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Hard right fails to make breakthrough in Spanish election

31 July 2023, by Dave Kellaway

The conservative People's Party (PP) did become the largest single party but was 40 seats shy of a governing majority on its own. It is 7 seats short of a working coalition if it allied with the neo-fascist Vox (Voice). It had already done so in a number of regional parliaments after its clear victory in the May local and regional elections. Its leader, Feijoo, is proclaiming his right to try to form a government as the largest single party and denouncing attempts to stop him as blocking democracy. But he does not have the numbers and in politics that is what counts. It is unlikely that he can put together a coalition with Vox, which has called for the banning of nationalist parties, while at the same time bringing on board pro-independence parties in the Basque country.

Party	% vote	seats	2019 %	2019 seats
PP (conservative)	33.1	136	20.8	89
PSOE (social liberal)	31.7	122	28.0	120
Vox (post/neo fascist)	12.4	33	15.1	52
Sumar*	12.3	31	12.9	35
ERC (Catalan nationalist)	1.9	7	3.6	13
Junts((Catalan nationalist)	1.6	7	2.1	8
EH Bildu (Basque Nationalist left)	1.4	6	1.1	5
PNV (Basque Nationalist mainstream)	1.2	5	1.6	6

** Sumar (radical left coalition includes Unidos Podemos, Compromis, Mas Pais etc). The 2019 % is for Unidos Podemos only, the 2019 seats total for the parties of the current coalition.*

You need 176 seats to form a government.

On the other side, Sanchez, the leader of the social liberal PSOE (Socialist Workers Party), was exultant in his post-election speech. His party had won a million more votes than in the last general election in 2019 and two more seats. Opinion polls had predicted a significantly larger (+3% more) gap between the PSOE and the PP. The PP had centred their campaign on burying Sanchismo, organising a cultural war on his party's measures in favour of trans, gays, and women. The rise of Vox to its right has meant it has adopted some of its reactionary policies.

Sanchez had gambled by calling this early election; he could have waited until later in the year. A defeat could have meant a challenge to his leadership. Undoubtedly, the strident calls to block the Francoist revanchists of Vox helped mobilise a significant part of the PSOE base. He has indicated that he will look to re-establish his coalition government. Already, he benefits from the support of some Basque and Catalan nationalists. The PSOE really needs to get at least the abstention of the Junts Catalan nationalists. Despite losing a seat and seeing the PSC (PSOE in Catalonia) and Sumar do well in Catalonia, Junts could now have a kingmaker role. Their leader, Puigdemont, has been persecuted by the Spanish state for his role in organising the unauthorised independence referendum in 2017. He is in exile in Belgium. The leader of Junts has already said they will not provide their support to Sanchez without something in exchange.

Yolanda Diaz, the leader of Sumar (Come Together), the new radical left coalition set up by her without the initial support of her Unidos Podemos leadership comrades, was also happy with the results. Sumar had just failed in its bid to beat Vox into third place and won fewer votes and seats than these components achieved in 2019, but it was a solid result that gives the formation some leverage in forming future coalitions with the PSOE. Yolanda claimed credit for helping to push back the neo-fascists, and certainly her campaign did mobilise around that issue.

Sumar, nevertheless, is far from the same political current that Podemos was at its height following the explosion of the 15M Indignados (angry ones) movement in 2011. Then there was a link between the new political current and a new, vibrant

movement in the communities. Podemos wanted to replace the PSOE, not become its left satellite and coalition partner. In the 2016 general election, it was a point or so behind the PSOE at 21%. It argued then for a 'rupture' with the post-Franco regime established in 1978. Podemos was sympathetic to a radical new deal for the nations within the Spanish state and was anti-monarchy. Yolanda Diaz created Sumar as a further moderate iteration of a Podemos that had already moved right by becoming a coalition partner and taking ministerial posts. It represents the integration of the left of the PSOE into the institutions. Mobilising against Vox was important, but the anti-fascist campaign also helped to drown out any critical balance sheet of the real character of the PSOE/Sumar coalition. Some commentators on the left in Britain have tended to leave out this analysis.

During this election, Sumar put forward some more radical proposals than Sanchez, such as a large 'inheritance' grant of 20,000 euros for each 18-year-old. Such a measure looks positive, but it places redistribution within an individualist framework that does not particularly challenge capitalist society. The money does not alter in any way how resources are produced and distributed, unlike measures that take industries or utilities into common ownership. The left would not necessarily oppose such a measure; it involves some redistribution, clearly, but like universal basic income, it is a measure that the bosses can live with, and it even stimulates capitalist consumption.

Pushing back the neo-fascist Vox (which lost 3% of its votes but nearly half its seats) was a positive outcome of this election. It demonstrates that advancing fascism is combatable and that the hard right's takeover of Europe is not an inevitable process. Unlike Starmer, Sanchez vigorously defended his progressive legislation against the PP/Vox cultural wars, demonstrating that you do not have to give ground on these issues. For example, in its Valencian stronghold, Naquera, where it had banned the LBGTQ+ flags, it lost the majority it had won in the local elections.
However, Vox will continue to govern in coalition in a number of regions, and its base has been consolidated. The impact its reactionary policies have had on a resurgent PP is another way to measure its political success. The latter, despite failing to get a majority, is now the largest party and has mopped up practically all the electoral support that the neo-liberal centrist party, Cuidadanos, formerly enjoyed.

Today, Sanchez is looking to knit together a new coalition. One problem is that all the small nationalist parties that facilitated his previous investiture have lost seats except EH Bildu, the more left wing of the Basque parties. He really needs Puigdemont's Junts to come onside, but Sanchez is wary of conceding too much to a leader that he has done nothing to free from exile in Belgium. Junts are demanding an amnesty for Catalan political prisoners and a referendum. It is not in a rush to deal with Sanchez, and they say they are unperturbed by a stalemate situation (El Diario, July 25). Already, there have been more Spanish general elections in recent times than elsewhere in Europe, and we could be heading for another one in a few months if no agreement is made.

The PP is desperately claiming some legitimate right to form a government as the largest party. After making a whole campaign around smashing Sanchismo, it is now asking the PSOE to allow it to govern. Apart from Vox, it is seeking the support of the moderate Basque PNV party, the Canary Coalition, and the UPN, a conservative party in Navarra. Sources suggest the numbers do not add up since the PNV has already said no. There may be some recriminations in the PP ranks over whether the alliance with Vox in regional governments had a negative effect on the general election.

The likely scenario is a new Sanchez-led coalition, which will be weaker given the surge in PP support, or new elections. Sanchez stated today that he is confident of rebuilding his coalition and that there will be no new elections. Feijoo's PP and Vox will focus on Sanchez's greater dependence on nationalist parties in order to mobilise conservative popular opposition to any new coalition. Despite Sanchez's reassurances, there could be greater political instability.

This election has confirmed a return to more of a two-party system, with the PP and PSOE taking 65% of the vote. It had fallen below 50% at one stage with the emergence of Podemos and Cuidadanos. It will be interesting to see how Sumar develops. Will it be able to consolidate its disparate forces into a coherent political current? Will there be democratic internal structures—currently it is organised in a top-down way through apparatus-to-apparatus discussions mediated by the personality of Yolanda Diaz? Will there be pressure for some of its forces to be absorbed by the PSOE? Can Sumar be a party or movement where revolutionary socialists can organise, as was the case with Podemos for some time?

For people suffering from the cost of living crisis, poor or expensive housing, and deteriorating public services, the PSOE/Sumar government has not altered a great deal apart from some tweaks in the labour laws and progressive reforms on gender rights or on the historical truth about the Civil War. Abstention remains at 34%, which confirms the trend of recent years where many working people are alienated from the political system. The new situation, which is very polarised on the institutional level, is unlikely to change this. Building self-organisation outside of institutions to defend living standards and make social gains remains a key priority. The unions have been pretty much integrated into the government's reformism without reforms. Recapturing the dynamic of the Indignados movement and the political radicalism of the early Podemos current is more important than ever.

26 July 2023

*Source: **Anti*Capitalist Resistance**.*

Campaigning to free Kagarlitsky: why and how.

30 July 2023, by Vincent Présumey

The Russian regime, whether Putin's loyalists or other networks, has no legitimacy and no historical right to try anyone – not even the criminal torturer Girkin. Boris Kagarlitsky has nothing to do with "terrorism" and is a celebrity on the international "radical left". Aplutsoc therefore associates itself with the statement circulating in the RESU and this regardless of the issues addressed in the rest of this article. [1]

""On 25 July last Boris Kagarlitsky, a well-known intellectual and socialist activist, was arrested by the FSB on charges of "justification of terrorism" and immediately transferred to Syktyvkar, 1300 km from Moscow. There, the court decided, during a hearing behind closed doors without the presence of his lawyer, to keep him in detention until his trial to be held in September, at the end of which he could be sentenced to seven years in prison.

Kagarlitsky's prosecution and detention comes in the context of a repressive campaign by the government trying to silence all voices opposing both the invasion of Ukraine and its domestic policies. Since last year, the Putin government has focused on prosecuting, imprisoning or forcing into exile many well-known political figures, intellectuals and activists, who have spoken out publicly against the war as ordinary citizens through social networks. Kagarlitsky's was classified as a "foreign agent" in May.

We express our solidarity with Boris Kagarlitsky and demand his immediate release and that of all those detained for political motives."

That said, a campaign for the release of Boris Kagarlitsky must for us, and, we believe, for the RESU if it were to engage as such, be well understood politically in order to be effective. This undoubtedly requires full information for all activists. That is the purpose of this article. To make it clear that there may be a problem, let us point out two press releases from Russia.

The first of these communiqués is that of the Angry Patriots, the fan club of Igor Girkin alias Strelkov. [2] Girkin-Strelkov, well known in Russia and sordidly known in Ukraine, Bosnia and Moldova, is a high-level FSB and GRU cadre, present in Transnistria in 1991, Bosnia in 1994, and leading the establishment of the "People's Republics" of Donbass and Luhansk in 2014. He then organized the shooting down of the MH17 plane (298 dead), for which he is the subject of international condemnation. For several years, he has denounced the inadequacy of the means implemented by Putin to Russify half of Ukraine, and he has become an "opponent", undoubtedly right-wing for ultra-nationalists, "left" for those who made him look like a "red soldier" wanting to "fight imperialism", most prominently, Kagarlitsky. Representing the critical ultra-nationalist wing hostile to Prigozhin, he was arrested a week before the latter.

His Angry Patriots movement calls for the unification of Kagarlitsky's cause and that of Girkin and there is no doubt that if, in the international left, there is much talk of Kagarlitsky's defence as that of a "Marxist sociologist", in Russia itself, perhaps more people hear about it from the Girkin side and other red-browns, monarchists and "patriots".

A completely different statement comes from the anarchist Telegram feed Netchaievtchina. [3] These comrades, because they are comrades, do not question the principle of demanding Kagarlitsky's release, but see in him the key figure of the "dangerous myth of revolutionary Donbass" and deplore the fact that the many activists threatened with death in prison, "ordinary activists" like Yevgeny Karakashev, threatened with dying of brain disease, do not have influential networks: in fact, it is clear that these comrades fear that even less will be said about these now that an ecumenical campaign of the "amnesiac left" in favour of Kagarlitsky could begin.

Let us repeat we must campaign for him. But is the terrible question of these Russian anarchist comrades legitimate? Yes, it is! Boris Kagarlitsky, born in 1958, joined Samizdat, or dissent, around 1980, and was arrested in the final months of the Brezhnev era, then was "pardoned and released in 1983"" according to the English Wikipedia article on him.
During perestroika, he was the best known leader of the Moscow New Socialists group, which, acting jointly with an anarcho-syndicalist group and with a sector of the CPSU that was to form the "Marxist Platform" current in 1990, was at the origin of the Moscow Popular Front, an "informal" movement which, more or less beyond the control of its initiators, would support the election of Boris Yeltsin to the Congress of People's Deputies and to the mayor's office.

It was during this period that Kagarlitsky became highly prized by the radical left and far-left press in the West, such as *New Left Review*. The book he had been working on for years, "The Thinking Reed: Intellectuals and the Soviet State from 1917 to the Present", which is by far his richest, most original and most remarkable work, appeared in English in 1988.

These years ended with the end of the USSR. During the August 1991 putsch, he and his group, like their anarcho-syndicalist and "CPSU Marxist" allies, adopted an abstentionist attitude, not supporting the mass movement that opposed the putschists and that Yeltsin would benefit from.

At the end of 1993, during the armed confrontation between the President of the "Russian Federation", Boris Yeltsin, and his "parliament", they sided with the latter and engaged in the fighting on the losing side – Kagarlitsky then served a brief prison sentence where he was molested. This second choice places its authors alongside the so-called "conservative" or "national-Stalinist" or even "red-brown" forces.

In these events and by these choices, their project of building a "Party of Labour" in Russia was aborted. Some retired, others began successful careers, like the hitherto "anarcho-syndicalist" leader Andrei Isayev who became leader of the official trade unions (and still is today) and a supporter of Putin.

Kagarlitsky began a career at the Russian Academy of Sciences and his international contacts played on his status as a "Marxist sociologist", though in fact, his most original work remains the first, on the Russian-Soviet intelligentsia. From the beginning of the Putin years, Kagarlitsky ran an "Institute for the Study of Globalization and Social Movements", then with the rise of the Internet, the *Rabkor* website.

Their activity consists in denouncing US "imperial" hegemony and highlighting Russia's integration under Putin into global neoliberalism and the hegemony of finance. Kagarlitsky takes up formulas from authors of a completely different calibre such as Immanuel Wallerstein and Samir Amin and gives some confirmation to Naomi Klein for the chapter of her book on the neoliberal "shock strategy" in Russia after the 1991 putsch. There are no truly original analyses here.

In the lively debates among Russian activists in recent days, one of them. while convinced of Kagarlitsky's "collaboration" with the "authorities", nevertheless considers him, like many others, ideologically quite sincere and explains that "this is the fundamental problem: ideologically, Kagarlitsky represents the vestiges (just relics?) of the movement for global justice of the 1990s - the first half of the 2000s, when planet Earth was enveloped in the tentacles of Euro-American capital, compared to which everything is secondary (...). Regimes like the Russian or Iranian ones, of course, do not represent anything really good either, but in principle they are a lesser evil compared to planetary financial neofascism. I think this is the most toxic idea that has circulated in the current left-wing milieu, and not only there." Thus, in 2008, as Vladislav Starodubtsev, a Ukrainian activist in *Sotsialnyi Rukh*, recalls, Kagarlitsky welcomed Putin's Georgian war: "The blow to the United States opens up new perspectives of struggle."

Then, during the massive demonstrations against Putin's re-election in 2011-2012, he observed, according to the aforementioned Russian comrade, a "sceptical" posture, speaking of a "petty-bourgeois and well-fed middle class" too far from the real "social movements".

Then, we arrive at the decisive moment: 2014. There, Kagarlitsky was the emblematic figure of what the Ukrainian Vitalii Kulik calls "pink Putinism". [4] He denounced the Maidan as "fascist" and told anyone who would listen that hundreds of thousands of workers rose up in the Donbass – a total fabrication – calling for a "capture of Kiev by Donetsk".

His Institute and its website then had large resources – 3.2 million roubles according to Ukrainian sources – coming from the Russian government. [5] They irrigated Western political relays, in particular the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation of the German party Die Linke, and Britain's Stop the War movement, conferences and biased information, including on the alleged "pogrom of the House of Trade Unions in Odessa" on 2 May 2014. A conference was organized in Crimea in November 2014, with the participation of Kagarlitsky and Western activists including Richard Brenner from Britain. The general line then was that Russia must help the "Donbass uprising" to wrest all "Novorussia" – this is what Putin had said in his speech of 14 April 2014. The promotion of the Borotba group, a real Potemkin party to make Western leftists believe that revolutionary communists with Che T-shirts were fighting "Ukrainian Nazis" in the "Donbass", was also organized from the same centre – Kagarlitsky. [6]

His relationship with Girkin-Strellkov was clear, Kagarlitsky's website interviewed him. Contacts and meetings with the Eurasian extreme right in Dugin also grew in this campaign for Novorussia. According to V. Kulik, during the summer and winter of 2014-2015, Kagarlitsky helped organise a "school for social activists" in Belgorod which sent its students "to work in the governmental apparatus of the people's republics", where strikes, trade unions and the Ukrainian language were banned, and the torture chambers were full.

It is clear that between the warmongering line covered with vague "revolutionary" verbiage, which played a key role in 2014 to cover up Putin's counter-revolution, and Kagarlitsky's orientation in 2022 when, from February, like the No. 2 of the Russian "Left Front"", Alexei Shakhin, who emigrated to France (and unlike its No. 1, Sergei Udaltsov), he condemned the "special military operation", there is a change.

However, a Russian comrade specifies that Kagarlitsky claims that he was right in 2014 as well as in 2022: ultra-warmongering imperialist in 2014, opposed to the "special military operation" in 2022, for him it is a continuity. Clearly opposed to the war from 24 February 2022, Kagarlitsky was not however defeatist from the Russian point of view (even considering the obligation to express himself in veiled words). His condemnation of the war was mainly based on the denunciation of a dictatorial drift in Russia of which it would be the means.

The most hostile Ukrainian analysts relate his position to the fall of a long time Putin ideologue and master of propaganda operations around the "Donbass" and the "Ukrainian Nazis" in 2014, Vladislav Surkov. This is not contradictory with the premise of a sincere position, where Putin, after turning his back on a phantasmatic "people's war" in 2014, would have fallen into a trap allowing him to

march to dictatorship.

So, the “Angry Patriots” supporters of Girkin defend Kagarlitsky, and since his arrest he has received two expressions of public support in the upper echelons, which indicates that there is a crisis at the top, debate in the state apparatus, and that what happens to him is part of this “Russian crisis” which has opened especially since the Prigozhin putsch.

Thus, there has been support from Margarita Simonyan, a fearsome TV presenter who called, for example, for starving the Ukrainians, whose Telegram channel, linked to a TV channel, described his arrest as “shameful, unnatural and disgusting”. [7]
There are also the statements of Sergei Markov, a Putinite figure who has led various parapublic bodies of foreign policy and state control of “history”, denouncing his arrest as a “very serious political error” and, in passing, presenting him as an immense figure of the “international socialist movement of the left” (sic), calling on the “presidential administration” to collaborate again, and closely, with him and what he represents. [8]

Fred Fuentes, a Green Left activist from Australia, author of numerous articles and with an active role in internationalist support for Ukraine, circulated an article defending Kagarlitsky against repression in which all the elements just presented here are either ignored or euphemized as past differences that do not alter the necessary solidarity. [9] Fuentes points to Sergei Markov’s support for Kagarlitsky by calling Markov “a prominent pro-Kremlin intellectual.” It’s a bit short: it was Markov who, on Russian TV, called in the autumn of 2022 for the nuclear bombing of European capitals, London in particular.

Girkin, Simonyan, Markov: it is clear that representatives of sectors of the Russian state who are supporters of the war have come forward in opposition to Kagarlitsky’s arrest, but probably finding it badly conducted and lacking in scope.

The question is therefore legitimate: is it a question of defending a militant of the left, of the workers’ movement, or of the “forces of progress” as we sometimes say, in the broad sense, whatever the differences, or are we facing a factional struggle? If Girkin is not a “political prisoner” for us, is Kagarlitsky one?

This question is inescapable, as is the answer that was given at the beginning of this article. But the worst thing would be to forbid this questioning, to dismiss it as what we do not want to hear – moreover, this would lead to not hearing, again, what the Ukrainian comrades tell us!

Only the truth is always revolutionary. And the golden legend of an eternal dissident who would have made only one big misstep, in 2014, is a golden legend, an insipid porridge unrelated to the truth, however harsh it may be.

To question this golden legend is to revisit the entire history of the relationship of the “radical left” to the USSR, which has been Russia for more than three decades now. The Kagarlitsky question is not a problem of persons, but it opens up a historical, political, and even moral questioning of great significance.

Perhaps this is why it is painful, and why a false facility would be to rush without conscience or reflection into an ecumenical cause with the campists. Nothing would be worse because it would muddy the waters when the global reality since 24 February requires them to be clarified.

No, we will not defend the “Russian anti-war and anti-Putin socialist” with Mélenchon or Corbyn, who have never taken a stand to save people like Igor Kuznetsov, Daria Polyudova, Yevgeny Karakashev or Maksym Butkevitch; yes, we must stick to the truth.

And yes, we must demand in all conscience the release of Boris Kagarlitsky, because it is not up to Putin or some faction of the mafia oligopoly in power in Russia to judge him, and because he belongs to our history in its most painful aspects, and we also have the duty to clarify it, to have a future by assuming the past, all the past – the real past.

Footnotes

[1] Aplutsoc (Arguments Pour la Lutte Sociale) publishes the blog aplutsoc.org, from which this article has been taken.

[2] https://t.me/KRPRus/147

[3] https://t.me/nechaeveverywhere/3951?fbclid=IwAR3OwFd6n3LHQo97bVr4uaqlBwxZCkwL1nKVFJNevHeRHNnr2Bn-ioAdyKU

[4] https://politcom.org.ua/kagarlitsky-as-a-mirror-of-pink-putinism

[5] https://www.nihilist.li/2015/03/31/kagarlitskij-vojna-i-politicheskaya-korruptsiya/?fbclid=IwAR2sKslj18hRiMO2eRyBrf-fxhcSUFzyYxjVzppnxz4k7b-BC9rPQKn4zHc

[6] https://europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article33625

[7] https://t.me/russica2/52942

[8] https://t.me/logikamarkova/7471

[9] https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/solidarity-needed-russian-anti-war-socialist-boris-kagarlitsky

The Writers Guild Strike

29 July 2023, by Alan Minsky, Howard A Rodham

Alan Minsky: Welcome to Beneath the Surface. I'm Alan Minsky sitting in for Suzi Weissman. Today, we're going to talk with Howard A. Rodman about the ongoing writers' strike that is impacting TV, movies and streaming platforms across the country and the world.

