



## IV585 - October 2023

# Chiapas: Blockades and Forced Displacement

31 October 2023, by **Dany Rico**

She asks us for security reasons not to mention her name and tells us that last September 3, members of a group calling themselves "Maíz" (Corn) arrived at her house. They came with guns in hand and, this time, they not only came to collect "protection" money for the little family-run local diner they run to survive. They were blunt: "Are you going to join the group or leave your house?" They gave the family only a couple of hours to vacate. The same happened to several neighbors in the community who, faced with the threat, preferred to flee their homes rather than join the ranks of organized crime.

Mrs. "N" and her family left their house in a hurry, leaving behind most of their belongings; they only managed to carry the bare necessities and their chickens. With no money and in the rain, they took refuge with neighbors who opened their doors to them. Without their diner, the family lost their only livelihood.

In addition to conflicts over religious intolerance, agrarian disputes, and other social problems, large parts of Chiapas are now territory controlled by cartels and crisscrossed by actions of the paramilitary groups defending mining interests in the region. The southern border has become a disputed territory for organized crime and big capital as it is strategic because of its wealth of natural resources and prime territory for

trafficking drugs, arms, and human beings, all of which is fed by massive migration from Central America. Chiapas has been paralyzed in recent weeks by the blockades perpetrated by the New Generation Jalisco Cartel in a war against the Sinaloa Cartel, who cut off the electricity supply in several localities, causing food and fuel shortages, to the point that a kilo of beans cost up to one hundred pesos in the area, as opposed to its usual price of thirty to forty pesos.

The armed groups have used forced recruitment as a strategy, especially among the youth. These groups have entered the communities disguised as charitable social organizations such as the "Maíz group" mentioned by Mrs. "N." They come offering food and supplies, taking advantage of poverty. Those who fall into their hands are "affiliated" with criminal organizations and forced to participate in blockades, acts of vandalism, and criminal activities. They also come to extort and threaten shopkeepers and merchants, who are forced to close their businesses and escape from their homes, which are then taken over by members of criminal groups.

The result has been the breakdown of the fabric of society and the forced displacement of thousands of people. At the end of September, elementary and high school teachers in the municipalities of the highlands and border areas chose to suspend classes

to protect their students, affecting thousands of students. Murders have increased by 23 percent between January and September according to figures from the National Public Security System (SNSP); and the number of disappearances is unknown.

What support Mrs. "N" has found in the face of the serious situation is thanks to the fact that she is part of a socially based political organization [We have omitted its name at their request for security reasons.]. With members of her organization, she went to Mexico City to demand justice and the intervention of the Federal Government. But neither the social nor the community organization has been able to confront the levels of violence in Chiapas. She says that weeks ago, a member of her organization was kidnapped, tortured, and forced to join the ranks of the cartels for fear of losing his life.

Chicomuselo and many other towns in Chiapas, have become towns without authorities, where the inhabitants live in dread, in silence, in fear of the permanent surveillance that weighs on them, as organized crime has people videotaping and taking pictures of people who meet up with others or talk to each other. In the absence of the state, the drug cartels have penetrated the communities, to the point of being cheered —or worse, with the ability to make an entire

population applaud them— as heroes by the villagers for opening a blockade of the opposing cartel, as we observed in a video that went viral a few days ago. However, the affected residents denounce that the local and state governments try to convince the public that the security problem in Chiapas is minor and do not respond to their demands, despite massive mobilizations and protests. This media policy has been echoed at the federal level, as the president has reiterated on several occasions that in Chiapas the rates of violence are low, and that the exacerbation of the situation is "right-wing propaganda."

It was only in the face of the undeniable seriousness of the situation that went viral that the Army and the National Guard intervened to lift the blockades and reestablish

electricity. "Everything is back to normal," described the First Executive after the entry of the military. However, hundreds of workers and merchants do not have guarantees of the conditions they need to return to work. This is why, with the few resources they have, members of the group to which Mrs. N belongs, together with others, mobilized to Mexico City on October 17 to make this situation visible, demand the participation of the federal government to solve the problem, and make a proposal for the safe return of all those who have been displaced or, at least, to implement a plan that guarantees food for displaced families. The Chiapas organizations were supported by various Mexico City groups.

A delegation from this mobilization

was received by an official from the Ministry of the Interior Area for Conciliation. In response to the demands and proposals, the official limited himself to saying, "This situation is beyond our control; it is the responsibility of the state government. I will refer you to the corresponding authority in Chiapas." To the same state authority that has already ignored the inhabitants of southern Chiapas. Meanwhile, on October 21, a professor was tortured and murdered in his home in front of his family. Professor Artemio López Aguilar, a teacher leader and militant of the ruling MORENA party, who coordinated the march for peace on October 12 in Chicomuselo, was murdered amid the existing "peace" in Chiapas.

*October 20, 2023*

## France and its African policy

**30 October 2023, by Paul Martial**

The way the subject has been overwhelmingly treated illustrates the link that France has with its former colonies. The general idea is that Paris is losing Africa. As if this continent, or at least part of it, continued to belong to the former colonial power despite six decades of independence. There is a consensus among the major political forces, whether on the right or the left, that France, by its common history with its former colonies, has a special responsibility which would justify its military interventions. For example, during the debate in the National Assembly in 2013, no deputy voted against the renewal of Operation Serval, the first military intervention in Mali, followed later by a second one across the Sahel called Operation Barkhane. One of the most left-wing deputies, François Asensi from the Front de Gauche, said on this occasion: "The stakes were essential: to prevent Malians from being subjected to a regime of terror and to preserve the stability of the Sahel.... Our support has been accompanied by

a number of reservations, but there is no doubt that our troops have achieved significant successes on the ground." [1]

### Safeguarding France's interests

This situation is the result of the decolonization process instituted by France in the early 1960s. The French authorities had perceived that maintaining the colonies was becoming increasingly costly politically. The idea was therefore to grant formal independence while maintaining the ties of subordination that structured the colonial relationship. This policy even had a name, *Françafrique*. Commentators spoke of the independence of the flag, where only the flag changed.

This subordination was formalized on the basis of agreements between states that guaranteed France its military presence, control of the

currency through the maintenance of the CFA franc (see box), and a monopoly of access to raw materials, particularly oil and uranium. At the same time, cohorts of French aid workers were present in the main ministries. All the heads of state "benefited" from French political advisers. The situation was sometimes caricatural as evidenced by one of the autocrats most loyal to France, Congolese President Denis Sassou Nguesso. During his visit to his Central African counterpart Kolingba in the 1990s, he said: "He didn't even pretend to lead. When we, the heads of neighbouring states, arrived at the airport, it was a certain French commander, Mansion, who showed up in shorts and a shirt to greet us." [2]

Another anecdote that is just as revealing is the existence during the reign of Félix Houphouët-Boigny, in Côte d'Ivoire, of an underground corridor linking the French embassy with the presidential palace.

France's African backyard has

evolved. It encompasses the French-speaking countries that emerged from Belgian colonization. A backyard considered to be the reserved domain of the French President. The latter could launch as many military operations as deemed necessary (see box).

A similar case can be found with the Monroe Doctrine, which laid the basis for relations between the United States and the countries of Latin America. Developed in the nineteenth century, it gradually evolved to build the foundations of Washington's policy towards the countries of the South American continent, considered to be the preserve of the United States.

Françafrique has obviously evolved, but the fundamentals have remained. Four axes can be distinguished: a military presence, the maintenance of monetary control, support for the government in place and diplomatic solidarity. Certainly, there have been changes throughout history. What France could do with impunity, for example help re-establish the dictatorship of Léon Mba in Gabon in 1964, or in the Central African Republic overthrow Bokassa who was dangerously close to Gaddafi's Libya, is now much more difficult, especially after the complicity of the French army in the genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994.

With regard to the CFA franc, the French authorities have had to accept changes in the management of this currency. Finally, at the diplomatic level, France no longer has leadership over its former colonies, as we could see in the vote condemning Russia's aggression in Ukraine where countries such as Senegal, Togo, Cameroon or the Republic of Congo, traditional allies of France, abstained.

## **Crisis of France's neocolonial policy in Africa**

The deep crisis of French imperialism in Africa has been hidden by the so-called military successes of the French army in Mali with Operation Serval. As a reminder, the imperialist

intervention in Libya by Britain and France, supported by the United States, had the effect of totally destabilizing the region. Many Tuaregs from Mali, integrated into Gaddafi's army, returned to their country with weapons and baggage in the literal sense. They began a guerrilla war that fostered another, that of the jihadists.

To counter the advance of the Islamist rebels, the Malian president at the time, Amadou Toumani Touré, requested an armed intervention by France. This took place under the name of Operation Serval. This intervention did not in any way defeat the terrorists, as the French authorities claimed. It has had the effect of fragmenting the jihadist forces that have spread across the north of the country. Then Operation Serval was transformed into Operation Barkhane with a geographical increase in its field of intervention in the Sahel-Saharan strip. Barkhane operated in three countries, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. Since then, they have all experienced a coup d'état.

Despite promises, the French army has been unable to restore a security situation acceptable to the population. On the contrary, it has worsened considerably, to the point that the various armed groups control nearly three-quarters of Mali's territory, according to Alioune Tine, an expert mandated by the UN Human Rights Council, and more than 40% in Burkina Faso. This failure has tarnished France's credibility.

But the resentment of a large part of African youth against French policy goes back much further. Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy made headlines during his speech in Dakar in 2007. He declared that Africa had not gone down in history. This claim echoed Hegel's view of the continent and has been challenged by historians for decades. In the same speech, he considered that colonization had had positive aspects. Very recently, Bruno Retailleau, president of the right-wing group Les Républicains in the Senate, spoke of the happy days of colonization.

With Emmanuel Macron, the

arrogance continues. Having made a humiliating joke about his host and Burkinabe counterpart, he went on to talk on another occasion about the high fertility rate of African women as the source of Africa's difficulties. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), he declared that this country was incapable of defending its sovereignty, that France had nothing to do with it, omitting to say that the security crisis is largely the consequence of Operation Turquoise. Indeed, France has exfiltrated thousands of genocidaires from Rwanda into the DRC who have sacked the Kivu region. At the beginning of 2020 Macron summoned the African presidents of the Sahel to Pau, to rebuke them. The latter had allegedly not sufficiently defended the French troops intervening in their country.

Added to this is France's repressive migration policy, Islamophobic measures under the pretext of secularism and its variable geometry policy. Paris condemns the coups d'état in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger but endorses the seizure of power by the son of the late dictator Idriss Déby in Chad and makes resounding declarations about democracy in Africa while congratulating the autocrats elected following electoral farces and/or constitutional manipulations.

France appears to be a country clinging to its neocolonial policy. The latest episode is Niger. Under the pretext of not recognising the government set up by the putschists, the French authorities maintained their ambassador, who had been declared persona non grata, and refused to withdraw the 1,500 soldiers stationed in Niamey. This is an inconsistent position because all joint operations against the jihadists between the Nigerien and French army have been cancelled. Faced with the mobilizations of the Nigeriens who blockaded the France embassy and the military base, the French authorities had to retreat and announce the departure of the troops before the end of the year. At the same time, Macron's government is aligning itself with the more hawkish wing of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) that

favours military intervention. Vigilance is required because even during the withdrawal period, French control could still be a base of support for a military operation by Ecowas. A plausible hypothesis. Indeed, *Le Monde* informs us that a French intervention was planned to free the deposed president Mohammad Bazoum and was cancelled at the last minute at his request. Other examples exist of the interference of the French army in the internal problems of African countries. For example, Operation Licorne in Côte d'Ivoire, initially planned to keep the peace between rebels led by Alassane Ouattara and the government of Laurent Gbagbo, was used to overthrow the latter in 2011. Closer to home, in 2019, the French army bombed the columns of the rebel movement Union of Resistance Forces (UFR) and thus saved the day for the dictatorship of Idriss Déby in Chad.

France's hard-line policy leads it to an unworthy diplomacy. Lately, all public artistic scenes have been told to cease all cooperation with artists from Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali. Visas for students from these three countries are suspended. As if artists and students were responsible for coups d'état in their countries.

## A profound evolution of African countries

The resentment against France and more generally against rich countries is also explained by the profound changes that African countries are experiencing.

The wave of democratization that began in the 1990s took place at the same time as the structural adjustment policies imposed by the international financial institutions. And for the CFA franc countries, the French Ministry of Finance decided in 1994 on a 50% devaluation, leading to considerable declines in living standards. African governments have shown their inability to initiate a different economic policy. Not only have they submitted to the demands of the World Bank and the IMF, but most

of their members have profited greatly from them during the privatization of entire sectors of the economy. This has led to popular disillusionment and distrust for politicians who take advantage of a fake democracy and to a certain popularity for coups d'état.

Profound changes have taken place on the continent. Relations between herders and farmers have deteriorated significantly as a result of the climate crisis. Conflicts over water points and land are a source of violent conflicts, some of which are becoming communitarian. This is fertile ground for the various Islamist groups that take advantage of these divisions and often feed them. Sometimes, their policies aim to challenge the social hierarchies of certain African societies. This is particularly the case for the Islamists of the Katiba Macina present in central Mali. They are mainly aimed at disadvantaged Fulani pastoralists. They question the sums to be paid for grazing the herds, but also criticize the marabouts, religious dignitaries, for their greed. Some observers describe the jihadist struggles in central Mali as a radical struggle of the rural poor.

Other changes are emerging with opposition to social subordination, whether linked to servile lineage, i.e., families descended from slaves, or the young who have a duty of submission to their elders. The urban and rural struggles of women have achieved success in West Africa, such as Sierra Leone, on the issue of women's right to own land.

The consequence of these developments is that people, especially the youngest, are no longer willing to live as before. Discourses offering a credible alternative to falsely elected and corrupt governments enjoy the approval of young people with no prospects. These discourses are carried to the Sahel by Islamists, armed or not, and by putschists who use nationalist rhetoric. There is one thing these two tendencies have in common, and that is distrust of the West.

