part of its debt.

Negotiations for the restructuring of Ukrainian debt will provide an opportunity for creditors to get as much as they can, to the detriment of the Ukrainian people and of Ukraine's natural resources. Washington, which has so far given more in grants than in loans, will use the IMF and the WB, which it dominates, to ensure that its interests are given priority. The US imperialist power will use the weight of the weapons it supplies to Ukraine and the dependence of this country for its defence. European and North American imperialists will use NATO.

As debt restructuring/reduction will also involve other powers such as Turkey and China, the governments of those countries will also push forward their interests and demands. Those two countries, and China in particular, are also creditors. China (like Russia) is represented at the IMF and the WB, and it will want its share of the cake.

**Sushovan Dhar: Is there an internal debt?**

**Éric Toussaint:** Indeed, there is an old internal debt from before the war to which a new internal debt must be added since the Zelensky government has issued debt securities called "war securities." In the graph below we can see that the government sold new securities for \$5.9 bn during the first term of 2023. Those securities earn an interest rate of 8.5 to 12 % if in Ukrainian currency, 2 to 3.5 % if in dollars or 2 to 2.7 % if in euros (information on interest rates provided by Yuliya Yurchenko, a Ukrainian economist and member of the left-wing Ukrainian movement Sotsialnyi

Rukh).

**Sushovan Dhar: How much financial aid has Ukraine received?**

**Éric Toussaint:** According to the Ukrainian website financed by a George Soros foundation, the US Congress via the National Endowment for Democracy and the Swedish embassy, "In 2022, Ukraine received \$31.1 billion in foreign grants and loans, which averaged \$3.1 billion per month of the war. However, payments were neither stable nor regular, with some months seeing extremely high or low amounts of funding. The irregular payments harmed budget execution."

Here is the detail of amounts received between 1 January 2023 and 3 May 2023:

**Graph 1: \$16.8 billion of foreign financing in 2023**

Additional financing on 3 May 2023, in US dollars



**Source:** Ministry of Finance • Others: Germany, Finland, Ireland, Spain, Switzerland, Belgium, Iceland, Estonia

Graph from Centre for Economic Strategy "Ukraine War Economy Tracker".

The next graph shows to what extent the financial means provided by imperialist powers supporting Ukraine (mainly North America, the EU and the United Kingdom) are vital to bridge Zelensky's government's fiscal deficit.

**Graph 2: Foreign sources of financing are essential to bridge the government's fiscal deficit (in billions of US dollars)**



**Source:** NBU, Ministry of Finance, CES research • Foreign financing and state budget financing needs, USD bn.

Graph from Centre for Economic Strategy "Ukraine War Economy Tracker".

As a consequence, Ukraine is very dependent on the powers that provide the money. The latter take advantage of this to put forward their economic and geostrategic interests.

### **Sushovan Dhar: What of the debt Russia claims from Ukraine?**

**Éric Toussaint:** We are talking about a debt that goes back to 2013. Ukraine suspended repayment of the debt as of December 2015. This gave rise to a legal proceeding in London: Russia wanted British justice to condemn Ukraine to resume payments.

I discussed this matter [in an interview I gave in April 2022](#) and since then there have been further developments. Let us go back over the events.

In December 2013, when Ukraine had Viktor Yanukovich as its president, who was closely linked to Putin's regime, the Russian Federation convinced Ukraine's Ministry of Finance to issue securities on the Dublin Stock Exchange in Ireland for an amount of 3 billion dollars. This was the first issue that was supposed to be followed by others to gradually reach \$15 billion. So the first issue of securities amounted to 3 billion and all the securities sold in Dublin were bought by the Russian Federation through a private company it had entrusted with this operation, the [Law Debenture Trust Corporation PLC](#). The interest rate was 5%. The following year, Russia annexed Crimea, which until then had been part of Ukraine. The Ukrainian government changed as a result of popular mobilizations, the exact nature of which is debatable as there was both a genuine popular rebellion and intervention by the right and extreme right. There was also the will of Western powers, especially Washington, to take advantage of popular discontent to weaken Putin and strengthen their own position. The new government continued for a while to pay back the debt to Russia. In total, \$233 million of interest was paid to Russia. Then in December 2015, when it was time to repay the principal (= the \$3 billion lent in December 2013) which fell due on 21 December of that year, the government decided to suspend the payment of the debt.

In brief, the Ukrainian government justified the suspension of payments by explaining that it had the right to take countermeasures against Russia because the latter had attacked Ukraine and annexed Crimea. And indeed, under international law, a state has the right to take countermeasures and suspend the fulfilment of a contract in such circumstances.

The [Law Debenture Trust Corporation PLC](#), representing the interests of the Russian Federation, took the case to the UK courts in London. Indeed, it had been established that the securities were issued in accordance with English law and that in case of dispute the British courts would have jurisdiction. Therefore, the [Law Debenture Trust Corporation PLC](#) filed a complaint against Ukraine asking the UK courts to order Ukraine to resume payment. The proceedings started in 2016.

There was a first judgement, followed by an appeal against the judgement. Then finally a session in the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom took place on 11 November 2021 (this session can be viewed in its entirety on the [website](#) of the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom).

It is worth noting that at first the British magistrates, notably the principal magistrate who was in charge at the beginning of the proceedings, was none other than William Blair, Tony Blair's brother, who had until recently very close business links with Putin's Russia. [He tended to rule in favour of Russia](#) since the UK judiciary wants to remain attractive to investors. Tony Blair's brother issued a judgement in March 2017 in which he rejected a series of obviously valid arguments put forward by Ukraine [14]. William Blair considered that there had been no real coercion by Russia on Ukraine. He considered that this was not a conflict between States. He accepted Russia's claim that the company that bought the Ukrainian securities (the Law Debenture Trust Corporation PLC) is a private entity. However, in reality, this company acts directly on behalf of Russia and it is Russia that actually bought all the securities.

Subsequently, the Court of Appeal challenged William Blair's ruling and in 2021 the case reached the final stages in the Supreme Court.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine that began at the end of February 2022, with huge loss of life and the perpetration of war crimes, it was difficult to foresee the Supreme Court siding with Russia against Ukraine in this case, when it had the support of the United States, Great Britain, the rest of the G7 (Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan) and a dozen other countries, mainly in Western Europe. The judgement handed down in March 2023 was heavily influenced by the dramatic turn of events in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

Finally, [the Supreme Court recognized that Russia had exercised duress against Ukraine](#).

However, the majority of the 5 judges refused to acknowledge that Ukraine was entitled to exercise countermeasures against Russia. They claimed that, although international law permitted a State to use countermeasures against another State that attacked or threatened to attack it, this is not applicable in British justice as British law does not provide for such a situation or does not take it into consideration! Only one of the judges affirmed that Ukraine had every right to have recourse to countermeasures against Russia. The official Press Summary can be seen [here](#): and the full judgement [here](#).

It conceded to Ukraine the right to a new trial to be brought before the British High Court of Justice.

The British justice system is thus playing for time while awaiting the outcome of the conflict.

The final judgement that will be handed down is of considerable importance as worldwide, about 15% of sovereign debt contracts fall under British law. Nearly 80 % are subject to the law of New York State. If the Court recognises that Russia has exercised duress against Ukraine and that Ukraine has the right to take countermeasures, this will set a precedent and other States will be able to invoke this precedent in their

disputes with creditors. So it is a highly significant issue.

**Sushovan Dhar: What is the CADTM's position on the cancellation of Ukrainian debt as a whole?**

**Éric Toussaint:** While Washington and the allied governments, the IMF and the World Bank pretend to be very generous, they are in fact increasing Ukraine's debt and seek to take advantage of the situation created by the Russian invasion and the ongoing war. It is not the subject of this interview, but it is clear that the Western powers, especially Washington, and the big corporations

of the military-industrial complex are pushing for a prolongation of the war.

The debt that Ukraine is accumulating already serves and will continue to serve in the future as a means of pressure in the hands of the creditors to make the country pursue its implementation of the anti-popular neoliberal model. The creditors will demand privatizations (of public enterprises, natural resources, arable land and so on) in order to appropriate part of Ukraine's wealth.

All debt demanded of Ukraine should be cancelled, just as the debts of the Global South should be cancelled. When we call for the cancellation of

Ukraine's debt, we are not asking for a privilege for the Ukrainian people. We uphold the demand for the generalized cancellation of illegitimate debt, whether in the North or the South of the planet. All the peoples of the world should be freed from the yoke of illegitimate debt.

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23 May 2023

Source: [CADTM](#).

## Party Struggles over Government's Finances Threatens the Poor

22 May 2023, by **Dan La Botz**

House leader Kevin McCarthy, who speaks for the Republicans who have a majority in the House of Representatives which controls the country's budget, has threatened to refuse to raise the national debt ceiling, that is, the amount the country can borrow, unless there are cuts to the budget, and his party advocates cutting childcare and health care funds that go to the nation's poorest citizens. Former president Donald Trump, of course, has told the Republicans, "Do not fold!"

If the Republican majority were to refuse to lift the debt limit by June 1, the United States could for the first time in its history default, with possibly disastrous consequences for the U.S. and the world economy. If the Democrats accept the Republicans' demands for budget cuts on the poor, it would violate the party's platform and promises and be a defeat for President Joseph Biden and his party as the country prepares for the 2024 presidential election.

The debt ceiling and the budget have

not always been tied together; each is a separate issue and is usually dealt with separately. By linking the two together, the Republicans have created a powerful lever to extort Congress and Biden and to force the budget cuts that they demand. The Republicans' politics are simple and crude—reduce taxes and cut the budget for social services—but all the factors are more complicated.

What worries economists, politicians, and the public is the ratio of the debt to the gross domestic product (GDP), which keeps growing. The United States has a debt of \$31.46 trillion dollars, but more important the ratio of the debt to the GDP to the debt reached 134.84% in 2020, higher than during World War II. The U.S. debt largely finances the U.S. budget, 50% of which goes for military spending, while health represents only 5%, education 7%, and food and agriculture only 1%. The Pentagon's half of the budget is considered untouchable by both parties: Biden's military budget is practically the same as Trump's. Yet the Republicans who

claim the title of fiscal responsibility want to cut the budget for health and food programs.

"It's absurd to come up with a proposal that will result in children being thrown off of child care, off of health care, be devastating to elderly people," said Senator Bernie Sanders, the progressive independent of Vermont. "We cannot be blackmailed into balancing the budget on the backs of the most vulnerable and leaving the most affluent alone." Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a progressive Democrat, believes that McCarthy will be unable to muster a majority to block the debt ceiling.

Sanders and other progressive senators have circulated a letter urging Biden to ignore the congressional debt ceiling vote altogether and to simply order the expansion of the national debt by fiat. They argue that the president could do this using the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Passed in 1868 after the U.S. Civil War and with the abolition of slavery, it guaranteed

equal rights to all men (not women). But it also contained a clause that said, the “validity of the public debt of the United States, authorized by law, including debts incurred for payments of pensions and bounties for services in suppressing insurrection or rebellion, shall not be questioned.”

The amendment has never been used for this purpose before and others fear that the U.S. Department of Justice might block such a procedure.

For a month now the country has been anxiously waiting as Republicans insist and Democrats resist. If the Republicans were to stop the lifting of

the debt ceiling leading to a default, it is feared that it could lead to another deep recession such as that of 2008. Each party, would blame the other, but it would be the working class and the poor who paid the price.

21 May 2023

## Global Post-Fascism and the War in Ukraine

21 May 2023, by Enzo Traverso, Ilya Budraitskis

**Ilya Budraitskis:** A few years ago, you wrote *The New Faces of Fascism*, where you defined post-fascism as a new threat that is simultaneously similar to and different from classical fascism of the 20th century. Post-fascism, as you describe, grows out of the fundamentally new soil of neoliberal capitalism, in which labor movements and forms of social solidarity have been attacked. You emphasize that post-fascism grew out of post-politics as a reaction to technocratic governments that ignore democratic legitimacy. At the same time, your analysis is limited mainly to the European Union and the United States, where fascism results from liberal democracy. Can this approach be expanded to the transformation of authoritarian regimes like the one in Russia, especially after the beginning of the invasion of Ukraine? In Russia, the regime in the first decade of its existence in the early 2000s also presented itself as a technocratic post-political government. It was based on mass depoliticization and lack of political participation in Russian society.

**Enzo Traverso:** Well, it's important to emphasize that “post-fascism” is an unconventional analytical category. It's not a canonical concept like liberalism, communism, or fascism. It's rather a transitional phenomenon that has not yet crystallized or clearly defined its nature. It can evolve in different directions. Nevertheless, the starting point of this definition is that fascism is trans-historical,

transcending the historically framed experience of the 1930s. Fascism is a category that can be useful to define political experiences, systems of power, and regimes that take place after the period between the two world wars. It's common to speak about Latin American fascism during the military dictatorships of the 1960s and the 1970s.

**“Global post-fascism is a heterogeneous constellation in which we can find shared tendencies: nationalism, authoritarianism, and a specific idea of ‘national regeneration’”**

That said, when we speak of democracy, it is worth noticing that although Germany, Italy, the United States, and Argentina share this label of liberal democracy, this does not mean that their institutional systems are the same. Nor does it mean that they correspond with Pericles' democracy in Ancient Athens. So, fascism is a generic term that takes a trans-historical dimension. You are right to say that my book on post-fascism primarily focuses on the European Union, the United States, and some Latin American countries. When I wrote it, Bolsonaro had not yet come to power in Brazil. However, I also wrote that post-fascism could be considered a global category, which tendentially includes authoritarian political regimes such as Putin's Russia or Bolsonaro's Brazil. I am not sure that this category can be used to define Xi Jinping's China, simply because this regime was created by

the communist revolution of 1949 (I similarly do not think we could describe Stalin's Russia as “fascist”). Maybe this category can be used to depict some tendencies that shape Modi's India or Erdogan's Turkey and raise legitimate worries. But I do not suggest extending or transposing my analysis of Western Europe to other continents and political systems; I would rather say that Western European post-fascism can be located into a global post-fascist tendency, including regimes with entirely different historical trajectories and pasts. Otherwise, it would be a very problematic way of creating for the umpteenth time a Eurocentric paradigm of fascism, which is not my approach.

The problem of how to define post-fascism, however, still remains after these considerations. Global post-fascism is a heterogeneous constellation in which we can find shared features and tendencies. They are nationalism, authoritarianism, and a specific idea of “national regeneration.” Within this constellation, these tendencies might appear differently combined and in varying degrees. For instance, Putin's Russia is much more authoritarian than Meloni's Italy. In Italy, we have a chief of government who proudly claims the fascist past (her own and that of her country), but Italy's dissident voices are not censored, persecuted, or put to jail like in Russia. There are no Italians who are exiled because their lives are

threatened in Italy. This is a significant qualitative difference. Another relevant difference is the relationship to violence. We are speaking about Russia, which is a country involved in a war. The violence displayed by this variety of post-fascist regimes cannot be compared.

There are a lot of relevant discrepancies distinguishing all these forms of post-fascism from classical fascism. Their ideologies and their ways of mobilizing the masses are not the same... The utopian dimension, for instance, which characterizes classical fascism, is utterly absent from current fascism, which is very conservative. We could mention other cleavages.

***“Italian post-fascists do not wish to install a dictatorship or to dissolve the parliament, but emotionally and culturally they remain fascist”***

**Ilya:** I would like to go through these features of post-fascism. If I understand you correctly, after reading the book and some of your interviews, you stress that post-fascism came from the crisis of democracy. Democracy not as a normative term, but electoral politics, to be more precise. The difference between classical fascism and post-fascism is that the latter does not challenge democracy. Classical fascism had the task of overthrowing democracy. Post-fascism still tries to use electoral mechanisms. The transformation towards an openly fascist dictatorship should take place through legal institutions. I am interested, in particular, in this moment of transition. You also write in your book that post-fascism can be understood as a stage for the new quality of political regimes with authoritarian or dictatorial features. How do you think this transition differs in different regions? I believe that in Russia fascist tendencies developed from the top. Twenty years ago, elements of the authoritarian regime were already installed, and since then Russia has been transformed into some kind of fascist dictatorship.

**Enzo:** A straightforward historical overview shows that many

authoritarian regimes with fascist features have appeared without mass movements, but were introduced through a military coup, for instance Franco’s regime in Spain or Latin American regimes in the 1960s and the 1970s. They were not supported by a mass movement unlike the canonical examples of fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Both Mussolini and Hitler were appointed to power by the King (of the Italian monarchy) and by the President (of the Weimar Republic) respectively, according to their constitutional prerogatives. I don’t think that we can create a compelling or normative fascist paradigm. It is a large category including different ideologies and forms of power.

***“Post-fascists win elections because they oppose neoliberalism, but when they come to power, they apply neoliberal policies”***

An enormous difference that separates post-fascism from classical fascism is the huge transformation that has taken place in the public sphere. At the time of classical fascism, charismatic leaders had an almost physical contact with their community of followers. Fascist rallies were liturgical moments that celebrated this emotional communion between the leader and its disciples. Today this connection has been replaced by the media, which create a completely different kind of charismatic leadership, at the same time more extended and pervasive, but also more fragile. Nonetheless, we cannot avoid the fundamental question: What does fascism mean in the twenty-first century? All observers constantly face this question: Is Trump/Putin/Bolsonaro/Le Pen/Meloni/Orban fascist? The simple fact of putting this question means that for us it is impossible to analyze all these leaders or regimes without comparing them to classical fascism. On the one hand, they are not fascist tout court; on the other hand, they cannot be defined without being compared with fascism. They are something between fascism and democracy, oscillating between these two poles according to the changing circumstances.

There are also contradictory dynamics. Russian nationalism is going through a process of radicalization, reinforcing these post-fascist tendencies. In Western Europe, the Italian case is emblematic of the opposite tendency. Until very recent times, Georgia Meloni was the only political leader who shamelessly claimed her fascist identity in the Italian parliament. In this she differed from other far-rights in Europe, for example Marine Le Pen, who had explicitly abandoned the ideological and political models of her father by changing the name of her movement (Rassemblement National replacing Front National). Marine Le Pen claimed her belief in democracy, affirming her support to the institutions of the French Republic, and so on, when Meloni celebrated the accomplishments of Mussolini’s Italy. The latter won the elections — thanks to a favorable electoral system and the division of the center-left — not because of her ideological references but rather because she appeared as the only and most coherent adversary of Mario Draghi, the chief of a governmental coalition supported by the European Union.