Howard is a screenwriter, author, and professor. He is the former president of the Writers Guild of America West, professor and former chair of the Writing division of the USC School of Cinematic Arts, alumnus of the Telluride Association Summer Program and an artistic director of the Sundance Institute Screening Labs. He is the author of two novels, Destiny Express and the much heralded The Great Eastern.

Welcome Howard to Beneath the Surface. Why have writers chosen to go on strike for the first time in 15 years?

Howard A. Rodman: To sketch in some history, the 2007-08 strike was about jurisdiction over what was then called "new media" and became known as the Internet, and which we now think of as streaming. The companies were maintaining that they didn't have a business model for this experimental thing and that if it ever made money, then we could come back and talk about it.

We understood that without jurisdiction over new media, over the Internet, all production and all distribution would jump to that new medium and it would be the Wild West. We wouldn't have minimums, we wouldn't have pensions, we wouldn't have medical plans.

All the things that writers have fought for over the decades would simply disappear because work in new media wouldn't be covered by the Guild. We thought that was an existential crisis for us, and that's why we stayed out 100 days. And we won.

AM: Wasn't that around the peak period of what was called reality TV?

HR: The struck companies, in response to not being able to air scripted programming, aired what are allegedly unscripted programs.

Reality TV — as Vladimir Nabokov once said, "reality" is the only word that makes sense only between inverted commas. They showed reality shows, but they weren't finding that those shows were actually filling their financial boats, and they really needed scripted content.

When they had to decide between giving us jurisdiction over the Internet or losing money hand over fist and having to report very disappointing earnings to Wall Street, they chose to resume talks with us.

AM: Haven't Hollywood writers and TV and film writers always been the secret hegemonic weapon of the United States of America? Is there anything that people around the world revel in more than the productions of these authors?

HR: The large success of the streaming companies — and now everybody's a streamer — is due to the global demand for scripted, dramatic content coming out of the United States. I think it's always been clear that the best work coming out of the United States has been at one and the same time an inspiration to people all over the world, that the world is far more beautiful than they let you see and far more terrifying than normally you're allowed to know.

Scorpion and the Frog

AM: While The Wire and The Sopranos preceded that strike, in the '07-08 period we entered into what seemed to be a new golden age of American television. How do you relate the incredible success of those serial dramas coming out of the platforms like HBO in the era of '07-08? In what way have the issues that inform this strike chipped away at what was such an artistic high point in recent U.S. television?

HR: It will surprise neither you nor your listeners to know that capitalism is always killing the goose that lays the golden egg. Late period capitalism, or as I think is more accurately After Hours Capitalism, is in the business of the scorpion and frog story.

Frog wants to cross the river; the scorpion says, "Can I hitch a ride with you?"

The frog says, "No. You'll sting me and we'll both drown."

And the scorpion asks, "why would I do that?"

So the frog says, "Okay."

And the scorpion hitches a ride. Halfway across the river, the scorpion stings the frog and they both drown.

The frog asks, "Why did you do that?"

The scorpion answers, "It's my character."

I think that's the companies. The work of the members of the Writers Guild of America West and the Writers Guild of America East have made the industry unprecedented profits. It enabled a business model far more successful and friction-free than I think any business model capitalism has ever invented.

Just using Netflix as an example, they have in their possession 230 million credit cards. Once a month, they press a little button and something like $3,600,000,600 million appears magically, reliably and repeatedly in their bank account — there's no invoicing, no showrooms, no salesmen, just ping.

And that is due to the global success of streaming content. If you think about the old days of the movie industry, they had to sell their product

territory by territory. They had to dub or subtitle films. They had to ship cans across the globe, heavy cans of celluloid.

Now, for subtitling they have a voice-to-text apparatus. They beam it up to the satellite and then beam it down. Fortunately for the companies, if you live in China, Burma, India or any number of developing or soon to be developed countries, the first thing the customer does is get either a cable or a satellite dish.

If we just talk about the cash flow, American writers write scripted serial content. There's an enormous global appetite for it. It goes out there. People subscribe. And instead of there being a model based on any one show, or any one thing, or any one event, it's a model based on a subscription.

As long as they keep the audience's attention, as long as subscribers feel that in order to be a citizen of their community, they need to be abreast of what's going on in the world of streaming, as long as you give them just enough, they forget to unsubscribe. The companies have that button that they push every month and $3.6 billion appears.

AM: What I'm interested in is the possibility that a writer in Hollywood can have a prosperous middle-class life where you can live as a human being and not under constant precarity. It seems right now, looking at the details of this strike, that way of living and being a writer is starting to close down. Apparently 33% of the writers back in '07-08 were receiving the minimum, now it's risen to 50%.

HR: And even more than that, among the community of show runners, the sort of writers who are like what A-list directors are to the directors, just 25% are working for the minimum. If you are a screenwriter, as I am, real income, adjusted for inflation, has declined at least 14% in the last five years.

If you are a writer-producer, your pay has declined 4% a year when you adjust for inflation. That's at least 20% less than you made a decade ago.

When I was starting out as a screenwriter, it was pretty uniform to get what is called a two-step deal. They hired you to do a draft and revisions. You do a draft, you get paid for it, you get a set of notes, you get paid to start your revisions, you get paid when you deliver your revisions.

Now more and more, there are only one-step deals. One and done. And of course, you end up doing an enormous amount of free labor because you do your draft and the studio doesn't quite like it or wants improvements or the producer wants something more. Of course you're going to do that; nobody wants to be labeled a draft counter.

And if you've got only one shot at getting this thing made, you're going to do all the writing that you can in order to make them happy. That's what screenwriters do.

The Mini Room

AM: Tell us about the advent of the mini room. What is the mini room and why is it a major issue in this strike?

HR: Let me go backwards a little bit. If you think of what actually made possible the streaming companies, The Shield was the show that put FX on the map. Mad Men was the show that put AMC on the map. House of Cards was the show that put Netflix on the map. All of these companies owe their origins to some really smart writer-producers who wrote and then went to the set and produced.

That was the model that enabled those companies not just to make a lot of money, but to exist in the first place. But once there's a successful model, CEOs try to figure out how to put downward pressure on fixed costs and "rationalize" it. It's like that old joke about the venture capitalist who walks into a bodega and says, Wow, imagine what this could be like if that guy behind the counter were out of a job."

They ask, "What if we hire a smaller number of writers? What if we hire them for a shorter period of time? What if we let them go before the show goes into production? Man, what an opportunity."

And they've been doing that. It's resulted in the alienation of the labor force. It's resulted in writers not being able to make their years.

Just to give a little history here: My father was a television writer. When he wrote a season was 39 episodes, and then there were 13 weeks of reruns in the summer. When I was coming up, a season was something like 22 or 23 episodes.

Now a season can be six episodes, but that can be your pay for a year. If you're being paid by the episode, it's a shitty metric for compensation for writers. It can be a very successful show, but the writer is working in a mini room for, six weeks, seven weeks, and then you're scrambling for work again.

It's the gig economy, it's the uberization of writing. And one of the things we fought back against in 2017 was something we called "options and exclusivity." It is where you could work on a six or eight-episode show but they held you in "first position."

That means in practice that you couldn't get employment other places, because who wants to hire a writer when somebody else owns their first position? If the show is renewed, the writer could be snapped back from you?

Due to the company's maniacal desire to have not only massive profits, which we were giving them, but more massive profits each quarter, they could show Wall Street that they were not only profitable, but increasingly profitable quarter over quarter.

This downward pressure on costs meant impoverishing writers. The companies worked to degrade writers, they worked to rake over the larger creative machineries that made them all this wealth in the first place.

Bifurcated Product and AI

AM: Did the negotiators for the classical studios, however savage they were in terms of their labor negotiations, have greater concern for the product than the eight or so corporations that make up the AMPTP

(Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers)? If all these guys care about now is the bottom line, won't that hurt the product?

HR: I actually think that they care about social capital as well as capital. Everybody wants to have an Oscar winner. When Marty Scorsese comes to Netflix and says, I've got this big expensive movie called The Irishman, they say Great, Marty, make it.

Just as the theatrical release movie business has become bifurcated, the industry contains both large, franchise-IP driven tentpole summer movies (industry term for high-budget blockbusters) and then little arty things, there is always a desire for the prestige product.

Everyone wants your Iñárritu film, everyone wants your Scorsese film. But at the same time, really what they are doing is trying to reverse engineer what will keep their audience from yanking their credit card from that magic machine.

AM: How does Artificial Intelligence play out in this strike? What do you see as the real life threats that exist because of AI?

HR: AI as it presently exists is pretty clumsy. If you ask AI to cough up a bio of Alan Minsky, you will find some things that are true and some things that seem like science fiction. AI doesn't understand the difference between probability and certainty.

I've asked it to write a screenplay in the style of Howard Rodman, thinking I could get my work done on the cheap. What you get is comical. But this is AI which has been trained for what — three months, four months, six months? The more material it has to train, the more of our work it can scrape up, the more it can be capable of doing things which are… creative? No.

Are they as stupidly satisfying as the most formulaic and stupidly satisfying things in the current marketplace? Maybe. I don't know.

What we want as writers is to be paid to rewrite people, not artificial intelligence. They would not even make a counterproposal, other than to say once a year we'll meet to talk about technology. We said we would rather not have AI do our jobs; they said, nah.

I did something interesting. I asked an AI chat to respond to our concerns. Here's what the AI generated.

"It's understandable that the Writers Guild of America would express concerns about the potential impact of AI on their profession. AI has made significant strides in recent years and has been used in various capacities to assist in the creation of written content. However, writing for film and television requires a level of creativity, nuance and storytelling that is difficult to replicate through AI alone."

That's from the horse's mouth.

The fact that in the same way that in 2007-08, the studio asked us why we were focusing on the Internet. They maintained it was just a little technological thing. Now they're asking why are we are harping on AI? We're harping on it because if they could get rid of our jobs, they would.

Prospects and Solidarity

AM: Between the introduction of a script and the final product being delivered, the sides seem to be very far apart. What do you see in terms of any potential ground being closed? As an expert with real life experience with these negotiations, what will the next few months look like?

HR: I just want to emphasize that whereas the 2007-08 strike was largely about one issue, this strike is about a whole constellation of issues which, taken together, create an existential threat to the ability of writers to earn a decent living.

If you write a feature and it ends up having a theatrical release, you get compensated a lot better than if it ends up being a streaming release. We think those things should be equalized by raising streaming feature rates up to theatrical rates instead of a race to the bottom as it currently is.

We are saying yes, there are new technologies, but don't use them to pay us less for more work. And because there's no one single issue, resolving it really means a commitment on the part of the companies to view writing as a sustainable enterprise.

Given their responses to the Writers Guild proposals, it doesn't feel like they do. It feels like they, like so many of their colleagues in Silicon Valley come out of a kind of Peter Thielesque libertarian philosophy.

They would rather replace careers with gigs, and they would rather replace continuity of employment with sporadic employment. They want to hire a writer for a shorter period of time and pay as little as possible for each step. It's sort of like an assembly line, you know, where writing appears only at the instant it's needed.

Unless the companies are willing to understand that they've broken the system of writing and if they want to continue making massive profits they've been making, they've got to fix it. Until they understand that, this strike will go on.

I've been in the Guild since 1989. I've been in leadership since 2004, although I am not currently in leadership, and I've been on many negotiating committees. I've never seen my union more united. I've never seen my union more resolute.

Interestingly enough, I've never seen the kind of support that we're getting. When Local 399 of the Teamsters appears before a room full of 2000 writers and says not a fucking truck will cross a picket line, when even the Directors Guild of America sends the head of its negotiating committee to speak to a roomful of writers, I'm feeling pretty good about the resolve of the community of writers.

And I'm feeling pretty good about the fact that the community understands that in 2023 what writers are fighting for is what everyone needs to be fighting for. If they can beat the writers down, they're going to beat everybody down.

Figuring the Costs

I don't see a swift solution. I think what will end it eventually is simple math, when the companies realize the cost of not having writers is greater than the cost of what they would have to pay to have writers. Then they have to calculate their reputational loss and maybe hits on the price of their stock, which they really care about.

One of my favorite American films is a movie called Body and Soul. It's a boxing movie with John Garfield. It was directed by Robert Rossen. It was written by the inimitable Abraham Lincoln Polonsky. And at the end of the movie John Garfield, who's an up-and-coming boxer and comes out of poverty, is asked to throw a fight. The big money is against him.

He makes a speech about his dignity, about ethics. But the boxing promoter says to him, there's addition, there's subtraction, and the rest is conversation.

I think that's what's going on here. When they add up the numbers and realize that the cost of a protracted writers' strike is greater to them than the cost of treating writers with dignity, the strike will end.

AM: My understanding is that SAG and the Directors Guild of America and SAG-AFTRA Screen Actors Guild are looking at potential work stoppages in June. How might that play into how the arc of the strike turns?

HR: SAG has its negotiations coming up, and it remains to be seen whether the intransigence of the studios with the writers extends to their intransigence with the other guilds. Traditionally the Writers Guild has been far less afraid to be militant, far less afraid to strike.

On the basis of the Writers Guild's willingness to strike, the other unions have, through that delightful device of pattern bargaining, piggybacked on the gains that the writers gained by striking. It remains to be seen what would enable them to strike.

[NOTE: The Directors Guild of America won a renewal of its contract at the beginning of June, with highlights indicating the promise that directors cannot be replaced by AI and increased residuals for subscription video on demand.

SAG's began negotiations on June 7; their contract is up at the end of June.—ed.]

AM: We also had the IATSE (International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees) strike. IATSE was involved in a very dramatic set of negotiations that turned out largely favorable to the union.

HR: Something interesting happened there. Generally when leadership of a union comes out of negotiations and says this is the deal, it's the best deal we could get, we won some things, we couldn't win everything, but we're recommending this to you, it's approved.

That's been traditional Hollywood union labor practice. This one was not approved by such a large majority. There was a lot of pushback and I think the lesson is that there's more militancy among the rank and file than there is among the leadership of some of these unions.

What I love about the community of writers — the WGA-West and the WGA-East — is there's no daylight between the militancy of the rank and file and the militancy of the leadership. The leadership of the Guild is never going to cut a cruddy deal and then try to convince its members that it's got enough non-crud in it to justify voting for it.

That's not who we are, and that's certainly not what we're going to do in 2023.

AM: There is a quite a significant uptick in enthusiasm for unions and for union militancy among the general public. This undoubtedly is even higher in metro New York and in metro Los Angeles relative to the rest of the country. How might you see that playing into this strike? How can people best show solidarity for striking workers?

HR: Polling approval in the United States for labor unions hasn't been higher since the Roosevelt days. It's pretty astonishing.

If you look concretely, you have very pro-labor people coming out from the labor movement and winning seats on the Los Angeles City Council. I do think that the more favorable the larger environment is toward organized labor, the easier it is for any given union to be successful in its struggle because we've got the wind at our backs now.

In terms of what other people can do, certainly the Writers Guild has been posting the schedules of where it's picketing, with handy little sheets about where to park and where the nearest bathrooms are.

Come join the writers on the line. Come walk around. Get your 10,000 steps a day in, in a very pleasant environment, talking to some lovely people. That's something you can do. If you are a writer, not yet in the Guild — what I think a lot of people are now calling free WGA, understand that a lot of people are giving up a lot of time and a lot of money to ensure your ability to earn a living.

So don't cross the picket lines, don't scab, don't work for struck employers. Understand that this is not an opportunity for you to advance. This is an opportunity for you to join a community in an honorable way.

And for everyone else, I think really the best way you can be supportive is when you pick up a newspaper and start reading those stories about the dry cleaners, the caterers, all the damage that the writers are doing to the economy of Los Angeles and New York — understand that it's not the writers who are doing this.

Understand that at any moment, day or night, the companies could choose to negotiate in earnest. They haven't yet, but that if there are larger economic, social repercussions and if you can't see your favorite late night TV show, that the onus for that is not the writers, but the companies that forced them to go on strike.

Against the Current

Renewing the left: not just doom and gloom

28 July 2023, by Mercia Andrews

Setbacks of the transition

The negotiations that culminated in the 1994 elections marked the end of legal apartheid in South Africa, and that certainly marked a turning point in the struggle for liberation. In the immediate phase of the transition, the ANC government set about dismantling the institutions and the legal frameworks that upheld apartheid. They introduced a new constitution and a battery of new policies and laws. The ANC has striven to dismantle apartheid's racialised structures and institutions. But it has failed to change the economic structure and ownership patterns underpinning the system of racial capitalism. Rather, according to Neva Makgetla in the Review of African Political Economy in 2004, "the state separates anti-poverty measures from its economic policy, treating them purely as assistance for the poor rather than as an integral part of its growth strategy." She further argues that the ANC has "underpinned measures to free up markets through deregulation and privatisation, and to encourage foreign investment through conservative fiscal and monetary policies." In 2002, in An Ordinary Country, Neville Alexander commented on the ease with which the ANC accepted compromise: Almost everything that had formerly been propagated as sacred cows has proved to be expendable. Most notable among these was the policy of nationalisation of the mines and of monopoly companies.

In a relatively short period of time, and with little popular opposition, the ANC shifted from a progressive Keynesian programme of "Growth with Redistribution", the RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme), to the trickle-down economics of the neoliberal Gear (Growth Employment, and Redistribution). And in 2012, under the presidency of Zuma, which we should not forget was the great hope of the left of the Alliance, adopted the National Development Plan (NDP), which represented a further slide down the neoliberal rabbit hole. The NDP argued for minimal state intervention, maintaining existing patterns of ownership and control of the economy, and the deregulation of the labour market.

The only policy that the ANC has advanced towards transforming the economy is black economic empowerment (BEE) which is nothing more than an attempt to create a black bourgeoisie on the margins of the economy. The shift to neoliberalism itself did not represent a defeat for the Left. But this dramatic shift in policy did not provoke sustained mass resistance.

The break in the Alliance and the ANC itself put the working class movement and the Left on the defensive. The euphoria of constructing a "New South Africa" demobilized and hollowed out mass movements, civics, youth and community groups into a range of "cogoverning/social contract" structures such as community police forums, health forums, development committees, Nedlac and ward committees. These processes dislocated and weakened the mass movement and tended to isolate the Left. However, even the Left (outside the Tripartite Alliance) were also drawn into policy making forums and absorbed into senior management in the academy and public institutions. Left formations were turned into spectators and mere commentators in the unfolding transition process from apartheid.

The complicated task confronting the Left in South Africa was that, in just three short decades after apartheid, it had to confront a society which had become the most unequal in the world. It had one of the highest levels of unemployment, linked to growing impoverishment, endemic corruption, and collapsing social services rendered by dysfunctional and bankrupt municipalities. This has given rise to a social crisis where the very social fabric in working-class communities is collapsing. This undermines the capacity of those communities to mobilise solidarity, especially in the face of the extreme violence against women and children, gangsterism and substance abuse. Under these conditions, and with the legacy of spatial apartheid, communities have turned in on themselves, making it very difficult for local organizing to flourish.

Possibilities and challenges in rebuilding

Workers have undertaken important struggles and strikes in relation to capital and the state's attack on workers, most of which have been outside the Cosatu fold. The 2012 mass strike of mineworkers and farmworkers are cases in point.

Notwithstanding these major setbacks, workers and working-class communities continue to struggle and resist. A range of new popular organisations and new generations of activists are organising on a number of fronts throughout the country. While many of these formations are very localised, they are important in terms of rebuilding the mass movement. They represent autonomous structures led by a new generation of activists, who have not been absorbed into the ANC machinery or the Tripartite Alliance structures. They are potentially able to link their local issues to broader national concerns, such as austerity, privatisation and commodification of services. They constitute a layer of activists available to be drawn into radical politics. In regard to regenerating Left politics, the student terrain has proven to be very important in the history of radical politics in South Africa and internationally. For a long time,

student politics has been dominated by ANC- and SACP-aligned formations.

Yet the most significant struggle and movement of tertiary students post-apartheid occurred in formations in #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall. Both #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall were united fronts of students coming from different political currents or no political current. In the absence of an independent left formation, it was the EFF which was able to attract a large number of the students radicalised during the course of this struggle. However, #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall also highlighted that radical intellectuals at the universities were either completely absent or at best present in relatively small pockets. Many of the "radical intellectual layers" of the apartheid period, such as Adam Habib and Ihron Rensberg, now manage the universities, pitting themselves against the movements. In terms of generating ideas, in the days of apartheid, the universities were places where socialist and Marxist politics played an influential role much beyond the confines of academia.

Today, post-modernism and identity politics have come to dominate at our tertiary institutions. Workers have undertaken important struggles and strikes in relation to capital and the state's attack on workers, most of which have been outside the Cosatu fold. The 2012 mass strike of mineworkers and farmworkers are cases in point. These struggles were heroic. Workers challenged capital against great odds, as strike actions and rebellions lasted for weeks, even months. Most actions were self-organised, and this should have been the basis for the regeneration of the bureaucratised trade union movement. That this has not occurred is a further indication of the weakness of the socialist Left.

The future direction for socialist activists in the labour movement lies in rank and file organising, fighting for democracy and the right to organise around different political views. In terms of thinking through strategies for rebuilding the Left, these local struggles of popular movements, the struggles of the students and the mass strikes of mine and farm workers must be celebrated. This is especially the case bearing in mind the capacity for self-organisation in these struggles. The failure of the struggles to generate a new anti-capitalist programme and political organisation indicates the critical role for the nascent Left in this country.

Rebuilding and reorganising of the Left

Given both the objective situation and the challenges confronting the rebuilding of the mass movement, the situation in the country shouts out with great urgency for a left alternative. Such an alternative would be able to link, generalise and politicise the resistance to capital and the state.

Tragically, all that South Africa has produced are hundreds of electoral parties, with limited roots in the working classes, and equally limited political agendas, other than a strong desire to have a path to lucrative paycheques for those elected. This is the context for this review of the several failed attempts at left regroupment which have been undertaken in the post-apartheid period. The Anti-Privatisation Forum and the Social Movement Indaba pointed to interesting processes which brought popular movements and different left currents together in struggle. This was later taken forward by the formation of the Democratic Left Front (DLF) in 2008, as an explicit political movement open to movements and individuals.

A range of new popular organisations and new generations of activists are organizing on a number of fronts throughout the country. While many of these formations are very localised, they are important in terms of rebuilding the mass movement.