The French authorities have been unable to measure and consider these profound changes. To take just one example, during Operation Barkhane,

France imposed its solution, that of a military settlement of the conflict. However, in Mali, the National Accord Conference, which began its work in 2017, had positioned itself for the opening of negotiations with Islamist rebels, at least those who were Malian. In 2019, during the holding of the inclusive national dialogue, the same request was again made by civil society organizations. France has consistently opposed it. It has imposed its policy, wholly security-oriented, with the success that we have seen. Ironically, the putschists in the Sahelian countries, whose anti-French verve is proven, are simply repeating the same recipes, refusing to try to deal politically with the conflicts raging in the region.

## Inter-imperialist competition

Where France was considered the guarantor of stability in playing its role as Africa's gendarme, the debacle of the military intervention in the Sahel is reshuffling the cards. While the Chinese presence is manifested at the economic level, it is also increasingly military through its base in Djibouti, its military training of African officers as well as arms sales. The same goes for Russia, which since 2014 has made a big comeback on the continent, benefiting from a past of anti-colonial solidarity, a policy that opposes the West and the weakness of French imperialism. It should be remembered that it was on the advice of French diplomacy, which at the United Nations maintained its veto on arms imports to that country, that the government of the Central African Republic turned to the Russians. Sensing a good opportunity, Sergei Lavrov proposed to the Central African President, Faustin-Archange Touadera, a military partnership with the establishment of the Wagner militia.

The United States is also distancing itself from French policy in Africa. The case of Niger is revealing. Washington, which has a large military base, has chosen negotiation with the coup plotters rather than confrontation as France does. Beyond the need to preserve its presence in

the country, the United States draws a negative assessment of the counterterrorism strategy implemented by Paris in the Sahel.

If France is seen in Africa as an empire in decline, its power of nuisance against the populations remains important. As evidenced by his various supports for African autocrats, Chad, Togo, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire and so on. Hence the need for progressive forces to maintain an intransigent struggle against France's neocolonialism in Africa and to shorten the agony of Françafrique, which has decidedly gone on far too long.

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## Military Operations

French military interventions follow one another and are similar. The arguments always remain the same, the maintenance of the stability of the region, the preservation of the constitutional order, the protection of French or European nationals or the fight against terrorism. Above all, however, it is a question of keeping governments, mostly dictatorships, in power and thus ensuring the neo-colonial order.

- 1962 - Military intervention in Senegal to keep Léopold Sédar Senghor in power and maintain order in the country.
- 1964 - Paratroopers intervene in Libreville, Gabon to save the dictatorship of Léon Mba.
- From 1968 to 1972 - French troops operate in Chad to put down the rebellion in Tibesti.
- 1977 - Operation Mazurka: Setting up an airlift against the Shaba rebellion and for the defence of Mobutu.
- 1977 - Operation Manatee: intervention in Mauritania against the Polisario Front.
- 1978 - Operation Tacaud: intervention in Chad with 2,000 troops to restore order and stability in the country (the operation lasted two

years).

- 1978 - Operation Bonito: second intervention in Zaire during the Shaba war, 600 paratroopers jump on Kolwezi.
- 1979 - Operation Caban: intervention in the Central African Republic to depose Bokassa.
- 1983-1984 - Operation Manta: 3,000 soldiers intervene in Chad to defend Hissène Habré against Goukouni Oueddeye.
- 1986 - Operation Épervier: air intervention in northern Chad at Ouasi-Doum and installation of an air force in N'Djamena.
- 1986 - Intervention in Togo to defend the dictatorship of Gnassingbé Eyadema.
- 1989 - Operation OSIDE: 200 military personnel intervene in the Comoros.
- 1990 - Operation Shark: French troops intervene in Libreville and Port-Gentil in Gabon to quell riots.
- 1990-1993 - Operation Noroît: 600 soldiers are sent to defend the dictatorship of Juvenal Habyarimana against the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF).
- 1991 - Intervention in Zaire during riots.
- 1991 - Operation Godoria: securing Djibouti, a French military base on the Horn of Africa.
- 1992-1994 - Operation Turquoise: 500 paratroopers intervene in Rwanda just before the outbreak of the genocide, then 2,500 afterwards to set up the exfiltration of the main perpetrators of the genocide.
- 1995 - Operation Azalea: intervention in the Comoros of nearly 1,000 soldiers.
- 1996 - Operations Almandin 1 and 2: two successive operations involving more than 2,000 soldiers in the Central African Republic.
- 1997 - Retaliatory operation against Central African fighters following the death of two French soldiers.
- 1997 - Operation Pelican: successive interventions in Congo Brazzaville employing more than a thousand soldiers.
- 1998 - Installation of a military presence in Congo Kinshasa
- 1999 - Operation Khor Angar: intervention in Djibouti to secure the port and airport.
- 2002 - Operation Licorne: intervention in Côte d'Ivoire around

four thousand soldiers.

- 2003 - Operation Boali, following the unrest in the Central African Republic
- 2003 - Operation Artemis: intervention in Congo-Kinshasa, particularly in the north-east of the country in Ituri.
- 2007 - Operation Alcyon: Maritime intervention in Somalia.
- 2009 - Operation Sabre in Burkina Faso.
- 2011 - Operation Harmattan: Colonel Gaddafi deposed.
- 2013 - Operation Serval in Mali.
- 2013 - Operation Sangaris in the Central African Republic.
- 2014 - Operation Barkhane without the Sahelo-Saharan strip.
- 2016 - Operation Sirli in Egypt: initially against jihadists, hijacked by the Egyptian authorities to neutralize simple smugglers.

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## The CFA Franc

The successive names of the CFA franc testify to the willingness of the French authorities to make cosmetic changes without conceding anything on substance.

From the Franc of the French Colonies in Africa, it became the Franc of French West Africa and finally called the Franc of the Financial Community in Africa. A much more acceptable name.

There are two CFA francs, one used by West African countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo), the other by Central African countries (Cameroon, Gabon, Central African Republic, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo and Chad)

Before the last reform, the CFA franc system was based on three pillars:

- The obligation for countries of the West African Monetary Union (WAMU) to deposit half of their foreign exchange reserves with the French Treasury.



- The presence of French representatives of the Ministry of Economy and Finance in the decision-making bodies of the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO) which operated by consensus - effectively giving France a right of veto.
- A fixed parity of the CFA franc to the euro.

The CFA franc has become the symbol of French colonial survival in Africa and the subject of major struggles over the continent.

Saying, "I've heard the criticism, I see your youth reproaching us for continuing a relationship that they deem postcolonial. So, let's break the moorings" Macron will try to reform

only the West African CFA franc by replacing it with the ECO. The latter, which was supposed to be launched in 2020, has been postponed indefinitely.

In short, 60 years later, the moorings are still not broken!

# Pro-Palestine Ceasefire Movement Shakes the Democratic Party

29 October 2023, by **Dan La Botz**

The protests have shaken the Democratic Party as a handful of progressives put forward ceasefire resolutions and President Joe Biden's support began to decline dramatically. Recent polls show that while most Americans, including Democrats, sympathize with Israel, 67 percent of Americans support calls for a ceasefire. Yet when progressives introduced a ceasefire resolution in the House of Representatives, only 18 of 435 supported it. More than 300 former staff members of Bernie Sanders urged him to introduce a ceasefire resolution in the Senate, but he has declined to do so. Instead, he called for a "humanitarian pause" to bring aid into Gaza, a position subsequently adopted by Biden.

Since the establishment of Israel in 1948, the U.S. government, under both Democrats and Republicans, has supported every Israeli government, providing 260 billion dollars in military and economic aid in the last 75 years. There are eight million Jews in the United States, making up 2.4 percent of the total population, but 70% of them are Democrats. A majority of Jews support Israel, and

though many secular and younger Jews are critical of Israel, the Zionist lobby in the United States is very influential. The Palestinian population, just 200,000 among the larger two million Arab Americans, has been much less influential. In any case, until now U.S. government support for Israel has been taken for granted.

Today, however, with Israel's attack on Gaza on TV every day, showing Palestinian men carrying their dead children through the rubble, the Democratic Party is beginning to fracture and support for Joseph Biden is declining. Palestinians, Arab Americans, and Muslims, as well as many Blacks, and young voters are withdrawing their support for the president. In the last month, Biden's support among Democrats fell by 11 points to just 75 percent, while his overall approval rating is just 37 percent.

Seeing 80-year-old Biden's vulnerability, Representative Dean Phillips, a 54-year-old, congressman from Minnesota, has declared himself to be a candidate for the presidency. He is a moderate and shares the

Democrats loyalty to Israel, saying, "We need the United States to continue to support Israel. We need to eradicate Hamas. And we need to encourage Palestinians to elevate a leadership that can sit at the table with principle, with good character, and with the intention for peace."

Meanwhile, the Republican Party, after weeks of paralysis, has finally elected Mike Johnson from the party's far-right as the new Speaker of the House. His first act upon taking office was to put forward a resolution in support of Israel, which passed 412 to 10 with 6 abstaining. Donald Trump, who transformed the Republicans into a far-right party told a Jewish Republican gathering, "I will defend America, and I will defend Western civilization from the barbarians and savages and fascists that you see now trying to do harm to our beautiful Israel."

Despite the obdurate American political establishment, we protestors in the street are determined to stop U.S. support for Israel's war.

29 October 2023

# China and Israel have a long history of cooperating in repression

28 October 2023, by **Promise Li**

As Israel carries out a massacre of Palestinians in Gaza, many have rightly focused on the United States' support for the Israeli state's war crimes. But as Tariq Kenney-Shawa points out, "The case that Israel simply no longer needs US aid in order to sustain its healthy economy or its monstrous qualitative military edge over all regional threats is clear." While US military support to Israel remains decisive, the country receives plenty of support from other quarters — including the United States' main global rival, China.

Though China is sometimes portrayed as an "anti-imperialist" bulwark, it is no ally to Palestinians. It is true that Chinese state media, unlike its Western counterparts, has been more willing to criticize Israel's treatment of Palestinians. But the Chinese state has not offered meaningful support for the cause of Palestinian liberation: the significant economic links between China and Israel mean that China has a vested interest in defending Israel. China's long history of triangulating between Israel and Palestine has involved endorsing a strategy of "peacemaking" and "nonalignment" that allows it to maintain friendly relations with Arab countries while deepening ties with Israel. China has in turn drawn on Israeli technology and counterinsurgency methods to repress its own population.

## Between Israel and Palestine

Israel was one of the first and only non-Communist states to officially recognize the People's Republic of China (PRC), doing so just a year after the latter's founding, in 1950. Prospects for diplomacy were cut short with the rise of the Cold War, as

China strengthened political and military ties with Palestinian political leaders. Chinese premier Zhou Enlai promised to support the Palestinian cause to Arab delegates at the Bandung Conference in 1955. And in the mid-1960s, Fatah and leaders of the newly established Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) visited China, which even offered some military training to the Palestinians.

The end of the Cultural Revolution and the Sino-Soviet split led to the revival of informal relations between China and Israel. The Deng Xiaoping administration began steering China toward market-based development in the 1980s, while Israel had become eager to expand its trade into East Asia. Israel started exporting military technology to China throughout the 1980s, paving the way for formal diplomatic ties between the two countries by 1992, even as China recognized the State of Palestine in 1988.

These Israeli imports became crucial for China's military development during the 1990s, as Western sanctions on China after the 1989 Tiananmen movement and massacre threatened to limit the growth of the PRC's military capacity. But Israel was able to bypass these sanctions, becoming a key backdoor to Western military technology for China. The rise of China as a global power in the 2000s expanded the two countries' trade beyond arms and deepened their economic interdependence. In the years after China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO), the PRC began heavily investing back into Israel, particularly in agriculture, technology, construction, and venture capital.

The growth of military and economic ties led China to pursue an

increasingly moderate position on the Israeli occupation of Palestine: moving from supporting "people's war" by Palestinians against Israel to sponsoring and defending the Israeli state. Xi Jinping's "four-point Israeli-Palestinian peace plan" emphasized China's adherence to the two-state solution, offering "sustainable security" for Israel, while calling for peace and development between Israel and Palestine.

The PRC's [defense](#) of "an independent State of Palestine" last week in response to Israel's attacks on Gaza, and its vague call for "relevant parties" to "immediately end the hostilities," should be seen in light of its commitment to the two-state solution. Mainstream commentators see this ambivalence as hesitation on China's part to firmly back Israel. But a two-state solution promises to continue the Israeli oppression of Palestinians in a different form.

"Two-state negotiations deny millions of Palestinians, one of the world's largest refugee populations, the internationally recognized right to return to land and homes from which they were forcibly expelled," Daphna Thier and Sumaya Awad [wrote](#) in *Jacobin* in 2021. "Any solution that maintains the state of Israel as a Jewish state violates the individual and collective democratic, civil, and human rights of Palestinians." A just alternative to the Israeli apartheid government will involve a single, democratic state with equal rights for all people.

## Quiet Zionism

China's ambivalent attitude toward Israel and Palestine, beginning from its gradual rapprochement with Israel in the 1980s, obscures its quiet

betrayal of the Palestinian cause. Its support of Palestinian statehood is a limited one, grounded on the preservation of Israel's military and economic power.

Since the 2000s, its investments in Israel have grown significantly. China has [become](#) Israel's second-largest trading partner, with a value of [trade](#) of over \$24 billion just last year. Though the United States continues to be the main direct provider for Israel's bloody military operations, Chinese investments are becoming increasingly crucial to Israel's economic, technological, and infrastructural development. In 2021-2022, [China](#) even replaced the United States as Israel's top source of imports.

Israel and China have also found a common cause in developing surveillance and policing apparatuses, by building on Western technologies and methods. The PRC's "People's War on Terror" against Uyghurs and other ethnic groups in Xinjiang did not only rhetorically invoke the United States' "war on terror" — it actively draws from its personnel and tactics.

Former Blackwater operatives, infamous for committing war crimes in Iraq, have been [hired](#) to improve

security facilities in Xinjiang. Chinese elite police academy researchers have also [publicly](#) studied Israeli counterinsurgency measures against Palestine as an inspiration for Xinjiang's surveillance state. Each has strategically eliminated secular and nonviolent oppositions and weaponized the rise of Islamic militant groups to justify broad repression of Palestinians, Uyghurs, and other ethnic groups. In fact, Pan Yue, the current head of China's National Ethnic Affairs Commission, [said](#) that the PRC should learn from the United States', Russia's, and Israel's colonial methods to introduce Han settlers to its western frontier.