However, since she came to power, Meloni is conducting the same policies of her predecessor and no longer criticizes the EU institutions. As chief of government, she celebrated the anniversary of the Liberation, the anniversary of the triumph of democracy over fascism that took place on April 25, 1945. Meloni reminds me of those paradoxical figures that, in the 1920s, were called in Germany Vernunftrepublikaner (“republicans by reason”). After the collapse of Wilhelm’s Empire at the end of 1918, they had accepted — by reason — the democratic institutions of the Weimar Republic, but their heart still beat for the empire. Italian post-fascists are a similar case, one century later. They do not wish to install a dictatorship or to dissolve the parliament, but emotionally and culturally speaking they remain fascist. Their fascism requires many adjustments to a changed historical context.

There is also the case of Trump. In 2016, he was a worrying and enigmatic political innovation. During

his presidency, and particularly on January 6, 2021, we experienced a significant political turn that revealed a clear fascist dynamic. Today I am not sure that the Republican Party, that was one of the pillars of the US establishment, can be defined any more as one of components of the American democracy. It is a political party in which very strong post-fascist or even neofascist tendencies have become hegemonic, a political party that puts into question the state of law and the most elementary principle of democracy: the alternation of power through elections.

Ilya: I hypothesize that in countries with a limitation of political power because of oppositional political movements or various state institutions which reduce the power of the president or prime minister, the transformation towards an authoritarian state is more complicated. Whereas in Russia, all the political institutions have lost any source of independence (no parliament, no court, no serious political opposition), and there are no limitations to the actions of the president, the only sovereign. In countries like the US, the president has many obstacles to his independent decision-making and setting of policies, and the president's decisions are not totally decisive.

Enzo: I agree with you. I am far from idealizing liberal democracy and market society, but there is undoubtedly a difference between the United States, where democracy has existed for two and a half centuries, and Russia, where it has almost never existed. We do not need to mobilize Tocqueville to explain this. In Russia, democracy is the legacy of a few years of Glasnost and Perestroika, at the end of the USSR, as well as a byproduct of the resistance of civil society against an oligarchic power that managed the transition to capitalism three decades ago.

***“Post-fascism is reactionary, and as such it is a reaction to neoliberalism”***

However, there remains a cleavage between the new radical right and classical fascism that should also be considered: the relationship of post-

fascism with neoliberalism, as you said at the beginning of our conversation. My book suggests that one of the keys to understanding the post-fascist wave in Western Europe is its opposition to neoliberalism. Of course, as the case of Meloni proves, it is a very contradictory opposition. They win elections because they oppose neoliberalism, but when they come to power, they apply neoliberal policies. Italy is a great example. Neoliberalism is embodied in Western Europe by the European Union, the European Commission, the Central European Bank, etc. Those institutions are trusted interlocutors for the financial elites, who can (also?) find a compromise with Marine Le Pen, Giorgia Meloni or Victor Orban, without trusting them completely. Emmanuel Macron, Mario Draghi, and Mark Rutte are much more reliable and trusted leaders.

In the US, one key to understanding the Trump election in 2016 was his opposition to the establishment. Hilary Clinton embodied the establishment much more than Trump did, despite the obvious fact that a powerful section of American capitalism supports the Republican Party. Nonetheless, there is an evident tension between Trump — sometimes an opposition — and the most significant elements of neoliberalism. Think of the very bad relationship between Trump and California's multinational companies, new technologies, and so on. There is also an almost “ontological” or constitutive discrepancy between neoliberalism, which works through the global market, and post-fascism, which is deeply nationalist. Post-fascists demand state interventions and protectionist tendencies that contradict the logic of financial capitalism.

Ilya: My next question is related to what you just said about current capitalism's neoliberal transformation. You mention in your book that one of the differences between post-fascism and classical fascism is the lack of a project for the future. While classical fascism was a modernist project with a vision of another society (opposite to any emancipatory socialist perspective), post-fascism has no consistent project, only a no-horizon

view. There's an idea that we have to go back to some beautiful past without any vision of the future. This reminds me of one of the main features of neoliberalism. There's no future, no alternative. Capitalist realism is dominant, as Mark Fischer once pointed out. Another feature is the temporal experience of the post-fascist leaders. People like Putin and Trump are older people. Classical fascism was mostly the movement of the young. Do you think this lack of the future and retrospective, nostalgic element of post-fascism somehow relates to the neoliberal lack of view on the future?

Enzo: You point out some relevant issues. Classical fascism possessed a powerful utopian dimension. It wanted to be an alternative to both liberalism and communism, but it even strived to be a new civilization, something related to a different conception of existence itself. They launched very ambitious projections of society: the myth of the new man, the myth of the “thousand-year Reich,” and so on. This utopian dimension was rooted in the depth of the European and international crisis of capitalism. It does not exist today because capitalism in its neoliberal form appears as an insuperable and indestructible framework. Between the two world wars, there was an alternative to capitalism, created by the Russian Revolution, and communism as a utopian project was able to mobilize millions of human beings. This is a huge difference. Contemporary post-fascist currents are extremely conservative. They wish to save traditional values. They want to return to the traditional idea of a nation, conceived as a cultural, religious, and ethnically homogeneous community. They wish to restore the Christian values on which the history of Europe was built. They want to defend national communities against the invasion of Islam, immigration, etc. They wish to protect national sovereignty against globalism. This does not remind us of the fascist utopianism or Nazi Germany, much more of the German “cultural despair” *Kulturpessimismus* of the end of the nineteenth century.

***“While post-fascism opposes neoliberalism, it is simultaneously***



### ***rooted in its social structure***

Post-fascism is reactionary, and as such it is a reaction to neoliberalism, which does not wish to come back to national borders and sovereignties. Neoliberal historical temporality is “presentist,” not reactionary. It posits an eternal present that absorbs both past and future: our lives and society must run and can be destroyed if they don't fit the compelling rules of capital development, according to a temporality rhythmized by the stock exchange, but the general framework of capitalism is immutable. Capitalism was “naturalized,” and this is probably the major achievement of neoliberalism. Post-fascism is an illusory alternative to neoliberalism, just as fascism often depicted itself as “anti-capitalist”; but the difference is that today the ruling classes do not choose this fake alternative. Their institutions are not so deeply unsettled to accept such an option.

The same can be said about its expansionism. Italian fascism wished to conquer new colonies; Nazi Germany wanted to conquer the entire continental Europe. Today's post-fascism is very xenophobic and racist, but its xenophobia and racism are defensive. They say: we must protect ourselves against the threat embodied by the “invasion” of non-white and non-European immigrants. We are not going to conquer Ethiopia; we are going to protect ourselves from Ethiopian immigration. The comparison between Putin's aggression of Ukraine and the fascist or Nazi conquests in Europe does not work because Putin's expansionism wishes to recreate the Russian Empire in Central Europe by reintegrating a country that Russian nationalism has always considered its own vital space, culturally belonging to Russian history. But the Ukrainian war, if we can make a counterfactual comparison, is as if the German invasion of Poland in September 1939 had been stopped in two weeks and the Wehrmacht had to give up occupying Warsaw.

**Ilya:** I agree that Hitler was much more successful than Putin.

**Enzo:** The nature of expansion is not the same. The Nazi aggression against

Poland was imperialistic and expansionist; the Russian aggression of Ukraine is revanchist and “defensive,” especially considering Kiev's goal of joining NATO. There are also some relevant demographic differences. In the 1930s, Nazi Germany had, like Russia today, suffered a significant loss of territories and population, but its population was dramatically growing. As for Italy, its population grew despite a structural emigration that weakened its economy. If today Putin embodies an illusory nationalist response to the collapse of 1990, it is also because his defensive expansionism is not supported by a powerful demographic dynamic. Russia is declining and struggling to preserve its status as a superpower. Of course, it has some advantages: nuclear weapons and so on. But economically and demographically speaking, its radicalized nationalism is defensive.

But let me add a last consideration on neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is not only a set of economic policies: free market, deregulation, global economy. It is also an anthropological model, a conduct of life. It is a philosophy and a lifestyle based on competition, individualism, and a particular way of conceiving human relations. In the twenty-first century, this anthropological paradigm has been imposed on a global scale. This means that all post-fascist movements are rooted in this anthropological background. This explains why there are so many significant changes compared with classical fascism. First, we have powerful post-fascist movements led by women. This would have been inconceivable in the 1930s. Second, the movements must accept certain forms of individualism, individual rights, and freedoms. Their Islamophobia, for instance, is sometimes formulated as a defense of Western values against Islamic obscurantism. This way, while post-fascism opposes neoliberalism, it is simultaneously rooted in its social structure.

***“The Ukrainian Resistance is conducting a national liberation war that is forcefully plural and heterogeneous”***

**Ilya:** You have mentioned that one of

the primary emotions of post-fascism is the defensive line.

In fact, the whole war in Russia was presented by the official propaganda as a defense not just against NATO but also fake values, especially the infiltration of LGBT and gender politics. In this sense, one can say that in this kind of regime, the borders between international politics and domestic politics are blurring. However, we can also see that the neoliberal mindset you have just talked about dominates all explanations of the international situation. Of course, Putin is very much preoccupied in his political imagination with the role of Russia in the global arena. Still, Putin and other Russian officials explain that international relations are a kind of market where you have competition, where the same self-interest paradigm is defining the position of states, where the multipolar world that they advertise instead of American hegemony is the true free market against monopoly. They see the world as the US's monopoly, which should be challenged by true, honest, fair competition of multiple strong players. How do you see these relations?

**Enzo:** I am not well equipped to answer this question satisfactorily. Of course, the tenacious and admirable resistance of Ukraine against Russian invasion deserves to be supported, both politically and militarily. I don't agree with the currents of Western left that denounce Russian aggression and simultaneously refuse to send weapons to Kiev. This seems to me a hypocritical stance. The Ukrainian Resistance is conducting a national liberation war that is forcefully plural and heterogeneous. Like all Resistance movements in Europe during the Second World War, it includes right- and left-wing currents, nationalist and cosmopolitan sensitivities, authoritarian and democratic tendencies. Between 1943 and 1945, the Italian Resistance gathered a large spectrum of forces, going from the communists (the hegemonic tendency) to the monarchists (a small minority), and passing through social-democrats, liberals, and Catholics. In France, Resistance had two souls — De Gaulle and the communists — beside which

there were also fighting Catholics, Trotskyists, and a constellation of small (but very effective) organizations of anti-fascist immigrants from Central Europe, Italy, Spain, Turkish Armenia, etc. This diversity is inevitable in a national resistance movement.

Having said that, I am quite pessimistic about the outcome of this conflict. If Putin wins, which is improbable but not impossible (particularly in case of an involvement of China on his side), this will have tragic consequences not only for Russia and Ukraine but also on a global scale. Fascist and authoritarian tendencies will be reinforced in Russia; post-fascist tendencies in Europe and internationally will strengthen equally. On the other hand, a Russian defeat, which is desirable, would mean not only the affirmation of a free and independent Ukraine but also, very probably, an extension of NATO and the US hegemony, which is much less attractive.

The Ukrainian war is often depicted as an entanglement of conflicts: a Russian invasion which is an unacceptable aggression; a self-defense war of Ukraine which wants to be supported; and a Western indirect military intervention which the US aims at transforming into a NATO proxy war. Ten years ago, there was a civil war in Ukraine, which created some premises for the current conflict. This is a very complex situation, in which the left needs to be nuanced. Whereas in Russia we must struggle against Putin and in Ukraine we must struggle against the Russian invasion; in the US and the EU countries we cannot support an extension of NATO or the increase of our military budgets.

***“The Western left should prove that it is possible to fight against the neoliberal order without being the friends of Putin”***

This situation is not completely new. During the Second World War, the Resistance movements and the Allied

armies fought together against the Axis powers, but their convergence was limited, and they did not share the same final goals. This became evident in Greece, where the collapse of German occupation threw the country into a civil war in which the British army helped to repress the communist Resistance. Tito and Eisenhower struggled together against Hitler, but their objectives were not the same. Today, we are in this whirl of contradictory tendencies: on the one hand, we must support the Ukrainian Resistance, as well as the dissident voices in Russia; on the other, we must be able to say that a neoliberal order is not the only alternative to post-fascism. The left should be able to speak to the non-Western countries that did not condemn this invasion. The Western left should prove that it is possible to fight against the neoliberal order without being the friends of Putin.

**Ilya:** My last question is about anti-fascism. You wrote that anti-fascism as a tradition and a view, was lost in recent years, and you believe that the re-establishment of the anti-fascist tradition could be the only proper answer to the rise of fascism. However, this also means that the anti-fascist tradition should be reinvented, it cannot be the same movement it was in the middle of the twentieth century. Of course, there are a lot of difficulties with this tradition. For instance, the Russian invasion of Ukraine was also labeled as anti-fascist (against the Ukrainian “Nazis”) by Russian official propaganda. Of course, the idea of anti-fascism was devalued from various sides. What can this reinvention of anti-fascism look like?

**Enzo:** Again, it is difficult to answer this question. I depicted post-fascism as a global phenomenon, but I am not sure we can speak of global anti-fascism. It depends on contingent circumstances. Of course, we can say that fascism is bad everywhere at any time, but anti-fascism does not have the same meaning and political

potentialities everywhere at any time. I do not know how anti-fascism can be perceived today in Russia, India, or the Philippines. Different countries have different historical trajectories, and anti-fascism cannot be understood and mobilized in the same way everywhere. In Western Europe, anti-fascism means a specific historical memory. In Italy, France, Germany, Spain or Portugal, in countries that experienced fascism, with shared collective memories, it is impossible to defend democracy without claiming an anti-fascist legacy. In India, for instance, the relationship between the struggle for independence and anti-fascism is much more complex. During the Second World War, being anti-fascist meant renouncing, at least for a while, to the struggle for independence. In Russia, Putin endorses a demagogic rhetoric by depicting the invasion of Ukraine as the final stage of the Great Patriotic War. Of course, demystifying this lying propaganda and re-establishing the true significance of anti-fascism is crucial for Russian democrats and dissidents. In Ukraine, things are more complicated because the fight against Russian oppression is older than anti-fascism and was not always anti-fascist. The history of Ukrainian nationalism includes a fascist and right-wing component which cannot be forgotten. At the same time, the memory of anti-fascism is that of an anti-Nazi war — as epic and heroic as it was tragic — that Ukrainians fought as part of the USSR. Therefore, being anti-fascist means claiming a tradition that is not consensual in Ukrainian history. It means to defend a certain political identity within a plural Resistance movement. Things are incredibly complicated. Roughly speaking, we could say that anti-fascism means a free and independent Ukraine not opposed to but rather allied with a democratic Russia. Unfortunately, this will not happen tomorrow.

18 May 2023

Source: [Posle](#).

# Peripheries of Chinese Imperialism: Belt & Road Initiative in Jamaica

20 May 2023, by **Robert Connell**

For socialists, these debates cut to the heart of the class nature of the Chinese state and its implication in processes of imperialism. Apologists for the Chinese Communist Party have gone so far as to frame the BRI within the ideals of socialist internationalism, “genuine compassion,” and “building humanity,” albeit within the dynamics of global capitalism.

More critical and robust assessments find that the BRI is an intensification of global capital accumulation, marked by state capitalism and public-private partnerships mobilized to facilitate the rise of a new multipolar imperialism for the benefit of Chinese capitalists and political elites. As socialists analyzing the geopolitical and economic ramifications of China’s entrenchment in the global neoliberal system, we must not lose sight of the on-the-ground impact of China’s overseas investments.

Indeed, such a viewpoint is a necessary component of critiquing the claims of the Chinese government and its defenders that the BRI is a win-win program of mutual development driven by socialist ideals. If such were the case, it would result in rising prospects and power of local workers’ movements and facilitate the reversal of structures of inequality and exploitation. The case of Jamaica demonstrates the opposite.

When I first went to Jamaica in 2012 as a graduate student studying the environmental politics of the Maroons, an Afro-Indigenous community who freed themselves from enslavement in the 18th century and established an autonomous society in the mountainous interior of the island, Chinese overseas development policy seemed irrelevant to my work. Yet as my field research progressed over the following eight years, first as a

doctoral student in African diaspora studies and then as a post-doctoral researcher, the impact of Chinese infrastructural development and extractive industry on the Jamaican people and environment became increasingly apparent.

The timing of my field work overlapped with an unprecedented surge in Chinese economic and diplomatic engagement with Jamaica and the Caribbean as a whole.

Between 2005 and 2021, the China Development Bank and the China Export-Import Bank loaned USD\$2.1 billion to the Jamaican government and state-owned enterprises (SOE), a significant proportion of the estimated \$9 billion loaned to the nations of the Caribbean Community in the same period.

In 2014, as I became well-immersed in the daily life of the Maroon village of Accompong, the state-owned China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC) made front page news for opening the historic cross-island North-South Highway (also called Highway 2000) at a cost of over \$700 million.

In 2016, the Jiuquan Iron & Steel Group (Jisco), another major Chinese SOE operating under the aegis of the BRI, purchased a bauxite (aluminum ore) mine and refining plant near Maroon territory. Increasingly, my daily conversations with my research respondents became peppered with concerns and experiences dealing with the Chinese economic power sweeping the country. Then in April 2019, Jamaica formally joined the BRI under circumstances of increasing domestic concern about the mounting debt to China.

With these experiences in mind, this article will discuss and analyze the

consequences of the BRI in Jamaica within the context of the island’s historical experience of neocolonial debt, environmental exploitation, workers’ struggle and Indigenous struggle.

Drawing from my ethnographic, political and ecological research, I take a grassroots view of the BRI in Jamaica, centering the experiences of those directly affected by the development projects of the BRI. As such, this article will focus less on analyzing the BRI as grand geopolitical strategy, and instead emphasize how Chinese development initiatives have acted to further increase the precarity of Jamaican workers and farmers while leaving the country in an economically dependent and indebted position.

## Empire and Debt in the Making of Jamaica

Jamaica’s encounter with the PRC long predates the founding of the BRI. In 1972, Jamaica was among the first group of countries in the English-speaking Caribbean to establish diplomatic relations with China. The first Chinese diplomats on the island would have found a country still reeling from the legacies of colonialism, with British rule only having ended in 1962.

Over 400 years of genocide, slavery and plunder by European empires (first under the Spanish and then the British) left the country underdeveloped and dealing with immense socio-cultural traumas. A rigid and racialized class system [15] persisted after British rule, and what infrastructural capacity the country had was geared toward facilitating

resource extraction, the main exports being sugar throughout most of the colonial era and bauxite upon independence.