The DLF united social movements, community organisations, small left parties, labour unions and popular working-class formations from a broad ideological spectrum, in an anti-capitalist Left. It played a key role, rooting its organisation in social struggles of the working class, such as housing and decommodified services, especially health and for climate jobs. It also advanced the perspective of feminist-eco-socialism in response to the reproduction of racial capitalism. It presented itself as a radical alternative at the very moment the Left in the Tripartite Alliance was celebrating their supposed breakthrough in getting Zuma elected as the left alternative to Mbeki's neoliberalism.

The 2013 Numsa Special National Congress opened a new movement for the regroupment of the Left, especially with its convening of a United Front. The DLF recognised the importance of this initiative. It offered an even greater scope for creating a common platform between labour, social movements and the broad Left. Tragically, the United Front failed, largely because the Stalinist leadership around Irvin Jim feared losing political control of it. Their political aspirations were channeled into forming the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party (SRWP) as a radical version of the SACP. Its failed electoral effort of 2019 has condemned it to the margins of politics and placed a seal on the Numsa moment's real possibilities for renewing left politics.

For those seeking to fill the vacuum of the Left, it is necessary to come to terms with the EFF. This is the only left formation which has managed, not only to develop a mass working-class base but also to successfully win representation in Parliament and local government. Its radical nationalism and strident race politics have led some of the Left to mistakenly characterise the EFF as a proto-fascist movement. In reality it is a cross between a radical ANC and an antineoliberal activist SACP. Given the popular base of the EFF, it will not be possible to wish them away. A new left politics will have to engage and seek alliances with the EFF, even as it guards its independence and focuses on building itself.

A long march

The global situation is dire, with the rise of right-wing populism, growing geopolitical tensions between competing imperialisms, the cost of living crisis, austerity and waves of retrenchments. No doubt, the Left globally and in South Africa face challenging times. It is almost 30 years since the end of apartheid. We are at the brink of the climate catastrophe. We are the most unequal country in the world, where colliding economic, environmental and social crises amplify the intensity of each other. We cannot approach politics with complacency. The intersection of racial, gender and class oppressions in post-apartheid South Africa further complicates understanding the essential nature of the system we are dealing with. It makes difficult the task of elaborating a comprehensive emancipatory programme and strategy for power.

Knowing the scale of the challenges we face is a necessary precondition for renewing an eco-socialist, eco-feminist politics. It has to be approached as a long march, avoiding shortcuts and opportunistic quick fixes. However, basing ourselves on the rich and significant legacy of left politics, on the ongoing struggles of poor and working-class people, and on the new movements and ideas these struggles have produced, will make the task less daunting.

Amandla

Privatisation and climate change mean sewage in rivers and seas

27 July 2023, by Terry Conway

The sewerage system carries rainwater and wastewater from toilets along the same pipes to the water treatment works. When there is too much rainfall, water companies are allowed to discharge overflow from these pipes into the waterways. This should happen rarely, but data – and experience – show it is happening more and more.

There are a number of different factors involved. Climate change is resulting in more dramatic weather patterns – periods of drought which lead to the ground becoming baked dry, followed by heavy thunderstorms which the land is not able to absorb. This leads to flooding and to more discharges. These phenomena have not resulted in the same level of deaths and loss of crops, homes and other resources as in Africa and Asia. But they are nevertheless still significant. And in Britain, this is compounded by the increasing proportion of land which is concreted over – and to the use of artificial rather than natural grass.

Another reason is the growth of intensive farming – in particular, factory farming of livestock. Particularly with poultry and pigs and the dairy industry, the slurry run off is a huge factor in contaminating rivers. George Monbiot, who writes for the UK newspaper The Guardian, argues that farming is the top cause of river pollution in the UK, a greater threat even than sewage pollution.

These two areas pose challenges which I don't have the scope to further explore in this piece. I will rather focus on the impact of the privatisation of the water and sewage system, and how this has intersected with other erosions of public services, such as the cuts to the Environment Agency.

Thatcher's privatisation drive

Privatisation in general was a key theme of Margaret Thatcher's four Conservative governments in control of the Westminster parliament between 1979 and 1990. Particularly after 1983 the ideological argument about the discipline of the market took increasing priority over the wish to make a profit for the government from the sell offs. The idea was that privatisation would make the large utilities more efficient and productive, and thus make British capitalism competitive, relative to its continental rivals.

The nationalised industries were suffering from underinvestment and were not subject to genuine democratic control. This helped them to drive through these policies with all too little opposition. To be fair, so too did the fact that there were other key battles against Thatcherism for the Left and the labour movement. In1984-85 there was a major class battle in the form of the Miners' strike. Then came the campaign against the introduction of the poll tax – introduced in Scotland in 1989 and then in England and Wales from 1990.

There were campaigns to defend the NHS from privatisation – as well as cuts – and around the sell-off of council housing. This was a major period of deindustrialisation and attacks on trade unions, so protests around manufacturing sectors such as British Steel focused more on job losses than on the question of ownership. Within this panoply of attacks on the working class, the least concentration of all was on the privatisation of utilities - British Gas (1986), water (1989), and electricity (1990).

Water privatisation

Water is unarguably a natural monopoly. Despite this, Thatcher's Tories did not hesitate to sell it off for

a meagre £6.1 billion. At the same time a Water Services Regulation Authority (Ofwat) was created, supposedly to regulate the companies' behaviour. The extent to which it has even tried to do that will become an important thread in this tale.

"Regulation was flawed from the outset in that it provided no checks to financial engineering and excessive borrowing," said Dieter Helm, professor of economics at Oxford university.

Since then the water companies have extracted £72 billion in dividends for their share holders. This is money which should have gone into the infrastructure to ensure sewage treatment works can process what we feed them, without affecting our rivers and seas.

The industry has adopted the classic private equity business model, with its key elements of high prices, low investment and financial engineering to extract high returns. Instead of shareholders making long-term investment through equity, this business model uses debt, because interest payments qualify for tax relief. In effect this is a public subsidy. This reduces the cost of capital and increases returns to shareholders, but it also increases vulnerability to interest rate hikes.

A report by Richard Murphy, Professor of accounting practice at Sheffield University, has calculated that between 2002 to 2022, the nine water and sewerage companies in England and Wales benefited from a 35% profit margin (before financing costs). They paid out £24.8bn of profits in dividends.

Meanwhile, almost 400,000 sewage dumping incidents were recorded in England and Wales in 2022, adding up to 3.3 million hours of pollution pouring into the country's waterways. Interactive maps with figures for the whole country can be found here. And despite the population growing by nearly 10 million, no new reservoirs have been built.

In the meantime, the Environment Agency found that 90% of sewage monitors at seasides are broken. In many locations, they're not installed at all. Over summer 2022, dozens of beaches were closed to swimmers due to the high levels of toxic waste. And there may have been many more that went untested. And less dramatically, some 2.4 billion litres of water are lost every day to leaks due to poor infrastructure. Meanwhile water charges to households have increased by 40 percent in real terms since privatisation

Revolving door

Two thirds of England's water companies employ key executives who previously worked for Ofwat, the watchdog that is supposed to regulate them.
An analysis by the Observer

> has found 27 former Ofwat directors, managers and consultants working in the industry they helped to regulate, with about half in senior posts…Six of the nine water and sewerage companies in England have hired directors of corporate strategy or heads of regulation who previously worked at Ofwat, including former director of strategy Andrew Beaver, now at Northumbrian Water, and former director of strategy and planning Iain McGuffog, now at South West Water… The findings have raised fresh concerns over a revolving door between the regulator and the industry.

The focus on this deeply problematic relationship has ramped up further in the last couple of weeks. There have emerged concerns that Thames Water, the biggest of the companies, supplying 15 million households, is at risk of collapse from about £14bn of debts. Thames loses around 630 million litres of water a day in leaks and routinely dumps tons of raw sewage in rivers. Since 2010, it has been sanctioned 92 times for failures and has been fined £163 million. Over the last three years, the salary of its recently resigned chief executive doubled.
Thames Water's current joint Chief Executive, Cathryn Ross, was previously head of Ofwat from 2013 – 2018. On July 11, she refused to apologise in front of a committee of MPs for her behaviour at the regulator, where she allowed the firm to rack up £14 billion of debt, while failing to curb dividends to share holders.

Prospects for change

Public anger at all this is growing. There is more demand now for renationalisation than there was opposition to the original privatisation. But despite the depth of the crisis of the current Tory government under Rishi Sunak, it's unlikely to be a concession he is prepared to make.

While Britain does not have to hold a general election until 2025, the expectation is that it is almost certain to take place in 2024, either in the spring or summer. Barring dramatic political about turns, this will result in the election of a Labour government. When the current leader of the Labour Party, Keir Starmer, was elected to that position in 2020, he stood on a platform of 10 pledges – of which water renationalisation was one.

Like the overwhelming majority of those other pledges, he has already reneged on it, in a rush to demonstrate what a safe pair of hands he is for British capital. There are rumours that he is contemplating backing some form of 'social purpose' company – keeping water in private hands but supposedly imposing more social responsibility.

The question will be whether it is possible to mount a campaign for genuine renationalisation – under greater public accountability than before.

Amandla

The Socio-Economic Ramifications of the February 2023 Earthquake in Syria

26 July 2023, by Joseph Daher

Human Impacts and Destruction

The earthquake had a profound impact on more than 8.8 million individuals residing in the governorates of Idlib, Aleppo, Latakia and to a lesser extent Hama and Tartus. Particularly affected were those residing in areas controlled by the Turkish army and the Salafist jihadist armed group, Hay'at Tahrir Sham (HTS), with a death toll surpassing 4,500 dead and over 8,700 injured. Thousands were left homeless, and more than 10,600 buildings were either partially or completely destroyed. Unfortunately, international humanitarian aid was limited and very slow to reach in these areas, unlike regions under the control of the Syrian regime, which received substantial aid from over 30 states. Concurrently, the Syrian regime sought to consolidate its authority by attempting to control or influence the organization and distribution of humanitarian assistance across the country.

According to a report by the World Bank (WB), earthquake resulted in direct material damage estimated at nearly $5.1 billion (with a range of $2.7 billion and $7.9 billion due to inherent uncertainties).

In May 2023, the UN announced that the preliminary assessment of post-earthquake recovery needs in Syria had estimated nearly $9 billion in damage and losses and $14.8 billion in recovery needs over the next three years.

In terms of material damage, the housing sector bore the brunt of this destruction, with the WB report indicating that over 87,000 housing units, equivalent to 4.8% of Syria's total housing stock, were either partially damaged or completely destroyed. The value of the damaged or destroyed property amounted to nearly $881 million, approximately 10% of the country's GDP. The reconstruction and economic recovery requirements are estimates at around $7.9 billion. Furthermore, the earthquake led to the loss of employment for over 170,000 workers. The International Labor Organization (ILO) reported that more than 35,000 micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) were affected. As a result, the temporary unemployment resulted in a loss of labor income of at least $5.7 million per month.

In heavily impacted areas like Aleppo, numerous factories and small businesses ceased operations in the weeks following the earthquake due to the forced displacement of local populations to safer regions and concerns about building collapses. Consequently, the livelihoods of many workers were jeopardized.

The earthquake is expected to have a significant impact on Syria's GDP in 2023, with an estimated decline of approximately 5.5%, according to the World Bank. It is important to note that Syria's GDP has already decreased by more than half between 2010 and 2020 and experienced a decline of around 12% in the last three years.

Rising inflation and cost of living

The devastating earthquake in February also had economic consequences in areas under the control of the Syrian regime. Following the disaster, prices of essential goods, including food, rose by approximately 30%, adding further strain on the Syrian population. The government's response to these price increases was inadequate, generating significant criticism among the people. As the holy month of Ramadan approached, the prices of basic necessities and other products surged even higher, ranging from 50% to 100%. For instance, clothing store owners in Aleppo increased their prices by 50%, on top of the already tripled prices since Ramadan 2022.

These price hikes occurred within a broader context of ongoing economic deterioration. In 2023, the United Nations estimated that around 15.3 million people in Syria would require humanitarian assistance, including 2.1 million displaced individuals, while over 90% of the population lived below the poverty line. Inflation rates have soared over the past decade, reaching approximately 113.5% to 114% in 2020, 101% to 111% in 2021, and 55% to 55.7% in the first half of 2022. Additionally, inflation rates increased significantly in areas controlled by HTS and the Turkish army in northwestern Syria due to the depreciation of the Turkish lira.

These high inflation rates were accompanied by the continuous devaluation of the Syrian pound due to structural reasons, and a lack of economic policies to mitigate the real income losses for the population. This severely impacted the purchasing power of the people, significantly increasing the cost of living. In 2022, the average cost of living for a Syrian family of five in Damascus rose from SYP 2,026,976 (equivalent to USD 802.8 at the official exchange rate of SYP 2.525/USD at that time) in January 2022 to SYP 4,012,178 (equivalent to USD 887.26 at the official exchange rate of SYP 4.522/USD at that time) in January 2023.

The minimum cost of living during the same period increased from SYP 1,266,860 to SYP 2,507,611 (equivalent to USD 501.7 and USD 554.5 respectively), representing an increase of more than 97.9% over the year. However, the minimum wage remained unchanged at SYP 92,970

(equivalent today to USD 14.3 at the official exchange rate of 6.532 SYP). More than half of public sector employees earn less than SYP 200,000 (USD 30.6) per month, while the average monthly wage in the private sector was estimated between SYP 300,000 and SYP 500,000 (USD 46 to 77). By the end of March 2023, the cost of living for a Syrian family had further risen to 5.60 million SYP (861.5 USD). In addition to the impact of the ongoing war, this economic situation prompted many highly skilled workers to migrate in search of better living and working conditions.

In 2023, the United Nations estimated that around 15.3 million people in Syria would require humanitarian assistance, including 2.1 million displaced individuals, while over 90% of the population lived below the poverty line.

The occasional bonuses provided by the Syrian government did little to alleviate the immense suffering of workers and the working class in Syria. The most recent bonus allocation occurred in mid-April 2023, with a financial provision of 150,000 SYP (23 USD) for pensioners and state employees, including the military.

Diaspora remittances as a survival tool

Faced with these challenging circumstances, workers are seeking alternative sources of income to supplement their daily and monthly expenses. In the public sector, an increasing number of employees are taking on additional jobs after their regular shifts, while the cost of bribes is also on the rise. Many workers rely on humanitarian aid, but more significantly, they depend on remittances from the Syrian diaspora.

Remittances play a crucial role as a significant source of foreign exchange inflows to Syria. Prior to 2011, remittances amounted to approximately $1.6 billion. In recent years, remittances have reached several billion dollars annually and have become a vital means of subsistence for large segments of the population over the past decade. In the aftermath of the earthquakes, numerous remittances were sent by the Syrian diaspora across Syria, primarily to assist families and relatives in coping with urgent needs. Money transfer offices like Western Union in areas under the regime's control witnessed long queues of people seeking to collect money sent by their relatives outside the country. Informal "Hawala" networks in opposition-held areas, beyond the Syrian regime's jurisdiction, also experienced a substantial influx of funds, such as in Afrin and Idlib. In Aleppo, al-Watan newspaper estimated that one-third of the city's population relies on diaspora remittances.

Conclusion

While earthquakes are natural disasters, the severity of this new human catastrophe in Syria can be attributed primarily to the actions of the Syrian regime. The regime laid the groundwork with the destruction it caused during its war against significant portions of the population, its economic policies, and its corruption. The regime also politicized humanitarian aid, notably by impeding or reducing its distribution in territories beyond its control.

Likewise, sanctions and external economic shocks, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine since February 2022 and the economic crisis in Lebanon since October 2019, undoubtedly contribute to the country's economic hardships, including high inflation and the impoverishment of the population.

However, it is the Syrian regime's policies that bear the primary responsibility for the current situation and the economic misery of 90% of the population in Syria. Alongside its war and repression against large sections of the Syrian population and the destruction of infrastructure, the regime pursued neoliberal economic policies, including measures like trade liberalization and corrupt practices that favored networks of traders affiliated with the presidential palace, as well as austerity measures. All of these factors prevented any effective action to combat inflation and halt the devaluation of wages and the population's purchasing power.

Several measures could be implemented to address these issues, such as price controls and state interventions in import channels, while ensuring that wages are indexed to inflation rates. However, without a grassroots social movement exerting pressure on the Syrian regime at a national level, no significant improvement in the lives of the population will be achieved. This situation underscores the need to build a progressive and democratic alternative with an inclusive socio-economic program that serves the diverse popular classes.

Syriauntold

Our Movement of Rising Resistance

25 July 2023, by Harvey J. Graff

Across the media and elsewhere, we hear of organized efforts to ban books, especially for school-aged young people, and to censor school curricula, primarily history and civics.

New currents of resistance, especially by young people, rise in response. We hear too little about them. Underreported and seldom viewed together as a national counter-movement or movement in its own right is what I now identify as not yet connected elements of a 2020s "massive resistance."

This is the developing response to misinformation and suppression of basic rights by censorship, overreach, and unconstitutional, anti-democratic dictatorship at all levels.

The strength of widespread reactions to anti-abortion and anti-LGBTQ attacks has rational Republicans concerned about losing votes. The results of the 2022 mid-term elections as well as patterns across numerous opinion polls support their fears.

The Attacks

False charges of teaching "critical race theory" (undefined by those attacking it) and "age-inappropriate" or "obscene" books do the work of politicians by attracting media and fearful parents' attention. Following scripts from the Heritage Foundation, the Koch Brothers and Moms for Liberty, among others, well-funded groups on the right do grave damage to public education.

These book-banning campaigns seek to reverse more than a hundred years of efforts to combat censorship and establish children's rights. Although the historical precedents are lengthy, today's efforts began in earnest during the last three years.

The ideologues contradict the wishes of the far greater number of parents and students. All reputable surveys agree with CBS News that "Americans overwhelmingly reject the idea of banning books about history or race. One reason for that: a big majority also say[s] teaching about the history of race in America makes students understand what others went through.

"Large majorities — more than 8 in 10 — don't think books should be banned from school for discussing race and criticizing U.S. history, for depicting slavery in the past or more broadly for political ideas they disagree with." More than 70% of those polled in a survey commissioned by the American Historical Association support "divisive" and "uncomfortable" schooling, across all lines of party, education and age.

Republican politicians, right-wing opinion columnists and editorial boards, and Fox News re-circulate talking points from Tucker Carlson, Christopher Rufo, Ted Cruz and Donald Trump. Mounting evidence suggests that they appeal to a declining minority.

The well-funded, highly organized national misinformation campaign targeting public education and literacy is very successful in reaching its intended audiences: rightwing sympathizers and fearful, manipulable parents.

Funded by the Kochs, Heritage Foundation and PAC, Bradley Foundation, Robert Gates and others, their propagandists like fake journalist Rufo admit to fabricating quotations and allegations. Books are banned; so are curricula topics.

The anti-factual message is dishonestly spam-mailed with fallacious "opinion surveys" and requests for donations to unknowledgeable millions by the Faith & Freedom Coalition and Michigan's Hillsdale College. The latter offers "free" online courses to tempt the fearful and unknowing to purchase online degrees on the 1776 Project's white-washed fictionalization of American history.

Hillsdale now also markets a speculative chain of "Classical Academy" Latin- and STEM-based private elementary "schools" as franchises of Hillsdale College. Private Christian and precariously accredited Hillsdale is DeSantis' model for remaking liberal arts education in Florida.

The Resistance Rises

Young adult novelist and literature professor Ashley Hope Perez's national prize winning novel Out of Darkness sat unchallenged on library shelves from 2015 until 2020, when organized banning actively commenced. With civil rights, free speech, authors' rights, librarians' and citizens' challenges, bans that violated district and state guidelines and laws are facing resistance.

So far, bans of Out of Darkness have been rescinded in several counties particularly in ban-flooded Utah after district superintendents or school boards were confronted with their own formal free-speech policies. That is a growing movement of legal resistance to unconstitutional actions, sometimes by authors and their representatives and sometimes by civil liberties groups.

With few exceptions, the authors of targeted books are racial and ethnic minorities, women, and/or LGBTQ, regardless of the national and international acclaim they have earned sometimes over decades. The only white male authors on banned lists have LGBTQ protagonists. Mere mentions of sexuality, romantic attraction, or differences lead quickly to radical exaggeration and distortion.

Few book-banners have any familiarity with the actual contents of their targets. Graphic novels including Art Spiegelman's award-winning account of Jews in the Holocaust, Maus, and an adaptation of Anne Frank's Diary attract condemnation and outright banning because they might make readers "uncomfortable" or are purported to be "divisive," categories that are never defined.

The underreported new and mounting "massive resistance" is an increasingly joint effort by librarians, students, authors, publishers, and civil libertarians more or less in that order. I call for greater communication and cooperation.

Not surprisingly, librarians lead in fighting back, at least as often individually and locally as with the national American Library Association's and Freedom to Read Foundation's leadership. This is sometimes part of union organizing drives and sometimes at the risk of losing their own jobs.

Imaginatively and originally, the Nashville (Tenn.) Public Library introduced a limited edition "I read banned books" library card. Teachers and librarians also remind youth people, "You can ban a book, but can you stop teens from finding it online." Banning parents and school boards typically, and ironically, miss that.

Individually, sometimes along with librarians, sometimes cooperatively with PEN America, scholarly organizations, ACLU, National Coalition Against Censorship, Red.Wine.Blue and publishers, authors also fight back. We need stronger leadership and organization across genres, generations, and interest groups.

Especially impressive, imaginative, and courageous, teenage high school students across the country and especially in Texas lead by organizing "read banned books clubs" and reading groups. Sometimes they act with the help of individual schools, teachers, parents, and local booksellers and authors who provide copies of books.

Social justice, LGBTQ rights, freedom to read, and the rights of the young are major motivations and themes. Some of the clubs initiate lawsuits against schools and local authorities. Texas, Florida, and even small-town Pennsylvania groups set examples that inspire peers elsewhere.

Some exceptional teens, often racial and ethnic minorities, add individual voices brilliantly. In the Dallas Morning News, 9th grader Sriya Tallapragada writes, "Adults who want to ban schoolbooks don't understand how we students read them." She continues, "Often the larger message of a book overshadows any uncomfortable language."