Rhetorically supporting Palestine while bolstering Israel's power and drawing inspiration from its warmaking methods has become a profitable strategy for the PRC. This approach has allowed it to reap the fruits of Israel's economic development, while maintaining good relations with Palestinian and other Arab leaders, as Chinese-led state-owned companies and public-private partnerships have deepened links with Israeli and other Arab governments and corporations across geopolitical blocs.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry's tepid response to Israel's ongoing assault on

Gaza shows that the PRC is uninterested in forcefully challenging Israeli policy. More generally, China's approach to Israel and Palestine shows that geopolitical rivals of the West are not necessarily allies of Palestinian liberation. Different imperial powers can converge, despite their conflicts, on support for Israeli apartheid and occupation.

China's trade with Israel offers an opportunity for solidarity between advocates of Palestinian liberation and opponents of repressive PRC policies. Targeting businesses and institutions that support the Chinese state from abroad has been a key strategy for overseas dissidents. Protesting and boycotting Chinese trade with Israel as part of the broader Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign — like DJI, formerly [DaJiang Innovation Science and Technology Company](#), a private Chinese company that receives PRC state funding and that has produced drones and other military equipment for the Israeli military — provides more avenues for this approach, while bridging the struggle for greater freedom in China with the Palestinian cause.

21 October 2023

Source: [Jacobin](#).

## "Record profits mean record contracts"

27 October 2023, by [Dianne Feeley](#)

**Meanwhile, Ford workers will report to work. In the video sent to members the evening of October 26, UAW President Shawn Fain and Vice President over the Ford division Chuck Browning and outlined a few elements of the agreement.**

While this was far from a complete review, the agreement represents a breakthrough as it marks the end of the concessionary bargaining unleashed in 2009. It restores much of what was lost but also offers some job

security in a volatile industry that is being restructured for electric vehicle production (EVs).

Ford workers will return to work as the agreement is read, discussed and voted on. This is undoubtedly important to Ford given that its most profitable plant, Kentucky Truck, went out on strike two weeks ago. It produces \$48,000 in revenue in every minute of operation. It is also helpful to the UAW as it puts pressure on GM and Stellantis to hurry up and settle.

Under the UAW's Stand Up Strike strategy of escalating their strike week by week, they had taken out the Detroit Three's most profitable plants over the last two weeks. This included Ford's Kentucky Truck plant, GM's Arlington Assembly and Stellantis's Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP). Annual revenue for each runs \$20-25 billion.

The contract will run 4.5 years and increase wages by 25%, with 11% rolled out in the first year. It will restore cost-of-living adjustment



(COLA) suspended during the 2009 economic crisis – even though Ford did not receive a federal bailout as did the other two.

Workers' eight-year progression to earning the maximum wage will be reduced to three years. This is a decisive move to eliminate the hated tiered wages – although undoubtedly the complete restoration of post-retirement health care and pensions is unlikely.

Ford retirees, who have not received an increase in their pensions since 2009, will receive an annual lump sum payment.

The agreement is the first time one of the Detroit Three agreed to stipulate that the UAW has the right to strike over plant closings. Previously announced was Ford's commitment to a two-year guarantee for workers in such cases. This would include a percentage of their wages as well as health care coverage. It is unclear whether Ford matched the GM offer to recognize the UAW as representing battery workers at joint-venture plants. (While GM has one joint venture in operation and another scheduled to go on line at the end of this year, Ford's joint ventures are still under construction.)

In their presentations, Fain and Browning made the point that it is the membership that has produced such a tentative agreement and it is up to the 48,000 UAW members at Ford to decide whether to accept or reject the agreement. Although unlikely to be rejected, if that occurred bargaining would be re-opened.

Given that a new leadership recently won the majority on the UAW's International Executive Board in what was a bitter battle between the old guard and reformers, one question was whether the two could carry out a united campaign to win a contract without concessions. When the union's 10 demands were announced, many influenced by the old guard said they were unrealistic. Yet with this tentative agreement, there is substantial movement on more than half (see the list below). The joint presentation by Fain (the reformer) and Browning (a longtime

Administration Caucus member) demonstrated that unity, at least for now.

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WITH THE DETROIT THREE raking in a quarter of a trillion dollars over the last decade, the United Auto Workers (UAW) centered its 2023 campaign for a new contract on exposing corporate greed. For their part, the three corporations, having made \$21 billion in the first half of 2023, were prepared for a hike in wages but made it clear that the restructuring necessary to bring electric vehicles to market meant there was little money to spare.

But the newly elected reform leadership declared "Record profits mean record contracts" and boldly outlined 10 demands:

- **ELIMINATE TIERS** – It's wrong to make any worker second class. The Teamsters ended tiers at UPS. We're ending them at the Big Three.
- **BIG WAGE INCREASES** – We're demanding double-digit pay raises. Big Three CEOs saw their pay spike 40 percent on average over the last four years. We know our members are worth the same and more.
- **RESTORE COLA** – Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA) made sure the working class thrived for decades. It must be restored.
- **DEFINED BENEFIT PENSION FOR ALL WORKERS** – All workers deserve the retirement security UAW members had for generations.
- **RE-ESTABLISH RETIREE MEDICAL BENEFITS** – That's just as essential as a solid pension.
- **RIGHT TO STRIKE OVER PLANT CLOSURES** – The Big Three have closed 65 plants over the last 20 years. That's devastated our hometowns. We must have the right to defend our communities.
- **WORKING FAMILY PROTECTION PROGRAM** – This program keeps UAW members on the job and product in our plants. If companies try a shutdown, they'll have to pay UAW members to do community-service

work.

- **END ABUSE OF TEMP WORKERS** – We are going to end the abuse of temps. Our fight at the Big Three is a fight for every worker.

- **MORE PAID TIME OFF TO BE WITH FAMILIES** – Our members are working 60, 70, even 80 hours a week just to make ends meet. That's not living. It's barely surviving and it needs to stop.

- **SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASE RETIREE PAY** – We owe our retirees everything. They built these companies and they built our union.

These demands, coming from the membership, not only reverse years of on-the-job inequality that crept into the contract but also assert the right of autoworkers to have a life outside work. Although it isn't spelled out, if the wage is increased and overtime curtailed, threats of plant closings decrease. Even if plants close that doesn't end corporate responsibility to the work force and larger community.

In preparing for the 2023 negotiations, the reformers understood that to win a good contract the membership needed to become active participants. Corporations were willing to bump up wages by 9-10% but little more. They were happy to maintain the union's massive givebacks from a decade ago but if pressed the companies might move the current crop of temporary workers to full-time.

There was a second reason as well. Over the years the leadership, under the control of the Administration Caucus, had lowered workers' expectations of what was possible. It turned out that not only did they agree that autoworkers had to sacrifice to keep plants open, but some of the top officials – including two presidents – had taken bribes, got kickbacks from contractors, and were stealing UAW funds to support their lifestyle. More than a dozen officials went to prison and a federal monitor had been appointed to oversee the union. How would the union recover from the corruption and forty years of concessionary bargaining?

The reformers could not have displaced the old leadership without the revelation of massive corruption of top officials. But once that happened, Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD) got a hearing for direct elections and then went on to win half the IEB seats.

## How Reformers Won

It's a long story of how a small caucus – United All Workers for Democracy (UAWD) — won a change in the UAW Constitution that provided for direct election, campaigned for the top seats and won every one of the seven candidates they backed, including the presidency. Without a reform leadership team to replace the old guard, we would have continued down the concessionary road.

Set up by Walter Reuther in the late 1940s, an Administration Caucus (AC) controlled the union's leadership positions from the top level down through the locals. Originally holding a social democratic conception of the UAW's role, its ruthlessness in dealing with any challenge to its authority helped build a bureaucracy that saw its role as keeping the companies in business.

Since the 1970s the AC has negotiated contracts that contained concessions to the companies. This meant explaining to its membership while it was impossible to win better working conditions, wages and benefits. Some officials claimed that as the economy recovered, these givebacks would be eliminated but this misestimation of capitalism's incessant demand for cheaper labor meant a constant restructuring of the industry, an intensification of work and greater job insecurity.

Typically negotiations started with the UAW president shaking hands with the Detroit Three's CEOs. As talks proceeded, the membership was not updated. Eventually the UAW would target one corporation. If negotiations stalled and led to a strike, workers reported for picket duty and were instructed not to speak to the press because that might endanger

negotiations. Even the UAW's Communications Department had been under orders to issue "no comment" when asked.

There has always been an alternative vision within the UAW. However, it was marginalized by the power of an entrenched caucus. Probably the most successful was the New Directions movement of the 1980s and early 1990s. Led by Jerry Tucker, it was able to win good contracts by using "work to rule." But the success of the regional assistant director threatened the AC's decision to accept concessions; they worked to crush the movement — and succeeded.

The small number of New Direction activists who survived fought against the Detroit Three's selling off of their parts plants. While allowing them to gain greater control over these plants, it reduced their work force. Able to dictate price and quality decisions over not only the product but also the workers, the three also were able to watch how the UAW leadership responded to the demand for a tiered work force. Little did we suspect that top AC leaders had decided not only did the corporations provide jobs, but that they could develop a lifestyle like corporate managers and be on the take. When the corruption was exposed, these leaders were golfing at expensive hotels for weeks and smoking \$2,000 cigars.

With both the company and the UAW top leadership propagandizing for a yes vote as the way to save jobs, many workers reluctantly voted yes. At American Axle's Detroit plant (Local 235), where I worked, we were able to vote no. But we were unable to reach out to the workers in the other plants the company owned, especially because the whisper campaign claimed we had secure jobs and therefore were selfish in opposing the tiered wage system.

Around the GM and Chrysler bankruptcy in 2009 oppositional currents reformed around UAW's leadership decision to unconditionally support the corporate demand for federal money. The group caravanned to Washington to hold a press conference demanding that if tax dollars were given, there should be

conditions. First was to require the corporations to focus on manufacturing for mass transit. Second, workers should sacrifice the right to strike or have their COLA suspended given that they had no part in corporate decision making. Those demands were brushed aside.

Auto Worker Caravan (AWC) continued to carry out the tradition of previous caucuses to get their hands on the actual contract that was negotiated, read and analyzed.

As the UAW negotiators reached a tentative agreement, they prepared a booklet outlined its "highlights." For its part, reform caucuses including AWC would locate the actual contract, then read and prepare a leaflet outlining its "lowlights." Eventually AWC was able to put the actual contract up on their website. Only after that did the UAW leadership finally put the contract online.

Some of the AWC activists decided to focus on changing the union's constitution to directly elect its top officers and Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD) was born. They organized a campaign to meet the requirements to call a special convention to make that constitutional change but ran out of time. As they prepared to re-launch their campaign, federal prosecutors began bringing charges against several UAW officials and the IEB was forced to accept a federal monitor in charge of investigating corruption and helping to establish membership control over its elected leaders. UAWD demanded a referendum over the process of IEB elections, won approval for that referendum and the subsequent constitutional change.

Organizing a campaign to contest half of the seats on the UAW's International Executive Board, UAWD was able to win all seven. However the last declared the winner was Shawn Fain, who won the office of the presidency by only 600 votes. He was sworn into office less than a week before the UAW Bargaining Convention opened. The reformer's slogan – their promise – was "No concessions, no corruption, no tiers." With the election of one independent candidate, the new IEB had the

chance to fulfill that promise.

## Reformers Choose a Different Strategy

The new reform UAW leadership had to break out of the apathetic dynamic that characterized the process of negotiating a contract. It began by organizing a campaign for the contract, encouraging members to sign up. Weekly text messages and emails began by emphasizing the profitability of the Detroit Three and emphasized how much CEOs were making. The 10 demands were introduced as the basis for negotiations and emphasized what members could do. Adapting some of the organizing preparations that Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) used in the recent Teamster-UPS contract negotiations, there were calls to wear red T-shirts on Wednesdays, organize 10-minute meetings with coworkers and practice picketing.

On the opening day of negotiations, President Fain went to a Ford, GM and Stellantis plant and shook hands with the workers. This was a dramatic break with past practice. It represented how important a role members needed to play if negotiations were successful.

Each week Fain held 20-minute Facebook live meetings. He would update members on the organizing drives and strikes at various UAW locals around the country and then focus in on Detroit Three negotiations. In the last few minutes he would respond to comments or questions members wrote in the chat. One week Fain reported on Stellantis' proposal, which asserted the company's right to close 18 plants over the life of the contract. He then dumped it in the trash can, remarking that's where it belonged.

This gesture illustrated the union's aggressive strategy. Fain had highlighted the profitability of all three corporations, pointing out that the money was plowed into stock buybacks and boosted CEO benefit

packages by 40%. Meanwhile workers were living paycheck to paycheck. It might take six or eight years for temporary workers to become permanent. Once full-timers, they would reach the highest wage tier in eight years, without ever gaining post-retirement health care or a pension. Then there were the companies' parts distribution subsidiaries, a highly profitable market, where workers start at a lower wage than assembly workers.

As an industrial union, the UAW constitution calls for bringing up the wages of the lowest-waged worker up to the higher-waged one. As two-tier wages were introduced into the Detroit Three contracts even those who reluctantly voted for them on the recommendation of the AC leadership - were uncomfortable working next to new hires who had inferior wages and fewer benefits. With each subsequent contract, workers said an end to tiers was their number one demand - but what they hoped was a temporary concession became standard operating procedure.

Five of the 10 demands oppose the tiering, and like the restoration of COLA and raising retiree benefits, are attempts to regain what has been lost. The other three issues - overtime, plant closings and protection from layoffs - are about the continual intensification of work and the restructuring of the industry that leaves workers behind. Although labor costs represent 4-5% of the total vehicle cost (down from 7-8%), it is the area that the corporations target. While the corporations claim their need to pour money into battery research and technology, the UAW is claiming the right to win back what was taken in what many workers saw as a temporary "sacrifice." Further its demands challenge the right of management to deepen inequality.

As a result, the weekly updates did not narrow to negotiation with just one corporation. This, too, broke with the tradition of targeting one corporation to win a contract that would become a pattern for the other two. In some cases this led to a strike at the targeted corporation.

As the expiration date of the old

contract approached, Fain made it clear that the deadline would not be extended. Workers, labor analysts and the media wondered if the UAW would strike against all three. With \$825 million in the UAW strike fund, the union could weather a month-long strike (with each worker entitled to \$500 plus health coverage).

