



## IV583 - August 2023

# Palestine and Empire

31 August 2023, by **Against the Current** Editors

Policy in practice is illustrated by recent too-typical episodes. Amidst near-daily killings of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, President Biden welcomed Israeli president Isaac Herzog to the White House and the honor of addressing a joint session of Congress. This in itself, we must admit, was hardly surprising — given that Biden already disgraced himself and the country by similarly receiving the nationalist Hindu-supremacist Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, and followed in Donald Trump's footsteps to Saudi Arabia to be warmly greeted by mass murderer crown prince Mohammad bin Salman (whom Biden previously called a "pariah").

After Congressional Progressive Caucus chair Pramila Jayapal, accurately if perhaps accidentally, publicly called Israel a "racist state," a bipartisan Concurrent Resolution 57 repudiating such a heresy was rushed to the House of Representatives, where the vote passed 412-9-1. We pause briefly for the honor roll of those opposing the resolution: Reps. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (NY), Rashida Tlaib (MI), Jamaal Bowman (NY), Summer Lee (PA), Ilhan Omar (MN), Cori Bush (MO), Andre Carson (IN), Delia Ramirez (IL) and Ayanna Pressley (MA). Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN), author of a bill (HR 3103) against U.S. aid for Israel's large-scale administrative detention of Palestinian children, voted "present."

An atrocity mostly under the media radar is a Memorandum of Understanding between the U.S. and Israeli governments for opening visa-free travel between the two countries for their respective citizens. Under this Visa Waiver Program, naturally, the arrangement is reciprocal. But that is decidedly not the case at Ben-Gurion Airport, where Arab and Palestinian U.S. citizens are routinely hassled and frequently denied entry, especially if they are residents of Gaza. The MOU providing a 45-day test period for the waiver program has outraged Arab American activists who had been assured it wouldn't be implemented. (See the scathing commentary by James Zogby of the Arab American Institute, July 24, 2023, <https://james.zogby.com/>.)

In short, the Israeli state continues to get not only a free pass for gross human rights abuses in view of its status as a strategic U.S. ally — far from unique in that respect — but also enjoys the highest standing as a moral beacon, including among those same far-right Republicans who promote narratives of "Jewish space lasers" causing wildfires and George Soros spearheading the Illuminati plans for the new world order.

## "Shared Fiction"

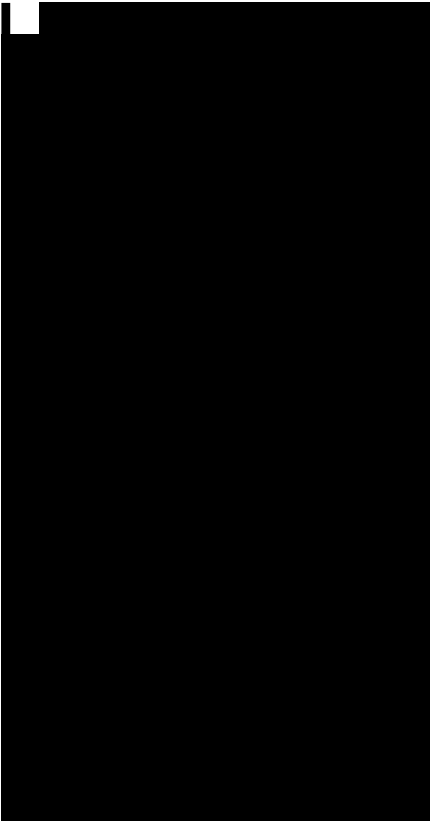
## Endangered

Nonetheless, strains are visible. They're detailed, for example, in an unusually-lengthy feature July 12 New York Times column by Thomas Friedman, "The U.S. Reassessment of Netanyahu Has Begun," which deserves to be read in full and carefully for channeling the angst of the mainstream "pro-Israel" U.S. establishment.

Friedman is a Pulitzer Prize winner, formerly head of the Times' Jerusalem Bureau, known for his support of the Iraq war and longtime apologetics for Israeli "defensive" state terrorism — in short, a pillar of elite consensus. Today he writes that "the Biden team sees the far-right Israeli government, led by Benjamin Netanyahu, engaged in unprecedented radical behavior — under the cloak of judicial 'reform' — that is undermining our shared interests with Israel, our shared values and the vitally important shared fiction about the status of the West Bank that has kept peace hopes there just barely alive." (emphasis added)

Further down, Friedman gets explicit:

"One of the most important Israeli and American shared interests was the shared fiction that Israel's



To be clear, Israel remains a powerful asset, not a liability, to Washington's project of controlling the Middle East and its strategic assets through a system of regional alliances, as the hegemon itself continues to "pivot" towards the U.S. rivalry with China. We are still a long way from a genuine crisis in the U.S.-Israeli partnership, but the run amok character of the Netanyahu coalition, dependent as it is on extreme Jewish-supremacist nationalism, the settler movement and ultra-Orthodox fundamentalism, doesn't bode well.

All proportions guarded, of course. Compared to the state of Israeli politics and the deadly degenerative spiral in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, a much bigger threat to the prestige and power of the U.S. empire is the internal state of U.S. politics, where the cult leader and dominant presidential candidate of the Republican Party engaged in major criminal conduct before, during and after his calamitous term in the White House. Where the present electoral cycle may leave the United States' status in the world is another complex and unfolding discussion.

## Disaster on the Ground

This is not at all to discount the gravity of circumstances in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The highly-publicized first part of the "judicial reform," stripping Israel's (far from progressive or pro-Palestinian) Supreme Court of the power to nullify laws as "unreasonable" — in the absence of a written Constitution for the country — has already brought Israel closer to a full-scale rupture than any time since a notorious armed confrontation between the official Haganah and Menahem Begin's rightwing Irgun militia in the very early days of the state.

It remains to be seen whether the Supreme Court itself might escalate the crisis by declaring the new law itself to be "unreasonable."

The announced refusal of elite reserve military officers — thousands are

reported to have resigned — to continue their service may not come to fruition, but even such a threat constitutes a genuine earthquake in the Israeli context. It's rather astonishing that protest mobilizations have continued even during Israeli military operations in Jenin, Nablus and other Palestinian population centers.

There's more to come. A piece of the "reform," less reported here because it's harder to summarize, will remove judicial nominations from professional bodies and put them in the hands of parliamentary committees — which in the highly disciplined Israeli political party system means control by party bosses of the ruling coalition, crippling the relative independence of the judiciary.

The protests seem likely to continue as much of the Israeli-Jewish population see the reform as "the end of democracy" — for themselves. They have not taken up issues of anti-Arab discrimination or found much resonance among Palestinian Israeli citizens. That's the movement's Achilles heel. Nonetheless the changes would have consequences — if for example the electoral commission bars Arab-led parties from running on grounds of "insufficient loyalty to the Jewish state" and the Court can't overturn the exclusion, or stop townships from declaring themselves officially "Jewish only."

Unquestionably, however, the core disaster is on the ground in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and that's where the real danger may lie not only for Israel but even for imperial "stability." The eruption of settler violence has revealed the depth of truly nazi-like attitudes and action. An Israeli writer, Yuval Noah Hariri, attended a pro-democracy rally in the town of Beit Shemesh, where they were confronted by a smaller pro-government counter-demonstration with a loudspeaker blaring songs, including a celebration of the February settler burning of Hawara:

"(T)he leader of the Religious Zionism party, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, supported the attack and publicly called for Hawara to be 'wiped out.' In a similar spirit, the pro-

(by which Friedman means the stability of Jordan, Israel's Abraham Accords with Gulf kingdoms, and normalization with Saudi Arabia. These rulers don't care about Palestine any more than Washington does, but their populations do.)

Two things stand out here. First is the extensive repetition of that loaded phrase "shared fiction," as it's clear that Friedman wants to make sure that even the least attentive reader gets the point and its implications. Second, as experienced readers of Thomas Friedman know, he almost always leaves something out, often something quite significant: In this case, his own decades-long role helping to perpetrate precisely that shared fiction, always by blaming Palestinians for rejecting U.S.-Israeli "peace plans" to preserve the shimmering mirage of a two-state solution somewhere in an always-receding future.

From this and other commentators, and Biden's remark to CNN that Netanyahu's cabinet is "one of the most extreme" he's seen, it's emerging that Israel's conduct and internal state is becoming an irritant to the efficient operation of the U.S. empire.

government loudspeakers in Beit Shemesh sounded out the following gleeful song:

“Who is going up in flames now? — Hawara!  
Houses and cars! — Hawara!  
They are evacuating old ladies, women and young girls,  
it is burning all night! — Hawara!  
Burn their trucks! — Hawara!  
Burn the roads and cars! - Hawara!

“I later looked for the song on YouTube, and found that it’s had thousands of views. One Israeli YouTube channel accompanied with it a request of viewers to share, ‘with all your might, to show everyone that just as Hawara is burning, so is our faith.’ I hummed the tune, and thought about the meaning of ‘destruction.’” (“Can Judaism survive a messianic dictatorship in Israel?” Haaretz, July 13, 2023)

If that isn’t frightening, you’re not paying attention. But the dissident Israel historian Ilan Pappé also writes that

“(t)his is a rare moment in history that opens opportunities for those struggling for liberation and justice in Palestine...a time to energize the popular Palestinian resistance and

unite both the Palestinians and their supporters around an agreed vision and program.” (Palestine Chronicle, August 3, 2023)

As chilling as it is, the vicious military and settler violence is also having an impact on sectors of U.S. society. While the Democratic Party leadership remains unshakably committed to the Israeli-partnership, sympathy with Palestine is growing among the voting base and especially young people.

More of the U.S. Jewish community is becoming alienated and angry, particularly as the pillar of the Zionist lobby, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) turns more and more to supporting rightwing politicians including election-denying Trump Republicans. In the face of state-level attempts to criminalize Boycott/Divestment/Sanctions activism, support for the BDS movement is gaining ground.

Congressional Representative Betty McCollum has reintroduced the above-mentioned “Defending the Human Rights of Palestinian Children and Families Living Under Israeli Military Occupation Act,” which her website describes as a bill “to prohibit Israel from using U.S. taxpayer dollars on the military detention, abuse, or ill-treatment of Palestinian children in

Israeli military detention; to support the seizure and destruction of Palestinian property and homes in violation of international humanitarian law; or on any support or assistance for Israel’s unilateral annexation of Palestinian territory in violation of international humanitarian law.”

These changes in public sentiment are far from what’s needed in a long struggle against U.S. support for Israeli racism and apartheid, as well as the other brutal structures of oppression undergirding imperialist dominance in the region. As Ilan Pappé writes, it’s a fight “rooted in the Palestinian struggle for democracy and self-determination ever since 1918. The future liberated and de-Zionised Palestine may look now as a fantasy, but...it has the best chance to galvanize locally, regionally and globally every person with a modicum of decency. It would also provide a safe place for anyone living in historical Palestine at the present or for whoever was expelled from there.”

Toward such a vision, the emerging cracks in elite circles, which are likely to deepen, open possibilities for enhanced, effective solidarity activism.

[Against the Current](#)

## Marxism and the U.S. Response to the HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 Pandemics

30 August 2023, by **Sam Friedman, Suzie Kay**

Over the last fifty years, few public health professionals have considered Marxism relevant, and few Marxists have treated pandemics as an imminent concern. We offer this paper to help both public health professionals and socialists view pandemics through a Marxist lens. Although our theory is global in scope, we focus on the U.S. because of its scientific prominence, its outsized global role in the AIDS pandemic, and its poor performance in the COVID-19

pandemic. Our hope is that this piece will strengthen efforts to protect public health and, better yet, help usher capitalism off the Earth before it makes the planet uninhabitable.

### Two pandemics

HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 have killed tens of millions since 1980. Both probably began in transmission from an animal to a human. [1] Yet, due to

their dissimilar modes of human-to-human transmission and differing intervals between infection and serious illness, they were met with distinct political responses: COVID-19 became a major global crisis while the response to HIV/AIDS was limited. COVID-19 threatened profitability by spreading rapidly through the global working and capitalist classes. In contrast, HIV/AIDS spread much more slowly, primarily affected poor countries, and in richer countries

mainly affected highly stigmatized populations.

Despite these differences, the responses to the two pandemics also bear similarities. Both were prone to controversies about their severity, nature, and treatment. Ronald Reagan and Thabo Mbeki downplayed the seriousness of HIV/AIDS; Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro's ideas about COVID-19 alternated between dismissive and bizarre. Joe Biden's administration, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), has minimized the COVID pandemic's severity and overestimated the effectiveness of efforts against it. [2] In both pandemics, popular and elite ideologies have significantly contributed to disease and death, including HIV denialism (mainly affecting South Africa), dismissal of antiretroviral therapy in preventing AIDS, and the "anti-vax" and anti-masking movements throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **A Marxist approach to analysing responses to pandemics**

Marxism views human society in a dialectical relationship with its environment, including pathogens like viruses and their various host species. Capitalist society is structured by nation states, which vary in political form, ideology, economic strength, imperialist relations, degree of class conflict, and natural environment. Thus, during pandemics, capitalists and politicians scramble to protect their own health and the health of their national workforce insofar as they estimate that working-class health is necessary for profit production. They impose policies that ensure workers remain productive and do not revolt.

Moreover, earlier responses to pandemics have material and ideological effects. For example, neoliberal restructuring made the U.S.

"lean" in trained personnel and protective equipment, while prior SARS-CoV-1 experience led many Asian countries, even poorer ones, to have ample mask supplies and mask-wearing experience. [3]

At the beginning of any pandemic, little is known. Scientists and politicians make decisions based on prior epidemics. As knowledge accrues, including which populations are most affected, it shapes the beliefs and actions of the capitalist class, the state, and sections of subordinated classes. Thus, in the mid-1980s, when a generalized heterosexual AIDS epidemic emerged in some African countries, U.S. elite fears helped generate resources to prevent sexual spread from people who injected drugs to those who did not. Once it became clear that a general epidemic was unlikely in the U.S., programs and policies for people who injected drugs became more limited. Early in COVID-19, workers in meatpacking and hospitals were the primary victims, alongside the elderly, institutionalized populations, Black, Native American, and Hispanic people. When this became obvious, politicians began to relax mandatory controls. Those closest to industries threatened by "science" (like fossil fuel producers) moved to discredit the science behind COVID-19 restrictions regardless of the cost in "disposable" populations' lives.

## **A note on ideologies and irrationality**

At capitalism's ideological core is the self-interested individual who bears primary responsibility for their own fate. Modern capitalist ideology also emphasizes top-down management, which leads firms and states, including public health agencies, toward bureaucratic implementation. Capitalism is also characterized by racist and sexist beliefs that are fully institutionalized and normatively controlling.

Since conflicts over science and anti-scientific policy-making were important in both the HIV/AIDS and

the SARS-CoV-2/COVID-19 pandemics, it is important to discuss Marxist ideas about the social sources of irrationality. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels discussed these issues primarily in relation to religious beliefs. Sam Friedman, co-author of this article, has also written usefully on this topic. [4]

Thus, the chaos of capitalist production generates chaos and mystification in the lives of workers and other oppressed or exploited groups. For example, the wage form is inherently mystified. Eschatological beliefs grow as capitalism's leaders evidently cannot solve its most profound crises such as climate change and nuclear armed imperial competition.

Racism, which is foundational to capitalism, though strategically rational for the capitalist class, is fundamentally irrational because it interprets the effects of oppression as its causes. [5] Mistaking effect for cause is irrational by definition.

Capitalism's inherent irrationality underpins contingent irrationalities, such as the anti-science sentiment seen during the HIV/AIDS and COVID pandemics. [6] Irrationalism is often strengthened by the self-serving actions of specific capitalist sectors. [7] For example, tobacco and agricultural interests have attacked research that reveals the harmful effects of their products. Fossil fuel industries have disputed climate change science despite climate change threatening general capitalist profitability and human survival. As evidence grows that capitalism can't solve the climate crisis, doomsday religions and anti-science have strengthened.

## **The U.S. response to AIDS**

Historical timing fundamentally shaped the U.S. response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Although HIV had been spreading in the country for at least seven years, it wasn't politically and medically visible until 1981. [8] By this time, popular movements such as the Black revolt,

the student and antiwar movements, and the rank-and-file-based labor unrest of the 1960s and '70s had been largely defeated. [9] Ideologically and politically, deregulation and the celebration of self-interest become hegemonic thanks to the successful employers' offensive embedded in the Jimmy Carter and Reagan administrations' policies, and strengthened by the "Volcker Shock" when the Federal Reserve hiked interest rates while cutting back social funding, leading to massive increases in unemployment. [10] The impact was compounded as corporations moved industrial jobs to the non-unionized U.S. South, Latin America, and Asia. [11] This, along with the Drug Wars, facilitated right-wing demagoguery in splitting communities even further by class, race, and sexuality to reduce resistance to neoliberalism. [12] Hence, when the HIV/AIDS pandemic emerged, policies were so individualistically focused, so stigmatizing of queer people, drugs users, and sex workers, that essential research and care were delayed for years and, when prevention was even attempted, it was hamstrung, resulting in untold deaths.

Although HIV/AIDS spreads much more slowly than COVID-19, its death count during the early 1980s quickly mounted. Neither mass media coverage nor state-funded research followed. Randy Shilts's book *And the Band Played On* shows that neither the CDC nor the National Institutes of Health (NIH) received additional funding for AIDS after the pandemic was discovered in 1981, and that the 1977 Legionnaires outbreak in Philadelphia and the Tylenol poisonings in 1982 both received far more attention and money than AIDS. [13]

As affected groups discovered they were high risk, media and government neglect forced communities to raise pandemic awareness and undertake their own prevention and mutual aid efforts. [14] Stop AIDS in San Francisco and the Gay Men's Health Crisis in New York were two early examples of such efforts.

To the extent the federal government did respond, it primarily focused on biomedical and clinical research, case

data surveillance, and, to a limited degree, epidemiologic research using existing agency funding. By 1986, some attention was given to public education around viral transmission. These efforts immediately sparked controversy, with powerful reactionary forces insisting that gay existence remain taboo, that sexual education be euphemistic, and that drug users become abstinent.

Overwhelmingly, epidemiologic and prevention programs were based on individual behavior. [15] This is congruent with basic ideology in capitalist society, as reinforced by the NIH's and CDC's reliance in non-biological prevention on randomized controlled trials that focus on individual characteristics. [16] Public health agencies and AIDS NGOs are normally top-down, hierarchical organizations that staff projects with grant funding. [17] Therefore, when the CDC finally funded large-scale prevention projects, its awardees were educational institutions, local and state governments, and NGOs intervening on individuals rather than their social environments.

There were exceptions. Notably, in 1986, when fear of widespread heterosexual transmission was still prevalent in the U.S., the first major NIH prevention program for people who inject drugs allowed community-focused outreach and evaluation using community indicators of infection rates. However, as worries about heterosexual transmission subsided, the NIH reoriented toward individual-level data.

Meanwhile, non-state and non-NGO community-driven projects focused on group activity, which saved lives. Buddy systems helped the sick care for themselves at home and manage pets during hospitalization. Stop AIDS in San Francisco built communal "Tupperware parties" where gay men discussed the pandemic. Later, ACT UP protested AIDS policy, organized independent research, and coordinated syringe exchanges alongside volunteers and organizers within drug-injecting communities. Despite immense pressure, significant community-based prevention prevailed. [18] Sterile syringe exchanges were particularly effective.

Data from New York City show that once these originally underground services were legalized and funded, they greatly reduced HIV transmission among people who inject drugs. [19]

Through the late 1980s and '90s, NIH HIV/AIDS research funding increased, partly due to political pressure and direct action by ACT UP and harm reduction groups, leading to breakthroughs in the treatment of opportunistic infections like pneumocystis carinii pneumonia and cytomegalovirus. By 1996, this politically won research led to effective antiretroviral therapy (ART), which kept the disease under control for most patients and reduced viral loads and thus infectiousness, leading to large-scale declines in HIV transmission throughout the U.S. Under pressure from mass demonstrations in South Africa and international activists, the World Health Organization and major foundations began providing ART to the world's poorest countries despite pharmaceutical patents. In 2003, the U.S. established the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, which significantly funded ART and related services globally, while increasing corporate and U.S. influence over drug sourcing and governing rules.

These programs were somewhat successful in providing effective safer sex and drug use education, and in controlling the HIV pandemic despite continuing attacks on LGBTQ people and those who inject drugs. By 2012, U.S. leaders were forecasting "the end of AIDS." This optimism proved misplaced on both national and global levels. ART funding was inadequate to end AIDS in the Global South. Currently, transmission in the U.S. hovers around 35,000 new cases per year. Combatting climate change will increasingly drain volunteers and funding for HIV prevention and care efforts. [20] The COVID-19 pandemic led to further attenuation of resources.

## The US response

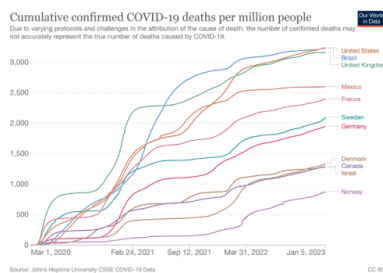
## to COVID-19

COVID-19 arrived under conditions quite distinct from those under which the HIV/AIDS pandemic began. The employers' offensive that had begun a half-century earlier had weakened unions, privatized state expenditures, globalized production and finance, and deeply entrenched ideological individualism, creating social tensions and general misery. Nonetheless, capitalist domination was running into resistance and sometimes revolt. Working-class misery led to political revolutions such as those in Argentina in 2002, and in a number of Arab countries and Ukraine after the 2008 economic crisis. Working-class organizing and resistance increased in the U.S. during the 2010s despite the ongoing erosion of labor unions. By 2020, years of antiracist organizing crescendoed in the George Floyd protests, a massive uprising against police violence during the first summer of COVID-19.

Capitalist politics, meanwhile, became polarized, often causing congressional deadlocks and impeding responses to the COVID pandemic. Reactionary movements, including armed racist militias, gained influence inside and outside the establishment. Some capitalists and others attacked climate science, while other factions attempted to coopt antiracist movements and apply "market-based" responses to climate change.

Successive "drug epidemics" like crack and then opioids led to an ever-rising number of overdose deaths. By the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, overdose deaths were approximately 80,000 a year; by 2021, they were nearly 110,000. Intensifying this crisis, neoliberalism drastically cut public health jobs. There were 220 public health workers per 100,000 people in 1980; by 2014, that number had dropped to 93. [21]

Then COVID-19 appeared. Neoliberalism's gradual hollowing of public health and medical resources, compounded by vacillating and incompetent presidential and state leadership, led the U.S. into a preventable spiral of viral spread, disease, and death. [22]



Source: Our World in Data.

An edited volume on *Coronavirus Politics* provides detailed accounts of the first few months of the response. [23] Accurate COVID testing was available in other countries months before the CDC was able to produce and distribute tests in the U.S. The initial partial lockdowns came too late. In some states, the initial lockdowns were ended far too early, leading to massive additional spread. Even governors who received initial acclaim for smart policies did not grasp the basics of aerosol transmission and therefore could not help high-risk locations or slow community transmission. [24] In both New York and New Jersey, for example, this led to catastrophic numbers of nursing home deaths. Relatedly, when the CDC established reporting systems as a basis for surveillance and understanding the epidemiology of SARS-Cov-2 transmission, it originally failed to include race/ethnicity and never included information about workplaces. (Much of what we know about workplaces is due to the California surveillance system and outbreak investigations.) [25]

Despite rapid vaccine development, nations overlooked strategizing how to organize the roll-out to curb viral escape mutation, instead prioritizing their own populations' short-term protection. Poorer countries waited months or years for vaccines for working populations, likely fueling the deadly global spread of the delta variant.

However, vaccine roll-out would have been unlikely to succeed anyway due to well-heeled opponents, such as Robert Kennedy Jr., scion of the Kennedy dynasty, who seized the opportunity to promote half-truths and cherry-pick data from unvetted

papers, and political entrepreneurs like Ron DeSantis, who attacked life-saving measures as ineffectual and anti-business. [26] Though initiated by President Trump, he and his followers also weakened the vaccine roll-out by promoting dangerous therapies like bleach, hydroxychloroquine, and azithromycin. [27]

COVID-19 has disproportionately infected and killed racially oppressed people (Native American, Black, and Hispanic people especially), the elderly, institutionalized populations such as prisoners and nursing home residents, workers in particular industries and occupations, and the disabled: populations that capitalists routinely disdain. Elderly people do not usually create surplus value for capitalists. Capitalists assume institutionalized people and disabled people do not create surplus value, and thus capitalist spokespeople often depict them as disposable drains on government budgets and pension funds. The immiseration of racially oppressed people reinforces racism and its structures among white workers and others. [28]

Unlike HIV/AIDS, COVID seriously threatened ruling-class members, politicians, and their workforces. Governments thus initially enacted lockdowns, which created a severe global economic slump that could have threatened the socioeconomic stability of capitalism. Countries responded in ways that reflected preexisting local social welfare infrastructure and traditions, which produced multiple contradictions. First, capitalism depends on workers' need to seek a wage for survival and for social respectability. Without this need, businesses and governments would face labor shortages and a potential increase in strike action. Income support policies weaken this compulsion, which is why welfare systems inadequately address need and stigmatize recipients. [29]

Second, working from home allowed workers to reflect on their lives. This threatened the availability of labor power if too many workers resisted returning or contemplated capitalism and how to end it. [30]

Early in the pandemic, the U.S.

federal government provided direct income support (though much less than other Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries), and extended unemployment insurance to many who would not normally have been eligible. Federal eviction moratoria were enacted to stop the spread of COVID-19 and to keep workers healthy for future exploitation. State enforcement of eviction moratoria varied considerably, so landlords were able to execute nearly 280,000 evictions in 2020. [31]

The system's ability to maintain such supports over the long term was limited, in part by international and intranational competitive pressures. Thus, reopening took place unevenly among the various states and became highly politicized, both in the sense of partisan politics as well as in terms of interpersonal debate and movement politics.

Working people were divided. They wanted to keep themselves and their families and friends healthy. Yet, stay-at-home policies and school closings reduced their sense of human connection. Worry for their children's future economic prospects, coupled with the hassles and pleasures of spending time with their children, pulled working-class individuals in opposing directions, creating openings for factions of the capitalist class and political entrepreneurs to divide the working class against itself, weakening working-class self-defense.

When Biden took office in 2021, his administration faced the competing demands of COVID-19 prevention and capitalist profitability. It immediately extended welfare supports and emphasized vaccination, testing, and masks, arguing: "If we raise our vaccination rate, protect ourselves and others with masking and expanded testing, and identify people who are infected, we can and we will turn the tide on COVID-19." [32]

He required large employers to give paid time off for required COVID vaccinations. However, he did not require bosses to offer paid sick leave, ensuring that many workers would still have to go to work infectious. Biden then emphasized a policy of "keeping our children safe and our

schools open," including the vaccination of (eligible) children and school staff. He mentioned testing, masking, and adequate ventilation systems, but never made a plan to implement them. [33]

Despite the weakness of these policies, by November 2021, the administration was already undermining them further. [34] In addition to capital's needs, partisan politics in the run-up to the midterms was a contributing factor. Republicans were successfully mobilizing their base around opposition to vaccines and mask mandates—and capturing some on the anti-vax left along the way.

In December 2021, the CDC changed its recommendations for isolation from ten days to five. [35] This change did not reflect epidemiologic findings, nor the advice of expert scientists and clinicians. As Rob Wallace has shown, this reduction was a reaction to government and industry concerns that the pandemic had decreased the workforce willing to accept current pay levels. The aim was to resume in-school education, making parents more available as workers, and was influenced by intense lobbying from the airline industry. [36]

Next, the CDC changed how it measured COVID risk itself. In February 2022, the CDC changed its "transmission map," based on new COVID-19 diagnoses and positive tests, to a "community levels map" focused on hospital capacity. Overnight, the CDC's map went from a concerning red, showing substantial risk nationwide, to a reassuring green. [37] The effect was to permanently discourage masking nationwide. [38]

Opposition to masking is now deeply entrenched government policy. For example, when the CDC director, Raquel Walensky, warned about the "triple-demic" of influenza, respiratory syncytial virus, and COVID-19 in October 2022, she refused to suggest masking, even under public criticism, for two months. [39] Despite high COVID-related sickness and mortality, the uncertainty of ongoing SARS-CoV-2 mutations, and long COVID's impact on the labor force and

population, the capitalist class and state remained committed to a "return to normal" to restore profitability. They ended the pandemic emergency and its social provisions in spring 2023.

Caught between, on the one hand, fear of disease, death, and long COVID's economic threat, and, on the other, the allure of human companionship and workplace ambition, the "return to normal" campaign has gained broad public acceptance even among groups hardest hit by the pandemic. Whether this acceptance will continue despite continuing deaths and the spread of long COVID depends on several contingencies: Will the virus mutate toward greater severity? Will new vaccines and therapies control its spread? Will public health and community groups, like the People's CDC or Long COVID Justice, successfully counter the capitalist state's callous disregard? Could economic collapse, or a resurgence of class struggle, antiracist struggle, feminist struggle, and/or disability rights struggle, undermine the capitalist state's credibility? Could semi-fascist forces enforce capital's ideological conformity to "the urgency of normal"?

Neoliberalism's gradual hollowing of public health and medical resources, compounded by vacillating and incompetent presidential and state leadership, led the U.S. into a preventable spiral of viral spread, disease, and death.

## Discussion

Neither pandemic is over. HIV continues to infect, sicken, and kill. Current funding commitments suggest that the limited control achieved over the AIDS pandemic may falter. The powerful "anti-vax" movement will be a hurdle to distribution of any effective HIV vaccines that should be discovered, compounding the longstanding problem of profit-driven vaccine research on a disease that affects the poor.

The COVID-19 pandemic is also far from over. Vast numbers of people sicken and die from it—and long COVID is a mass disabling event. As

this paragraph is being written, the People's CDC, an invaluable resource for understanding how to respond to the pandemic from a socially involved public health perspective, stated in their weekly "Weather Report" that "at least 3,907 people died of COVID nationally." [40]

We are likely to experience more major pandemics. [41] Capitalism puts humans into contact with viruses and bacteria through constant business, military expansion, and travel. Capitalist industrial agriculture forms a perfect breeding ground for viral and bacterial mutations, as evidenced by frequently emerging new varieties of avian and swine flu. Careless over-prescription of medicines to get workers back on the job and to increase meat production accelerates the development of bacteria and viruses that medicines can then no longer cure.

Pandemics, then, happen more rapidly and spread far more rapidly than they did in earlier historical eras due to advanced capitalist production and distribution. Science under capitalism has, to be sure, provided new ways to try to counteract these dangers. But the history of the responses to HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 shows that the needs of capital and the states that serve capital hamstring our ability to respond to pandemics. The COVID-19 response history indicates a major defeat for those favoring "public health" approaches to pandemics that prioritize worker protection over "opening up." Capitalist interests skeptical of pandemic and climate change science have successfully reduced executive authority for health emergencies and opposed vaccination and masking rules. This retreat suggests Democrats and Republicans will prioritize immediate economic profitability over public health in future pandemics.

Some public health response limitations to pandemics stem from firms' profit interests, evident in government support for intellectual property rights. This has enhanced profits for HIV antiretroviral therapy and COVID-19 vaccine makers, leaving billions poorly protected and millions dead. Fortunately, these "rights" are firm-specific, so they can be

challenged without total opposition from capital, as when the global efforts of AIDS movements enabled additional firms to produce generic HIV antiretrovirals that let millions of people get them more cheaply.

By the beginning of 2022, capitalists decided that vaccination provided sufficient protection against devastating declines in labor power availability for behavioral protections to be ended and employees who had worked from home to be forced to work at their workplaces. [42] Politically, this developed in part out of (perceived) advantages in productivity and in workplace control from opening up, and in part due to the existence of a lot of people who disliked wearing masks.

Our argument in this piece helps to understand China's COVID policies. One partial reason why China opened up was that its approach was creating a significant competitive disadvantage when other countries opened up. Specifically, regular city-wide lockdowns in 2022 were hindering Chinese capital's ability to ensure prompt product delivery to both domestic and international customers. In the era of global neoliberal just-in-time production, supply chain disruptions from these lockdowns were fueling inflation and undermining Chinese capital's competitiveness. Amid escalating inter-imperialist tensions and U.S.-led diplomatic offensives against China, this disadvantage risked becoming debilitating. When worker revolts against the zero-COVID approach erupted at Foxconn and elsewhere, paralleled by university and street demonstrations, China's rulers opted for global opening up. The subsequent COVID-19 outbreak has been significant, but likely not enough to substantially weaken China's economy.

In essence, 2022 saw a global decision by capital and state leaders to risk workers' health and lives to maintain competitive standing. This gamble is fraught with uncertainty. The dynamics of long COVID, which incapacitates many workers, remain unclear. Depending on virus mutations and worker responses, this mass disabling event could become more

prevalent and economically—and perhaps militarily—debilitating. Capitalists are also gambling on being allowed to let the virus run rampant without workers rising up and threatening to end the system itself. [43]

Pandemics present a dilemma for capital: it must balance public health measures to preserve the labor force for future exploitation against letting workers sicken and die for immediate exploitation. COVID-19 is unique in that capitalists initially chose to protect workers' health, leading to issues like massive production decline, enduring supply chain shortages, inflation, and worker strikes, partially offset by the significant income increase for billionaires and major corporations during the period of worker self-protection. [44]

The lessons from HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 are vital for public health and global populations, especially as neither pandemic is waning, and capitalism's dynamics will prompt future pandemics. Moreover, these pandemics coincide with escalating climate change disruptions. Massive global migrations induced by climate change will inevitably accelerate disease spread, including HIV/AIDS and SARS-CoV-2/COVID-19, while simultaneously disrupting the capacity to manage pandemics.

We underscore the need to eradicate capitalism and establish a new social order rooted in revolutionary democracy, where workers sustainably organize the production and distribution of necessities and thereby prevent mass pandemics. Just to add to the difficulty, we will need to do this "on the ashes of the old"—that is, while dealing with the catastrophes of global climate change, the pandemics capitalism spawned, and whatever disorganization and destruction takes place in the struggle to end capitalism. [45]

For now, we must remember that the way to total transformation—that is, a social and ecological revolution—is through mass movements that struggle for reforms in ways that build workers' power and their consciousness of their power. Such struggles require a thorough



understanding of the ways in which racial, gender, and other oppression can create new forms of mobilization and struggle, and can develop new ideas and proposals of how we will organize a new society. The historical memory of the caring communities and hard-won infrastructure built by groups like ACT UP and Stop AIDS is an invaluable lesson in how to respond to health emergencies with solidarity and people-centered programs, not austerity and profit-focused

individualism.

The historical memory of the caring communities and hard-won infrastructure built by groups like ACT UP and Stop AIDS is an invaluable lesson in how to respond to health emergencies with solidarity and people-centered programs, not austerity and profit-focused individualism.

We in public health must collaborate with workers and communities affected by pandemics, including movements like those against AIDS and COVID, that demand sensible public health and social policies from the state. In doing this, we must fight for class independence and recognize that both capitalist political parties are obstacles to our collective survival.

[Spectre](#)

## North Korea's chronic food shortages exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic

29 August 2023, by [Karen Yamanaka](#)

North Korea has always publicly committed itself to the fight against Covid-19. But their options are very limited due to lack of vaccines, poor health care, and limited access to basic necessities. Since the WHO announced declared an end to Covid-19 as a public health emergency on May 5 of this year, North Korean media coverage of corona-related issues has declined dramatically. At present, the country is in the process of transition to 'normal life with coronavirus'. A prominent feature of recent North Korean news has been reporting on agricultural policy. In addition, this year's abnormal weather conditions have further exacerbated the situation of food shortages in the country.

### North Korea's conventional agricultural policy

In Korea, major industries were nationalized after independence movement against Japanese imperialism during the Second World War. But farmland was not nationalized. Farmland was distributed to small farmers and others, and individual ownership was

allowed. Then, after the Korean War, a policy of cooperative farming was proposed. The agricultural cooperative was renamed the cooperative farm system in 1962.