In the Opinion pages of the New York Times, Viet Thanh Nguyen reports movingly how "My Young Mind Was Disturbed by a Book. It Changed My Life." The Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, author of The Sympathizer, attributes his intellectual beginnings: "When I was 12 or 13 years old, I was not prepared for the racism, the brutality or the sexual assault in Larry Heinemann's 1974 novel, Close Quarters."

He continues, "If we oppose banning some books, we should oppose banning any book. If our society isn't strong enough to withstand the weight of difficult or challenging — and even hateful or problematic — ideas, then something must be fixed…. And loving books is really the point…."

Four months later, on April 18, 2022, Southern California high school junior Sungjoo Yoon boldly announces, "Take it From a Student: We Should Argue About Books, Not Bans." As a sophomore, he led a petition drive to remove five classic novels from a banned book list (it gathered almost 5000 signatures) and spoke at school board meetings.

From these experiences, he "had a long-overdue realization: How we as Americans approach restrictions on literature curriculums is not only flawed but also wholly reactionary. My experience… convinced me that the problem is not that we disagree but how. We need to shift focus away from reflexive outrage about restrictions and bans, and toward actual discussions of the merits and drawbacks of the individual books."

If only more adults would read and listen. Can they?

Next a Spectator Sport

Founder and president of Interfaith America, author and father, Eboo Patel adds an accompanying adult parental voice. He writes clearly about "What I Want My Kids to Learn About American Racism." Recalling his own educational awakening 30 years ago through reading, he observes that his children are learning about racism more immediately and at younger ages.

"My kids are 12 and 15. As they progress through adolescence and become even more attuned to the politics and culture of their nation, I want their schools to play the appropriate role in shaping them to be participating citizens of a diverse democracy. That means teaching an expansive version of American history and instilling in them a sense of responsibility to help make the next chapter more just and inclusive. Citizenship is not a spectator sport."

This is precisely what Moms for Liberty, No Left Turn in Education, Heritage Foundation, Faith and Freedom Coalition, Hillsdale College, and rightwing politicians do not want.

There are mounting signs of progress on the ground. I mentioned unbannings when citizens confront school superintendents and boards of education with their own stated policies upholding free speech, and/or threaten legal action. Many cases now move through the courts.

In rare instances, such as calls to "ban the Bible" or algebra, exposure of illogic and self-contradiction, as well as action on constitutional grounds, is effective. Changing state laws to make banning books easier prompted one long-time Florida activist to the logical counter of proposing publicly banning the Bible in accord with new laws' terms. A Washington Post humorist imagined that one state legislator added, "Let's ban algebra, too," because it causes widespread "discomfort."

The Miami Florida Board of Education reversed itself by accepting sex education books that it had rejected previously. Some schools compromise by adding "content warning labels" instead of banning books.

Especially compelling is increasing evidence that few parents are choosing to take action by enrolling in programs to restrict their school-age children's reading of school library books.

State-level Censors

With right-wing Republican-domination and the ambitions of their governors, Texas and Florida lead the race for white supremacy and self-caricature. They spew fact-free violations of free speech and children's rights, and contradict established understandings of child development.

The bar is low. A Tennessee Republican state representative, Jerry Sexton, responded to a colleague's question about what he would do with the books he banned: "I don't have a clue, but I would burn them."

As part of a statewide election campaign (from which he later withdrew), Texas state house representative Matt Krause's office produced — but could not explain — a

list of 850 books supposedly in school or public libraries that he demanded without definition or explanation be "investigated."

Inspection of the list quickly confirmed that it was compiled by a literature- and history-ignorant Google word search. Krause, his office, and his vocal supporters are completely ignorant of the contents of the books. This is part of what I've named "the new illiteracy," the condemnation and campaign to ban books while lacking any familiarity with their contents.

Again in Texas, the Governor assaults trans-youth, illegally denying health care and protection from bullying. He disallows protecting the young from parental and other adult abuse. In Oklahoma, a teacher was threatened with having her license revoked for explaining to her students how to access "banned books" legally.

One West Philadelphia teacher adds reality to the nondebates: "Book Bans? My School Doesn't Even Have a Library. How underfunding is its own form of censorship."

A number of states try to limit the books for which students may search. Virginia attempts to label books as "obscene" and alternatively ban them, restrict their sales, or sue publishers, booksellers, or the books themselves. Judges find no merit in these illogical, unconstitutional stunts.

In Ohio, a home-schooled, non-college educated, former member of the State Board of Education and current member of the State House, argued against inclusive history education because she believes that "both sides of the Holocaust must be taught" and "only 300,000 Jews" were killed. Her colleagues only gently scolded her.

Meanwhile, with no debate and ignoring all testimony and opinion polls, the substantially appointed State Board of Education rescinded its own 2020 resolution in support of anti-racist, inclusive education.

Fraudulent Faith and Local Lunacies

For decades, across the states, Christian home-schooling parents proclaim doctrines of "parental rights" that have no basis in law and contradict the more than century-long struggle to establish the fundamental rights of children and young people. They clash with everything we know about child and adolescent development.

Among their tactics are myths about children "identifying" as animals in schools, the threat of unisex and gender-neutral restrooms, transgender young people competing in school sports, and endless streams of condemned but rarely read books, increasingly graphic books. Families home-schooling with a 1930s Nazi curriculum make the news but solicit no action by local or state authorities.

Most of the action, especially regarding efforts to censor reading, ban books, and limit libraries and librarians takes place in counties, cities and school districts. These are the trenches, sites of sometimes all-out rhetorical, socio-cultural, political, and legal warfare, often ignoring the law and established processes and procedures.

We know the anti-constitutional and anti-child development book, education, and growing up banners do not, and perhaps cannot, read. But are they listening? The future of young generations and a semi-democratic nation depends on it. We must act collectively, and quickly. [1] . [2]

Against the Current

Footnotes

[1] At a moment of intensifying rightwing attacks and even defunding of libraries for refusing to remove books on Queer and anti-racist topics, the author has supplied an extensive list of references and sources, which can be obtained from him by writing to graff.40@osu.edu

[2] Thanks to David Finkel and Ashley Perez for their comments.

Strike and more strikes driven by technological change

24 July 2023, by Dan La Botz

Hollywood was hit first when 11,500 writers walked out on May 2. Some 60,000 actors followed on July 4. UPS workers, 340,000 of them, have voted to strike if they don't have a new and improved contract by July 31. And the 140,000 autoworkers have similarly voted to strike the industry if they don't get a better contract by September 15. Meanwhile, small, short walkout are taking place at Amazon facilities by worker trying to organize the logistics giant.

What's behind all of these strikes and threats to strike? Driving the rising class conflict is the continuing technological transformation of American industry as computer surveillance, GPS, robots, and artificial intelligence play an ever-larger role. At the same time, the unions' demands remain the fundamental demands of workers for the last 250 years: job security and above all higher wages.

Technology, given a boost by the COVID pandemic, has transformed both the movie industry and package delivery. In the movie industry, online streaming began twenty years ago and was a growing force but became

dominant during the pandemic. Movie studios created streaming service and streaming service made more movies. The changes altered work arrangements so that writers lost money and often got no royalties for the reruns of the films they had written. At the same time, artificial intelligence (AI) threatened to replace writers, actors, and other professionals in the business.

In package delivery, COVID led consumers to avoid stores and buy online. UPS and Amazon depend on hundreds of thousands of men and women moving boxes in warehouses who, as described by one UPS worker, are "work like mules." Treated like mules but monitored by computers. And every day, there are more and more robots running through the warehouses bringing and taking boxes from the human mules. UPS drivers on the street are surveilled by the Global Positioning System (GPS) as the company assesses their productivity.

A Teamsters union strike at UPS would affect the entire U.S. economy, interrupting parts deliveries to workplaces and product deliveries to customers. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce has called upon President Joe Biden to intervene in the strike. The Teamsters president told him to keep out. Biden says he will not get involved, "I believe in unions."

The auto industry is also in the throes of yet another wave of technological transformation. The introduction of robots into the plants has already eliminated tens of thousands of jobs over the last several decades. But now the union faces and even great challenge as the government and the corporations work together because of the role of CO2 in producing global warming to replace the petroleum burning internal combustion engine with electronic vehicles (EVs).

Not only will the EV auto assembly plants require fewer workers, but the U.S. government is giving billions to U.S. and foreign corporations to create the new electric battery plants necessary for the EVs, but without requiring that the plants be unionized and pay union wages. "Why is Joe Biden's administration facilitating this corporate greed with taxpayer money?" asked Shawn Fain, the United Auto Workers' new president.

Aggravating the situation in all of these industries is the avarice of corporations As Fran Drescher, the president of SAG -AFTRA, said, "**We are the victims here….How they plead poverty, that they're losing money left and right when giving hundreds of millions of dollars to their CEOs. It is disgusting. Shame on them.** She's right:"Robert Iger of Disney, $27 million; David Zaslav, Warner Brothers, $39.3; Carol Tomé of UPS, $18.9; Mary Barras of GM, $28.9; Jim Farley of Ford, $22.8.

The technological transformations taking place demonstrate the need for class-wide program of democratic control of new technology by unions and the workers who use them.

Erdoğan's new journey in old direction

23 July 2023, by Metin Feyyaz

Erdoğan's second major policy change happened in relation to his stance against Sweden's accession to NATO. Just a few days ago Minister of Foreign Affairs and former Chief of Intelligence Service Hakan Fidan, was saying that "terrorist organizations" are fr acting freely in Sweden and Erdoğan's de-facto coalition partner far-right MHP's leader was telling that they disapprove Sweden's accession to NATO, Erdoğan had a swift policy change in just a few days.

Actually this shouldn't be a surprise for those who are following Turkey's foreign policy for a while. While Turkish capitalism is going through multiple and interconnected crisis, Erdoğan has been trying to navigate his way through these interconnected crisis by using every means possible. And global geopolitical disorder has helped him a lot in these times of crisis, he has sharpened his ability to use world events a bargaining chip by using Turkey's geopolitical position. Turkey's stance on Sweden's accession to NATO was actually a life jacket for Erdoğan so that he could negotiate further concessions. It is important to remember Sweden didn't hesitate to ignore basic human rights by expelling some of the refugees to Turkey to be imprisoned.

While a full-born currency crisis is accumulating and the Turkish Lira is loosing value strongly, one can say that Turkish capitalism didn't have much chance other than turning its face towards to West again and please international capital. Still we don't exactly know the content of the Sweden-Turkey deal but recently American journalist Seymour Hersh claimed that US President Biden promised an IMF loan of 11-13 billion dollars in exchange for Turkey's approval of Sweden's NATO membership.

Turkey's bid for EU membership has also become discussion topic during these discussions, it was declared that "Sweden will actively support Turkey's efforts to update the Turkey-EU Customs Union and revitalize the EU membership process, including visa liberalisation." Modernization of Customs Union agreement between EU and Turkey, has been a beloved subject for both European and Turkish capitalists while supply chains are moving closer to company headquarters, Turkey is a perfect choice for those who are looking for cheap, unorganized, well trained work-force.

Around a year ago, during discussions on Sweden's NATO accession, organization of big capitalists in Turkey, TÜSİAD, has warned the government in a declaration they made by telling that "now supply chains are moving towards countries which share same "values" and

government has to go back to its Western alliances in order to benefit from these changes in global supply chains."

At that time, Erdoğan responded to this declaration with fierce anger. He apparently didn't want to show his negotiating hand so early. Now capitalists both in Turkey and in Western alliance are happy to bringing in their old friend back to club; of course at the expense of human rights.

Radical Socialist Statement on Manipur

22 July 2023, by Radical Socialist

1. The main though not only purpose of giving ST status to Meiteis is the land question. Kukis reside mostly in the Hills comprising some 90% of the state (much of which is forested) and is deemed their ancestral lands which even the government cannot easily encroach upon yet has tried to do so through arbitrary declarations of 'reserved forest' areas. The longer term aim is to extract mineral and forest wealth from the region via public-private partnerships with Indian big capital e.g., Adani, Ambanis, etc.

2. Ethnic, religious and demographic dimensions also play a part. Economically, giving ST status to Meiteis can pave the way for them and the government to acquire land in the Hills. Politically, the BJP in the longer term knows it will have to live with Christians in the northeast but seeks politically not just to subordinate Christian groups and parties through alliances based on Central patronage but ultimately to diminish as much as possible their political influence and social power. This is where the portrayal of a growing number of Kukis as illegal migrants comes in since they have strong kinship bonds with Chin tribes in Myanmar and there is cross-border traffic and activities. There are Meitei Christians and it is revealing of both ethnic pulls and religious hostilities that on the worst nights of May 3-4 while not a single Meitei Christian was killed some 240 odd churches of different Meitei denominations were destroyed, along with 50 others in and around Imphal where sections of the better-off and government employed Kukis also live. Panic-stricken, Kukis have left the Valley for the Hills and similarly Meiteis have moved in the reverse direction.

3. The duplicities of the BJP at the Centre and of Manipur government and the police it controls are self-evident. (i) Well after the earlier outbreaks of violence, on May 17 the Biren Singh government tells the Supreme Court on May 17 that the origin of this is the "crackdown on illegal Myanmar migrants... and drug business in the hills". On May 28 Biren Singh again lies declaring that the clashes are not between the two communities "but between Kuki militants and security forces". The nefarious role of two major Meitei vigilante groups with alleged links to the RSS, responsible for the one-sided violence against Kukis, namely Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun, are not brought into the picture. Subsequently, the Chief of Leepun had to be formally investigated by the police for possible crimes but both organisations are not outlawed. (ii) Why has President's Rule not been implemented for so long? Why did Modi himself remain silent for so long? ---The answer is obvious. There is a BJP government in the state and how can the Centre by such action indict its own party-led government, and implicitly, its biased support to the Meiteis. [No surprise—in this over two month period Modi ignores domestic church destruction but screams about Hindu temple destruction in Australia.]

4. It is the recent video revelation of the shocking rape and murders that took place in early May of Kuki victims that has forced the BJP's hand and made Modi speak out for the first time. Please note the following facts. The victims were abducted from the police. How could this happen and nothing subsequently made of it! A complaint to the police is made in mid-May but the FIR is registered only a month later in mid-June and investigation begun only after the video became public in mid-July. The police operate under orders from the state government and BJP state governments are always alert to what the BJP Central government wants.

5. It is clear that relations between the Meiteis and the Kukis have now reached a point where there can be no reconciliation without recognizing that either the ST status to Meiteis (already recognized as constitutionally highly dubious if not unjustified) be withdrawn quickly by legal process; and more importantly, the Kuki demand for a separately administrated geographical area with substantial autonomous powers (including their own police) be set up. In creating this, due care should also be taken to consider the legitimate territorial concerns of the Nagas. Here, the question of land rights (inclusive of forest regions) must be protected so that this cannot be dis-alienated in the name of the government's claim to "eminent domain" against the will of the great majority of the Zo-Kuki people of that administration.

6. The fundamental reason for why, not just Manipur but J&K, Nagaland and parts of Mizoram, are from time to time undergoing great turmoil especially under the reign of the BJP should be obvious. Even other governments in New Delhi have sought to undermine the asymmetric character of Indian federalism which it is crucial to preserve. This is because colonial rule through brutality against diverse peoples and regions created the singular geographical unit of India that post-colonial governments have wanted to preserve, often through forcible forms of incorporation of peoples and regions having very different histories. Any effort to establish a humane and truly

democratic India must endorse an asymmetrical federalism respecting these diverse histories, sentiments and rights. The two parts of India which have had distinctive and special powers of autonomy have been the only Muslim majority state of J&K and the states of the Northeast where there is a substantial Christian population, indeed a majority in some states. And no prizes for guessing who are the biggest culprits in seeking to diminish and eventually eliminate this asymmetrical federalism and furthermore to go on to establish the kind of Central domination that would undermine (they are already doing so) the more uniformly distributed powers of autonomy that other Indian states currently have—yes, it is the Sangh Parivar/BJP guided as it is by its raison d' etre of Hindutva Nationalism.

7. We demand impartial punishment of all those who have violated human rights in any form.

Radical Socialist — 21 July 2023

Thai elections without democracy

21 July 2023, by Thitinan Pongsudhirak

Although it may come across as dramatic and unprecedented, Move Forward Party (MFP) leader Pita Limjaroenrat's ordeal in trying to take office as prime minister after winning the May 14 election is par for the course in Thai politics over the past two decades.

Every time a party wins convincingly at the polls and its leader appears charismatic and capable, conservative forces push back resolutely to stymie and negate the election outcome. At issue in view of Mr Pita's case is thus whether Thailand's elections are perfunctory and pro forma, whereas real political power to call the shots lies with the established centres of power, from the military and monarchy to the judiciary and bureaucracy.

The conservative establishment's tried and tested method to supervise and shape outcomes is to deploy legal instruments and constitutional tools as interpreted by the judiciary, particularly the Constitutional Court but also including in the past the Supreme Administrative Court and the Supreme Court Division for Political Office Holders. After a given poll, a handful of saboteurs typically launch a slew of charges against parties and politicians deemed as a threat.

These charges are duly accepted and become options to exercise as the judicial authorities deem fit. Charges can be filed from different sides but only those that go after establishment enemies are pursued. This process has been likened to the "judicialisation" of Thai politics — a judicial putsch of sorts — where judges can set political directions and shape outcomes without having to resort to a hard military coup which attracts international attention and criticism.

This is what happened earlier to Thaksin Shinawatra and his political machinery. At first, he was not deemed an enemy, and was allowed to take office and run the country after winning a near-majority poll victory in January 2001. Although charged for failing to fully declare his assets and hiding them under his assistants' names, the Constitutional Court let him off the hook in a close call of 8-7. He was useful to the established regime at the time because of his pro-growth policies to pull Thailand out of the 1997-98 economic crisis beyond the IMF rescue programme.

But after triumphing in a landslide re-election four years later, Thaksin grew too strong for the conservative establishment. One big irony in Thai politics is that he was not at all anti-establishment but merely wanted to be a preferred part of it among the highest echelons. Ultimately, Thaksin was kicked out by competitors in the highest corridors of power, his massive voter base coming into conflict with the traditional patronage network of incumbent power holders.

The September 2006 coup that ejected and exiled him was complemented by a fusillade of legal charges that have lingered until today, including the dissolution of his Thai Rak Thai Party and a five-year ban on its executive board members from running for office in May 2007. When his Palang Prachachon (People's Power) Party returned to power after again winning the election in December 2007, it was also dissolved and its executives banned. While in office, Thaksin's ally and prime minister Samak Sundaravej was expelled from office by the Constitutional Court for emceeing a cooking show and receiving 5,000 baht for miscellaneous expenses.

Thaksin's sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, faced a similar fate but in a different way after the Pheu Thai Party again won the election in July 2011. As prime minister, she faced a number of malfeasance and conflicts of interest charges. But this time, the military took the decisive action by seizing power in May 2014 after a crippling protest movement, backed by judicial decisions as the record shows, failed to oust her government over seven months.

It then came to Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, the deposed leader of the Future Forward Party. Formed just a year prior to the March 2019 election, Future Forward garnered 6.3 million votes and 80 seats in parliament. While the party's showing was well behind that of Pheu Thai and the pro-military Palang Pracharath, its reform agenda of traditional institutions of political power raised alarm bells in establishment circles. The Thaksin-led machinery was just competition for the masses but Future Forward's reform programme was a clear and present threat.

A series of charges were duly hurled at Mr Thanathorn, featuring his ownership of media shares. In fact,

the constitutional prohibition of media ownership harks back to Thaksin whose conglomerate bought a TV company and turned it into a government mouthpiece. Mr Thanathorn's small shareholdings did not allow him to influence the company in question, and he explained that the shares had been transferred to his mother. Nonetheless he was disqualified and banned from office for ten years while his party was dismantled in February 2020.

When these major political parties were dissolved, the people who voted for them became simultaneously disenfranchised. The Constitutional Court getting rid of Thai Rak Thai and Palang Prachachon begot the red-shirt protests in 2009-10, culminating with an armed suppression by security forces. Future Forward's disbandment led to younger Thais' street demonstrations in 2020-21 in the face of water cannons and rubber bullets. Established power holders have had no qualms shutting down political parties and quashing anger and frustration of their voters and supporters.

Mr Pita is next in the establishment's sight. But this time, apart from the usual hazy media ownership infraction, he and Move Forward are deemed as a threat for calling for an amendment of the lese majeste law, or Section 112 of the Criminal Code. What Future Forward started, Move Forward has continued by spotlighting institutional reforms of traditional institutions for Thailand to move forward. These institutions underpin an entrenched system and network of powerful personalities, connections, and vested interests that have held Thailand back for years. Reform could unlock and unleash productive forces and talents to enable Thailand to reach its potential.

But their seeming denial of Mr Pita from the premiership and Move Forward from government suggests that conservative forces are having to strike back harder than ever, looking outwardly strong but perhaps internally weak. Despite repeated polls that have not led to truly democratic outcomes, Thailand's centres of power are essentially saying "this is the authoritarian way we are going to have it, do you have a problem with that?"

Source: Bangkok Post

Statement in advance of the general election of 23 June

20 July 2023, by Anticapitalistas

Although the results were relatively close between the PP (People's Party, mainstream conservatives) and the PSOE (Socialist Workers Party, traditional social democrats), the electoral arithmetic generated a major shift. We saw the spectacular collapse of Unidas Podemos (groups to the left of the PSOE but in full coalition government with it) and the decline of the PSOE, which led the PP to win many provincial capitals and Autonomous Regions. This changed the political cycle and led Pedro Sánchez to call a general election. But let us try to go further.