Furthermore, Jamaica in the 1970s was a nation rapidly descending into mass violence and chaos as the United States further entrenched its role as the regional hegemon, taking over from the defunct British Empire. A self-described democratic socialist Jamaican government, upon introducing much-needed wealth redistribution and social welfare programs, faced a violent backlash from right-wing forces in the form of gang warfare, allegedly fueled by the CIA.

Tit-for-tat street battles, an exodus of professionals and skilled workers, and rising import prices due to the 1970s oil crisis, paved the way for the unsustainable debt for which Jamaica would become famous in the 1980s and '90s and into the 21st century.

It is beyond the scope of this article to detail the political economic dynamics and immense social impact of debt in Jamaica over the last 40 years. [16] Suffice it to say that the island became a byword for structural adjustment during this period, with every new loan from the World Bank, or default on payments thereof, coming with International Monetary Fund-mandated austerity.

Health and education were notable casualties of this socio-economic assault. By the start of my field research, Jamaican child mortality had almost doubled over the span of a single decade while completion of primary school dropped from 97% to 73% in the same period. This despite the fact that Jamaica had already repaid more money than it had been lent, with continuing debt servicing accounting for a 106% debt-to-GDP ratio according to the latest World Bank figures.

All this is only a small snapshot of the catastrophic outcomes of debt wielded as a tool of neocolonialism.

With the island's status as one of the most indebted countries on the planet, Chinese infrastructural development was received with fanfare from

Jamaican elites, a possible economic lifeline out of the debt trap. The aforementioned highway opened by CHEC in 2014 was greeted by then Prime Minister Portia Simpson-Miller as an "emancipence" gift.

## The Tourism Trap

My research respondents were more circumspect about the "Beijing Highway," as it was commonly called. Since Jamaica needed a Chinese loan to finance the highway, CHEC was granted the right to own and operate the highway for 50 years as part of the arrangement. Also, the tolls collected on the highway cannot be used for debt-servicing and, rather, go directly to CHEC as profit.

Additionally, the tolls are astronomical by local standards; to drive the length of the highway in a standard car costs the equivalent of over \$12 each way.

This is well out of reach for the vast majority of Jamaicans, where the average monthly salary is around \$600 and only 60% of workers have a waged or salaried position at all. Many of my research respondents wondered: for whom was this highway?

The answer may lie in the additional concessions granted to CHEC, primarily 1200 acres of land along the highway to be held in perpetuity. Apparently, this will be used to construct hotels and adjoining infrastructure by Chinese companies for Chinese tourists, a kind of economic enclave from which the locals would not directly benefit, as acknowledged by the then Jamaican Minister of Transport.

This gestures to another dynamic of the BRI in Jamaica, where Chinese SOEs bring in their own workforce from China operating under their own labor conditions and laws. Jamaican trade unionists complained that Jamaican workers were generally not hired for CHEC projects, and in the few cases where they were, the denial of labor rights was so egregious that it led to a strike.

Thus, for all the official cheerleading around this "gift" of the BRI, Jamaica

now has a pristine (and quite empty) highway that local workers did not build, that most Jamaicans cannot use, that the Jamaican government does not own, the profits of which do not stay in the local economy, and which will primarily serve as an enclave owned and operated by foreign companies for foreign tourists.

As disappointing as the outcomes of the North-South Highway were for the hope of internationalist solidarity from China, the risk of a far more catastrophic clash between Jamaicans and the BRI emerged with the purchase of a bauxite mine and smelter by Jisco in 2016.

Bauxite mining is deeply intertwined with legacies of colonialism, environmental destruction, and the struggle for indigenous rights in Jamaica. In 1952, the interests of Britain and a group of mining corporations coalesced to establish the bauxite industry in Jamaica. [17] The island would become a leading global exporter of bauxite and alumina, [18] although there would be little benefit to the people in proportion to the cost of mining.

Between 1952 and 1990, some 62,735 acres of land had been extensively damaged by bauxite mining, which had also displaced thousands of families. [19]

Pollution is also a major risk of mining, with public health surveys of Jamaican bauxite production centers recounting that "the excavation and transportation of bauxite materials left behind clouds of red dust . . . and a fine layering of red covers much of the scene, spreading far downwind ... there prevails a distinct, acrid smell of bauxite dust in the air." [20]

## Maroons Against Mining

Given the despoliation entailed in bauxite mining, the community and leadership of the Jamaican Maroons view mining as an existential threat to their society.

The contours of contemporary Maroon struggle and the legacies of resistance

they bring to bear in fighting to preserve their land, sovereignty, and culture cannot be discussed in detail here.<sup>(8)</sup> Briefly, Maroon societies emerged from the sociogenic processes of collective struggle against enslavement when captive Africans and their descendants in the western hemisphere fled their bondage and defended themselves against recapture through guerrilla warfare. [21]

Since enslaved labor was central to colonial capitalism in the Americas, the slave-holding states expended great effort in suppressing Maroons as an existential threat to their plantation economies. However, the Jamaican Maroons, against great odds, fought the British to a standstill and forced the empire to recognize their freedom and territorial claims in 1739. [22]

Today, the Maroons live on as one of humanity's great cultures of resistance, embodying a tenacious praxis of struggle from below, the present-day target of which is defense of their land at all costs. It is hard to overstate how important the integrity of their environment is to Maroon culture and physical survival.

The Maroon village of Accompong is situated in a unique and ecologically sensitive region named Cockpit Country, the last contiguous rainforest of Jamaica. This is an area claimed by the Maroons as their historical territory won during their ancestors' fight for freedom in the 17th and 18th centuries.

The Maroons today live as mostly small-scale cash-crop farmers and are dependent on Cockpit Country for their livelihoods and the memory of their ancestral struggle, the fountainhead of their culture. Since the mid-2000s, when Accompong became aware of plans to mine Cockpit Country for bauxite, the autonomous community has played a leading role in an unprecedented anti-mining coalition of environmental non-governmental organizations, activists, academics, and local stakeholders reflective of the high stakes of the struggle. [23]

Jisco's reopening and expansion of a bauxite mine a mere 20 miles away

from Accompong escalates the stakes of Maroon struggle to dangerous proportions. Indeed, many of my research respondents, prominent leaders among them, consider mining in their territory to be an act of war.

Jisco has made no attempt to consult with the Maroons on their plans, and although they have not yet expanded their operations into Cockpit Country proper (their location lies in the lowlands at the edge of the geological and cultural boundary), company representatives have publicized plans to more than double output of the refining facility and expand the mines by hundreds, if not thousands of acres.

Residents of the areas around the mine have complained of damage to their health due to air and water pollution, only to be stonewalled and undermined by Jisco. Compounding these problems is Jisco's acknowledgment that the displacement of farmers will be necessary as the mines expand.

All this is adding to the fear and apprehension in the Maroon community about Chinese intentions, and they share the concern of many Jamaicans that the lack of transparency in negotiations between China and their government is fueling the already endemic corruption in their country.

Also, being a country of the African diaspora, Jamaicans are increasingly aware of the horror stories of Chinese exploitation in Africa. Only time will tell how these tensions unfold and, of course, the Maroons and their allies are not passive actors in these events, having already fought to curtail similar mining encroachments from Western companies.

## **A Meeting of Revolutionary Traditions**

If the projects of the BRI have stark parallels with the colonial and neoliberal policies of Jamaica's past, when the island valued as little more than a servile "paradise" for American tourists and/or an environmental

sacrifice zone for the Western aluminum industry, they also have differences in keeping with China's more novel form of imperialism.

As previously mentioned, Chinese companies often insist on importing their own labor, thus denying what little material benefit Jamaican workers could have received from the BRI. [24] They also manage this labor force outside the remit of Jamaican labor laws.

This, combined with a Chinese SOE (CHEC) being granted a large land grant as partial compensation for infrastructural development, represents what scholar Ruben Gonzalez-Vicente calls "embodied transnational sovereignty," where China is able to circumvent Jamaican sovereignty, including customs duties and taxes, for the realization of profit.

China has, in effect, transposed its own exploitative labor conditions to Jamaica. Jamaican elites may appreciate that they can pay back debts with land, and that China does not directly require broad policy changes like the structural adjustment conditions of IMF and World Bank loans.

However, even with the above and the fact that the Jamaican debt to China is small compared to that claimed by Western IFIs and private firms, Jamaican politicians are growing increasingly wary of the costs of doing business with China. In November 2019, Prime Minister Andrew Holness announced that Jamaica would no longer borrow from China, a scant seven months after formally joining the BRI.

As usual, most Jamaicans are not privy to the inter-governmental discussions and deals driving these decisions, but their government's newfound reticence in engaging with China reflects deeper concerns among BRI partners that the initiative is a debt trap.

In effect, much like the debt repayment structure of Jamaica's "Beijing Highway" described above, China expects a financial return from its investments such that Chinese companies become the main

beneficiaries of a BRI loan while the host country incurs the debt. If profits are insufficient to repay the debt, then China will repossess the project, imperiling host country finances and sovereignty.

This risk is perhaps amplified in the Caribbean where, despite CARICOM's (Caribbean Community, a political and economic union of Caribbean nation-states founded in 1973) objective to coordinate foreign policy for the equal benefit of all member nations and China's lofty rhetoric of equal partnerships, China pursues bilateral deals with individual states, thus leveraging its greater political economic power in an uneven relationship with smaller countries.

Almost two decades of Chinese loans and infrastructure-led development have left Jamaican workers and farmers as precarious and dispossessed as ever. The hard-fought and generational struggle for Jamaican workers' power (trade unions were instrumental to Jamaica's independence struggle) has been curtailed and rolled back by China's transposed sovereignty.

Furthermore, Chinese mining interests appear poised to pick up where their Western counterparts left

off in terms of irreversible ecological destruction and threats to indigenous survival. Certainly, Jamaica cannot bear another 50 years of capitalist exploitation and extractive industry.

If there is any hope in turning this dire situation into revolutionary momentum, it will be in Jamaicans making common cause with the Chinese laborers imported to the country. According to China Labor Watch, Chinese workers on overseas BRI projects are often subject to "deceptive job ads, passport retention, wage withholding, physical violence and lack of contracts" to the extent of constituting forced labor and human trafficking.

In fact, at least one Chinese worker in Jamaica has already blown the whistle on such conditions. Unfortunately, as of the time of writing this article, there appears to be no organized effort to make solidaristic alliances among Jamaican workers, Chinese workers, and Maroons. The Maroons are organized as an indigenous community seeking land and sovereign rights, rather than workers seeking class emancipation, and remain locked in a fractious political battle with the Jamaican state toward those ends.

Furthermore, the cultural and language barriers between Jamaicans

and imported Chinese workers are significant. Yet both countries have rich revolutionary traditions. If Jamaican labor militancy and Maroon struggle were able to reconcile and align their interests, while cultivating strategic allies among the heavily exploited Chinese workers, a powerful relationship of international solidarity from below could be forged.

Given the regional and transnational diasporic networks Jamaicans and Maroons are embedded in, along with Chinese workers' connections to their homeland, such potential is made all the more compelling in the possibility of global worker solidarity spreading along the very network of the BRI itself.

We cannot diminish the profound logistical, organizational, and ideological barriers to achieving such a vision, but conversely, the terrain of struggle in Jamaica is now aligned such that previously disparate and distant traditions of revolutionary internationalism are positioned to renew themselves and unite to resist Chinese imperialism, transnational capital accumulation, and the local capitalist class in the Caribbean.

Source: *Against the Current* May-June 2023, 224.

## The social movement on hold in France

19 May 2023, by **Léon Crémieux**

Macron was able to promulgate his law on 14 April, after obtaining the blank cheque of the Constitutional Council and even avoiding the pressure that could have been exerted by the process of a referendum of shared initiative (RIP). [25] The street mobilizations continued during the month of April and since then, with local rallies, especially during visits to cities by ministers or Macron himself. The bans, provocations and multiple examples of police violence did not prevent the concerts of pots and pans and the presence of hundreds of

demonstrators during these visits. So much so that Darmanin (Minister of the Interior) preferred on May 6 to deny that he was coming to inaugurate a city centre in the North of France, finally turning up on the sly; all this so as not to have to confront a concert of pots and pans.

The inter-union coordination had decided to make 1 May an unprecedented unitary initiative. In fact, it was by far, with 2.3 million demonstrators according to the CGT and 300 demonstrations across the

country, the most massive May Day in the last 30 years, apart from May 1, 2002, which took place on the eve of the second round of the presidential election between Chirac and Le Pen: the demonstration was transformed into an anti-fascist wave of more than two million people in the streets. The last May Day marked by trade-union unity, in 2009 at the heart of the financial crisis, had mobilized "only" 465,000 people according to the police, against 782,000 this year, according to the same source. This 1 May therefore represented a

significant revival of mobilization, returning to a level comparable to the large demonstrations of 23 and 28 March, despite the promulgation of the law, despite the rejection of the RIP and in the absence of a renewable strike movement. This dynamic is also registered by all the opinion polls, which show that 60 per cent of the population want the mobilisation against the reform to continue.

May Day 2023 was therefore anything but a lap of honour, with a stimulating combativeness in the demonstrations and the determination not to turn the page. This goes hand in hand with “the 100 days of zbeul” [26] a national competition between all the initiatives of concerts of pots and pans and actions against the government, at the initiative of the Union syndicale Solidaires and relayed on social networks, expressing the opposite of Macron’s commitment to give himself “100 days to act and get out of the crisis, 100 days of appeasement”, a commitment made in his speech on 17 April.

The government, even if Macron speaks of appeasement, was especially represented on 1 May by the relentlessness of the police against the demonstrations, as if they thought that the clouds of tear gas could mask the scale of the rallies. Street doctors counted 590 injured among the demonstrators and passers-by, including 118 severe cases who had to be evacuated to emergency services. But all the media channels banded together to headline and denounce the “violence of the wreckers”, and the injured among the police, seeking to hide both police violence and the social importance of the demonstrations.

Macron and his government are currently emerging from this situation in a bad position. While Bruno Le Maire, the Minister of the Economy, strives to present a solid economic policy and a stable government to the ECB and the rating agencies, one of the three main ones (along with Moody’s and Standard & Poors), the Fitch agency, has just downgraded the rating of France from AA to AA-, at the end of April, two levels below Germany. As instruments of liberal capitalism, these agencies assess the

confidence that investors and buyers of government debt securities can have. Fitch sanctions “a high level of budget deficit and public debt and a social climate detrimental to a consolidation policy”. However, the pension reform was precisely presented as a guarantee of budgetary management rigour! This ingratitude will therefore undoubtedly lead to an increase in interest rates for French government debt securities.

The MEDEF (employers’ organization), scalded by Macron’s inability to keep the situation under control, trumpets that he manages very well to dialogue with the unions on the sharing of value, teleworking or vocational training and even to obtain the agreement of the CFDT and the CFTC on the “sharing of value”, that is to say all the mechanisms that exclude wage increases in favour of combinations of profit-sharing and participation. Elisabeth Borne’s government would therefore like to take up the challenge and give itself the image of an opening to the union leaderships, after having flouted them for three months.

At the beginning of May, it announced that it was issuing invitations to trade unions to discuss all the projects to be implemented, a scenario that does not quite manage to hide the refusal of any social measures. In all areas, health, education, immigration, everything announced by the government goes in the direction of a hardening of security measures, a restriction of social budgets.

Borne divided the inter-union coordination, discarding the “non-representative” unions (Solidaires, FSU and UNSA) and proposed a round of meetings on 16 and 17 May to the other five confederations (CFDT, CGT, Force ouvrière, CFE-CGC, CFTC), receiving them separately “without a precise agenda”. The government’s goal is obviously to break the trade union front and see if there is not an opening of negotiations that would restore the social image of the government.

The CGT, the CFDT, FO, the CFTC and the CGC will therefore each go separately to Matignon. In a sign of the fragility, despite everything, of the

coordination, they are not acting around a common platform of demands, other than the reaffirmation of the demand for the withdrawal of the law raising the retirement age to 64.

Furthermore, the national inter-union coordination is calling for a new day of mobilization on 6 June. The explicit purpose of this day is to support a new parliamentary initiative planned for 8 June by the LIOT group, an independent centrist group, which was already at the initiative of the motion of censure on 20 March. The initiative, using LIOT’s parliamentary slot, consists of a bill repealing the postponement of the legal retirement age to 64. Given the balance of power, a majority vote for this project is not impossible and this would obviously be a new slap in the face for the government and the assurance of an imbroglio in the following days and weeks.

But the government could count on its Republican semi-allies in the Senate to undo this vote and on the blocking role of a joint parity committee before a return to the Assembly. Certainly the hypothesis of such a vote exists, but the essence of the problem is that the national coordination should not have as its only perspective in the coming weeks and even months this hypothetical vote, in the same way as hope was placed in the implementation of the RIP a few weeks ago. In fact, the coordination is not giving any perspective to the social movement.

Yet the vigour of this movement, its depth and its persistence should make possible the establishment of a unitary platform of social demands carried forward by the coordination; demands which, beyond the question of pensions, have been the basis of the mobilizations, on the questions of the cost of living and wages, on health, education, public services, among others. Unfortunately, the other side of the coin of a unitary coordination that has rhythmised the movement since January, has been the weakness of an autonomous dynamic of local or sectoral coordinations, giving their own rhythm and their own content. This is what the CGT unions of Energy, Chemicals, Ports and Docks,

Roads, mainly, did and it is what the coordination at the SNCF did in March.

Today the energy of local activists appears in the concerts of pots and pans and the welcoming committees for ministers, but this is not enough to give a new dynamic that could provide a general perspective of struggle to a social movement that is not exhausted.

The other question, a corollary of the previous one, is the inability of the NUPES and its components to rely on this powerful social movement to lead the debate on demands to fight against capitalist neoliberalism, in the extension of the refusal of retirement at 64. The NUPES is not seeking to use the present conjuncture to propose that the trade union and political activists of the movement get together locally in unitary structures to debate, act and build a force that can pose an alternative to Macron and the far right. Unfortunately, a low

level of self-organization in workplaces and at the local level has also been the hallmark of the movement since January. We must regretfully note the small number of initiatives for unitary debates between political and trade union forces in recent months.

Today the components of the NUPES, instead of debating unitary local initiatives as an extension of the movement, have their eyes on the next European elections in 2024, where the components other than La France Inosumise (PS, EELV, PCF) hope to “redivide the cake”, to readjust the balance of power on the left.