With only two hours before midnight, Fain revealed the innovative strategy by striking one plant at each of the three corporations. This not only conserved UAW financial resources but provided the negotiating teams with a weekly built-in escalation and kept the corporations guessing about which facility might next be struck.

As 13,000 UAW workers were called to strike, Fain outlined the "Stand Up" strategy that united both those on strike and those ready to go out if needed. Working under an expired contract, those remaining on the job were encouraged to refuse voluntary overtime and watch supervisors who might try to institute changes in violation of the rules. Those not yet on strike should continue to organize, wear red shirts on Wednesday, discuss with their coworkers and join the strikers' picket lines.

Each week Fain held a Facebook live report to discuss where negotiations stood. At the end of week #1, Ford offered positive responses to some of the demands: agreeing to make the current temporary workers permanent after 90 working days, restoring COLA and guaranteeing up to two years of wages and benefits where a plant closed and the workers laid off. Because of this step forward, the UAW chose to strike only the Stellantis and GM distribution sites. These 38 sites are spread out in 21 states, enabling workers and community to flock to their picket lines. Some strikers spontaneously organized caravans from one striking plant to another. By the following week, caravans were networking across regions.

As the strike moved into the third week, Stellantis came forward with a proposal and got a reprieve. With a GM assembly plant in Lansing, Michigan and a Ford assembly near Chicago, 25,000 UAW workers were on strike with a few hundred more laid

off because of the strike.

This strategy of starting off with minimal targets means that each week companies need to respond or their sites targeted. As the strike geographically expanded the strike more unions and community organizations joined in solidarity - including President Joe Biden.

As the first U.S. president to visit a picket line, Biden announced that the workers' demands were just. It also meant that the Biden administration could not attempt to negotiate an end to the strike but had to remain on the sideline.

When Trump attempted to support the strikers but oppose their leadership, Shain remarked that he was just another billionaire — the class who opposed workers' demands. Instead of

coming to Michigan to walk the picket line, Trump held a rally at a non-union parts plant where the press couldn't find any strikers among those wore autoworkers for Trump T-shirts. They did locate two autoworkers who were Trump supporters but even they didn't agree with Trump's views about the UAW's strike strategy.

The strategy of striking the Detroit Three puts corporations on the hot seat, having to continually respond to the UAW demands. It is also transparent as the weekly updates reveal what is being negotiated and even what is being won. And it is encouraging members to keep the pressure up, whether working under an expired contract and having their eyes on management or on the picket line.

Unions, community and political organizations joined the picket lines all hours of the day and night. They brought food, music — and once the weather turned cold — stacks of wood for the burn barrels. In particular, DSA chapters across the country picketed regularly and contributed material aid.

When Bill Ford implored UAW workers at the Ford Rouge facility to see their future with the company and in competition with foreign-owned companies where the work force is not unionized, Fain responded that those non-union workers were our brothers and sisters — and open to joining unions. Fain also makes the point that the strike isn't just about the UAW, but the broader need for end inequality.

*26 October 2023*

## Two Gaza Scenarios: Greater Israel vs. Oslo

**26 October 2023, by Gilbert Achcar**

Announced as imminent several days ago, after over 1 million inhabitants of the northern half of the Gaza Strip were given only 24 hours to flee south, the Israeli armed forces' land onslaught on Gaza is yet to start at the time of writing. Despite attempts to convey a contrary impression, this delay reflects the fact that Israel's political leadership and military command had no oven-ready plan for the invasion of Gaza on the scale they have been contemplating since the assault launched by Hamas on Oct. 7.

The Israeli armed forces could hardly have been anticipating a reoccupation of Gaza, which they evacuated 18 years ago. The successive operations they launched against the strip in 2006, 2008-09, 2012, 2014 and 2021 — to mention only the largest ones — have all been limited, essentially consisting of bombing, along with limited ground assaults in 2009 and 2014. But the extraordinary scale and traumatizing effect of Oct. 7 made it impossible for Israel's leaders to set a

lesser goal than the total eradication of Hamas from Gaza and the "pacification" of the strip.

This is a formidable challenge, for not only does the invasion of such a densely populated territory involve urban warfare of a kind that is highly risky for the assailant, but it poses most acutely the problem of what to do with the conquered territory the day after. The issue is not only military, needless to say; it is also, even primarily, political. The tight interdependency of political and military considerations is especially clear in the present situation. The scale of violence that is unavoidable in the pursuit of Israel's proclaimed goals will inevitably provoke a political fallout, which will impact the conduct of the war itself.

The most obvious factor in the equation is that Israel's tolerance for losses among its troops is very limited, as illustrated most spectacularly by the exchange in 2011 of Israeli soldier

Gilad Shalit, held captive in Gaza, for over 1,000 Palestinian prisoners. This makes it impossible for the Israeli army to launch ground assaults under conditions that impose a heavy cost in soldiers' lives, like the assaults that Russian troops (regular ones and/or those affiliated with the Wagner paramilitary service) have been launching in Ukraine since 2022 — not to mention extreme cases like Iran's "human waves" during its 1980-88 war with Iraq.

Thus, the Israeli army's superiority is at its maximum in terrains such as Egypt's Sinai desert or the Syrian Golan Heights, where buildings are scarce and firepower from a distance is decisive. Conversely, when Ariel Sharon, Israel's minister of defense at the time, ordered his troops to enter besieged Beirut in early August 1982, they had to abandon the attempt the next day. It was only after the negotiated evacuation of Palestinian fighters from Beirut that Israeli forces managed to storm the city in mid-

September. They withdrew by the end of the same month after a nascent Lebanese urban resistance movement started targeting them.

A corollary of this is that the only way for Israel's army to invade any part of so dense and vast an urban landscape as the Gaza Strip with minimal Israeli losses is to flatten the areas that it strives to occupy by way of intensive bombing before launching the ground offensive. This is indeed what started in the immediate aftermath of Oct. 7, with a level of damage that, in both extent and intensity, goes way beyond prior Israeli bombing campaigns, from Lebanon in 2006 to the successive wars on Gaza. Flattening vast swaths of urban territory was not possible for the Israeli military in any of the previous wars — not for lack of destructive power, of course, but for the absence of the necessary political conditions.

This was most obvious in 1982, when the Israeli siege of Beirut provoked a major international outcry and political crisis inside Israel itself, where the opposition to the Likud government of Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon came out in massive protests. In the previous wars against Gaza, Israel's armed forces had no intention of reoccupying part of Gaza anyway. This time around, this intention is on clear display, and the shockwaves from the unprecedented killing of huge numbers of Israeli civilians as well as soldiers are of such a magnitude that both the Israeli public and Israel's traditional international backers are explicitly or implicitly approving the reoccupation of Gaza in its entirety. What can the eradication of Hamas and the analogy with the Islamic State group mean, short of conducting a search and sweep operation in the whole of the strip?

As the Financial Times recently reported, based on interviews with military experts:

Israel's army will deploy its so-called "doctrine of victory", which requires the air force to have a deep bank of pre-vetted targets destroyed in rapid order. It is

already in play, with fighter jets intensely bombing large swaths of Gaza, pausing only to refuel, often in mid-air. The campaign is meant to outpace the ability of Hamas to regroup and, according to a person familiar with the discussions that created the 2020 doctrine, to "achieve maximum goals before the international community puts political pressure to slow down".

This is the military scenario that is brewing. Now comes the political dimension. If the military goal is indeed to reoccupy Gaza in order to eradicate Hamas, the next questions, naturally, are: For how long, and to replace Hamas with what? There is much more room for disagreement on these two questions of political strategy than on the military strategy, whose parameters are much narrower since they depend on objective considerations and the nature of the military means at hand. The two opposite poles of the political divergence translate into two scenarios that we might call the Greater Israel scenario and the Oslo scenario.

The Greater Israel scenario is the one that appeals most to Benjamin Netanyahu and his acolytes on Israel's far right. The Likud Party is heir to the Zionist far right, known as Revisionist Zionism, whose armed offshoots perpetrated the Deir Yassin massacre, the most infamous mass murder of Palestinians in 1948, amid what the Arabs call the Nakba (catastrophe). On the 78% of the territory of British Mandate Palestine that Zionist armed forces managed to conquer during the war of that year (the Zionists had been granted 55% by the partition plan approved by a nascent United Nations Organization, then dominated by countries of the Global North), 80% of the Palestinian population were uprooted. They had fled the war, frightened by atrocities such as Deir Yassin, and were never to be allowed to return to their homes and land. And yet the Zionist far right never forgave mainstream Zionism, which was then led by David Ben-Gurion, for having agreed to stop the war before conquering 100% of British Mandate Palestine between the Mediterranean

Sea and the Jordan River.

During his recent speech at the U.N. General Assembly in New York, only two weeks before Oct. 7, Netanyahu brandished a map of the Middle East showing a Greater Israel that included Gaza and the West Bank. Even more relevant to the new Gaza war is the fact — hardly mentioned in the global media — that Netanyahu had resigned from the Israeli cabinet led by Sharon in 2005 in protest against the latter's decision to withdraw from Gaza. (Sharon had succeeded Netanyahu as the head of Likud in 1999, following the latter's electoral defeat to the Labor Party then led by Ehud Barak. Sharon then managed to win the next election, in 2003, and offered the ministry of finance to Netanyahu.)

Much more an army man than a politician, Sharon was attentive to the military's plea for a withdrawal of troops from the unruly Gaza, with a preference for controlling the strip from outside. He saw no prospect for an annexation of Gaza similar to what has been occurring in the West Bank since its occupation in 1967. He therefore judged that it would be wiser to let the Palestinian Authority, established by the 1993 Oslo Accords, take care of Gaza, while focusing on the West Bank — a much more prized and consensual Zionist goal.

Oslo required the withdrawal of Israeli troops only from those West Bank areas densely populated by Palestinians, while allowing Israel to maintain control of most of the territory. To show his contempt for the Palestinian Authority, Sharon opted for a unilateral "disengagement" from Gaza in 2005 — without preparing it with the Palestinian Authority, that is. Two years later, Hamas seized power in the strip.

Netanyahu protested Sharon's disengagement. He led the opposition to Sharon within Likud and gathered enough force to incite him to quit the party and found a new one that same year, 2005. Netanyahu has led Likud ever since. He maneuvered his way to the prime ministership in 2009 by playing on the fragmentation of the Israeli political scene — an art at which, as the consummate opportunist, he excels — and



remained in office until June 2021. By the end of 2022, he was back at the helm, heading the most far-right government in Israel's history — a country where several successive governments since Likud's first victory in 1977 have been labeled the "most right-wing in history" in an unending drift to the right. Netanyahu nodded to Donald Trump's (and Jared Kushner's) "peace plan" in 2020 only because he knew full well that the Palestinians could not accept it. He likely saw this inevitable rejection as a good pretext for a unilateral annexation of most of the West Bank at some later point.

The prospect of reconquering Gaza required a major upheaval that was not on the horizon. No one could have expected that it would be created, all of a sudden, by Hamas' "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation. It was indeed the Israeli equivalent of 9/11. Oct. 7 was in fact 20 times more deadly than 9/11 relative to each country's population, as Netanyahu pointed out to Joe Biden during the latter's visit to Israel on Oct. 18. Just as 9/11 created the political conditions that allowed the Bush administration to realize its pet project of invading Iraq, Israel's Oct. 7 created the political conditions for Gaza's reconquest, something that Netanyahu had long desired but that was too wild and out of bounds to be openly discussed up to that point. Whether this goal is attainable remains to be seen, of course, but it is what the Zionist hard right aspires to.

The repeated calls by Israel's political and military authorities to Gaza's inhabitants to flee southward toward the border with Egypt, and their eagerness to convince Cairo to open the door to the Sinai Peninsula and take in the bulk of Gaza's population (2.3 million people), are thus rightly understood by the Egyptians as an invitation to let the Gazans settle in Sinai for the indefinite future — just as the Palestinians displaced from their land in 1948 and 1967 have been turned into permanent refugees in neighboring Arab countries. On Oct. 18, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi poured cold water on this idea, cunningly advising Israel to give refuge to the Gazans in the Negev desert, within its own 1948 territory, if it is truly seeking to grant them only

temporary shelter.

Greater Israel is not a unanimous ambition of Israel's leaders, however — not even after Oct. 7. It has some support in the United States, from the far right of the Republican Party and among Christian Zionists. But it is certainly not supported by the bulk of the U.S. foreign policy establishment, the Democrats in particular. The Biden administration — well known to have little sympathy for Netanyahu, who in 2012 openly backed Mitt Romney for president against Barack Obama (and Biden, his vice president) — sticks to the prospect, created by the Oslo Accords, of a Palestinian rump state, providing an alibi to sideline the Palestinian cause and clear the way for the development of links and collaboration between Israel and the Arab states.

This is why Biden told CBS on Oct. 15 that "it would be a big mistake" for Israel to occupy Gaza. The U.S. president did not mean that the invasion of the entire strip in order to eradicate Hamas would be a mistake. On the contrary, he clearly stated that, "Going in but taking out the extremists ... is a necessary requirement." Asked then "Do you believe that Hamas must be eliminated entirely?" Biden replied:

Yes, I do. But there needs to be a Palestinian authority. There needs to be a path to a Palestinian state. That path, called "the two state solution," has been U.S. policy for decades. It would create an independent nation next to Israel for 5 million Palestinians who live in Gaza and on the West Bank of the Jordan River.

The purpose of Biden's daylong visit to Israel was not only to enhance his political profile for the 2024 presidential election, ensuring that Trump, right-wing Republicans and evangelical Christian Zionists can't outflank him in their military support for Israel. (Note that in so doing, Biden is going against the views of a majority of U.S. citizens, and especially the majority of Democrats, who favor a more balanced approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.) Nor was Biden's purpose only to negotiate a token humanitarian gesture in order to pretend that his administration is

doing all it can to alleviate the unfolding disaster. His purpose was also, and perhaps primarily, to convince the Israeli polity — with or without Netanyahu — of the necessity of sticking to the Oslo perspective. He aimed to boost this endeavor by meeting with Mahmoud Abbas, the head of the Palestinian Authority, and with the king of Jordan. But the destruction of the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital on the eve of his visit thwarted his plan.