Most of farming in North Korea was collectivized with cooperative farms. Later, the 'socialistic' collective farming system of the country led to the collapse of the rationing system. The Arduous March, a period of mass starvation together with a general economic crisis from 1994 to 1998, is a typical example. In response to the collapse of the rationing system, North Koreans have been buying grains in the market to make up for deficiency. In North Korea, the rationing system of 'socialism' and selling food at markets have coexisted for many years. So even when the rationing system did not work, the markets were there to provide food to the population.

Kim Jong-un implemented an incentive-added policy shortly after taking office as 'supreme leader' in 2013. Under the incentive-added policy, farmers were allowed to keep the a 30% surplus for themselves on their own if they met their quotas. This policy motivated farmers to work harder, and for a time, production increased. In recent years, however,

the results of this incentive-added policy have not been reported.

### Severe food shortages

Originally, the food supply in North Korea was barely controlled by coexistence of the food supply stations that delivered rations and the markets. The Covid-19 crisis, which began in 2020, has exacerbated food shortages. Since 2020, North Korea's trade with China, which accounts for more than 90% of its trade, has plummeted due to the Covid-19 crisis. Economic sanctions and flooding also exacerbated the Covid-19 crisis situation.

Data from the Bank of Korea (the central bank of South Korea) estimated that North Korea's economic growth after the Covid-19 crisis would be -4.5% in 2020 and -0.1% in 2021. The economic growth rate for 2019 was plus 0.4%. This indicates the magnitude of the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on North Korea's economy after 2020 [46].

North Korea held the Eighth Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) and launched the five-year national economic development plan

(2021-2025) in January 2021. However, about six months later, Kim Jong-un said at the 3th Plenary Meeting of the 8th WPK Central Committee that the food supply situation was strained due to typhoon damage. In September 2021, grain sales stations were set up on a large scale in addition to the existing food supply stations to supply food to the people. At the 7th Session of the 14th Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) of September 2022, Kim Jong-un announced that an average annual economic growth rate of 7% was set in the five-year national economic development plan starting in 2021. And about a month later, the North Korean government banned buying and selling of grain on the open market. By transferring the functions of the traditional market to grain sales stations, the government sought to bring entire food supply under state control.

## **Unworkable plan from the beginning**

However, the grain sales stations did not work as the North Korean government intended. The North Korean government initially set the price of rice at grain sales stations below the market price to induce people to buy it. And the purchase price of rice from farms was kept low. As a result, the farms were reluctant to contribute their products. The farms began to send poor quality products to grain sales stations and good quality products to the market. And the quality of rice sold at grain sales stations declined. Consumers stopped buying at the grain sales stations and started buying on the open markets again.

The 8th Congress of WPK was held in 2021 amid this turmoil of the domestic food supply system. And plenary meetings of the WPK Central Committee were held an unprecedented four times during the year. The 4th plenary meeting of the 8th WPK Central Committee which was held on December 27, 2021 presented 'a rural revolution in the new era' [47]. Despite this situation,

grain sales stations continued to exist.

According to North Korean media reports, Premier Kim Tok-hun subsequently visited grain sales stations in various parts of the country at least four times in 2022 and three times in 2023. These reports indicate that grain sales stations are still in operation. However, reports indicating a change in conventional agricultural policy had been seen since 2022. Strange changes have been observed in North Korea's official media since August 2022. The term 'cooperative farm,' one of North Korea's agricultural forms, no longer appears. And when the term was used in the article, it was expressed as 'xx cooperative farm (at that time)'. The basic unit of the agricultural sector in North Korea had been the cooperative farm. There has been no official explanation from Pyongyang, but it is possible that state control over farms has been tightened.

## **Revived 'rural thought revolution'**

The Session of Permanent Commission of SPA Standing Committee was held about four months after this change in North Korean media reports. The Session officially amended and supplemented the law on farms and the law on food administration. The law on farms defined farm as socialist agricultural enterprise according to a report in Rodong Sinmun, the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the WPK on December 8, 2022. The term socialist agricultural enterprise was originally used in the course of the 'rural thought revolution'. This would mean closer government control from harvest to distribution.

These draconian measures further tightened the distribution of food in North Korea. It seemed almost impossible to achieve the 7% average annual growth target that Kim Jong-un had mentioned in September 2022. As if to demonstrate Kim Jong-un's frustration, a series of meetings followed. Amid the difficulties in achieving the targets of the five-year national economic development plan,

the 6th Enlarged Plenary Meeting of the 8th WPK Central Committee, held at the end of the 2022 meeting, set numerical targets for each of the 12 industry sectors [48]. The 12 industry sectors to be achieved were as follows: (1) Grain (2) Electricity (3) Coal (4) Rolled steel (5) Colored metals (6) Nitrogen fertilizer (7) Cement (8) Timber (9) Textile (10) Marine products (11) Housing (12) Railway freight.

As of January 2023, grain production was the nation's top priority and food and energy issues were serious challenges. The 7th Plenary Meeting of the 8th WPK Central Committee was held on February 26 of the same year. The meeting called for reaffirming and thoroughly implementing the 'rural revolution in the new era' that had been put forward at the 4th Plenary Session of the 8th WPK Central Committee at the end of 2021. The plenary meeting was held two months after the previous plenary meeting, which was unprecedented. That is how serious the economic situation in North Korea was at the end of last year and the beginning of this year. The economic plan for the first half of this year was reported as "overachieved", but production figures are not clear [49].

## **'Supreme leader' continues to evade responsibility**

Amid the seriousness of the North Korean economy, there have been changes in the reported activities of Kim Jong-un. In North Korea, where media coverage is extremely limited, the reported activities of the 'supreme leader' are a crucial element in analyzing the situation of the hyper-repressive and dictatorial regime. Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, the scope of Kim Jong-un's activities has narrowed and the number of field inspections has decreased. In recent years, 'field inspections' by Kim Jong-un have been replaced by inspections by Premier and other senior administrative officials. Kim Jong-un's field inspections were mainly conducted in the vicinity of the capital, with rare

trips to the countryside.

On the other hand, inspections by senior administrative officials include visits to a wide range of farms, factories, and laboratories throughout the country. In the midst of difficult economic conditions, this is probably a desperate measure to pass the buck to someone else in the sectors related to improving of people's lives.

In recent years, there has also been a change in Kim Jong-un's behavior in important meetings. For the past decade, political bureau meetings have played a central role in North Korean politics. In recent years, however, Kim Jong-un has shown a tendency to stay away from the meetings, leaving the chairmanship of

the meetings to the secretariat in charge of organizing the meetings.

If the economic situation does not improve in the future after the Covid-19 crisis, the responsibility will fall not on Kim Jong-un but on senior administrative officials and the secretariat of the Political Bureau. Needless to say, it is responsible for the crisis that has plunged the lives of the population in North Korea since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Ian Parker, in his book [50], described the state of the North Korean society before Covid-19 as 'Transition to Juche Capitalism [51]'. However, the present situation is quite different from that a few years ago when the book was

published. The Covid-19 pandemic made a full-blown transition to capitalism of the country difficult to execute. Most of the country's people have limited access to vaccines with inadequate basic health care. They are restricted from information from the outside world. In August of this year, Pyongyang reported several times on abnormal weather [52]. The Korean peninsula has been hit by a heat wave in recent weeks, causing further damage to the North Korean economy. The current situation in North Korea in 2023 could be even more critical, as even the basic livelihood of the people is not guaranteed [53]. The threat of a humanitarian crisis still looms in the country.

28 August 2023

## Chinese Feminists Face Paradoxical State Policies

28 August 2023, by Yige Dong

After women from all walks of life mounted a #MeToo campaign, and a few bravely came forward with allegations of sexual assault against some of the country's most powerful business tycoons and celebrities, the courts dismissed their cases. Student-run feminist and LGBTQ societies used to thrive on university campuses, but they now find that their online accounts get shut down overnight. Though extremely popular among youth, television dramas featuring "sissy men" and "boys' love" have been banned because the alternative masculinities and sexualities they exhibit do not conform with the image of manhood characterized by tough, strong, and patriotic "wolf warriors," featured in a blockbuster movie released in 2017. The central government's new Politburo, announced in October 2022, includes no women for the first time in two decades.

All of this has happened in just the past few years, suggesting a strong

resurgence of patriarchy. The trend has extended into some areas of social policy. Notably, despite young women's growing rejection of marriage and motherhood, the national population policy has undergone an about-face: from allowing each family to have only one child to preaching that three is the ideal number.

In 2015, however, the National People's Congress passed the country's first law against domestic violence; previously, most violence against women had been treated as a "private matter." A Civil Code provision enacted in 2020 for the first time systemically addressed sexual harassment, holding individuals responsible for using "speech, words, images, or bodily actions to sexually harass a person against their wishes" and allowing victims to bring lawsuits.

In 2021, multiple branches of government jointly issued a new policy giving female researchers priority for

talent recruitment and funding opportunities. Also that year, the State Council published the Outline for the Development of Women (2021-30), the fourth in a series of agenda-setting documents on women's issues published since 1995, when China hosted the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women. This newest Outline addressed previously unmentioned issues, such as promoting women in STEM careers, closing the gender pay gap as well as the gender gap in doing domestic work, providing affordable child care and elder care services, and guaranteeing maternity leave and cash benefits for families with children.

Of course, Chinese state policy announcements must always be read with a grain of salt. Many proposals may just be lip service. Yet it seems that compared with its recent record, the government is making an effort to respond to women's needs and demands in employment, education,

and reproductive welfare policy and legislation.

What should we make of this contradictory moment in Chinese gender politics? Why is the state ruthlessly suppressing feminist activists while also trying to show that it is accountable to the female masses? This is an authoritarian response to women's voices and actions in the civic sphere, which have gained momentum in recent years. By stifling feminist forces outside the state and appropriating their successes, the state is reclaiming its monopoly over women's affairs.

Over the longer term, the changing of the gender order and shifting forms of women's struggles throughout the history of the People's Republic of China (PRC) can be divided into three stages: socialist state feminism (1949-76), the post-socialist patriarchal resurgence (1978-2010), and made-in-China feminism (2010-present). The first two stages are not simply part of the historical background; they have decisively shaped today's gender dynamics.

Chinese women's massive participation in the country's development has made them the backbone of the economy, even while their rights have been systematically violated. Gaps between the state's commitment to gender equality in rhetoric and its patriarchal and sexist policies in practice have generated various forms of resistance and mobilization by Chinese women.

## **Socialist State Feminism**

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in its early years conceived of "women's liberation" as an integral part of its larger political agenda to create an egalitarian society. Upon seizing power in 1949, the party developed a comprehensive gender program that purported to empower women. Contrary to the conventional view that these gender-leveling measures were carried out under the auspices of a few top leaders, including Mao Zedong, they were in fact advanced primarily by feminists

working within state institutions. The All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), a de facto branch of government that oversaw women's affairs and connected top-down policies to the masses, served as a vehicle for these "state feminists."

Among the hard-fought achievements in gender-leveling in this period, one of the key reforms was the Marriage Law, enacted in 1950, which abolished the long-standing practices of arranged marriage, child marriage, and concubinage. It also promised women freedom to marry and divorce.

Meanwhile, under the banner of the popular slogan "Women can hold up half the sky," rapid state-led industrialization and agricultural development incorporated an unprecedented number of women into the labor force, resulting in a female employment rate above 90 percent. To accommodate women's employment, the Constitution of 1954 and national labor regulations dictated equal pay, paid maternity leave, and public child care services. An emphasis on the strength of laboring women, highlighting their independence and contributions to socialism, gave rise to the image of "iron girls"—female peasants and industrial workers with masculine features, thriving in traditionally male-dominated fields.

Yet these measures were significantly limited. China adopted an extremely austere approach to development in this period, prioritizing profit accumulation via industrialization over distribution, which prevented many welfare provisions from being implemented evenly across regions or sectors. Urban women (making up less than 20 percent of the total population), especially those working in state-owned enterprises, became the main beneficiaries of the socialist welfare regime; far fewer resources trickled down to nonstate sectors and rural areas. Moreover, under the party dictatorship, women's rights were always subjugated to the larger goal of class struggle, and state feminists were not allowed to pursue their own cause independent of the party's agenda.

Some of the limitations set on women's rights in this era would prove

to be major sources of gender tension in later periods. High levels of female labor-force participation in combination with underdeveloped welfare provisions imposed a grave double burden on working women. Huge gaps between urban and rural areas would become the foundation for radically worsening inequalities among Chinese women in the post-socialist period. A gender ideology that celebrated one type of womanhood exclusively—the manly working-class woman—failed to appreciate individual differences or accommodate women's physiological characteristics, and subsequently drew a strong backlash.

## **Post-Socialist Patriarchal Resurgence**

The post-1978 period has been celebrated as the beginning of China's economic takeoff, but it came with huge social costs that were disproportionately absorbed by Chinese women. The CCP shifted toward modernization, systemically abandoning Maoist measures and ideology. The ACWF continued to oversee women's affairs, but it became further marginalized within the party. Reactions against earlier women's empowerment efforts were on the rise.

With the erosion of permanent state employment and welfare provisions in urban areas, many previously available services such as child care were curtailed. Those responsibilities were handed back to the family, or effectively to working women, jeopardizing their positions in an increasingly competitive labor market. During industrial restructuring in the 1990s, women in urban areas were disproportionately laid off from state enterprises. Many started working in the informal sector, especially in low-end services.

As a result, despite diminishing gender disparities in education, urban gender gaps dramatically widened over the past three decades in labor force participation, unemployment rates, and income. From 1990 to 2010,

the average length of women's education nearly doubled from 4.7 to 8.8 years, gradually narrowing the gap with men, but the urban female labor force participation rate fell from 73 percent in 1990 to 60 percent in 2019.

With the relaxation of rural-urban segregation, millions of peasants came to work in the cities. Women peasants in particular took jobs in the service sector and labor-intensive, export-oriented manufacturing enterprises that mushroomed in special economic zones. International observers may be familiar with the Chinese "factory girls" whose nimble fingers supply products for the world. A less visible but equally crucial group are the servants taking care of rising Chinese middle-class families. There are now about 25 million paid domestic workers in China, making it the world's largest such market—and the majority are female rural migrants. But there are still no regulations or laws to protect service workers' rights. They have no formal contracts, protections, or benefits, and can be terminated from employment at any time.

Despite serving as the backbone of the workforce for three decades, rural migrant women did not enjoy gains commensurate with the scale of China's economic boom. They had to put up with hostile working conditions, send remittances back to their families, and fulfill their child-birthing and child-rearing duties after their shifts in the factories. Women who did not become migrant laborers served as the primary caretakers of the left-behind children and seniors in declining rural communities. Until recently, more women than men committed suicide in rural China; the reverse is true in the rest of the world.

Women's status also suffered in the social and cultural domains in this period. In their systemic denunciations of state socialism, reform-minded elites (especially males) demonized the "iron girls" as embodiments of a gender culture that had masculinized women and emasculated men. They started to emphasize "natural" differences between the two sexes and called for women to "return home" to fulfill their "long neglected" domestic duties. The

infamous one-child policy, launched in 1979, was consistent with this message. Besides being a form of state violence against women who were subjected to forced sterilization and abortions, the policy also gave rise to the discourse of "nurturing the most intelligent child." This demanded intensive cognitive labor and material investment in child-rearing, and implied that a woman's primary role was in the family.

Around the same time, depictions of desire reemerged in public culture, and images of women's desire and agency quickly engulfed mass media, a stark contrast with the revolutionary ascetic culture of the Mao era. Although the celebration of female sexuality can be seen as a way of challenging the state's control over individual bodily autonomy, this trend's one-sided emphasis on essential differences between men and women has ironically contributed to the objectification of women's bodies.

Starting in the 2000s, pressure on women to settle for marriage started to increase, leading to a discourse shaming unmarried "leftover women." Legal reforms designed to promote the rule of law raised expectations of gender equality, but instituted private property rights in ways that constrict women's entitlements to real estate and other assets upon divorce. This in turn reinforces biases in the marriage institution favoring men.

Despite this patriarchal resurgence, Chinese women have continued to fight for their rights. In response to the retreat of the state from the realm of domestic life and the widening of gender inequalities since market reforms were implemented, some urban women sought inspiration and resources from transnational feminist movements, giving birth to an era of "NGO feminism." Coming of age during the heyday of state socialism and feeling betrayed by the state in its turn to market reforms, these women were empowered by the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. The conference approached gender justice from a new angle—centered not on "women's liberation," but on "combating gender-based violence." While the former was losing its legitimacy with the

withering of state feminism, the focus on violence started to gain momentum in China with the burgeoning of civil society and individual awareness. Around the same time, China also saw the quick development of NGOs advocating for the rights of LGBTQ groups as well as people with HIV and other conditions.

Feminist NGOs leveraged different resources in bargaining with both the public and private sectors. They had to negotiate among the state-sponsored ACWF, increasingly subsumed to the central party authority; nonstate sectors allowing the amplification of gender discrimination and misogyny; and international funding agencies trying to promote a liberal feminist agenda. As with NGOs fighting for the human rights of other groups, this NGO feminism reached its limit about a decade ago, when the state drastically changed its overall approach to managing a burgeoning civil society in China.

Gender disparities have diminished in education and widened in the workplace.

## **'Made-in-China' Feminism**

Although Chinese women have made indispensable contributions to the country's development and prosperity, they have faced widening discrepancies between the rights and benefits they expect and what the state and society can actually offer. These cleavages have led to the current formation of women's right's activism, which critical media scholar Angela Wu and I call "made-in-China feminism." We chose this term, instead of the generic term "feminism," to highlight the fact that home-grown Chinese feminism is not a single, fixed entity that can neatly fit into the standard notion of feminism as conventionally understood in Western academic contexts. Although our analysis recognizes a spectrum of feminist actions, from protesting online to taking to the streets—forms of struggle more "legible" to international observers—we also pay close attention to latent forms that are often underappreciated.

One of the earliest high-profile forms of this new struggle for women's rights emerged in the early 2010s. Calling their movement "Youth Feminist Activism" (YFA), an informal network of college students and young professionals from both urban and rural backgrounds set out to fight gender discrimination and violence in all sectors. The work of their predecessors in the NGO arena had made it possible to learn about concepts such as gender discrimination, domestic violence, and sexual harassment. But this new generation's activism appeared to be less institutionalized and more grounded in the grassroots. Despite lacking access to the political establishment, they protested, brought legal cases, and ran social media platforms, while also staging plays and sponsoring walkathons, calling on all citizens to join their fight.

Five prominent figures of the YFA—dubbed the "Feminist Five"—were arrested in March 2015, on the eve of International Women's Day. Since then, fellow activists have taken steps to circumvent state surveillance. They have become more decentralized, and their actions are more spontaneous. This does not mean the movement has become weaker.

The Chinese #MeToo movement, which is to a certain degree a legacy of the early YFA, started with a single complaint of sexual harassment posted online in 2018. Within two years, a group of volunteers compiled 2,500 pages of documentation containing all the ensuing online complaints—hundreds of allegations of sexual harassment and assault.

Also in 2018, prosecutors in Minneapolis charged Chinese tech billionaire Liu Qiangdong with rape, based on a complaint filed by Liu Jingyao, a Chinese student at the University of Minnesota who alleged that he had assaulted her after a business banquet. Despite the eventual dismissal of the criminal charges based on a perceived lack of "sufficient evidence," Liu went on to file a civil suit that resulted in a court settlement. During the legal battle, she also had to deal with a smear campaign against her on the Chinese Internet. Meanwhile, she received

unwavering support from the Chinese feminist community. Her courageous actions have inspired numerous other victims to speak out about their experiences.

Another significant case involved Zhou Xiaoxuan (known as Xuanzi), a 28-year-old who accused Zhu Jun, one of China's most prominent TV anchors, of sexually harassing her when she was an intern. Zhou did not win her case either, losing an appeal of the original ruling of insufficient evidence. Nevertheless, she gathered overwhelming support from fellow feminists, who launched an online solidarity campaign and rallied outside the courthouse (the hearings were not open to the public), despite a heavy police presence.

In one of the latest Chinese #MeToo episodes, the prominent tennis player Peng Shuai came forward in November 2021 to accuse Zhang Gaoli, the retired Chinese vice premier, of sexual assault. He is the highest-ranking Chinese political figure accused to date. Although Peng has all but disappeared since making her claim, the issue of sexual harassment continues to capture the attention and mobilize the energy of the public thanks to these continuous fights.

As these activists courageously put themselves on the line, advocating for institutional accountability and legal reforms, a growing number of women from diverse backgrounds have begun expressing their discontent and criticism of prevailing gender expectations, which seek to reinstate women in traditional roles of childbearing, family caregiving, and domestic labor. But these women's voices tend to offer an individual perspective and often lack structure or a clear political agenda. This makes it challenging to fit them neatly within the conventional definition of feminism. Nonetheless, their everyday disruptions of the system play a crucial role in keeping Chinese women's activism alive and dynamic despite the stifling political environment.

Within this category, two distinct approaches can be observed. The first is entrepreneurial, characterized by

women cultivating a hyper-feminine image in order to secure a higher social status through marriage. The second is more oppositional: women rejecting societal expectations of marriage and the reproductive role imposed on them. Instead, they prioritize individual achievement and career advancement.

The latter approach has become increasingly common, making it highly unlikely that the state will be able to compel all women to revert to traditional family roles and have more children in the near future. It is important to note, however, that both approaches are predominantly accessible to middle-class women who have more social and knowledge capital to achieve their goals than their working-class counterparts.

## Stifling and Co-opting Feminism

In response to the remarkable social energy generated by the made-in-China feminist movement, the Chinese state has taken a series of sometimes self-contradictory steps, trying to appeal to and at the same time control Chinese women. The state has both economic and political concerns related to gender.

On the economic front, as China's fertility rate reaches a historic low and the population is aging fast—two correlated issues that jeopardize the country's continuous economic growth—the state has abandoned its former stringent policies restricting childbirth, switching to a pro-natalist push to increase the population. It implemented a two-child policy in 2015, soon replacing it with a three-child policy in 2021. These measures failed to do much to boost fertility, prompting officials to consider rewarding births with tax credits and child allowances.

The state has already resorted to other family- and child-friendly policies in the hope that these will persuade more young women to marry and become mothers. Many of the new additions to the Outline for the Development of Women (2021–30) revolve around benefits and

protections for working mothers. Men's duties with respect to parenting and housework are also mentioned, but the general tone still reinforces essentialist gender roles instead of challenging them.

The state has also been explicitly promoting "traditional Chinese family values" since 2013, stressing women's roles in birthing, rearing, and caring for children. Around the same time, the ACWF, once dedicated to advocating for women's rights and interests, redefined its core mission as "organizing women to build virtuous families." This represents a complete abandonment of the CCP's avowed commitment to women's liberation. To buttress this public campaign, the new civil code introduced in 2021 also makes divorce more difficult. It stipulates that before a divorce application can be approved, couples must wait 30 days—to "calm down" and reconsider their decision.

It is unlikely that any of these measures will increase the fertility rate and boost China's population, since they fail to address the underlying problem. As recent survey data show, people are not going to have more children when it costs so much to raise them—and when most social services have been privatized or are provided by already overburdened working-class women and families.

Another economic factor shaping the state's current gender policy is its changing development strategy. As China intensifies its push for industrial upgrading and global technological primacy, recruiting and retaining talented women is part of the plan. But there is a glaring discrepancy between social investment in women's education and outcomes. Females have long outnumbered males among college students, yet men still dominate jobs in the middle and upper echelons of social and economic prestige—in medicine, engineering,

logistics, and other high-skilled, high value-added fields. China's female labor force participation rate has been progressively dropping, a pattern contrary to the global trend. If the decline continues, this brain waste will further impede the country's already slowing economic growth.

On the political front, having observed how vibrant feminist movements have won many hearts and minds among younger generations, the state has shifted from reluctantly responding to their demands to actively co-opting their grassroots energy. At the same time, the state is stifling civic activism to ensure total control of society. The result has been a bifurcation of gender politics.

Certain gender issues have been assimilated into mainstream discourse and co-opted by branches of the government and corporations. The voices of professional women are allowed to be heard, and are hailed as proof of "women's power" as long as they do not challenge the political status quo. A notable example of this is the popular reality TV show *Sisters Who Make Waves*, which has gained prominence since 2020. The show features women celebrities in their 30s to 50s, emphasizing their creativity and energy and asserting that they are still in their prime. *Sisters Who Make Waves* has garnered a substantial fan base and achieved commercial success. It can be interpreted as a market response to women's demand for entertainment content that challenges ageism while also celebrating female power, beauty, and agency.

The entertainment market is highly attuned to cultural shifts, but the scientific community has also made efforts to portray the country as an advocate for gender equality. For example, it has highlighted the career of Dr. Wang Yaping, who became China's first female astronaut to conduct a spacewalk in November 2021.

Meanwhile, the Chinese government has taken strong measures to suppress feminist and LGBTQ organizations as well as individuals. The message is clear: after years of stepping back from promoting women's rights and gender equality, the state is reclaiming its authority in these domains—and other voices will not be tolerated. Over the past eight years, since the detention of the Feminist Five, numerous independent feminist media outlets and organizations have been forcibly closed, and prominent figures have fled the country.

Through orchestrated efforts by the state, made-in-China feminism has been unjustly accused of seeking privileges without fulfilling corresponding duties. The government has employed social media influencers to launch smear campaigns against feminist voices. Anyone who addresses gender inequality on social media risks being swiftly labeled as a "feminazi" or accused of "inciting hatred," and targeted for severe cyberbullying.

By stifling social movements while selectively appropriating their achievements, the Chinese party-state appears to be pursuing a dual objective: gaining control over civil society activists and taking credit for their hard work. Promoting gender equality in contemporary China can be seen as either legitimate or subversive, depending on whether the actors align with the state's agenda. Although the situation may appear discouraging, it is also characterized by a sense of unpredictability. Recent history has demonstrated that as long as discrepancies persist between the state's promises and their actual implementation, Chinese women will continue to identify points of leverage and take action.

[Current History](#)

# Climate Change, Record Temperatures, and Human Fatalities

27 August 2023, by **Judith Deutsch**

In the US, climate-related deaths are narrowly classified as heat-related, so simple google searches to this question come up with 106 deaths for 2022. However, vector-borne diseases that proliferate due to heat, like malaria, dengue, zika, also account for 700,000 deaths/year. George Monbiot [wrote](#) that the burning of Indonesia's tropical forests for biofuels (as an alternative to coal) from sugar cane/palm oil plantations, caused air pollution possibly leading to 15,000 infant deaths. And the US oil war for fossil fuels and the UN Iraqi oil-for-food program led to millions of deaths, including an estimated 5,000,000 children.

In 2021 the Guardian [reported](#) that extreme temperatures kill 5 million people/year, and that deaths were on the rise. There is also the question about reporting accuracy and the difficulty of estimation. [The World Mortality Database](#) found that the number of people dying in the 2015 Egyptian heat wave was 20,000, not the reported 61, and that in 2022, heat waves in Europe killed more than 61,600 people. Two decades ago, [71,000 excess deaths](#) were recorded in Europe from the summer heat wave. This was not enough to jar any fundamental changes.

On July 13, 2023, [James Hansen wrote](#) that the Earth is heading into a new frontier of global climate in which "the moisture extremes are more important than the temperature extremes." It is unclear how this affects ground-level humidity and human life; Hansen writes that "higher absolute humidity and deeper penetration of moist convection cause a larger portion of the rainfall to occur in intense thunderstorms."

Rarely mentioned in the news are the inevitable, unpreventable deaths due

to 'wet-bulb' conditions that occur when [relative humidity](#) is above 95% and temperatures are at least 31.1°C (88°F), a wet-bulb temperature of 35°C. When the wet-bulb temperature reaches 35°C, it crosses a threshold at which humans have difficulty losing internal body heat to cool themselves. But research shows that even wet-bulb temperatures lower than 35°C can be fatal. That was the case in 2010, when [Russia](#) experienced a deadly heat wave, where wet-bulb temperatures didn't pass 28°C. In [Iran](#), "a combination of heat and humidity this week pushed the heat index at the Persian Gulf International Airport to 152° degrees Fahrenheit, with a dew point above 90°." That's close to the limit of what [the human body can survive](#), but there is no information about fatalities.

## The Human and Ecological Impacts of Warming

The Global Humanitarian Forum, under Kofi Annan, only lasted between 2007-2010 when the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs announced that it was over-indebted and needed to cease its activity. It issued the [Human Impact Report: Climate Change](#) to the 2009 Copenhagen climate meeting, stating that this was only the beginning of addressing the human impact of climate change. The Report estimated that since 1991, developing countries experienced 99% of the casualties, and that with the current global policies projected to result in about 2.7°C warming above pre-industrial levels, there was an urgent need to address Loss and Damage.

"If we do not reverse current trends by close to 2020, however, we may have failed. Global warming will pass the widely acknowledged danger level of two degrees, since there is an approximately 20 year delay between emission reductions and the halting of their warming effect."

This is one of many facts omitted from the carbon budget. As of 2009, the Report indicated that 315,000 lives/year were lost due to climate change, principally due to malnutrition, diarrhea, malaria, and weather-related disasters brought about by climate change. It reported that women account for two-thirds of the world's poor. The Report quoted many poor, uneducated people on the ground who were well aware of climate change and its consequences.

It is well-worth the time to read the Report and to recall the failures of Copenhagen 2009 as reported by Sara Flounders: "with more than 15,000 participants from 192 countries, including more than 100 heads of state, as well as 100,000 demonstrators in the streets - it is important to ask: How is it possible that the worst polluter of carbon dioxide and other toxic emissions on the planet is not a focus of any conference discussion or proposed restrictions? ...[T]he Pentagon has a blanket exemption in all international climate agreements." [54] This exemption remained at the 2015 Paris COP meeting.

## Measuring Climate



# Change in Number of Deaths

What if the cost of climate change was measured in terms of human life and not money and that using the tools of math, measurement, statistics, algorithms, search engines, could determine deaths caused by each increase in temperature or greenhouse gas (GHG) concentration? For example, people could find out how many deaths a transatlantic flight cost (aviation is exempt under Kyoto); how many deaths does a NATO 'mission' or wargame cost (military is exempt under Kyoto); how many deaths does a ship carrying steel, or transporting oranges cause (shipping is exempt under Kyoto), or eating meat and its related emissions from methane, deforestation, transportation? How many deaths does mining cobalt for electronic vehicles and electronic devices cost? See this shocking reports in the recent book, [Cobalt Red](#), about US, Belgian, Chinese mining in the Congo.

What if human death were taken seriously, and centrally? At the beginning of the COVID epidemic, drastic measures were implemented: investment in pharmaceutical research, moratorium on non-essential production, on international aviation, moratorium on debts. But soon after there was utter, unfathomable undoing, backtracking. Since the pandemic began, a "new billionaire [has been] minted every 26 hours, as inequality contributes to the death of one person every four seconds."

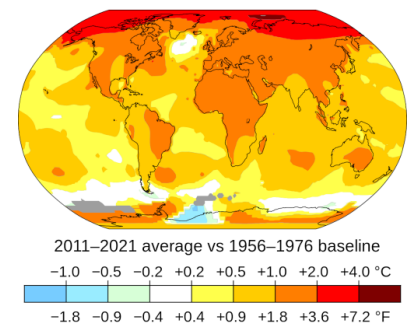
The famous [hockey stick graph](#) depicts the gradual upward slope since the beginning of the industrial revolution around 1800, and then steep, sudden climbs from 1990, and the graphs can also be used to illustrate disappearing forests, corals, wetlands, birds, insects, and mammals. However, there are no graphs on human fatalities. The iconic climate images are of disappearing bears, or entire ecosystems (corals), or at times disappearing traditional societies. The disaster of climate change is depicted as an abstraction like the 'end of civilization as we know it'. Monetizing the 'cost' of war or the cost of climate

change doesn't get at the death of an entire human being, which many people know and feel deeply about – and doubtlessly know the causes: the worldwide response to seeing the lifeless body of [toddler Alan \(Aylan\) Kurdi](#) who drowned in the Mediterranean, the worldwide response to the death of George Floyd. Daniel Ellsberg expresses his own shock and incredulity about the casual carelessness of the military and government people he interviewed – their indifference about the enormous possible deaths from the use of nuclear weapons.

## The Climate System Today

What are essential key facts about the climate system itself? Based on the paleoclimate record, James Hansen found that 350 parts per million (PPM) of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere was the turning point of ice-formation on the planet, and that additional greenhouse gas in the atmosphere would cause the melting of all Earth's ice. The rate of change is determined by positive and negative feedbacks and by the rate of adding additional CO<sub>2</sub> to the atmosphere. At this time, the ever-increasing rate is unprecedented, making it difficult to predict how long it will take for all Earth's ice to melt. Humans never lived under this condition. The entire pre-industrial level was around 275 parts per million. In May 2023, the monthly mean level was [424 ppm](#) of CO<sub>2</sub>. [55] That does not include other greenhouse gases which significantly increase global heating forcing to an effective 550 ppm: [water vapor](#), [methane](#), and [nitrous oxide](#).

A crucial determinant is the increasing potency of positive feedbacks, and the deterioration of the Earth's capacity to draw down CO<sub>2</sub> through absorption by forests (e.g. fires, deforestation) and soils (e.g. loss of topsoil, desiccation and sterilization). Each additional human-produced increment of CO<sub>2</sub> generates secondary amplifying feedbacks. It is perhaps comparable to the impacts of COVID-19 on the healthcare system, in which a cascade of secondary effects causes a general system breakdown and death.



Much current prognostication about climate solutions confuses and deceives: the target dates and baseline dates for reaching 'net zero' are arbitrary and inconsistent from country to country. As explained above, it is unpredictable how much feedback any quantity of human-produced CO<sub>2</sub> will generate. Further, representing climate change with average global surface temperature vastly oversimplifies the much more significant and complex impact of contrasting regional differences (e.g. the decreasing difference between the tropics and the Arctic), the interactions of ocean layers and circulation (regional, hemispheric, and global circulation; the layering of salt water and fresh water), the effects of atmospheric circulation (e.g. climate effects on troposphere and stratosphere), the differences between surface land and surface sea temperatures.

The demands for just solutions and sustainability are crucial, but they do not in themselves reflect the urgent human life emergency co-opted by [delay](#), [distraction](#), [deception](#). Even the most minute efforts are often lost to follow-up or treated as pilot projects. Immediate emission reductions do not require switching to renewables or leaving fossil fuels in the ground – high-emitting non-essential activities must be eliminated immediately or substantially reduced until the effective concentration of greenhouse gases is brought down to 350 ppm.

It's clear that immense areas of the earth are becoming uninhabitable. The current unprecedented weather disasters are happening at average temperatures lower than 1.5°C and reflect concentrations far lower than current 424 ppm due to inertia in the climate system. Basing policy on the notion of a carbon budget, with some

mainstream neoclassical economists, the key defenders of capitalist economics, even believing that a 6°C rise in temperature is safe for Americans as work can be done in air conditioned buildings. This contention invites the label of a crime against global humanity and bears comparability to Ellsberg's revelations about the nuclear war planners. [56]

From the perspective of preventing death, the whole climate political picture requires urgent action beyond divestment, keeping fossil fuels in the ground, and renewables. It must include open borders, eliminating the military and the entire arms industry, eliminating third-world debt and making reparations domestically and internationally, funding fire departments and first responders,

building up grain reserves, replacing factory farming with regional agriculture and decision-making. And, actually talking and listening to people, not just polls. This is a matter of life and death for the majority population, and cannot avoid breaking with the capitalist economic system itself. •

[Socialist Project](#)

## Rubiales' kiss creates political storm

26 August 2023, by [Dave Kellaway](#)

Those fans who had not switched off after the defeat against Spain in the Women's World Cup final would have observed the antics of Luis Rubiales, the Chair of the Spanish Football Federation, during the celebrations with the Spanish team. He had already clutched his crotch earlier in a sign of celebration. On the pitch, he lifted one of the players on his back like a firefighter, hugged and kissed others on the cheek, and in the official presentation, he gave Jenni Hermoso a kiss on the lips.