However, the urgency should be to open the road to a united movement to fight Macron’s capitalist policies, while social anger is well and truly present among the popular classes. A year ago, the NUPES succeeded in occupying the ground on the left

during the general elections. But since then, although the deputies of the NUPES have been the parliamentary relay of the social movement, no dynamic of a unitary and combative movement has been created locally or nationally. This is one of the elements that explains why, paradoxically, the NUPES, as a political force, is not deriving any political benefit from this social movement, while the far right, the RN, is building itself on the crisis of the right and a polarization of right-wing abstentionist sectors.

Thus both at the trade union level and the political level, we are in a moment when the social and popular movement of resistance to Macron is suspended in a vacuum. The urgency of the coming weeks is therefore to occupy a social and political space so that the activists who have fought together in recent months can come together and act.

*16 May 2023*

## Hope shipwrecked: the opposition doesn't triumph, the regime doesn't collapse in Turkey

**18 May 2023, by Uraz Aydin**

With 49.5% of the vote the AKP leader, in power for twenty years, is ahead of the opposition candidate Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu who only won 44.8% in this high-turnout election (88.9%). Many irregularities in favor of Erdogan’s allies have been denounced by the opposition. A second round is expected to be held on 28 May 2023. If Erdogan wins, his nationalist, Islamist and dictatorial regime will continue for another five years.

### Reactionary bloc

### wins majority in parliament

The bloc formed around Recep Tayyip Erdogan is probably one of the most reactionary coalitions in the country’s political history. Already, since 2015 the AKP has been in alliance with the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). For this election Erdogan included in his bloc the Islamist party Yeniden Refah led by Fatih Erbakan, the son of the historic leader of political Islam in Turkey, Necmettin Erbakan, Another more Islamizing wing of the far right, the Great Union Party (BBP) is also part of this alliance. Also in this bloc was the

HÜDA-PAR, the legal party of Hezbollah in Turkey, mainly established in the Kurdish region and which had in the 90s been used as an armed force by the Turkish Gladio against the PKK, committing many massacres.

In the parliamentary elections held at the same time, Erdogan’s alliance obtained 49.4% of the vote and 322 deputies (out of 600). If his votes are down from 2018 when he won 344 seats, Erdogan still has the majority in parliament that allows him to pass or prevent bills. The results obtained by the AKP are also falling, but the MHP, which was estimated to have fallen to 6-7%, almost returned to its 2018 level by reaching 10%. It thus seems that



discontent has not been asserted in a change of bloc, but within Erdogan's own camp. However, it should be noted that the AKP came out ahead in almost all the cities in the earthquake zone.

## **A defeat for the opposition**

Facing this bloc was the Alliance of the Nation whose main party is the centre-left Republican People's Party (CHP). The other "big party" in this bloc is Meral Akşener's Good Party (İYİP) which is a split from the far right, representing a more secular nationalism than the MHP but trying to reposition itself towards the centre-right. Also part of this alliance are two parties whose leaders were prominent in the AKP, Ahmet Davutoğlu, former prime minister, and Ali Babacan former economy minister. Finally, the Saadet Partisi (SP), which comes from the historical current of Islamism from which the AKP emerged, also participates in this bloc, as well as another small right-wing party. Politically, this opposition alliance defends the return to a parliamentary regime (abolished by Erdogan in 2017 following a referendum) and the recovery of the economy by restoring neoliberalism with certain "social" features. With 35.4% of the vote the opposition bloc won 213 MPs, i.e., 24 seats more than in the previous election. The parties of Babacan and Davutoğlu as well as the SP, whose candidates ran under the CHP lists, seem to have contributed 3% to the CHP results. These right-wing parties won 40 seats, only 23 more. The eligible places reserved for right-wing candidates on these lists had sparked debate among the CHP base.

## **Desire for "reconciliation" not a majority view**

For the presidential elections, the candidate of this bloc against Erdogan was Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, leader of the CHP. Given the importance of the presidency in the autocratic system, Kılıçdaroğlu's victory was decisive for

regime change. The latter led a campaign that embraced large sectors of the population. The fact that he is an Alevi Kurd (a minority current of Islam seen as a heresy by traditional Sunnism) had generated debates, many thinking that he could not unify the opposition. However, the CHP leader had led a campaign proudly proclaiming his Alevism and calling for a reconciliation of the population of Turkey in the face of Erdogan's polarizing policies. It would seem, however, that the desire for "reconciliation" and a return to the rule of law and parliamentary rule is not the majority in Turkish society.

A third candidate, Sinan Ogan, ultranationalist and from the ranks of the MHP, won 5.1%. His small nationalist and anti-Kurdish bloc, which refused to support Kılıçdaroğlu, notably because the latter was also supported by the pro-Kurdish HDP party, now holds a crucial position for the second round. If he decides to support Erdogan, the latter's victory becomes inevitable. If he calls for a vote for Kılıçdaroğlu, nothing is guaranteed because it seems difficult for him to manage to channel his voters en bloc. His choice will depend on the negotiations where the positions that each side will promise to deliver to its alliance in the event of victory will be discussed. This may lead the opposition to adopt a more nationalist (and anti-immigrant) discourse to convince Ogan, which will however have the effect of alienating the Kurdish electorate, which represents nearly 10% of the vote, more than the maximum the Ogan base can bring.

## **HDP, TIP and the "Work and Freedom" Alliance**

Another opposition alliance is "Work and Freedom", constituted by the HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party, a left-wing party from the Kurdish movement), the TIP (Workers' Party of Turkey where our comrades of the Fourth International are active) and four other formations of the radical left. For the presidential elections, this coalition supported Kılıçdaroğlu. For

the presidential elections, the HDP participated given the probability that it would be banned, as its "alternative party", the Green-Left Party (YSP). The TIP did not stand in the cities where the HDP had a large majority (Kurdistan in Turkey) and in some where it risked losing MPs to the HDP and the CHP; it submitted lists in 52 cities out of 81. The fact that the TIP wants to run within the alliance but with independent lists in some cities is a subject that has given rise to a lot of debate, to which we will have to return. The TIP lists also included candidates from two Trotskyist currents, the Workers' Democratic Party (IDP) and the Association of International Workers' Solidarity (UID-DER).

The HDP-YSP won 8.8% in these elections, i.e., 3% less than in the previous elections. It is still too early to make consistent analyses, but it seems that support for Kılıçdaroğlu for the presidential elections has been understood as support for the CHP (in the parliamentary elections) and therefore votes have passed to this party. On the other hand, the 10% barrier (to enter parliament) was an important source of motivation to vote for this party and allow its representation in parliament. The fact that this barrier is currently 7% (a threshold that the HDP was easily supposed to exceed) must also have weighed and part of the left-wing electorate that had previously voted for the HDP returned to vote for the CHP and partly for the TIP. Finally, we know that especially among the Kurdish people, some more conservative and nationalist sectors are opposed to alliances with the Turkish far left, this must also have had an effect on the results.

In this nightmarish panorama a small (but significant) consolation is the result that the TIP achieved. For the first time since 1965, a socialist and revolutionary party identifying with the cause of the working class has managed to enter parliament with its own votes (and not by being elected under the list of another party). The TIP got 1.7% with 1 million votes, standing in only 2/3 of the country, so probably above 2% in total. Note that part of its vote, probably about a half, comes from voters who previously

voted for the HDP, but the rest comes from the left of the CHP but also from an electorate that voted for the right but which has (especially through the elected representatives of the TIP) discovered a combative left, which does not spare its words in the face of the powerful and advances the rights of workers.

The party has increased its membership fourfold since mid-

January, going from 10,000 to 40,000 members in four months, notably because of its mobilization in solidarity with the city of Hatay (Antioch), seriously affected by the earthquake. It thus gained four deputies, three of whom were already in the previous parliament. The fourth, Can Atalay, elected as deputy of Hatay, is a renowned lawyer engaged in all the struggles of the country and is currently in pre-trial detention for

more than a year, having been the main spokesperson of the Gezi revolt in 2013. If a sentence does not fall in the coming days, Can will come out of prison to take his place in parliament to present, with his comrades of the TIP and the HDP, the voice of the exploited and oppressed, whatever the outcome of the second round of the presidential elections.

17 May 2023

## **Biden's New Immigration Policy Will Keep Most Immigrants Out of U.S.**

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

Historically the United States takes in about one million legal immigrants each year who are given legal permanent resident status (green card) and about half a million enter yearly without documents. The total U.S. immigrant population is over 40 million, more immigrants than any other nation. They make up 13.7% of the population, while 10.5 million undocumented immigrants make up just 3.2%. Asylees, people fleeing persecution and violence who are admitted, amount to only 25,000 per year.

Democrats and progressives have tended to see immigration as contributing to the U.S. economy and enriching its culture, while Republicans today argue that American society is being overwhelmed by foreigners who threaten the culture. Many large corporations favor immigration because it provides more workers, many at lower wages. Under pressure from Republicans, Biden appears to be adopting anti-immigrant policies to win broader support from independent voters with an eye to the coming election in 2024, though his new rules also reflect the Democrats' long-term trend of harsher immigration and border policies.

The new law is complicated. Immigrants from a few nations—Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Afghanistan and Ukraine—will get what is called “humanitarian parole” of two years legal residence. That is limited to 30,000 people per month who have financial sponsorship. Other migrants, while remaining abroad, must use an app to get an appointment, with about 1,000 available per day, though hearings have a waiting time of months or even years.

To get asylum based on fear of persecution and violence, migrants must first have applied for and been denied asylum in other countries through which they have passed. Some people will cross the border in an unauthorized place and turn themselves into authorities in order to seek asylum. Those with children will be released into the United States and given hearing dates, though they will have to wait for months or years for a hearing. Most adults traveling alone who claim asylum, a difficult standard to meet, will be quickly processed and deported and perhaps charged with a criminal violation. Based on earlier records, perhaps half of those who get asylum hearings will be accepted, the rest deported.

Why do so many migrants seek to enter the United States? The history of U.S. imperialism could be called the principal driving force. The United States has dominated Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central America over a hundred years, and South America for seventy. U.S. economic exploitation, wars and military occupations, and support for military coups took the wealth from Latin America while destroying democracy, leading to authoritarianism. Then came the drug cartels with their extreme violence. At present, 25% of migrants come from Mexico, 15% from Central America, while a smaller percentage from the Philippines, a former U.S. colony. Today, Asians—most from India and China—represent the largest number of migrants, driven by global inequalities. Now the climate crisis also leads to migration.

U.S. imperialism, economic and military, led to a flood of migrants, and U.S. migration and border policies are meant to be a damn to stop them. But the crisis will continue as long as imperialism, militarism, and environmental crises continue.

13 May 2023

# The disappointing aftermath of the Turkish elections

16 May 2023, by **Mireille Court**

All the polls predicted at least a strong lead on Sunday 14 May, or even a victory in the first round, against Recep Tayyip Erdoğan worn out by 21 years of power, entangled in a serious economic crisis and criticised for his calamitous management of the two earthquakes that hit Turkey in February 2023.

On the morning of the elections in Diyarbakir, the capital of the Kurdish region of Turkey, all the passers-by were enthusiastic. Zelia, 56 years old told us: "Of course we are going to win! We are fed up with Erdoğan, we want freedom for our prisoners and for us, nobody will vote for Erdoğan here! All the young people want him to leave". A little further on, young people are waving the flag of Yesil sol, the New Green Party, created following the threats of dissolution of the HDP. They are 20 years old and have only known Erdoğan as president.

On the pavement opposite, Hadi Abdou Khader, 73, is having tea with his friends under the sun. "There was no other choice for the Kurds in the presidential elections than to vote for Kemal Kılıçdaroglu. If I had any other choice I would have done it. Kurds start being oppressed the moment they are born. And many other spontaneous testimonies, affirming their confidence in the fall of the tyrant.

But in the evening, in the premises crowded with HDP activists, which have become the premises of Yesil sol, when the first estimates start to appear on the screen, faces close. Erdoğan has a large lead, and even if the results of the big cities favourable to the CHP, such as Istanbul, Ankara or Izmir, are not yet known, the hope of a defeat of Erdoğan in the first round collapses. In the CHP offices, from 10pm onwards, the activists no longer believe in victory and desert what they thought would be the night of victory.

At midnight, in front of the court under heavy police protection, bales of ballots continue to arrive for endless recounts, but for the HDP youth gathered behind the gates, their hearts are no longer in it. "If he is elected again, we are leaving! In Europe, anywhere! We can't take it anymore!"

So how to explain this last-minute turnaround in relation to the many polls? Some believe that it was the agreement with the Kurds that demotivated part of the CHP electorate, others that it was the religion of Kemal Kılıçdaroglu, an Alevi, that put off the predominantly Sunni electorate, or still others evoke frauds and manipulations.

It is true that Erdoğan holds all the powers, from the electoral commission to the machinery of the State, including judges and the Parliament, but a fraud on the scale of several million votes seems implausible. A possible manipulation, however, would be to deliberately invalidate enough votes to provoke a second round. The AKP has a significant vote reserve with the 5.3% of votes cast for Sinan Ogan, an ultra-nationalist who advocates the expulsion of all Syrian refugees, and a second round in which he would triumph would have the advantage of silencing the rumours of fraud and above all of legitimising his election in the eyes of the Westerners who had abandoned him.

As for the second round, it really offers little hope, even for the leadership of Yesil Sol.

Serra Bucak, a member of the party leadership told us on Monday morning, the day after the first round: "We knew that it wasn't an easy election. We knew that it would be difficult for the first round but we didn't know that Erdoğan would get so many votes, especially in the earthquake areas. I hope the CHP will use these 2 weeks well, they will have to find new strategies, not for the Kurdish region, which is won to him, but for the rest of Turkey."

15 May 2022

**"The areas of the uprising were those that had suffered the most from the liberalization**

# measures of the 2000s"

15 May 2023, by **Joseph Daher**

**The dictator Bashar al-Assad, who was in power at the outbreak of the Syrian revolution, inherited the state from his father, Hafez al-Assad...**

When Bashar al-Assad came to power in 2000, he inherited power from his father as part of a so-called republic (or rather, a monarchy). When Hafez al-Assad took power in the 1970s, he represented the right wing of the Baath Party, an Arab nationalist party of a third-worldist tendency, with a commitment to national sovereignty and certain forms of social justice, but which opposed the class struggle and defended nationalist policies against national minorities, particularly against the Kurds. Accelerated neoliberalization took place under Bashar al-Assad. Here we see a concentration of political, economic and military power in a small family group of people directly linked to state power. We see this transition from the "neo-patrimonial" power of Hafez-al-Assad to "patrimonial" power with Bashar al-Assad, who now holds political power. During the ten years preceding the outbreak of the revolutionary process, wealth inequalities increased. These were the material conditions of the outbreak. The images coming from Egypt and Tunisia inspired this new generation of Syrians to go out onto the streets, several million strong, from March 2011.

**In addition to an acceleration of neoliberal reforms, we saw an attempt at a political opening, which was quickly stopped. What were the consequences?**

Syria is a country on the periphery in relation to the centre of capitalist accumulation. Trotsky's theory of uneven and combined development allows us to understand why forms of social organization that can be considered "archaic" or "primary", based on questions of tribe, religion,

regionalism — which can also be found in Europe, but not necessarily as developed — are linked to the capitalist but also political development of this region. It is not a question of essentializing but of understanding the instrumentalization made by those who exercise political power, such as the French mandatory power when it occupied Syria. This is how we can understand why these forms exist today.

In the 2000s, Syria experienced privatizations, liberalization measures, the reappearance of the first private banks, free trade agreements with countries in the region, with Turkey, which greatly affected small industries that do not have the capacity to compete with Turkey, or with foreign products. The areas most affected by the uprising were those that had suffered the most from liberalization measures. We are talking about a poverty rate that is calculated to have risen from 10 to 15 per cent in 2000 to more than 30 per cent, bearing in mind that another third of the population lived just above the poverty line. The social structure of the regime was changing under Bashar al-Assad. The social base of the regime was reduced to the liberal upper middle class. The link with the popular classes was loosened, although the popular base was a little larger and made use of its links through religion, tribe and clientelism.

**In 2011, almost 60 per cent of Syrians were under the age of 28. They were a young people, therefore revolutionary...**

The images of Tunisia and Egypt all day long on television gave rise to a desire for change. Already between January and March there were small demonstrations in some cities, in some neighbourhoods, before the actual outbreak in mid-March 2011. These new generations did not directly experience the repression of the

1980s. In 2011, until the end of 2012 and the beginning of 2013, the popular movement was deeply-rooted. Moreover, along with Libya, we were in a real "revolutionary situation". There were swathes of Syrian territory that were escaping from the control of the Syrian regime, and when the regime had to withdraw from parts of Syria, people began to organize on all aspects of society. This is where the local councils were born. The idea was to go beyond simple coordinating committees, which were usually neighbourhood or village organisations, to the regional level, and to try and organise demonstrations. The idea came from a militant of the revolution, Omar Aziz, a doctor and an anarchist, of founding a counter-power that would organize everything from A to Z. Local councils were emerging, out of necessity, since the "state" had disappeared. The dominant message was democratic, a message of social justice, equality, even though there was also a lack of organization linked to decades of repression, a lack of will of a majority of the democratic and liberal oppositions to form free trade unions, mass feminist organizations, etc., while reducing the fight to its democratic aspects.

**From the failure of the Free Syrian Army, two antagonistic political camps emerged: the jihadists and the democratic confederalism of the PYD. However, in 2012, jihadism was in a hyper minority. How did the jihadists manage to gain a foothold?**

There was a turning point, that was, moreover, regional, in the summer of 2013, with the coup d'état in Egypt against the president of the Muslim Brotherhood, which was rather a coup against the revolution itself, and which went beyond the Muslim Brotherhood. It was not a problem to receive Sisi in several European capitals, including Paris. In Syria, the

turning point was the use of chemical weapons at the Gouta in the suburbs of Damascus, which caused several hundred deaths. While US President Obama had announced that chemical weapons were a red line not to be crossed, there was no reaction. From then on, the opposition, whether armed or political, weakened, and the fundamentalist and Islamic organizations, which already had a criticism of Western states, and therefore Daesh, Jabhat al-Nusra, etc. were growing stronger. They began to dominate the armed arena. We were also increasingly seeing the split between the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra, and their monetary effectiveness on the terrain, the ability to rake in money, to accumulate capital through different private sources, from the Gulf monarchies or

through smuggling and theft.