The clearest indication yet that part of the Israeli military-political establishment sees eye to eye with the Biden administration has been provided by Ehud Barak, former chief of the general staff of the Israeli armed forces and former prime minister. He fine-tuned the Oslo scenario in an interview with *The Economist*:

Mr Barak believes that the optimal outcome, once Hamas's military capabilities have been sufficiently degraded, is the re-establishment of the Palestinian Authority in Gaza. ... However he warns that Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president, "cannot be seen to be returning on Israeli bayonets". There will, therefore, need to be an interim period during which "Israel will capitulate to international pressure and hand Gaza over to an Arab peacekeeping force, which could include members such as Egypt, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates. They would secure the area until the Palestinian Authority could take control."

The fact that the Oslo process stalled shortly after being launched with great pomp and circumstance in 1993 — which led to the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000, followed by Israel's temporary reoccupation of those parts of the West Bank that it had evacuated in favor of the Palestinian Authority — does not seem to deter Washington and its allies from regarding it as the only feasible settlement. They probably believe that some sort of territorial swap like the one that was envisaged in the Trump-Kushner "peace plan" might eventually square the circle of reconciling the annexation of the West Bank areas where settlements have

been proliferating with granting the Palestinians a fragmented “independent state” on 22% of their ancestral land west of the Jordan River.

Ultimately, the two scenarios — Greater Israel and Oslo — are predicated on Israel’s ability to destroy Hamas to a degree sufficient to prevent it from controlling Gaza. This entails the conquest of most of the strip, if not all of it, by Israel’s armed forces — a goal they could only achieve by destroying most of Gaza, which would come at an enormous human cost.

The Washington Post recently quoted Bruce Hoffman, a counterterrorism expert and professor at Georgetown University, who pointed to the eradication of the Tamil Tigers in the northern part of Sri Lanka as the only type of success achievable in such endeavors. The Tigers were wiped out in 2009 after a military offensive by

Sri Lanka’s armed forces that involved the killing of up to 40,000 civilians, according to U.N. estimates. “God forbid that that sort of carnage unfolds today,” Hoffman told the Post. “But, if you’re determined to destroy a terrorist organization, you can. There’s a ruthlessness that goes with it.”

Except that the world’s attention is incomparably more focused on what happens in the Middle East than it was on what happened in Sri Lanka. The question therefore becomes what the Israeli army can achieve before a combination of losses in personnel and international pressure forces it to stop, not to mention the possibility of a regional conflagration involving Lebanon’s Hezbollah, with Iran backing it. So it is by no means certain that either of the two scenarios will materialize. Israel’s military has cautiously drafted a minimal plan consisting of creating a new extended buffer zone inside Gaza all along its

borders, further aggravating the strip’s condition as an “open-air prison.”

The only thing that is certain is that Israel’s new onslaught on Gaza is already deadlier and more destructive than all previous episodes in the tragic 75-year history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It’s also certain that this is going to get exponentially worse, which will only add to the destabilization of what is already the most unstable region of the world, and which plays a major role in destabilizing the Global North itself — with waves of refugees and the spillover of violence. Yet again, the shortsightedness and double standards of the United States and its European allies are going to blow back in their faces — this time with even more tragic consequences.

*October 23*

[New Lines Magazine](#)

# Writing on the wall for Sunak and Starmer

**25 October 2023, by Phil Hearse**

Events last week (October 16–21) not only highlighted the turmoil in British politics but some fundamental trends as well. The Tories suffered drastic by-election defeats; Rishi Sunak rushed to Israel to repeat Joe Biden’s pledge of abject loyalty; Keir Starmer was left spluttering over Gaza as Muslim councillors rebelled [3] and Chancellor Jeremy Hunt let it be known—unofficially—that he would not stand in the next election. What does it all mean?

New factors that potentially threaten Keir Starmer’s road to Number 10 are the rise of a mass movement in solidarity with Gaza, which saw hundreds of thousands on the streets of London on 21 October; the rebellion of dozens of Muslim Labour councillors, some of whom have resigned the party whip; and the significant rise in support for Reform

UK, the continuity Brexit Party, registering 6–8% in some polls.

On the ongoing catastrophe in Gaza, Labour spokespeople started saying, ‘We are very clear that Israel has the right to defend itself.’ A few days later, they joined Joe Biden and Rishi Sunak in calling for Israel to admit emergency humanitarian aid and ‘respect international law’. This obviously evades the issue of Israel’s bombing campaign and the slaughter of thousands of civilians in a society where 50% of them are children. Talking transparent rubbish will not prevent a revolt among Labour’s Muslim base, voters, and councillors.

As we discuss below, this is not a special one-off case. The unravelling of Labour’s political support among wide sections of workers is inevitable in the next period, irrespective of how many votes it gets in a general

election. The danger is that before and especially after the general election, forces of the radical right could gain a base among disillusioned voters.

Rishi Sunak has the biggest problems, however. The by-election results in Tamworth and South Bedfordshire, with swings of 20%+ to Labour, threaten the Tories with a meltdown. According to one poll of voting intentions [4], if a general election were held today, Labour would win more than 400 seats, while the Conservatives would reach only 118. In this poll, the Liberal Democrats would get 29 seats and the Greens just one. Schadenfreude at the Tories’ electoral distress should not disguise the fact that Britain’s undemocratic electoral system is likely to hardly register mass votes for the Greens and Reform UK. But such votes could have an effect on the outcome nonetheless.

Many Tory MPs appear to think that defeat is inevitable, and the apparent decision by Jeremy Hunt to resign as an MP is highly significant. According to the Observer, Hunt fears a 'Portillo moment', the humiliating event in the 1997 general election when Tory minister Michael Portillo saw a 20,000 majority in Enfield collapse, a moment that finished his political career. [5]

As an ex-Chancellor and ex-Health Minister, Jeremy Hunt would see endless vistas of highly paid directorships open up, perhaps in investment banks and private health companies, the latter thanking him for his great work allowing private investment into the NHS. For sure, he will earn enough to avoid having to go to a food bank, languish on an NHS waiting list, or keep his heating turned off in the winter.

On the day of the two by-elections, Rishi Sunak did a Boris [6] and fled the country, dashing to Israel, where he outdid Joe Biden's total support for the Gaza blockade and military assault with the statement 'we hope you win'.

Like Joe Biden's visit, there was an obvious electoral motivation for his trip. Britain's Jewish community is small but highly motivated, with overwhelming support for Israel. But for Labour, there is one electoral statistic that is ominous: Jewish voters are a majority in just two constituencies, and Muslim voters are a majority in 36.

The central political operation, as far as Labour is concerned, is Keir Starmer's attempt to win power by saying little and promising nothing. In particular, Starmer:

- Refuses to cancel the Rosebank oil field or promise any substantial policies with radical net zero outcomes.
- Refuses to pledge any major increase in financial support for the NHS, care homes, and other public services.
- Refuses to promise decent pay for public

services.

- Refuses to promise a big programme to build social housing;
- Refuses to promise any major increase in taxes on the rich, energy companies, and multinational corporations that hide their profits in foreign bank accounts [7]
- Refuses to promise to repeal reactionary Tory legislation like the Police, Crime, and Sentencing Act and the Public Order Act, which between them give substantial new powers to the police to ban demonstrations and arrest people for the mildest acts of civil disobedience.

No wonder many people now see no point in voting for Labour. More outrageously, Starmer and his key lieutenants refuse to say they will repeal Conservative policy on immigration, merely criticising the Tories for failing to deal with the asylum appeals backlog and making no guarantee of safe routes for asylum seekers themselves.

Already, Labour's failure to support more than a year of strikes among NHS staff, rail workers, teachers, and university staff has caused widespread disillusion and has caused numerous former Labour loyalists to say they won't support Labour at the next election. Regrettably, there is no viable left-wing electoral alternative to Labour, and one is unlikely to emerge before an election in 2024.

Reform UK is the continuity Brexit Party, effectively the same thing. Unlike Labour, it disdains concealing its electoral pledges, which revolve around tax cuts, climate change scepticism, and 'net zero immigration'. Reform UK is saying that Brexit wasn't done properly. Nigel Farage has been ramping up his public appearances, and in the run-up

to the general election, he will likely resume his position as leading spokesperson for Reform UK.

Even if Reform UK gets 6-8% of the vote, nobody can predict exactly the effect that would have on the election outcome. If Reform UK got a big vote in the former Red Wall seats in the North and Midlands, that could result in capsizing existing Tory majorities. There are just too many variables to make exact predictions. One of the key ones is the number of abstentions. A low turnout played an important role in the Tory defeats in Telford and South Bedfordshire. It is quite possible that a higher proportion of previously Tory voters can be mobilised for the general election, but most Tory MPs appear not to be expecting such an outcome. Unnamed ministerial sources told *The Guardian* that defeat was inevitable.

Reform The UK appears to have a credible programme for government, but it is, in reality, nonsense. They propose addressing the cost of living crisis by taking many lower-paid workers out of income tax bands. This is counterposed by wage increases. But they refuse to say anything about taxes on big businesses, particularly oil and gas companies. Net-zero immigration will be enforced by sending immigrants back to France. Or wherever they came from.

The one Tory policy leak of the week was the idea of reducing taxes for the top five million wage earners, about 13 percent of the workforce, those earning over £50,000 a year. (The fact that many top earners have income in the form of benefits not declared and income placed into bank accounts in tax havens like Jersey distorts this figure.) People in this top tax bracket—over £80,000 a year—are repeatedly complaining they can't manage and need tax relief. See [this insightful article](#).

The outcome of the general election in Scotland is also a potential danger for Starmer. Labour won the October 5 Rutherglen and Hamilton by-election, doubling its Scottish Westminster representation, but this was on top of scandals in the Scottish National Party, which forced the resignation of Nicola Sturgeon as SNP leader and

the resignation of two of its MPs.

On the basis of this, some observers were predicting a Labour turnaround to win 20 seats at the general election. But the turnout in this by-election was only 37%, hardly a ringing endorsement for Labour, despite 59% of the votes cast. In this situation of disillusion with all the main parties, no one can exactly predict the outcome in Scotland, but some polls have said the SNP will lose half its seats to Labour [8].

What about the right wing of the Conservative Party and the left of Labour?

The Labour left at a parliamentary level is a busted flush, with a parliamentary critical resolution on Gaza relying on SNP MPs and Green MP Caroline MP to get its sponsors passed the 20 mark. The Labour conference was a totally controlled Starmer rally. The fundamental process at work that Starmerism has brought is one of squeezing every possible space for the Labour left to exist and participate.

The cold hands of the Labour machine have had a deadening effect at the constituency level as well. In the past, the right-wing hated the Bevanite Tribune group and the Bennite left-wing. But their legitimacy as components of Labour was not challenged. Since the defeat of Corbynism, left opposition is not legitimate and can be excluded from the party or the PLP by a flick of Keir Starmer's little finger. Corbynism in the Labour Party is not coming back, at least not in our lifetimes. And Jeremy Corbyn himself refuses to make any substantial move to organise a combative new left formation.

On the right, there is plotting and desperation. And it is easy to see why. Gone are the days when most Tory MPs had well-paid professional jobs that they pursued in the morning. The £88,000 a year MP salary plus maybe £50,000 a year expenses is a big incentive when most, unlike Jeremy Hunt and Rishi Sunak, are unable to achieve fabulous wealth outside parliament.

Most likely, the Tories will lose their

majority, and Sunak will depart. Then there will be a brawl between different right-wing factions, with Suella Braverman by far the candidate most likely to win the leadership on a radical right-wing programme, foreshadowed by her policies as Home Secretary, much more like Donald Trump and Italian neo-fascist premier Giorgia Meloni than Boris Johnson. Harsh repression against democratic rights, brutal repression against trade unions, and against immigration will be the centre of Tory hard-right politics. Topped off with climate change scepticism

Alternative right-wing candidates like Priti Patel will be plotted against for being too pro-Boris and not, amazingly, right wing enough. For sure, the Tory right's plotter in chief, Wycombe MP Steve Baker, will be at the centre of trying to move the parliamentary Conservative Party even further to the right. Another ingredient in the reactionary right wing soup is Annunziata Rees-Mogg, sister of Jacob and one of the most prominent leaders in Reform UK, after their star Nigel Farage. For sure, the Rees-Mogg dinner parties will include a party discourse about what happens if the Tories suffer a big collapse.

But in the light of likely mass disillusion with a Keir Starmer government, not only is there a missing Labour left with mass support, but there is also the absence of a credible left party capable of acting as an alternative to the Starmer leadership and all its works. This is a really tragic situation.

Demonstrations on October 21 in solidarity with Gaza saw a massive 300,000 in London and tens of thousands around the country. For the first time since 2023, an anti-imperialist demonstration had a high proportion of young people—many students, but importantly, many from Muslim communities and people with family links to Gaza. We have entered a world of not only climate collapse but permanent imperialist war, as demonstrated in Gaza and Ukraine [9]. Building a broad left party, as all international experience shows, requires a core network of revolutionary anti-capitalist cadres; otherwise, the danger of reformist

capitulation and collapse is immense.

So these are the alternative possible perspectives for Britain after the general election:

- The Tories win another term in office, which would open up a carnival of reaction with a very nasty cohort of right-wing Tory MPs. This would be a government with many similarities to the Meloni government in Italy. But a new Tory government is highly unlikely.
- A minority Labour government with issue-by-issue support from the LibDems and SNP. This would likely lead to the replacement of Rishi Sunak with Suella Braverman and Reform UK, or associated fascist groups, running rampant in the streets. Labour would then blame its inability to do anything progressive on its lack of a parliamentary majority.
- A majority Labour government besieged by the right, as above, blames its incapacity to do anything substantial to help the working class and the poor on the dire financial situation it inherited from the Tories. Exactly how the radical right would recompose is a matter of speculation. Paul Mason says that the Tories could unravel, creating a major space for semi-fascist politics, and that we should hope the Tories remain strong



enough to contain the radical right. The problem with this idea is that the Tories are already drifting to the radical right [10]

Any of these scenarios means a quickening of the basic conflicts in British politics. Each stage of these processes would expose the lack of a credible socialist, environmentalist, and feminist alternative. The debate on how socialists need to organise should be opened now, not after a

general election next year. There is an important responsibility here. The need for socialist and left-wing unity is immense. Otherwise, the dangerous forces of the radical right will outflank and out-recruit us.