In the outcry that followed and the statement from Hermoso that she did not feel at all comfortable about it, he made a weasel-like half apology. Condemnation of his actions followed from many of Hermoso's teammates, major league clubs, and the Spanish government. The Prime Minister, Pedro Sanchez, intervened and effectively called for Rubiales to go.

The Spanish state, along with Portugal and Morocco, is well advanced in its bid to stage the 2030 World Cup, which would generate a huge tourist income. Expressions of machismo like this are not a good look for this process.

So amid a number of leaks, it was assumed that Rubiales was going to announce he was going to step down in a speech delivered today to federation members. Instead, we had the bombshell of him doubling down and saying he was not going to resign;

he repeated this statement about five times to make sure everyone got the message. He blamed false feminists who were hunting him down unfairly. He was the victim, and Hermoso was a willing participant. He seemed to have torn up his earlier half-apology.

It is difficult to disentangle his stance from the gearing up of culture wars in the recent national elections by the right wing Peoples Party and the neo-fascist Vox current. The latter, in particular, has denounced feminists and attacked gay and trans activists. Measures against progressives have been taken by the regional governments that these parties now govern in coalition.

Another factor in Rubiales attitude is his close relationship with Jorge Vilda, the women's team coach. A year or so ago, there was a revolt by 15 of the squad against his coaching and management. For example, he would check their hotel rooms and act in a very authoritarian way in training. Although some key players were reintegrated for the tournament, the vast majority remained outcasts. It was noticeable that during goal celebrations, the players and Vilda were apart, and there was a marked coolness shown between him and the squad.

In his non-resignation speech today, Rubiales specifically mentioned Vilda as if to place his so-called persecution alongside the problems Vilda had. The

latter was among those who applauded the loudest at the end of the speech. Indeed, Rubiales is apparently negotiating a big new salary contract for him.

Ana Requena Aguilar has written an excellent article (A man in love with his balls) in *El Diario*, a progressive national daily in the Spanish state, where she deconstructs the speech point by point, demonstrating how it is a classic machista reaction:

**Step one:** deny the facts or muddy the waters. It was spontaneous, mutual, euphoric, and consensual. He adds a gloss that he had not mentioned before: that the player had lifted him up by the hips and initiated close bodily contact. She apparently said vale (okay) when he asked if he could give her a little kiss. Rubiales denied any sexual intent. What he leaves out is the power relationship. He said he was not dominating. But he forgets that he is the leader of the football federation that employs her and picks her for the team. He fails to understand his position of power.

**Step two:** in the machista playbook, you then use the women who are around you to exonerate you. It is a bit like saying some of my best friends are black, a ploy used in relation to excusing racism. As though having a mother, daughters, or wife stops you from being sexist. Rubiales actually brought his three daughters to the meeting to use them as props in his

justification. One of them started crying, and he directly addressed her, telling her not to cry and to be proud of him. He told them that there was a lesson on equality being given today and that the truth did not depend on whether something was being said by a man or a woman. Somehow he fails to see that condemnation of his actions has been received across the board by men and women.

**Step three:** construct a distinction between feminism acceptable to people like him and extreme feminism, which he defined as 'false'. In this day and age, it is difficult for people like him to completely reject what is increasingly mainstream, so he has to create what is actually a false counterposition.

**Step four:** invoke the inquisition against yourself. These false feminists are trying to destroy you as a person. He talked about a 'social assassination', likening the feminist movement to a lynching court out to kill him. So rather than acknowledging that there was a victim as a consequence of his (and Vilda's) actions, he becomes the victim. It makes you think of another powerful

sexist man, Donald Trump, who was flaunting his mug shot on social media as Rubiales was delivering his speech.

Countries vary in how quickly and thoroughly they have become more progressive in terms of sexism or racism. You can see things in Italy, for example, the continuation of beauty contests, that rarely or never happen in Britain. Similarly, with racism in football, Britain is overall further down the road than the Spanish state. Rubiles is obviously well behind the curve in Spain, particularly given the recent legal progress enacted by the left-of-centre government in Spain.

If you watch to the end of the video, you can see the reaction of the room to the speech. Not everybody applauded or stood, but the majority did, and there were few women there in any case. What it shows is how sexism also depends on a sort of fraternity between men—a locker room mentality. The fact that there were mostly men meant this reaction was much more inevitable. Like bullying, acquiescence to sexism is governed by this sort of learned group dynamics. It is a behaviour that has to be systematically challenged and

educated against.

Where do Rubiales (and Vilda) go from here? The case has already been referred to disciplinary procedures inside the federation, within FIFA (the International Football Federation), and the higher tribunal for sport. The government is being proactive and was involved in the latter referral. A male player has already said he will refuse to play iforthe national team if Rubiales stays. Further boycotts could develop. Her trade union is also taking the matter up.

The affair is at the top of the political agenda in the Spanish state at the moment, and it is difficult to see how he can survive the crisis.

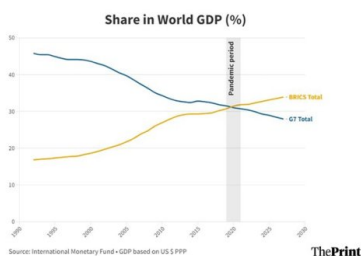
### Stop Press

In a dramatic development, 81 players have now confirmed they will refuse to play for Spain's women's national team until Rubiales is removed from his post. Meanwhile, the Spanish Football Federation has said it will sue Hermoso and other players for defamation over their allegations against Rubiales.

[AntiCapitalist Resistance](#) 25 August

## BRICS: getting bigger, but is it any stronger?

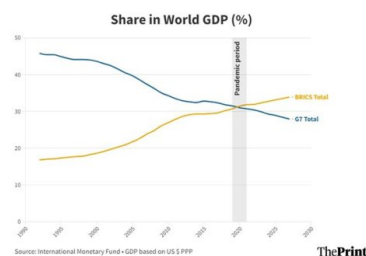
25 August 2023, by **Michael Roberts**



This sounds like a turning point in the world economic order. But that would be an illusion. First, within the BRICS, China (accounting for 17.6 per cent of global GDP) is dominant, followed by India at a distant second (7 per cent); while Russia (3.1 per cent), Brazil (2.4 per cent), and South Africa (0.6 per

cent) together made up just 6.1 per cent of world GDP. So this is no equally shared economic power.

Moreover, in nominal dollar terms, which in my opinion is what matters, the BRICS countries are still well behind the G7. Combined, the BRICS bloc had a GDP of USD26trn in 2022, which is about the same as the US alone. And when we measure GDP per person, the BRICS are nowhere. Even using PPP-adjusted international dollars, the United States' per-capita GDP amounts to \$80,035, more than three times that of China, which amounts to \$23,382.



From this summit, more countries have been invited to join as full members: Argentina, [Egypt](#), [Ethiopia](#), Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. But even if that happens, the BRICS group will remain a much smaller and weaker economic force than the G7 imperialist bloc.

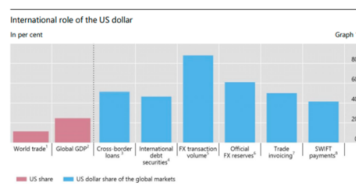
Moreover, the BRICS are very diverse in population, GDP per head, geographically and in trade composition. And the ruling elites in these countries are often at loggerheads (China v India; Brazil v Russia).

So, unlike the G7, which has increasingly homogenous economic objectives under the hegemonic control of the US, the BRICS group is disparate in wealth and income and without any unified economic objectives - except maybe to try and move away from the economic dominance of the US and in particular, the US dollar.

And even that objective is going to be difficult to achieve. [As I have pointed out in previous posts](#), even though there has been a relative decline in US economic dominance globally and in the dollar, the latter remains the most important currency by far for trade, investment and national reserves.

Approximately half of all global trade is invoiced in dollars and this share has hardly changed. The USD was involved in nearly 90% of global FX transactions, making it the single most traded currency in the FX market. Approximately half of all cross-border loans, international debt securities, and trade invoices are denominated in US dollars, while roughly 40 percent of SWIFT messages and 60 percent of global foreign exchange reserves are in dollars. The Chinese yuan continues

to make gradual gains and the renminbi's share in global FX turnover has increased from less than 1% 20 years ago to more than 7% now. But the Chinese currency still only represents 3 percent of global FX reserves, up from 1 percent in 2017.



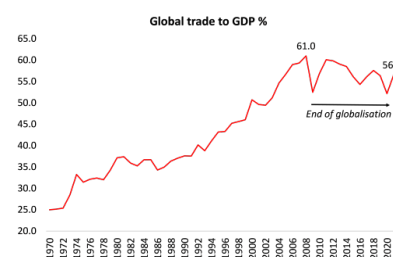
And it's even the case that 'anti-US' China remains heavily committed in its FX reserves to the US dollar. China publicly reported that it reduced the dollar share of its reserves from 79% to 58% between 2005 and 2014. But China doesn't appear to have changed the dollar share of its reserves in the last ten years.

Moreover, multilateral institutions that could be an alternative to the existing IMF and World Bank (controlled by the imperialist economies) are still tiny and weak. For example, there is the New Development Bank set up in 2015. The NDB has now appointed Brazil's former leftist President Dilma Rousseff as head, based in Shanghai.

There is much noise that the NDB can provide an opposite pole of credit to the imperialist institutions of the IMF and World Bank. But there is a long

way to go in doing that. One ex-official of South African Reserve bank (SARB) commented: "the idea that Brics initiatives, of which the most prominent thus far has been the NDB, will supplant Western-dominated multilateral financial institutions is a pipe dream."

Even so, international rivalry, politically, economically and militarily, is going to hot up in this decade. The days of complete domination by the imperialist bloc under the US are over - [because globalization ie unimpeded trade and financial flows of the last two decades of the 20th century, is over](#)



As the profitability of capital fell back in the major economies in the first two decades of this century, the struggle for surplus value by the major capitalist economies has intensified. And this is leading to a fragmentation of economic power. The US-led imperialist bloc is still dominant, but its dominance is being questioned as never before.

[The next recession](#)

# UAW Mobilizing, Contract Deadlines Nearing

24 August 2023, by [Dianne Feeley](#)

Wearing "End Tiers" and "No Concessions" T-shirts, hundreds of workers and their families turned out to demonstrate their willingness to fight for a good contract at the rally UAW Region 1 on Sunday, August 20. The short program featured Fain, Region 1 director LaShawn English, and U.S. Congressional representative Haley Stevens.

Fain took on the argument that the UAW has set expectations too high. Why is it okay that CEOs reward themselves with 40% increases in their benefits package but wrong for workers to make such a demand?

Wages have stagnated over a generation, the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) given up during the bailout has not been restored, and

a tiered workforce means some workers have drastically fewer wages and benefits. Those issues, along with an end to forced overtime, the right to have both job security and a life beyond the workplace, are essential to win as companies restructure.

Negotiations between the corporations and the UAW traditionally begin with the union

president staging highly photographed handshakes with the CEOs of each company. That didn't happen this year. Instead, President Fain shook hands with workers at Ford, GM and Stellantis plants, listening to workers' demands and answering questions.

At the same time UAW staff passed out cards and encouraged members to sign up to receive weekly updates by text or email. Since then Fain has been holding short and weekly Facebook Live updates.

In addition to the Facebook Live updates, the UAW's website and Facebook pages have short videos that include workers' stories. The latest features a fourth generation Ford worker who describes her experience as a single mom working as a temp for six years in four different plants before becoming fulltime.

This inclusion and transparency is a

sea change from how the UAW leadership functioned over the last half century. It used to be that negotiations were walled off from members, and the UAW Communications Department typically issued "no comment" responses to the media's questions.

In contrast, the newly elected UAW leadership — the first directly elected in a one-person, one vote mail-in ballot — developed a militant No Concessions, No Tiers strategy as the contract deadline rapidly approaches. They have provided a clear list of members' demands, taken on the companies' line, encouraged regions and locals to prepare a contract campaign, and through the union's Organizing Department set up online trainings so that members are empowered to develop actions with co-workers.

Borrowing methods developed during the Teamster contract campaign at UPS, these include having members sign cards in order to receive weekly updates, asking members to wear buttons and red shirts with slogans to work on Wednesdays, encouraging 10-minute parking lot rallies and practice picketing. Whether or not the local leadership is plugged into the campaign, autoworkers are encouraged to be actively involved. Fain has called for locals to conduct votes to authorize a strike mandate if negotiations are not progressing. He added, "As a union, we have to lead the fight for economic justice — not just for ourselves but for the entire working class" matched the sentiment of the crowd. Clearly the slogan on the UAW website, "Our generation's defining moment at the Big Three" captures the mood of autoworkers as September 15 approaches.

[Against the Current](#)

## Popular Protest and Labor Insurgency in Iran

23 August 2023, by **Shirin Kamangar**

At its peak, the uprising attracted global media coverage, which tended to reduce it to a liberal feminist struggle for legal rights already enjoyed by middle-class white women in the Western world. Although in its initial stages the movement was undoubtedly centered on women's rights—as one of its main slogans, "Women, Life, Freedom" indicates—the diverse and sometimes contradictory character of its development makes it irreducible to a homogenous set of demands expressed by a certain class or gender.

The Farsi-language media, owned and controlled by right-wing exiles, consistently represented the demands of the mass uprising as oriented to the concerns of what might be called "liberal, white feminism," suppressing the very real heterogeneity of the movement by reducing it to the

struggle against the forced hijab. This is not to say that the question of the forced hijab was not important or that it does not remain important in Iran today. We cannot, however, treat the question of the hijab as the only issue behind the mass movement. Instead, we must examine the other widespread demands that have received very little media attention and determine why they have gone largely unreported.

While it is true that relative quiet has returned to major cities like Tehran and Isfahan, media accounts generally ignore the fact that the movement is still ongoing in provinces like Sistan and Baluchestan in the southeast of Iran, Kurdistan in the northwest, and some cities of Khuzestan in the south.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, there has been little coverage of the activity of the Iranian workers' movement, either at the height of the mass uprising or since it

subsided. This neglect is easy to explain: any demand that challenges the neoliberal economic reforms that have already been carried out and that have led to mass uprisings four times in the last five years must be marginalized. The loss of legitimacy of the present regime is due in large part to the relentless "economic restructuring" that began a decade after the 1979 revolution and led to the elimination of state subsidies and welfare services for education, healthcare, housing, basic foods, and fuel energies. The redistributive regime established immediately following the 1979 revolution was not simply granted to the people by the state but was attained through the self-organization of workers, peasants, local people, and minorities, and in schools, hospitals, offices, factories, and the military into hundreds of independent shuras (or councils) designed to institute workers' and

peoples' control of workplaces and neighborhoods. These organs of popular power were soon brutally repressed and replaced by state-controlled shuras.

In fact, every time the state has removed a subsidy on necessities like food or fuel, allowing prices to rise to whatever level the market dictates, the result has been mass uprisings that are, in turn, repressed with increasing levels of violence. The delegitimization of the regime that followed each of these episodes helped create the conditions for the latest upsurge. That is why the right-wing opposition, from the monarchists to the republicans, do not intend to rebuild capitalism in Iran from scratch as they often claim. Instead, they aim to take advantage of the rich opportunities offered by the present regime to pursue even harsher neoliberal economic reforms. Despite the fact that over 90 percent of national industries have been sold to the private sector, the right-wing opposition continues to argue that there is no "real" privatization because some of the energy and oil products—in one of the world's most oil-rich countries—are not sold at the international market price.

In reality, state subsidies devoted to keeping staple foods and petroleum affordable were gradually removed over the last five years. Access to higher education is almost exclusively restricted to students from the upper classes, and 80 percent of workers' employment contracts have become temporary. At this point, state intervention is limited to repression aimed at protecting the interests of the capitalists closely tied to the regime. The removal of state subsidies on petroleum in 2019 not only failed to improve the lives of the common people but provoked an uprising of the poor, in which 1500 people were reportedly killed.

As might be expected, the right-wing opposition makes every attempt to silence the demands of the working class by reformulating them in very vague and abstract terms. In its "Mahsa Charter," economic demands are translated into abstract and universal rights that cannot be realized in capitalist society. Even the

most pressing concrete problems that women in Iran struggle with daily are ignored by the right. They have nothing to say about 80 percent unemployment among women, the feminization of poverty, or the sexual division of labor. They have reduced the notion of equality to the right not to wear the hijab.

The question remains, however, of whether the working class participated in the mass uprising and, if so, what its key demands were. On November 1, local news outlets in Sistan and Baluchistan reported that the Anjirak gold mine in Taftan was shut down by members of the tribes of northern Baluchistan after more than 80 protesters were killed and 300 people seriously injured by security forces in a single day. They closed off the road to the mines and sabotaged extractive equipment. The Taftan gold mine is one of the largest in Iran, and as the provincial governor of Sistan and Baluchistan remarked last year, it "has mineral deposits worth nearly 800 billion dollars," which he insisted meant "a bright future for the inhabitants." In fact, despite its mineral wealth, the province has the highest poverty rate in all of Iran, and its Baluchi population faces discrimination and neglect. The current revolt against a despotic state committed to defending the increasingly unequal distribution of wealth and imposing its own unpopular version of Islam on the people has led not only to active solidarity with the protests, but also to a growing sense of outrage at how little of the province's great wealth goes to those who produce it. According to the news channel Rasad Baluchistan, mine workers and their supporters declared that "the wealth in this mine belongs to Baluchi people and we will never allow outsiders to extract and exploit this wealth." Reza Mohtashami-Pour, Deputy Minister for Mines and Minerals Processing, reported that a number of mining companies have shut down their operations in response to the protests.

Immediately after the beginning of the nationwide protests over the killing of Jina Amini, contract workers at Bushehr Petrochemical went on strike in solidarity with the mass movement and against the regime's violent

repression, blocking the road and chanting slogans directly aimed at the overthrow of the regime. The strike soon spread to the refinery complex in Abadan, the largest in Iran, located in the country's oil-rich southwest. However, as expected, the state quickly moved to break the strike, with mass arrests (allegedly 200 project-based workers) and strict security measures, which succeeded in discouraging further solidarity actions by oil workers.

The regime's brutal repression, arrests, surveillance, and all-too-common association of the workers' strikes with the "external enemy" in attempt to divert attention from the harsh working conditions imposed by neoliberal reforms, discouraged the working class from taking explicit political positions aimed at overthrowing the regime and its dominant socio-economic relations. Moreover, the opportunistic attempts by the right wing to use the workers' strikes as a means for regaining power further dissuaded the working class from taking direct political positions. The right-wing opposition, comfortably established abroad thanks to the public wealth stolen just before the 1979 revolution, went so far as to denounce Iranian workers for not obeying their decrees for a general strike. However, as Meysam Al-e Mahdi, a worker and activist living in exile, explained in an interview with the leftist Slingers Collective: "the workers do not sell their strikes, they strike as required by their daily working conditions."

The workers very carefully considered how best to advance their struggle in the face of the restrictions imposed on them both by the present regime and by the right-wing opposition. The mass uprising has provided fertile ground for them to voice demands linked to their daily existence and lived experience. The workers immediately realized that the explicit articulation of demands aimed at the collapse of the regime could only lead to repression, and could potentially be appropriated by the right wing for the advancement of its pro-capitalist interests. Workers from various industrial and service sectors therefore launched strikes protesting low wages, long working hours,

overdue payments, lack of safety measures at the workplace, arbitrary dismissals, and the lack of independent workers' organizations.

The response to the strategy developed by the workers' organizations by the right-wing opposition and certain parts of the left has been that making demands concerning wages and working conditions is an expression of the particular interests of workers without underlying political demands, and that it legitimizes the regime simply by addressing demands to it. There is nothing surprising about the right-wing opposition's rejection of the workers' demands; they adhere to the most draconian form of neoliberalism. But the attitude of a segment of the left is more surprising. The workers' demands challenge the guiding principles of the neoliberal economy on which the IRGC depends. Because the regime has accelerated the pace of neoliberal reforms over the past decade, any obstacle placed by the workers can seriously challenge its functioning and should be seen as a loss for the regime. If the state is forced to agree to the workers' immediate demands, leading to an improvement in their material conditions, the struggle will serve as an example and encourage others throughout Iran. This gives workers confidence in their power to wage struggles and win, and to see the vulnerabilities of the state. If, however, the state rejects the workers' demands, and employs violent means to suppress the movement, the regime is further delegitimized and its anti-worker policies exposed, revealing the regime's supposed anti-imperialism as a lie. More importantly, fighting to win immediate demands helps prepare the working class and the popular masses more broadly to fight against any attempt to impose market discipline which deprives them of the means of sustenance or reduces them to destitution.

The right-wing opposition has learned from the "traumatic" experience of the 1979 revolution that the oil industry is one of the most critical sectors in Iran; the strike waged by oil workers played a significant role in paralyzing the economy and hastening the fall of the

Shah. It hopes to use the weapon of the oil workers' strike as a quick and easy means of bringing down the current regime, but to do so it must limit the workers' demands to the single issue of forcing the regime to step down. The experience of 1979 shows, however, that workers' mobilizations cannot be directed from above and will very likely go beyond merely political and legal demands. They know from experience that workers in Iran have without fail organized shuras in such circumstances to counter the authority of the state and the employers. Thankfully, the workers' movement today has charted an independent course that has disappointed the right-wing opposition and frightened the current regime.

As noted above, international media has consistently failed to report on the multi-sectoral mobilization of workers following the first days of the mass uprising in Iran. What follows is a brief account of the mobilization, emphasizing both its depth and breadth.

Workers in the oil, gas, and petrochemical industries went on strike several times during October and November, pushing for a set of shared demands, including pay raises and the right to form independent unions. The state-controlled unions determine and impose wage levels, which are far below the poverty level, often as little as 25 percent of what would be necessary for subsistence. The workers have also consistently fought to eliminate the contractors, who have mushroomed following the neoliberalization of the economy that delivered nationalized industries to the private sector. After the privatization of these industrial plants, temporary and individualized contracts were substituted for permanent ones, depriving workers of the protections provided by the Labor Code against arbitrary dismissal.

On November 22, the workers of the 11th refinery in Phase 19 of South Pars Gas Complex of the Masjed Soleiman Petrochemical industry and those in the repair section of the Asaluyeh Petrochemical industry launched a strike after their employers failed to respond to their

repeated demand for wage increases. In the summer of 2021, oil workers launched a two-month strike known as the "10-20" campaign, demanding a reduction in working days to 20 per month—down from 24. Workers from more than 100 different petrochemical sites joined the strike and succeeded in winning this key demand.

The steel industry was also another sector that witnessed work stoppages during the same period. Four thousand workers in Esfahan Steel Company, Iran's third largest steel producer, went on strike on November 15 and 16 demanded pay raises and the implementation of a "job classification scheme." As reported by the Free Union of Iranian Workers (FUIW), initially formed in December 2006 as the National Union of Expelled and Unemployed Workers, the manager of the company and the representative of the Labor Ministry attended the workers' assembly and promised to meet their demands. According to Radio Zamaneh, the sum of 10 million rials (USD\$20) was transferred to every worker's bank account to convince them to call off the strike. On November 25, it was clear that the company had no intention of keeping its promise and workers from every sector of the company stopped work, chanting, "No more empty promises, our tables are bare."

They then marched to another sector where they stopped the flow of molten and cast iron and turned off the furnaces. The loading lines were disrupted, and the cars were not unloaded. Crane operators shut off their machinery and joined the strike as well. The representative of the "Social Security Insurance Company" visited the workers and announced an increase of 30 to 50 million rials (USD\$60-100) in their wages by December 1, 2022. The workers warned that they had formally agreed to strike again if their wages did not increase as promised. In addition to the low wages, the working conditions at Esfahan Steel are particularly dangerous, both because of the use of outdated technologies and because of the miserable and unregulated working conditions. A recent tweet by a visitor to the facility posted to the Instagram account of Collective98

gives us a glimpse into the conditions workers face daily:

In 2015 we went on a research tour organized by the university to Esfahan Steel Company. On our arrival, we were angrily told that we can't take selfies. After a series of arguments, we were allowed in. I saw things that I will never forget. One of the workers was a friend of my friend. He held my hand and took me near the furnace. The intense heat was melting me. He said: 'I'm sorry for treating you badly on your arrival. This is a very dangerous place. If you become distracted by taking selfies, a disaster might occur. One of the workers was killed after an explosion last week. His body appeared healthy, but he had been cooked from inside.

The welders' strike at the Foolad Technic Company of Bafgh Steel complex (Kerman province) over the death of their co-workers is another testimony to poor working conditions and low safety standards. On Friday, November 25, three welders suffered fatal burns as they were working on a compressor because of gas leakage and the explosion of an undischarged gas pipe. One of the workers died on the spot before the arrival of rescue teams, and two others died after arriving at the hospital with burns covering over 70 percent of their bodies. Workers at this complex have persistently challenged the granting of permits that allow management to compel them to labor under unsafe conditions. Iran ranks 102 in the world in workers' safety. According to the HRANA news agency, during the last year at least 811 workers were killed and 10,895 injured. This statistic is based on incidents actually reported by workers; the real figures are certainly significantly higher.

Also, on November 23, the workers at South Aluminum Corporation (SALCO), the largest aluminum production complex in Iran, located in the Lamerd Special Economic Zone in Fars province, went on strike after management refused to agree to their

demands.

A study of the strikes launched in the automobile industry is also of high importance because this sector has been at the center of debates for several years over its privatization. The two major car manufacturers in Iran—Iran Khodroo and SAIPA, which have around 100,000 workers combined—are jointly owned by the state and several private sector auto parts companies. Crouse, the largest private manufacturer of auto parts in Iran, is owned by Hamid Keshavarz Toochai and Mohammad Alipoor Fetрати and employs 12,000 workers. Neoliberal advocates speak of this company as playing a critical role in the country's economic growth and development. This company has bought 62 percent of Bahman Group's stock share and a striking share of Iran Khodroo and SAIPA. According to the official news agencies, Crouse annually sells around 30,000 billion rials (USD\$85 million) to Iran Khodroo and SAIPA collectively. But the workers face low wages and extremely difficult working conditions in one of the largest and most profitable companies in Iran.

On November 19, many of the 12,000 workers at Crouse—again, Iran's largest auto parts manufacturer—went on strike for three days. According to the reports given by the FUIW, workers have complained about gender discrimination and working conditions over the past several years. Their demands included wage increases, an end to mandatory overtime work, and a ban on overtime shifts on Fridays, an official holiday in Iran. When management refused to respond to their demands, the workers again walked off the job, chanting, "The poverty level is 200 million Rial (USD\$400), our pay is only 60 million rial (USD\$120)," indicating that poverty level is around four times the average wage at Crouse. The owner of the company, Hamid Keshavarz, threatened to call the security forces if the workers continued the strike or their chants.

Part of the explanation for the extremely low wages lies in the fact that women make up 70 percent of the company's labor force. They must work on their feet for 10 hours per

day, and the use of cell phones is prohibited—including in cases of emergency. The company employs only single women under 32; those who marry are subject to immediate dismissal. Reviewing some of the feedback by workers on the company's own website helps to clarify the hardships they suffer:

I had to leave the company after 6 years because my neck was seriously damaged. [M]y neck and hands were completely damaged because of the difficult working conditions. If you care a bit about your spiritual and physical health, do not go there for work.

During the same time, on November 22-23, the workers at Bahman Motor and Bahman Diesel companies staged a strike against low wages, chanting, "We don't want promises, we want our rights actualized," and "Dollar-paid experts, Rial-paid workers." Bahman Diesel Company produces light, heavy, semi-heavy and minibus trucks in Qazvin's Alborz Industrial City. Bahman Group was privatized in 2016, and Crouse is the main shareholder, employing over 4000 workers and personnel. Visiting the production line of Bahman Motor, Ahmad Naderi, a member of parliament, remarked, "I am pleased that the Bahman Group and Crouse automotive parts producers are operating as private firms. The result has been countless achievements in domestic production."

Many news agencies speak of Bahman Group as one of the most successful private auto manufacturers and advocates of neoliberalism are among its staunchest backers. As is evident, "business success" and high efficiency for state authorities and business owners signifies an increase in productivity and profit, gained through forced overtime work, low wages, physically damaging working conditions, an increase in the retirement age and the dismissal of workers' representatives. Further, one of the myths constantly repeated by the proponents of neoliberalism is that the "free market" provides an opportunity for "competition" between



equal individuals without state interference. But the case of Crouse, which controls a large share of the auto industry in Iran (one of the largest and most profitable sectors of the economy) and which is owned by two individuals with no ties to the regime, is instructive. The company's freedom from state interference has resulted in the imposition of working conditions significantly worse than those faced by workers at Iran Khodroo and SAIPA.

Around the same time, in late November 2022, the workers at Morattab production company, an SUV manufacturer based in Tehran, organized a series of strikes, demanding the payment of nine months of overdue wages, chanting, "Bread, cheese, oregano: we are all hungry." That employers feel free to withhold workers' wages for a period of nine months, thereby denying workers the ability to reproduce their own labor power and continue to work, shows the current regime's commitment to the most extreme forms of neoliberalism. Workers in such circumstances often take a second or third job to support themselves while working without pay in the hopes of one day receiving their wages back.

Also in late 2022, the workers at Iran Tractor Manufacturing Company—a manufacturer of tractors, trucks, auto-parts, and diesel engines in Tabriz—stopped working because none of their demands in the previous year's nine-day strike were satisfied. They asked for wage increases, the implementation of a "job classification scheme," and the right to organize an independent work council.

Strikes were also launched by the drivers in the transportation sector during the Jina Amini uprising. As reported by Collective98, the Union of Truck Drivers and Truck Owners called for a 10-day strike beginning from November 26th, both in solidarity with those who suffered the bloody repression in Baluchistan and Kurdistan, and to protest their working conditions.

According to the head of the truckers' guild societies, Seyyed Jalal Moosavi Nayeb, "The truckers demand the

return of their basic share of subsidized fuel, which had been priced at 3000 rials (USD\$6) per 2000 liters." He added, "The truck drivers are not provided with a clear program regarding the time and place of the stations which provide subsidized fuel. A trucker must go from one fuel station to another in search for the subsidized fuel. The other problem is that the designated stations supply fuel at random times which leads to long queues." The removal of state subsidies on fuel was undertaken as part of the program of neoliberalization. However, this is only one source of concern; several other additional factors were additional sources of discontent. Not only are the costs of maintenance extremely high, but some of the regulations recently introduced increase freight tariffs solely to the benefit of private contractors. The truckers are demanding the extension of a freight rate system that guarantees basic wages.

It is necessary to recall that this is not the first trucker strike in recent years. The largest and most comprehensive truckers' strikes took place in 2018. Truck and bus drivers from over 100 cities organized one of the longest strikes in the summer and autumn of 2018, causing serious disruptions in the transportation and general economic cycle. However, none of their demands were met and after four years their working conditions have deteriorated rather than improved.

What can be called the fruit of the workers' intervention in the Jina Uprising occurred in February 2023, when 20 independent workers' organizations and unions inside Iran formulated a charter expressing their minimum demands. What is significant about this charter is that the existing organizations managed to unite around shared objectives in the absence of a left-wing party and assert their existence and power in a period of shifting relations. Further, it became more evident that there exist multiple antagonistic forces and positions in the ongoing struggle against the regime. What the right-wing opposition was constantly describing as the necessary unity of all against a common enemy was shattered when it became clear that

the immiseration of the working class at the hands of the regime was deemed unworthy of mention. More importantly, the demands expressed in the Workers' Charter, as opposed to those of the right wing's "Mahsa Charter," derive from the concrete conditions inside the country and rely on the power of the existing organizations (including the independent workers' shuras) for its realization—as opposed to the right-wing opposition's focus on abstract and universal rights dependent on the authority of international declarations and conventions for their actualization.

In May 2023, around eight months after the Jina Uprising, two developments occurred that expressed certain shifts in the political conjuncture. First, there was the breakdown of the alliance between the different wings of the opposition in exile. This coalition was originally formed in February 2023 among Reza Pahlavi, Hamed Esmaeilion, Nazanin Bonyadi, Shirin Ebadi, Mahsa Ali Nejad, and Abdollah Mohtadi at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. It broke down over the monarchists' criticism of Reza Pahlavi for degrading his "royal majesty" through the alliance. Furthermore, because the protests were mainly led by the national minorities in Kurdistan, Sistan, Baluchistan, and Khuzestan, the alliance was forced to include rights such as the official recognition of their mother tongues and the decentralization of power, although in very vague and ambiguous terms. The monarchists, however, began to denounce the other members of the alliance for the inclusion of such rights which, they argued, threaten the nation's "territorial integrity" and give way to the "segregationist" demands of minorities. Hamed Esmaeilion also remarked that the alliance was broken because of the "undemocratic behavior" of Reza Pahlavi's supporters, whose only reaction to their fascistic attitude was silence.

The second major development occurred when thousands of the contract workers from over 100 companies—mostly from the oil, gas, petrochemical refineries, mining, and steel—launched a new wave of

nationwide strikes under the name "Campaign 2023," protesting the 21 percent wage increase determined by the Ministry of Labor and the Supreme Shura of Labor, a state-controlled organization, for the new working year. This increase failed to accommodate the inflation rate of 50 percent. The oil strike expanded across the border into Iraq, where construction workers hired by Iranian contracting firms in charge of installing power plants on the outskirts of the city of Basra reportedly joined the strike. The demands expressed by the project's oil workers included a 79 percent wage rise, complete implementation of the "10-20" working scheme, payment of overdue wages and bonuses, compensation for extreme weather, the right to have independent

workers' organizations, and improvement in accommodations. The project's workers were accommodated in extremely inadequate dormitories, where six individuals were cramped into 12m2 rooms. Moreover, the contracting companies provide very low-quality food to the workers.

The strikers were brutally repressed and many workers arrested by the regime, which smeared them as the "main leaders of the strikes." Instagram accounts such as "The Official News Media of the Central Oil and Gas Campaign," which played an important role in coordinating and publishing news on the nationwide strikes, were deactivated. At the same time, however, many workers saw a wage increase at the end of this

period. The most important outcome of the recent nationwide strike was that the united power of the workers, in the complete absence of any organized left-wing organization, became clearly visible. It also contained a clear message: the workers will not be deceived by any power that promises to establish "democracy" and "freedom" but overlooks the demands of the workers. The demands expressed by the workers are diametrically opposed to the neoliberal economic reforms, which have already caused poverty and destitution for the majority of the people and which the right-wing opposition puts forward as the answer to Iran's problems.

22 August 2023

Source: *Spectre*.

## How Javier Milei upset Argentina's political status quo

22 August 2023, by **Juan Elman**

"We are the true opposition," he declared. "We are the only ones who want real change. Because remember: a different Argentina is impossible with the same old ones, who have failed."

The primaries, in which presidential candidates from all parties take part, is seen as a good gauge of the actual election, scheduled for 22 October. Milei's party Freedom Advances (La Libertad Avanza) took 30% of the total vote, while Milei (who had no rival for his party's presidential nomination) won the most votes at an individual level.

The centre-right opposition coalition Together for Change (Juntos Por el Cambio) came second on 28%, with hardline ex-security minister Patricia Bullrich becoming its candidate for president. These two results - Milei's overall victory and Bullrich's victory as nominee - entails a significant advance for the right.

The ruling centre-left coalition Union for the Fatherland (Unión por la Patria) came third on 27%. It was the worst result for Peronism - a movement identified with former president Juan Domingo Perón, whose main banner is social justice - since the return of democracy 40 years ago. Union for the Fatherland's presidential candidate will be the current economy minister Sergio Massa, who won the primary comfortably. But governing took its toll: Union for the Fatherland lost almost half of the votes it won in 2019.

Turnout was under 70% - a low number given that voting is compulsory.