**The Syrian National Council (SNC) and the FSA made mistakes that the Kurdish PYD did not make. From July 2012, a second revolution within the revolution was born in northern Syria, but with a progressive political leadership...**

The parent organization, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), had decades of political experience from the 1970s and 1980s. It had a presence in Syria and even an alliance with the Syrian regime that turned against it with the rapprochement with Turkey. From the 2000s, political developments within the PKK led to the founding of sister parties in national structures, hence the PYD. With the outbreak of the

revolutionary process, the majority of Kurdish parties did not necessarily participate in the demonstrations. The PYD emerged from this, with a very important political experience from the PKK, and it benefited from the fact that the weakened regime left the task of administration to the PYD, and armed groups returned from the mountains of northern Iraq. Rojava and the autonomous authority of north-eastern Syria developed, whose aspirations were very interesting: the question of women, a desire for Arab unity, the encouragement of secular laws, civil marriage and the idea of a Syria conceived in a different way, far from a centralizing, authoritarian state.

*Interview conducted by Camille Nashorn. Translated by **International Viewpoint** from *l'Anticapitaliste*.*

## Imran Khan arrested, what next?

14 May 2023, by **Farooq Tariq**

Imran Khan came to power in the 2018 general elections that were alleged to be rigged in his favor by the military establishment. Their relationship broke down after 2020 due to several factors. Khan's personality was more self-centered and egotistic, leading to clashes with military generals over the appointment of high officials. Moreover, the economy was not growing, leading to mounting economic pressures on both sides. While Khan refused to normalize relations with India, the military commander-in-chief saw it as a key strategy. Khan also held a sympathetic view of the Taliban government in Afghanistan and tried to cozy up to the head of the ISI to split the army's loyalty. Khan repatriated over 5000 Pakistani Taliban from Afghanistan under the guise of rehabilitation, a move opposed by military generals. He was in favor of negotiating with the Taliban government in Afghanistan, leading some to speculate that he wanted to become a better version of the Taliban than the original.

Imran Khan's differences with the military on key issues, such as the economy, India-Pakistan relations, and the Taliban government in Afghanistan, seem to have contributed to his downfall. His adventurist strategy to counter his arrest has backfired, leading to widespread arrests of his party activists and the party being on the run. In his bid to become Prime Minister again, Khan dissolved his own provincial governments in Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa—two important provinces in the Pakistani federation, but his moves were thwarted by the present government and military establishment by delaying elections.

### Developments so far

On May 9th, the day Imran Khan was arrested, ten people were killed, and most of the country, including the motorways, remained closed. This well-planned violent response, as the

present government alleges, was the result of Imran Khan's instructions to his leaders and cadre. The government further alleges that Imran Khan hoped to trigger a violent response from the military establishment by asking his supporters to directly confront them. His plan, as the government suggests, was to destabilize the regime to the point where the military takes over the government and declares martial law.

On May 10th, the military issued a press statement declaring May 9th as the black day in Pakistan's history, announcing a restrained response to the burning of their buildings and warning that they would not tolerate any future attacks. Legal action has also been taken against those involved in the violent actions.

Wholesale arrests of PTI activists have been carried out throughout Pakistan, with most of the party's main leaders arrested. Murder and attempted murder cases have been registered

under anti-terrorist laws. The PTI party is now paying dearly for its adventurist strategy to counter its leader's arrest, and the party is on the run. However, small groups of PTI supporters continue to carry out burning vehicles whenever possible, but the mass response to the arrest has disappeared.

## What's in the offing?

With increasing deployment of violence and military's intervention in civilian affairs, it seems that the future for democratic forces in Pakistan does not bode well. With the excuse to maintain law and order, the military's control over civilian affairs will increase. The stifling of dissent will continue and free speech will be criminalized and working classes of the country will be further pushed to

poverty.

It must be noted that there is no fundamental contradiction between Imran Khan and Pakistan's powerful military establishment. Khan is simply trying to cajole or coerce the military establishment to get him back to the seat of power. In order to do that, Khan in his previous government tried to strengthen the military. His government passed a notorious law criminalizing any criticism of the armed forces, which is now being used against him. During his tenure as Prime Minister, he used Pakistan's anti-corruption watchdog, National Accountability Bureau, to witch-hunt his opponents. Today, the same NAB is being used against him.

The collapse of the economy, coupled with the corona and climate disasters, has led to severe poverty and inequality in Pakistan. The

implementation of neoliberal policies and the dominance of the military in civilian life are likely to further shrink democratic space and exacerbate poverty and inequality in the country. Ordinary people are likely to bear the brunt of the power struggles and political crises in the country.

The palace-intrigues between Pakistan's political elite and military establishment have worsened the economic conditions in the country. Strengthening democratic forces would require a complete overhaul of the system including policies that favor the people. Pakistan's elite consumes 27 billion of subsidies to sustain their lifestyle. Any political force that doesn't challenge such gross inequality will continue to be in cahoots with the military establishment, furthering the economic poverty of its people.

11 May 2023

# New fiscal framework: a barrier to building the Brazil that the people need

**13 May 2023, by Deborah Cavalcante, Marcelo Ramos, Nadja Carvalho**

Despite possible changes to the final text the matter was formally brought before the Brazilian National Congress last Tuesday. Initial information confirms the financial lines of the project which is already a concern for the entire party and a large part of Brazilian society.

The majority of the national leaders of the PSOL understand that "so far, the proposal is less rigid than the [previous] Expenditure Limits", but also identify the maintenance of a "logic of adjustment in public accounts" that legitimises a budgetary discourse of spending by restricting increases in investment. In summary, its most negative aspect is opposed to the strengthening of the rule of law. The new proposal foresees expenses

being tied to a 70% revenue growth rate whilst still limited to real advances (limited by inflation) within the parameters of 0.6% to 2.5% per year. This enforcing of both a floor and ceiling for public investment, working with a totally unnecessary primary surplus target, yields to the pressures of the financial market, whereas the real need is to resume social investment by the state.

In practice, according to first projections, if this rule had been in force from the beginning of Lula's first government in 2003, around 8.8 billion reais [approximately USD1.76 billion] would not have been invested in Brazilian public services. There is a risk of structurally reducing the growth of health and education by at

least 30%, with no room for manoeuvre for the work of government. This implies deleting the right to education and health from the Constitution in order to fit the budget within the new framework. This would be a very serious attack on basic social and constitutional rights. Even the budget of the BNDES (Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Social, the National Bank for Economic and Social Development) and other public banks have been included within the new limitations proposed by the Treasury. These measures call into question the possibility of the government fulfilling its role in the construction of a Social State and a true Brazilian democracy.

In 100 days, the Lula government has

faced a coup attempt and there is enormous weight from the right and the extreme right in society and in the National Congress. Obviously, this is PSOL's first concern, even when voting on the new fiscal framework. All the Bolsonarista opposition wants is a government with its hands tied. The PSOL, on the contrary, wants to help open space for investment in health, education, infrastructure works, social programmes and reparation policies.

The problem in Brazil is not, as most of the press and the market celebrating the new proposal dream of, the "loss of control" of investments. On the contrary, the underlying problems are hunger, unemployment and precariousness, inflation and the cost of rent and food, environmental destruction, global warming, deindustrialisation and a possible global economic crisis. For this reason, Michel Temer's expenditure ceiling was successively perforated by Bolsonaro, with the support of a part of those who today defend the new Fiscal Framework and blackmail Lula and Haddad for the fiscal adjustment rules. For the same reason, the new

framework will be an obstacle to the Lula government fulfilling its campaign promises. An obstacle to realising the Brazil that we want and that the Brazilian people need!

The big difference is that when Bolsonaro broke the spending ceiling to offer emergency aid, he did not suffer impeachment for breach of fiscal responsibility. This did not happen even when the former president defended military intervention and committed serious crimes during the pandemic crisis (everyone remembers the bribery related to the purchase of vaccines which then took months to be distributed as well as the lack of oxygen in Manaus state hospitals Intensive Care Units.) Meanwhile, Lula was unjustly imprisoned over an alleged triplex and pedalos in Atibaia, São Paulo state in a manifestly political and arbitrary process.

There is no doubt that if the Brazilian economy goes through difficulties and Lula has to break the new fiscal framework to get the country out of the crisis, the "market" and big media will not proffer the same affection they did to Bolsonaro and will

question the legitimacy of the new government elected with 51% of the votes. It was like that with the accusation of "fiscal pedaling" against Dilma Rousseff. It was a very short time ago, let's not forget it!

This means that if the proposal does not undergo structural changes to unblock the path of public investment, the most correct thing is for the PSOL to vote against the fiscal framework proposal, which also tends to be approved by the vast majority of Congress that led to Arthur Lira's re-election. In the end, the PSOL has also assumed its political commitments to society: defending Lula's government from attacks, fighting the extreme right and also defending the constitutional rights of the majority of the Brazilian people whilst fighting in Congress and in the streets for its expansion.

April 24, 2023

*Translated by David Fagan for International Viewpoint from [Punto de Vista Internacional](#).*

*Originally published in Portuguese by [Insurgencia.org](#).*

# Shireen Abu Akleh's killing made clear that Israel's war on Palestinian journalists is part of its war on Palestine

12 May 2023, by **Mariam Barghouti**

At the time, Shireen Abu Akleh had already been with Aljazeera for four or five years, working as their field reporter in Jerusalem.

"The Israeli army is currently invading our offices," I remembered her saying through the screen, her face barely showing. It was dark, and the cameraman's light was not enough. She seemed to be in a stairwell, and Abu Akleh's fierce voice continued reporting through the fear.

That was the first memory I remembered when I found out about Abu Akleh's killing: the image of all of us huddled around the television as the Al-Jazeera offices were raided by the military not too far away from where my family lived at the time.

The second memory that came to mind after I learned of her death happened almost a decade ago — the first time I met her.

Shireen Abu Akleh was the only

journalist at the scene when I experienced my first arrest by the Israeli army in Nabi Saleh. I was 19. She was the only journalist that dared come close to myself and a friend, also arrested, as we were taken to the military jeep. I remember Shireen walking cautiously but with a confidence that told everyone she was just doing her job. She kept coming closer until the soldiers obstructed her, so she held her microphone towards the two of us as we were being handcuffed and detained. She

yelled at us to explain what was happening to us, why we were there, as her microphone flailed. She asked us, and her voice felt like a saving grace.

I yelled: “the soldiers are taking us because we wanted to go to the spring.” That was the truth. We wanted to go sit by the spring owned by the Palestinians of Nabi Saleh, and we were taken at gunpoint by settlers in Halamish. I was afraid, but Abu Akleh made me feel seen, made me take comfort in the fact that if a crime were to happen, someone would know.

Almost a decade later, on May 11 of last year, the Israeli army shot [Shireen](#) with a bullet to the neck. Now a senior correspondent for Al-Jazeera, Abu Akleh was covering an Israeli invasion of the Jenin refugee camp. She was one of the earliest journalists to catch on the rise of armed resistance and the Israeli assassination campaign against youth. It was the same army that raided their offices in Ramallah two decades ago and the same army that bombed their offices in Gaza on live television two years ago.

Despite [Israel's effort to attack her coffin and the people mourning her](#), Abu Akleh was buried in Jerusalem last May.

Shireen's imprint on those who heard her voice and followed her coverage remains a testament to her bravery, professionalism, and the importance of journalism in an increasingly suffocating environment.

## Shireen changed Palestinian journalism

On May 11, 2022, Palestinian media and social networks were erupting with news on the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh. I remember receiving the news from a friend through a phone call that day. I mainly stayed silent, went to a cafe, and continued my silence. The entire city of Ramallah seemed to be in paralysis. None of us knew what to do with the news.

“I woke up that morning and it felt like my phone had exploded with messages

on Signal and Whatsapp,” Dina Hamdan, editor and manager of the Marie Colvin Journalist Network, told Mondoweiss, recalling the moment she learned of Abu Akleh's killing. Hamdan admits that she did not register the loss at first. “It took a while for me to understand that the ‘Shireen’ everyone is talking about is Shireen Abu Akleh,” Hamdan said.

“It felt like we were in a funeral but for the whole of Palestine,” Yara Eid, 23, a human rights advocate and reporter, told Mondoweiss on the first anniversary of Abu Akleh's death. “It felt like Palestine lost one of the important figures we have,” Eid said.

Having survived the war on Gaza in 2014, the 23-year-old became a war correspondent last July and August shortly after Shireen's killing.

“Shireen was killed in May, and a few months later I found myself reporting on the ground and I was a journalist...a war journalist,” Eid confessed. “I didn't expect that.” It was Eid's first time back to Gaza since she left to study at the University of Edinburgh six years earlier.

“I was so traumatized from the war in 2014, and I never thought I would be able to do anything,” Eid said. “I never thought I would survive another war, and there I was on the ground, reporting, wearing my PRESS vest,” the 23-year-old said, recollecting her first assignment during the week-long military aggression on Gaza last year, when [49 Palestinians were killed](#) in a matter of days, with more succumbing to their wounds in its aftermath.

Eid, now two years younger than Shireen was when she first started working at Aljazeera in 1997, struggles to capture the words. Finally, she rests on saying: “she is so much more than a journalist.”

Abu Akleh and her killing have birthed a new sense of identification and heartache for Palestine and Palestinians. A woman from Jerusalem, a Christian with dual American citizenship, she almost constantly reported directly from the field, no matter how dangerous. She overcame stereotypes and maintained the profession's integrity by reporting

on a context that was also her own lived experience. Perhaps this is why she became such an icon that all Palestinians have rallied around.

“If this happened to Shireen, then it could happen to any journalist,” Dina Hamdan told Mondoweiss, reflecting on the moment she saw the assault on Shireen's funeral.

In this, Shireen's death was also a rude awakening and a reminder that Palestinian journalists, despite being journalists, remain Palestinians and hence “legitimate” targets for Israel.

On June 6 last year, I joined Mondoweiss as Senior Palestine correspondent. Shireen's execution in the previous month was a formative event that propelled me to end my years-long hiatus from reporting. I was not the only one, either.

Shireen's impact in death and life has transcended her role in covering Palestine. Her killing became a moment of rupture and mending for Palestinians, from the river to the sea and in the diaspora.

## Journalists second

“Israel was established on the mere principle of ethnically cleansing Palestinians, including journalists,” Eid explained to Mondoweiss. “They're really threatened by journalists,” Eid continued. “They always had the intention to attack Palestinian journalists,” she said. “And that's because they're threatened by the other narrative, they're threatened by the narrative Palestinians show.”

The fact that Abu Akleh was wearing her PRESS vest is what appalled the international community in Israel's targeted shooting at non-combatants. The fact that not even those words emblazoned across her chest could save her is what horrified Palestinians. Because, at the end of the day, she was a Palestinian first.

“I didn't know her personally,” Hamdan told Mondoweiss. “But she's one of those people whom you thought would always be there to tell the story, not to become the story.”

Abu Akleh's case highlights the grave



injustices journalists face in bringing the public reliable and updated information and analysis. However, it also emphasizes the lethal environment which Palestinians must navigate. In fact, the targeted assault on media production and Palestinian journalists has become a pillar of the Israeli colonial apparatus rather than a case of “collateral damage.”

Abu Akleh’s case is just one of the clearest examples of this policy — she was wearing a protective flack vest that read PRESS, and a protective helmet, when the bullet that killed the 51-year-old passed through the gap between her protective equipment, hitting her neck. According to independent investigations by media agencies, the lethal attack was likely intentional and [targeted](#).

“The 2022 assassination of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh by Israeli security forces remains unpunished, despite strong pressure from the international community and the Israeli authorities’ admission,” Reporters Without Borders [stated](#).

Since 2001, more than 21 journalists have been killed in what is seen as a “[deadly pattern, <https://mondoweiss.net/2023/05/on-anniversary-of-shireen-abu-aklehs-death-new-report-details-israels-history-of-killing-reporters-with-impunity/>]” according to the latest [report](#) by the Committee on the Protection of Journalists (CPJ).

But the number may be much higher. According to the [Palestinian Ministry of Information-<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/12/infographic-the->

[journalists-killed-by-israeli-forces-since-2000](#)], at least 45 Palestinian journalists have been killed since 2000, while the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate puts the number at 55. Since 2018, and in the span of five years, Israeli forces have injured at least 145 Palestinian journalists. This is not even counting the assaults on journalists during field coverage. Israeli forces and settlers have assaulted and detained international journalists, including journalists on assignment for the BBC, CNN, and the New York Times.

“They’re threatened that Palestinian journalists can actually show the world what’s really happening,” Eid said, reflecting on the targeted killing and assault of Palestinian journalists.

The bloodbath Israel unleashed during the 2018 [Great March of Return](#) upon Palestinians — journalists and protesters alike — is one of the bloodiest examples of this Israeli fear. Israeli forces shot at the unarmed demonstrators indiscriminately and intentionally.

With a siege imposed on Gaza, making it difficult for journalists to reach it safely, younger journalists from the coastal enclave reported developments from the field. It was not an easy terrain to navigate for either journalists or Palestinian. Being both would only put you at greater risk.

Israeli forces created [games of who can shoot more knees in a single day](#), and [others cheered snipers](#) as they fired toward the unarmed Palestinian protesters trying to escape their prison and shed light on the Gaza slaughterhouse. The Israeli violence

only escalated. On [April 6](#), 2018, Israeli snipers shot photojournalist Yasser Murtaja, 30, and on April 13, Israeli snipers shot journalist Ahmad Abu Hussein, 27. Both were wearing PRESS vests, yet both were killed. Over 20 journalists identified as media personnel were injured with gunshot wounds during the Great March. More than 36,143 Palestinians were injured throughout that year. An independent investigation by the Human Rights Council found that aside from two cases, [Israel’s use of force](#) was unlawful. Yet no one was held accountable for the crimes against Palestinians (journalists or otherwise).

It becomes clear from this record that Israel’s war on Palestinian journalists is part of its larger war against Palestinians. It is also evident in the circumstances of Shireen’s death. Covering an Israeli raid in Jenin refugee camp, which had been experiencing the nascent resurgence of armed resistance, Shireen was killed by the same bullets directed against her fellow Palestinians. Since her death, those bullets have continued to fly, and the Israeli war machine has taken the lives of nearly 300 Palestinians in the past year. Shireen was one of them.

“From ethnic cleansing to apartheid to constant attacks and killing of children,” Eid told Mondoweiss. “All of this is documented by people like Shireen.” Continuing to reflect, Eid said, “and that is so scary for Israel, and they can’t handle it. That’s why they attack them, so the truth won’t be told.”

11 May 2023

Source: [Mondoweiss](#).