[Anti-Capitalist Resistance](#)

# Hezbollah is increasingly isolated in the Middle East

24 October 2023, by **Joseph Daher**

Israel's war on the population of Gaza — which has thus far claimed the lives of more than 3,500 people and destroyed crucial infrastructure, including schools and hospitals — has now raged for over two weeks. Since the start of Israel's bombing campaign, launched after a Hamas military operation killed 1,400 Israelis, many of whom were civilians, on October 7, observers have feared that the conflict could bring in regional actors such as the Lebanon-based Hezbollah, supported by its main financial backer Iran.

This, in part, explains Israel's reluctance to launch a ground invasion of the Gaza strip, despite having promised to do so since the start of the conflict. Hezbollah, which has under its control over fifty thousand troops, is a significant military force, and the prospect of it opening up a northern front in the ongoing war has tempered the more hawkish elements within the Israeli security state and forced the United States to warn outside parties against intervention.

However, the barriers to Hezbollah's involvement in the war are more complicated than its members, and Iranian assertions of its readiness for a new military confrontation, would suggest. There remain multiple conflicting interests both within the Lebanese party and across the region that make it impossible to speak confidently about the prospects for an

escalation of the war.

Their roots lie in the history of Hezbollah and the evolution of the party's base of support, the latter of which has been shaped by Israel's ongoing occupation of Palestine and its suppression of the Palestinian populations in Gaza and the West Bank. Regional conflict is, nevertheless, more likely now than it has been for decades.

## Class Dealignment

Hezbollah was officially established in 1985, although it began organizing in 1982. Since then the so-called Party of God has been politically, militarily, socially, and financially supported by the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Islamic Republic has provided Hezbollah with its main source of funding, although the Lebanese party also developed additional revenue streams in the past decade in Lebanon, as well as in Syria, where it has raised funds through its involvement in the smuggling and the drug trade.

Since the 1990s, Hezbollah has become the most prominent voice for the Shi'a population within Lebanon, surpassing the other main Shi'a party Amal in the process. It has reached this position of prominence by providing welfare and services to the Shi'a population through its own organizations and institutions, and as

the main actor in the military resistance against Israel. Both efforts were made possible by the financial support of Iran.

Since its founding, Hezbollah's base has widened and evolved. It has since become a party whose membership and cadres are increasingly dominated by a fraction of the Shi'a bourgeoisie and upper middle class, particularly in Beirut. This is a significant departure from the party's roots among religious clerics and the popular classes. In the capital's southern suburbs, many wealthy families and most of the merchants have become reliable supporters of Hezbollah. As the party grew, it helped give rise to a new segment of the bourgeoisie connected to it through Iranian capital. Meanwhile, the rest of the Shi'a portion of the bourgeoisie, whether in Lebanon or in the diaspora, has come increasingly under the umbrella of Hezbollah.

The party has also obtained growing weight in professional associations, and in some private companies, especially in real estate, tourism, and trade. Under Hezbollah's direct influence, these interests have gained power in the Lebanese business community. Consequently, Hezbollah has become an important economic actor in Lebanon by fostering relations with multiple business interests that provide employment to tens of thousands of people. This, in addition to the party's networks within civil



society organizations and its armed branch, has ensured its popularity.

At the same time, Hezbollah has managed to achieve a position of hegemony among Lebanon's Shi'a population through a combination of consent and coercion: the former based on the party's provision of much-needed services to large sections of the Shi'a population, and the latter through repressive measures directed against those who challenge the party's claim to a monopoly on resistance against Israel in Lebanon. Following the outbreak of the Lebanese uprising of October 2019, Hezbollah did not hesitate to mobilize. Initially it rallied its supporters and members to intimidate the demonstrators in different localities and to attack them in downtown Beirut or in the city of Nabatiyeh, in southern Lebanon.

The embourgeoisement of Hezbollah has had other consequences, in addition to motivating the party's turn against popular protests. It has also changed the party's political orientation towards the Lebanese sectarian and neoliberal political system. Hezbollah has evolved from a voice of radical opposition to this system to one in favor of compromise and participation within Lebanon's existing political structures. Moreover, it has become one of Lebanon's political system's main protectors, alongside the rest of the country's ruling class.

## Hezbollah's Roots

The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 was in part motivated by the development of Hezbollah. The first military operations carried out by Hezbollah prior its official establishment in 1985 were suicide attacks on Western embassies and targets, as well as kidnappings of Westerners in the 1980s. But since then, and up until the 2000s, the development of Hezbollah's armed apparatus has been closely connected to the organization's resistance activities against Israel.

In 2000, Hezbollah routed Israel from the south of Lebanon, ending an occupation that began in 1978.

Despite rocket exchanges from both sides of the border, the Party of God has retained this area ever since. Israel launched a new war against Lebanon and Hezbollah in 2006, during which Lebanon suffered over 1500 casualties, 1200 of which were civilians; Israel lost 160 of its citizens, including 120 soldiers.

Despite the asymmetry of casualties, Israel was unable to achieve its objectives in the war against Lebanon, which Hezbollah considered to be a success. The Party of God would go on to use this victory to reinforce its popularity in Lebanon, and in the wider Middle East. The southern areas of Lebanon suffered the most from Israeli attacks, invasions, and occupation, and Hezbollah's resistance enabled it to widen its social base in the Shi'a population.

However, since the 2006 war, Hezbollah's resistance against Israel, which had been at the core of its identity, has increasingly been subordinated to the other political objectives of the party and its sponsor Iran. This has been particularly reflected in Hezbollah's military intervention in Syria, which considerably strengthened it from a military standpoint by increasing recruitment for party's military arm. Allied with the despotic regime of Bashar Al-Assad as well as Russia and Iran, Hezbollah was also able to benefit by learning new strategies and gaining battle experience.

But from the perspective of Hezbollah's involvement in Palestine, the Syria campaign marked a significant reorientation away from its struggle against Israel. This does not mean that the party's military component did not and does not still play a role in its dealings with Israel, but after the 2006 war, Hezbollah increasingly came to deploy its forces for other purposes.

## Growing Power, Weakening Support

Hezbollah's military capacities and numbers have increased significantly

since the war in 2006. It has notably expanded its arsenal and now has vast numbers of rockets and missiles under its control. Yet this increase in military might has not coincided with a growth in popular support. On the national level, Hezbollah has become increasingly isolated, both politically and socially outside the Shia population.

The party has been involved in a number of sectarian conflicts within Lebanon, one example of which is the Khalde incident that took place in August 2021 in a town just south of Beirut. There, fighting broke out between Hezbollah and local Arab Sunni tribes that led to three deaths. During the same month, in the majority Druze village of Chouaya, angry youths intercepted a van carrying Hezbollah militiamen equipped with a rocket launcher. The militiamen's plan was to target Israel from the locality. However, molested by the Druze youths, who snatched the rocket launcher from them, the Hezbollah fighters were forced to retreat.

Two months later, in October 2021, another major incident took place. Following a protest by members from Hezbollah and its ally Amal against Judge Tarek Bitar, who was in charge of the investigation into the explosion at the port of Beirut on August 4, 2020, street fighting broke out in the neighboring Tayouné district of southern Beirut. The clashes pitted Shi'a fighters from Hezbollah and Amal against other minorities stationed in Christian neighborhoods, most probably members of the Lebanese Forces, a Christian far-right movement. This street battle left seven people dead and thirty-two wounded, raising fears of a new civil war.

Within Lebanon, sectarian political parties opposed to Hezbollah, but also wider sectors of the population, view Hezbollah as the main obstacle to achieving justice for the Beirut port explosion. The head of Hezbollah's Liaison and Coordination Unit, Wafic Safa, threatened that he would "get rid of" Judge Bitar, for example. Even the party's former political allies, such as the Free Patriotic Movement, have been increasingly critical of it.

Lebanon's main political actors, such as the Progressive Socialist Party and its longtime leader Walid Jumblatt, continue to voice their support for the Palestinian struggle in the Gaza Strip. They have, however, done so while insisting they oppose getting their country involved in a new war with Israel. In addition, the country is facing a deep socioeconomic crisis, which has been ongoing since October 2019. During this period, the rate of poverty increased dramatically from 25 percent in 2019 to over 80 percent. For large sectors of the population, the country can't sustain a new war.

All of this means that the broad-based popular support that Hezbollah enjoyed in 2006 is absent today. Beyond the Lebanese national scene, Hezbollah's military intervention to support the despotic Syrian regime to crush the country's popular uprising undermined its popularity on a regional level.

Hezbollah has, since the start of the Syrian uprising in 2011, moved away from a strategy primarily predicated on armed confrontation with Israel. Part of the motivation for this is that Iran, its main sponsor, does not want Hezbollah weakened significantly in a new war with Israel in Lebanon. While Hezbollah is based in Lebanon and has some relative political autonomy, the party is largely bound by the interests

of the Islamic Republic.

The role that Hezbollah has played within the region has been to consolidate and expand Iran's network of regional allies, including state and nonstate actors. After the assassination of Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force, the part of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps primarily responsible for extraterritorial and clandestine activity, the importance of Hezbollah for the Iranian state has only increased. Hezbollah has therefore become the main guardian of Lebanon's sectarian neoliberal system and the chief enforcer of Iran's geopolitical interests.

Despite Hezbollah's reservations, which it shares with Teheran, about starting a new war with Israel, whatever calculations it makes must also take into account the party's need to preserve to some degree its relationship with its political ally Hamas and what it sees as the political gains made by October 7 attacks. The latter have strengthened the hand of Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas within the region.

Hamas has been able to position itself once again as the leading actor on the Palestinian political scene, further marginalizing the already weak Palestinian Authority. The Palestinian

issue and the need to deal with it politically are now back both on the Israeli and regional agendas. Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7, and Israel's response to it, have had the effect of undermining the process of normalization initiated by Donald Trump and carried over by Joe Biden, ensuring that the occupation cannot be ignored on the road to smoothing out formerly hostile relations within the region. Soon after war erupted, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia responded by halting all progress on bilateral agreements between itself and Israel.

As the war develops, it is now clear that there can be no path towards stability in the Middle East that ignores the occupation and colonization of Palestine. The main task for the Left and progressive actors in the region must be to build a strategy based on a regional solidarity from below. This requires opposing the coalition of Western powers and Israel on one side, and regional authoritarian powers as well as the political forces linked to them on the other. This strategy, based on class struggle from below, is the only way to win liberation for the popular classes of the Middle East from regimes held up by the imperial power of the United States, Russia, and China.

[Jacobin](#)

# Israel-Palestine Conflict Gives Birth to a New U.S. Anti-War Movement

23 October 2023, by **Dan La Botz**

In Washington, D.C. on October 18 hundreds of protestors calling for a ceasefire took over a congressional office building. Organized by the Jewish groups Jewish Voice for Peace and If Not Now, during the occupation, five rabbis read testimonials from Palestinians and the group prayed and sang in Hebrew and English. Three hundred were arrested there. In Los Angeles and Chicago

thousands marched and, as in other cities, called not only for a ceasefire but also for an end to Israel's genocidal war, a stop to ethnic cleansing, and an end to apartheid in Israel/Palestine. In New York City, where on October 20, I joined the rally and march of thousands, we engaged in civil disobedience, blocking one of Manhattan's main streets in front of the offices of Senator Kristen

Gillibrand. Some 150 of us were arrested and jailed. And also in New York, the next day thousands rallied in Bay Ridge, a Palestinian neighborhood, where there was a sea of Palestinian flags and some of the chants were in Arabic.

Everywhere these demonstrations have been highly emotional, filled as they are with Jews and Palestinians

some of whom have family either in Israel or in Palestine. Speakers at some rallies made it clear they were supporting the Palestinian movement for self-determination, not Hamas' heinous violent attack on Israeli civilians. In the one I joined in New York one of the speakers said, "We will not tolerate hate speech in this movement, no antisemitism, no Islamophobia, no hate against any group," a statement greeted with applause and cheers. Many of the young demonstrators, whatever their nationality or religion, have donned kufiya scarves as a symbol of solidarity with Palestine.

Biden's literal embrace of Netanyahu, the US. Ambassador's veto of a U.N. Security Council resolution

condemning violence against all civilians, and U.S. legislators' overwhelming support for Israel have disappointed and angered many. These demonstrations, intended to put pressure on U.S. legislators, are demanding an end to U.S. funding of Israel's war machine. In some rallies we chanted, "Not a penny, not a dime, no more money for Israel's crimes." In a reprise of a slogan from the anti-Vietnam War movement, people chanted, "Hey, Biden, what do you say? How many kids did you kill today." Sometimes Netanyahu's name was substituted for Biden's. Some protestors' placards carried the number of Palestinian children killed, a growing number every day.

The new anti-war movement is

fighting against powerful, pro-war propaganda from the United States, Israel, and much of the media. A recent poll showed that among registered voters, 61% sympathized with Israel and only 13% with Palestine. Among Democrats, 48% say their sympathies are more with Israelis compared to 22% who said Palestinians. This is a complete reversal of Democrats' opinions since a poll taken three years ago.

All of those in the movement recognize that it will take continued pressure, more protests and more civil disobedience, and much more to stop the U.S. complicity in Israel's war crimes.

22 October 2023

## Far-right has created a climate of racism, Islamophobia and fear

22 October 2023, by **Farooq Sulehria, Hakan Blomqvist**

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**What do you think suddenly led to this flurry of Quran burnings in Sweden — a society and country otherwise known for liberal values and tolerance?**

That image is not very accurate. Sweden has changed. We have for a long time had right-wing extremists, sentiments and organised groups opposing immigration, foreigners from other cultures and Islam.

A right-wing populist anti-immigration and anti-Muslim party, the Sweden Democrats, which had its first electoral breakthrough in 2010, is now the second-largest party in Sweden (next to the Social Democrats).

After the so-called "refugee crisis" in 2015, Sweden has almost closed its borders to refugees — both by the non-socialist as well as social democratic governments.

In the latest general elections held in

2022, right-wing liberal parties formed the government with the support of the Sweden Democrats. That has radicalised right-wing currents who were already growing.

It was a right-wing activist who advised the Swedish-Danish extremist Rasmus Paludan to start burning the Quran during Easter in 2022. The example has been followed by others, both by the right-wing extremists and anti-Islam actors.