The reactionary turn in the situation has underlying causes. The first and most decisive is to be found at the international level, in a succession of defeats and capitulations of the left that emerged after the 2008 crisis and which have provoked the rise of a new right: from Syriza in Greece to the integration of Podemos into a government with the PSOE, passing through Corbynism or Sanders. The feeling that remains is that the left is not capable of consolidating stable mass projects or putting forward a programme that it can implement. So the crisis within the left is the first factor

Another underlying reason has to do with fear: war, the geopolitical reordering of capitalism, and the ecological crisis generate a sense of the end of an epoch. Inequality is increasing in the countries of the capitalist centre; whole areas of the world are being thrown into chaos by capitalism; and new powers are disputing hegemony with the old ones. It is clear to the middle classes: law and order must be imposed within each country in order to be in a better position to maintain relative privileges in a world in flames. The working class and the oppressed lack strong political organisations and do not have a strategic perspective to fight capitalism. But the rebellions continue, albeit without clear political direction: France took over from Chile, Chile from Black people in the USA... and so on and so forth.

In Spain, the transformation of Podemos into a more institutionally integrated and less radical force and the defeat of the pro-independence cycle have been the determining factors within the progressive bloc. The emergence of VOX (the voice of hard-right post-fascists) and the rise of the PP are the reverse of this pendulum. The progressive coalition government formed in 2018 was not the beginning of a period of great change. It was rather the end of the hope that 15M had opened up. [1] The progressive government tried to promote a policy of modernisation of Spanish capitalism, which we describe as "reformist without reforms" Far from seeking a recomposition of capitalist society on the basis of a certain redistribution of wealth, they have maintained at all costs a policy that preserved corporate profits in a context of "Keynesianism without growth or redistribution". Related to this policy, which reflects and feeds the current dynamics of capitalism, military spending is brutally increased, the pro-security

reinforcement of the state is promoted, the terrain of protest is created, territorial autonomy is defended, and migrants are attacked.

In this sense, despite grandioise speeches, the progressive government did not keep its promises in terms of legislation on labour reform, pensions, the gag law, housing, etc. Objectively it implemented a reinforcement of the authoritarian drift of the state on migration; it has aligned itself with Western imperialism, where it plays a subordinate role (Sahara, the war in Ukraine, etc.). The government has applied the economic policy of capital: inflation has eaten into wages, and the working class is no stronger socially than when this legislature began. The great historic task of tackling the climate crisis has been postponed and handed over to big business, thus promoting 'green capitalism'. Even in areas where certain advances have been made, such as feminism and LGBTI rights, these are fragile and threatened, among other things, by the co-option and institutionalisation of social movements.

The rise of the right in the Spanish state is part of this context: insecurity about the future, hegemony of the old middle classes in the political field, reaction against the processes of social mobilisation of recent years. In a distorted way, this right has been moulded by its reaction to the progressive bloc. It feeds off the chronic crisis, the need to preserve order because change can only be imagined to be worse, and the structural weakening of workers' organisational capacity. The underlying negative process inexorably advances while progressivism suffers and agonises as it "manages the existing situation".

We do not want a single vote to go to the right. We do not want the Popular Party and VOX to get into government. But, beyond the individual vote of each person, we cannot close our eyes to the left parties' politics of surrender, which have already demonstrated in government that they are incapable of fulfilling their promises and of confronting the economic powers in order to defend the interests of the working class.
Where they exist, we call on voters to vote for candidates who express a clear position against the reactionary wave but also a rejection of capitulations and alliances with social liberalism and who defend freedom and self-determination. So we call for a vote for the CUP (a Catalan left independence current). This is despite our differences with them regarding their overly complacent policy with the rest of the pro-independence bloc and on more strategic issues. We also vote for and participate in Adelante Andalucía (Forward Andalucia), which aims to build an ecosocialist and feminist current among Andalusian workers against the regime of 78 [2] giving voice to the secular oppression suffered by this land.

On 23 July, we will know what the new political framework is in which we will live. If progressivism resists, the onslaught of the right will not cease, and we have no confidence that the necessary transformation will be undertaken. If the right wing governs, a redoubled offensive against the working class and the rights of women, LGBTI people, migrants, and all the exploited and oppressed is coming. Whatever happens, we will fight together with many more people.

But resistance cannot be simply taking to the streets; the travails of progressivism are making it clear to us that we need a left independent of the regime, as loyal to the subordinate classes as the right wing is to the capitalists. This project for Anticapitalists is called ecosocialism, and it will have to be built through social resistance and also by drawing the relevant lessons on the political terrain: neither resigning ourselves to the lesser evil nor letting history continue to be dictated by the same old, same old politics.

Footnotes

[1] 15M -15 May is the name given to the Indignados movement, huge street mobilisations, and radicalisation that erupted in 2011 and led to the creation of the radical left Podemos-Tr
[2] The government that led the compromised and moderate transition from Francoism

Actors Walk the Picket Lines

19 July 2023, by Malik Miah

After negotiations between studio representatives of the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) and the actors' union broke down the union voted to strike by an overwhelming 97.91%.

With the strike, film and television productions ground to a halt. Actors will not appear for any promotional interviews.

Worried about not receiving a fair share of a streaming-dominated future and fed up with seeing exorbitant pay for entertainment moguls, actors have joined 11,500 striking screenwriters who walked out in May over similar concerns. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) is a major strike issue for both.

Actors and writers have not been on strike together since 1960. The last SAG strike occurred in 1980 and lasted for three months.

Actors & Screenwriters Face Tough Times

Just before the SAG Board voted to authorize a strike, Fran Drescher, the star and creator of the 1990s sitcom "The Nanny" and union president, explained that the membership had no choice but to strike:

"From the time negotiations began on June 7, the members of our Negotiating Committee and our staff

team have spent many long days, weekends and holidays working to achieve a deal that protects you, the working actors, and performers on whom this industry relies. As you know, over the past decade, your compensation has been severely eroded by the rise of the streaming ecosystem. Furthermore, artificial intelligence poses an existential threat to creative professions, and all actors and performers deserve contract language that protects them from having their identity and talent exploited without consent and pay. Despite our team's dedication to advocating on your behalf, the AMPTP has refused to acknowledge that enormous shifts in the industry and economy have had a detrimental impact on those who perform labor for the studios."

The arrogance of the top executives was on full display two days before the strike began. The chief executive of Disney, Robert Iger, received a two-year contract extension at $27 million per year. He then went on business media to blast the actors union for striking for higher compensation.

Meanwhile most working actors live paycheck to paycheck and have few benefits. Health insurance requires earning at least $26,470 over a Covered Base Earning Period and excludes wages from part-time jobs. One actor interviewed on the picket line said he was dropped from his health insurance coverage for being short $50.

Who Needs Creative Products?

The major studios don't create the movies and television shows that the public enjoys. Like all industries, it's the workers who create the shows. Without them, there is no Hollywood.

Of course, the attitude of the big studios is the same as in other major industries: The only way to please Wall Street is to increase stock values by stiffing writers and actors.

It's only mega stars like Tom Cruise or Nicole Kidman who have the power to negotiate high-paying contracts. Lesser-known actors and others on the production team are dependent on what the unions can get the studio bosses to accept in contract negotiations.

SAG says it is trying to ensure living wages for workaday actors and protect members from having their likenesses used in productions in which they took no part. The studios, which released a list of proposals they offered the actors, maintain that they have worked to reach a reasonable deal at a time when the industry has been upended by the growth of streaming services and faced shrinking viewership and lower box office returns.

The last time actors and screenwriters were on strike together was when Marilyn Monroe was starring in films. It was a different industry then. Today's dual strikes pit more than 170,000 workers against old-line studios like Disney, Universal, Sony and Paramount, as well newer juggernauts like Netflix, Amazon, and Apple. The stakes are high as the industry moguls seek to introduce new technology at the expense of its workforce. (See interview with Howard A. Rothman on the writers' strike.)

Without an agreement on how to use AI, writers might be rewriting scripts AI drafted while working actors find their voices and facial outlines used over and over with ridiculously small residual checks — or no check at all. The same technology is being introduced into other industries.

As Drescher noted, "What's happening to us is happening across all fields of labor. When employers make Wall Street and greed their priority and they forget about the essential contributors who make the machine run, we have a problem."

*Source **Against the Current**.*

The rights of migrants in the deepest point of the Mediterranean

18 July 2023, by Giorgos Maniatis

Modern migration is, along with the climate crisis, a constant reminder of global exploitation, poverty and racism. The shipwreck on the 14th of June in Pylos is, however, not only unimaginable injustice and pain, a tragedy. It is an event that condenses an entire period because in the unfolding of the dramatic events of the shipwreck the way a rescue operation is decided is brought to light; a decision that is equivalent to which lives are worth saving and which are expendable for the Greek state, the E.U. and the developed capitalist countries as a whole.

The fateful course of the vessel, which was monitored for 12 hours and escorted for more than 4 hours by Frontex and the Greek coast guard, exposed the way the European and Greek coast guards operate when they detect migrant boats trying to avoid Greece and sail directly to Italy on the so-called Calabrian route. [1] Three months earlier, a boat that started from Turkey and crossed the entire Aegean Sea had also sunk under the watch of the Italian and European coast guards off Coutro, Calabria. More than 100 men, women and children drowned in this wreck only 40 meters from the shore. As in Pylos, the vessel was located by a Frontex aircraft in international waters but within Italy's search and rescue area.

Both Frontex and the Italian coastguard downplayed the incident and withheld information in their reports about the circumstances and the seaworthiness of the vessel. They monitored the vessel for several hours without ordering a rescue operation,

even when the weather worsened. Finally, the rescue operation was launched. After the vessel had sunk.

The avoidance of Greece and the use of larger, usually aged and unseaworthy vessels has become widespread in the last three years. It is the result not of weakness, but of the "success" of the policies of the New Democracy party and the EU: the implementation of the policy enforcing violent, illegal deportations/pushbacks to the islands of the eastern Aegean and Evros, and the closure of the Balkan route, as well as the policies of confinement, isolation and deprivation of rights in refugee camps. Migration routes have gradually shifted from the narrow passages of the eastern Aegean to the open sea and have become extremely dangerous, as is the case in the Central Mediterranean.

In these cases, the primary objective of the countries whose waters are crossed by migrant boats is to prevent migrants from landing on their territory. The practices they follow range from toleration to facilitating the continuation of their journey to the neighboring country; from Greece to Italy, from Italy to Malta and so on. It is significant that in 2021, 1/6 of the arrivals in Italy, about 150 boats and 12,000 migrants, went via the Calabrian route under the nose of the Greek Coast Guard. However, in recent years in Greece, fatal shipwrecks tend to become commonplace, insignificant news, even when they happen near tourist destinations such as Kythera, Folegandros, Paros, Mykonos or Lesvos.

The shipwreck off Cutro's naval vessel had already exposed Frontex which in the Mediterranean, as in the case of illegal deportations/pushbacks in the Aegean, colludes and covers up illegal and murderous practices by national border guards. However, Pylos is not only a case of refusal to rescue, but a case of the active involvement of the Greek coastguard in causing the shipwreck, as is evident from the testimonies, the contradictory statements of the coastguard and, finally, the overt attempt to impose silence and cover up responsibility. Frontex, which had initially covered the actions of the Greek coastguard, chose to distance itself, denying any responsibility and thus exposing the Greek party.

Certainly, the Pylos shipwreck is one of the moments when a public space in which the voice of migrants can be heard opens up and facilitates the development of the anti-racist movement and social solidarity after a long period of retreat. But it would be delusional to expect a change of attitude on the part of the European Union, e.g. with the withdrawal of Frontex from Greece! The migration management model imposed in 2016 with the establishment of hotspots and the restriction of access to asylum by introducing the concept of a third safe country in the Euro-Turkish Agreement not only hasn't faltered, but has been generalised in the new Pact on Immigration and Asylum.

Obviously, the European Commission would prefer preventative operations with fewer deaths, detention camps with less abuse, police checks without overt racism. It is also very likely that the European Social Democrats and Greens are concerned about the shrinking of asylum and the criminalisation of activists and private rescue boats. Yet they still succumb to the right-wing correlation and probably equally share the fear of a repeat of the 2015-16 border opening. They consent to the core of the Europeanisation of immigration policy, the rapid increase in deportations under agreements/deals with transit countries, accept mass detention in countries with external borders and ultimately compromise on the dominant logic of reducing the 'pull factors' of migration.

For the anti-racist movement, the left and the a/a space, it is now an opportunity and a duty to fight back against violence and the devaluation of the lives of migrants. At this particular moment, when the death politics of borders is being revealed and the contradictions between national and European institutions are intensifying and, to a certain extent, the deep hegemony of the discourse on the migratory threat and border protection is being destabilized, we have the opportunity to return to a multifaceted solidarity with migrants and to reorganize ourselves on an international level. [2] It is a top priority today to confront the majority racist views and attitudes in society and to confront the unprecedented rise of fascism in Europe.

The successive marches and mobilisations for the crime at Pylos, as well as the Lawyers' Initiative against the cover-up and for the investigation of the criminal liabilities of the Coast Guard [3], and the support for the survivors including the solidarity shown for the scapegoats of this state crime -the nine Egyptians persecuted as "traffickers"- indicate that the first steps have already been taken.

Magazine "4" No 11, July 2023

From: Τα δικαιώματα των μεταναστών-ριών στο πιο βαθύ σημείο της Μεσογείου.

Footnotes

[1] See investigation by Solomon, Forensis, The Guardian and ARD: "Under the unwatchful eye of the authorities' deactivated cameras: dying in the darkest depths of the Mediterranean".

[2] See the "Open letter addressed to Greek and EU authorities by 300 academics": published at Tilburg University and elsewhere...

[3] See Lawyers' Initiative against the cover-up and for the investigation of the criminal liabilities of the Coast Guard.

The IMF's conditional loan and its cost: Pakistan may have been saved, but not the people

17 July 2023, by Farooq Tariq

On the day the IMF loan was approved, the price of electricity surged by Rs 5 rupees per unit. The Gas department also announced an increase in prices, as it was part of the agreement with the IMF. The implementation of IMF conditionalities for the loan has resulted in an unprecedented price hike across the country.

Moreover, the interest rate has already risen to 21 percent, and numerous public welfare subsidies have been withdrawn. New taxes have been imposed on the property and construction industry, while the Goods and Services Tax (GST) has been raised by one percent. Talks of a new mini-budget are ongoing, which could bring about further waves of taxation. These tax measures predominantly affect ordinary people, as the burden of taxation falls heavily on them. Despite the introduction of a new super tax ranging from 1 to 10 percent on affluent individuals and companies since May 2022, there is currently no effective mechanism in place to collect taxes from the wealthy.

To secure the $3 billion SBA, Pakistan paid $12 billion in external debt servicing during the 2022-2023 financial year. In addition to the IMF loan, Pakistan also received a $2 billion loan from Saudi Arabia and a $1 billion loan from the United Arab Emirates (UAE). These loans have temporarily mitigated the risk of default for Pakistan.

However, for the majority of the population, the state has already defaulted in various aspects. The COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase of 20 million people living below the poverty line, and the recent austerity measures implemented by the government since April 2022 have added another 10 million to that count. While there was a 35% wage increase for public sector employees (who had demanded a 100% increase), no relief was provided to workers in the private sector. According to a conservative estimate by the World Bank, the poverty rate in Pakistan is expected to reach 37.2 percent ($3.65 a day).

The IMF conditionalities imposed on Pakistan may not have parallel examples internationally. The IMF has exerted significant influence over the Pakistani ruling class, requiring them to comply with every demand. This situation is also influenced by the geopolitical dynamics at play, with China being Pakistan's largest economic partner. Through the Pak China Economic Corridor (CPEC), China has invested over $25 billion, out of a promised $60 billion, in Pakistan, primarily in the form of loans. The IMF feared that Pakistan may utilize the IMF loans to repay the Chinese debts.

Despite last year's devastating floods resulting in a loss of $30 billion, the strict IMF conditionalities have been enforced without considering these challenges. The government has failed to adequately rehabilitate flood victims, with over 4 million people still residing in roadside camps. Furthermore, the promises made to Pakistan at COP 27, under the "loss and damage agreement," have yet to materialize.

Although these economic measures may have helped prevent a Sri Lanka-style default, they have significantly eroded the popularity of the present government. Consequently, the former prime minister, Imran Khan, has experienced a surge in popularity, despite having lost a vote of no confidence in 2022. This popularity, however, is waning. The violent reaction, including attacks on military installations, by Imran Khan's party, the Pakistan Justice Party (PTI), following his brief arrest on May 9, provided a pretext for the military establishment to suppress the PTI. Over 3,000 PTI activists and leaders have been arrested, and military courts have been established to try civilians involved in attacking military installations. Ironically, Imran Khan was brought to power by the military establishment but was subsequently removed when he went out of their control.

The general elections are scheduled for October, but there are concerns of potential postponement. Paradoxically, the present unpopular coalition government, due to the implementation of IMF conditionalities, may still have an advantage in the elections, as it is backed by the military establishment. The alternative option available is fundamentalist religious parties, who, at least in words, maintain opposition to the IMF. These fundamentalist parties may regain popularity similar to their success in 2002 following the 9/11 events. Imran Khan's PTI, unless disqualified due to corruption allegations and attacks on military installations, is unlikely to achieve the same level of success as in the previous 2018 general elections.

The left-wing parties in Pakistan, presently marginalized, are planning to contest only a few seats. Ali Wazir, the sole socialist member in the National Assembly, has gained prominence through his opposition to the military establishment. However, he has become a target for the powerful military, having spent half of his mandated period behind bars. While he remains popular in his constituency, election rigging may hinder his victory in the upcoming elections.

17 July 2023

America’s Housing Crisis

16 July 2023, by Dan La Botz

Most Americans, 66 percent, own homes, while 27 percent rent. But Black homeownership is only 44%, while for whites it’s 73%. The difference is due in large part to bankers red-lining of Black neighborhoods and denying those who lived there, loans and insurance to buy homes. While now illegal, the practice means that Black people bought few homes and so accumulated less wealth. It was a major contributor to the wealth-gap, so that today the median Black household has $24,000, while the median white household has about $189,000.

Today homeownership is increasingly unattainable because buyers don’t have high enough incomes for the down payment and the monthly mortgage. The median home sales price $329,000 in 2020, but rose 32% to $436,800 in March 2023. The rise in prices is putting housing out of reach of many middle class and working-class people.

At the same time almost 90 percent of cities have experienced rent increases and rental prices have gone up by about 9 percent in the last year. The median cost of a one-bedroom apartment last month was $1,504 monthly, but $3,900 in New York City and Los Angles $2,400. Many people are rent burdened, meaning that more than 30% of their income goes to pay the rent. Rising rental prices have meant rising evictions in several major cities such as New York, Houston, and Dallas-Ft. Worth.

Why is housing so expensive? Because not enough homes have been built. The United States needs approximately 7 million homes for low-income families, but builders prefer to build expensive homes for the rich because they are more profitable. They build big-box homes in the suburbs and transform city buildings that once housed two or three families into elegant one-family townhouse. so low-income housing has been neglected
The United States has little public housing and it is largely segregated, not by law but because city governments built public housing in white neighborhoods for white people and in Black neighborhoods for Black people. In big cities like Chicago, Black people often lived in projects in the Black ghetto, while white people could get government subsidized loans and move to the suburbs. Public housing was generally neglected as budgets were cut, while poverty and crime grew in the projects. And the government stopped building public housing. Today there are only about 1.2 million households in public housing which is run by 3,300 local agencies. City governments in places like L.A., San Francisco and Seattle, and state governments in California and New York have created some local programs, but they are not enough.

Without enough housing, and rents so high, many people have become homeless, now about 600,000 nationally. Increasingly working families, women and their children, whose wages are too low become homeless.

Fighting for more housing at lower prices is difficult. The housing business—construction, sales and rentals—is controlled by bankers, developers, builders, and real estate companies. The owners of these businesses exert enormous political influence in city, state, and federal governments and lobby to protect their interest. Every city has housing movements that fight for more housing, oppose rising rents and resist evictions. There are also national housing organizations that lobby for federal legislation. The Democratic Socialists of America and other leftists are involved in the housing movement. But we need a large, powerful movement to win social housing, which would lower all rents.

16 July 2023

Stop the repression! Solidarity with Dr Kamel Aissat!

15 July 2023, by PST - Socialist Workers Party of Algeria

He was informed that he would have to appear before the public prosecutor on Sunday morning. His mobile phone, which he had just lost in this unexpectedly chaotic situation, was demanded by the gendarmes.

Our comrade was told that this harassment by the police and the judiciary was the result of his public scientific and political stance, in particular his videos posted on social networks, against the Tala Hamza/Amizour zinc and lead mine project, and his involvement in mobilising the local population against this dangerous project.

The project, which has been approved by the Council of Ministers and awarded to Australian and Chinese multinationals, has been rejected by several villages in Tala Hamza and Amizour in the wilaya of Béjaïa, especially as no prior environmental or public health impact assessment has been carried out, as required by the laws in force.

The harmful and disastrous effects of

this type of mine on the environment and public health are well known throughout the world and in Algeria (similar case of the Tlemcen mine).

Several weeks ago, a petition was even launched demanding that the public authorities comply with the law by consulting the population and carrying out an impact study on the environment and public health.

Everything points to the fact that, if the Tala Hamza mine is developed, not only could several villages and their entire agricultural economy be wiped out, but also the huge water table in the soumame valley (estimated at over 1,600 billion m3), which would be contaminated. The serious consequences of such a scenario, if it were to occur, could even affect the sea and a number of economic activities in the wilaya of Béjaïa, particularly the agri-food sector.

The repressive action taken against our comrade Kamel Aissat in order to intimidate and silence him, and consequently against the entire population of the region, seems to reflect once again the determination of the government in power to continue with the authoritarian logic of force majeure that has been rife since 2019. This repressive attitude, which is contrary to the laws of the regime itself, has already filled the prisons with hundreds of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, and has muzzled democratic freedoms in our country.

A campaign of solidarity with our comrade Dr Kamal Aissat and the people of Tala Hamza and Amizour has been launched to denounce the repression and demand respect for democratic freedoms, in particular freedom of expression and opinion on all economic, social and political issues and projects in our country.

The silence of environmental officials, members of parliament, local elected representatives and civil society in the wilaya of Béjaïa on this serious issue is simply unacceptable!

- Stop the repression and intimidation!

- For the respect of democratic freedoms and expression!

- Let us express loud and clear our solidarity with Dr Kamel Aissat and the people of Tala Hamza, Amizour and Béjaia!