It's unlikely that any of the three candidates - Milei, Bullrich, Massa - will win the presidency in the first round, which requires 45% of the votes (or 40% plus a difference of ten percentage points from the second-placed candidate). But Milei is now

the favourite to win the run-off in November.

Milei anchored his campaign on the promise of uprooting the "political caste" and what he sees as its byproducts: a bureaucratic state that cares for those in need. Before he began his victory speech in a packed hotel in downtown Buenos Aires, Milei's excited young supporters chanted: "They all must go - not a single one of them must remain." That slogan, aimed at the country's political parties and their leaders, was last heard on Argentina's streets during the severe economic and political crisis of 2001.

The bipartisan political system born out of that crisis - basically centre-left 'Kirchnerism' based on Néstor Kirchner's presidency in 2003 and his wife Cristina Fernández's two terms (2007-15) followed by the centre-right 'anti-Kirchnerism' of Mauricio Macri, who won in 2015 - has ended with the

emergence of Milei.

Now the country is back in crisis. Inflation is above 100%, 50% of the population does not have secure employment, 40% live in poverty and there's been no growth for more than a decade. In the 20th century, Argentina boasted of being a sort of European island in Latin America; now it increasingly resembles its neighbours.

That longstanding polarisation has been replaced by a more powerful one that pits traditional politics ("the caste" in Milei's words) against the "indignados" ('outraged').

## Eccentric libertarian

An eccentric character, resembling a messy-haired rockstar in looks, Milei was born into a lower middle-class family and had a turbulent childhood. Journalist Juan Luis González [portrays](#) him in his recent biography 'El loco' ('the madman') as an unstable person who indulges in messianic delusions and communicates with his deceased dog via his sister Karina. In his victory speech on Sunday, he thanked his "four-legged children", who are named after Austrian School economists.

Before becoming a politician, he taught economics at university, worked as a financial adviser for several large companies and was a TV panellist discussing economics. In 2021, he won a seat as a deputy in Buenos Aires city - his only political experience so far.

Milei's supporters are socially diverse and come mainly from the provinces. In Sunday's primaries, Milei and his party won 16 of the country's 24 provinces. In some traditionally Peronist provinces in the south and north, he got more than 40% of the vote, as he also did in the agribusiness-dominated central region, until now a centre-right stronghold. He fared worst in Buenos Aires city and province, respectively Argentina's capital and most populated electoral district, which have long monopolised national politics.

Milei is a libertarian who identifies with the global far right, wants to launch a [referendum](#) about the 2020 legal abortion law and has promised to scrap mandatory sex education, [as openDemocracy explained](#). A [climate crisis denier](#), he proposes a shock economic programme with [dollarisation](#) as the main policy - until recently considered taboo in Argentine politics, but perceived by many voters as the only way to curb inflation.

A negative media campaign, which intensified in recent months in the wake of a series of [financial scandals](#), did not damage him; possibly the opposite, in fact.

With an electorate divided into almost three equal parts, Milei is not far ahead of his rivals, but he has the advantage of momentum from his victory - and they also face more problems.

The centre-right candidate Patricia Bullrich may well lose right-wing votes

to Milei. Her dilemma reflects a global trend, with the rise of the far right punishing mainly traditional centre-right parties.

Meanwhile, the ruling party's candidate Sergio Massa carries the burden of being the driver of an economy that was dealt a [severe blow](#) by Sunday's results. After a record interest rate hike, inflation is expected to rise, further exacerbating the economic crisis. The ruling coalition still has a chance of reaching the presidential run-off, but to achieve this it will have to win the left-wing vote.

And all the parties have to appeal to the record ten million voters who didn't cast their ballots on Sunday.

As for Milei, he has to show he's more than the recipient of 'angry votes' and that his [proposals](#) are feasible. The opinion polls, which before the primaries failed to capture the strength of his support, show some [dissent](#) from his own voters for his more radical ideas.

The results of the primaries in the southern province of Santa Cruz, the home and stronghold of centre-left Kirchnerism, are revealing. Milei won the most votes as contender for president. But his Freedom Advances party did not present any candidates, ceding first place to the ruling party - but on only 17% of the vote. More than 60% left this part of their ballot blank. In other words, it was Milei's party or none at all.

17 August 2023

Source: [openDemocracy](#).

# "Indigenous peoples cannot continue to carry capitalist development on our shoulders"

21 August 2023, by **Leonidas Iza**

A CONAIE delegation, headed by Leónidas Iza, toured Europe in July

to talk about the struggles of indigenous peoples and other

peasant, environmentalist, feminist and sexual diversity

**groups, with whom they maintain a level of coordination from the indigenous movement, the “Yes” campaign for Yasuní and also the book *Estallido. La rebelión de octubre en Ecuador* written by Iza, along with Andrés Tapia and Andrés Madrid. Maureen Zelaya Paredes interviewed Leónidas Iza about his book and the current Ecuadorian situation.**

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**Among other things, you are on tour for the presentation of “Estallido,” a book that delves into the experience of October 2019... what does Estallido offer us?**

We have defined politically and ideologically making a theoretical-academic systematization for the debate, about what happened in October 2019. Normally what is told about social struggles is done from an academic neutrality and that is why we believe it is important to tell it from the subjects who build the struggles. That’s what “Estallido” does. We have said “we are going to write from within,” from the political subjects, from the fighting subjects, from the subjects that sustain the struggle. And, based on what we have, to question the economic, social, political situation of Ecuador allowing us to take the whole situation to a broader debate at the international level.

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But with that academic and theoretical spirit we not only want to analyse but change that reality. We aspire to make it a contribution to the other struggles at the continental level. We have to be respectful of the generation of thought at the global level but I maintain that indigenous thought should not remain only for indigenous peoples, but should look for the currents with which it can unify at the global level, identify the correlation of forces, always maintaining political autonomy, autonomy of thought, organizational autonomy, and even have the possibility of anchoring with a current at a global level.

There are comrades who say, “we are

indigenous, we are neither left nor right,” and when political decision-making moments arrive, they go with anyone and that does not seem right to me. We must have a look from our positioning and know with whom we anchor globally. I believe in the camp of the left and that camp of the left, of course it is diverse, there are countless currents, but we must make an effort to bring them together in the popular field at the global level, together with critical academics, with unions, workers, workers, environmentalists, ecologists and the indigenous movement recreating its own thought. The book “Estallido” looks at the struggle from practice, but also contributing a projection forward.

**On August 20, general elections are called in Ecuador, what is the pre-electoral political and social context? What feelings are there in the street, in the social movement?**

August 20 will mark a change of a political moment, not of conjuncture, but of political moment. We do not know what the decision of the Ecuadorian people will be, but it will finally allow us to be clear about the political conditions. The strength in the streets, the strength of the organizations determined this political moment. If the struggles of 2019 and 2022 had not taken place, the dissolution of the national assembly by Lasso would hardly have occurred. It has come here not of its own volition but because of the pressure in the streets of the popular movements in Ecuador.

At this political moment, the National Assembly has been dismissed, but the President of the Republic has also been dismissed and the government is governing by decree. Everything that at the moment the government is defining, the next Assembly has to execute those decisions, it has to throw away all decisions that are undemocratic, those of a dictatorship using the constitution. So, this political change from the elections will depend on the government that comes, and its legitimacy will be given to the extent that it accepts our demands or that it positions itself against. There, the indigenous movement and the popular sectors in

general are still going to be very attentive about the government’s program. There are issues that are red lines where we are not willing to give in. For the indigenous peoples, for the popular sectors, the moment will be defined by the capacity for unity at the level of all of Ecuador.

**What are those red lines? What is expected of the government that emerges this August 20 and that change of political moment?**

On the results of the elections, we prefer not to speculate. We are going to wait for the scenario that occurs and the conditions that occur with the results. But for us three things are clear: First to position our program. The political project that we have as an indigenous movement and popular sectors is public knowledge, and we are going to support and defend it against any government that comes.

Second, we will defend the red lines that we are not willing to accept, no matter whether the resulting government is left or right. We’ve had a response from our base, from our people about what those red lines are. In the last fifty years the economy has depended on oil and now it is intended to supplant that dependence by large-scale mining. We are not willing to accept that, and we have the organizational capacity installed in the territory: we cannot advance in large-scale mining. There is artisanal mining that needs to be regulated and better conditions guaranteed, but large-scale mining, no. And the coming governments have to know this.

We have heard politicians say that we cannot continue to be poor sitting on a sack of gold, but the problem is that that sack of gold for us is the balance of ecological conditions. Because, in the case of mining, what would be the sack of gold? The mountain! And the mountain gives us the water we drink and the ecological conditions to continue sustaining the agricultural system. The 70% that Ecuadorians consume depends on these ecological environmental conditions.

Another red line, we have said, concerns employment flexibility. There we are united with the workers, with unions. A third red line that cannot be

crossed is to advance in the processes of privatization. Rather, what must be done is to strengthen, to re-empower the productive capacity of the strategic sectors that are public.

An assessment of 14 strategic public companies has been made, indicating a production of 13 billion dollars: oil, to some extent mining, telecommunications, social security; the Bank of the Ecuadorian Institute of Social Security -BIESS- and thus we can determine that ceding private rights for the exploitation of the public is a red line in which we cannot yield.

And another red line is that progress has to be made immediately in a programmatic and pragmatic agenda on the points that remained pending in the struggle of 2022 and are the aspects that have to do with the ten points that led to the struggle of the indigenous movement. So, on the one hand, we have a broad, big political project. On the other hand, these points that are red lines and, in addition, the implementation of the demands that were raised in 2019 and 2022 in the National Strike, in a concrete way.

### **On the National Strike of June 2022, what balance sheet has been made of the results? How was this negotiation of the ten points with the government?**

As it was known throughout Ecuador and internationally, the negotiation took place from some public points. They tried to generate political pressure on us by saying that all we wanted was Lasso's departure, that that was the only intention. When we held 18 days of struggle, demonstrating "we have not come to remove Lasso", but if he falls under his own weight, it will be because he does not listen, because he does not understand and does not have the political will to fulfil our demands.

But the goal was the ten points, to solve the problem of subsidies. In Ecuador, subsidies are a general policy, where we say that we must focus on fuels. We identified that Ecuador's liberalized economic sectors are the ones that take the most advantage of general subsidies. So, we proposed to the National

Government eight subpoints so that the sectors that love the free market are not the most benefited: if they really believe in the free market, then they should produce according to its rules and not benefit from subsidies. We show that some 1,200 million dollars are focused on sectors that should produce without subsidies, such as tuna vessels, industrial fishing, the shrimp sector, among others.

We also ask for economic relief for the people, that the price of basic necessities be controlled, that speculation with these products not be allowed and that productive development policies for peasants be guaranteed.

We also put on the table the defence of life, which is a NO to mining extractivism mainly. We demand the implementation of the 21 collective rights of indigenous peoples in all state programs and in coordination with the different branches of government. They concern health, education and also insecurity. These were the issues that, according to the report of the same national government, we reached 218 agreements in points: they were procedural agreements, general agreements that allowed progress to the possibility of building a plurinational state, of which the government complied in procedural aspects by 10%. The rest stayed there. That is why for us at this time it is of vital importance to be able to take possession in the new conjuncture of these demands on the government because they have not been resolved after the 2019 and 2022 struggle, of the national strike.

### **What does the "Yes to Yasuní" campaign defend in rejection of its exploitation? What would it mean for the populations that inhabit these territories if this consultation were lost?**

People tend to think that we are holding an opposition in the Yasuní consultation, in a general way. But no, we have reasons and arguments to defend the Yasuní and say that to defend the Yasuní is to defend life. First, UNESCO declared it to be one of the most biodiverse areas in the

world. This is because, in the period of the glaciation of the Earth, everything that is now the Amazon basin was an area that did not freeze and hence the immense diversity of this National Park, which was before that a sacred territory of the indigenous peoples.

To get an idea of the containment capacity of the species at a global level that this territory has in qualitative and quantitative terms, a single hectare of the Yasuní contains all the diversity of amphibians, reptiles, vertebrates, invertebrates, plants, major animals, minors, etc., contained in the whole of North America. But what would happen if humanity generates oil pressure? It would cause an ecological imbalance.

That is why we propose that instead of extracting oil, scientific tourism can be developed, because studying the jungle could give answers to many ills that humanity has, answers that can be found in the Amazon basin. Also promoting ecological tourism, which allows economic recovery while respecting the balance of Mother Earth.

A second argument is that in the El Yasuní Reserve, in the National Park, two peoples live in voluntary isolation: the Tagaeri and Taromenane. There were already massacres in 2003, 2006 and 2013 because the oil companies have been gaining strength and control in the territories and the pressure generated by exploitation has reduced the territory of the peoples in voluntary isolation. When the isolation and balance have been broken, everything has ended in massacres. For these peoples it is a forced way of relating to the world and if pressure continues to be generated, there will only be more killings. Therefore, it is demanded that they stop this genocide of the populations that are there.

And a third argument is that while in other regions there has been a development due to extractivism, what have the oil companies left in 50 years to the indigenous peoples? Only contaminated territories, contaminated water, comrades with diabetes, with cancer, a soil that does not produce because it is contaminated. It cannot be that we

indigenous peoples continue to shoulder the development that Ecuador needs.

Fifty years of oil extractivism have not left a sustainable economy for indigenous peoples, it cannot be said that, once the oil was extracted, we have a sustainable economy and a future for the new generations of all indigenous nationalities, to continue living. This has not happened. What has happened is that the territories have been destroyed. Therefore, these three arguments for us are tremendously strong, which is why we say yes to life and yes to Yasuní.

**The destruction of extractivist capitalism is common to many countries in Latin America and other parts of the world, where it is the native and indigenous peoples who bear the burden of sustaining modern civilization, and - so-called - development. Are there alliances in this struggle at the continental level?**

Yes, because that is a shared reality. They are destroying the territories of life of indigenous peoples, which happens in Ecuador, in Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Brazil, throughout the Amazon basin and elsewhere.

Why do indigenous peoples' territories have to sustain development? Why do we have to exploit Mother Earth to sustain the capitalist productive matrix at a global level? We do not believe that this should be the case. You have to think about another economy. Another related theme whose struggle we share is against the prevailing racism and a colonial vision of society. Can they impose on us indigenous peoples all this that is so entrenched in society? And we can no

longer accept that as normal.

A third issue is that progress is being made in this change in the energy matrix, from oil to clean energy. In this process, in addition to territorial control there is also control of our rivers: the main gorges of the rivers are being concessioned to generate hydroelectric plants and all this without respecting the right to prior, free and informed consultation. That's another shared struggle.

We believe that it is important to make society and humanity understand that there are territories that are regulating the balance of nature and that rivers, forests, moors are central to that balance. Also, in our territories they are invading with monoculture, agribusiness, concentration of land, concentration of water. Also here in Europe, in France, we have seen these struggles against the concentration of land, privatization. All this allows us to call in the first instance for a continental unity at the level of Latin America, but also with that impulse I think we can lead to struggle at the global level.

**To close, let's go back to the book. Everything you have put into perspective about the struggle of indigenous peoples and the need for change, what receptivity have you found in academia about the approaches you propose?**

We've found a lot of reluctance really. That is, there is a dominant form of production of conservative thought and that means that there is also a rejection of a part of the population that continues to question, that does not find answers. Many people on the left have chosen not to participate in these spaces, even though they are struggling. I believe that we must give

options that do not break organizational capacity but seek the ability to bring together from different forms of struggle. If we do not do it, we see that the right and the extreme right are already doing it. Look at what happened with the progressive governments of Latin America or what is happening in Europe, they are taking the doubts of the youth, taking arguments where citizens are asking for answers.

Although in Ecuador we are fighting, although we may have conditions of change, in a country that is anchored to the global capitalist economic model it will be very difficult to win. We already have experience of what happened with Chile, Peru, Cuba, Venezuela.

If we in the popular camp are not giving answers, then it will be the right who propitiates theses that end up reaching the popular sectors.

I believe that academia at the global level cannot produce science and theory just to analyse. That is what has happened with all sources of ideological political construction. Rather, it ends up attacking the possibilities of change from a political line different from that of the right, attacking the very possibility of change. And we end up defending change, as responsible. In that sense, I believe that if we want to make a qualitative leap in the change that humanity needs right now, we must unite struggles at the global level. So, we are putting in a grain of sand for this.

6 August 2023

*Translated by **International Viewpoint** from **Punto de Vista Internacional**.*

## **Our Era of Mass Uprisings**

**20 August 2023, by Shireen Akram-Boshar**

This massive uptick should be understood largely as a response to decades of neoliberal austerity, which

drastically increased pressures on the global working class, removing social provisioning, privatizing and putting

more of a burden on individuals to take on the tasks of social reproduction, transferring wealth to

an ever-smaller, richer elite, while also increasing authoritarian and undemocratic measures to enforce this heightened level of inequity. The increasing level of hardship, plus the lack of alternatives present in the level of high politics, pushed masses of people into the streets in revolt.

But it has become clearer and clearer that we are also in a period of reaction. We have witnessed a pattern of explosive revolts and uprisings followed by massive repression and backlash. We should not only expect uprisings and revolts to continue to emerge, but to also have more intense back-and-forths between revolts holding the seeds of liberatory futures, and brutal counter-revolution and repression, coupled with imperialist interventions working together to crush progressive uprisings.

The coming years and decades will continue to see harsher and more intense cycles like these, until our uprisings are able to break through the impasse by building up leadership in our movements, building up solidarity networks that can pressure states against counter-revolutionary military interventions, and learning the lessons of previous revolts in the latest period in order to avoid their mistakes. This starts with paying much closer attention to the revolts of the past decade.

This includes other cases, including in the US, where the 2020 Black Lives Matter uprising, the largest multi-racial mass protests in the country's history, has been followed by a backlash: a hardening right wing, attacks on trans people, the overthrow of Roe v. Wade, and so forth. But this pattern can be seen even more acutely in the Middle East and North Africa region, which is in the midst of a drawn-out revolutionary struggle that began in 2011.

## **The Middle East and North Africa: The Regional Hotbed of Revolt**

Since this cyclical pattern of revolt

and reaction is most acute in the Middle East and North Africa, where the revolts of the 2010s started with the “Arab Spring” revolutions and continue in a protracted revolutionary process, and where imperialist interventions assist in the counterrevolutionary process, I focus here on that region. In December 2010, a Tunisian street vendor set himself on fire in protest of police harassment and the difficulties in selling his wares. His action lit the spark for Tunisia's revolution, which then spread to Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria, followed by waves of mass protest throughout the region and echoes of it around the world. These revolts were catalyzed by the unlivable reality of neoliberalism, the harshness of authoritarian rule, and a regional system shaped by imperialism — including (but no limited to) US imperialism.

The revolutions that began in 2011 in the region saw two years of advancement, with millions of working-class people taking the streets and squares and overthrowing imperialist-backed dictators like Ben Ali and Mubarak, and in Syria creating a near dual-power situation of rebel-controlled areas. But these revolutions did not manage to — or even aim to — capture state power. This has been a common problem globally over the past few decades — not just in the MENA region, where horizontalism and leaderlessness are prioritized, which actually puts uprisings at greater risk of defeat. This of course can be explained in large part by neoliberalism itself having disintegrated working-class power, consciousness, and ideas of how to take power.

Importantly, this does not mean that the uprisings are not worthy of support, solidarity, clear study, and comradeship with the progressive forces within them. These political lessons are necessary. Political leadership, the capture of state power, and international solidarity are essential because, without them, by 2013, the region's regimes had regrouped and responded with harsh counter-revolutionary repression. Through massacres and coups, mass imprisonment and divide-and-conquer sectarianism, and military

interventions by regional and international regimes assisting the ruling classes, the forces of reaction were able to crush the progressive uprisings.

This was only the first cycle of explosive revolt followed by repression and reaction. But even the horrific level of repression only temporarily stopped the long-term revolutions. The political and economic factors behind the first wave were not resolved, so, perhaps inevitably, a second wave erupted in late 2018, first in Sudan and Algeria, then Lebanon and Iraq. Each brought back some of the hope from 2011. In Sudan and Algeria, the uprisings toppled dictators for the first time since 2011. In Iraq, the uprising demanded a civil rather than sectarian state system and an end to Iran's interference in the country, alongside demands for electricity, water, and employment. In Lebanon, the uprising also demanded an end to the sectarian system, and put the blame on the ruling class for the economic crisis. This time, the key slogan across these uprisings was “All of them means all of them,” refusing to stop with just the overthrow of a regime figurehead. They had learned the lesson of the 2011 revolutions, which showed that change at the very top alone was not enough. At the same time, outside of the region, we saw revolts in Chile, India, Hong Kong, Iran, France, the Black Lives Matter rebellion in the US, and more recently, Iran.

## **The Especially Relevant Cases of Sudan, Syria, and Palestine**

The revolt in Sudan paints a clear example of an explosive liberatory struggle on the one hand, and a horrific reaction and counter-revolution on the other — the latter exhibited acutely over the past few months. Sudan's revolution initially managed to move beyond the limitations of the 2011 revolutions, as millions of Sudanese refused to return to their homes after the regime removed the figurehead of the dictatorship.

Sudan's movement has had a strong revolutionary character due to Sudan's history of revolutions and its preservation of leftist and communist history. This relative political maturity is what made it possible for the leadership of the revolution to shift from the Sudanese Professionals Association, a middle-class grouping of unions, to more radical neighborhood resistance committees. With the slogan "No negotiation, no partnership, no compromise," they maintained clarity on the role of the military, and have refused to accept concessions from it. Crucially, they have also refused to allow outside forces to intervene.

Nonetheless, after a brutal massacre by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in 2019, the initial revolutionary phase in Sudan was brought to an end, and counter-revolutionary negotiations — denounced by the resistance committees but not liberal and middle class forces — led to a power-sharing agreement, a mixed civilian and military government, which almost inevitably led to the military coup of 2021. And just over two months ago, tensions between two militias, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the RSF, burst out into all-out war, with the SAF bombing RSF bases in Khartoum and the RSF taking over homes, each backed by regional and international states eager to intervene for their own gain, from the Gulf states to Egypt to the EU.

The neighborhood resistance committees were in the process of cohering a national charter when war broke out and suddenly hundreds of thousands of people were displaced, hundreds killed, and the revolution was drastically pushed back. This shows that a protracted situation of dual power cannot be sustained, as it will open up the door for counter-revolution and brutal repression. It is a reminder that militaries and militias must be removed from power and dismantled, and an alternate left-wing force must take power. Although easier said than done, the lesson is clear: without that, counterrevolution is inevitable. Nonetheless, in Sudan there has been far more experimentation with revolutionary form and tactics that should be studied more closely. Unfortunately,

the western left has all but ignored Sudan's revolutionary movement, which thus far has been the strongest and most advanced of the revolutionary struggles, and which is now suffering one of the most brutal defeats.

Syria, too, is a key example. The struggle there went perhaps the farthest of the 2011 revolutions, and then faced a crushing and brutal defeat. In 2011, Syrians joined the revolutions that were emerging, and when met with harsh repression, deepened their revolution, eventually liberating entire areas and attempting to reorganize society independent of the regime. But while Sudan has been largely ignored by the western left, Syria stumped them altogether, as it did not fit the outdated bipolar framework of imperialism.

Similar to Ukraine today, Syria should be a reminder that we cannot rely on outdated analyses of imperialism that assume the enemy of my enemy is my friend. It indicates that inter-imperial rivalry is increasing, not decreasing. To crush the Syrian uprising, Russia and Iran intervened on the side of the regime, and Turkey and the Gulf states intervened ostensibly in opposition, but worked to sideline the progressive elements and transform the struggle into an ugly, drawn-out, sectarian war. Resistance to the Assad regime and to Russia and Iran's military interventions remained widespread until around 2018 when the brutality of siege and bombardment far eclipsed the possibilities for continued organizing.

Another weakness on the Syrian revolution's side was that after decades under a harsh police state, organizing levels were low, and localized, anarchist-model organizing was prioritized over a larger scale model, leaving rebellious towns and cities even more vulnerable to decimation. Syria is one of the tragedies of the 21st century and a dangerous warning that until the left learns to provide solidarity to those resisting imperialism, even if it is not primarily the imperialism of the US, there will continue to be other mini-Syrias, while the Left remains divorced from the movements it must relate to.

Although not technically part of the 2011 MENA revolutions, Palestine is central to the region due to its 75-plus-year struggle against colonialism and imperialism, making it a symbol of the oppression, as well as a spark historically for revolts across the region. More recent dynamics of volatility, polarization, revolt, and reaction are present here as well.

Two summers ago, Palestinian youth mobilizing against Israel's ethnic cleansing in Jerusalem, in particular defending the Al-Aqsa mosque, transformed their mobilizations into a revolt that became known as the Unity Intifada. For the first time in decades, Palestinians united in uprising against Israeli fragmentation from the West Bank to Gaza to Palestinians inside Israel proper, and generalized a new liberatory framework, vocabulary, and consciousness against Israel's settler-colonialism. The Unity Intifada was a refusal of Israel's regime that has fragmented and divided Palestinians, and it was largely propelled by youth organizing, not by the Palestinian political factions.

In fact, within this struggle against Israeli ethnic cleansing emerged a struggle against the Palestinian Authority, a body created under the guise of state-building to carry out the role of policing Palestinians while upholding neoliberalism in the West Bank in particular. Through this larger struggle, Palestinian political consciousness and activity sharpened, even as the attacks of the colonizer and its right-wing settler-colonial population became harsher.

But the Unity Intifada has been followed by increasing brutality by Israel, in the form of bombing Gaza, assassination of journalists, mass arrests, curfews, and targeted killings in Palestinian towns, attacks across the West Bank amounting to a slow-motion war, and the rightward march of Israeli politics now bringing on board extreme far-right leaders like Ben Gvir. Meanwhile in the UK, the US, and elsewhere, the liberal left — whether the Labour Party in the UK or the Democratic Socialists of America in the US — have made clear that solidarity with Palestine is not only no longer a priority but will be actively repressed.



What the general dynamic and the particular cases all point towards is the need for a left that takes seriously the revolts that emerge globally, even as the majority of them will not be as sophisticated as Sudan's due to the legacy of neoliberalism and decades of defeat. A left that can study, learn from, and help guide revolts with lessons from prior waves is sorely needed — especially as we are entering an age of increased economic volatility, climate change, inter-

imperial and regional rivalry. Neither existing regimes nor reactions to uprisings have the political ability to fundamentally alter the underlying dynamics that lead to these increasingly radical opportunities.

This is why surface-level frameworks on the left that fail to analyze the dynamics on the ground or ignore the role of intervening states just won't cut it anymore. We instead need

dynamic movements that can engage with activists and revolutionaries in struggle around the globe, call mass protests and forums on their behalf at home, and provide solidarity and attention even if these rebellions do not espouse perfect politics or fit our preconceived notions. The failure to do so, as we have seen, leaves the door increasingly open to the forces of reaction.

*Source: Spectre.*

# We Oppose McCarthyism and Apologizing for China

19 August 2023, by **Dan La Botz, Stephen R Shalom**

The essence of the reporting is that Singham, a long-time Maoist who supports the Chinese government, uses his fortune to influence and sometimes to control other organizations. Singham, who doesn't need or, as far as is known, receive Chinese government funding, gives his money to other organizations that share his support for China and pro-Chinese policies. As in other cases where the rich provide financial backing to politicians or political parties, it is not obvious whether the money caused a change in political position on the part of the recipient. But either way, the money increases the political weight of views aligned with the donor, in ways unaccountable to the progressive community or anyone else. What Singham has been doing seems a mirror image of U.S global disinformation and media manipulations over the decades.

Though we object to the lack of transparency and accountability of Singham's largesse, our principal objection is to his politics. That is, we oppose his uncritical support for China. And this is not because we support a new Cold War.

Although Cold War rhetoric in the United States has indeed increased among both Republicans and

Democrats, the deeper problem is the rising tension caused by a new period of imperialism driven principally by the competition among the United States, the European Union, China, and Russia, as well as other great and lesser powers. The resulting tensions and conflicts now drive the world toward war. As often happens, these external conflicts also contribute to racism towards the Chinese and others in America. The militarism, war, and racism of the United States must all be condemned in the strongest terms, as the left has always done.

But Chinese policies must also be denounced. China is one of those great imperial powers, with a highly authoritarian state that represses the Chinese working class, the Uyghurs, the Tibetans, and the Hong Kong democracy movement. China also threatens war with Taiwan, carries out bullying in the South China Sea, and, in classic imperialist style, makes loans and investments worth tens of billions of dollars in nations of the global South, gaining increasing influence over their governments. China's policies resemble, without having yet equaled, those of Great Britain and France in the nineteenth century and the United States in the twentieth. As socialists, we oppose the

Chinese government's repression of democratic and social justice movements at home and its use of economic leverage to pressure governments abroad. Yes, China has accomplished commendable poverty alleviation, but this no more makes it socialist than economic growth in Taiwan or South Korea make them socialist.

Singham's generosity and his politics have helped to promote an unfortunate ideological current on the left: campism. In the name of anti-imperialism, campists oppose the camp of the United States and reflexively support governments in the opposite camp, no matter how authoritarian and repressive they may be. During the original Cold War, some allowed their rejection of Western imperialism to blind them to the evils of the Soviet Union. All too many on the pro-Soviet left denied the existence of the gulags or excused Soviet intervention in Hungary or Czechoslovakia because of the crimes of the West. Unfortunately, a similar dynamic is seen today. The campists praise China despite its wretched record on political and civil rights. They back Iran and Nicaragua as opponents of U.S. imperialism, though these regimes trample on women's rights and basic democratic rights.

They soft-peddle Russia's violations of international and humanitarian law in Ukraine and are silent about its increasingly dictatorial regime with viciously anti-LGBTQ+ policies. And some campists have even joined with the far-right in what has been called the red-brown alliance.

The New York Times or New Lines articles are not McCarthyism. The Times of course is a major instrument of the U.S. elite that often promotes rotten policies and colludes with the government. But that doesn't mean that everything it reports is false. McCarthyism, while it involved the collaboration of the media, was based in state power. In the late 1940s and 1950s, presidents Harry Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower along with

Senator Joseph McCarthy enacted laws and conducted investigations aimed at discrediting and repressing the Communist Party. Many on the far left in that period—not just CP members, but anarchists, Trotskyists, and some socialists—opposed McCarthyism, and rightly so.

Recently Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL) called on the Department of Justice to investigate China's ties to Code Pink and other groups on the left. This should be opposed. The left should defend anybody facing state repression of their democratic rights. But honest investigations and reporting on money that both rich people and governments spend to influence policy and politics should be welcomed. Investigative journalism exposing obscure financial

connections shouldn't be confused with McCarthyism.

The left should oppose Cold War rhetoric and actions as well as anti-Chinese racism or any other sort of discrimination or bias. At the same time, the left should be internationalist in the sense of supporting movements for democracy, for labor unions, for feminism or LGBT rights whether in the United States, Russia, China, Nicaragua, Iran, or Uganda. The best weapon for countering a new Cold War, imperialism, and racism is a democratic and internationalist foreign policy.

August 15, 2023

Source: [Foreign Policy in Focus](#)

# I'm a Ukrainian leftist. This is why I support Boris Kagarlitsky

18 August 2023, by [Andriy Movchan](#)

Kagarlitsky is perhaps the most prominent Marxist thinker in the post-Soviet space, known in academic and political circles inside Russia and [beyond](#). He was arrested on 25 July after stating in a social media post that the [attack on Russia's Crimean Bridge in October 2022](#), believed to be the work of Ukraine, was understandable "from a military point of view". His case is just one of hundreds of police investigations into anti-war Russians.

His arrest has provoked a heated debate about solidarity - and whether Kagarlitsky deserves it, given his previous statements.

Starting out in the late Soviet Union as a left-wing dissident and underground Marxist, Kagarlitsky, now 64, was perhaps the only person from this community to achieve widespread recognition in Russia and the wider region following the fall of the USSR while retaining his socialist

convictions. Several generations grew up on Kagarlitsky's books and lectures, and his assessments of political events in post-Soviet countries became a guide for observers in the West. He became a symbolic figure for the Russian left.

Kagarlitsky's public rejection of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine was therefore bound to irritate the Russian authorities. His arrest shows that even internationally famous public intellectuals, who have connections in high political circles, are no longer safe from repression.

## Support for Russia's annexation of Crimea

But Kagarlitsky's views on the war in

Ukraine have not always been the same. Following Ukraine's Euromaidan revolution, he was an enthusiastic supporter of Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the pro-Russian separatist movements in the Donbas, seeing some progressive 'anti-imperialist' features in those events.

As he [put it](#) in 2015: "Novorossiya [New Russia] is not a project, but a movement, a dream, a public goal." The website he ran, Rabkor, followed suit, [arguing](#) that "the way to end the civil war in Ukraine lies through... [Kyiv's recognition of] defeat in its war against the rebellious south-east", meaning the so-called 'people's republics' in the Donbas.

Many who grew up on his work found it difficult to read such articles - it felt as if the author had been replaced by someone completely different.

Kagarlitsky became a frequent guest

on state television, commenting on Russia's military operations in the Donbas. His new milieu came to be dominated by people associated with Russia's so-called 'patriotic left', which often involved conservative and imperialist positions.

The conclusions that Kagarlitsky drew from world-systems theory (an analytical framework that emphasises long-term political and economic trends outside of nation states) matched the expansionist aims of the Russian state.

If you present world politics exclusively as a confrontation between the global periphery and the global centre, it isn't difficult to imagine the 2014/15 war in the Donbas as one of the hotbeds of this confrontation. In this analysis, Russia became (even unwittingly) a kind of vanguard of anti-imperialist struggle, supposedly helping the Global South to free itself from the hegemony of the West.

Kagarlitsky also expressed hope that, under the burden of new historical challenges, the Russian regime would put an end to neoliberalism and transform into a more progressive system. But, as it became clear that this was unrealistic, and that such a position was merely a left-wing prop for the Putin regime and its imperial adventures, he began to revise his views.

## Changing views

Kagarlitsky's political assessments began to change in 2017, as Russian political life became 'interesting' again. He seems to have realised that he had got involved with a rather unpleasant crowd and it was time to move away - towards the Russian opposition, a much more natural place for him as a representative of the progressive Russian intelligentsia.

He clashed with political conservatives who applauded the [Russian police's vicious crackdown on youth protests](#). Unambiguous comments about the need to overthrow Russia's top officials and the supreme ruler himself began to appear. Kagarlitsky also sought to expose Putin's statements about

Russia as a "besieged fortress" as ridiculous self-justifications of a corrupt regime.

In 2020, he supported the huge [anti-Lukashenka protests in Belarus](#), calling on Russians to learn from their neighbours. In 2021, he supported [protests defending opposition leader Alexey Navalny](#), who had been detained on his return from abroad, and called for his release.

Kagarlitsky's dislike for the current system and Putin personally had grown so much by this point that he was ready to devote entire streams on his Rabkor YouTube channel to discussing rumours of the president's poor health. He did not conceal his hope that the 'wait' would not be long.

On 24 February 2022, the Russian army began its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Kagarlitsky immediately took a very specific position against Russian aggression, calling it a sinister adventure of the regime that was doomed to failure.

When asked about his changed attitude towards Ukraine, Kagarlitsky replied: "The victim may be a bad person, but they are still a victim. 1930s Poland was a very reactionary state, but when Germany attacked, it was a victim of aggression and it had every right to support and sympathy in repelling the attack." He did not hesitate to compare Russia with the darkest aggressors of the past.

Since the invasion, Kagarlitsky's Rabkor YouTube channel and website has published anti-war content from Marxist positions, aimed at the Russian left rather than the liberal audience that is traditional for the opposition media. Other anti-war leftists and even liberals began to appear on Kagarlitsky's live streams - people who were on the opposite side of the argument from him eight years ago.

As another anti-war blogger Alexander Shtefanov noted, Kagarlitsky's activities became dangerous for the Russian authorities because they created rallying points for a wide range of anti-war opposition - and specifically for those who remained in Russia.

In 2022, the authorities declared he was a 'foreign agent', hinting that it was time for him to get out of the country. He decided to stay - despite the real risk of going to prison, which has now happened. Undoubtedly, this was a very brave and honourable act.