**What has been the response of the Swedish left, particularly the Left Party and some of the key far left organisations?**

The general reaction from the left has been an urge to stop burning of Quran. On certain occasions, the left activists resorted to direct action (by physically trying to stop the burners or acting as pretended fire fighters). Otherwise, the left has demanded to invoke the "law of incitement against ethnic group".

In Sweden, one is not allowed to publicly wear a badge with a swastika or a picture of the Nazi leader Adolf Hitler, since it is considered antisemitic. Many spokespersons of the left (as well as the chairperson of the Social Democratic party) think that the abovementioned law should be invoked also in this case.

Recently, a man in a small Swedish town was prosecuted and sentenced in line with that law. However, the court made it clear that it was not only because of the burning but also the "circumstances" (the convicted person played — at the same time — threatening Nazi, anti-Muslim music).

**What has been the trade union movement's response to these events?**

In general, the Swedish trade union movement is against such provocations that risk splitting working class members. A big part of the Swedish working class consists of

immigrants, many with a Muslim faith. But I don't think the union movement as a whole has any proposals for the legislation.

The leadership of the trade union umbrella called Lands Organisationen or LO (like the Trade Union Congress in the UK), usually has the same opinion as the Social Democrats (since they are a part of its leadership). I have seen that there is a debate within the union movement around the same questions as in other milieux about freedom of expression versus a ban on incitement.

**How has the present coalition government reacted? Is there a debate about changes in freedom of expression laws?**

The incumbent right-wing coalition government avoids the available law on incitement. Instead, it tries to make the burning of Quran a question of national security. That is, if the police (and courts) consider a planned burning of Quran a threat to national security, such actions should be considered illegal, hence, prevented. The government in this manner avoids confronting the anti-Muslim opinions held by the Sweden Democrats, thus turning the issue into an issue of national interest instead of discrimination.

**This debate is definitely difficult. On the one hand is the question of free expression. On the other, Islamophobia. How would you balance the two?**

To me it is not that terribly difficult. A society, at least of the Swedish type, always draws limits. Not everything is allowed, even in the case of the right to free expression.

You are not allowed in Sweden to

propagate for pedophilia, Nazi genocide or hatred against different ethnic groups. You are allowed to criticise and even ridicule beliefs and religion as well as atheism, but not to spread hate against nationalities or ethnic groups.

Previously, Sweden had a law called "trosfrid" – "peace for religions". According to trosfrid, insulting religion was illegal. But that law was abolished in 1970. The reason was the secularisation of the society and the very strong opposition from artists, writers and others who were prosecuted according to that law for criticising religion.

Sweden was for hundreds of years (since the 16th century) a protestant country with a very strong and authoritarian state-church. To criticise Christianity and the church often led to prison in the late 19th century (and earlier, to a death sentence).

However, during the 20th century, the grip of the church loosened as democratic development became stronger. In 1951, the right to leave the state-church without joining another religious faith was granted. From 1960, Christian prayers in the schools were no longer compulsory and, from 1970, it was allowed to freely criticise religion.

In 2000, the state and the Protestant church were separated, and we no longer have a state-church. One's faith and congregation is a private affair.

But the freedom of religion and expression is not the same thing, in my view, as allowing hate-agitation against the believers, religious and ethnic groups.

**Sweden Democrats, the far-right party, has been defending the**

**Quran burnings in the name of free expression. Yet, the present government has been bent upon cutting subsidies to the media that will hurt the radical press. How would you analyse these contradictions in the stated viewpoints of coalition partners?**

To them that is no contradiction. Their defence of the freedom of the press is purely rhetorical. They defend anti-Islamic actions in most areas since they think Islam is alien to Swedish nationality and should be reduced to a minimum in Swedish society. Hence, they object to any restrictions against Islamophobia. Instead they are now — in line with the agenda of national security — turning also the Quran-issue into an anti-immigrant theme. They propose that burners of Quran should be expelled from Sweden. Regarding the withdrawal of subsidies to the press — radical or liberal — which oppose Islamophobia, it is wholly in line with that orientation.

**After threats from al-Qaeda, the threat level was raised to maximum in August. Do you think, there are real threats of al-Qaeda attacks?**

Yes. On Monday (October 16), two Swedish football supporters in Brussels — where the Swedish team played against Belgium — were killed (and one wounded) by a terrorist claiming to be a member of Islamic State (ISIS). The assassin explicitly targeted the Swedes. So yes, that might be a real threat, perhaps even stronger since the Swedish right-wing government is such a strong supporter of the Netanyahu's war against Gaza, cutting Swedish aid to Palestinians and trying to withdraw the Swedish recognition of the Palestinian state.

Source: [Green Left](#).

## Under the yoke of the IMF

21 October 2023, by **Éric Toussaint**

The Counter-summit in Marrakesh has shone a spotlight on the spiral of indebtedness that threatens the States of the South. Eric Toussaint, in a wake-up call to the movement for global justice, explains:

Several hundred activists opposed to neoliberal policies left Marrakesh on Sunday under the shadow of gloomy perspectives. The months ahead look likely to be months of great hardship for the populations of numerous countries of the South, threatened by what can only be called “a new debt crisis”, asserts Eric Toussaint. Toussaint was one of the initiators of the Counter-summit coordinated by about 70 organizations and networks, in a parallel meeting to the Annual Meetings of the IMF and the World Bank (see our Friday issue). The Belgian political scientist and economist, founder of the anti-debt network the CADTM, gave *Le Courrier* his analysis of the financial dimension of this umpteenth systemic crisis of Capitalism, which, like environmental damage and disruptions in health services, impact the most fragile people first.

### **What are the contours of this new debt crisis which is affecting so many States in the South?**

Eric Toussaint: Since last year, an increasing number of countries have been finding themselves unable to refinance their debt on the markets. The main cause for this is the cessation of the Quantitative Easing policies (QE) that Central Banks had engaged in after the housing and banking crises in the United States in 2006-2007, which turned into a generalized crisis of the European and North-American finance system in 2008. As well as injecting thousands of billions of dollars, euros and pounds sterling to save the banks, there was a policy of extremely low-to-zero interest rates, until 2021. Throughout that decade, States that had never been able to access the financial markets, even the poorest, like Rwanda or Ethiopia, suddenly found takers for their debt securities in Wall Street. Investment funds and banks, seeing that the returns on French or German bonds were near zero, showed an interest in financing the governments of the South against

interest rates of 4%, 5% or 6%. These States then became indebted, telling their populations: “as you see, all is well, the money markets have confidence in us, we are credit-worthy”, and so on. But the moment Western Central Banks, faced with inflation, suddenly hiked their interest rates up to 5%, financiers turned once again to the bonds of the North, and the countries of the South could no longer find money to refinance their loans for less than 9%, 12% or even 15%.

The shock was aggravated by the consequences of the Covid crisis. The States had to increase their spending, especially on health, while at the same time their income was drying up, often dependent on the global market for raw materials or on tourism. Finally, we have to mention speculation on the price of cereals and oil, after the invasion of Ukraine by Russian imperialism. A great many countries of the South are net importers of those two products.

### **The QE policy was probably not viable in the long term, but what explains the sudden flare-up of inflation after over a decade without an increase?**

First of all, we have to remember that the policy of rescuing the banks was not a good idea. In fact, it also caused indebtedness of the countries of the North. As for the inflation, it was mainly the result of decisions made by big food and fuel companies to increase their profit margins, taking advantage of breakdowns in the supply chain and price fluctuations due to the Covid crises and war.

### **In the South, which countries are the weakest links of the new crisis?**

They are often those that were formerly considered star pupils by the neoliberal finance system. Take Sri Lanka, a country which had never defaulted. In the past, it had even had to drop regulation of the price of rice. Previously self-sufficient, it became dependent on the global market (Vietnam, Thailand, the United States). Then Sri Lanka invested massively in the tourist industry. But with Covid and the war in Ukraine,

tourism ground to a halt and the price of cereals rocketed! By April 2022, Colombo had no choice but to suspend debt payments and stop imports; which in turn led to an explosion of social unrest.

Another example is Ghana, “a model of openness”, which also had to suspend debt servicing.

Egypt, Pakistan and Bangladesh only narrowly avoided suspension of payments thanks to the intervention of the IMF, but with the usual draconian conditionalities (privatisations, austerity, deregulation) which have already slammed down on the population.

### **What comes after Marrakesh?**

Despite the somewhat chaotic organization and the forced absence of several activists who didn't receive their visas, on Sunday the participants made a very positive assessment of the Counter-summit. The meeting for global justice was mainly African, but enriched with European, Asian and even Latin-American interventions. It reminded us how indispensable such direct exchanges are, as Monica Vargas, of the NGO Grain, pointed out. It was a unique opportunity to create a web of solidarity, all the more valued since it is so hard to travel within Africa, added Broulaye Bagayoko, the Permanent Secretary of CADTM-Africa, who also mentioned the help provided by donors.

Roos Saalbrink of the Netherlands, from the NGO Action Aid, agreed. She was in the enviable position of moving to and fro between the alternative and the official summits, as she was accompanying a group of African women suffering from austerity programmes. “We appreciated coming away from the official speeches to hear down-to-earth analyses of the IMF's promises,” she testified.

Eric Toussaint believes that there will definitely be a follow-up to Marrakesh; if only to keep up the new connections made between social movements who not long ago did not know one another. In the context of a global recession of resistance, the little spark created in Morocco must be kept alive. The militant acknowledges, however, that “many more forces need



to be brought together, as several networks have remained on the fringe, if there is to be any hope of achieving a framework” for global justice coordination on a global scale. Although the CADTM will be participating in the next World Social Forum, which is to be held from 15 to 19 February 2024 in Nepal, it seems clear that the absence of Via Campesina in particular, will undermine the representativity that the WSF enjoyed in the past.

**We should expect to see a new wave of structural adjustment policies.**

Yes indeed, this new crisis marks the triumphant return of the IMF, which always thrives best on disaster in the South. We are certainly not about to see the generalization of suspension of payments, but rather a flurry of problems that engender systematic recourse to the IMF. That institution has signed over a hundred loan agreements. The more difficulty countries have to pay their debts, the

harsher and more numerous austerity programmes will become. We are talking of amounts going from a few tens of million dollars to 45 billion for Argentina, or 15 billion for Ukraine. You can imagine the power of coercion that that places in the hands of the IMF.

**Debates in the Counter-summit revealed much scepticism as to the possibility that the New Development Bank (NDB), established by BRICS [1], might provide an alternative to the Bretton Woods institutions (FMI/BM). Why?**

In our view, it is absolutely not an alternative, since it is based on the same extractivist and productivist model. The NDB, in which China plays a central role, sees Africa simply as a site for extracting raw materials or a source of underpaid labour. Its interest rates are similar to those of the IMF and the World Bank. The main difference is that it does not

impose economic and political conditionalities on borrowing countries. That is what sparks the interest of many African countries. But that does not make it a development bank. It is not lending so that Africa can industrialize, but to create the infrastructure to export raw materials or to carry out prestige policies.

**What alternative is there, then? Have you seen an element of hope emerge during the Counter-summit?**

I was struck by the extent to which the social movements of Sub-Saharan Africa understand the true nature of the IMF's and the World Bank's policies. There are far fewer illusions than in the past about creditors' promises. There are more and more actors of civil society who envisage development without those bodies. By adopting alternative monetary, fiscal and judiciary policies, African States could manage without them for good.

*Translated by Vicki Briault (CADTM)*

## **Gaza: between a second chapter of the Nakba and the revival of the Oslo fiction**

**20 October 2023, by Gilbert Achcar**

Since the establishment of the State of Israel, the Zionist right has been dreaming of completing the Nakba of 1948 with a new mass expulsion of Palestinians from the whole of Palestine between the sea and the river, including the Gaza Strip. There is no doubt that they now see what happened last Saturday as a shock that will allow them to drag the rest of Zionist society behind them in implementing their dream in the Gaza Strip first, while awaiting the opportunity to implement it in the West Bank. The gravity of what befell Israel last Saturday can reduce the deterrent role of Hamas's holding of hostages, unlike what happened in previous rounds of confrontation between the movement and the

Zionist state. It is very likely that the latter this time will not be satisfied with anything less than a destruction of the Gaza Strip to an extent that exceeds anything we have seen to date, in order to reoccupy it at the lowest possible Israeli human cost and provoke the displacement of most of its residents to Egyptian territory, all under the pretext of completely eradicating Hamas. It is to be greatly feared therefore that the 'Al-Aqsa Flood' will eventually sweep away the entire Gaza Strip, just as the natural flood swept away the Libyan city of Derna a month ago, but on a much larger scale.

Unfortunately, the spectacle of Gaza's destruction has already begun to

outweigh that of what the natural flood swept away in Derna. What is yet more serious than the destruction of buildings is that the new massacre that the Zionist occupation army has begun to carry out in Gaza has already exceeded in size the largest previous massacres that befell the people of Palestine, while the Israeli aggression is still at its beginning, and the number of displaced people inside the Gaza Strip has now exceeded the number of those who were displaced during the 1948 Nakba. The Zionist army is truly destroying the Gaza Strip to an extent that exceeds anything we have seen to date.

This is because it is an army keen on keeping its human losses low, which is

what thwarted its attempt to invade Beirut in August 1982. Ariel Sharon ordered his troops to storm the besieged Lebanese capital then and they were forced to stop the operation after realizing that they would incur heavy losses because of the difficulty of penetrating into built-up areas, where it is easy for resistance fighters to hide and surprise the enemy. The lesson was confirmed when the Zionist army launched a ground attack on Gaza in 2009. The Zionist army was not going to repeat the experience, therefore. Instead, it is using its overwhelming superiority in destructive power to flatten built-up areas as a prelude to storming them.

Destruction on a similar scale was not possible in Beirut 1982, nor in Gaza 2009 due to the absence of favourable political conditions (in 1982, Israel was subjected to great international pressure and its society was deeply divided over the invasion of Lebanon led by the duo of Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon). Today, the “Al-Aqsa Flood” operation—which included acts of killing committed against unarmed men and women in numbers that exceeded anything Israel had ever known before, acts that were exploited to the fullest extent by the global pro-Israel media—provided Israel with a golden opportunity to proceed with the implementation of a new chapter of the Nakba, just as Al-Qaeda’s attacks in 2001 provided the US administration of George W. Bush with a golden opportunity to realize its members’ long-held project to occupy Iraq (they agreed to start with Afghanistan after some of them insisted that starting with Iraq might be difficult to sell to the public opinion).