## Writers Strike for Economic Security in Response to Streaming

11 May 2023, by [Dan La Botz](#)

This is a strike at the heart of a profitable trillion-dollar industry. Amazon has 200 million subscribers in the United States and abroad, Netflix 232 million. The Writers Guild of America (WGA) is negotiating with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP), the umbrella organization that represents the film studios that the union is picketing, such as Disney, Warner Brothers, NBCUniversal, Paramount and Sony, as well as streaming companies like Amazon, Netflix, Apple.

To understand the strike, you have to know how the companies use the writers they hire. The writers create virtually everything we see on the screen. Each show has a showrunner, a producer-writer who has creative and administrative responsibility for the show. The showrunner has a group of writers who meet together to write the script. When the show is finished, these writers must search for work elsewhere. There is a minimum pay per episode that is the basis of writers' income, and the WGA wants it raised.

The union is striking because changes in the entertainment industry, especially the development of streaming services such as Netflix and

Amazon, has led to fewer jobs and less income. The union's last contract was written for the TV broadcast, cable, and movie industry with different expectations than today. In the past, the typical TV show ran from September to May and had 22 to 25 episodes, but today streaming shows on Netflix or Amazon may only be eight or ten episodes. Because TV writers are paid by the episode, the change in format has reduced their pay and increased insecurity. While studio profits have risen 39% since the last contract, writers' wages have fallen 4%.

The WGA also wants to increase residuals, similar to royalties, so that writers also share in a show's success. The AMPTP claims that writers received a 46% increase in streaming residuals in their last contract, which began to kick in only last year. But rerun residuals that once brought writers a good part of their income no longer function because a rerun now often goes to a streaming service that doesn't share viewer data, so writers get far fewer residuals and smaller payments. So the WGA wants more money upfront.

The WGA also wants to protect writers' employment and give them opportunities to develop their craft by

increasing the size of the writers' room to six people, four of whom must be writer-producers and others may be newer writers. The AMPTP has so far rejected that proposal. And looming over this strike is the fear that AI will write the scripts, an issue put on the table by the WGA.

The strike will affect not only the 11,500 writers, but also thousands of other workers in the industry, and tens of millions of television viewers in the United States and around the world. The last WGA strike in 2007-2008, lasted 100 days while the longest strike in 1988, lasted 153. When writers struck in the past, the companies turned to reality TV shows, expanded talk shows and news, turned to reruns of old shows, as they will do again. And studios like Warner Brothers Discovery has been stockpiling scripts while Netflix will rely to a greater extent than its competitors on foreign-made films.

The writers are on the picket lines and a lot is at stake, not only for them, but also for the directors' union, DGA, and the actors' union, SAG, both scheduled to negotiate new contracts later this year. There is power in the pen—and the writers have laid theirs down.

8 May 2023

## Ukraine's workers are fighting an internal threat, too. They need support

10 May 2023, by **Hanna Perekhoda**

Russia has engaged in a deliberate and systematic strategy of terror against civilians. Those who have found themselves under Russian occupation are victims of forced displacement, murder, rape and torture. Tens of thousands of children are thought to have been deported from the occupied territories to Russia, where their national identity is forcibly erased. With every liberation of a Ukrainian village or town, new crimes come to light, showing the

whole world what awaits any territory seized by Russia.

This is why, regardless of political disagreements, all of Ukrainian society is united in the view that Ukraine can only survive if it succeeds in expelling the Russian army from its entire territory. Faced with the explicit genocidal intent of the Russian invasion, Ukraine's civic and political forces are unwavering in their resistance.

The war has pushed Ukraine's economy into a deep recession. In a single year of war, the country's GDP has **fallen by roughly 30%**. High inflation has meant falling real incomes. Only 60% of Ukrainians have been able to keep their jobs, of which only 35% were full-time. Not only did many people lose their jobs - they also lost homes and relatives. There have been tens of thousands of civilian casualties and military casualties must surely exceed that.

Despite these difficult conditions, the Ukrainian people refuse to be passive victims. The capacity of ordinary Ukrainians for self-organisation has been, and remains, one of the keys to the country's resistance to Russian imperialist aggression.

But instead of focusing on adapting the economy to the needs of war, the Ukrainian authorities have launched a vast **privatisation programme**. Taking advantage of martial law and the restrictions on demonstrations, the government has also **dismantled labour legislation** and pushed through a series of other **unpopular measures**.

This is undermining social cohesion at a time that Ukraine needs it most. Unfortunately, Ukrainian workers are facing attacks from their own government even as they defend the country from an external enemy. Meanwhile, the state fails to meet both security and consumption needs of the population.

After the war, Ukraine will face a colossal task. It will have to deal with the massive destruction of infrastructure, relaunch industry and cope with a major demographic crisis: eight million people, most of them women, have left the country. A significant number of refugees may not return from abroad; some because of the deterioration of social rights and working conditions.

We need to ensure that post-war reconstruction is

not used to justify the radical transformation of the Ukrainian economy in favour of oligarchs and corporations,

Yet instead of adopting measures that would encourage Ukrainians to return home after the war, the authorities are calling for the commercialisation of healthcare, the total privatisation of state assets and public service cuts in order to attract foreign investment. In the name of neoliberal dogma, the government is undermining the economic and political sovereignty for which ordinary Ukrainians are giving their lives.

Even in these harsh conditions, Ukrainian workers are mobilising against policies that attack their **social rights** and while left-wing and trade union activists are supporting their efforts to organise. But these people, who are heroically fighting for their sovereignty on every front, need allies. The international left and labour movement can help Ukrainians regain their independence from the Russian aggressor, as well as to defend themselves against neoliberal dependency.

Military, financial and diplomatic support for Ukraine is essential in order that it achieves not just a ceasefire and a peace that doesn't last, but the immediate withdrawal of Russian occupying troops from all territory.

Yet we also need to ensure that post-war reconstruction is not used to justify the **radical transformation of the Ukrainian economy** in favour of oligarchs and corporations, rather than the people. The only way to guarantee national security both in wartime and afterwards is to put in place decent labour conditions in accordance with European and international standards. Ukraine also needs to develop an effective policy on the protection of workers' rights.

Three initiatives are doing a great deal to bring the voices of Ukrainian progressive organisations to the wider world. **The European Network of Solidarity with Ukraine**, the **US Solidarity Network** and Elected Left for Ukraine were founded to provide concrete support to Ukrainian popular resistance. Using their links to civic organisations, trade unions and feminists in Ukraine, as well as Belarusian and Russian anti-war organisations, the two initiatives are supporting the Ukrainian resistance by means of international solidarity, funds and aid convoys.

It is the workers who are keeping **Ukraine's factories, hospitals, schools, trains** and offices running, often at risk to their own lives. And it is the workers who are fighting on the front line, ensuring the survival of the state. That is why only Ukrainian workers can decide the future of their country. We must ensure their voices are heard.

Source: [Open Democracy](#).

## Local Elections - Tories take a beating

9 May 2023, by **Dave Kellaway**

You know a party has had truly awful results when the number of seats lost goes beyond its pre-election management numbers. The Tory press officers were saying beforehand that they could lose up to 1,000 seats. They pitch it high so that when the actual

results come in, they can claim the party did better than forecast. The Tories shot through the false target by 60 seats!

Sunak must be thankful that the mainstream press has submerged

these results under an avalanche of Coronation coverage. Johnson's COVID/partygate debacle, Truss's catastrophic interlude, and the daily experience of a deep cost of living crisis meant voters deserted the government party. The Brexit

premium is no longer operative given the lies about a bonus to the NHS, multiple trade deals, and increased control that have all been exposed. Sunak's clumsy attempt to salvage support through racist or anti-trans culture wars has only meant they are losing liberal-minded (or just human?) Tory voters in the Blue Wall areas. All opposition parties, but particularly the Liberal Democrats and Greens, are gaining there.

The Tory vote share is down to 26%, which confirms the opinion poll trends. Recent exaggerated claims that Sunak was turning things around through the Northern Ireland 'Windsor' agreement or the fact that he is more competent than Truss have evaporated. He may compare in some head-to-head polls more favourably than a lacklustre Starmer, but this is unlikely to stave off a near-certain defeat at the next general election. Dozens of Tory MPs are already brushing up their CVs and making contacts for a lucrative life outside politics.

## Labour largest party in local government

Labour is now once again the largest party in local government, having won a 35% share of the vote and a 9% margin. The last time it was in this position was in 2002. It gained over 500 seats. Leader Keir Starmer maintained in his post-election statement that Labour was on course to form the next government. There has been some discussion on whether Labour can win an outright majority on these figures or will only have a relative majority. Sky TV's Thresher, the BBC's Curtice, and the *Guardian's* Rob Ford all gave their specialists two pennyworths on the question. Thresher says he thinks they are 28 seats short on these figures, and Curtice tends to agree.

However, Ford makes the argument that Lib Dem and Green council gains were often in smaller numbers, whereas Labour gained in key urban target seats like Stoke or Medway, and so the actual potential result in

seats could be better for Starmer. Tactical voting, where opposition parties vote for the best-placed candidate to kick out the Tories, could also work better for Labour than the Lib Dems. Certainly, there was quite a lot of evidence that this went on in these local elections. An overall majority can be achieved if Labour wins back a lot of the Red Wall seats it lost in 2019 and the Lib Dems significantly gain Tory seats in more rural or suburban areas, particularly in the South and South West.

Some people on the left have argued that unless Starmer adopts a more radical approach, it is unlikely that he will win an overall majority. They quote the bigger lead Labour had in the run-up to Blair's election in 1997. But that was only two percentage points higher. Obviously, we think that Labour's gains have more to do with the collapse in Tory support than any mass enthusiasm for Starmer's policy agenda. Indeed, we have seen evidence in these elections that Labour has lost some voters on what may be called its left or liberal flank. Otherwise, it is hard to explain the continued gains of the Greens in some areas with high numbers of graduate voters (see [Ford](#)).

We support the Labour manifesto policies that did so well in the 2016 general election and oppose Starmer's continued dumping of radical policies like nationalisation of all utilities and ending student tuition fees. Such an approach could make an overall majority more likely. We do not agree that Labour's gains are because Starmer has abandoned Corbyn's policies. Local examples like Preston or Worthing, where some left-leaning policies have been more prominent, show that you do not need to adopt ultra-moderate policies to win well.

However, this does not mean that Starmer cannot win an overall majority if he pursues his moderate pro-business line. It would be taking our desires for reality to believe that is not possible. A Labour overall majority is more likely than not given the degree of Tory disintegration, the state of the economy, and the increasingly popular refrain that it is time for a change after thirteen years.

## Gains for the Greens

The forward march of the Green Party cannot be denied. It had already made a breakthrough the last time these seats were contested. The [Bright Green website](#) summarises:

- The Greens have gained more seats than in any local election ever before, with over 230 gains at the time of writing. The previous record was set in 2019, when the party gained 198.
- The Greens have also broken records by taking majority control of a council for the first time. In Mid Suffolk, the Greens have won 24 out of the 34 seats.
- The Greens have also become the largest party in more than half a dozen councils, including in Warwick, Lewes, East Hertfordshire, East Sussex, and the Forest of Dean.
- The Green Party has broken into a series of new councils for the first time, including in Havant, Southend, South Kesteven, South Ribble, and more.
- Other major gains have come in Worcester, South Tyneside, and Darlington.

Clearly, its voters represent a varied constituency depending on where they are. In some urban and university towns, they are clearly picking up people who see themselves as progressive, ecological, or even on the left—some are ex-Corbyn supporters. We all know people from the Labour left who have joined the Green Party after the defeat of the Corbyn project. In fact, one ex-Corbyn supporter, Jo Bird, won a seat for the Greens in the Wirral. In other areas, they operate perhaps as a slightly more ecological or progressive variant of the Lib Dems. In terms of a formal programme - for example, the monarchy or the green transition—they have more radical positions than Labour.

Despite the extreme difficulties that the anti-democratic first-past-the-post system places on parties outside the two-party system, the Greens have managed to build up a national presence. The number of candidates they are able to stand for and the

areas where they win seats have increased. It shows how the ecological question is important to ordinary voters and that political loyalty to the two main parties is not as solid as it once was.

These elections also saw the success of a few independent candidates to the left of Labour. Alan Gibbons, along with two other Liverpool Community Independents, defeated the official Labour candidates. They had been forced out of the Labour Party after refusing to accept the budget of the Liverpool Labour Group on the council. Gibbons won a stunning 1400 votes, or 77% of the vote. Their success was due to their consistent work defending the interests of the local community. The official Labour candidates were seen as being 'parachuted' in (see the fuller story at [Labour Hub](#)). In Portsmouth, former leader Cal Corkery and others had been deselected by Labour. He won, and another five independents did too. Left-leaning Labour candidates have the best chance of success in local elections where they have formerly been good community Labour councillors.

It is much more difficult for people to stand for new parties without having a connection with Labour or the local community; the record of the Socialist Party electoral front, the Trade Union,

and the Socialist Coalition is testimony to that. Results for the Breakthrough Party candidates were mostly between 2 and 5%. This puts into perspective talk of setting up new parties to challenge Labour from the left at the next election. One thing is for Corbyn or another sitting Labour MP to stand as an independent after being expelled, but it is quite different for a regroupment of left-wing political groups to come together and set up a challenge. This is even more unlikely since if Corbyn stands, he is unlikely to call for the formation of a new party.

These elections show both a mass rejection of the Tories and a desire for a new Labour government. However, there are hardly any radical Labour policies—apart possibly from the green energy plans—that can build up enthusiasm for a new government. There is also a big gap between the push for this new government and the need for the ongoing strike struggles to defend workers' living standards.

Socialists need to campaign to kick out the Tories, to call for a vote for Labour, and at the same time to build a socialist alternative project to Starmer's pro-business policies among activists both inside and outside the Labour Party. A vote for Labour does not mean support for Starmer's programme but recognises that the

terrain for struggle is better under a Labour government. Union struggles can have a more immediate impact on the party they are affiliated with, and Labour in government tends to put forward some partial reforms. For instance, we support the ending of non-dom tax breaks but argue for a serious wealth tax.

It is easier to campaign on these issues under a government that is proposing some modest progressive tax changes than one that is constantly favouring regressive tax changes. Refusing to openly call for a vote for Labour on the basis that Starmer is not Corbyn would risk isolating socialist activists from the mass of class-conscious workers. Building organised resistance from the ground up, independent of any government, remains our priority. Working alongside strikers to win their demands or campaigning against the increasingly anti-democratic and repressive turn of this government is what we do. Nothing is put on hold in anticipation of a Starmer government that will supposedly deal progressively with all these issues. The stronger we can build the movement now, the better we can try to impose real change on a Labour government.

8 May 2023

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

## Four years of struggles against the “Mitsotakis memorandum”

8 May 2023, by **Andreas Sartzekis**

Despite the brutal anti-social and repressive measures, the struggles have never stopped since 2019, and even if they have not changed the landscape on the left in depth, their diversity and massiveness remain a sign of hope beyond the parliamentary elections on 21 May.

### Workers' struggles despite the obstacles

As under the memoranda, the struggles have been about wages and conditions of employment, which the government has made harder and

harder. At the beginning of this year, fatal accidents at work have multiplied. In the public sector, the government is trying to outlaw the numerous strikes against the "evaluation" policy, which is synonymous with "merit" salaries and regressions.

However, an important obstacle is that of trade union structuring: faced with

the bureaucratic leadership of the single confederation of the private sector and with division, the question of the revival of the trade union tool is a central issue linked to a question that has not been advanced enough, that of the unity of the class, which is decisive for the near future.

Beyond the national strike days (24 hours) which are always well attended, the activity of demands was maintained in many sectors: victorious struggles for collective agreements at efood and among the dockers at Cosco. Popular struggles with trade union participation, such as the one underway against the privatisation of water, are strengthening the fighting spirit: recently 25,000 people gathered in Thessaloniki, and the Athens town hall is refusing to grant the central square for a demonstration of the same type today. The support continues for the exemplary struggle of the VIOME factory occupied for ten years and revived by the workers!

## Struggles against

## the police state and in many sectors!

Resistance was shown in the summer of 2019 against the end of asylum and then against the creation of a university police force: the student movement made the government back down. During the pandemic, big mobilisations took place against the police state wanted by Mitsotakis and against the catastrophic medical management, with energetic struggles in public hospitals. If the environmental movement has not spread nationally as in other countries, there are numerous local struggles in defence of the increased attacks on the environment, with Mitsotakis planning to accelerate underwater drilling with the anachronistic ambition that Greece becomes a champion of hydrocarbon extraction...

Anti-racist struggles have decreased in intensity despite the activity of associations like KEERFA, but anti-fascist vigilance remains strong, as witnessed every year by the big demonstrations commemorating the murder of the rapper Fyssas by the Nazis. Let's also mention the recent struggles in the cultural and archaeological sector (privatisation of national museums) or against property seizures...

But the most striking struggle, which brought hundreds of thousands of Greeks into the streets, broke out in March after the Tèmbi railway tragedy: despite the manoeuvres to cover up his blatant responsibility, Mitsotakis will not be able to prevent the elections from resounding with the anger expressed in the slogan "Our dead, their profits", with all that this brings in terms of breaking with the headlong rush of capitalism!

*Athens*

29 April 2023

## “Not my King” - Protest the Coronation

7 May 2023, by **Dave Kellaway**

### We are paying for it

It is estimated that the taxpayer will contribute up to £100 million. We are all paying taxes, and wage workers proportionally pay more taxes than the rich. It is not as though the Royal Family does not have plenty of wealth accumulated over the centuries through expropriation of land, feudal dues, colonial empires, and slavery. No wonder the government studiously avoids giving any breakdown of the real costs. What is interesting is that polls show 51% think the royals should pay for their own coronation and leave our taxes to help deal with the dire crisis in the NHS.

### Support for the monarchy is declining, particularly among the young

Support for a republic is steady at 25 to 26% in recent polls and has been up by five points or so in recent decades. Surveys show 31% want a referendum on the question. Around two-thirds of the population still support the monarchy, down from three-quarters since the 1990s. If you add the increasing numbers of people who want a slimmed-down or modernised monarchy and add them to the

republicans, then supporters of the status quo are barely half the population.

Rising opposition to the union and support for self-determination in Scotland and Wales is weakening the popularity of the royal family there. If the progressive side is beginning to gain more support, there is even more reason for the socialist left to get out there and support the various Republican campaigns. We can agree that placing a demand to abolish the monarchy as a key plank in the Corbyn manifesto would have been tactically inept, but there is no reason for the radical left not to raise the issue as part of an ongoing campaign and in political discussion aimed at winning people away from one-nation labourism.