15 July 2023

"The Worker House is one of the cogs of the regime"

14 July 2023, by Dominique Lerouge, Sara Salemi

Dominique Lerouge: What is the WH's position on the government's repressive policies?

Sara Salemi: Not only does it not fight it, but it is a cog in the wheel. It provides the security services with the information they need to repress workers and in particular activists.

Its main activity is to prevent trade union organisations that are independent of the state from being set up or from being able to function. It also seeks to prevent strikes.

Workers who stand up to them are threatened with dismissal. They are the targets of daily harassment, persecution, imprisonment, physical violence and so on.

In 2005, for example, following the reconstitution of the independent trade union of the Tehran and Suburbs Transport Authority (Vahed), the men of the WH, on the orders of their leader Alireza Mahjoub and the security forces, stormed a union meeting, violently beat the trade unionists and had them arrested.

Is the WH defending employees' rights?

SS: It was with the WH's agreement that an ultra-precarious employment contract was introduced. This allows the boss to dismiss the employee at any time and without justification (93% of workers in Iran are hired under such "contracts").

During his six successive terms in the Islamic Parliament (1996-2020), the President of the WH, Alireza Mahjoub, was in charge of the Social Affairs Committee. This committee played an active role in the adoption of laws aimed at strengthening the powers of employers to the detriment of employees' rights, deregulation and privatisation. In 1990, Alireza Mahjoub was also promoted to advisor and special inspector to the then President of the Republic, the father of Iranian-style neo-liberalism.

The WH propagates racist and xenophobic slogans against Afghan workers who are refugees in Iran. At the official ceremony organised by the WH on 1 May 2015 in Tehran, large banners and hundreds of identical placards demanded that employers sack Afghan workers and employ only "Iranians".

Is the WH independent of the State and the ruling party?

SS: Since 1979, three people have headed the central committee of the WH. They are closely linked to the state apparatus of the theocracy:

- Ali Rabi'i, secretary general of the WH between 1979 and 1989, became deputy minister of intelligence and security, then head of intelligence for the Revolutionary Guards (Sepah) in several regions, minister of cooperation, labour and social affairs (2013-2018) and government spokesman (2019-2021).

- Hossein Kamali, the current

Secretary General of the ruling party, was also a member of parliament for three terms and was promoted to Minister of Labour and Social Affairs (1989-2001).

– Alireza Mahjoub has been Secretary General for 33 years. He was also a member of parliament for six terms. He was appointed Adviser to the Prime Minister in 1981, and Adviser and Inspector General to the President of the Republic in 1990.

What is Worker House's international orientation?

SS: Firstly, it follows in the footsteps of the Iranian state. The WH also plays a leading role in the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) - the international centre formerly led by the former USSR.

In May 2022, at the same time as a massive wave of repression was unleashed, Alireza Mahjoub was elected Vice-President of the WFTU. This promotion helps to preserve the WH's control over the fate of workers in Iran. It is also intended to serve as a guarantee for the repressive policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, particularly towards workers and organisations independent of the authorities.

How was the Worker House created?

Its origins date back to the monarchical period. This institution brought together state trade unions and professional associations subservient to the government.

During the revolutionary upsurge that led to the fall of the monarchy in February 1979, strike committees and other structures for workers' self-organisation came into being. In Tehran, revolutionary workers' activists took over the headquarters of this organisation and transformed it into a meeting place for workers' activists, intellectuals and left-wing revolutionaries.

Four months after the proclamation of the "Islamic Republic of Iran", henchmen of the new regime violently seized the headquarters of the Worker House (WH). These assailants, closely linked to the clergy, were supervised by the intelligence and security services. The fundamental mission entrusted to the WH was to deal with workers' protests and prevent the formation of trade unions and other independent professional organisations, in order to reorganise the exploitation of labour power and thus consolidate the new regime.

10 July 2023

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Negrophobia in Tunisia: structural racism and imperialist export

13 July 2023, by Édouard Soulier

In this context, the Tunisian presidency has even developed theories of the "great replacement" to justify this treatment, and has followed in the footsteps of the Tunisian National Party, a small but extremely racist (and anti-Semitic) party.

Border guard

A month ago, (French Interior Minister) Darmanin came to officialise an agreement turning Tunisia into a border guard, following in the footsteps of Italy, which had made the same request in January. For a few million euros, the Tunisian government has undertaken to discourage people from leaving for Europe from its shores, with the tacit agreement that as long as the flow of migrants decreases, France will be less strict about human rights.

The situation deteriorated sharply in the port town of Sfax - which, because of the configuration of the tides, is the one most conducive to crossing - where, following a fatal altercation with a migrant, real pogroms took place over several nights in front of a police force that was passive at best. Several dozen injured people filled the hospital in Sfax. Some of the people forcibly evicted from their homes and robbed included people who were "in order" as far as Tunisian immigration was concerned.

Deportations to Libya

The authorities have chartered buses to forcibly take migrants fleeing the city to the Libyan border. To date, there are around 1,200 of them, including at least 29 children and three pregnant women, and their situation is unknown. They have to get by without water or food in the desert, and organisations and journalists are forbidden to intervene. On the Libyan side, they have been threatened and have had to turn back. Their situation is dramatic. Several people have already died of dehydration. Those who did not get on the buses are wandering in the suburbs of Sfax, with nowhere to shelter and no humanitarian aid other than individual solidarity.

Fanning the flames of the structural

negrophobia that exists in the Maghreb by acting as a safeguard against European racist policies while developing a vague anti-imperialism façade: this is the recipe of the Tunisian state. The massive scale of the deportations nevertheless represents a break with the past. There is an urgent need to develop solidarity with organisations supporting migrants in Tunisia, and above all for us to demand an end to the Fortress Europe policy. No one is illegal and all immigrants are welcome.

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

The end of the UN mission Minusma

12 July 2023, by Paul Martial

It was well known that relations between the Malian authorities and the heads of Minusma (the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali) were not at their best. However, it was a surprise to hear Malian Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop demand "the immediate withdrawal" of the UN mission.

Tense relations

Once the surprise was over, negotiations on the withdrawal took place. The Malian authorities demanded a three-month deadline, which everyone considered unrealistic, but agreement was reached on a departure date of the very beginning of 2024.

Since the second putsch in May 2021, relations between the junta and Minusma have been marred by numerous incidents: the expulsion of Guillaume Ngefa, director of the human rights division; the refusal since 11 October 2022 to authorise flights by Bundeswehr reconnaissance drones and numerous aircraft flights; the detention of 49 Ivorian soldiers mandated by the UN; administrative harassment over imports of goods for the mission, and so on.

Added to this list are the obstacles to the Minusma's investigations into human rights violations perpetrated by the Malian army and Wagner's mercenaries. The junta has done everything in its power to prevent the publication of the report on the massacre of nearly 500 civilians in the town of Moura, in which the army and its Russian auxiliaries are implicated.

Consequences for the population

Officially, the junta blames the Minusma for its inability to curb the jihadist violence. This is not a new complaint. Back in 2016, Mali asked the UN Security Council for a more robust mandate for Minusma. Minusma tried to respond to this request, but to no avail. Indeed, it has peace-related objectives and is not structured to carry out offensive actions. Its role is to protect civilians and stabilise the country politically by promoting the presence of the State throughout the country.

With a contingent of 13,000 soldiers and a presence in more than a dozen locations across Mali, Minusma, despite its obvious shortcomings, has proved useful. It has enabled civil servants and members of the government to move around the country by providing planes and helicopters. It has acted as a facilitator between the authorities and the armed groups that signed the 2015 Algiers peace agreement. Finally, despite its limitations, it has contributed to the protection of civilians and remains a source of information on human rights violations on all sides of the conflict.

Headlong rush

The French military presence with Barkhane was focused on security, preventing Malians from taking a political approach to the conflict. By getting rid of Barkhane, the junta had the opportunity to break with this policy too. It did not make that choice. Worse still, it is stepping up military operations that are costly in terms of civilian casualties, without succeeding in containing the Islamists' advances.

If the junta wants to put an end to the Minusma, it is so that it can be alone with Wagner and exclude all witnesses to the human consequences of its security headlong rush. Even if this means suffering a deterioration in logistical resources. Indeed, Prigozhin's group has nowhere near the level of the UN mission's fleet of planes and helicopters. The coup plotters are trying to make up for their failures on the ground by playing up their sovereignty, even if this is only a façade, given Wagner's growing influence in the affairs of state. The decision to put an end to the Minusma also corresponds to an accentuation of the junta's authoritarianism. The shrinking of democratic space bears witness to this, as does the latest government reshuffle. Two of the four ministers from the armed groups that signed the peace agreements were dismissed, as were those close to Prime Minister Choguel Maïga.

We can only fear for the civilian population, caught between the Malian army, accompanied by Wagner's mercenaries, and the jihadists of al-Qaeda and Daech.

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Race and Racism in America: Class Does Not Explain Everything

11 July 2023, by Dan La Botz

In the United States, the federal government, economists, sociologists, and epidemiologists, among others, include race in looking at the national census, voting patterns, unemployment and wealth, or public health. Everywhere we keep race data and draw conclusions from it, with the goal of ameliorating the situations of historically oppressed racial groups and making society more equal.

The U.S. Census taken every ten years has counted whites and Blacks since 1790, Asians since 1860, Native Americans since 1890, Hispanics since 1940, "other race" since 1950, and people of "two or more races" since 2000. The census determines geographical congressional representation and the distribution of federal funds. The census also provides information on age, sex, marital status, household composition, family characteristics, and household size. The U.S. Census Bureau also keeps monthly data on employment by race. Other surveys provide information related to health and educational attainment.

Thanks to these statistics, we know that in 2020 there were 47.2 million people who self-identified as Black, making up 14.2% of the country's population. We know that the median Black household in America has about $24,000 in savings, investments, home equity, and other wealth, while the median White household: around $189,000, a huge gap that has grown greater in recent decades. We know that Black unemployment is always greater than white unemployment. We know that Black people make up 12.1 percent of the population, but that Black men constitute 35 percent of the incarcerated.

A striking example

Social class explains much, but not everything. Consider this, for example. *The New York Times* of February 12, 2023 reported,

> New data from California shows that, for every 100,000 births, 173 of the babies born to the richest white mothers die before their first birthday. 350 babies born to the poorest white mothers die. 437 babies born to the richest Black mothers die. 653 babies born to the poorest Black mothers die.

Even the richest Black mothers, who have access to excellent health care, lose more of their babies than the poorest of white mothers. Some say bias in the health care system is a major contributor. Why? Joia Crear-Perry, founder and president of the National Birth Equity Collaboration says, "Race is not a factor for illness and death, but racism, bias, and discrimination definitely are."

If we think class is the only problem, then we would fund prenatal care for the poor, for example. This should be done but the racism of society would continue to cause Black women to lose their babies at a higher rate. There is also a general problem: on average, US infant mortality figures are the worst among rich countries.

Here is another example of the impact of racism on health. The strands of DNA called chromosomes have tails called leukocyte telomeres (LTL); the length of these is an indicator of general systemic aging, with shorter LTL being associated with several chronic diseases of aging and earlier mortality. Several studies of Black people, found that experiences of racism caused shorter LTLs suggesting that that racism results in a shorter life expectancy. As a study in the Journal of Preventive Medicine reports:

> Results suggest that multiple levels of racism, including interpersonal experiences of racial discrimination and the internalization of negative racial bias, operate jointly to accelerate biological aging among African-American men.

As Marxists and socialists we continue to look at capitalism and class to understand our society, but we must also use racial statistics to understand and fight against racism. We also know that some reactionaries can use these statistics to stigmatise certain racial groups, and it is our responsibility to rise to this challenge. We are, after all, scientific socialists.

9 July 2023

[Thanks to my wife Dr. Sherry Baron, an epidemiologist, for her help with this article.]

"During the current war, there is much less

space possible for resistance committees compared to before”

10 July 2023, by Interview

Can you remind us of how the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) and the Resistance Committees (RCs) emerged?

It must be said that the context and timing of the creation of the SPA and the RCs are different. Moreover, in terms of composition, the SPA was formed mainly as a federation of professional associations which, while not the expression of political parties, already had a developed political training and consciousness. The training criterion is also different: for the SPA, it is professional qualifications (various categories), therefore closer to the union form, and transversal (not localized). For the CR, it is location and attachment to the neighbourhood where you live that counts.

Little by little the resistance committees distanced themselves from the SPA?

It happened gradually. The first stage was during the army headquarters sit-in (which began on 6 April 2019, continuing after the fall of Omar al-Bashir on 11 April until its dissolution by the 3 June 2019 massacre). The SPA had two options: either stay closer to the base and its demands, or join the negotiations between the Military Council and the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC), and it was from there that the base, the RCs, began to distance themselves, to understand that they had to rely on their own forces and coordination – from here the idea of having an RC coordination, autonomous from the SPA, was born. An example of this distancing of the RCs from the SPA (with whom they had been coordinated since the beginning of the insurrection in December 2018): after the massacre of the sit-in on 3 June 2019, the RCs called for continued civil disobedience, but three days later, the FFC, supported by the SPA, wanted to put an end to it, arguing that there was no strength to continue, but the RCs consider that it was rather to regain their place at the negotiating table and they saw it as a betrayal.

So, the resistance committees are autonomous organizationally and financially?

Organizational autonomy is deeply rooted and defended as a principle from the beginning. Any issue is discussed first at the lowest level (different sections of a neighbourhood), then in a neighbourhood coordination and eventually at the higher level (federal state coordination). This makes some decisions take a long time, because of this desire to respect a shared discussion and not to reproduce a system where “political elites” make decisions quickly, without consulting the base.

As for financial autonomy: first, many activities do not require money but only the investment of time and effort by people. Then, practices of giving or sharing “what we have” are solicited for cases that require money or goods (food or other). Over time, there have also been in some contexts more regular forms of membership and neighbourhood membership fees of small amounts. In general, most RCs do not want to be too dependent on money from elsewhere: for example, they accept the offer of useful equipment for their actions (pens, colours and spray to draw on walls or banners; self-defence equipment – helmets, glasses, gloves – in demonstrations especially after the coup d’état; medicines for hospitals that treat those wounded in the demonstrations).

The resistance committees have had several functions depending on the political situation of the country?

In the first period (2019), most of the activities in support of people in the neighbourhoods were put in place. In the period of the pandemic, especially in the containment phase and until June 2020, the RCs were very active in coordination with the medical staff (prevention, vaccination, food aid to those locked down).

After the Juba agreements in October 2020 [a peace agreement with certain politico-military forces], they also resumed a role as critics of the government and "guardians" of revolutionary principles. After the coup d’état (October 2021), the increase in repression led to the resumption of forms of clandestinity and accentuation of initiatives to support martyrs or political prisoners.

During the current war, there is much less space possible for resistance committees compared to before, this includes humanitarian work, medical assistance in emergency rooms, documentation of violations and crimes (rape and so on), information on services (where to find water, electricity, bread), caring for the missing and burying the dead (including soldiers and militiamen). This is especially true in the capital, because in provincial towns such as Wad Medani in Gezira and others hosting the displaced, the RCs are responsible for providing shelter or food, or monitoring compliance with maximum rent prices.

Apart from the calls for demonstrations, can you give examples of the concrete activities of the resistance committees?

It is a long list, as varied as the various contexts of the resistance committees and the various temporalities. We could mention the following initiatives: There was *Hanabnihu* (“we will build it”) started in 2019, and in part already in 2018, mainly focused on environmental health, neighbourhood cleaning practices or tree planting; supporting

women who sell tea or food on the street, to improve their working environment and defend them from police raids; material support for flood victims after the autumn rains of 2019 and 2020; food harvesting (*takaful*) to distribute to poor families during Ramadan; material support and information, vaccination for the population during the first period of the Covid-19 pandemic, in collaboration with medical teams and the Ministry of Health in 2020.

In addition, there have been specific actions with market vendors to lower food prices (sometimes with boycott campaigns – for example the purchase red meat) and with landlords to lower rent prices; censuses of the inhabitants of the neighbourhoods (including "illegal" foreigners) with a view to distributing basic goods in times of crisis (especially bread and gas); the organization of queues at petrol stations and bakeries at the time of rationing of these goods (under the first Hamdok government); monitoring of judicial proceedings for the martyrs of the revolution and support for the families of the martyrs; peace campaigns in Darfur, the Nuba Mountains and the Blue Nile during persistent or new conflicts, including the Blue Nile in July 2022; campaigns in support of political prisoners, especially after the 2021 coup and the wave of arrests that followed; maintenance or decoration of public schools; initiatives to maintain the memory of the martyrs (making wall portraits, football matches and so on).

Do we know precisely where the resistance committees are located?

This is a question that is difficult to answer, firstly, because a complete inventory of RCs has not been carried out (attempts were underway), it is rather at the level of the federal states that the coordination identified them, indeed at the lower level. Secondly, because from the beginning of 2020, the government enacted an institutionalization of the RCs as "Change and Services Committees", which some RCs rejected (because they feared that it would be a kind of "domestication-depoliticization" as well as a dangerous tool of control for possible future repression). Thus, since then, the "mapping" of RCs has become more complicated. Finally, for security reasons, some RCs wanted to remain "clandestine," not to appear as such, for a longer period.

Nevertheless, by observing actual practices, we can suggest some trends, which indicate the districts of the capital or provincial cities where the formation of RCs was faster and more effective, and then influenced the emergence of other neighbouring RCs (thus their concentration).

Neighbourhoods that already had experience of revolt and repression (2013 uprising) were quicker and more active in organizing themselves as committees. This is the case of Shambat and Khartoum North. The same applies to neighbourhoods where there had been protests prior to the expropriation of land by the regime (e.g., Burri, Khartoum). Some neighbourhoods that were marked by their marginalization within the capital (often peripheral, inhabited by former displaced populations) were also present (for example Haj Yusif, Khartoum East). At the level of provincial cities, sites such as Atbara (a workers' town, eastern Sudan) and western Gezira (an agricultural region) also experienced early and denser formation of the RCs, as there was a historical presence of trade union formations and the Sudanese Communist Party.

As for rural areas, the situation is more complex. In general, we can say that in rural areas, the appearance of RCs is slower (some were only formed in 2021) and the latter often more in line with the idea of the service committee (with a less visible political dimension and very concrete objectives – access to water, services and so on).

However, some rural areas that had experienced the violence of armed conflict were active and early in the formation of RCs, such as Darfur or Maiurno (Sennar). It can be added that the difficulty of having a homogeneous and definitive vision of the presence of RCs on Sudan and an exact and exhaustive mapping, are linked to the very "nature" of these formations which are really created "from below" and are not "offshoots" of a centralized organization.

What is the role of women?

The role of women was fundamental in the revolutionary movement, but the contradictions of a patriarchal society were present in the life of the RCs as well. Moreover, "women" are not a single subject, there are differences between them, according to places, social class, level of education, generation. In general, it can be said that there were three types of situations: in some cases, women participated in RCs equally with men without major problems, in other cases, they had to fight for their space within the RCs, and finally, there are RCs where there were no women – or even the women themselves did not want to be there.

Certain modes of operation have also implicitly hindered real participation – such as organizing meetings in the evening or at night, when women find it more difficult to go out according to local culture and practices.

When did resistance committees start to coordinate?

The need for more effective coordination was gradually being felt. At first, still in 2019, it was more informal. At the beginning of 2020, this also became essential because the "counter-revolution" began to appear in the streets (movements animated by the old regime begin to appear). The pandemic crisis (early 2020) was the moment when the RCs begin an in-depth reflection aimed at creating the coordination (*Tansikiyat* of the various RCs. This became necessary for political mobilization but also to avoid the boycott of counter-revolutionary forces. The objective is to keep the common principles of the revolution and to face the various actions, even if localized, in a coherent and shared way.

The resistance committees have adopted a charter of people's power. How was it developed?

To draw up the charters, the RCs created a project committee after the coup, when the question of revolutionary legitimacy was brought to the forefront, and each RC appointed its representative to participate in this drawing up. The

latter took a long time, eight to nine months, because the drafts developed went through a process of return and validation with the RCs, which was also long, and then there was the pooling between coordination of different federal states.

Although the process of producing the document was carried out through horizontal and democratic methods of debate, it was difficult to create full consensus. For example, some RCs did not sign the final document, mainly because there was disagreement on the part around the economic project. The Sudanese Communist Party tried to push for a position totally contrary to dependence on the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and international capitalism, which was not accepted by many of the rank-and-file RCs. It is true that the economic part of the draft charters did not carry the same vision of "radical" change as in other areas (freedoms, peace, women's rights, democratic participation and so on). It is a very complex debate, and the arrival of the war did not make it possible to end it.

What is the position of the resistance committees in relation to the war and on the question of self-defence?

The position of the RCs remains strictly pacifist so far: a communiqué of the coordination of the RCs of Khartoum of 22 June 2023 again affirms this position, and the refusal to position itself for action alongside either of the two armed parties, which would endanger the population. The self-defence for which the RCs call rather concerns behaviours that protect citizens from violence, allowing safe evacuation or permanence in homes while avoiding the risks and dangers related to the ongoing conflict.

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Women workers transform Tamil Nadu factories in fight against gender-based violence

9 July 2023, by Tansy E Hoskins

It is a far cry from the days when Nadiya, a woman from a Dalit colony, would pray to God for protection every time she entered the factory. The days when all the women knew they were targets for the men but were trapped between the abuse and the need to provide for their families.

Across the garment industry women work in factories owned and managed by men. Add to this a social context which considers women to be inferior, and then multiply it by caste discrimination, race, age, poverty, and migrant status and you get the gender-based violence that sees men exploit the power they have over women in workplaces.

Today, however, Nadiya looks her manager directly in the eye when she stands up for herself and the thousands of women she works with. It is the kind of change she says was impossible to imagine until it was done.

In her bag is a card printed with the initials TTCU and a flag emblem. This card denotes Nadiya's membership of the Tamil Nadu Textile and Common Labour Union (TTCU) – a union led by Dalit women in a sexist, caste-ridden society where even the other trade union leaders are typically upper-caste men.

So how was a little-known Dalit women-led trade union able to transform the toxic workplace culture of a factory owned by Eastman Exports, India's fourth biggest garment exporter? It starts with a crime so terrible that a 21-year-old-woman became a global emblem of centuries of injustice.