## Anti-war, anti-Putin

Has Kagarlitsky rejected his past positions? Probably not. He adheres to the theory of the 'absolute event', which is to say neither the failures nor the merits of the past matter when you're facing a crisis such as Russia's war against Ukraine. Instead, it's your attitudes and actions that count.

Kagarlitsky's approach is very practical. Instead of excluding potential allies, it assumes that the coalition against the 'absolute event' will be open and inclusive.

Kagarlitsky's media activity since February 2022 has shaped the anti-war views of thousands of Russians. In fact, his stance in 2014 and 2015 may have helped, allowing him to reach those with moderate patriotic views, who would never have been won over by agitators with an 'ideal' past and a clear-cut position.

Kagarlitsky may have once supported sections of the Russian patriotic left who yearn for territorial expansion. But no other well-known leftist has done more to instil into thousands of Russians a simple thought: the Putin regime is criminal, the invasion of Ukraine is criminal, there is no justification for it, and it must be resisted.

Some still cannot forgive him for his past conduct, but now he has been detained for his sincere anti-war convictions, for his actions against the war. For this reason alone, he deserves international solidarity.

The campaign to free him is important for other reasons. Without an anti-war movement inside Russia itself, it will be very difficult, perhaps impossible, to end the war in Ukraine. Russian society is far from ideal, of course, but only from this imperfect society, with

its imperfect people with their imperfect biographies, can an anti-war and anti-government movement emerge.

Anyone who delays this movement is doing harm. For the last 18 months, Kagarlitsky brought it closer.

1 August 2023

Source: [openDemocracy](#).

# The politics of degrowth - Technology, ideology, and the fight for eco-socialism

17 August 2023, by **Gareth Dale**

**Paul Fleckenstein: Gareth, can you introduce yourself?**

Gareth Dale: I teach politics at a university in London. My research is mainly on environmental politics and the ideology of economic growth. I'm active in my union, in several campaigns, and in a small socialist group, though the lack of resonance of radical socialist ideas is bringing me some sleepless nights. How can I put it? It's interesting to be alive at this conjuncture in which, if capitalism juggernauts on and on, there's a gathering risk of multiple tipping points being tripped en route to the extermination of millions of species, including possibly even our own. Alternatively, of course, radical movements could build and gain critical mass, pull the emergency brake, and look toward a different social system, one based on solidarity and planning, not compulsive accumulation.

**PF: You have jumped right to the heart of the dangerous moment we are in and the strategic question of how we can come to grips with the challenge and respond. Decades of business-as-usual has failed to do anything but increase the scale of destruction, despite green rhetoric from elites.**

GD: I would add: Business-as-usual has impacted climate science and the discourse around it. Those who predicted the terrifying scale of destruction were marginalized. In the early 2000s, when I began reading systematically about these topics, the

sharpest minds were often making the darkest predictions. They could see how the gravity of capital, states, and fossil-fuel interests distorts the climatological lens, pulling predictions toward the complacent end of the scale in a bid to justify only slow and mild reform. Their predictions, sometimes belittled as "catastrophism," took account of that pressure—and rightly so, as we can now see against a skyline of burning hillsides. Even today, atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations are accelerating: Not only are they growing growing, but their growth is accelerating.

**PF: Right. And all this is the background for alternatives proposed, and in some adopted by, movements, such as "green growth," climate justice, the Green New Deal, eco-socialism, and, the main topic for this interview, "degrowth." Degrowth is better known in Europe than in the United States. Can you explain the concept for those who are not familiar with it?**

GD: Each of these alternatives cover broad sets of positions, with many overlaps. But whereas the Green New Deal is at heart social-democratic, degrowth is closer to traditions of utopian socialism, anarchism, and populism (in the Russian Narodnik sense). Degrowth is an eco-political stance attached to a rather diffuse movement. It began to take shape in the early 2000s in France—and that's one reason why it's better known in Europe than the United States.

Other reasons include the more militantly capitalist culture of the United States that makes degrowth a tougher hill to climb. With its high rates of flying, meat eating, and car dependency, as well as warming and cooling those big, detached suburban houses, U.S. per capita greenhouse emissions are double the European level. But if I described the degrowth movement as diffuse, I should add that it is gaining a profile, and its socialist wing is very prominent and gaining converts in the United States, too, most recently the Marxist journal *Monthly Review*.

**PF: We can return to movement questions later, but I'm wondering first if you would be able to explain what maybe you think are the strong basic points of degrowth in relation to economic growth versus the planet?**

GD: First, degrowth identifies growth as fundamental to the capitalist system and develops a critique of that. Growth tends to enrich property owners and the wealthy, leaving the rest behind. And the environmental consequences of continuous growth are disastrous. Degrowthers are alert to the "destructive forces" that spring from what Marxists call the productive forces.

Second, its critique of growth is based firmly on leftist positions: the deepening of democracy, feminism, and anti-racism. Inasmuch as reducing aggregate consumption is its goal, the focus is on the rich and the rich world.

Third, its critique of capitalism is not

restricted to property relations (private versus nationalized property) but extends to the nature and purposes of technology and of consumption. Degrowthers don't assume that needs and desires are god-given. They have a critical take on the "manufacture of needs."

Finally, degrowthers recognize that the most fundamental human need is for a habitable planet. They are more sober, more clear-eyed than most on the Left in recognizing that facing up to the multiple environmental crises will require much more than nationalization of the energy sector and investments in renewable energy and electric vehicles (EVs). It requires an extreme reduction in energy use and material throughput, at least in the rich world, a reduction that, while focused on the highest energy users, will affect working people, too, above all in consumption of such goods as flights and beef. Their pitch is that a world of "public luxury and private sufficiency," with greater equality and democracy, less hierarchy, and much more free time, would enable the quality of life for the masses to improve immeasurably, even if some consumer goods disappear from the menu.

The technocratic myth is that decarbonization must center on the invention and deployment of new technologies. ... [T]hey lull us into the belief that new tech can simply be scaled up and plugged in. It's a state of mind that reflects our own condition of alienation.

**PF: Degrowthers reject the "growth paradigm" driving national economic policies, which equates progress and social well-being with growth in gross domestic product (GDP). There is certainly an ideology of growth that supports business as usual, but capitalist growth is also rooted materially in private ownership, class, markets, and accumulation. You mentioned a developing socialist wing of degrowth, including Monthly Review. What does Marxism bring to degrowth, or what does degrowth bring to Marxism?**

GD: Degrowth has contributed to Marxism's environmental awakening

over the last couple of decades. But unlike some degrowthers who see economic growth as the product of psychological or cultural factors, or of untheorized industrialization, Marxism can—and should—theorize the growth paradigm as a core ideology of capitalist society, a complex myth that lends democratic clothing to the accumulation drive. Even though growth in the current sense wasn't in use in Marx's day, it's not hard to find in his writings a critique of the growth imperative. And his later followers Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, André Gorz, and Cornelius Castoriadis developed ideas that, together with Romantic and religious critiques of industrial modernity, form the pre-history of the degrowth movement.

The connection between growth ideology and capital accumulation is seen most clearly by Marxists who theorize China and Soviet Russia as state capitalist. If those systems are seen as socialist, the growth drive is not distinctively capitalist. So, what then is it? It's no coincidence that one of the first thinkers to identify the ideology of capitalist modernity as "growth fetishism" was a theorist of state-capitalist Russia, Mike Kidron, back in 1966.

These are some points of theory that Marxism can bring to degrowth, but what of practice? Marxists aligned with the growth-fetishizing traditions—social democracy, Stalinism, Maoism—are mostly unsympathetic to degrowth. As for Leninists, in your and my understanding of the term, I think our role, alongside throwing ourselves into campaigns, is to build common ground with left forces in both the degrowth and the Green New Deal camps. With one, there's a shared language of utopian aspiration, human emancipation, and the need to learn respect for the natural world. With the other, there's a shared commitment to union-based campaigning for climate jobs and for a "just transition."

**PF: The Left sometimes displays an uncritical acceptance of capitalist technology. If it could only be put to social use instead of deployed for profit, it could address global heating and perhaps other**

**catastrophic planetary boundary problems like the destruction of natural ecosystems, groundwater depletion, and nitrogen pollution. Electrification of everything, for instance. But what about the ever-expanding colonial mining of metals and complex chemicals needed to build this out? And to those who advocate nuclear power, what about the weapons proliferation and nuclear waste and dangers of fuel mining? Can you talk about the transition to an eco-socialist society, and to what degree highly productive technologies, in say agriculture or manufacturing, can be retained and operated for social ends instead of profit? When is more radical thinking needed about different, even more labor-intensive technologies?**

GD: "Uncritical acceptance"—yes, exactly. As I see it, technology fetishism is central to capitalist ideology, to the fantasies through which we reconcile ourselves to this brutal and berserk system. We find hope, even awe, in the tech-centric style with which capital and its cadre affect to address the environmental crisis. Their techno-optimism offers us a "comfort blanket." We can keep flying without limit because planes will fly on biofuel and batteries. We needn't worry about burning oil and gas because tech wizardry will catch and store all the carbon. Shipping will switch from hydrocarbons to hydrogen. For power, we can ramp up nuclear fission, and why not gamble on nuclear fusion, too?

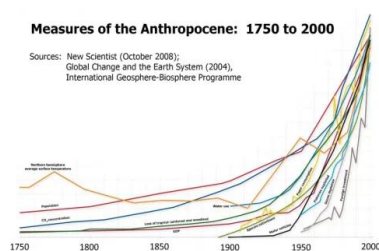
The news cycle churns out corporate press releases trumpeting the latest advances: artificial trees that suck carbon from the breeze, planes fuelled by hydrogen, and so on. These may one distant day work out, but for now they're the escapist daydreams of a world in which technologies are owned by capital, made in its image, and developed in order to gain profit and military advantage. The technocratic myth is that decarbonization must center on the invention and deployment of new technologies, with a downplaying of the potential for the application of existing technologies and of social-

systemic change. And they lull us into the belief that new tech can simply be scaled up and plugged in.

It's a state of mind that reflects our own condition of alienation. When we desire a commodity, we simply click on a button and voilà, there it is at the front door within 24 hours. The commodity's prehistory of labor and nature—the minerals extraction, production, distribution, and so on—are more distant than ever.

As with most ideologies, these tech promises are not “fake news.” There's a grain of sense in each one, at least in engineering terms. But they only appear to seriously reduce greenhouse gas emissions when looked at in abstraction from the overall system. It's banally true that technological advances can improve energy efficiency, but in a capitalist system those gains are generally frittered away through rebound effects. And many of the tech-utopian wagers require us to assume that only the rich world will remain rich.

### **A chart showing the parallel growth of economic production, climate disaster, and other measures**



Source: *Smithsonian Institution*.

Let's look at a few examples. One is nuclear power. It's a highly centralized and secretive industry, a spin-off from the arms race—and nuclear fusion, too, is heavily connected to warmaking. Fission plants produce expensive power and hazardous waste. You'd think that the threat of missiles targeting Ukraine's Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Station would accelerate the retreat from nuclear energy, but instead the war has spurred its boosterism, supposedly for “energy security” reasons—including among socialists.

Even if we ignore waste and the risk of damage through war, at least we should do the arithmetic. If the current U.S. level of per capita energy consumption were rolled out worldwide (we're internationalists, right?) and powered by nuclear plants, they would have to be multiplied 88-fold. To visualize that, take the current number worldwide, 440, and raise it to 38,720—and then, if your model envisages GDP growth, hike it further. Even if you think nuclear power should only supply, say, a quarter of the world's energy, that'd still be an increase from several hundred to nearly 10,000 nuclear power stations—and mostly sited beside rising seas.

Or take hydrogen. There's a lot of buzz around its green potential, but most hydrogen is produced in a hugely carbon-emitting process. Less than one percent of hydrogen production is “blue,” and only 0.04% is “green.” “Blue” hydrogen is a scam to prolong the drilling for oil and gas—with lots of methane leakage, and probably leakage of the carbon dioxide that will supposedly be “captured and stored.” What we're seeing is fossil-fuel interests using hydrogen as a PR weapon. Their marketing and lobbying campaigns present a largely fictional substance, blue hydrogen, as a low-carbon “bridge” to a vague future green transition. The ulterior motive is to counter and confuse the growing movement against new drilling for fossil gas and oil.

Or take aviation. There's a lot of hype around electric planes, but these can only work for small aircraft at short-haul distances. Biofuels work, but they compete with food crops. Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF) work, too, but they're no magic bullet. In Britain, one company is able to convert waste into SAF. But I interviewed them and then did the sums. Even if we could collect all of Britain's municipal and business waste, the annual SAF yield would be only a couple of million tons, far less than the amount of fuel used by planes at Britain's airports each year. This is why serious engineers, the ones who look at the big picture and not just the technology itself, argue the aviation industry has to be, basically, shut down. Look at the Absolute Zero report by the UK FIRES research

group. They're not Marxists or degrowthers; they're engineers who take seriously the UK Climate Change Act, which requires the government to steer the economy towards “net zero” by 2050. If that goal is to be reached, they calculate, all British airports except Glasgow and Heathrow must be shut down by 2030, and probably those two as well by 2050—and only then, if new technologies and masses of renewable electricity have come onstream, could some reopening begin.

A final example is EVs. With such products we should ask: are they the lynchpin of a green transition, or are they a new commodity designed to keep the wheels of accumulation spinning, to ensure that every driver keeps on carrying two tons of metals and plastics everywhere they go, while governments keep on marginalizing alternatives that reduce demand for travel or expand public transport and cycle lanes? And what are EVs powered by? Batteries, from lithium.

Again, do the math. If the world's vehicle fleet were replaced by EVs, the planet's lithium reserves would all be mined out and/or seabed mining would lay waste to the oceans. Much of this activity reproduces relations of extractivist imperialism. Look for instance at Germany's lithium-grab in Bolivia. The tech fetishists will say in response, “Lithium was only discovered as a chemical for batteries in the 1990s. In ten years time, there'll be a new one discovered.” Maybe. But we can't bet the future of the planet on this kind of speculation.

These are points on which eco-socialists and degrowthers should be in unison. The approach requires an emphasis on “shutting down” in the rich countries as much as on “building anew.” Of course, there's an urgent need for more electricity connections and safe water in the Global South—and, in the North, too—to lift millions out of poverty. Some sectors obviously must grow. But in the high energy-using nations, there also has to be a near-complete shut-down of aviation, as well as beef, and far lower use of cars and energy in general.

One can find some perverse inspiration in the wartime United

States. “Perverse” in that any serious degrowth or eco-socialist program must be anti-militaristic. I’m thinking, rather, on the lines that Mike Davis lays out in his essay “Home-Front Ecology.” Davis recounts how U.S. daily life was transformed during the Second World War. Cars were ditched for bicycles, people tore up concrete in their yards and planted vegetables. Nowadays you could imagine agroecology transforming the suburbs. The U.S. lawn, for example. At present, it’s a monoculture kept lifeless by herbicides and pesticides. Instead, garden it, allow life to thrive, plant fruit trees and flowers, and in the process we’ll transform our relationship to nature. More labor would be required, but a great deal of food would be produced—and locally, without the need for transport, preservatives, and so on. This requires less “technology,” in the usual sense of the term.

High-tech firms like Bayer—the producer of Roundup—would see profits dive. But it would develop what Marxists call the “productive forces.” These center not on “technology” per se, but on human knowledge and capacities. Scale up the example of the suburban lawn and we can imagine industrial agriculture replaced by agroecology and agroforestry, a transformation that would dramatically mitigate climate change, increase the supply, diversity and resilience of crops, and in general begin to overcome the “antithesis between town and country.” Books such as *Braiding Sweetgrass* are full of suggestions as to how our relationship to the natural world could be revolutionized.

**PF: I want to close on eco-socialist**

**strategy. Tempest interviewed David Camfield, author of *Future on Fire*, earlier this year. David, I think correctly stressed the importance of mass movements and struggle to win the economic and societal changes needed to address global heating. You have questioned a predominant current in radical degrowth politics, localism—a focus on cooperatives, municipal reforms, and mutual aid. How do you see degrowth goals relating to the challenges of building mass struggle and movements, and confronting state power?**

GD: To clarify, I wasn’t presenting a full-on critique of localism in the *Spectre* essay. As you’ve seen from my comments on gardens and horticulture, any eco-socialist transition would involve localization of production particularly in foodstuffs. My critique, rather, is of those who, although sharply critical of the tendencies of labor unions and social democrats to conform to the requirements of the system, give a free pass to degrowth politics in its municipalist and cooperative forms. But here, too, just as in unions, the challenge is to engage in ways that can build mass movements that can open up ways to break beyond existing structures.

Just as Green New Dealers can learn from the degrowth movement, degrowthers should place greater emphasis on class struggle. The “growth” they abhor is structural, endemic to a system ruled by a class of tycoons who also happen to be gluttonous consumers. We’re in an era of widespread anti-systemic

consciousness, but anti-systemic struggle will only gain real momentum if it can gather together “traditional” workers’ action over wages and conditions together with struggles against oppression and war, and for democratization, the environment, and so on.

So for example in my workplace right now, a university, I’m taking part in a union fight over pay and conditions but am also involved with a group of colleagues who are pressing management to take action on sustainability issues. We proposed—successfully—that where the university pays for our travel to conferences, it should insist that we use ground transportation rather than air, at least for short-haul distances. The point is, we should be doing more to collectively define what human need looks like in the age of climate breakdown. Too often, consumption questions are seen dichotomously: moralistic guilt-tripping versus simple demands for “more.” The latter is conflated by some Marxists with Marx’s cherishing of humanity’s ever-expanding needs, but the two are not the same. What is sometimes thought of as Marx’s Prometheism is, ultimately, a belief in the ability of the human species to collectively define and keep redefining its own “species being,” including its relationship to the environment. This belief in the ability of humanity to radically redefine itself is perfectly compatible with the degrowth movement, at least on its left flank. In fact, in the age of climate breakdown, species survival will depend on that redefinition.

*16 August 2023*

Source [Tempest](#).

## “Indigenous communities are leading the struggle in Jujuy”

16 August 2023, by **Collective**

**The protests exploded against constitutional reforms imposed by the government of Governor Gerardo Morales with the help of all the traditional parties, including the center-left Peronist Justicialist Party (PJ). International uproar was caused by images of intense police repression of roadblocks, strikes, and mobilizations. The backdrop to this conflict is an anti-imperialist fight against austerity and for control of the country's resources. Also at stake is the strength of a working-class, indigenous population that is rising up against years of oppression and hyperexploitation. We sat down with Gastón Remy — a professor and councillor for the city of San Salvador in Jujuy, who is a member of the Party of Socialist Workers (PTS) and the Workers Left Front (FIT-U) — to talk about the rebellion and where it goes from here for Left Voice and Tempest.**

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**Interviewers: In June, Jujuy governor Gerardo Morales, of the Radical Civic Union (UCR) party, passed a reform to the state constitution, a reform that has been resoundingly rejected by the people of Jujuy. The reform proposes, among other things, to prohibit street and highway blockades as a method of protest. It also includes several attacks on democratic rights, including voting rights. The reform was approved not only by the representatives of the UCR — the traditional right-wing party in Jujuy — but also by the opposition, represented by Peronism. Since the day the reform was approved, the rebellion of the people of Jujuy has not been quelled. The protests against the constitutional reform — led by indigenous communities — coincided with teachers' protests demanding better wages, as well as the mobilizations of miners calling for better conditions. How was the reform**

**approved? What are its most relevant provisions? And why have the people of Jujuy risen up to overthrow it?**

Gastón Remy: The provincial constitutional reform was approved twice, once on June 16 and again on the 20th. Both times it passed with the vote of the governing party, UCR, and its supposed "opposition," the Justicialist Party (PJ) — the center-left party of Peronism, which now holds the presidency. It was voted on twice because the government retreated in the face of mass protests, particularly the resistance of indigenous communities, which began roadblocks on June 17. These communities resisted repression and the police were unable to subdue them, forcing the government to withdraw changes to articles 50 and 36, which directly affected their land rights. Before the first vote of the reform to the Constitution, mass protests forced the government to withdraw two points from the reform that would have created a near-authoritarian regime in Jujuy, enshrined in its Constitution. It would have eliminated legislative elections every two years (changing it to every four years), as well as adding a "governability" clause, whereby the political party that won the governorship would automatically control the majority of the legislature. The mass rejection of these measures in the streets throughout the province forced the government to remove them.

The government, however, also managed to prohibit roadblocks and street blockades (article 67), as well as to include measures to harshly repress protests and class struggle. They managed to keep these reactionary changes in the new Constitution with the help of the union leaderships, which never called for a general strike because of their relationship to the PJ. They acted to contain the social struggle, balancing between denouncing measures their own party voted for and limiting the ability of the rank-and-file to fight.

The struggle against the reform continues, thanks to the rebellion of workers and communities across the province, which has weakened the position of the government and its

partners. This rebellion challenges living and working conditions in the province as well as the reform, which was passed behind the backs and against the rights of the people in just 17 workdays. The movement that rose up to reject the reform is linked to teachers' demand for higher salaries. Taken alongside the roadblocks by indigenous communities against the reform, these actions express something profound.

This is a challenge — by the vast majority of people in Jujuy — to a regime that has oppressed and exploited the province for eight years, imposing low wages and enabling the plundering of lithium and other minerals by big businesses. The people have said enough to the political regime, which puts forward these policies at the request of the big mining, sugar, and tobacco companies. That is why we say that today, the balance of forces between the social classes has changed, in favor of the working class and the popular sectors — those who have the strength to defeat this regime.

**Interviewers: Jujuy is one of the poorest provinces in Argentina, yet at the same time, it has natural resources such as lithium that are coveted by corporations. According to official data, last year, 42 percent of the inhabitants of Gran Jujuy (the suburban area of the capital San Salvador) were living in poverty. Jujuy also has a high concentration of indigenous people and one of the country's most hyperexploited workforces. What are the living conditions in Jujuy and in its indigenous communities?**

GR: Official data shows that Jujuy is ranked fourth for the lowest incomes in the country. The base salary of a teacher before the June uprising was 34,000 pesos (US\$128) a month. With the new bargaining agreement, it went up to 72,000 pesos (US\$272) per month. State workers have a base salary of 45,000 pesos (US\$170) per month. On top of these base salaries, much of workers' income does not count toward their pensions. In other words, what workers take home is well below a living wage.



These are the conditions in the public sector, but across Jujuy's workforce, 46.5 percent of salaried workers are informal workers, or off the books. Against a backdrop of high inflation, which is above 100 percent this year, job insecurity and lack of steady employment reinforce a vicious cycle of low salaries. Twenty-seven percent of employed workers in Jujuy seek second jobs, the highest percentage in the country. The national average is 14.8 percent.

Further, many of the workers who face these high levels of exploitation are members of indigenous communities, a historically oppressed sector of the working class in Jujuy. According to an official survey, 11 percent of households in Jujuy self-identify as being of indigenous descent, the highest percentage in the country. Indigenous people make up 38 percent of Jujuy's rural population.

Indigenous communities are leading the struggle in Jujuy, and this is no coincidence. Teachers who are demanding higher salaries in turn participate in the roadblocks as members of the indigenous communities using their own methods against the regime. The same applies to miners and municipal workers. Most of the members of these communities are salaried workers. Other sectors find work as small producers or take up other precarious work, such as driving taxis.

The questions of class and ethnicity at the heart of the current struggle in Jujuy show the true character of a deeply racist political and social regime. It lays bare the limits of the state policy — formed together with the big mining multinationals — of offering some improvements to the broken-down infrastructure of towns while not fixing much bigger systemic issues. The government offers crumbs, which merely divide communities while deepening the enormous inequality between the capitalists, who get millions of dollars from lithium exports and populations whose water is contaminated with arsenic (as is the case in the town of Susques). While the state builds a gas pipeline for a profit, schools are heated with firewood in the winter. These contrasts, even more stark in light of

the push for lithium extraction, the new "white gold," also create the conditions for communities to rise up and fiercely confront the government and the state it represents, as they have done to defeat Morales's reform.

**Interviewers: Argentina has been hit hard by an economic crisis, not just in Jujuy but across the entire country. Added to this is increased imperialist pressure in the form of debt and other measures. The IMF has been pressuring the Argentinean government to sign a new economic relief plan that deepens the country's economic subordination to imperialist interests in the United States. Can you tell us about the more general context of the crisis in Argentina and how it has impacted Jujuy in particular?**

GR: Undoubtedly, the agreement with the IMF has deepened Argentina's ties of subordination to imperialism, as well as the broader contradictions inherent to its dependent economic structure. In fact, you could say that Argentina's economic plans are drawn up in Washington, DC. None of the traditional political coalitions, neither the current Peronist government (Frente de Todos) nor the Right (Juntxs), differ in their policies on repaying the IMF and following its orders.

That "agreement" is now in jeopardy, owing mainly to the drought, which caused a \$20 billion loss in agricultural exports. The government is trying to sign a new agreement with the IMF, though this is complicated given the IMF's demand to further devalue the peso, which could further exacerbate inflation. Such a move, in an election year, would be suicide for Peronism and its likely candidate, Minister of Economy Sergio Massa. Argentina's austerity policies, which are meant to reduce its deficit, are pushed by the IMF and drive up inflation.

For economies like that of Jujuy, where nearly 90 percent of public spending is financed with national funds, the population acutely feels the effects of these fiscal austerity plans. Adjusted for inflation, workers face cuts to their already-low salaries. This

is why the current struggle is taking a political character, not just an economic one. The union leaderships allowed the austerity to pass, and the teachers' rebellion is beginning to challenge both these leaderships and the austerity plans they uphold.

On the other hand, the government's attempt to pay its debt in dollars by exporting raw materials legitimizes the mining multinationals, which need lithium for their "green energy transition." Officials like Laura Richardson, the head of the U.S. Southern Command, have been clear about the United States' interest in a region that holds 80 percent of the world's lithium: the Lithium Triangle of Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina. Currently, the United States has its own multinational, Livent — which has been operating in the province of Catamarca since 1998 — which is connected to the second-largest lithium mining company in Argentina, Sales de Jujuy. The other project that will begin lithium production this year is Exar, bringing together Chinese and Canadian capital in Argentina.

By applying pressure, the foreign lithium multinationals are heightening tensions in a country that has been forced to export its natural resources in order to pay a debt contracted by governments behind the backs of the working people. Yet austerity policies that gut living conditions are sold as a "necessary evil" to achieve a "stability" that will at some point bring some improvements. These contradictions of a greater subordination to imperialism, as seen in Jujuy, foreshadow greater conflicts between the working class and the ruling class throughout the country.

**Interviewers: The approval of the reform in Jujuy aroused an enormous popular response. We have seen the images of intense and massive struggle throughout the state, including teachers marching and shocking videos of indigenous communities facing police brutality. The widespread rejection of the reform has been met with fierce repression. A few weeks ago the police arrested Natalia Morales — a socialist congresswoman from the Party of Socialist Workers (PTS) in**

**Argentina, which is part of the Workers Left Front Unity (FIT-U). Also arrested was Lucho Aguilar — a La Izquierda Diario journalist and member of the PTS — among dozens of other political prisoners. The repression hasn't abated. Can you describe the repression they are facing and how the people of Jujuy are fighting back? What course do you think the struggle will take from here?**

**The heart of these proposals is advancing the idea that there is a way out of the economic and social crises we face, and it is through the strength of the working class.**

GR: The response in the streets to Morales and the PJ's reform reflects an enormous desire to fight back against these attacks. We are seeing a shift in people's thinking, elements of what Gramsci called "a new way of thinking" — not only in the resurgence of a vanguard that resisted repression, such as that on June 17 in Purmamarca, a town where indigenous communities forced the police to retreat in a battle that lasted almost an entire day. But we also see it in the continuous road blockades and the marches of teachers on strike.

The people of Jujuy have lost the fear imposed on them by Governor Morales for almost eight years. They have regained their confidence in their own forces. Now local communities have begun to look for support from the teachers unions, and it is this unity that can defeat the regime.

In this process, broad sectors have had a political experience with the regime, going beyond particular demands. With their actions, they have shone a light on the role of the traditional political parties: to govern against the interests of the people in favor of the powerful. This last part is still the least developed. Many people now see with more clarity that the mining companies loot the province's resources, but they don't yet see this as something that characterizes the capitalist class as a whole. Taking these conclusions further is a task of the revolutionary Left — to help organize the struggle and point it in an anti-capitalist direction.

The government and its friends in the

PJ took a political hit with the widespread rejection of the reform in the streets. Now it is trying to recover its strength, imposing state coercive measures (arrests, fines, persecution) in order to defeat the rebellion. But they are struggling to turn the new relationship of forces between the classes to their favor. The PJ is helping Morales regain control, above all with its role in the unions and the trade union centers (the CGT and CTA). These organizations never called for a general strike to rescind the reform.

In fact, they called strikes off, like the teachers' union (Cedems) strike. In contrast, the teachers' organization April 9 — which is organized and led by teachers who are also members of the PTS, among others — fought those who wanted to lift the strike and called for teachers themselves to decide on a plan of struggle together with the teachers union (Adep) and indigenous communities. The undemocratic decision to lift the strike weakened the mobilizations at a key moment of the conflict. If the strike had gone forward, the struggle could have reached a new phase and ushered other sectors of workers onto the scene and generated better conditions for calling a general strike.

Of course, building toward a general strike is not a closed possibility. The conflict is still open, beyond any individual advances or setbacks of the mobilizations. The change in the relation of forces between the government and the people, and the fact that the reform still stands — all this demands a united plan and democratic coordination to develop a strategy of class struggle to take the fight to the end. This can be done with a general strike, road blockades, and street mobilizations.

In this sense, the PTS is posing the need for a Provincial Assembly to develop such a strategy, one that would unify the unions, activist organizations, indigenous communities and organizations, students, etc. A development that points in this direction is the People's Assembly against the reform, which is made up of teachers, healthcare workers, students, indigenous communities, and unemployed workers. It has been organizing

solidarity for local communities and teachers, contributing and raising funds for their struggle, and raising the need for a general strike to defeat the reform.

**Interviewers: During the regional elections last May, the FIT-U performed extraordinarily well in Jujuy. Now the socialist Left is playing an important role in the heat of the struggle. Can you tell us a little about the campaign of Alejandro Vilca, your own experience as a candidate, and why the PTS in particular and the FIT-U in general have gained influence in Jujuy?**

GR: The regional elections in May showed a historic result for the Left. My comrade Alejandro Vilca, who is currently a national deputy in Argentina's Congress, won 12.8 percent of the votes for governor. In San Salvador, Jujuy's capital city, we got 18 percent of the votes, coming in second and beating the PJ.

Being part of this process was an amazing experience because we were able to put forward a plan to fight to stop the impoverishment of millions of workers in a rich province that makes so much money for businesses and the wealthy. Specifically, we put forward the need to nationalize the lithium industry under the control of workers and communities. This would allow us to democratically decide for ourselves how the region's resources are used, developing a lithium production plan, as well as deciding what techniques we use to minimize their environmental impact. These proposals received widespread support.

We also proposed nationalizing the province's main energy company (EJESA) under workers' and consumers' control, creating a single energy company that would also direct the operations of the Cauchari solar park, an important source of energy. On top of this, we called for the nationalization of public transportation under workers' control. We put forward an ambitious campaign in the capital city on this issue, showing how we could stop endless fare hikes while providing better service for millions of people

who use the system each day.

These were just a few of the most important points of our openly anti-capitalist and socialist program, and they have been well received by broad sectors of the population. But it's not just this. The heart of these proposals is advancing the idea that there is a way out of the economic and social crises we face, and it is through the strength of the working class. And this is beginning to be felt by the people of Jujuy. The current struggle has brought it to the fore.

From another angle, our members played a crucial role in the Constituent Convention as revolutionary socialist politicians. We used our public positions to seize

every opportunity to denounce and warn how the government and the PJ intended to take away the rights of the people. We denounced and explained the reactionary nature of the reform. We spoke from the convention, highlighting and speaking in tandem with the teachers' strike and the communities staging road blockades. We denounced every maneuver and deception the traditional parties were planning in the convention, calling for mobilizations and demanding a general strike to throw out the reform.

We put forward a perspective of no confidence in the Parliament, and no confidence that a better reform could be negotiated, as the PJ claimed. So when they moved ahead with the

reform, we resigned from the convention before the vote in protest, and we joined the protesters in the streets to amplify their struggle and show that our confidence is in class struggle.

This whole experience reaffirms the role of those of us who have or will have responsibilities in parliament. As members of the PTS, we know that this is alien and hostile terrain and that we will not change the system from within. But we use our platforms to amplify the struggle of the working class as it stands up and finds its own solutions from below, as has always been the case in the history of class struggle.

*7 August 2023*

## **Oil refinery trade union leaders arrested in Belarus**

### **15 August 2023, by Collective**

Olga Britikova, former head of the independent trade union organisation at the factory, and Aleksandr Kukhareнок, a member of the strike committee formed in 2020, were detained by the OMON security police.

Legal cases have been opened against both activists for political offences under the Criminal Code (Article 2.361, making calls for sanctions and other actions that threaten national security).

Initial reports said that Kukhareнок's wife has also been arrested. The pair have young children.

Olga Britikova was "one of the leaders of the protest movement at Naftan after the 2020 elections", the Zerkalo web site reported. "It was Olga who conveyed the workers' demands to the authorities and factory management."

In August 2020, a letter signed by more than 3000 Naftan workers called on Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenka to resign and for new

elections.

In December that year, as the protest movement was being repressed by police violence and mass arrests, Britikova was dismissed from Naftan, where she had worked for 16 years.

Between 2020 and 2022 both Britikova and Kukhareнок were arrested several times, and penalised with administrative detentions, Zerkalo reported. Britikova spent 75 days in jail in the spring of last year, and another 30 days in the autumn.

Naftan, in Novopolotsk, is one of Belarus's two large oil refineries, processing Russian oil. It has a workforce of more than 9000 and is owned by the state concern Belneftekhim.

The detention of Britikova and Kukhareнок comes on top of a wave of dismissals of workers from Naftan, and Polymir, the nearby chemical works, for political offences. Three were sacked last month, and 16 in

May.

Aliakassandr Sakalou, a former Naftan worker and supporter of Rabochy Rukh, a network of workplace activists, told the Nasha Niva site that managers were compiling blacklists of employees who followed the political opposition on social media.

Naftan is "run by KGB agents", Sakalou said. "The lower management follows orders, and the heads of the enterprise, at least some of them, are not against such measures. They are even in favour of them."

It is three years since the anti-government uprising in Belarus - in which trade unions played a prominent part - and a year since the country's independent trade union organisation, the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions, was dissolved by a court order.

But repression against activists continues. Police raid factories and assault suspected oppositionists, as

they did at an engineering works in Gomel last month. Arrested workplace militants are sometimes forced to make video confessions that circulated by the security forces: the most recent reported case was of a welder from the Gomselmash factory.

Prosecutors last month brought new charges against Palina Sharenda-Panasiuk, a prominent activist in the Belarusian Trade Union of the Radioelectronic Industry (REP), who has been in jail for two years and was due to be released last week. Her

sentence could now be extended.

Journalists are also targeted. Pavel Mazheyka was sentenced to six years in prison last month for “promoting extremist activities”, a verdict condemned by the European Federation of Journalists.

The background to the ongoing repression is Russia’s war in Ukraine, supported albeit erratically by Belarusian dictator Lukashenka, and opposed by large numbers of Belarusians.

□ If you can take action in solidarity with the Belarusian workers’ movement, please contact the Solidarnast association, formed by Belarusian trade union activists living in exile in Germany,

□ Solidarnast supports more than 40 trade unionist political prisoners. They are among several thousand people who have been jailed for participating in the 2020 uprising.

14 August 2023

Source *People and Nature*.