## **We reject the myth of national unity that the coronation is supposed to express**

When formerly anti-monarchist Keir Starmer was asked about his participation in the Coronation Party, he was suitably enthusiastic. He almost wet himself, saying how excited he was and being interested to know who he was going to be sitting next to. Of course, for him, this was a great occasion to show how the British people 'come together in unity'. The essence of his tepid social liberalism is that we are all on the same ship; we can work with big business to make things fairer for workers and to bring about a green transition. All those powerful capitalists who need to exploit us every day to maintain their wealth can be convinced, in the name of national unity, to give up some of their wealth.

Conjuring a scene of happy peasants exulting at street parties, he gushed: "The world will see our country at its best, celebrating a new chapter in our history. But it will also be a reminder of the loss of the late Queen, Elizabeth ... So will the Prime Minister join me in honouring our late Queen and wishing our new King a long and happy reign?"

*Robert McNeil writing about Sir Keir Starmer in [The Herald](#), 4 May 2023.*

Where is the national unity between the shareholders of Shell or BP reaping super profits and the millions of people this winter who made themselves ill deciding whether to heat or eat? Where is the unity between older people who can afford the best private social care and the millions who are enduring terrible conditions in the community or in privatised nursing homes? Is there a

national unity between people who never have any problems with the police and black or Asian youth who are regularly harassed? These royal events play an important role in reproducing day-to-day the ideology of the nation as a family. We need to unmask it.

## **The royal family is the festering sore on the rotten body of our undemocratic political system**

Most countries do not have an unelected head of state or, indeed, an unelected upper house. Bishops are given places as of right in the House of Lords. It is the monarch who appoints the Prime Minister and opens or dissolves parliament. There is no written constitution. The PM has regular formal meetings with him or her. There is a huge honours system that is under the patronage of the PM via royal consent. Yes, we all know that this is a constitutional monarchy, and these powers have always tended to be used under the command of the elected government, but in exceptional situations of crisis, they could very well be used to maintain the status quo.

The Royalty connects these threads of a political system that is less democratic for working people than even other European countries such as Italy. Some of the left, even the revolutionary left, seem to think that, like the anti-democratic first past the post electoral system, these issues are secondary to some real class struggle going on somewhere else. Opposing the monarchy should be part of a general critique and opposition to the antiquated British constitutional arrangements as a whole.

## **The monarchy reproduces a**

## **religious ideology that no longer has majority support.**

The Archbishop of Canterbury continues to anoint the British head of state with holy oils as though God had chosen him. The entire coronation demonstrates the integration of the protestant Church of England as the recognised state religion, despite the modifications made this weekend to allow for the participation of other religions. Hardly anyone goes to CoE religious services, and all polls show Britain as a secular society. The national anthem and the now notorious proclamation of loyalty to the monarch all reference God. Surely the head of state should represent the reality of British society today?

## **We are citizens, not subjects, and we reject any oath of allegiance**

The suggestion that we all recite the oath of allegiance that the peers of the realm typically utter at a particular point in the ceremony has received a lot of attention during this coronation. According to what Jonathon Dimbleby, a confidante of Charles III, claims today, this was all a put-up job by Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury. The latter has retorted that the liturgy was produced as a collaborative exercise. This makes it look like Charles has taken a step back given the reaction—part outrage, part ridicule. Certainly, this sort of mass public shouting of allegiance smacks a bit of fascism or Stalinist regimes and does not sit well with British ideology, which would never countenance such practises. Starmer's Labour Party, of course, did not react at all to the proposal. If we are to make progress with the building of a socialist alternative, we have to cross the threshold of people seeing themselves as subjects at the very least.

## Reject the spectacle; we can come together and enjoy more harmless rituals or collective struggles.

Royal occasions are today fully integrated into the capitalist spectacle of celebrity and contrived mass events. People like to get together, meet new people, and be involved in community events. There's no harm in that at all. As socialists, we want more of that, and mass strike struggles often produce the same feelings. Most of the inevitable vox pop interviews with the people camping out on the mall include references to the atmosphere and the camaraderie. The problem is that all that is coming together is around a circus, which really honours a privileged elite and amounts to passive consumption with little positive participation. Even mass sporting events are less toxic to constructing our view of the world. Community or charity efforts like organising a food bank are better, and

collective wage or political struggles, such as we have seen in the last year, are even better.

## Rejecting the Coronation means rejecting colonialism and slavery.

*The Guardian* has recently run [a series of excellent articles](#) revealing how the wealth of the royal family is intimately connected with the spoils of empire and slavery. It was the royalty that gave official legitimacy to colonial enterprises like the East India Company. Even the crown jewels, one of the stars of the ceremony, are material expressions of the wealth stolen from British colonies. The monarch is still head of the Commonwealth, and there has been no apology for its involvement in slavery. It is no surprise that more and more Commonwealth countries are questioning the British monarch's role within their constitutions. The Royal family's participation in the Empire directly produced its super wealth, and we should be demanding public recognition of its role. Indeed, it would

be just to confiscate its wealth and use it for reparations to those people.

## What can we do today to protest?

It is a pity that the radical left could not come together to build a decent, united campaign against the monarchy. Badges and posters have been produced, but we are missing an opportunity to reach out to a lot of people, often young, who are critical and want change. The main campaign, Republic, has managed to get some publicity and is organising a protest at Trafalgar Square. [27] Clive Lewis, a Labour MP, is saving the honour of the labour movement by speaking there. There are events in Cardiff and other places. (See the website here.) The Labour leadership has explicitly banned local parties from affiliating with this campaign. Starmer is even scared of a democratic campaign that includes the union jack in its resources! You can download and print a poster from their website to put in your window. We should look beyond the coronation junket to an ongoing campaign.

5 May 2023

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

## The Landless Workers Movement under attack

6 May 2023, by [Guy Zurkinder](#)

### An orchestrated campaign.

Since the beginning of this year, circles close to the big landowners and agribusiness have been waging a noisy media campaign to denounce the unproductive land occupations (renamed "invasions"), which are the main tool of the MST in its struggle

for agrarian reform. [28] This offensive has just gone up a notch. On Wednesday 26 April, the President of the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies, Arthur Lira, launched the establishment of a Parliamentary Investigation Commission (CPI) targeting the MST. The official objective of this commission will be to "investigate the 'real objective' of the country's main social movement, and look into its sources of funding".

According to the *Folhã de São Paulo*, deputies Luciano Lorenzini Zucco and Ricardo Aquino Salles are expected to head the commission.

### Extreme right and "bancada



## ruralista” at the helm...

Originally from Rio Grande do Sul (south of the country), Luciano Lorenzini Zucco, better known as “Lieutenant Colonel Zucco”, is an elected member of the Republicans, a party linked to the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God and a member of the allied base of former president Jair Bolsonaro. On his website, Mr Zucco makes no secret of his convictions: “After 27 years serving the country in the army, I received from my friend General Mourão [vice-president under Bolsonaro] and from Jair Bolsonaro, at the time a federal deputy, the call to serve my country on another front of struggle: politics. I understood the reasons for this and accepted my mission, which was and continues to be the rescue of the real Brazil, the conservative, patriotic Brazil, respectful of laws and freedoms, defender of the family and of children.”

The other key figure in the ICC targeting the MST is MP Ricardo Aquino Salles. A member of the Liberal Party, Salles served as Environment Minister under President Jair Bolsonaro from 1 January 2019 to 23 June 2021. He was forced to resign from his post after two judicial investigations were opened against

him: one for obstructing an investigation against an illegal deforestation programme in the Amazon; the other for his alleged involvement in a timber smuggling network. In 2014, while campaigning for the Chamber of Deputies, Salles publicly claimed that ‘bullets’ were the ‘solution’ to counter MST activities.

In their (successful) search for the 171 parliamentary signatures needed to open an ICC, Zucco and Salles worked hand in hand with the leader of the “bancada ruralista”, the parliamentary faction representing large landowners and agribusiness firms, MP Pedro Lupion (Progressive Party).

## The MST’s response.

The ICC’s announcement was made in a highly symbolic month, April. Every year, the MST mobilises throughout the country during “April Days” to demand agrarian reform and to commemorate the sad anniversary of the Eldorado de Carajás massacre - on 17 April 1996, twenty-one rural worker members of the MST were murdered by the military police of the northern state of Pará.

For João Paulo Rodrigues, a member of the national leadership of the MST, this CPI - the fifth targeting the MST

since the movement’s creation in the 1980s - is part of an overall plan by conservative circles: “The right-wing is going to use the federal parliament and the legislative assemblies throughout the country to confront the MST. In addition, they will use their media, fake news and the armed militias of the shooting clubs of collectors, sport shooters and hunters. It is an evil combination. The aim of these manoeuvres is to muzzle the country’s main social movement and prevent a resurgence of the struggle for land reform under the new Lula government.”

In the interview given to the *Folhã de São Paulo*, João Paulo Rodrigues reaffirms however the determination of the movement to fight against this CPI and to continue its struggle for land reform. He also recalls the two main demands of the MST to the current Lula government: on the one hand, the allocation of land to the 60,000 families currently living in settlements; on the other, the implementation of a comprehensive plan to develop food creation and preserve the environment - which requires the redistribution of the 200 million hectares of unproductive land in the country.

28 April 2020

*Translated by International Viewpoint from A l’Encontre.*

## A Biden-Trump Rematch? So it Seems

5 May 2023, by **Dan La Botz**

Donald Trump, who is now on trial in two cases, a criminal case for falsifying business records regarding his \$130,000 hush money pay off to porn star Stormy Daniels with whom he is alleged to have sex, and a civil trial where he is accused of raping journalist E. Jean Carroll in the mid-1990s. He is also under investigation in Georgia for having interfered in the 2020 election and in Washington, D.C. for having played a leading role in the January 6, 2021

insurrection in the capital and also for mishandling of government documents. Still 70 percent of all Republicans support Trump and he is 15 percentage points ahead of Florida Governor Ron DeSantis as first choice for the Republican nomination. In fact, Trump, who claims that he is being persecuted by the “far left radical Democrats,” has used the charges against him to raise \$18.8 million dollars for his campaign.

Biden should be able to win a rematch if he can get young voters, women, Blacks and Latinos to the polls, but there is not much enthusiasm at the moment. But Republicans are busy working to restrict voting rights and to make it more difficult for students, Blacks, and Latinos to vote. The Democrats’ campaign seems so far to focus on the fight for abortion rights, while Republicans have decided to make denying trans people their rights a central issues. While gender will be

at the center of both campaigns it seems, the biggest issue in voters' minds is usually the economy, and if the economy slows, Biden will face an uphill battle.

The goal of Biden and Trump will be to win over independent voters. According to a 2022 poll of adults in the U.S., 28% identify as Republicans and 28% as Democrats, but 41% of U.S. adults consider themselves to be independents.

You may wonder, are there no other possible Democratic presidential candidates? Well, Bernie Sanders who ran twice, in 2016 and 2020, not only announced that he will not run has declared his support for Biden. Vice

President Kamala Harris will be Biden's running mate, and so not a presidential candidate, but in any case, she is unpopular with the electorate in general and progressive Democrats don't like her because of her background in law enforcement. Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, leader of "The Squad" of progressive Democrats, will turn 35 just before election day, making her legally eligible, but she is perceived by most as too young and inexperienced and by others as too far left, not to mention the race and gender prejudice that being Latina she would face.

To the left of the Democrats is the Green Party, but its presidential

candidate in 2020, Howie Hawkins, who was also the presidential candidate of the Socialist Party, won only 404,084 votes or 0.3% of the national vote. Many voters fear that casting a vote for the Greens or Socialists might lead to a Republican victory.

The Democratic Socialists of America, with 92,000 members in fifty states, has adopted a strategy of supporting progressive Democrats rather running its own candidate. While DSA will hold its convention this summer, it seems unlikely that the fundamental strategy will change. In a Biden versus Trump race, DSA members will back Biden.

30 April 2023

## Bring together the anti-fascist struggle and class struggle. If not now when?

4 May 2023, by **Franco Turigliatto**

The 25 April and 1 May are two dates that are not only symbolic, but concrete expressions of the class struggle in our country and of the protagonismo (active role) of the working classes. The extreme right government continues undisturbed (at least for now) in its pursuit of reactionary and pro-boss objectives. It is occupying key administrative posts in the institutions and in the main public or semi-public economic structures of the Italian capitalist system.

### What the DPEF is about

The annual Economic and Financial Planning Document (DPEF) in April confirms certain features of the economic situation and the current basic choices of the bourgeoisie and European capitalist institutions, and by extension those of the Italian government.

To summarize,

- There is a particularly difficult international economic situation, so much so that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecasts the weakest world growth since 1990 and a very fragile financial system (just think of the collapse of some banks), which is also the result of the partial reorganization of the production networks connected to the contradictory processes of the so-called (very relative) de-globalization of the capitalist economy and, of course, the war in Ukraine

- It takes the decision to prioritize the fight against inflation and therefore to put an end to a phase of expansionist policies, in other words, the reduction of budget deficits and the pure and simple renewal of austerity policies as we have known them in past years; all this means increasingly significant cuts in public health and social spending, pensions and, of course, government action to stop any movement of the working classes to

recover what inflation from profits has stolen from them

- Therefore the government is shrinking public spending in order to ensure a strong primary surplus to reduce the state's debt (the surplus amounts to 6 billion in 2024 and 26 and 45 billion in the following two years), through the attack on the conditions of the weakest sectors of society, the reduction of pensions and the containment of salaries. All this is combined with the Meloni government's strong focus on safeguarding the economic privileges of the petty and middle bourgeoisie in the most diverse sectors of activity, (its main social and electoral base) while managing the economy according to the profits and financial rents of the big bourgeoisie. It knows full well that it must guarantee its fundamental interests. [1] Military spending continues to increase.

We are therefore see the continuation of Draghi's (previous government of 'national unity') policies, corrected

according to the new conditions of the capitalist economy. This is combined with an ideological, cultural and regressive offensive in terms of rights which is indispensable to produce bogus enemies and objectives for the workers. It attempts to conceal the anti-working-class reality of the government's choices. The government is constructing an ideological narrative (false consciousness) of the country's history, in order to erase the significance of the struggles of the working class, justly commemorated on the 25 April (Liberation from fascism day) and I May.

Nor should the government's choice to use the three billion freed from the small gap between the actual deficit and the programmed deficit to reduce the so-called tax take on middle and low incomes mislead us. It is a measure that, in the best case scenario (but it is not certain), will have an impact of 40 euros per month, aimed, according to their own admission, at sheltering the bosses from wage tensions and workers' demands for increases.

This small tax reduction in fact has little to do with the needs of wage-earners affected by a 30-year impoverishment and double-digit inflation. To make up for what has been lost with the high cost of living and the productivity increases diverted to the bosses, a paltry EUR 30/40 is certainly not enough. What is needed is a large increase of at least 300 euros for everyone, and an automatic and permanent sliding scale of wages which 30 years ago was cancelled by a shameless agreement between the three trade union confederations, the government and Confindustria (bosses national lobby organization).

## **So different from France, but also from England and Germany**

It is almost surreal that the introduction of the sliding scale of wages is being discussed in a country

like Germany and not in Italy. Moreover, it is very bad for the working class in our country that in the face of the present economic scenario and the enormous profits of capitalist corporations, a mass mobilization is not being organized, like those that have been going on for months in France, England and Germany. In Italy we are witnessing an absurd social peace to the total benefit of the bosses, punctuated here and there only by increasingly difficult isolated struggles. We are witnessing a total subservience of the confederal trade union leaderships in spite of their more or less combative pronouncements from congress platforms. Not even the arrival in government of the main historical and political enemy of the workers, namely the extreme right, has shaken them up and seriously changed the policies of the trade union bureaucratic apparatus.

The position of the CISL (one of the trade union confederations formerly close to the Christian Democrats) is not surprising. For some time it has been more pro-government than any other political party in power. It has not dissented from Meloni on certain crucial issues such as the procurement code and differentiated regional autonomy. Opposition to these measures, under CISL pressure, has been removed from the joint platform of the three unions. Even the CGIL and UIL trade union federations, which in words proclaim their firm opposition to the government's policies, end up tail-ending the CISL leadership, rejecting any substantial mobilization.

Thus the loud and repeated proclamations of a hard and broad struggle by the CGIL secretary remain words without practical consequences. The mountain, that is, the meetings of the three federations, gave birth to the classic mouse: no strike, no serious project of class mobilization, but only three largely symbolic demonstrations in three city squares to be held on Saturdays, without any work stoppages, that is, without impacting any business activities. Not only an insufficient mobilization, but a completely symbolic one that builds a fake struggle, only concerned with saving the face and fading credibility

of the leadership groups at the expense of the necessary real social clash against the government and bosses. We are working below the union minimum to employ an expression familiar to these people.

There is no doubt that there is a concern about the possibility of successful strikes, after years of passivity and concessions, and that building for them requires careful preparation. The necessary development of workplace assemblies will in fact only be useful and effective if it becomes clear in the eyes of the workers that the leadership wants to be serious, i.e. really committed to building the conditions for a strong strike, as a fundamental objective to be achieved and not put off forever.

What is happening in other countries should be used as an example and a stimulus to resume mobilizations that in the past allowed the Italian working class to achieve great results that were then gradually lost.

We are far from the confederal leaders choosing such a way forward. It does not seem that many of them want to go on strike, which would impact not only the government, but also the employers with whom they are seeking agreement in the hope of wresting a few crumbs. In reality, it is only by striking the capitalists themselves, who are primarily responsible for the workers' conditions, that it would be possible not only to make life difficult for the government, but also to take back (at least in part) what they have stolen and are stealing from the working class.

## **Use assemblies to build strikes and struggles**

Mass assemblies in the workplace must be used by union militants to activate a different path, to propose that we must do as in France, England and Germany, identifying a platform of struggles for big wage increases, for a new sliding scale and the reduction of working hours without loss of pay. This would mean a reduction of

exploitation, and a path of mobilization that would be able to generalize the struggles and strikes, thus building the conditions of strength and unity that would allow us to win again. It is not easy to get out of the quagmire into which we have fallen and which demoralizes large sectors of the working class, but this is the only way to try to get out of the mess.

The wait-and-see approach of the confederations could leave a little more room for initiative and credibility to the grassroots unions, which have identified a few days of strike action between April and May. However they have decided on separate strikes at different times. This is a step backwards compared to last year, when a convergence was reached both on the platform of demands and the timing of the mobilization. This

division will make an effective path of struggle more difficult and weaken attempts to dent the 'credibility', albeit declining, of the majority union leaderships in such a context.

We are a long way from the French 'inter-union' coordination, the structure, which, albeit with limitations, is leading the struggles in France.