Jeyasre Kathiravel was the first person in her village to go to college. She got a job at Natchi Apparel, intending to leave as soon as she found other employment. But on the 1 January 2021, Jeyasre did not return home from work. After an extensive search by her family and community that lasted four days, she was discovered dead in a patch of wasteland, having been raped and murdered. Her supervisor at Natchi Apparel confessed and is awaiting trial.

Natchi Apparel, now known as India Dyeing, is the same factory Nadiya works in, and Jeyasre was her colleague and fellow union member. In the aftermath of Jeyasre's death dozens more women came forward with their own stories of abuse at Natchi Apparel and it emerged that global brand H&M had been a customer of the factory for roughly ten years. As news of the murder spread, the TTCU launched the Justice For Jeyasre campaign which swiftly became a global cause. Conditions at Natchi Apparel were found to be so bad that US Customs banned Eastman Exports, which owns Natchi Apparel from importing goods into the US – a ban that has now been lifted.

Amidst the outpouring of anger at Jeyasre's death, the TTCU worked with garment worker rights group the Asia Floor Wage Alliance (AFWA) to construct and implement a ground-breaking agreement called the Dindigul Agreement to End Gender-Based Violence and Harassment – named after the Dindigul region of Tamil Nadu.

The Dindigul Agreement consists of two interlocking contracts, both of which are legally binding – the first is between the TTCU and Eastman Exports. These two parties have contracted to end gender-based violence and harassment at all Eastman facilities in the Dindigul region – factories, dormitories, spinning mills, printing workshops, and training centres.

The second is a contract between the TTCU, AFWA, and US based group Global Labor Justice – International Labor Rights Forum (GLJ–ILRF) on the one side, and H&M, Gap Inc. and PVH Corporation (which owns Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger) on the other. This agreement locks H&M, GAP and PVH into supporting and enforcing the TTCU-Eastman agreement, and imposing business consequences onto Eastman if they fail to comply.

With its intersectional focus on ending gender and caste based violence, the Dindigul Agreement is a first not just for India or Asia, but for the entire garment industry. The only other legally binding agreement that exists is the International Accord for Health and Safety in the Textile & Garment Industry which has its roots in the Rana Plaza factory collapse. There is also the Lesotho Agreement in Southern Africa.

This week, labour stakeholders have published impact data from the first year of the Dindigul Agreement. The report documents women workers saying they are no longer afraid but instead actually want to work for Eastman Exports – the terror that existed at the time of Jeyasre's death has gone.

The report indicates two vital factors that are responsible for this huge change. Firstly, the Dindigul Agreement is not a voluntary scheme like the hundreds of worse-than-useless 'sustainability certification' schemes that exist in the textile industry. Secondly, this is a genuinely worker-led system of change with a women-led trade union at its centre. Women now have a strong collective voice because the agreement centres the right to join a union.

The data shows that over the past year workers across Eastman's facilities raised 185 grievances – 170 were reported by women. Remarkably, 182 of these grievances were resolved – 90% of them within a single week.

Most of the grievances concerned verbal abuse, and the resolutions have included warnings, apologies, and in one case a repeat offender manager was fired. Another manager was fired for taking photos of women without their permission. This is a key Dindigul tactic – stopping gender-based violence and harassment right at the beginning before it escalates. This means stamping out behaviours like verbal abuse or taking photos without consent before the abuse becomes physical.

Within this trade union-built framework, the shop floor monitor mechanisms for reporting and remediating grievances are survivor centred and led by women like Nadiya. This might seem obvious but many garment industry 'safety schemes' are organised so that the people addressing grievances are the same managers who carry out the abuse. Similarly, negative repercussions against people who report abuse is outlawed and shop floor monitors have extra protections against retaliation. This system of eyes and ears across the factory has created a network of 58 trusted shop floor monitors and union representatives.

Over the past year an intense programme of anti-violence training has also taken place, not just of workers but of managers, drivers and security guards. The people doing the training have overwhelmingly been Dalit women. The space created by the Dindigul Agreement is now being used to raise other important issues like health and safety, minimum wage violations, and canteen food. The factory crèche has dramatically improved and workers are taking advantage of the educational scholarships set up in Jeyasre's memory.

The right to a violence-free workplace should be enough of an incentive for more brands to step up and support the expansion of the Dindigul Agreement. Where that is not enough, there is also a business case: AFWA found that when workers do not fear for their lives, employee retention rises by 67% and higher union involvement in industrial planning results in 16% greater factory efficiency.

Despite being a multi-trillion-dollar industry, the production of clothing and fashion is still routinely dismissed as 'women's work.' Add to this the racism that sees the people of the Global South as there to be exploited, and you have the further devaluing of garment workers and the undermining of calls for change. And yet the women of the TTCU are actively changing the world they live and work in.

History teaches that industrial struggle is one area where women can change not only their conditions at work, but their position in society. One of the most profound aspects of the Dindigul Agreement is reports of a newfound capacity of the Dalit women it represents to challenge discrimination not just at work but in homes and communities. In this way, sexism, casteism, and gender-based violence are being challenged across society, showing the need for trade unions as a means to fight discrimination and create social change.

Source: Social Policy Worldwide.

Where do things stand in Iran?

8 July 2023, by Behrouz Farahany

Daily street demonstrations took place all over the country from September to January. This was not a sudden event that came out of nowhere. The experiences of the 2017 and 2019 uprisings were there, and were used by the young people involved in this struggle.

The feminine character of this uprising sets it apart from all the others. The active presence of women is undeniable. Their courage in the face of the forces of repression dazzled the whole world, and provoked an outpouring of solidarity from the four corners of the planet. At the same time, the presence of women without veils in public spaces in the cities gave the general protest movement an unprecedented dimension of civil disobedience.

The participation of students is reminiscent of their role in the uprisings of 2017 and 2019. But the scale of the massive student involvement far exceeded their activism in previous movements. The geographical dispersion of the universities meant that student participation broadened the scope of the protests. At the same time, it gave considerable impetus to the movement's demands, thanks to the heroic modern history of the student world, which has been the vanguard of movements for democracy and social progress for the last 70 years.

All social classes, with the exception of the new capitalist-religious bourgeoisie, have been present in this movement, with a predominance of the lower middle classes, as well as young workers in precarious employment, the unemployed, small shopkeepers, etc. Strikes have taken place in all sectors of society. Strikes took place in shops and shopping centres, especially in Kurdistan, in the northern province of Guilan, in Tehran and in some other large cities.

Solidarity strikes took place, including in the Tehran Bazaar, the historic base of the Islamic regime. This too is new, and is a distinctive feature of the Women, Life and Liberty movement.

Social groups such as doctors and lawyers, who were not involved in the protests of 2017 and 2019, were present, in their own way, in this movement. This unprecedented fact shows that the "all together" character of the uprising was much broader than in the past.

The whole country was in turmoil: people in every province, from north to south and east to west, big and small towns, the centre of the country and outlying regions.

National minorities such as the Kurds, Azeris, Lors and Baluchis were not only present, but in solidarity with all the demonstrators, thwarting their opponents' accusations of "separatism". Women, Kurds and students were the three main pillars of the movement.

The solidarity of the Iranian diaspora with the current uprising is particularly noteworthy. The rally in Berlin last December, where over a hundred thousand Iranians came from all over Europe, was unprecedented in the history of the Iranian diaspora.

But there was one big absence from this movement: the political strike by workers as a class, not as citizens taking part in street protests. Iran is a country dominated by capitalist relations of production. Urban wage earners, in all their diversity, make up the majority of the population. Nothing radical or profound will happen in Iran without the participation of the working class.

The success of urban and student demonstrations requires that they be accompanied by labour strikes, as shown by the anti-monarchic revolution of 1978-1979. Unfortunately, this latest confrontation between the Iranian people and the current regime failed to make up for this shortcoming.

The turning point at the beginning of 2023

It was marked by the end of the major demonstrations and the publication, on 15 February, of a charter by 20 unions and associations ("The Statement of Minimum Demands of Independent Iranian Unions and Civil Society Organizations"). This set out the minimum demands of the social movement, combining social-economic, political and social justice demands, which were unachievable within the framework of the Islamic Republic,

This charter was a turning point. It testifies to the maturity of the progressive leaders of the social movements in Iran. It could provide a good basis for the next political and social "storm".

Since the regime succeeded in putting an end to the large-scale daily demonstrations, strikes and industrial action by workers have been on the increase. Employees, pensioners and teachers have come up with their own demands.

There is a gap between movements with a political objective and those that are fundamentally protest movements. As long as this gap exists, the success of an uprising against the ayatollahs' regime will be compromised.And it is on this subject that the lively discussions currently taking place between activists in Iranian social movements are focused.Unless this major problem is resolved, the chances of success for the next popular uprising will be very slim.

Is Wagner facing a new challenge in Africa?

7 July 2023, by Paul Martial

Wagner is present in different ways in the countries of the continent. These range from the simple establishment of a branch of one of the group's companies, as in Douala in Cameroon, to the massive infiltration of the state apparatus seen in the Central African Republic.

African presence

Wagner's presence in Africa fulfils several functions: a military presence that is above all designed to provide security for the African powers that be; lucrative activities focused primarily on mining; propaganda campaigns against Western countries; and a geopolitical reinforcement of Russia that proved very useful during its aggression against Ukraine.

In Libya, Wagner's troops are working alongside General Haftar to help control the oilfields in Cyrenaica. In Sudan, they are exploiting gold mines through the companies M Finance, M Invest and Meroe Gold with the complicity of Hemidti, head of the Rapid Support Forces at war with his former ally General Burhan.

In Mali, Colonel Assimi Goïta, by demanding the departure of the UN mission Minusma, is only reinforcing his dependence on Wagner. All the more so as the junta is struggling to pay him the monthly sum of ten million dollars. This financial fragility is proving to be a godsend that Yevgeny Prigozhin's company is seizing on to extend its political and economic power over the country. The consequences were disastrous for the population, with violence on the increase. The massacre of nearly 500 people in the town of Moura, perpetrated by the Malian army and Russian mercenaries, is a terrible illustration of this.

Violence and predation

These human rights violations have been amplified in the Central African Republic. The recent report by Sentry, an NGO which fights against predation in war-torn countries, reveals systemic violence against the population by the Prigojine troops accompanying the Central African armed forces. Under the pretext of fighting the rebels, these mercenaries are seizing most of the country's wealth, in exchange for providing protection for Central African President Faustin-Archange Touadéra. Villages are wiped off the map so that the various companies linked to the Wagner group can exploit the diamond and gold mines and cut precious woods. Their stranglehold on the country is such that they now also control customs and Bangui airport, enabling them to recover a large proportion of the taxes on imported goods.

Ensuring continuity

During Prigozhin's attempted putsch, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov repeatedly reassured his African counterparts that nothing would change. However, the future remains uncertain and several options are possible.

The Kremlin is in a position to integrate Wagner and its related companies into the state, even if it means arresting some of their leaders, as appears to be the case in Syria. Then the Russian authorities will no longer be able to hide behind their avatar and absolve themselves of the crimes they have committed. Another possibility would be to set up another private military company like the Patriot mercenary group linked to Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu.

Finally, some or all of Wagner's forces on the ground could refuse to come under the Kremlin's authority, maintaining their loyalty to Prigozhin or continuing their activities on their own account. This would fragment Wagner's troops. The breakdown of the states in Sudan and the Central African Republic could favour this hypothesis, leading to an exacerbation of violence against the population.

Prigozhin's failed putsch has tarnished the image of authority, strength and virility conveyed by Putin's propaganda, which seemed to appeal to some in Africa, who saw him as a model for their country. Instead of a model, what they have in front of them is an isolated dictatorship, betrayals, a putsch, murders, brigands vying for power - in short, an air of déjà vu on the continent.

6 July 2023

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

In Jenin, Israel is unveiling the next phase of apartheid

6 July 2023, by Amjad Iraqi

Putting aside the glaring fact that the army is one of the principal institutions providing settlers with the resources, protection, and confidence to carry out such wanton violence, there is another reason why this public relations maneuver

On June 19, just days before the pogroms, an Israeli Apache helicopter fired missiles into the West Bank city of Jenin during a fierce battle between raiding army units and Palestinian fighters, purportedly to "provide cover" for evacuating wounded soldiers; five Palestinians including a 15-year-old boy were killed, and 90 were injured. Two days later, an Israeli drone fired at a Palestinian

militant cell near Jenin, said to target gunmen responsible for several attacks including at a checkpoint. Both operations were quickly overshadowed in the ensuing days by the Eli shooting and the settler violence that followed.

Far from being one-off incidents, the aerial assaults reveal a dangerous phase in the evolution of Israel's occupation. The air strikes are reportedly the first in the West Bank in two decades, awakening the nightmares of many Palestinians who ran for cover or suffered wounds from helicopter attacks during the Second Intifada. In that time, though, aerial warfare became the modus operandi in the Gaza Strip, accelerated by Israel's withdrawal of its settlements in 2005 and the total blockade of the territory following Hamas' takeover.

This reconfiguration of military rule has intentionally produced a physical and psychological separation between the West Bank and Gaza, abetted by the fratricidal rivalry between Fatah and Hamas. As that distance normalized, the two territories became regarded as disconnected and incomparable. Even well-meaning advocates — in their heavy focus on settlements and annexation — often fell into the trap of forgetting Gaza outside the scope of wartime, deeming it an anomaly in the context of the "one-state reality." But as many activists, scholars, and experts have warned, the structures used to confine and suppress Gaza are not a deviation from Israel's methodology, but a natural continuation of it. And that was made clear over the skies of Jenin last week.

Like Gaza, Jenin has long been a center of Palestinian social life and political resistance — and as such, a target of vicious repression. For over a year, the Israeli army has carried out a deadly and protracted operation in the city, repeatedly closing off the region while ground troops break into civilian homes and destroy public infrastructure on a near-weekly basis. The Palestinian armed groups, led by young men who have only known a life of despair and death, have put up a relentless fight, and have recently shown that they can make it even more difficult for Israeli troops to invade — a fact that forced the army to desperately turn to air power last week. The bombardment of a populated urban area, together with the city's collective punishment, is further justified by the demonization of Jenin as a "cesspool of terrorism" requiring constant intervention — in essence, the same doctrine of "mowing the lawn" that is applied in the blockaded strip a few kilometers away.

As such, Gaza is hardly an exception to the rule of Israeli apartheid. Rather, it is the ultimate bantustan — the model for controlling and weakening a native population in a besieged space, using modern weapons and technology, with local rulers to handle their basic needs, at minimal cost to the settler society surrounding them. West Bank centers like Jenin and Nablus, already subjected to various forms of closure and invasion, are now catching a glimpse of what is yet to come. For many people there, the main experience of Israelis may no longer be of raiding troops or marauding settlers, but of soaring jets and humming drones. If the expulsion of Palestinians won't be possible, Gazafication will be their future.

That is why it is a morbid joke to hear IDF Chief of Staff Herzl Halevi, days after the settler pogroms, preaching at an army commencement ceremony: "An officer who sees an Israeli citizen, intending to throw a Molotov cocktail at a Palestinian house and stands idly by, cannot be an officer." The army may feign distress over settlers committing "nationalist terrorism," but it openly commands its soldiers to do the same, so long as it is done in uniform. Either way, despite Halevi's claim, it is clear that an Israeli who oversees brutal violence in Gaza can easily find a path to becoming a general-turned-politician. An Israeli inciting the same violence in the West Bank, meanwhile, can now aspire to become minister of national security.

30 June 2023

Source: +972 Magazine.

Our country is in mourning and angry

5 July 2023, by Collective

The tensions between the public and the police have a long history, marked by injustice, prejudice, violence, discrimination, sexism and a systemic racism that permeates the whole of society and has still not been eradicated.

The residents of the neighbourhoods concerned, and women in particular, often have to make up the shortfall in public services on their own. It is the decline in these services - schools, social and cultural facilities, sports facilities, the post office, administrative services, etc. - and the reduction in state support for voluntary organizations, which have largely contributed to the marginalization of these neighbourhoods and of entire regions far beyond, particularly in the French overseas territories.

The abandonment of these neighbourhoods is exacerbated by the economic context of impoverishment, inflation, rising rents and energy prices, and the reform of unemployment insurance. Social inequalities particularly affect children and single mothers. This is borne out by the uprisings that have shaken working-class neighbourhoods in recent days in reaction to the tragedy in Nanterre.

In addition to decades of excesses in policing policies, security laws (the Global Security Act, the Separatism Act, etc.) and emergency measures, in recent days we have witnessed

pressure from the government to introduce expeditious justice. Systematic preventive detention with increasingly harsh sentences is unacceptable!

The urgent need is not for repression, which will only strengthen the extreme right and set back rights and freedoms once again.

Lasting peace is only possible if the government takes the necessary measures to respond to the urgency of the situation and the demands of the people concerned.

The UN has repeatedly criticized security policies and the institutional problems of racism in France, particularly in the police force.

Discrimination is a toxic poison that undermines the very idea of equality and sows despair.

The far right uses it to divide society even further. We condemn the call for civil war against working-class neighbourhoods and the description of people from these neighbourhoods as "harmful" by police unions.

We condemn the setting up of a fund in support of the policeman who killed Nahel on the initiative of a member of the far right and the lack of any action by the government, thus adding fuel to the fire.

Everything needs to be rethought and built upon. We need to start from new foundations, create broad forums for discussion and learn from the mistakes of decades of public policy, while respecting the histories, backgrounds, cultures and singularities that fuel our collective aspiration for equality. It is high time we listened to and took into account the demands of the people living in working-class neighbourhoods, especially young people!

The situation requires the government to shoulder its responsibilities and come up with immediate solutions to end the confrontation:

– repeal of the 2017 law relaxing the rules on the use of firearms by law enforcement officers;

– an in-depth reform of the police, their intervention techniques and their weapons;

– replacing the IGPN (Inspection générale de la Police nationale) with a body that is independent of the police hierarchy and the government;

– the creation of a department dedicated to discrimination against young people within the administrative authority chaired by the Human Rights Defender, and the strengthening of resources to combat racism, including within the police force.

However, nothing can be done without a different distribution of wealth, without combating social inequalities. Nothing can be done without the fight against poverty and insecurity, exacerbated by climate change and rising rents and charges, and without strengthening public services and popular education. These are the issues that the government should be tackling, instead of pursuing regressive public policies that provide fertile ground for the far right.

Our trade unions, associations, collectives, committees and political parties are mobilizing to safeguard public and individual freedoms.

For the time being, we are calling for people to join all the rallies and marches organized around these demands, throughout the country from Wednesday 5 July, following the example of the march organized by the Comité Vérité et Justice pour Adama on 8 July, in Beaumont-sur-Oise, and the march organized by the Coordination Nationale contre les violences policières on 15 July.

We are calling for citizens' marches on Saturday 8 July throughout France and the overseas territories.

We will be working together on the follow-up to these marches.

5 July 2023

Signatories

Trade unions:

CGT,
CNT-Solidarité Ouvrière,
Fédération Syndicale Étudiante (FSE),
FSU,
Solidaires Étudiant-e-s,
Syndicat des Avocats de France,
UNEF le syndicat étudiant
Union Syndicale Solidaires,
Union Étudiante,

Associations:

350.org,
Adelphi'Cité,
Amnesty International France,
Alternatiba,
Alternatiba Paris,
Les Amis de la Terre France,
ANV-COP21,
ATTAC France,
Bagagérue,
Conscience,
Coudes à Coudes,
DAL Droit au Logement,
La Fabrique Décoloniale,
FASTI (Fédération des Associations de Solidarité avec Tou-te-s les Immigrés-e-s),
Fédération Nationale de la Libre Pensée,
Fédération nationale des maisons des potes,
Femmes Egalité,
Fondation Copernic,
Gisti (Groupe d'information et de soutien des immigré·es),
Greenpeace France,
Jeune Garde Antifasciste,
LDH (Ligue des droits de l'Homme),
Memorial 98,
Observatoire nationale de l'extrême-droite,
Organisation de Solidarité Trans (OST),
Planning familial,
Réseau d'Actions contre l'Antisémitisme et tous les racismes-RAAR,
REVES Jeunes,
SOS Racisme,

Collectives:

Alliances et Convergences,
Assemblée des Gilets Jaunes de Lyon & Environs,
Colère Légitime,
Collectif civgTENON,
Collectif des Écoles de Marseille (le CeM),
Collectif national pour les Droits des Femmes,
Collectif Nouvelle Vague,
Collectif Vérité et Justice pour Safyatou, Salif et Ilan,
Collective des mères isolées,

Comité des Soulèvements de la Terre Sud-Essonne,
Comité Local de Soutien aux Soulèvements de la Terre Aude,
Comité Soulèvement Bas-Vivarais,
Comité les Soulèvements de la Terre Lyon et environs,
Comité local de soutien aux Soulèvements de la Terre Villefranche,
Comité local de soutien aux Soulèvements de la Terre Romans-sur-Isère,
Comité nîmois de soutien aux Soulèvements de la Terre,
Comité de soutien à Moussé Blé,
Comité justice et vérité pour Mahamadou,
Comité Les Lichens Ardéchois,
Comité Vérité et Justice pour Adama,
Coordination des comités pour la défense des quartiers populaires,
Démocra'psy,
Dernière Rénovation,
En Gare,
Justice pour Othmane,
La Révolution est en marche,
Lla Terre se soulève en Corrèze,
Le Peuple Uni,
Les Soulèvements de la Terre - comité Île-de-France,
Les Soulèvements de l'Entre2Mers (33),
Lyon en lutte,
Lyon Insurrection,
Nîmes Révoltée,
Réseau GBM,
Rejoignons-nous,
Collectif du 5 novembre - Noailles en colère (Marseille),
Syndicat des quartiers populaires de Marseille,
Collectif Justice pour Claude Jean-Pierre,
Youth for Climate IDF,

Political organizations:

ENSEMBLE! – Mouvement pour une Alternative de Gauche, Écologiste et Solidaire,
Europe Ecologie Les Verts (EELV)
La France insoumise (LFI),
Front Uni des Immigrations et des quartiers populaires (FUIQP),
Gauche Ecosocialiste (GES),
Génération.s (G.s),
Nouveau parti anticapitaliste (NPA),
Parti Communiste des Ouvriers de France (PCOF),
Parti de Gauche (PG),
Pour une Écologie Populaire et Sociale (PEPS),
Parti Ouvrier Indépendant (POI)
Réseau Bastille,
Révolution Écologique pour le Vivant (REV),
Union communiste libertaire (UCL),

*The appeal can be consulted for example on the website of **Solidaires**.*

Dump the Tories but organise for an anti-capitalist alternative

4 July 2023, by Dave Kellaway

All the attacks on migrants and Tory culture wars cannot wipe out the everyday reality for the vast majority of us – wage cuts, soaring energy bills, a crisis ridden NHS, cash-strapped schools and council spending choked off. While the planet burns or floods and our rivers are polluted by privatised water companies Sunak increasingly panders to the climate change deniers in his party. Faced with the strike wave and a rising tide of environmental protests he passes repressive laws that aim to demonise activists and break the will to struggle.