## Transforming Politics from the Left - A new Left party Transform

13 August 2023, by Joseph Healy

Earlier this year, the [Breakthrough](#) and [Left Unity](#) parties and the [People’s Alliance of the Left](#) decided to come together and try to construct such a party. We felt that there had been enough talk, both from those still inside Labour and those outside, about building an opposition from the Left to Starmerite Labour. With this view in mind, we set up two working groups, one dealing with our core principles and the other with the constitution. We also established a Steering committee, which later included the Liverpool Community Independents, a group of ex-Labour councillors in Liverpool who were re-elected in May this year under their new banner. The core principles were agreed upon, and the constitution is still being discussed. We decided to approach a number of significant activists and figures on the Left and ask them to become signatories to our call for a new party.

Armed with this and our 10 Principles, we put out the call several weeks ago and have already had nearly 5000 people sign up, almost 2000 in the first day. We are now in the process of organising online meetings in many of the regions of England and later in

Wales, where activists will discuss the new party and decide on what they wish to do to build it in their own areas. Over the next few months, we will be distributing leaflets at meetings and rallies, encouraging people to sign up for the new party.

The launch of the party will be the point where we formulate policy beyond our 10 Principles and also democratically agree on a constitution. One of our guiding principles is that the party will be democratic and bottom-up from the beginning and that all of our policies won’t come from above.

We are quite clear that we are an ecosocialist party, and saving the planet will be at the centre of everything that we do, which will include working closely with climate activists and movements.

We are also committed to equality and intersectionality in all their forms and will have a strong commitment to women’s and trans rights, along with fighting against racism and for the full equality of people living with disabilities. We will also be laser-focused on workers rights and hope to work closely with the unions on this;

many of our leading members are active trade unionists.

There has already been some criticism of the party, [Transform](#), from both centrists and some on the left, saying that we should have waited until after the next general election. We feel that we need to get organised now and be in a position to intervene and offer radical voters some opportunity in the election next year, as well as build a base for the future. This is because we feel that the current Labour Party in government will offer very little that is different from the current economic and political malaise in Britain to the British people, and that this will inevitably lead to huge disillusionment and a possible opportunity for the Far Right. In order to counter this, there needs to be a real socialist opposition party in place to offer an alternative. We also want to work side by side with progressive movements and campaigns so that we are not a solely electorally focused party, which we feel parties like the Green Party have become.

Many people at this time of growing inequality, particularly young people who put their hope in the Labour

Party under Jeremy Corbyn, are now crushed by the cost-of-living crisis, high rents, and the increasing realisation that they have no future under this capitalist system run by the banks, big business, and the Tory Party. They don't see any real

alternative in Labour's business as usual offer. Transform plans to offer a real socialist alternative and to place young people, along with those marginalised by this capitalist society, at the centre of its programme and work. The party will be launched later this year, and we hope that many

people will sign up between now and then and help us build an alternative future. Never has it been more urgent to build a democratic party of the left, with the planet literally burning and the cost of greed leading to increasing poverty and misery. Come and join us!

## Striking Writers and Actors Hold the Line Against Tech Slicing and Dicing

12 August 2023, by **Nelson Lichtenstein**

Their concerns are remarkably similar to those of the 340,000 Teamsters who work at United Parcel Service, where the union achieved an historic wage and working conditions victory just days before an August 1 strike deadline.

The Hollywood studios and big logistics companies like UPS and Amazon are global entities whose revenues steadily rose even before the pandemic sent them soaring. All over the world, home-bound customers splurged on both packaged goods and televised entertainment, the latter increasingly delivered by Netflix, HBO, Amazon, or one of the other streaming companies. During the last three decades, employment just about doubled in the film industry and in the transportation and warehousing sector.

But employment growth has not been accompanied by either job or income security. Top managements in the U.S. have sought to deploy all the technological wizardry coming out of Silicon Valley to slice and dice the labor of employees so as to create a "flexible" work regime—displacing the cost of an unpredictable demand for labor from the corporate balance sheet onto the shoulders of the workers who provide the service. Uber, Lyft, and the other app-based employment platforms have done much to perfect this contingent work regime, with UPS and Hollywood trending in the same direction.

The unions are fighting back. The Teamsters have been energized by a reform slate that swept into office 20 months ago. At UPS this year, the union was clearly prepared to strike in order to dramatically raise the wages of all UPS Teamsters, especially those part-time warehouse employees who constitute more than half the UPS workforce.

In a tentative agreement that members will vote on through August 22, these workers won an immediate wage increase of at least \$2.75 per hour, with 7,500 of them transitioning to a new set of full-time jobs. The part-timers wanted \$25 an hour, and all the current ones will get there through general wage increases amounting to at least \$7.50 over the life of the five-year contract. For some workers that amounts to a nearly 50 percent increase in pay. And the tentative agreement contains a lot of other things that will materially improve their lives on the job.

The Teamster victory establishes a new standard that will ripple through the rest of the logistics industry and constitute a powerful argument that employees at Amazon, Walmart, and elsewhere should also organize under the union banner.

Like UPS and Amazon, Hollywood is part of a global supply chain, with 70 percent of its revenue coming from abroad, East Asia in particular. There is more work for actors and writers,

but globalization has disrupted the old order. Today, many Hollywood blockbusters are designed with a non-English-speaking audience in mind; there are plenty of heavy action sequences, with the dialogue simplified for easy dubbing and subtitling.

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Meanwhile the proliferation of streaming platforms has created more work for writers, but the owners of this new entertainment technology have gone to war with the traditional way actors and writers won a measure of income security. Some of these platforms, like Apple, Netflix, and Amazon Prime, are products of Silicon Valley and its libertarian, anti-union business culture.

To keep and hold audience attention in a highly competitive market, these streaming platforms contract for shows with but a handful of episodes, instead of the multi-year series of just a dozen years ago. This keeps writers and actors continually scrambling for new work and also limits the opportunities workers had to move up into producing and directing.

Writers and actors are also on edge because of the threat posed by studio deployment of artificial intelligence.

The writers fear it will degrade the script-making process while many actors worry that AI has the potential to capture and manipulate an actor's image, thus threatening an Orwellian future unless the Screen Actors Guild (SAG-AFTRA) wins a set of well-defined guardrails protecting their personae.

Episodic employment has always been characteristic of Hollywood, but in the old days, writers and actors could rely on an additional income stream—residuals—resulting from the

continuing, years-long popularity of a film or TV series. These were won by the talent guilds in battles that stretch back to the 1950s. Studio executives have long chafed that this slice of the profits goes to the workers. As one of them put it, "I don't pay my plumber every time I flush my toilet."

But the new streaming platforms make their money by selling subscriptions to household viewers. They pay the talent a fee based on the level of those subscriptions, not the success of the show. Payments have

been sharply lower than in the old system.

All this has created a crisis atmosphere in Hollywood, but this time militancy has replaced despair. As Fran Drescher, SAG president, put it, "If we don't stand tall right now, we are all going to be in trouble, we are all going to be in jeopardy of being replaced by machines."

9 August 2023

Source: [Labor Notes](#).

## The Fight Over Israel's Judicial Reform Neglects Palestinian Rights

11 August 2023, by **Jordan Bollag, Sami Abu Shehadeh**

**Last month, despite unprecedented mass protests, strike threats, and military resignations, Benjamin Netanyahu's government in Israel passed a controversial judicial reform law through the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, to weaken the Supreme Court's ability to strike down government decisions. Dubbed a "judicial coup," the law is seen by Israeli liberals as an existential threat to Israeli democracy, and it has intensely divided Jewish Israeli society. But "pro-democracy" protests against Netanyahu exhibit a glaring omission: the Palestinians, for whom Israeli democracy has never really existed.**

Sami Abu Shehadeh is a Palestinian citizen of Israel, a former member of the Knesset, and the leader of the political party Balad (the National Democratic Assembly). While Palestinian citizens of Israel face institutional discrimination and the state openly proclaims itself "not a state of all its citizens," Palestinian citizens have voting rights and are much better off than their fellow Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. The latter live under military

occupation, displacement, blockades, and frequent military attacks, and have no rights at all under the Israeli state that rules them.

For *Jacobin*, Jordan Bollag spoke with Shehadeh about the current political moment in Israel and how Palestinians feel about a conflict over an Israeli "democracy" that has never truly included them.

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**Jordan Bollag: What is going on in Israel? What's your reaction to the passage of the judicial reform law?**

Sami Abu Shehadeh: What's happening in Israel is a very complicated situation, but those who are reading it as something new are far from reality. What we are seeing now are the results of at least two decades of deterioration toward the fascist right, and the extreme national religious Jewish groups controlling nearly all the important decision-making processes in Israel. We are also seeing deterioration of political discourse in Israel into a fanatical, religious way of reading reality and

dealing with it.

There has been a long process of religious national extremists — Zionists — taking control of all the important decision-making processes and being overrepresented in all the Israeli ministries, in all the important places in the Israeli government. These new elites are fighting with the old elites; the old elites that established the State of Israel were liberal Zionists. From a Palestinian point of view, both of them are settler colonialist, and both of their agendas are built on Jewish supremacy.

The struggle between them is about what kind of Jewish supremacy they want to lead in this part of the world. The old elites want to have Jewish supremacy built on race, but which deals in a liberal way with the Jewish people who live here, and the new elites want to lead a Jewish supremacy that is established on a fanatical national religious discourse. They are struggling over the identity of the apartheid state they want to lead in Israel.

**Jordan Bollag: We've seen massive protests and threats of strikes and military resignations in response**

**to the judicial reforms. How do you, as a Palestinian citizen of Israel, fit into this oppositional pro-democracy movement?**

Sami Abu Shehadeh: We're not part of the protest movement, because its political demands are very far from our political demands. The old elites, who are trying to gain back control of the state, do not want to build a state and society on the values of justice and equality for all. The only thing they want to do is to go back a few months before the last elections in Israel. From their point of view, the old racist apartheid regime, as long as it only destroyed Palestinian lives, was bearable. It was something that they could live with.

For us, as the victims of this racist apartheid regime, we don't have any good past in Israeli history that we want to go back to. Our political agenda is totally different. We are aiming at building a better future, which is built on the values of human rights — mainly on justice and equality for all the people who are living in this part of the world.

We want a serious change inside the Israeli government, to change it from a state that is built on race, a Jewish state, into a normal democracy that is built on justice and equality for all, that deals equally with all citizens, whether they are Jewish or not. We are the indigenous population in this part of the world, and we are not Jewish. We are 20 percent of the population of this state, and we want to have a better future for all, for Jews and for us. We believe that we should have a political project different than what has existed until today because both sides — those who are for the judicial changes and those who are against the judicial changes — each want a system of Jewish supremacy.

The Arab Palestinian minority that represents 20 percent of the population in the State of Israel — it is not just that we are not part of the protest movement, but that we are not [seriously involved in Israeli institutions at all]. If you check all the ministries since the establishment of the Israeli state, we have barely existed. If you check all the heads of these ministries, we were never

represented there. If you look at any important decision-making process that has to do with planning the present and the future of the state and society in Israel, we are not there. Not in the media, not in the culture, not in sports, not in anything.

**Jordan Bollag: When the mainstream media talks about the pro-democracy movement, they've mostly focused on Netanyahu and his personal corruption as the reason for the judicial overhaul. But it's also become clear that the reforms have been pushed by ideologues like Justice Minister Yariv Levin specifically to stop the court from protecting Palestinian rights, to facilitate more legal settlements, to block Arabs from Jewish neighborhoods and Palestinians from Israeli highways.**

On the other hand, the Israeli Supreme Court very rarely protects Palestinian rights anyway. Given this reality, how do Palestinians navigate the current moment?

Sami Abu Shehadeh: You are right: the Israeli high courts, in all the important big issues that have to do with the Palestinian question — we did not have justice there. But still, we don't want the situation to get worse. Those who will be affected first and foremost by this weakening of the judicial system in Israel will be the Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line: Palestinian citizens of Israel and the Palestinians who are living under the occupation of 1967.

I'll give you a few examples. First, I am the head of a political party called the National Democratic Assembly [Balad]. Since we established our party — because our main agenda is changing Israel from a Jewish state into a normal democracy, a state of all its citizens — all the Zionist parties have been against us. Under Israeli law, the Elections Committee is composed of members of the Knesset. So every election they ban us from running in the elections! We used to apply to the high courts, and the high courts would give us the right to at least compete in the elections. With the new judicial reform, we will not be able to do that.

In any political system, there are checks and balances that can defend individual citizens or groups against oppression. Usually the main thing is a constitution. In Israel, there is hardly a constitution, so there is nothing that can save or defend our rights. Another important form of checks and balances is having different systems [e.g., the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary] balancing each other. In Israel, this also does not exist, because the government and the parliament are the same.

The only place that we could seek justice, or at least reduce the system's oppression of us, is through the high court in Israel. The new judicial changes want to remove a lot of authority from the high courts. So we'll not be able to do the minimum we did before. We did not win all of what we wanted there, but at least we had a place that we could try to defend ourselves. If the judicial reform passes, we will not have even this minimum.

**Jordan Bollag: These reforms surround the court's powers in interpreting the "reasonableness" of laws. But the court has only needed this power because Israel does not have a written constitution, which may be difficult for an American audience to understand. Why doesn't Israel have a constitution, and what are the implications of this?**

Sami Abu Shehadeh: Israel does not have a constitution for a few important reasons. The Orthodox religious groups in the old times dealt with Zionism as a secular movement: they accused Zionists of infidelity, of not believing in God, and they did not think that there could be a consensus between themselves and the Zionists. Writing a constitution would've wrote the religious groups totally out from the state and society at that time. So in order to keep them as part of the project, the founders did not write a constitution.

This is one reason. Another important reason is that the State of Israel, from the beginning, was built on Jewish supremacy. [Israel's founders] could not write a democratic constitution because they knew from the beginning

that they were building a system on Jewish supremacy that discriminates against 20 percent of the population, who are considered the indigenous people in this part of the world — the Arab Palestinian minority.

Another important thing is that after the establishment of the Israeli state, Israel put that 20 percent of the population under military control. Imagine a state controlling 20 percent of its citizens with a military system; this could not work with a constitution.

Nowadays, when we are talking about a democratic constitution, unfortunately we don't have partners among the Zionists. The vast majority of the Zionist parties are ready to compromise on different systems, but all of them must maintain, according to the Zionist parties, Jewish supremacy. Keeping any kind of Jewish supremacy means that the system cannot have equality among its citizens. No equality, no democracy — it's as simple as that. The Zionists were quite aware that they had a

problem with the value of equality from the beginning.

**Jordan Bollag: In the wake of all this turmoil, we're seeing high-tech companies moving assets out of the "start-up nation" or leaving entirely, and the Bank of Israel is warning of economic risks from the judicial overhaul. With assets leaving the country, the Netanyahu government has ironically accomplished what the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement has been working toward for years. And in the New York Times, Bret Stephens lamented Israel's "self-inflicted wound" as more damaging than BDS.**

Does this instability in the Israeli state present opportunities for Palestinian movements, and is there an upside to all of this?

Sami Abu Shehadeh: I don't think there's an upside to all this. There's a proverb that we use: the train has already left the station. What we are seeing inside the Israeli state and

society is quite similar to Italy on the eve of fascists controlling the state. Unfortunately, there is no serious, rational democratic movement among the Jewish majority that can salvage the situation and lead us to a better place. Of course, on the margins, there are great activists — great people trying to build something better — but these are totally marginal, and their numbers are very small.

Is there an opportunity for the Palestinians here? I'm seeing a very big opportunity. I think that what's happening now is helping the world to see what we have been warning them about for decades, is helping the world to see the truth, to see the real face of the State of Israel, to see the apartheid system that was built in this part of the world, to see the racist elements of the Zionist project, to see the way Israel has been dealing with Palestinians for decades.'

10 August 2023

Source *Jacobin*.

## Environmental activist takes on Australian mining company

10 August 2023, by Susan Price

Professor Leila Bensmaine from the Algerian University of Science and Technology Houari Boumediene, writing in [assafirarabi.com](https://assafirarabi.com) last November, said: "Whereas the global temperature rise in the twentieth century was 0.74°C, it was somewhere between 1.5°C and 2°C in the Maghreb, depending on the region; more than twice the global average rise."

Due to its geographical location, Algeria is "one of the 24 hotspots that are highly vulnerable to climate change, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)", Bensmaine said.

Moreover, the drop in rainfall "ranges between 10 and 20%". This has led to depleted dams and badly impacts coastal aquifers and groundwater. In addition, "recurring periods of drought, which have become longer, have exacerbated desertification".

These impacts are exacerbated as globalised neoliberalism is driving the intensive exploitation of natural and mineral resources, degrading the environment, affecting biodiversity and displacing local populations.

This is the context in which university lecturer Kamel Aissat is fighting to protect Algeria's environment and

challenging a zinc mining project that locals say will contaminate groundwater and displace communities.

South Australian-based mining company [Terramin](https://www.terramin.com.au) is involved in the joint venture to mine zinc and lead from the Tala Hamza mine, on Algeria's Mediterranean Sea coast, 15 kilometres from the city of Béjaia.

According to [mining-technology.com](https://www.mining-technology.com): "[Tala Hamza] is owned by Western Mediterranean Zinc, a joint venture between Terramin and Algerian-based Enterprise Nationale des Produits Miniers Non-Ferreux et des



Substances Utiles Spa”.

Terramin was given the green light on May 13 to develop its mining operation. It told the [Australian Stock Exchange](#) on May 18 that its mining permit means “that Tala Hamza has satisfied all Algerian regulatory, financial and environmental requirements”.

Terramin said together with its Algerian partners it plans to mine and process 2 million tonnes of zinc ore each year instead of the 1.3 million tonnes anticipated by the 2018 Tala Hamza Definitive Feasibility Study.

It said this indicates the project’s “returns will be enhanced over the anticipated 20+ year mine life”.

The mine’s opponents say it will pose a danger to the population’s health,

threatens to displace entire villages, damage the region’s flora and fauna and pollute groundwater and a protected Ramsar wetland.

Aissat was banned from leaving the country on July 15 and has been placed under judicial supervision and threatened with arrest. His supporters are proud of his “involvement in mobilising the local population against this dangerous project”.

Opponents of the mine launched a petition weeks ago demanding that “public authorities comply with the law by consulting the population and carrying out an impact study on the environment and public health”, said his supporters.

“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 [Soummam] 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 [province] of Béjaïa, particularly the agri-food sector.”

A campaign in solidarity with Aissat and the people of Tala Hamza, Amizour and Béjaïa is calling for the legal proceedings against him to be dropped and for an end to repression and intimidation and to respect freedom of expression.

10 August 2023

Source [Green Left](#).

## The IMF deal and its critics

### 9 August 2023, by [Sushovan Dhar](#)

*According to Dawn, “in February this year, annualised food inflation shot up to 41.9 per cent in urban areas and 47 pc in rural areas of Pakistan. In February last year, these readings stood at 14.3 pc and 14.6pc, respectively. This means that food inflation — or the pace of increase in the prices of food items — has more than tripled in just one year.”*

In April 2023, Pakistan’s reported foreign exchange reserves were hovering at \$4 billion, insufficient to pay even one month’s import bill.

This enormous external debt places significant repayment pressure on the country. Pakistan is required to repay \$77.5 billion in external debt between April 2023 and June 2026. This is a significant burden for a \$376 billion economy. The biggest repayments will be made to Chinese financial institutions, private creditors, and Saudi Arabia during the following three years. Pakistan had \$126.3 billion in external debt and liabilities

as of December 2022. Nearly 77% of this debt, or \$97.5 billion, is owed directly by the government of Pakistan to various creditors; an additional \$7.9 billion is owing to multilateral creditors by government-controlled public sector firms.

### Current Account deficit

According to State Bank of Pakistan data issued on May 17, the economy posted a current account surplus for the second consecutive month in April, reducing the existing fiscal year’s current account deficit by a staggering 76% to \$3.3 billion in July-April compared to the same period previous year.

The reduction was caused by a \$13.5 billion decrease in imports, a direct result of the 2022 import ban on luxury items and non-essential raw materials. While it may appear to be

encouraging, the country’s current account advantage may actually be detrimental.

The initial impact of the raw material import prohibition was in the manufacturing sector, which accounted for 19% of GDP in 2022. According to [Pakistan’s Ministry of Finance’s April Monthly Report](#), the Large-Scale Manufacturing (LSM) sector decreased 5.56% between July 2012 and February 2023, compared to a 7.8% expansion during the same time last year. Atif Rehman Mian, a Pakistani-American economist at Princeton University, opines that the government’s restrictions on imports of raw materials needed for production and export will eventually cut the country’s production, and a lower GDP will make it more difficult to pay off the debt, leading to more devaluation and more misery.

Currency depreciation, in fact, has the terrible ability to increase industrial prices and diminish the intensity of

capacity utilisation. In truth, the Pakistani Rupee has been progressively losing value in relation to the US dollar in recent years.

## IMF bailout

The International Monetary Fund's (IMF) enters the stage in this setting as the supreme saviour. On July 12, 2023, the IMF Executive Board agreed a 9-month Stand-By Arrangement (SBA) for Pakistan in the sum of SDR2,250 million (about \$3 billion, or 111 percent of quota) to assist the authorities' economic stabilisation programme.

The agreement of the Executive Board allows for an immediate disbursement of SDR894 million (about US\$1.2 billion). The remaining funds will be phased in throughout the course of the programme, with two quarterly evaluations. Subsequent to the Executive Board discussion, Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director and Chair, made the following **statement**: *"Pakistan's economy was hit hard by significant shocks last year, notably the spillovers from the severe impacts of floods, the large volatility in commodity prices, and the tightening of external and domestic financing conditions. These factors together with uneven policy implementation under the EFF combined to halt the post-pandemic recovery, sharply increase inflation, and significantly depleted internal and external buffers. The authorities' new StandBy Arrangement, implemented faithfully, offers Pakistan an opportunity to regain macroeconomic stability and address these imbalances through consistent policy implementation."*

An upbeat Shehbaz Sharif, Pakistan's Prime Minister, **said** the bailout was a significant step forward in attempts to stabilise the economy. "It bolsters Pakistan's economic position to overcome immediate to medium-term economic challenges, giving next government the fiscal space to chart the way forward." The country's Finance Minister, Ishaq Dar, **felt** that "things are now moving in the right direction."

**According to Lahore-based economist Ali Khizr,** *"the currency and inflation*

*could have gone out of control" had the government and IMF not reached this agreement.* He also said, *"the absence of foreign exchange could have resulted in massive shortages of fuel, food, medicine and other items. Things are likely to improve now - as the currency will stabilise and inflation will slowly come down in the short to medium term."*

## Dissent from the ground

However, not everyone in the country or overseas shares this upbeat outlook. Abdul Khaliq, CADTM Pakistan, **observed** that the latest financial lifeline - and its reliance on hardline countries for support - wouldn't spur political reforms needed to enable stability. He further said, *"Pakistan has sought a bailout agreement with the IMF desperately, but it is not a way out of the crisis. The policies funded by the Fund have worsened Pakistan's food and energy dependency and insecurity, increased inequality and reinforced the trend towards an authoritarian regime. A comprehensive debt relief followed by establishment of parliamentary Debt Audit Commission would be helpful to get Pakistan out of this worst economic crisis."*

In this context, it is important to note that, since 1958, 11 years after the birth of the nation, Pakistan has entered into 22 agreements with the IMF. Since the government borrowed to deal with worldwide oil price rises in the 1970s, Pakistan became heavily indebted. People have suffered as a result of the massive external debt ever since. Successive administrations have sought IMF rescue assistance on an ongoing basis. These bailout loans have ensured that debt carries down through generations, providing the IMF immense leverage over Pakistan's progress through the economic conditions imposed on the country.

Lending and grants have also been used to assist Western-backed military regimes in Pakistan, such as those of General Musharraf (1999-2008) and Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988). Earlier, IMF loans were liberally granted to the General Ayub Khan regime

(1958-1968). This raises concerns about the odious nature of a significant portion of Pakistan's external debt.

Tess Woolfenden, Senior Policy Officer Head of Policy at Debt Justice **remarked**, *"the IMF is continuing to follow its flawed strategy of bailing out previous lenders, while forcing austerity on the people of Pakistan. This perpetuates Pakistan's decades long debt crisis, which is worsening because of the impacts of climate change caused by rich people, such as 2022's devastating floods. Instead, Pakistan needs debt cancellation from all its creditors, alongside grant based finance to cope with the impacts of climate change."*

Indeed, debt-ridden Pakistan will become the world's fourth largest IMF borrower after getting a new loan of USD 3 billion over the next nine months under a standby agreement with the global lender. Pakistan, which is experiencing its worst economic crisis in history, was earlier rated fifth in the list of countries with the largest borrowing from the Fund on March 31, 2023.

A large portion of Pakistan's debt, almost \$45 billion, is owed to multilateral organisations. The World Bank (\$18 billion), the Asian Development Bank (\$15 billion), and the IMF (\$7.6 billion) are Islamabad's biggest multilateral creditors. Pakistan also owes considerably to the Islamic Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

Farooq Tariq, General Secretary of the Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee, a network of 26 peasant organizations feels that while the government has been spared for the moment, but not its people. **According to him,** *"The IMF conditionalities imposed on Pakistan may not have parallels 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 Pakistan-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 might utilise the IMF loans to repay the Chinese debts.

Despite last year's devastating floods, which resulted 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 materialise."

A hike in power tariffs followed hard on the heels of the agreement. The IMF has reportedly ordered Pakistan to raise power and gas prices. According to the agreement, Pakistan's monetary policy must be tight in order to reduce inflation in the country. Needless to say, the Fund applauded Pakistan's hike in interest rates. It has recommended that Pakistan gradually reduce subsidies in the power industry as well as salaries and pension costs. Pension reform is also one of the major priorities for the IMF.

While Pakistan has averted an imminent default, Farooq Tariq adds : "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)."

According to Oxfam, the country's top 1% is wealthier than the bottom 70% of the population. This wealth disparity has far-reaching ramifications for the country's economic and social development. The statistics and figures on wealth inequality in Pakistan are mind-boggling. According to a World Inequality Database analysis, the top 10% of Pakistani households earn 42% of the country's income, while the

lowest 50% earn only 13%. This means that the richest households in Pakistan earn more than three times as much as the lowest. When it comes to wealth rather than income, the issue is much more pronounced. According to the Oxfam research, the top 1% of Pakistani households own 21.9% of the country's wealth, while the lowest 50% control only 4.4%. This means that Pakistan's wealthiest households have more than five times the wealth of the poorest households. These **wealth and income discrepancies have serious implications for the country's economic and social development.** The IMF accord will almost certainly not help the country improve its predicament.

Instead of focusing on the people they govern, successive governments and regimes have ironically shifted the debt load onto Pakistan's working classes, as dictated by international financial organisations. Sadly enough, these have made the lives of ordinary folks more miserable.

24 July 2023

Source [CADTM](#).

## Yes to Life, Yes to Yasuní!

8 August 2023, by **Iain Bruce**

### Winning support

In a week of meetings and events in Madrid, Brussels, Paris, London, Oxford, Glasgow and Grangemouth, Leonidas Iza and his co-authors, Andres Tapia and Andres Madrid, won support from MEPs, British MPs, trade unionists, peasants, climate justice activists, academics, migrants and many others, for a Yes vote in Ecuador's August referendum.

Iza was a central figure in the Indigenous-led uprising of October 2019, triggered by the removal of fuel subsidies and therefore a sharp rise in the cost of living. He was then elected President of CONAIE, the

Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, the most powerful movement of its kind in Latin America. In that role, he led the follow-up national stoppage, or paro, of June last year. That closed down the country for even longer, 17 days in all, and expanded the list of demands. Alongside opposition to a broader range of neo-liberal policies, mandated by the International Monetary Fund, the Indigenous movement and its allies put at the centre of their struggle the need to halt oil drilling and mining on protected, sensitive and Indigenous land. On both occasions, they forced the government to negotiate and won significant concessions, but not

enough.

This August's referendum, which includes the question on stopping oil drilling in three oil fields known as Block 43, in the Yasuni, and another on limiting mining near the capital, Quito, is in effect a continuation of the 2019 and 2022 struggles. It brings together environmental campaigners with the Indigenous communities and other social movements that staged those insurrections, in a National Anti-mining Front. This combination is itself a significant, if tentative, achievement. The relationship of the Indigenous leaders and mass movement that led the insurrections, with the NGO left that has tended to

dominate the environmental movement, has sometimes been difficult in recent years.

## **Biodiversity hotspot**

As Iza and his colleagues repeated many times on their European tour, the campaign for Yasuní is not just about saving one of the most biodiverse spots on the planet. Of course, it is that too. The Yasuni National Park comprises 9,823 sq. kms of rainforest (almost half the size of Wales) in the Ecuadorean Amazon, just 200 kms from Quito and bordering the eastern range of the Andes. Perhaps because it was one of the few places that never froze over during the last ice age, it is one of the most biodiverse areas in the world, possibly the most biodiverse. Botanists have recorded 685 species of tree in one hectare of the Yasuni. That is more than in all of the United States and Canada. The same hectare also contains about 100,000 species of insects, again similar to the total number for North America. The Yasuni National Park is also home to Ecuador's two Indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation, the Tagaeri and the Taromenane. The pressure from oil companies operating on the edges of their territory has already resulted in three massacres, putting their survival in jeopardy.

## **A novel initiative for mitigation**

At the same time, the campaign for a Yes in the referendum has a broader international significance, because it revives one of the world's most original proposals for mitigating climate change. The Yasuni ITT Initiative was launched by the progressive government of Rafael Correa in 2007, during its early, more radical phase. It was based on proposals coming from Indigenous communities in Ecuadorean Amazonia and some environmental NGOs. It proposed leaving in the ground the 20 percent of Ecuador's oil reserves that had been identified in the Ishpingo, Tambococha and Tiputini oil fields,

known as ITT or Block 43, most of which lay beneath the Yasuni National Park. In return, the rich countries would pay Ecuador for not exploiting those reserves. US\$3.6 billion over 13 years was what the Correa government was asking for, in public and private sector contributions, when it took the Yasuni ITT initiative to the UN General Assembly in 2007, and to COP15 in Copenhagen two years later, where it formed a central plank of the proposals put forward by the ALBA alliance led by Bolivia, Cuba and Venezuela. That amount was calculated as 50 percent of the money the country would make if it did exploit those reserves. This was emphatically not conceived as compensation or as any kind of offset, nor was the money to be obtained through any sort of carbon market, as Alberto Acosta, Correa's first energy minister and an architect of the Initiative, repeatedly insisted. The idea was not to leave the oil in the ground beneath the Yasuni National Park in exchange for some northern polluters being allowed to continue their business as usual; on the contrary, the rich countries should pay as part of their responsibility to cut global emissions.

## **Towards a global just transition**

As the ecosocialist theorist, Michael Lowy, suggests in his foreword to the English edition of Iza's *Uprising*, the Yasuni ITT Initiative could have been an unparalleled example to other countries – an inspiration for how the global south and the global north, both producers and consumers of fossil fuels, could have engaged together in a just transition away from the carbon economy, in a way that would be fair for communities across the planet.

In the end, President Rafael Correa abandoned the Yasuni Initiative. By 2013, the international pledges amounted to only US\$336 million, of which less than 4 percent had actually been delivered. At the same time, the right-leaning and often pro-oil developmentalists in his Citizen Revolution movement had gained ground, bolstering Correa's own

sympathies with the extractive industries – and his impatience with both the Indigenous and environmental movements, which he liked to refer to as “infantile”. Alberto Acosta and others on the radical left in his government had either left or been marginalised. Blaming “the international community” for failing in its response (quite correctly of course), Correa declared the Yasuni Initiative dead, and ordered the state oil company, Petroecuador, to press ahead with drilling. In 2016, oil began to flow from the ITT fields, but in lesser quantities than expected, given the slump in world prices. Nonetheless, Correa's retreat from the Initiative sealed the already deep breach between his government and the bulk of the Indigenous and environmental movements.

The latter had argued that the oil should be left in the ground, with or without the international financial contribution. Already by 2014, a campaign called Yasunidos, launched by the environmental NGO Accion Ecológica, had collected enough signatures to trigger a referendum. But the electoral authorities refused to recognise hundreds of thousands of them, and for a number of years the Yasuni question all but disappeared from the political agenda.

## **The Yasuni returns**

It was only in May this year that Ecuador's Constitutional Court ruled, somewhat unexpectedly, that the call for a referendum was valid. It set the vote to coincide with the snap presidential election on 20 August, called by Ecuador's right-wing president, Guillermo Lasso, to avoid his own impeachment. Since then, the Yasuni question has burst back into the centre of Ecuador's political life. In a context that has been changed fundamentally by the two Indigenous-led insurrections of 2019 and 2022, it has unleashed an unprecedented debate on what kind of social and economic development the Ecuadorean people want for their country. It is a debate that cuts through the middle of the electoral options on offer on the same day. It also reveals, once again, the profound contradictions that run through Latin

America's diverse experiences with progressive governments, and their complicated relations with powerful social movements, like the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador.

For the last decade or more, the left and progressive forces in Ecuador have been riven by a bitter, debilitating division. The supporters of former president Rafael Correa and his Citizen Revolution movement have been ranged against much of the Indigenous and women's movements (the country's two most important social movements) and most of the trade unions (much weakened from their high point of the 1980s), as well as many environmental NGOs and a number of small far-left groups and currents.

## Yasuni, elections and beyond

This split is playing out once again in the presidential election on 20 August. But whether as tragedy or as farce, it

may be for the last time. On one side, the favourite to become Ecuador's next president, possibly in the first round but more likely in a second round in October, is Luisa Gonzalez, the candidate of the Citizen Revolution movement. She has avoided taking a very explicit position on the Yasuni referendum, and her party has said its members will be free to vote as they choose. But like Correa himself, she has left little doubt about her opposition to leaving the oil in the ground. Both insist the country needs the money to build schools and hospitals. Most of the half a dozen candidates vying to represent a discredited right have maintained a similar ambiguity, and used the same arguments.

On the other side, Yaku Perez, who was the candidate of the Indigenous movement's party, Pachakutik, in the 2021 election and came third, is the only presidential candidate this time to support openly a Yes vote in the Yasuni referendum. He still has the support of the old, right-leaning leadership of Pachakutik and some

environmental NGOs, as well as parts of the anti-Correa left and centre-left. But this bloc has lost much of its credibility. In particular, the Pachakutik leaders who engineered his candidacy last time and who led the large group of Pachakutik members in the now-dissolved National Assembly, revealed an extraordinary capacity for opportunism. Putting their virulent anti-Correa stance above loyalty to any particular ideology or policy, they struck a series of deals with Guillermo Lasso's right-wing government, in exchange for favours and positions. As a result, last April's national conference of Pachakutik voted them out and elected a new leadership aligned with the positions and priorities of CONAIE itself. They appealed against their removal, and since the National Electoral Council had still not ruled on the dispute, Pachakutik was not allowed to give formal endorsement to any candidates at a national level in this election.

7 August 2023

Source: [Ecosocialist.scot](https://ecosocialist.scot)

# Grain is the key, sweep away everything else

7 August 2023, by **Au Loong-Yu, Liu Xiang**

The result was that the output of both grain and cash crops declined, which led to ordinary people suffering starvation and malnourishment. By the end of the Cultural Revolution, the slogan had been adapted into a popular jingle: "Grain is the key link, sweep away everything else (粮食是金链子，扫清一切障碍)。" Today, as new concerns about food security emerge, the farce of "sweeping away everything else" is being played out once again in China.

## Growing ginger is a crime

On May 8, a pig farmer in Fujian province injured three "nongguan" (农管), or "Agricultural Administration

Officers," with a nail gun while resisting the forced demolition of his pig shed. After the man fled, police offered a reward of 50,000 yuan for his arrest. Follow-up reports indicate that the suspect has turned himself in.

While resistance to forced demolition is not uncommon in China in recent years, the development of the nongguan as a new agricultural police force is relatively new. In [November last year](#), China's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs issued the Measures for the Administration of Comprehensive Agricultural Administrative Law Enforcement, which states that the government would "strengthen the administration of comprehensive agricultural administrative law enforcement

agencies and law enforcement personnel" and "standardize the conduct of agricultural administrative law enforcement."