Our union activists will remain committed to fostering convergence between all class union forces inside and outside the confederations. The commitment and role of the left opposition in the CGIL is important so that some momentum is maintained among many militants that identify with the largest Italian trade union.

This alternative social and trade union activity, which for us as an

organization and as individual militants is so central, does not seem to us to have the same prominence in other political forces of the radical left. It seems to us that it is only partly present (sometimes even subordinate to the majority bureaucratic apparatuses) while the greatest concern remains elections. Electoral intervention is important but it is certainly not the decisive terrain today for changing the relationship of force between the classes. From this point of view too, something should change. In the meantime, on these two symbolic dates, 25 April and 1 May, let us work for the full convergence of anti-fascist and class social mobilization.

15 April 2023

*Translated by Dave Kellaway from [Sinistra Anticapitalista](#).*

## A Sudanese Dream

### 3 May 2023, by Gilbert Achcar

The reason for this is clear, since the armed forces represent the greatest obstacle to revolutions in non-democratic countries. For, as long as the existing regime controls them, it can use them to suppress the popular movement, even if this required perpetrating a major bloodbath. One of the most prominent leaders of the Russian revolution summarized the task of the revolutionary forces as consisting in winning the "hearts and minds" of soldiers, non-commissioned officers, and lower ranks, which is indeed what allowed the revolution to triumph in 1917. The truth is, however, that winning hearts and minds is much easier when the troops are resentful in the wake of a defeat whose responsibility they attribute to their commanders and their country's rulers. The Arab region offers an example of this, albeit in a manner that is not revolutionary strictly speaking, in that the coup d'état that overthrew the monarchy in Egypt in 1952 was a delayed result of the

Egyptian army's defeat in the Palestine war.

The convergence of defeat and its impact on morale with the existence of a revolutionary organization capable of extending its influence in the ranks of the armed forces provides the best prelude to revolutionary victory, whether it happens in a revolutionary way through a mass uprising with the participation of a civilian revolutionary party, as happened in the 1917 revolution in Russia, or by way of a coup led by a secret revolutionary organization within the armed forces themselves, similar to the Free Officers who led the overthrow of King Farouk's regime in Egypt. In contrast, the failures of the two revolutionary waves that swept the Arab region in 2011 and 2019 are primarily due to the popular revolutions' inability to win over to their cause the bulk of the armed forces, which is related to the fact that the revolutionary movement failed to extend its influence within

the armed forces or was unsuccessful if it did try.

The military commands in Egypt, Algeria and Sudan realized the danger of their bases sympathizing with the massive popular uprisings against rulers who had completely lost their legitimacy. They therefore took themselves the initiative to overthrow these rulers (Hosni Mubarak, Abdel Aziz Bouteflika and Omar al-Bashir), whereas the revolutionary movement was unable to win over the base of the armed forces to the cause of ending military rule altogether. The Libyan exception—the only case in which a popular uprising managed to completely overthrow a political system during the Arab Spring—is due to the fact that external military intervention contributed to persuading a large part of the regular armed forces to abandon Gaddafi's regime and join the uprising.

Where is our Sudanese dream from all the above? Sudan has thus far been

the scene of the most advanced revolutionary experience that the Arab region has witnessed since 2010. The Sudanese popular movement, with its radical wing spearheaded by the Resistance Committees, has reached a level of mobilization and steadfastness that surpasses everything witnessed in other countries. This is what prevented the military from getting rid of the Sudanese popular movement, for they feared that the ranks of the armed forces would refuse to obey an order to carry out a large-scale massacre—the only event that could have put an end to the Sudanese movement. That is because this movement is characterized by the superiority of its organizational forms and the horizontality of its decision-making that renders its suppression by ordinary oppression intractable. Yet, despite its advanced level of awareness and organizational forms, the Sudanese revolutionary movement did not possess some kind of secret organization that would have allowed it to weave an underground network within the armed forces—a very difficult and dangerous endeavour indeed. This inability has been compensated for by military defeats in

the abovementioned historical cases.

Will the infighting between the two pillars of the Sudanese military weaken and exhaust them, will their infighting arouse the resentment of the ranks against the high command, especially among the regular army, and provide a gateway to the exacerbation of popular resentment against the military rule to a degree that could enable the revolutionary movement to lead the masses to the overthrow of military rule and its replacement with the democracy that they aspire to? This is but a dream, for sure, and yet the current situation is the closest to that “connection between dream and life” mentioned by a Russian radical philosopher cited by another of the most prominent leaders of the Russian revolution in justifying his famous saying “We should dream!” at the beginning of the twentieth century. The ongoing tragic events in Sudan have enhanced the role of the Resistance Committees in organizing basic needs at the local level, so that their ability to achieve what they aspire to—in a context of heightened popular resentment against the military rulers and general weakening of the armed forces as a result of their

infighting—may reach its pinnacle.

If it were to come true, this Sudanese dream could inaugurate a new phase in the long-term revolutionary process that started in Tunisia more than twelve years ago. But, on the other hand, if the infighting of the military were to lead to the demise of the Sudanese popular movement as a result of the situation sliding towards a long-term civil war, or due to one of the conflicting parties managing to impose a criminal military dictatorship on the whole country, we would have then witnessed, after the return of dictatorship to Tunisia, the completion of the backward surge and the end of the last remaining achievements of the two revolutionary waves that the Arab region has witnessed so far. It would then become imperative for the new revolutionary generation to fully assimilate the lessons of the two waves and of their failure in order to prepare for the next new wave, which is inevitably forthcoming before long given the continuous exacerbation of economic and social crises in the Arab region.

*Source Gilbert Achcar blog.*

## **Desperate Journeys. Sick System!**

**2 May 2023, by Against the Current Editors**

In just very recent incidents, here are only a few of the horrific stories that made headlines:

Forty-nine asylum seekers from multiple Latin American and Asian countries, in detention in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico because of the U.S. border shutdown, burned to death when guards left them locked in their cells — apparently on orders from the government of “progressive” president Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador.

Two families including young children, reportedly from India and Romania, drowned when their boat capsized in the St. Lawrence River attempting a deadly dangerous crossing from

Canada to the United States. The Romanian family was seeking to join relatives in New York to avoid imminent deportation. This comes in the wake of refugees freezing to death trying to cross into the U.S. in a Manitoba border wasteland — AGAIN, hoping to reach relatives living in the United States.

Meanwhile, U.S. President Biden and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau have cemented their friendship summit by closing an “unofficial crossing” into Quebec at a place called Roxham Road used by hundreds of asylum seekers whose cases have little or no chance in the

nightmarish U.S. immigration system.

The Biden administration has resumed the unspeakable practice of deporting Haitians back to the collapsing country virtually destroyed as result of more than a century of imperialist exploitation and interventions. Notoriously, it was U.S. insistence on getting rid of the popular Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide (not once but twice!) that contributed directly to the chaos over the past 20 years.

We don't even know the numbers who have perished in the Darien Gap wilderness between Colombia and Panama as they made their northward

journey. In the first three months of 2023 alone, an astounding 87,000 migrants have braved the Darien Gap crossing. (AP New, April 12, 2023)

The Mexican-U.S. Sonoran desert in recent years has become increasingly treacherous. According to *Latino USA*: “Over the last two decades, more than 4,000 remains of people believed to have died attempting to cross the border have been recovered from this region. And many more people have disappeared. Last year, 225 deaths were recorded in this stretch of southern Arizona. The actual death toll is unknown, but experts say it is likely much higher than has been reported.”

Behind the death count, it's important to try to grasp the extreme daily misery that makes these incredible treks, and the enormous risks, a rational calculation. That's a window not only onto the cynicism of government policies, but the systemic collapse that gives rise to them.  
Gross Statistics

During the past decade, reports the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the global refugee crisis more than doubled. In 2022, the UNHCR announced that the world had surpassed the 100 million mark for total displacement, meaning that over 1.2% of the global population have been forced to leave their homes. This includes some 70 million internally displaced, an often overlooked dimension of the disaster.

The deadliest of all the desperate refugee journeys are [the Mediterranean crossings from North Africa to Europe](#), where 25,000 people are believed to have died during the past decade, according to Human Rights Watch. The response? The government of Italy criminalizes the rescue ships that pull survivors from the water or from sinking rafts.

European states subsidize the government of Morocco and Libya to accept refugees who are forced back. Those who do reach European shores are often warehoused indefinitely on islands or detention camps. Australia's policy toward refugees has been equally brutal.

Even with the cruelty of government immigration policies in the richer countries, racist and rightwing backlash politics are rising in response to the influx of refugee populations. Even when the refugees are white and European, as in the case of millions of Ukrainians who fled early in the Russian invasion, the warm initial welcomes are wearing thin in neighboring eastern European countries — let alone the travails faced across Europe by Middle Eastern and African refugees subjected to racist abuse as less “desirable” arrivals.

As in the United States, conservative and far-right parties exploit the fear of immigrants to promote their racist agendas. It's contributed significantly to the Brexit movement, the growth of the Le Pen “National Rally” party in France and *Alternativ fur Deutschland* in Germany, the ascendance of Viktor Orban's self-described “illiberal democracy” (white-supremacist Christian nationalism) in Hungary, the Polish government acclaiming Ukrainian refugees as “people like us” while those from Africa are distinctly unwelcome, bans in Switzerland on construction of minarets, and other expressions of xenophobic illness.

We shouldn't imagine that Europe or the United States have any monopoly on reactionary prejudices. In [the case of Tunisia](#), *The Legal Agenda* (March 21, 2023) notes the growth of a “great replacement” conspiracy theory — targeting what the Tunisian president calls “hordes of irregular migrants” from sub-Saharan Africa, committing alleged crimes and “unacceptable practices.”

Not only Black foreigners but also Black Tunisians (10-15% of the population) have subsequently been subjected to “violence, arbitrary arrests based on skin color, humiliation, vandalism, workplace dismissals, evictions, and incitement to violence...in a climate reminiscent of the White man's colonial paranoia about Black people.”

The crisis is international, and systemic, and only marginally ameliorated by those countries that have relatively liberal, or at least less blatantly cruel and sadistic, policies.

To understand the deep roots of a global dilemma, it helps to look at one set of circumstances — those closest to home in the western hemisphere.

## North American Case Study

Think of an agricultural village in central Mexico, for example, where young and not-so-young people are considering their future. Are they hoping to make it to the USA and find work, let's say, in a meatpacking plant, because they've heard that midwestern winters are really the best?

Probably not. More likely, the village is already hollowing out because its native agriculture has been gutted by heavily subsidized U.S. agribusiness exports, facilitated by North American “free trade” agreements since the 1990s.

The impact on Mexican agriculture is not accidental or unintended. It was planned, under the free-market doctrine of “comparative advantage,” whereby agriculture in Mexico would shift to specialty produce for the U.S. market, with its labor force largely moving onto *maquiladora* factories — for production taken away from the U.S. industrial belt, driving down wages and labor rights all around.

That project didn't really work out, as U.S. capital quite logically used global “free trade” to find even lower-wage sites in the Global South.

But the wreckage perpetrated by imperialist policies extends beyond the ravages of the market alone. Through the genocidal counter-revolutionary wars waged by U.S.-allied regimes in Central America, the societies of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras were ripped apart, with the greatest impact on Indigenous and peasant communities.

While hundreds of thousands fled the military death squads, even worse devastation has been wrought by the truly insane U.S. “war on drugs” since the 1980s. The entirely predictable result is that drug production — ever more potent and deadly, precisely

because it's unregulated — and circulation and smuggling into the U.S. market on industrial scale is in the hands of criminal syndicates.

Wars among the gangs, their forced recruitment of youth, violent and arbitrary police crackdowns, prison overcrowding, riots and murders, have made parts of Mexico, El Salvador and other countries so deadly that flight becomes the sensible strategy. It's a big part of the reason why parents send their children northward, unaccompanied — an otherwise incomprehensible option.

The quadruple whammy is completed by the ravages of climate change, which destroys for example coffee production in parts of Central America and contributes to increasingly deadly hurricanes, flooding and droughts. All these factors of "free trade" economics, U.S.-sponsored repression, drug-war politics and natural disasters interact to produce an intractable crisis of population displacement on this continent.

One can point to the cruelty and opportunism, of immigration policies of all U.S. administrations — "stay in Mexico," Title 42, family separation, mass detention and all the rest — more overtly racist and sadistic under a Donald Trump, somewhat less so and better disguised under a Biden or "deporter-in-chief" Obama. These are significant but secondary differences. Under Biden, many children taken from their families under Trump remain separated or missing.

What's done every day to immigrants and asylum seekers at the U.S. border, and the terror experienced by undocumented people and their families living in U.S. cities under constant fear of deportation, are crimes against humanity. The atrocities of policy, however, are really symptoms of a dysfunctional

and destructive world system. Humane and comprehensive immigration reform is desperately needed, but even that is way short of a fundamental solution.

## Destructive Global Disorder

This synopsis of what's happening on the North American continent opens a window on the broader crises of displacement around the world. We sometimes forget, unfortunately, that there are disasters of wars and economic ruin on a scale equal to the horrors facing Ukraine.

Such calamities in the Middle East and North Africa have brought hundreds of thousands of people attempting to reach safe haven in Europe — whether going from Syria to Turkey to the Greek islands, from the Libyan coast toward Italy, from Morocco toward Spain. The countries from which people are fleeing extend from Afghanistan and Burma to Somalia, South Sudan and Ethiopia to Mali.

In one year alone, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) reported: "Some 40.5 million new people became internally displaced by conflict and disasters worldwide during the course of 2020. Of these people, 30.7 million were displaced by violence and conflict, and 9.8 million by natural disasters." That's two years before Russia invaded Ukraine, setting off further upheaval in global food and fertilizer supply.

So long as a world system persists that drives people by the tens of millions [to undertake desperate journeys](#) with all the deadly risks, progressive movements must demand the rights of people to move across borders to save their lives. The immediate demand must be: Let them

in!

But a world without borders, without cruel immigrant policies, and cynical manipulation by racist politicians of all stripes (including centrist and liberal ones), will only become possible in a fundamentally transformed system. Bland statements by U.S. vice-president Kamala Harris about programs to help people stay in their home countries are meaningless in present conditions — particularly when the programs are mainly about corporations like Pepsi-Cola setting up shop in the Global South!

The first step toward the necessary transformation must include *reparations* and debt cancellation for the destruction brought by imperialism and colonialism. There can be no more burning example right now than Haiti — where the U.S. administration wants to prod Canada into leading the kind of military intervention that's been so disastrous for Haiti's people on every previous occasion.

If Ukraine is quite rightly demanding reparations for the colossal destruction of Putin's criminal invasion, what do western imperialist powers owe for the damage inflicted on the African, Asian and American continents?

We're not only talking here about moral obligations, but about beginning a sustainable, ecosocialist restructuring of economy in both the Global South and the rich, but brutally unequal, societies of the capitalist North. Until that is undertaken, the crises of displacement and refugee flight — which themselves are a symptom of capitalism's threat to the survival of civilization and humanity — will only grow.

Source [Against the Current May-June 2023, 224](#)

## For a massive and noisy May Day

# 1 May 2023, by **Editors l'Anticapitaliste**



*Wearing a sprig of Lily of the valley (muguet) is traditional on May Day. Here the flowers are depicted as saucepans.*

For the anniversary of his re-election, Macron, standing tall, displayed a disconcerting self-satisfaction about his record, which contrasts with the *casserolades* that still resounded everywhere on Monday 24 April. In an interview with the newspaper *Le Parisien*, he unsurprisingly insisted on the “legitimacy” of his reform, the usefulness of which would have been misunderstood by opponents who, according to him, only know how to make noise and indulge in incivilities. The anger of millions of people for more than three months is thus trampled on by an illegitimate government.

Macron dares to say that this reform “gives France back some muscle” and allows future projects to be opened. Basically, it means continuing to destroy our social gains and the planet. In terms of form, it reinforces the practices of authoritarian governance, the use of force in the Assembly or in the street, practices symbolized by the equally assumed refusal to consider police violence, even though this is becoming institutionalised. Worse still, Macron is camped out as an opponent of the RN while at the same time announcing a tougher migration policy. In Mayotte, the hunt for the poor and immigrants via the “Wuambushu” operation will worsen an already dramatic situation and offer Darmanin a laboratory for his migration policy.

By reinforcing the political crisis, by carrying out an authoritarian, racist

and anti-social policy, the government is rolling out a red carpet to the fascists in ambush, who dream of feeding on the disillusionment of the social movement.

## **The Zbeul Olympics [29]**

For more than a week now, not a day has gone by without a trip by a member of the Macronie being disrupted by actions and demonstrations. The phenomenon has become so widespread that more than a dozen ministerial trips have been cancelled in the space of a week, and the ministries communicate at the last moment to announce the ministers’ agendas. This was the case for the trip of the Minister of National Education, Pap Ndiaye, to Lyon on 24 April, which was announced less than two hours in advance, but which was severely disrupted... until the return to Paris, at the Gare de Lyon, when Ndiaye was forced to leave the station through a back door and under police escort.

The “JO du Zbeul”, as they are now called, are not just the work of a few radical left-wing activists, but bear witness to the extent and depth of the rejection of the pension counter-reform and, more globally, of the Macron regime. Everywhere they go, they are awaited by tens, hundreds, even thousands of demonstrators, determined to make their lives impossible. And that’s good! Far from admitting defeat, more and more people are convinced that it is urgent to stop this government which is leading us ever further into the wall and to break with an anti-democratic institutional regime which establishes that a handful of elected representatives are more legitimate

than the opinion and mobilisation of the majority.

## **Mobilization to build an anti-capitalist alternative**

There will be no truce in the class struggle. We refuse to allow a political agenda to be imposed on us that is modelled on the institutional agenda. As with the “*casserolades*” movement or the day of “railway anger” on 20 April, it is up to our social camp to impose a new calendar of mobilizations whose ultimate objective is to bring the country to a standstill with a general strike. This May Day must be a demonstration of strength that will allow us to engage new perspectives to win the withdrawal of the reform.

This victory is necessary to reverse the balance of power and impose urgent social measures: return to retirement at 60 (55 for arduous jobs), with a maximum of 37.5 years of contributions, a drastic reduction in the working week, increases in wages and pensions, development of public services...

This is possible by building a united and radical response based on political, trade union and associative forces determined to fight back. More broadly, we must engage in the political battle to get rid of this illegitimate government and work for a revolutionary break with capitalism, for a democratic, eco-socialist society, free of exploitation and oppression.

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