His MPs know their days are numbered and are fighting like rats in a sinking ship. Many do not even bother to support their leader by attending Prime Minister's Question Time. Some are looking to secure a better pay day; others are conspiring to win control of the party after a Sunak defeat.

The myth of Brexit giving people back control or ushering in an era of plenty based on free trade deals with the US will not con the electorate for a second time. Recent polls show there is a comfortable majority for turning back from Brexit and restoring a closer relationship with the single market.

The Covid public inquiry is up and running and exposing how the Tories cavalier and corrupt policies led to thousands of unnecessary deaths. It also exposes how the Labour leadership's timid opposition to Johnson, concentrating on his incompetence rather than denouncing his contempt for the health of the people, meant it missed an opportunity to put this government into a bigger crisis much earlier. For Sunak there is no respite since the inquiry will continue right into the election year.

All the economic projections suggest the same – there will be little room for giveaways before the next election. People will be coming off fixed rate mortgages to take on much higher rates costing thousands more each year all the way through to the next election.

So the Tory crisis is the main reason for Labour's huge lead in the polls rather than any enthusiasm for Labour policies or campaigns. Even the moderate alternatives proposed by Labour on energy or housing seem an alternative to the catastrophe we are currently living through under the Tories. The only question is the scale of the Tory defeat.

Until recently some pollsters suggested Labour would not have an absolute majority but now it seems they are more likely to win enough to govern on their own. There is always a risk that Starmer's hyper cautious approach may weaken to some degree the perception that it is a real alternative government.

The more it moves to the centre, the more other parties in that area could pick up votes that could go to Labour. Certainly Labour Party activists on the

left are right to argue that a more radical manifesto will enthuse more voters and help achieve a clear majority.

What change will Starmer's Labour make?

Millions of workers will vote Labour in order to end a regime that is making their lives and the environment worse. Labour does have some policies such as rights at work, cutting the cost of land for housing, the green energy plan or investment in the NHS that we support as first steps to exit the multiple crises.

Certainly radical change requires a much bigger investment. For example the recently postponed £28 billion a year for the green energy plan is already dwarfed by plans in countries like France or Germany. It requires wealth taxes, taking back key utilities and industries into common ownership and a challenge to capitalist power. Starmer's relentless removal of Corbyn's progressive policies aims to reassure the bosses that their power will not be touched.

Purging the party of any pro-Corbyn candidates and of sitting left MPs where possible reinforces these signals. A popular Labour mayor like Jamie Driscoll is prevented from even getting on the short list for the regional mayoralty in the North East because he was part of a discussion about culture with Ken Loach. If you talk to anybody defined by Labour as antisemitic then you are presumably contaminated. Local parties are prevented from discussing any aspect of these purges under threat of being closed down.

Such Stalinist, anti-democratic functioning does not bode well for the way a Labour government might operate. Activists are repelled from working for Labour and even voters do not find it attractive. There is no pretence maintained that Labour conference or members have any say over policy or candidates. A spokesperson for Labour was quoted recently as saying the manifesto is decided by Starmer and his leadership team.

Worse still not a week goes by that shadow chancellor, Rachel Reeves, does not water down even these timid policies – first the green energy plan has been delayed for two years and now universal child care appears to a lot less universal. A tax on the digital corporations has been dropped or rather redefined as not a pledge in the first place.

An earlier promise about free school meals for all primary school pupils has been deemed fiscally risky despite the open support of Sadiq Khan, Labour mayor of London. Rent controls have also been ruled out despite Sadiq supporting the measure. At this rate the mayor will have to watch it, he might provoke Starmer in deselecting him for the upcoming election.

Even the Liberal party is outflanking Labour to its left by proposing government funds to soften the effect of steep mortgage rises. Labour has ruled out such government support. Continually changing position allows the Tories to paint Starmer as someone you cannot rely on; one moment he supports Corbynism and later he opposes everything about it.

The election manifesto could be even more moderate. Starmer's team think this is the way to guarantee victory and win back those Brexit-voting Labour traditionalists in the so called Red Wall constituencies. This strategy grossly oversimplifies what happened in those areas in the last election and will also lead to losses of progressive voters, particularly younger ones, to the Liberal Democrats or Greens. Decreeing the Brexit debate as over despite clear evidence of its negative consequences means Labour will fail to pick up support from the growing numbers who know Brexit has been a disaster.

What is astonishing about Labour's caution is that the news agenda is full of evidence that Corbyn's policies of taking the utilities into common ownership makes sense. Thames Water is on the brink of collapse after ramping up its debt while dishing out billions to shareholders – including Saudi sovereign funds. People know the energy companies have been ripping them off big time. Some rail companies have been de-privatised already. You would have thought a big campaign by Labour denouncing privatised utilities and explaining the advantages of common ownership would be a no-brainer. Instead the leadership mainly publicises it endless wooing of big business at specially arranged events.

Labour is being careful not to align itself with progressive opposition to the Tory offensive against migrants, environmental protestors or supporters of trans rights. It refuses to take sides in the culture wars. Rather than unambiguously supporting the right to asylum it criticises the government for incompetence and not sending people back quickly enough. At least it opposes sending migrants to Rwanda but mainly on the grounds of costs and efficiency. It does not campaign for safe and accessible routes for asylum seekers. Ukrainian refugees, thankfully, are not on the boats precisely because there is a safe and legal route.

Is there a difference between a Labour or Tory government?

Apart from the marginal, but significant, differences in policies, organising under a Labour government is less constrained. People will feel more confident about change and if – as is likely – Labour keeps change within very strict limits then historic illusions in Labour can be weakened.

Trade unions have been more active this year and are mostly affiliated to the Labour Party. They could be a base for winning more radical policies. Sticking to fiscal rules aimed at reassuring the capitalist establishment could well lead to a conflict particularly with public sector workers defending wages and public services. Traditional loyalty shown by union leaders to 'their government' may be weaker this time. Leaders like Sharon Graham has already indicated she

wants her union to be more independent from Labour and it is not clear that some tinkering with the repressive Tory labour laws will be enough to buy them off.

Whatever happens with the election, the most important priority is to deepen and extend the self-organisation we have seen in the strike wave and campaigns. We support all initiatives to bring together activists from across the unions who have been involved in these struggles. We should not hold back and wait for Labour. The Labour leadership refuses to support strikers and has abstained on the new repressive laws going through parliament. Real anti-capitalist change will only come through the left, whether inside or outside the Labour Party, working together to patiently build a culture and network that can draw in mass support and lay the basis for a socialist alternative.

30 June 2023

*Source Anti*Capitalist Resistance.*

Power in the hands of mafiosi businessmen

3 July 2023, by Paul Martial

In the absence of a comprehensive agreement, the Libyan elections due to be held on 24 December 2021 were postponed indefinitely. Since then, meetings between the country's two authorities - Abdelhamid Dabaiba's internationally recognized authority in Tripoli, backed by Turkey, and the authority in the east, led by Marshal Haftar and aided and abetted by Wagner's Russian mercenaries - have continued unabated.

New attempt

After the failure to hold elections in 2021, the UN's special envoy, Abdoulaye Bathily of Senegal, decided to relaunch the process by convening a high-level panel comprising segments of Libyan society, such as political and NGO leaders, tribal chiefs, women and young people, to map out a path leading to free and transparent elections. A 6+6 committee was immediately set up, bringing together, on the one hand, the parliament close to Haftar and, on the other, the Libyan State Council, which is dependent on the government in Tripoli. The aim is to regain control of the elections and do everything possible to prevent them from taking place.

This objective is now being achieved. Although the elections have been announced for this year, the disagreements between the two parties over the eligibility criteria for the presidential election and the formation of a unitive transitional government persist. These are the same disagreements that torpedoed the 2021 election project.

A Mafia agreement

With the failure of Haftar's offensive on Tripoli in 2019, a new page has been turned. Both sides realised that they would not have the upper hand militarily. A modus vivendi has been established, with each side making a profit in its own territory from its legal and illegal businesses, particularly human trafficking. Haftar has decided not to be outdone. In addition to the profits that the militias can make from trafficking in migrants, this sordid activity provides them with an interlocutor with the European Union.

An agreement has been reached between the two camps to appoint Farhat Omar Bengdara as the new chairman of Libya's national oil company. It is up to him to water each camp fairly and, above all, generously; returning to pre-2017 practices.

The suffering population

Although the USA and the European Union constantly proclaim their desire to see the elections held quickly, they may well be satisfied with this situation. Indeed, the various militias of the two authorities are policing the borders to prevent migrants from trying to reach the old continent, and the oil can now flow freely. As for Russia, it is maintaining its military presence in the country (although the crisis with Wagner could reshuffle the cards) and Turkey is taking advantage of the situation to explore for oil in Libyan waters.

Libya has fallen under the control of mafia clans who, with their accompanying militias, are plundering the country's wealth, while state social structures such as health, education and culture are in disarray. The popular demonstrations of 2022 demanding elections and denouncing the corruption of the leaders were ferociously repressed by both the Tripoli and Haftar powers.

29 June 2023

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

A new purple tide of anger sweeps Switzerland

2 July 2023, by Aude Spang, Françoise Nyffeler

Once again this year, hundreds of thousands of people in all the major cities shouted out their demands for a world of solidarity, for the abolition of patriarchy, capitalism and rape culture.

Collective framework and trade union support

This national feminist strike was prepared in mixed groups chosen from the cantons and working horizontally. We organised ourselves from the bottom up, giving room to anyone who respected collective decisions, while seeking to empower each other. We work and think together. The feminist strike collectives are training grounds that have helped us all evolve in our practices and our demands for democratic functioning. All the major decisions and demands were discussed at local level, then at regional level, and finalised by votes at national meetings. So 14 June is the culmination of a process that seeks to avoid domination and is based on democratic, inclusive and collective operations.

We worked with the unions who called the strike and, together with the workers, drew up dozens of lists of grievances and demands addressed to the employers. On 14 June, walkouts took place mainly in female-dominated occupations in the public sector, but also in the private sector, such as watchmaking and home economics.

Making public spaces feminist

The 14th was punctuated by numerous actions in workplaces and public spaces, at symbolic times defined according to statistics on inequalities in income and wages. Programmes were organised with those who left their workplaces, and solidarity actions were also organised for those for whom this was impossible. Commandos went into department stores, for example, where shop assistants proudly wore badges bearing the feminist strike logo. One of the strengths of this movement is that it is rooted not only in the big cities but also in the smaller towns and neighbourhoods, which mobilised with their own programmes before inviting people to join the big demonstration in the evening. Everywhere we went, we made the public space feminist, combative and festive! The whole day was about struggle and togetherness, solidarity and the joy of feeling the strength of being many and together.

Throughout the day, everyone converged on the starting point for the demonstration. The gamble paid off: every major city in Switzerland was blocked off by a gigantic purple tide - strong, proud, feminist and angry!

We've been changing Switzerland for five years now, and this colossal work will continue to bear fruit in families, associations, neighbourhoods, trade unions, workplaces, politics and institutions. We're not there yet, and we know that the state will use violence as soon as it feels threatened. But we dare to imagine a world where women, gender minorities and the exploited occupy the space they deserve.

30 June 2023

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

"Noise as Usual" — Or Crisis Now?

1 July 2023, by Against the Current Editors

AS THE UNITED States hurtled toward an unthinkable, and entirely artificial, default on the "full faith and credit" of meeting its debt obligations, the question arises: was the appearance of crisis more a case of "noise as usual, only louder"? Hadn't we had debt-limit brinksmanship before — a periodic and partisan theatrical game of chicken, ultimately refereed by ruling class imperatives not to end in mutual suicide?

Against this logical assumption was another fact: a powerful far-right faction, within the traditionally preferred party of the capitalist ruling class, that was prepared to let default happen — even ready to force it, on the assumption that the resulting chaos or collapse would propel them to victory in the 2024 election.

The imminent crisis, ultimately, was defused with the wide Congressional vote and 63-36 Senate approval for the McCarthy-Biden deficit-and-budget deal. The practical imperatives of "divided government" and the demands of ruling-class financial institutions prevailed. The hot media debate over "who won" — House Speaker Kevin McCarthy for blackmailing the President to negotiate over the debt ceiling, or Biden for maneuvering McCarthy into budget deals without savage social

spending cuts — is ephemeral and unimportant.

The rightwing playbook since the 1980s has been to run up deficits under Republican administrations with military spending, untax-the-rich policies and unfunded corporate subsidies, then scream "out-of- control spending" to force Democratic presidents to make cuts. In recent history, only the Bill Clinton administration produced a balanced budget — at the expense of America's miserable welfare system and the working poor.

Looking forward, what's important is the connections of the debt-and-budget fights to the broader dysfunctions of U.S. bourgeois politics. Republican demands will persistently center on cutting the safety net for working people and vulnerable populations, despite food and housing inflation that's constricting tens of millions of people's lives, without reducing the military budget or fossil-fuel corporate subsidies — and most definitely nothing to raise revenue from the severely under-taxed super-wealthy and big business.

The Republican — and Wall Street's — goal meant "putting paid" (to borrow the apt British phrase) to what remained of the Democrats' once-expansive "Build Back Better" infrastructure programs, along with emergency spending that propped the economy and actually reduced poverty during the pandemic. What's left are mostly measures like in-shoring semiconductor production and escalating the scramble for lithium — elements aimed at countering the global reach of China, on which both ruling class parties generally agree.

The sausage-making deal process did little or nothing to solve real issues, whether the national debt, inflation, housing costs and homelessness, or anything else — nor could it have done so in existing political conditions. On the one hand, there is a genuine problem following the runup of the national debt to $31 trillion, mostly under the Reagan-Bushes-Trump regimes and recently the COVID pandemic crisis — and now higher interest rates, which at five percent mean interest payments of $1.5 trillion on the debt annually. (Corporate and individual debts are another whole issue.)

Seriously addressing the debt would require major military budget cuts, reversing tax cuts and loopholes for rich and corporate America, and ending destructive fossil fuel and agribusiness subsidies — none of which are remotely on capital's agenda.

On the other hand, a feature of the present deal is new "work requirement" restrictions imposed on some food assistance (SNAP) recipients (although partially offset by new eligibility for military veterans and some homeless people). At a time when SNAP should be expanding, tighter work requirements and the associated administrative hoops are morally bankrupt, politically stupid for the Democrats, and fiscally irrelevant, a "bipartisan" trifecta — 1) stomping on the face of the most vulnerable working poor experiencing job precarity and insecurity, 2) repelling and demoralizing a good part of the Democrats' voting base, and 3) not saving any measurable money.

Confluence of Attacks

While the far right's blackmail threats fizzled in the debt ceiling fight, their convergence with unbridled state legislatures' and Supreme Court assaults on democratic rights suggest that in the arena of U.S. bourgeois politics, the crisis is now.

The attacks are out in the open, well covered in much of the media — we are not making any spectacular revelations here — and importantly, they're met with as much resistance as targeted populations and communities are able to mount.

The overriding twin dynamics of the reactionary assault are white racism, and unrestrained corporate greed. The first of these is politically leveraged to enable the second, the real priority of ruling-class America. Labor rights. and environmental protections are gutted, while headlines are dominated by "culture war" attacks on Critical Race Theory, Black Lives Matter and the mythical "woke mob."

Mounted in state arenas, the attacks are also propellants for the Ron DeSantis presidential campaign, with its shambolic but also profoundly menacing features. How long before the public gets sick of his "Florida is where woke goes to die" mantra — or whether DeSantis or some other reactionary emerges as the main Republican challenger to the career fraudster and soon-to-be serial criminal defendant ex-president who commands the party's present frontrunner status — are secondary questions.

The infrastructure for the brutally reactionary social agenda is provided by well-funded fake-grassroots and advocacy forces — call them Moms for Illiteracy, Americans for Plutocracy, Club for Greed, Prolife (until you're born) America, etc. The infamous American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) provides language to be cut and pasted into rightwing state legislation.

In almost all cases these measures are against majority public opinion. In some cases they're blatantly unconstitutional as well as sadistic, notably laws criminalizing essential medical care for transgender people and youth in particular. Abortion bans are metastasizing following last year's unhinged Supreme Court overturning Roe v. Wade, with increasingly deadly effect.

Book bans and forced library closures — and most important, the rising resistance against them — are covered elsewhere in this issue of Against the Current. The miseducation of American kids includes prohibition of teaching about racism, U.S. history as it actually unfolded, or anything to do with gender or sexual realities.

In Michigan, rightwing state reps who are now in the minority have proposed — even with no immediate chance of passing — compulsory school teaching of "the Christian foundations of America" and the Pilgrims' quest for religious freedom. (Recall Malcolm X's memorable line: "We didn't land on Plymouth Rock. Plymouth Rock landed

on us.")

Old and new restrictions on voting rights proliferate —to take just one example, the move in Ohio to make ballot initiatives (such as enshrining reproductive rights in the state Constitution) effectively impossible.

Supreme Court Stranglehold

The outrage of outlawing transgender medical care stands alongside a Texas district court judge's ruling to bar mifepristone, the abortion and miscarriage care drug that's been available and proven safe for over two decades. Lawmakers and governors banning transgender care clearly feel empowered by the extreme right's control of the ultimate "umpire," the U.S. Supreme Court.

This far-right Court majority seems partly restrained by the fear of being totally delegitimized. The mifepristone ban directly threatens so many people and produces such anger that the Supreme Court was forced to put it on hold and might kick it to next year's session.

Transgender care directly impacts a far smaller proportion of the population — about one half of one percent — and their families. In some ways, the strategy of singling out a relatively small targeted group, despite the obvious fact that it makes a mockery of equal protection promised on paper by the Constitution, becomes even more dangerous in both its immediate effect and wider consequences. It opens a bigger can of poisonous worms for the political suppression of essential medical services that so-called "conservatives" disapprove in the name of "traditional values."

It's all the more important, as we've said before, that delegitimizing the present far-right Supreme Court majority is not a "threat," but an urgent necessity. What we've called the WSCOTUS (White Supremacy Court of the United States) majority has also been exposed as one of the most corrupt and clientelist institutions in U.S. politics — which is saying a lot.

From Clarence Thomas — bought and paid for by sleazoid billionaire Harlan Crow — to John Roberts' wife making $10 million by matching lawyers with elite firms including some with cases before the Court, the fact emerges that "ethics standards" when it comes to these Supreme Court Justices are functionally nonexistent. Since their purpose is to serve and protect the wealthy and powerful, it's hardly surprising that these "conservative" Justices find it appropriate to live like them.

There is nothing much "conservative" about them. Principles of respect for precedent, avoidance of drastic radical change by judicial fiat, and consideration for the impact of Court rulings on real people's lives, mean nothing. (Those of us who do want radical changes don't expect them to be handed down by courts, but rather to be won through powerful social movements and political action.)

The most recent decision in this regard, Sackett v. EPA, guts longstanding Environmental Protection Agency's regulatory authority. While the Court unanimously agreed that the plaintiffs' property rights were unreasonably violated in this particular case, the far-right majority took the occasion to basically wipe out the Clean Water Act.

This kind of ruling has become standard for this Court majority, whose only "conservative" allegiance is to elite privilege and power. A remaining question, which will reveal something important about the speed of the overall rightwing offensive, is whether this SCOTUS is ready right now to expose itself by affirming a mifepristone ban — creating an immediate national health emergency — or upholding an insane "independent state legislatures" theory allowing the overturn of election results.

Either or both of these could trigger an authentic constitutional crisis. In case of a court-imposed mifepristone ban, progressives and reproductive rights advocates must demand that Biden immediately issue an emergency order to the FDA and the drug manufacturer to keep it available.

Clouded Prospects

We've noted that it's way early to handicap what might emerge from the nasty, brutish and long electoral season. Far more important right now is to uphold and magnify the existing and growing resistance, which is impressive although inadequately represented in daily headlines.

Notably, abortion rights organizations and networks have creatively mobilized to make the service available to people who need to travel long distances within or across state lines. There are many other examples of standing up to rightwing authoritarianism, including at community levels under the mass media radar.

Politically, it's critical to spell out why the Democratic Party is such an abject failure in turning back the attacks. Its mega-donor base requires the party establishment to rely on the illusion of victory by appealing to that elusive suburban "socially liberal but fiscally conservative" population — while the much larger majority of the working class is actually more "fiscally liberal" in wanting to save and expand programs like social security and medicare, living wages and a social safety net that works.

And while strikes, labor contract fights and union organizing might seem a step removed from the reactionary assaults on democracy and vulnerable people's lives, they are actually of central importance in shaping society's future. Underlying the right wing's attacks and anti-"woke" antics is an agenda of capital — to keep wages low, work and life for the majority precarious and insecure and to enforce "discipline" and individualism against social solidarity and struggle.

The ruling corporate elites for their part care little or nothing about issues like abortion rights, transgender medical care, public libraries or education or so-called "culture wars" one way or the other. What matters is

preservation of their profits and structural privilege — and to whatever extent the far right's social agenda and ugly racism help advance that agenda, they're quite happy to accept its support.

That's why the answer to the question we posed of whether the present moment is somewhat louder "noise as usual," or the onset of "crisis now," might well be — both.

*Source: **ATC 225**, July-August 2023.*