Only then did the public notice that the Integrated Rural Administration Bureau had already been established in 2019. Public anger has been mounting against these new law enforcement officers who were unleashed into the countryside to confiscate what farmers have produced. Inspired by the infamous "chengguan" (城管), or Urban Administration Officers, people give the new law enforcement agency and its staff a similar moniker. The latter, however, soon became no less vicious than their predecessors during the Great Leap Forward. Censorship in

China makes it difficult for readers to know exactly what kind of law enforcement action would cause a pig farmer to attack the nongguan, but some other recent incidents might provide some food for thought. In April this year, 1.5 mu of ginger fields were eradicated by the nongguan in Hunan on the grounds that growing ginger does not meet food security requirements under the relevant law and that the land must be used to grow rice.

Furthermore, circumstantial evidence reveals that the legal rules governing nongguan operations are vague enough for these officers to use escalating types of force, short of carrying firearms. In February, a list of equipment purchases by nongguan in a Tibetan city

### [was revealed online](#)

explicitly raising alarms over food security, demanding that all lower level officials ban the practice of “feinonghua” (匪农化)—banning peasants from turning agricultural land into non-agricultural land. The ban was later further extended to “feilianghua” (匪粮化), or banning peasants from abandoning grains to make ways for other crops. It was followed by the No. 1 Document of the CCP Central Committee in 2023. This document calls for, among other things, “ensuring that national grain production remains above 1.3 trillion catties, and that all provinces (including autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government) should stabilize the size of farmland, focus on unit yield and strive to increase yields.” Xi Jinping himself has also repeatedly stressed that China’s arable land cannot be less than 1.8 billion mu. Given the publicity of this document, all levels of state and local bureaucracy naturally see the implementation of the policy as a priority.

Many cases of controversial enforcement by nongguan have been related to forcing farmers to convert land for fruit, livestock, aquatic, and cash crops into grain land. The Measures promulgated last November also seem to provide the basis for such enforcement.

## The rationality of the irrational

It seems unbelievable that China does not have an adequate grain supply for human consumption. Although China’s overall self-sufficiency in grain production (which includes feed production for animals) has declined, there is no shortage of staple foods. According to CCTV News on May 11, China’s staple food self-sufficiency rate for human consumption is above 100 percent, with a per capita holding of 483 kilograms, above the internationally recognized 400 kilograms safety line. The problem, however, is that domestic feed production is not enough for the country’s livestock. In order to produce enough meat to satisfy the growing appetite of its people, China still **needs to import** grain (e.g. soybeans) to ensure its feed supply. According to the General Administration of Customs, China imported 146,872,000 tons of grains last year, down 10.7% year-on-year, but the cost increased by 10.5% year-on-year. Apparently, imported feed consumes much of China’s foreign exchange. So, we might hazard a guess that the government is trying to save foreign exchange by eliminating cash crops to make way for increasing domestic feed production. Perhaps the CCP’s perception is that the lack of bananas (or other cash crop fruits) for Chinese people would not cause any major problems.

But if the recent trend of eliminating cash crops and parks to make way for grain production, even if it is only a regional phenomenon, is designed to save foreign exchange on grain imports, the cost of implementation itself may be so high that it renders the effort useless. The costs begin to pile up immediately: the salaries of the huge army of nongguan; the waste of the millions, if not billions, of yuan spent on the building of the now demolished green spaces and parks; compensation to farmers for their losses (if the CCP does not want more violent resistance); and, not to mention the unproven benefits of rushing to change the land use in the first place.

All of the above costs should have deterred sensible officials from undertaking what people have called “converting forests into cropland.” The chemical components of soil can be very different, even within the same general areas. Finding out which pieces of land are best for certain plants is a complicated science requiring careful scientific planning. Agricultural planning must foreground the democratic decision-making and rational expertise of local farmers and agronomists—but the CCP’s bureaucratic structure prevents this. More often, in the rush to implement policies, local officials are only interested in putting on performances for their superiors. The irrational behaviour of this bureaucracy is only rational from the point of view of its own interests, and the expansion of its ranks implies that there are now more resources at the disposal of the department heads. The creation of new departments also means creating a great number of jobs for potential new officials as well, a phenomenon accurately described in “Parkinson’s Law”: that bureaucrats will expand their numbers indefinitely relative to their timespan, not the workload, if not checked by outside forces.

There is also speculation about the real motives of the No. 1 Document. It is thought that the CCP may want officials to prepare for war, and ensuring food self-sufficiency is one of the requirements, so local governments are assisting this task in their own ways. Due to censorship, we cannot know how far such a campaign has gone at the moment. Now even some official media began to question such chaotic implementation of the policy of protecting food security. On May 21, the Economic Review **warned that**

On top of the administrative and legal measures, from now on we need to take economic measures as well, and provide economic incentives (to the farmers). In moments when the local (governments) need to control the “feinonghua” and “feilianghua”... they should not resort to casual and rough measures, for instance simply cutting down what the

farmers have grown.

## A return to “commandism”

It is common knowledge that the Chinese phrase “digging out the flesh to mend sores” (刮骨疗毒)—that the treatment is worse than the disease—is simply a way of victimizing working people without helping to cultivate food security. Yet this kind of brutal implementation of questionable policies is commonplace in the history of the CCP. The lack of political democracy in commandism compels destructive methods of social planning by the central government, setting targets based on the whims of its top leaders. Most of the time the party only orders local authorities to meet targets without telling them how to do so wisely. On the other hand, in order to meet their targets, local governments do not discuss the most effective implementation details with other stakeholders, including affected

sectors and residents. This was the case with the Great Leap Forward and more recently, the Three Gorges Dam Project.

This style of administration, formerly known as “commandism” 命令主义, came under fire after the Cultural Revolution from both private citizens and party cadres. However, the party-state’s work of planning rarely faces rigorous and critical reviews. After the suppression of the 1989 pro-democracy movement, commandism once again became more intense, and accordingly, the party became increasingly intolerant of criticism, something which eventually reached its height during the “Zero-Covid” period. Today’s “converting forests to farmland” is another iteration of this dynamic. It is not difficult to counter commandism. Chen Duxiu, one early founder of the CCP, already prescribed the remedy: democracy and science, he argued, cannot exist without the other. But the modern CCP, believing in its own omnipotence, is absolutely unwilling to take the medicine to cure the

disease.

The rise of the nongguan marks how this new expression of bureaucratic commandism manifests in new forms of policing that structure China’s food production planning. The nongguan shows that without a system of political democracy, the management of food production demands violent coercion. With food security becoming an increasingly urgent issue for China—amplified by the demands of inter-imperialist rivalry on the global stage—the regime’s investment in new modes of policing ensures that capital accumulation (and its violent mechanisms) remain the CCP’s driving motor.

### Postscript

Since early May 2023, there have been unverified reports about certain local adjustments of the jurisdiction or power of the nongguan. In general, it has been increasingly hard to verify details about the operations of both local and central governments.

Source [Lausan](#).

# Yes to Refugees/No to Fascists and Racists

6 August 2023, by **Geoff Ryan**

## The UK Government’s Racist Policies and Labeling of Refugees

The UK government has spent a lot of time and energy attempting to justify its appalling racist policies towards refugees. And beyond this paragraph I will only use the term ‘refugees’. The relatively recent term ‘asylum seekers’ was coined because ‘refugees’ automatically produces a felling of empathy, hopefully solidarity with those seeking refuge from persecution

and oppression. By contrast ‘asylum seekers’ especially when preceded by ‘bogus’ is designed to present those seeking refuge as not ‘genuine’ and to whip up hostility to them, to encourage people to fear them and to massively exaggerate the numbers. Rather than empathize with their situation people have been encouraged to do whatever they can to prevent refugees being housed in Britain. That is exactly what is going on at the protest camp outside the Stradey Park Hotel in Llanelli.

It is somewhat bizarre that the protests are taking place at the Stradey Park Hotel given that the UK government is constantly telling us that they want to move refugees out of hotels in order to save money. Their

preferred option is to deport them to Rwanda or anywhere else willing to accept bribes to take refugees. Since the Court of Appeal has made that impossible at present then the next option chosen by the Tories is to house refugees on barges off the coast of Britain. That has also run into problems with the Fire Brigades Union arguing that the Bibby Stockholm, anchored off Portland, Dorset is a potential death trap, with comparisons to Grenfell Tower. The Tories claimed that the FBU objections to the scheme are part of a plot by the Labour Party to continue to house people in hotels. Yet it is the same Tory government that has chosen to house between 207 and 241 refugees, squashed into 77 rooms, at the Stradey Park Hotel.

# Local Opposition and Concerns About Refugee Housing

The Stradey Park Hotel is a four-star hotel in the village of Furnace on the outskirts of Llanelli, a popular venue for wedding receptions as well as housing a spa. All wedding plans have subsequently been cancelled (I know one young woman who has had to rearrange her wedding at short notice), and all 95 staff have been made redundant. So, if refugees are finally moved to Stradey Park Hotel they won't be moving into a luxury hotel run by welcoming and well-trained staff.

The refugee holding centre will be managed by Clearsprings Ready Homes on behalf of the owners, Sterling Woodrow. According to openDemocracy Daily Newsletter of July 28 Clearsprings were accused of 'treating [a] migrant like [a] slave'. In fact, two-thirds of the complaints made to the Home Office helpline Migrant Help were made about hotels managed by Clearsprings Ready Homes. These claims include a child being left outside in the cold and sexual harassment, as well as complaints about racism, harassment and discrimination. In the year ending 31 January 2022 Clearsprings made a profit of £28,012,487, with its 3 directors sharing dividends of nearly 328 million.

Opposition to the plan has come from very different sources and perspectives:

Carmarthenshire County Council (dominated by Plaid Cymru), Llanelli Council, Labour MP Nia Griffith and Labour MS Lee Waters, Welsh Refugee Council, Stand Up to Racism Local Residents

The far right: Voice of Wales and Patriotic Alternative

Carmarthenshire County Council has expressed concerns about housing so many refugees in a single place. It prefers to settle refugees throughout Cymru. The Council failed in a legal challenge to prevent the hotel being

used to house refugees but only argued about a legal technicality (the change of use of the hotel) rather than challenge the whole logic of shutting people away who have fled from wars and oppression. The Welsh Refugee Council took a similar view of opposition to housing so many refugees in one place.

In addition, Llanelli council raised issues about the effects on local services of the introduction of a large number of people at one time, which would increase the population of Furnace by about 50% immediately. While opposition to the scheme from Nia Griffith is welcome, she would perhaps do well to reflect on what effect her cheerleading for NATO and its military interventions might have on the need for tens of thousand of people to flee their homes and seek refuge in Britain.

While the Welsh Government does not have responsibility for refugee policy, they have made clear their opposition to this move by the UK government. As usual the Tory government completely bypassed the Senedd, the Welsh government and the people of Llanelli.

## The Role of Stand Up to Racism in Promoting Solidarity

Stand Up to Racism have been exemplary in organising solidarity with refugees. They are clear that refugees are welcome in Cymru, in Carmarthenshire and in Llanelli and have consistently opposed the far-right's attempts to use the issue to recruit and should be congratulated on their determined work.

Local residents have expressed opposition in different ways. For some the main issue is the effect such a large influx will have on already struggling services: how will schools cope, will it be even more difficult to see a GP. These are perfectly legitimate concerns, indeed legitimate concerns whenever there is a sudden increase in population in an area. In

my own village there is considerable opposition to plans for a new housing estate without provision for dealing with an increase in traffic on an already busy road, where children will go to school since the existing school is already stretched beyond capacity, how people will get an appointment at the local GP practice when the current population find it near impossible to do so. All these are entirely legitimate concerns for residents of Furnace.

The local protesters are also annoyed about the complete lack of consultation with them by the Home Office and the UK government. This is a concern shared by the Welsh Government, Carmarthenshire County Council, Llanelli Council, all of whom were completely bypassed by Sunak, Braverman and co.

However, despite their protestations that they are not racist there have undoubtedly been racist signs, racist chanting and racist opinions expressed at the picket and protest camp outside the hotel. 'Welsh Lives Matter' is a racist slogan in this context because it implies that refugees' lives don't matter. Black Lives Matter never implied that the lives of other people didn't matter except in the fevered brains of racists, fascists and their apologists: it was a response to a society, and especially to a police force, for whom black lives were worth considerably less than those of white people.

It has been reported that some of the protesters have suggested that local shops should refuse to serve refugees. What is that if not racism and xenophobia? Or comments such as 'let the decision makers take them in'. These are not comments from people who welcome refugees. They are comments from people who don't want refugees in the Stradey Park Hotel or anywhere else for that matter. In Llanelli the opposition to refugees per se is noticeably higher than at Tees Port or Portland where local people have opposed the deployment of barges as totally unsuitable for human beings and expressing empathy with refugees.

And the far-right has been active in the camp. Earlier this year the attempt by Patriotic Alternative to



whip up hatred against a hostel for refugees in Llanilltud Fawr/Llantwit Major ended in abject failure when they were massively outnumbered on the streets by local people. Support for the pro-refugee campaign came from Llantwit Major FC, local faith groups, local cafes and craft shops, a local DJ among others. A second attempt by the fascists to march in Llantwit Major also came to naught.

In Llanelli Voice of Wales hater Stan Robinson has been involved in setting up the protest camp outside the hotel. As Far Right Watch Wales has reported far-right activists have been involved in the SOS PAN (Save Our Stradey Park and Neighbourhood) Facebook group. Alek Yerbury, an admirer of Franco and Hitler with a record of organising anti-refugee protests in the North of England, Darren Harries and Jonathan Murray have all posted recently. The involvement of the far-right has not been welcomed by all the local residents of Furnace, with many withdrawing from SOS PAN. Welsh folk singer Dafydd Iwan strongly objected to his stirring anthem Yma O Hyd (now strongly associated with the Wales/Cymru Football team) being sung by right-wing protesters at the camp.

However, the Involvement of Voice of Wales and the rump Patriotic Alternative is a serious threat to any refugees that are moved into the hotel. They have been able to get some support in Llanelli, not least because so much nonsense about refugees is spread by the media and right-wing politicians (including much of the Parliamentary Labour Party and its supporters) and subsequently believed by many people. They have been aided by Rishi Sunak's 'Stop the Boats' obsession which chimes with what the far-right claim.

## **Debunking Misconceptions About Refugees and Their Impact**

There is a widespread belief that Britain houses a huge number of refugees and that it has taken in far more refugees than most other countries. 'We' are supposedly a 'soft touch' compared to other countries. There is not a shred of truth in these stories.

The vast majority of refugees are found in poor countries bordering the state from which they fled. The UK doesn't even come close to making the top 25. Turkey, with over 3.6 million, easily has more refugees than any other state. As of 2022 Germany, Russia, Poland, France, Czechia, Italy, Sweden and Spain, at a minimum, all hosted far more refugees than the UK. Apart from the USA all the other states hosting large numbers of refugees are in the poorest parts of the world, Africa, Asia and Latin America.

This is even more the case when the proportion of the number of refugees compared to the population of a state is taken into account. The only European countries in the Top 10 are Montenegro (5.2%) and Czechia (4.2%) in both cases almost solely Ukrainians. Both trail a long way behind Lebanon (22% of the total population. The UK figure is 0.54%, one of the lowest in the world.

Contrary to popular belief refugees do not take 'our' jobs. They are not allowed to work while waiting for their application for refugee status to be processed. They may have useful, often desperately needed, skills such as health professionals or engineers but they are not allowed to put those skills into practice. Instead, they have to live on a £5.84 per day handout while living in often in appalling conditions. Conditions that are going to get worse if the Tories have their way.

Once they get refugee status this is not the end of their problems. Refugees only have 28 days after getting refugees status to find accommodation and apply for mainstream benefits before they are

evicted from refugee accommodation. Not surprisingly many become homeless at this stage.

There are also claims that the vast majority of those seeking refuge are not refugees but 'economic migrants'. But are they not refugees from grinding poverty, a poverty for which western capitalism is largely responsible? Did western capitalist states not invade their countries and plunder their resources? And is western capitalism not primarily responsible for the terrible fires and floods that are currently devastating large parts of the planet?

Poverty (and now the threat of ecological collapse) has often been the driving force behind people choosing to migrate from the land in which they happened, by chance, to have been born to somewhere with better prospects for themselves and future generations. White people moved from Europe to the Americas, to parts of Africa, to Asia and Australasia because they believed they would get a better future there. In the 19th century my wife's family moved from Britain to New Zealand. In the late 20th century, she moved to London. So, is she an immigrant to Britain from New Zealand or is she a British expat returning home? Why should people be forced to remain in that little bit of the world in which they were born and not experience other countries, other cultures?

As an ecosocialist I firmly believe that people should have the right to live wherever they choose. I also strongly believe that a worker in Cymru has a billion things in common with a worker in Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Bangladesh, Barbados & Bulgaria - all the way to Yemen, Zambia and Zimbabwe. But next to nothing in common with a capitalist, however Welsh they may be.

As Karl Marx put it: Workers of All Countries Unite.

5 August 2023

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

# Death, Abuse and Super-exploitation of Children on Rise

5 August 2023, by **Malik Miah**

The police received an early-morning call regarding an unresponsive teenager at Florence Hardwoods, a sawmill in northern Wisconsin, reported the Florence county sheriff's office. Deputies and paramedics transported the 16-year-old to a local hospital before transferring him to Milwaukee children's hospital.

Michael Schuls was attempting to unjam a wood-stacking machine when the conveyor belt he was standing on moved and caused him to become pinned in the machine according to the Sheriff's office.

Schuls died two days later from his injuries. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) was notified about the accident and is investigating what took place.

## Not atypical

The teen's death is becoming more common as states loosen child labor protections of 80 years to bring in super exploited labor especially where unions don't exist. These children are generally from poor working-class families where the wages supplements household income.

Fourteen states across the U.S. - including Wisconsin - have proposed new legislation to roll back decades old child labor protections. Most states doing so are led by anti-labor Republicans—governors and state legislatures.

Wisconsin had a Republican governor and legislature until recent elections. In 2015 Republicans adopted an antilabor "right to work" laws that made it more difficult to form unions and protect public workers. They pressed for changes to child labor restrictions.

In 2019, a Democratic governor, Tony Evers, was elected. Evers vetoed legislation in 2022 that would have changed current child labor laws that restrict the number of hours teenagers can work. Republicans in the state legislature continually seek to weaken child labor laws.

The push back against the right and employers on this issue has generally been weak, relying on liberal elected officials. There has not been a necessary broad-based public pushback.

## Roots of multi-industry push

"The trend reflects a coordinated multi-industry push to expand employer access to low-wage labor and weaken state child labor laws in ways that contradict federal protections," according to the Economic Policy Institute.

Skip Mark, a University of Rhode Island professor specializing in labor and human rights, told the *Guardian* (July 6) of the prevalence of child labor in the country's agriculture industry.

In many ways, the employer push is a return to the late 1800s.

In 1870 the U.S. census expanded the collection of employment statistics to include children. It found that 75,000 children under age 15 worked—a number that didn't include those "employed" in family businesses or on family farms.

The expansion of child labor quantitatively expanded in the 1870s with the industrial revolution. Children not only worked in agriculture but the new

manufacturing factories in urban areas. The super exploitation of children between ages 5-14, and many mutilations and deaths led to a public outcry.

From the late 1800s until the 1930s workers began organizing unions on the railways and other industries. The new industrial labor organizations that were organizing and striking many employers frightened the capitalist class. It led the government of Democrat President Franklin Roosevelt to adopt favorable labor laws, including some child protections.

"The US Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 helped limit child labor in many ways. However, it did and still does not apply to the agricultural sector, where most child labor in the US and most child injuries and deaths occur," said Mark. "Child labor is most common in agriculture where children are maimed, killed, exposed to dangerous chemicals, underpaid, and we've known about these issues for decades."

He added: "Child labor is hard to measure, and most estimates are terrible and should not be taken at face value. Governments don't want to report how bad child labor is because it makes them look bad.

"Businesses don't want to report that they have hired children because then they would have to pay fines. Children and their parents don't want to report child labor because they need the job to support themselves and would lose their job if it was reported."

Terri Gerstein, the director of the Project on State and Local Enforcement at the Harvard Law School Center for Labor and a Just Economy, echoed similar sentiments.

"To stop violations of child labor laws,

we need more funding for enforcement, higher penalties, and clear, attainable ways to hold lead corporations accountable for violations in their supply chains,” Gerstein told the *Guardian*.

## Unions need to step up

The official labor federations have

always opposed unrestricted child labor. At its first convention in 1881, The American Federation of Labor ((AFL) adopted a resolution calling on states to ban children under 14 “from all gainful employment.”

But fighting efforts to weaken child labor protection has not been a priority for the modern labor movement.

Organized labor needs to change

course from lip service to action. Most working people are unaware of the issue of child labor and its connection to other attacks on the working class.

The death of a teenager in Wisconsin, and other states, will hopefully be the impetus to bring new awareness to this issue and rally the public to stop the abuse and exploitation of young children.

Source *Against the Current*.

# “Left Bloc: ‘We provide a solid political reference point to the workers and social movements’ ”

4 August 2023, by **Jorge Costa**

In this wide-ranging interview, Costa covers developments in Portuguese politics since the Socialist Party (PS) was returned to government in 2015, the Left Bloc’s changing relation to it, the rise of the far right in the form of Chega! (Enough!), the Bloc’s relations with the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), and the challenges facing the party as it returns to growth with an influx of a generation of younger activists.

The interview was conducted after the Left Bloc’s Thirteenth National Convention, held in Lisbon from May 26-28. To determine the work of the Bloc over the next two years, the 658 convention delegates (representing just under 10,000 members) had to choose between two different political perspectives, presented as Motion A and Motion E. Motion A, which Costa backed, won the support of 83% of the convention delegates, while Motion E attracted 15% support and 2% abstained.

In the vote for the 80-member National Board — the Bloc leadership between conventions — supporters of Motion A won 67 seats and supporters of Motion E 13 seats. The National Board elected the Bloc’s 21-member

Political Commission, on which supporters of Motion A (including Costa) have 17 seats, and supporters of Motion E have 4. A major feature of the convention was the election of Mariana Mortagua as new coordinator of the Bloc, replacing Catarina Martins, who stepped down after 11 years of leading the organisation.

Full coverage of the convention can be found (in Portuguese) on the [Left Bloc web site](#).

Jorge Costa was interviewed by Dick Nichols for *LINKS International Journal of Socialist Renewal*.

## The Left Bloc and the Socialist Party government of prime minister António Costa

**The Left Bloc has lost half its electoral support since 2017, beginning with the loss of its two representatives in the regional assembly of the island of Madeira**

**that year. In the 2019 legislative election it held on to its 19 seats in the national parliament but with a reduced vote, then lost 65% of its vote in the 2021 presidential elections and two-thirds of its 12 local councillors in the local government elections of the same year, to be followed by losing 14 of its 19 parliamentary seats in the January 2022 early general election. How much of this slump was due to factors beyond its control and how much to the Left Bloc’s own shortcomings?**

The agreement between the Socialist Party (PS) and the Left Bloc that formed the basis for the Left Bloc supporting a PS government was signed in 2015. Back then, the PS came second in the general elections and the issue was to prevent the right wing from continuing to govern and go on ravaging with its unprecedented austerity measures. In **the 2019 elections**, at the end of the socialists’ four-year term, and when the agreement had been fulfilled, the Left Bloc won 10% of the vote (half a million votes), which was almost the same result as four years previously (our best result ever). So, the

explanation of our **January 2022 result** is not to be found in some continuum of gradually increasing bad election results. Rather, we fell abruptly, to only half the vote and a quarter of the members of parliament compared to October 2019.

The reason was our refusal, taken after the negotiations, to vote for the PS government's budget. In those negotiations we fully respected our mandate, which was to use our influence to achieve important gains for the working class and the majority of the population: firstly, with regard to labour legislation — in particular ending **the labour laws of the Troika period** — and, secondly, with regard to investment in the National Health Service (SNS). However, we were not able to reach an agreement with the PS that would achieve these goals.

So, we did not have grounds for voting for the national budget. That decision, a decision for strategic independence from the PS, was not followed by a large section of Left Bloc voters. But we did not use their criteria to decide our vote: we used strategic criteria — those of our independent political project.

In the days just before the election, a second factor emerged that also contributed greatly to the Left Bloc's bad results: national polling showed that the parties of the right, taken together, were equalling the PS vote. This polling, which also pointed to a victory for the right when taken together with the far right vote, created a wave of fear that mobilised some left people towards the PS.

In the end, the feared right victory did not happen and the PS ended up with an absolute majority in parliament. So, the polls were either wrong or they contributed directly in the last days to a shift in voting intentions. In either case, those final polls were also very important in mobilising left voters towards the PS. These two factors are what explain our bad results in 2022.

**So, did the Left Bloc's (and PCP's) poor result show that SNS underfunding was not — at that moment — the most important issue for a sizable part of the "people of the left". Did the Left**

### **Bloc misread the popular mood?**

As I said, we used our mandate to exert pressure around strategic issues for the working class, like labour legislation, SNS funding and the struggle against casualisation. We will always refuse to be an appendix to the PS, to be a fifth wheel on the wagon of government. And so, in the circumstances of that time, we had a choice to make: for autonomy or subordination to the PS. We chose autonomy and we shrank after the national election results came in. That is true. We lost a lot of weight, but we kept our backbone intact and we are now able to strike back, which is what we are doing.

We face the PS's absolute majority with a parliamentary caucus that is much smaller than before, but one with a straight and coherent relationship with the popular movements that are emerging against the arrogance of the socialists and their incapacity to answer the big questions that need answering in Portugal today.

**Unlike the 2015-2019 *geringonça* ("contraption") — the PS government supported from without by the Left Bloc, PCP and others on the basis of a set of specific undertakings — the current PS majority government has drawn its stability from pacts with Portuguese big capital combined with, at best, last minute band-aid treatments for the multiple social crises the country is suffering. It now seems to be paying a big price for this, averaging 29% in recent polling — equal to the opposition Social Democratic Party (PSD) — and well down from its 41.4% result in the January 2022 poll. Recent polling also shows the Left Bloc recovering support to 8-10% levels. What explains these shifts?**

There are many different polls nowadays and different electoral attitudes are being reflected in them. It is also true that some are pointing to the Left Bloc recovering at the next elections or getting much better results if the elections were today.

The policy of the PS absolute majority

is marked not only by great arrogance — refusing to answer opposition parties, refusing to come to parliament to be held to account for their mistakes — but also by the government's coming apart at the seams, with many members of government (13 to date) falling because of scandals, large and small, of conflicts of interest, of promiscuousness between business and the public sphere.

But it is mainly because of a lack of perspective, of answers to the social crisis and to the inflation cycle. People are under the pressure of wage stagnation as a result of the government-bosses pact and of the combined effect of inflation and rises in interest rates commanded by the European Central Bank (ECB). Portugal has a massive housing crisis, with lots of people unable to pay for a home and endlessly searching for accommodation. We are also facing huge difficulties in the normal functioning of public services, mainly education and health: throughout 2022 we had the biggest ever strike wave in education and very significant strikes in the public health services, because the government went on refusing the minimal demands of doctors, nurses and teachers.

Portugal also has a development model based on massive and unsustainable tourism. This is one of the main explanations why Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth does not produce a corresponding increase in living standards. Instead, people are getting poorer, they are losing out, because the share of wages in the distribution of the country's wealth is shrinking. But the socialists are too disconnected from the people and think that people who are getting poorer will be happy seeing big GDP growth numbers.

This growth in GDP goes to the protected economic and financial sectors that benefit from the Portuguese development model and from the European Union rules, which forbid public investment and pro-worker policies at the same time as facilitating speculative financial operations. That is why, according to statistics of the ECB and the International Monetary Fund, half the

inflation rate is to be explained by profit growth.

**In a May 26 interview in *Diário de Notícias*, former Left Bloc coordinator Francisco Louçã said the socialist government had “given up on the SNS”. He also described its planned privatisation of the state-owned airline TAP-Air Portugal as “senseless from the point of the view of the country’s economic strategy”. Why is the PS government, unlike the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) government in Spain, pursuing this approach? Isn’t it undermining the PS’s own base of support?**

Portugal and Spain operate under the same power structure, that of the European institutions, the European Commission, the ECB, the European Council and the Eurogroup [of Eurozone finance ministers]. So, the main characteristics of both governments — despite the participation, in the case of Spain, of left-wing parties with ministries — is not so different: they both accept the European rules.

It is true that, as a smaller country, Portugal has less bargaining power in European conclaves. We also have stricter and more toxic forms of subordination and ways of applying the European rules and euro monetary policies, which are one of the main causes of our stagnation.

But when we see a visit to Lisbon of ECB president Christine Lagarde, we understand the enormous arrogance of this power, which goes on raising interest rates on housing mortgages. She comes to a country like Portugal, where a large part of the population has housing mortgages at variable interest rates and faces an enormous increase in its mortgage repayments, and says, “that’s life, you just have to put up with it. We at the ECB will go on increasing interest rates” — as if inflation was caused because working people are consuming too much.

This is not true. This is a false narrative. It is a class war on workers and the poor, and Lagarde and the European institutions are taking sides in this war and organising for it to be

won by the bourgeoisies in the European countries.

**In a June 14 interview with *Jornal de Notícias*, newly elected Left Bloc coordinator Mariana Mortagua described the present-day Portuguese political situation as a “quagmire” and said: “In 2019, the PS, by rejecting the second *geringonça*, a second written agreement and the possibility of opening up new policies to the Left, told the country that there were to be no Left policies... The choice from then on was between the bad — the PS governing with its absolute majority — and the worse — a right-wing government.” How stable is the PS government? With more than two years to go until the next election, can the Left Bloc — in combination with the other forces to the left of the PS — force a change in Costa’s line? Or is it simply too late for a *geringonça* 2.0?**

The socialists have an absolute majority: they do not need any more votes to change policies. We understand that to achieve any changes, we have to come out onto the streets. So, the Left Bloc is very much engaged in organising, and giving a solid political reference point to, the social movements and the workers.

As I said, over the last years we have seen very significant protest movements. For example, the biggest ever demonstrations of public-school teachers, repeated strikes of doctors and nurses, and public transport strikes that have been going on for a long time.

There is a continuous, across-the-board refusal from the government to answer to the workers in general and especially to the workers in public services that are getting increasingly old and run-down, with problems in finding substitute staff because conditions are so poor that young workers are refusing to make a career for themselves in these areas.

We also see the politicisation of the LGBTIQ+ and feminist movements and their resistance to the conservatising pressures

accompanying the rise of the far right. These movements and their politicisation have had a very important role to play in the last period, with enormous demonstrations of young people. They are a crucial part of the landscape of social resistance.

So, the role of the Left Bloc right now is to be a left-wing reference point, to offer left-wing politics to these movements and the mass sectors they represent. That is what we are doing to confront the government and extract political change from it.

**What, if any, truth was there in the minority Motion E’s diagnosis of the Left Bloc’s problems (its alleged “loss of coherence and dilution as a political project”) as due to “the almost exclusive parliamentary emphasis as the centre of political initiative, the sidelining of popular struggles and even the distancing of labour struggles subject to strong attack by the government”?**

Anyone who was present and followed the activities of our National Convention can testify to the enormous participation of Left Bloc activists, to the big responsibilities they are taking on in dynamising the social movements in Portugal.

We are a plural party, we are open to the free expression of every opinion. Our conventions are open to the media, our opposition has the statutory guarantee of freedom of expression and freedom of organisation in the party.

But it must be said that the type of critique contained in Motion E has less expression nowadays than it had in the last convention. So, it is a particular point of view, respectable and legitimate, but representing a small minority within the Left Bloc.

**Looked at since 1999, the Left Bloc vote has been among the most volatile of Portuguese parties. Is there anything the Left Bloc can do to moderate the roller coaster ride in its support? Can left voters be brought to understand that they don’t have to vote PS to stop the right, that what**

**counts is that the overall left vote exceeds that of the right?**

We do not get nervous about that roller coaster ride! Elections are a distorted mirror of the country's social environment and of the balance of forces in the class struggle. So, anyone who hopes for steady electoral growth as a strategy for social change will be disappointed. And I think this is true everywhere. We should just look at France and the recent political developments there, positive developments in the streets, but also at the ballot box with the rise of the **France Insoumise** of Jean-Luc Mélenchon. So, to survive in the long run, the left must also be ready for quick political change and be ready to intervene and take initiatives in volatile political contexts.

We must be consistent and independent of the social liberal camp, such as the labour parties or socialist parties like we have here in Portugal; parties that have abandoned a left perspective on the economy. Working people do not need the left if all it does is explain that they have to get poorer. In elections there will be good and bad moments, ups and downs, and often election results, good or bad, do not reveal the quality of strategic choices.

The important thing is to keep on the side of the exploited people and always act accordingly, in the street struggle and in parliament.

**The next election in Portugal is for the Madeira regional assembly. What opportunities does the Left Bloc have of rewinning a presence in its regional assembly?**

We lost representation in 2017 by just a couple of votes. Madeira is a two-island archipelago with 150,000 voters in total. It is a region with an autonomous government. The polls are now indicating that we have a big chance of getting back into the parliament and that is what we are fighting for right now in Madeira.

## The emergence of

## Chega

**Chega (Enough) is a late arrival in the wave of far-right reaction in Europe and turned up just as some of us were saying that, unlike Spain, there is no far right in Portugal because of the April 25, 1974 Carnation Revolution! What feature does it share with other far-right forces in Europe? What is specifically Portuguese about it? Why did it emerge so belatedly? Does it have the degree of support in the state apparatus, judiciary, armed forces and police that, say, Vox has in the Spanish state?**

For many years there was a party, the **Party of the Social and Democratic Centre (CDS-PP)**, which was kind of a gathering together of the remnants of the dictatorship, political personnel from its last years, with close connections with the church and sections of the bourgeoisie, sections of the employers' confederation, etc. At its electoral peak, CDS-PP got the same score that Chega gets today, around 12%. CDS-PP disappeared from the political landscape and its cadres are now orphans. They are not in Chega — they did not become politicians for the far right. But the far right absorbed the popular vote this party had, so you can see this as a kind of *aggiornamento* [updating] from the grassroots of the right wing, from its voting base.

When you note the political personnel of these new ultra-right political parties — not only Chega but also Iniciativa Liberal (IL, Liberal Initiative) — they come from the middle cadres of the traditional right-wing parties. So, rather than Nazi and fascist groups getting parliamentary representation and growing, we have sectors from the previously existing right-wing formations fragmenting and reorganising, adopting elements of the radicalised right — of Trump and Orban, and also of the ultra-liberal right from all over Europe.

In the case of Chega, we should also note its organic fragility. For example, one-third of its elected members on local council executives resigned from the party last year. Not for any specific political difference, but

because of clashing personalities and personal ambitions. Also, the last congresses of the party were ruled to be irregular by the Constitutional Court.

So, this is an organisation that is still very weak, which still gets its representatives and candidates from people with very loose connections with the party itself, and that reflects its lack of real social presence. Yes, Chega is very visible in parliament. It has a very charismatic leader, **André Ventura** (who came from the PSD), but it is a very loose organisation with very little capacity for street mobilisation.

The only sector with real far-right influence in its organised ranks is the police. In no other sector, in no other expression of protest, does Chega have anything comparable, not even in massively mobilised sectors, like teachers and nurses. Nowhere else does the far right have any capacity for mobilisation.

Nonetheless, the far right still connects with the traditional themes of the Portuguese right: anti-Roma racism, colonial nostalgia and **Salazarism**, the normalisation of the fascist dictatorship and **the Colonial War** viewed as an heroic epic. All that goes with macho nostalgia and a very strong rejection of feminism. These are the main features of the Portuguese far right narrative, as represented by Chega.

Then there is IL, another radicalised party of the right, but which is very different. IL is an ultra-liberal party, inspired by **Hayekism**, one of many European parties of this type. An extremist liberal party, anti-Marxist but not ultra-conservative, with an agenda focused on economic issues like lowering tax rates.

IL has a high-income support base and is much more concentrated in wealthy inner-city milieux. Its typical voter is younger and more educated. It does not express xenophobic and racist ideas openly and refuses to make them part of its agenda.

**Like the PSOE government in relation to Vox, Costa sees continuing political gain in**

**presenting the PS as Portuguese democracy's best anti-Chega bulwark and highlighting the complicity of the PSD with the far right. The tactic is to build the PS vote by splitting the right and frightening left voters into seeking shelter with it. How does the Left Bloc counter this gambit, which pretends that the PS is the only real anti-fascist force?**

The main way that the Left Bloc deals with this is by explaining that Chega is a "federation of discontent" — discontent with neoliberal policy and its results in wages, health, education etc. All this despite the lack of policies to answer these needs, or even a more radical version of neoliberal policies.

This is the direct result of the bad politics of the socialist government, which refuses left policies. So, we answer the far right by finding the largest unity in the movements that resist fascism, racism, misogyny, homophobia or transphobia, but also by underlining our opposition to PS neoliberalism and by responding on the terrain of alternative economic and social policy.

This orientation coincides with how protest has developed in the first year and a half of the PS's absolute majority. Every demonstration that has emerged comes with left-wing demands: those of the teachers, of the health workers, of the workers in the legal system; the demands of the feminists, the demands of LGBTIQ+ movement, the demands of young people who are fighting for housing.

They all connect with the left and with our left demands. They have no connection with, and there is no presence of, the far right in these demonstrations. This is very, very important because the opposition in the streets to the Costa government is not a far-right opposition at all. It is mainly led by social movements and trade unions, which connect directly with the left-wing parties and the left-wing opposition, either with the PCP or the Left Bloc.

Look at France, which is a country where you have a ruling centre which is very close to the Portuguese PS, that of Emmanuel Macron. And there

you have a strong far right on one side and a strong left on the other, led by France Insoumise. It is true that the far right is rising in Italy, Greece and Spain, and that it is very strong also in France, but the performance of the French left shows — its electoral results show — that there is room for another kind of left opposition, so long as it is coherent and independent.

That is the way we can create a left-wing pole of attraction that can win over those social sectors in the working class who are in shock because of the neoliberal policies of the PS and could be more vulnerable to far-right demagoguery.

**In the Spanish state, part of the vote for Vox, which mainly comes from the rich and very rich suburbs, is also concentrated among the poorest regions along the Mediterranean coast, where there are many North African and sub-Saharan workers. Here, Vox racism and Islamophobia finds support in the most abandoned Spanish-speaking *barrios*. Is the Portuguese situation similar? If so, what does the Left Bloc propose to counter the influence of Chega?**

The characteristics of immigration in Portugal are quite different from Spain. Here, Chega is closely connected to the interests, to the bosses, of our intensive monoculture in agriculture, which is very much dependent on immigrant labour. So, Chega has shifted its message more to themes like Romaphobia, corruption in politics, ultra-conservatism around LGBTIQ+ and feminist concerns, and opposition to euthanasia and abortion. These are the main issues, the lines along which the far right tries to build its identity, more than with a straightforward racist and anti-immigrant stance. That would, at a certain point, clash with the interests of some of its own supporters and financiers, the bosses from the intensive agriculture in the South.

Also, Chega voters are different from their Vox counterparts. The typical Chega voter is male, middle-aged to elderly, and from the popular classes. As I said, the more highly educated, urban right-wing voter who might vote Vox in Spain tends to vote IL in

Portugal.

## **Strengthening social justice, social resistance and alternative policy**

**Motion A, now Left Bloc policy, expresses the aspiration that drives the Left Bloc as "A Good Life for All Persons" and summarises this as "a comfortable home, work with rights, quality public services, time to enjoy life on a habitable planet, access to culture, individual and collective wellbeing. Living well requires the material conditions for a dignified existence, but it is more than that: it is self-determination about what we want to be, it is freedom and respect for our choices. It is care and interdependence. It is the security of the future, of a salary and of pensions. It is the peace of a place in the world that does not depend on competition against others or the tyranny of the market. It is the sharing of the common goods and democracy that decides; the essence of socialism." Why was this reformulation necessary?**

This was no theoretical innovation. We were trying to give a simple definition to a very simple idea. Access to essential goods and services is being denied to increasingly large sectors of society, as inequalities grow, and neoliberal policies take their toll. So, when we talk about the fight for a good life, we are talking about the set of demands that everybody finds fair and regards as comprising essential rights — housing, a fair wage, education, health care, culture — but that are only achievable in today's context through socialist policies of the kind that the Left Bloc proposes. So, I guess that everywhere the left should do its homework and try to find efficient ways and words with which to convey its ecosocialist viewpoint. When we speak about the good life, we are also inspired by this idea coming from South American

indigenous peoples.

We are trying to express the very simple idea of what an essential human right is, what is fair, what everybody should have, what must be guaranteed and not be put at risk as it is today. If it were not at risk, we would have a good life. I guess this encapsulates our way of presenting our political proposal.

**Both motions to the convention note the large protests in Portugal of migrant workers and against racism. How is the Left Bloc aiming to strengthen its support and implantation among migrant workers, who, as in the Mediterranean countries, are largely concentrated in low-paid casual work in cleaning, hospitality, aged care and tourism?**

Left Bloc activists are present in the two most important fronts where the left deals with immigrant people. The first is in the intensive agriculture in the South, where an immigrant workforce is concentrated. We try to connect to these workers through their networks of associations, in order to fight for those working “illegally” (without residency papers) and surviving in appallingly inadequate housing — a very cruel existence for workers in intensive agriculture. We are at the centre of efforts to denounce these conditions, which too often escape the attention of even PCP-run municipalities where this agriculture is based. So, on the left, we are the main force dealing with the underpayment, bad working conditions and miserable housing of this workforce.

The second front is around the digital platforms of the delivery companies that employ a large mass of immigrant workers — Brazilians, Asians, Africans — who once taken on by these digital platforms, end up overexploited and underpaid. Here we also have a developing intervention, a very difficult and new experience for us. We are trying to develop this experience by engaging these communities in networks of solidarity and self-help.

This experience is very important. As recently as mid-June we were able to

pass a new law in parliament against casualisation in these “uberfied” sectors, initiating a process of public inspection of the working conditions and work contracts of the workers in these platforms. Together with the organised workers in this sector we are following the process very closely in order to change the brutal conditions that prevail there.

Finally, we have a very large Portuguese community that is victim of racism and mainly composed of the grandchildren and great grandchildren of immigrants from the former Portuguese colonies. We try to link up with and win over these people in the anti-racist movement and in the fight to give visibility to the oppression of this race-categorised community. We do it through participation in the anti-racist movement, in the Black people’s movement and in our practice in the party.

This approach includes giving prominence to the presence of Black people and race-branded people in the leadership of the Left Bloc and on our election tickets. For instance, the first Black woman to have an executive position on Lisbon City Council is **our representative Beatriz Gomes Diaz**.

However, there is a long way to go in this country, which has an imperial and colonial history in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and a long history of slavery and exploitation. We are bringing together the demands and the historical material that empower the Black and race-categorised people in Portugal in the fight for historical memory, dignity and acknowledgment of the meaning of the violence of the oppression exerted in the countries that were Portuguese colonies. This part of our country is still paying the price for the policies that the ruling class and powers-that-be in Portugal imposed there for centuries.

**The housing affordability crisis, which is common to most of the advanced capitalist world, is particularly sharp in Portugal, where average house prices have doubled in less than a decade and where, as in Spain, the dire situation is exacerbated by economic dependency on tourism.**

**What are the Left Bloc’s proposals to resolve the housing crisis?**

Today, Portugal is one of the countries most harshly hit by the speculative and financialisation dynamics of the housing market.

Our huge housing crisis is the result of gentrification, the expulsion of the people from city centres towards every more distant outskirts, as well as of the increase in the demand for housing in the big cities — mainly Porto, Lisbon, the Algarve, Madeira — from non-residents. This is one of the factors driving the rapid impoverishment of the population, together with the rise in bank mortgage interest rates.

The proposals of the Left Bloc in these circumstances are:

- Firstly, huge investment in increasing the stock of public housing, at accessible rents.
- Secondly, a ban on selling houses to non-residents, because in this country this housing is almost entirely dedicated to speculation and luxury lifestyles.
- Thirdly, an end to the “golden visa”, a mechanism to promote the selling of good houses to rich foreigners, mainly oligarchs from China, Brazil, Russia and Ukraine.
- Fourthly, a rent ceiling to prevent owners of private dwellings from imposing exorbitant rents.

As far as the banks are concerned, we demand a limit on the proportion of their income that any family has to dedicate to paying their mortgage. With the rise in the Euribor rate, the part of family income that is being spent on paying the mortgage is increasing very fast and becoming very high for a large number of families.



The difference between the monthly mortgage payment applying today compared to when the hikes in the Euribor rate began should be funded from the record profits of the banks — the highest in at least 15 years.

**The Left Bloc is deeply involved in the campaign for proper funding of the SNS, with a national June 3 demonstration featured at the convention. How is this campaign progressing?**

The movement in defence of the SNS is strategic. Privatisation of health services has been going on for several years now and it is taking place through disinvestment in the public health service. As a result, people find it increasingly difficult to get a timely appointment with their SNS doctor and, as waiting lists get longer and longer, they also find it very difficult to get their surgery, even in urgent cases.

The door thus gets opened to private business investment in health provision and health insurance, as a lot of people move into private sector health care. This, however, just happens to be subsidised through the national budget via contracts made directly by the SNS with private providers!

This is a dreadful way of managing public funding: it should be devoted to expanding the capacity of public health provision to make it universal, accessible and timely for everyone that needs it. That demand was at the centre of a new movement that was launched in early June and which gathers together not only nurses, doctors and hospital and health centre personnel, but also citizens that use these services and want to defend them.

It is critical that Portuguese society mobilise for the SNS by giving citizen support to the demands of the trade unions of the health care professionals. Their demands are just: better careers and wages so as to be able to recruit and retain the professionals that are needed in the service. Today there is a huge problem of insufficient, increasingly old, overstressed professional staff in all health services.

These problems must be solved, but the professionals alone cannot solve them — they must have the active solidarity of the community. That is the challenge that we are dealing with in the “More SNS” movement, as it is called: to take the fight for properly funded national public health care beyond the health sector and into society at large.

**The Left Bloc program implies a very different type of national budget, with increased funding of public services and infrastructure for the ecological transition financed by greater contributions from those who can afford to pay. Has the Left Bloc developed an alternative budget process that can be used to visualise its priorities?**

The visualisation of the priorities of the national budget was one of the main characteristics of the period when there was an agreement between the PS and the parties of the left. The process of bargaining that took place at that time connected social movements, social protest and trade unions with concrete negotiations over every new budget.

This process was very visible, on the daily media for weeks and months, every year of that four-year term. The budget was discussed in its entirety, from its main priorities down to specific details. This bargaining was very important because it gave discussion over budget options a very public profile as parliament itself became a kind of a bargaining arena between the left and the socialist government.

The right wing was marginalised in this process, reduced to complaining about the pressure of the left and about the results of this bargaining, even though the greater part of this bargaining was good news for ordinary people. It also made it very difficult for the right wing to assert an alternative social and economic agenda of their own, since the bargaining brought gains to the working people.

So, this is the main experience we have had, a parliamentary experience, but a very public one that provided a

good visualisation of what a budgetary process is.

Of course, if we had been part of the government, this bargaining would have been much more discreet, done much more indoors, and been less scrutinised. Whereas in other countries left-wing parties participate in government alliances with socialists, we do not do it. We were supporting the PS government from outside, in the parliament, but we were in permanent conflict with the socialists in parliament and with the government. This was a permanent bargaining process and, I think, a very formative one for all of us involved in it.

Of course, after 2019, the process was not strong enough to deal with the pressure and the blackmail of the right wing, and, as I have already mentioned, it was not easy to vote against the government. But you must take into consideration that during the period of the agreement (between 2015 and 2019), the Left Bloc was able to make good use of this bargaining process and it repeated its very good election result at the end of the agreement.

**How much in the way of policy development and concretisation of plans for the ecosocialist transition do you feel the Left Bloc has still to develop?**

As far as the ecosocialist transition goes, I think there’s a balance we must find — and it is what the Left Bloc is trying to achieve — between developing a very detailed and accurate political program for the transition and making full use of the opportunities the balance of social forces gives us to impose actual concrete changes.

We think the ecosocialist transition will be the product of the social struggles against climate injustice. Of course, the left must have its own proposal, and we have ours. We presented it as part of our national program.

Ecosocialist planning is economic planning determined by social and climate justice criteria. This means we must carry out the transitions in

production and distribution and make the technical choices needed to produce these changes, but do that in a way that brings economic progress interconnecting two dimensions: the ecosocialist transition is the creation of a fair and sustainable economy. This process must involve a debate within the climate movement and the trade unions that develops the general conscience of the working class around climate issues.

At the same time, of course, we have had meetings all over the country of the people doing the technical work on the choices for eliminating carbon emissions.

## Relations with the Communist Party of Portugal (PCP)

**In his *Diario de Noticias* interview Louçã said that “the relation between the PCP and the Left Bloc is converging a lot in regard to concrete national policies and measures. It is diverging a lot, and more and more, in relation to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.” For its part, the recent PCP congress resolution scorned the Left Bloc for “submission to the dominant ideological environment [and] alignment with the aims of imperialism”.**

How is the Left Bloc’s perspective of “convergence of all the political sectors of the left that express their rejection of the government’s policies of inequality” and “a broad popular leftist camp that changes the balance of power in favour of those who work” possible without a solution to Left Bloc-PCP rivalry — either through a (presently unimaginable) strategic agreement, or through the marginalisation of the PCP (not in prospect, at least in the short term)?

The relations between the Left Bloc and the Communist Party are not going to develop either through strategic agreement or through marginalisation.

The way we relate to the PCP is by affirming very clearly the big

differences we have around international issues and around questions of social progress, issues like LGBTIQ+ rights, transgender rights, drug policy and euthanasia. We want to make the large differences we have around these critical issues as visible as possible. But we simultaneously seek common ground for social struggle with comrades from the Communist Party and other wings of the left who should come together against the Socialist Party’s absolute majority and its neoliberal policies.

We are doing that right now. We are doing it in the housing movement, where all the left comes together around joint appeals and in big demonstrations. We also try to do it in the movement around health care, but it is more difficult there because the Communist Party has a more sectarian approach, since it controls parts of the trade union movement in the sector and tries to have open mobilisations done exclusively via structures controlled by its members.

With different experiences, our orientation is always to seek the most united possible forms of social mobilisation against the neoliberal policies of the government.

**Recent polling shows the Left Bloc recovering support to its historical 9-10% levels, while the PCP is still to recover from the 4-5% level. What explains this apparent gap? Is the PCP’s **position on the Russian invasion of Ukraine part of the cause?****

Ukraine was a very dramatic moment and a bad year for the PCP, because they very openly identified with Russia’s stance and narrative justifying the invasion. It was very badly received, including by parts of its own membership and voting base.

The PCP also paid a certain price, maybe in more activist circles, for its hostility towards the Left Bloc and for its authoritarian methods in the trade union movement. All the minority currents in the General Confederation of Portuguese Workers (CGTP, controlled by the PCP) are publicly protesting at being prevented from presenting and discussing their own proposals at the level of the CGTP

leadership. This is inconceivable in a healthy trade union movement. But it is happening right now in the leadership of the CGTP, and that is public news.

The PCP’s hostility towards the Left Bloc, a party with which the Communists share many proposals and views on economic and social issues, taken with its authoritarian practice in the trade union movement, are the reason for a certain scepticism towards the party that is growing in parts of the left and also lies at the root of its inability to expand its influence in recent years.

## Ukraine

**Majority motion A, now Left Bloc policy, states: “The existence of global US hegemony does not change the imperialist nature of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, which the Bloc condemned with the same clarity with which it has condemned the Putin regime over the years. The left can’t expect anything else from an oligarchic dictatorship and militarist adventurism”. It calls for “a Ukraine Peace conference under the aegis of the UN and the European Union (EU)” and an end to the arms race. The motion is silent on Portugal providing arms to Ukraine, and does not call for an immediate ceasefire.**

Motion E, by contrast, while “vehemently” condemning Russian aggression, demands an immediate ceasefire and refers to European Parliament resolutions on Ukraine for which Left Bloc MEPs voted, stating: “The Left Bloc cannot remain tied to any decision that whitewashes this subordination [of the EU to US policy]”.

What is the policy of the Left Bloc on a ceasefire in the war and on Portugal supplying arms to Ukraine?

From the beginning of the invasion of Ukraine, the main issue for the Left Bloc was the right of self-determination of the Ukrainian people. That was the principal problem on the table. On the day after the invasion, on

February 25, the Left Bloc issued a statement calling for the Portuguese government to demand of the EU that it define in concrete terms its conditions for a ceasefire in the region of Donbas and for negotiations aimed at establishing peaceful coexistence for all peoples in the region.

At the same time, the Left Bloc said that the demand for a ceasefire had to be linked to the demand for withdrawal of Russian troops from the territory invaded in February 2022 and that it also had to be linked to a concrete proposal for negotiations aimed at achieving a peace agreement. It is not possible to separate these three elements: withdrawal of troops, ceasefire and the opening of negotiations; they must be simultaneous.

As far as Ukraine's access to defensive weapons is concerned, what is at stake is the sovereignty of the Ukrainian state and respect for the integrity of its territory. Ukrainian military defence is legitimate to expel the invader. Thus, the guns that have been supplied to Ukraine by the imperialist countries from the West are mainly defensive weapons which are needed for Ukraine's national resistance effort.

The protection that is being provided by NATO to the government in Kyiv does not change the nature of the national resistance of Ukraine. It has never been the case that the national struggle for the liberation against an invader or colonial power changes nature according to the kind of imperialist forces that might, at one moment or the other, support those national struggles.

So, we think this theory applies in the Ukrainian case; that we are dealing with a struggle for national liberation, and we should not only be actively supporting a ceasefire based on the withdrawal of Russian forces and finding the way to a peaceful agreement with Russia, but also that we should not oppose the supply of defensive — I stress defensive — weaponry to Ukraine.

## European Union

**Majority motion A notes the perspective of a return to austerity on the part of the European Commission and says: "Cooperation between European states is an important element of a strategy to contain the radicalised right wing, on condition of a democratic turn that accepts the sovereignty of peoples, the development of social rights and ecological planning."**

This perspective, certainly desirable, is light-years from the present-day EU, with its border policy against refugees, increases in arms expenditure, support for the Moroccan monarchy in its war on the Western Sahara freedom struggle, and effective denial of the right to self-determination.

How can the political tide be turned in Europe to make such a democratic turn feasible?

Well, the EU is a war machine against social rights. If you read the treaties that are at its core and which state the way in which the European institutions (the ECB, the European Commission and the European Council) should connect and act, you will see that they were designed and built to escape democratic control, escape the inspection of the people's directly elected representatives, and to impose permanently — and with little national capacity of deciding otherwise — neoliberal reforms and setbacks for workers and the popular classes. That is the nature of the EU.

When the Left Bloc speaks about cooperation between European states, we are not speaking about the actually existing EU. It is unreformable and can only be substituted with new forms of cooperation between sovereign states.

The Left Bloc has had a long debate on these issues and has also been updating its views on the EU, not only before but also after the Troika intervention in Portugal ten years ago and after **the intervention of the Troika in Greece** and the capitulation of the SYRIZA government of the time.

So, we do not have any kind of false illusions about the role that the EU can have. We know that the respect for sovereignty, the development of social rights and the ecological policies that can deal with climate change will only be achieved in a completely different framework.

## Strengthening the Left Bloc's implantation, interventions and functioning

**Motion A notes the growth and better organisation of the Left Bloc's trade union presence (in telecommunications, health, education, and the security industry). Could you give some details of these advances? How are you trying to build greater Left Bloc participation in a Portuguese trade union movement that seems to be shrinking, losing vitality and not gaining coverage of the areas where younger workers are concentrated, and with its main organised contingent, the CGTP, becoming more bureaucratised?**

The Left Bloc's social implantation has been growing steadily over the years, and today, despite the big difficulties rising from the hegemony and authoritarianism that the Communist Party still exerts in the functioning of specific trade unions and the CGTP, there has been room for us to grow in influence in certain sectors, professions and trade unions.

The sectors mentioned — telecommunications, health, education, the security industry — are among the parts of the working class that have been most engaged in struggle in recent years. We are also building, as I said also before, among workers in the digital platforms, culture and the arts, and wherever casualisation and new forms of exploitation of the working class emerge.

We are gaining from these experiences, trying to connect them

and generate a political debate to advance an alternative vision of what the working-class struggle should be in Portugal today, including the roles for trade unionism and for enterprise-based rank-and-file committees. We have some interesting experiences that provide very rich material for this debate.

We have also been developing critical mass in the health sector. Comrades of ours have been leading the formation of left-wing tickets in the doctors' and nurses' associations. This has been a rich experience that links with the health sector unions and the More SNS citizens movement in defence of the public health system. This is taking its first steps and we hope to play a very active role in it in the next period.

Then there is the teachers' struggle, which has been central in the last period and where there has been an increase in organised struggles and strikes around the small minority trade union that has emerged in the sector. It remains very small, but had the initiative to start a movement when the traditional trade unions were failing to understand the situation. This minority grasped that there was huge resentment among teachers and that there was willingness to fight, and they advanced, bringing the traditional unions after them. This exposed the role of the PCP's rule in the trade unions and the consequence of this rule: a bureaucratisation of the unions and a lack of answer to the workers.

**In what other areas has the Left Bloc had successes? What are the areas that still need most attention? What remains to be achieved in making the Left Bloc a fully national organisation?**

In territorial terms, the Left Bloc has today a very widespread presence in the country's small and medium-sized cities. Of course, after the general election result we experienced a big drop in our public financing, and it had consequences for the ways that we can develop our territorial structure. But we are trying to solve this problem and to step forward.

**Motion A says that Left Bloc's**

**reduced dependence on public financing as a result of its vote was a blessing in disguise: "The reinforcement of self-financing ... is a change in internal culture that needs to be deepened." How?**

We are tackling our goal of reducing dependence on public financing through a combination of across-the-board financial campaigns, introducing elements of self-financing and having a fundraising component in each and every public initiative that we undertake. Also, by changing the structure of our spending and propaganda in order to save and, in the near future, have the capacity for a huge increase in the self-financing part of our budget.

This was well understood by the members since the cause of our present difficulties is well known to everyone.

**A persistent complaint in Left Bloc pre-convention contributions is that its conventions are – unlike those of other European left organisations – structured according to competing motions (platforms), of which many members do not identify 100% with any of them, and that this decision-making method tends to entrench "tribal" tendencies.**

On the other hand, this method of structuring conventions also requires members and delegates to decide what they actually want for the organisation, instead of wasting their time in discussion of hundreds of (usually minor) amendments to a (usually massive) single, pre-cooked document, a la PCP.

Do you see any ways in which the procedure of Left Bloc conventions can be improved?

There is room for participation in our congresses for comrades who do not engage with any of the main platforms. It is true that you can only present yourself as a candidate for the leadership of the party under a global political platform. But you can present yourself as a candidate for delegate under a local political platform independent of the global political platforms.

Local platforms that can link up between themselves and build a shared political identity — and they do this — then present themselves to convention and make their contribution without being part of any of the major political camps. This is the tradition of the party. It is very important in order not to have conventions dominated by the debate between the big alignments. And this has been our experience to date.

**The Left Bloc has experienced an influx of nearly 1000 new members, mainly but not only younger and "with a strong identification with the Left Bloc's ecosocialist, anti-racist and anti-conservative profile". How do you envisage the work of educating and training this "intake" to be able to take responsibility for leading the organisation in the future?**

The way we handle this challenge is to carry out specific welcoming meetings for new members and apply a policy of encouraging them to take areas of responsibility. At the same time, we always try to have a good presence of young people in the elected organs of the party and on its election tickets.

Young Left Bloc members are not ghettoised in a separate organisation, we refuse to have a separate youth organisation. This means that there is always a presence of the younger comrades throughout the Left Bloc's structures. They are inside the party, engaging with the older comrades, but, of course, with space for dealing with their own concerns. They elect a national coordination of young people in order to deal with the young people's issues, and they organise their national educational program and their annual national camp.

However, as far as the day-to-day life and organs of the Left Bloc go, they are members in full rights.

**The left and the social democracy:**

# Portugal and Spain contrasted

**There's a sharp contrast between the approach of the Spanish left to the left of the social democracy and its Portuguese counterparts, the Left Bloc in particular. In the Spanish state, it is just accepted that the non-PSOE left should govern in alliance with the PSOE, and that having "our people" in government guarantees a better result than leaving the job to the PSOE apparatchiks. The Left Bloc's approach has been that of the *geringonça*: external support for the PS against the right on the basis of an agreed set of undertakings, leaving the organisations free to pressure, criticise and showcase its policies in areas not covered by the agreement.**

After four years of Portuguese *geringonça* (2015-2019) and three-and-a-half years (2019-2023) of Spanish "cohabitation" by Unidas Podemos (UP) as a minority partner in a PSOE government, what conclusions would you draw as to which approach is to be preferred?

When the Left Bloc lost half of its vote in 2022, Pablo Iglesias, at the time leader of Podemos, rushed into public debate to make a balance sheet of the Portuguese experience, the "Portuguese model", as it was called. He was critical of our option of staying outside the PS government. He said we should have been in government to have influence, to have our voters understand that to vote for the left is to elect possible members of government, change the rules, and change government policies. So, Iglesias always had a bad prognosis about the Portuguese experience.

But the fact is that, as I have already said, at the end of the "Portuguese model" (in 2019, after the fulfilment of

the clauses of the four-year agreement with the PS), the Left Bloc kept its influence and re-elected its 19 MPs. So, there was no negative balance sheet to be drawn from that orientation.

The loss of half of our vote happened more than two years after that, when, with no agreement with the PS, we had to choose between being an autonomous force of the left using its representation to exert influence over government decisions or becoming an unconditional supporter of the PS. We chose the first option. At no time have we had any doubts about the nature of the PS government, a government of the liberal centre. We never saw it as part of a progressive camp, as a left government. We always saw it as offering an opportunity, through political agreement, to extract gains for the working class.

In contrast, when we look at the balance sheet at the end of the near four-year term of the PSOE-UP government in Spain, we have to be honest and say that the advances that the left wing got from participating in the government with the PSOE were tiny and few. This is true not only on the international level, for instance **with the criminal deal between the Spanish government and the Kingdom of Morocco against the Saharan people** — for the first time in recent Spanish history, the left was unable to avoid this turn in Spanish foreign policy — but also in terms of social policy and the reformed labour law: the complete abrogation of the right-wing labour counter-reform of 2012, specified in the PSOE-UP agreement for government, was abandoned.

So, the strategic debate is about how to find ways of building electoral majorities that block the right and far right's path to power and at the same time, within these majorities, allow an open conflict with the liberal centre (the PS or PSOE). That is, we need to think about how to build a strategic alternative from the left that is able to

make policy for the majority. We do not want to be the left flank of a government that goes on implementing liberal politics and remains completely subordinate to the monetary and budgetary rules of the EU and the Eurozone.

If you make a serious balance sheet of **the labour law reform** that was led by Yolanda Diaz and Pedro Sanchez, or of the social policies in general of the Spanish Government over the past four years, you have to make an effort to find the hallmark of the left. And despite this, all these forces — Podemos, the United Left, Yolanda Diaz's Sumar — all agree on the essential point: their goal is to locate ministers inside a government led by the socialists.

This consensus translated into convulsion, with violent clashes between the organised components of **the Sumar candidacy**. In the next parliament, the parties that held ministries in the outgoing government (Podemos and the Communist Party of Spain/United Left) will have together, at best, ten members of parliament, even if there will be a majority of MPs from the PSOE together with Sumar. So, **in the context of the new reconfiguration of the left in Spain**, this marginalisation of the parties that signed the previous PSOE-UP government has to mean something.

When we lost electoral influence in Portugal, in 2022, that was a problem, of course. But in Spain the naturalisation of left integration into government (as an apparently necessary consequence of the clash with the right wing) poses the question of the real political influence of the left. We have to do everything to block the access of the right and the far right to government, true. But we should by no means erase the left and its goals into a "progressive bloc" that is hard to distinguish from the simple liberal centre rule of the PS.

Source: [Links](#).

# Unbridled exploitation in the digital sector

3 August 2023, by **Paul Martial**

The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) requires downstream identification of a huge mass of data to enable algorithms to improve their efficiency. To carry out these tasks, almost 90% of high-tech companies resort to outsourcing.

## Content identification

In the French-speaking world, cost savings are estimated at over 30% for companies based in Morocco, Tunisia or Mauritius, and 50% in Madagascar. Madagascar is home to almost 250 BPO (Business Process Outsourcing) agencies.

Working conditions there are deplorable. French radio station RFI reported on employees' experiences: "The trainers come up behind us. If they think you're taking too long to process a simple image, they give you a warning. If it happens a second time, they send you straight back. If, for example, you haven't finished the 200 tasks you were supposed to do in a day, you have to keep going. And that's not counted as overtime." [57]

As for wages, they start at around 90 euros a month and can go up to 500 euros for highly qualified employees. Alongside this tedious work of identifying data, other BPOs [business process outsourcing] offer moderation services. They are used by major

social networking companies such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, Twitter and others.

## Danger to mental health

Sama is one such BPO company based in Kenya. Its employees spend entire days processing ultra-violent content, including murder, torture and sexual violence against women and children. They tag it, feeding it into the algorithms of social network filters and artificial intelligence. The consequences for their mental health are serious, amounting to post-traumatic stress disorder. At no time did the Kenyan company set up psychological support structures for its employees.

Worse still, in order to carry out the moderations in the local languages, Sama recruited young, often poor, graduates from various countries in East and Southern Africa. It brought them to Kenya without warning them of the real nature of the job. The company spoke only of administrative work, omitting the question of the daily confrontation with online hate that they would have to endure. Once in Kenya, these young workers were trapped.

## Resisting and organising

An initial complaint in May 2022 against Meta, Facebook's parent company, and its subcontractor Sama was launched by former employee Daniel Motaung. The complaint focused on working conditions, pay issues and the lack of psychological support.

Other complaints followed when Sama ceased its moderation activities and dismissed the employees. The Kenyan court has suspended the dismissals pending a ruling.

At the same time, 150 employees set up the first African union of content moderators, despite the employers' policies of intimidation. Other employees, such as those at Majorel, the company that took over TikTok's moderation activities, have announced their decision to join the union.

Although despised by the major social networking groups, moderators play an essential role in combating online hate. Failings can have dramatic consequences. Another trial is taking place in Ethiopia against Meta. During the war in Tigray, calls for the murder of a Tigrayan university professor living in the capital Addis Ababa circulated for several days on Facebook. Despite his representations to the social network, the messages continued to circulate. He was shot by his killers.

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

# The populist right is on the rise in Germany too

## 2 August 2023, by **Jakob Schaefer**

In Germany, the AfD (Alternative for Germany), a populist party on the right and largely on the far right, is ahead of the SPD (17%), the Chancellor's party, with 20% in opinion polls (the SPD is in a coalition with the neo-liberal Greens and the hard-line neo-liberals of the FDP). Three factors are fuelling the rise of the AfD.

### **A third of the population xenophobic**

Even after the defeat of fascism, there is a persistent undercurrent in German society that believes in authority and is xenophobic, even racist, encompassing around a third of the population. This fact was the subject of an extensive study in 1981 (the Sinus study) and has since been repeatedly confirmed by several subsequent studies. This basic attitude stems from the "capitalist way of life" (Erich Fromm), i.e. social insecurity for a large proportion of the population, and from the religion of the system, i.e. the constantly preached and practised competition and the selfishness that stems from it.

However, for a long time, this fundamental current was unable to assert itself in politics in the form of a party. This was due in part to the absence of a charismatic leader, but

above all to the fact that the Christian Democrats represented some of these ideas, and that the SPD was not a bulwark against racism either. After all, it was the SPD that allowed the right of asylum to be severely restricted in 1993 when it approved the amendment to the Constitution.

### **Widespread precarious employment**

The general insecurity of capitalism has been compounded over the last twenty years (in East Germany, even since the takeover by the FRG in 1990) by a marked increase in social insecurity for the bottom half of society (for the majority of the population of East Germany). For at least the last ten years, this phenomenon has been exacerbated by the spread of precarious employment, the housing crisis and, in the meantime, the climate crisis.

### **Loss of party credibility**

Over the last few years, people have come to realise that the onus for solving their problems lies with them (and, more specifically, with the working classes), and that this will continue to be the case in the future.

Energy and food prices, for example, rose sharply last year and this year, with dramatic consequences for the public.

In recent weeks, the Heating Act has been added to this list (the law will be passed in September), so that rents and expenses for owners of single-family homes will rise considerably from next year onwards.

The result over the last few months has been a huge surge in the loss of credibility of the "established parties". Only the AfD can profit from this deep crisis of confidence. The AfD is seen as the only real opposition, and it is exploiting this situation to the full - with the help of right-wing populist demagoguery.

This is a crisis of representation, and therefore a crisis of parties, but not yet an institutional crisis.

Die Linke is not seen as an alternative. As a reformist party, it participates in the government in three Länder (it even has the head of government in Thuringia). What's more, it is divided and could split in the near future (possibly as early as this year). With Sarah Wagenknecht at its head, this will not be a split to the left, but to the right.

27 July 2023

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

## **In Africa, focus on the forests**

### **1 August 2023, by **Paul Martial****

Africa's forests are under threat from the accelerating commercialization of the continent's land. While the focus is often on the equatorial forest of Central Africa, the dry forest below

the Sahel-Saharan strip and in large parts of southern Africa is in an even more serious crisis. African forests in danger

During colonization, the forests were exploited in the legal form of concessions. Under this system, the colonial state transferred all its prerogatives to private companies.

These companies grew export crops such as cocoa, coffee, rubber, palm oil, etc., to the detriment of the forests. When African countries gained independence, this type of agricultural economy continued.

As a result, for decades the forests were decimated. Côte d'Ivoire is a case in point. Between 1900 and 2021, the country lost 80% of its forest area, mainly to cocoa exports.

Like the Amazon, the forests of Africa are a formidable carbon trap. The Congo forest stores 50 billion tonnes of carbon. They help to regulate the climate and are home to many species of flora and fauna. For almost 100 million people, they are also a direct or indirect source of food, health and building materials.

## **Illegal and lucrative trafficking**

Every year, nearly four million hectares of forest disappear in Africa as a result of the financialisation of forests. This takes the form of land-grabbing policies that benefit the major multinationals, with the complicity of the leaders of African countries. The aim is to develop export agriculture and mining operations.

The other factor exacerbating deforestation is the timber trade. Illegal logging has exploded as a result of very strong demand from the Asian market. It represents a loss of 17 billion dollars for the continent. In Uganda, for example, illegally logged timber accounts for 80% of the total volume.

Trafficking of this kind cannot take place without the complicity of politicians and senior civil servants. In 2019, Gabon's Minister of Forests, Guy-Bertrand Mapangou, was implicated in trafficking in kevazingo, a precious wood. In Zambia, it was those close to former president Edgar Lungu who were involved in a similar

affair.

## **User-friendly conservation**

Under international pressure, the African governments concerned have introduced legal measures to protect their forests. But the results have been meagre, primarily because of a lack of resources, but also because of corruption.

Such policies encourage forest communities to take part in this trade, preferring to benefit from the financial windfall rather than be mere bystanders. The precarious land tenure situation in which communities live does not encourage them to engage in sustainable forestry activities. As one community leader put it: "The companies come in, they operate parcels of our forests without consulting us, and when we protest, they pull an official document stating they are allowed to do it. We just stand there powerless when these forests unquestionably belong to us." [