The massive destruction inflicted on Gaza is not limited to military considerations this time. It serves an additional goal, which is the displacement of the Strip’s population. We have become accustomed to the Zionist army’s excuse that it did warn civilians and that Hamas is responsible for their deaths because it is based in the middle of built-up, populated areas (as if it were possible

for Hamas to be based outside these places without being immediately destroyed by Israeli bombing!). However, this time the call on the people to flee is not like what was witnessed in previous rounds of aggression against the Gaza Strip but falls rather transparently into the project of displacing most of Gaza’s population, in the same way as eighty percent of the Palestinians living in the lands seized by the Zionist state in 1948 were displaced out of them.

Completing what was begun in that fateful year is a dream that has haunted the Zionist far right since the Nakba. This far right, of which the Likud Party is the legitimate heir, blamed David Ben-Gurion and his colleagues in the mainstream Zionist movement of that time for having accepted a ceasefire before completing the occupation of all the land of Palestine between the sea and the river. It is worth remembering that it was that same political movement that carried out the Deir Yassin massacre, the most famous of the atrocities that accompanied the Zionist takeover of Palestine and caused the displacement of its population.

The Zionist far right remained determined to achieve its “Greater Israel” project. Thus, Sharon faced strong opposition within Likud in 2005 when he was both leader of the party and Israeli prime minister and decided to evacuate Gaza (“unilateral disengagement plan”) to satisfy the military’s desire to get rid of the burden of controlling the Strip from within. Sharon’s priority was indeed to consolidate Israel’s control of most of the West Bank and formally annex these territories at first political opportunity, while keeping Gaza and Areas A and B stipulated in the Oslo II Agreement under the control of the Palestinian Authority so as to liquidate the Palestinian cause under the pretext of granting the Palestinians an entity of their own (even if under tight Israeli supervision).

Benjamin Netanyahu led the campaign against Sharon within Likud and went

so far as to resign from the cabinet in protest against the withdrawal from Gaza. Sharon soon left Likud to establish another party, and Netanyahu replaced him at the helm of the party, which he continues to lead to this day. He saw in the “Al-Aqsa Flood” not only an opportunity to divert the attention of the Israeli opposition from him and achieve a Zionist revengeful unity against the people of Gaza, but also a golden opportunity to reoccupy the Gaza Strip, while emptying it of most of its people this time, as in the 1948 Nakba. Netanyahu, who brandished a map showing “Greater Israel” at the UN General Assembly less than a month ago, clearly wants to displace most of Gaza’s people to Sinai, beyond the border with Egypt. For this, he hopes that the United States will be able to convince the Egyptian regime to take them in.

On the other hand, Washington hopes that the Zionist army will “content itself” with eradicating Hamas (and Islamic Jihad) from the Gaza Strip in order to then hand over its administration to the Ramallah Authority, thus reviving the Oslo fiction without a permanent displacement that would increase the amplitude of the Palestinian refugee issue. For, what Netanyahu aspires to would inflame the entire Arab region and cancel the “normalization” achieved between Israel and some of the Arab regimes, whereas Washington believes that what it advocates will allow the “normalization” process to move forward. Which of the two options will be achieved in the end will be determined by the speed with which the Zionist army can advance in seizing the Gaza Strip in the face of an international pressure that will escalate the more the spectacle of what is happening to Gaza’s people will overshadow the scenes of the “Al-Aqsa Flood”.

Translated from the Arabic original published in Al-Quds al-Arabi on 17 October 2023.

Source: [Gilbert Achcar blog](#)

# Chlordecone: the fight against colonial crime takes on a new dimension

19 October 2023, by **Patrick Le Moal**

It is present in soil, plants and spring water, and accumulates in organisms via the food chain: traces are found in the plasma of 90% of West Indians, with neurological consequences for pregnant women and newborns, and prostate cancer, not to mention effects that are still poorly understood.

## No penalties for this health scandal

The poisoning of the people of the Antilles is no longer in dispute: in 2021, the French government has finally recognized the prostate cancers of people who have worked for at least ten years in contact with chlordecone as an occupational disease, allowing them to be compensated. But nothing for the others!

What's more, the courts have refused to penalize the chain of responsibility that allowed chlordecone to be produced and used on a massive scale. In January 2023, sixteen years after the complaint was lodged, the dismissal of the case was rightly seen as yet another act of colonial contempt. The judges confirmed that

there was a "health scandal", but decided that no one could be punished!

Against this impunity, the *Lyannaj pou dépolyé Matinik* collective, which played a central role in the mobilisation, the huge demonstration on 21 February 2021 and the following ones, has built an even broader front against this dismissal, for truth, justice and reparations for this crime. Because the current responses - free tests, money put into the victims' compensation fund and the chlordecone plans - fall far short of the mark.

## A week of mobilisation

This is how *Simenn Matinik Doubout - Gaoule kont Chlordécone* came into being last June, bringing together trade unions (CDMT, CFDT, CSTM, FO, UNSA), political parties (CNC, Fédération socialiste, GRS, InsoumiEs, MIM, PALIMA, PCM, Peyi-A, PPM, RDM, RESPE), environmental and women's rights associations, lawyers, artists and activists. This wide range

of social, political, cultural and civic forces is a new and very important element in building the balance of power.

The collective is organizing a week of mobilization from 22 to 28 October, joined by Guadeloupean organizations, around a village of struggles and alternatives, debates on health, demands, agriculture, fishing, judicial prospects (with the plan to bring civil actions against hundreds of people) and a mass demonstration on Saturday 28 October. To prepare for the initiative, meetings are being held everywhere, with local elected representatives and the general public, to put together the civil party files.

The plan for an international citizens' tribunal on chlordecone and other pesticides is also under discussion. The French workers' and democratic movement must stand shoulder to shoulder with the Antilles activists, by taking part in the solidarity mobilization on 28 October and supporting all the proceedings under way.

19 October 2023

# The struggle for national liberation is linked to the struggle for social liberation

18 October 2023, by **A Manca**

To sum up, recognition of the Corsican people is a no. The co-official status of Corsican and French is a no-no. Extending the powers of the Corsican Assembly, including the possibility of

legislating in a number of areas, is a no-no. And the residency status designed to curb property speculation is still a no-no.

The LR-affiliated right-wing in the Assembly was fully reassured. At the other end of the spectrum, the pro-independence members of the Core in Fronte movement understandably

found Macron's comments to be little more than flat regionalism, with no desire to find a political solution worthy of the name.

## **The relationship between the dominant and the dominated**

But the social, economic, democratic and cultural situation in our country requires more than vague speeches based solely on rhetoric.

With a rate of precariousness that puts Corsica at the top of the list of regions where the number of people at or below the poverty line is constantly rising. With food prices 16% higher than in France. With property speculation depriving thousands of workers of housing. With a language that survives thanks solely to the determination of teachers and community activists. For all these reasons, in addition to the democratic denial of the fundamental rights of the Corsican people, Macron's visit is part

of a relationship between the dominant and the dominated that French imperialism has no intention of abandoning.

The consequences of the ultra-liberal approach, which focuses mainly on the tourism industry as a "mode of development", are the massive disappearance of arable land, exorbitant prices in the rental market with the takeover of networks such as Airbnb, and the total privatisation of maritime transport. In this particular sector, consortiums are dictating their law and speculating blithely in the agri-food sector.

## **The right to self-determination**

Faced with this economic and social tsunami, there is absolutely no point in hoping that moderate or otherwise nationalists will manage to convince themselves of the need to break with the economic model that still dominates. Their line boils down to denouncing the galloping precariousness without producing any real solutions.

As far as we're concerned, there's nothing new under the sun. We will continue relentlessly to demand the effective realisation of the right to self-determination based on the principle of a community of destiny open to all, whatever their origins.

On the economic and social front, we are calling for the introduction of a sliding wage scale, massive taxation of second homes and the creation of public maritime, land and air transport companies. For decades, we have been advocating the introduction of an economic and social emergency plan that also takes into account the issue of agriculture. Corsica currently imports 93% of its basic necessities.

A Manca continues to link the struggle for national liberation to the struggle for social liberation, with the clear prospect of a break with capitalism and with the imperialist domination of which Macron and his henchmen remain the representatives. Until these thresholds are crossed, the situation in our country will remain one of alienation and trusteeship.

*16 October 2023*

# **Homophobia that has exposed more than 300 people to sexual violence for decades**

**17 October 2023, by Yong-hui Hong**

The broadcast of the program attracted a great deal of attention in Japan. After the BBC report, several people from Johnny & Associates began to speak out about the sexual violence they had suffered. Major Japanese media also began to cover the story, publishing a video and written apology from Keiko Fujishima Julie, president of Johnny & Associates. Later, the president of the company resigned. This was an unprecedented case of sexual violence, with a single perpetrator sexually assaulting an more than 300 people for decades. Many of the

victims were underage males. Yet for more than half a century, Japanese society remained silent about this unprecedented case of sexual violence.

## **History and major obstacles to punishment**

Rumors and court testimony about Johnny Kitagawa committing obscene acts against the male talent in his

office have been around since the 1960s. However, they were only reported by some Japanese publishers. In 1964, Johnny & Associates was taken to court for the indecent assault of a student by Johnny Kitagawa. At that time, the sexual abuse by Johnny Kitagawa was reported in some weekly magazines and became public, but it coincided with the taboo against homosexuality at that time. Accusations of sexual violence by Johnny Kitagawa did not stop after the late 1980s. Victims continued to publish books of accusations. Although they were reported in weekly

newspapers, they never became criminal cases. And the damage caused by sexual violence continued to grow while victims' allegations remained unaddressed. For decades, there was a deliberate silence about this grave sexual violence. There was a widespread feeling in Japanese society that sexuality did not matter much. Furthermore, the fact that it was same-sex violence and that the victims were male was an obstacle to clarifying the reality of the situation.

Until recently, there were major obstacles to punishing sexual crimes against men. In Japan, until 2017, "rape" only included sexual intercourse with women. The 2017 law changed "rape" to "forcible sexual intercourse," and also criminalized sexual violence against men. Although there were criminal laws against indecent assault and battery, it was not punished as severely as rape. The perpetrators exploited the loopholes in the law and continued to commit the crimes deliberately. This incident is an unprecedented sex crime in recent years. Strangely, however, the police and prosecutors have not acted at all. There have been cases in other countries where investigations were conducted after the perpetrator's death, but they do not even explore such possibilities. In this case, the special situation of the country stands out. Japanese society is extremely lenient when it comes to child abuse. One reason for this is the underdevelopment of social movements to prosecute child abuse. What is even more extraordinary is that none of the media outlets involved in this child abuse, their affiliates, their financiers, or the male talents who tacitly condoned the abuse have yet to face any social sanctions.

## **Problems in prosecuting sexual violence**

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the situation is moving in a "better" direction than before. At present, most of the Japanese media are trying to report and follow the case properly. However, there are limits to the

coverage. The problem of sexual violence is too much an individual one. If we look at this problem as an individual versus individual battle, it will be difficult to see the industry or broader societal problems that lie behind it. The stereotyping of both victims and perpetrators has distanced the issue itself from the public eye. We need to look at the fundamental structure of Japanese society, not just the individual versus individual problem. In committing sexual violence, the perpetrator makes a decision about whether or not to carry it out. In this case, the situation lasted for decades, and the sexual violence continued unabated until the perpetrator's death in 2019. During this time, society and those around the perpetrator effectively gave him permission to commit sexual violence.

This case is also about sexuality and homophobia. Furthermore, because the problem has been going on for almost 60 years, it is necessary to look at the issue from an even broader perspective. Sexual harassment and sexual violence perpetrated by men used to be considered minor in Japanese society. Not long ago, it was very difficult to obtain human rights remedies in rape cases in Japan. In such a society, there was also a general and unfounded notion that only women were victims and that men should not be victimized. And the victims themselves were forced by society as a whole to agree with such a tendency. And the men who were victimized were further blamed by society for being "unmanly. In the context of this trend, it has even been said that only young women are victimized, and that they are victimized because they expose their skin. In reality, sexual violence occurs regardless of gender, age, or skin exposure. Victims are further tormented by these unfounded discourses because of the gender stereotypes and homophobia that dominate Japanese society. Sexual violence, whether same-sex or opposite-sex, should be criminalized.

## **Homophobia that**

## **prevented them from pursuing the issue**

This case challenged everyone's position on the issue of gender and sexuality. The "responsibility of the media" is often mentioned in this context. But the media can only do so much when it comes to sexual violence and crime. The police and the courts are there to judge these crimes. Holding them accountable for their actions is what the media should be doing. However, the homophobia that pervades Japanese society has slowed the media's pursuit of this issue. The media itself has also insulted homosexuals, either to curry public favor or for commercial reasons. And they have reproduced gender and sexuality orders such as heterocentrism, cis-centrism, and homophobia.

The victims of homophobia continue to suffer. Homophobia is deeply rooted in Japanese society. First of all, homophobic racists view the homosexual group as "strange people" who only think about their sexuality. All same-sex sexual acts are considered "perverted", and even the victims are treated as "perverts". The perception of violence is absent. Society's view of same-sex sexual acts as a "special hobby" that has been singled out and separated from the rest of the world has covered up the problem and left it unaddressed. And the sense of disregard for same-sex violence suffered by men has continued to permeate society as a whole. While this case has been neglected for a long time, the homophobia of Japanese society has kept the victims in a corner. The case should not end with a superficial search for individual responsibility. Even today, victims of sexual violence are being questioned in minute detail by the press. Curiosity is mixed with unconscious gender bias and prejudice against homosexuality. This attitude in the reporting, and the perception that prevails in Japanese society in general, has as a result fueled prejudice and discrimination against homosexuality. There is nothing wrong with the victims. Is there anyone who



dares to be a victim?

On October 17, Johnny & Associates changed its name to "Smile-Up." However, the truth about the unprecedented case of sexual violence

has yet to be fully investigated. This incident was a crime before any discussion of homosexuality or heterosexuality. This incident also highlights the deep-seated social

structures in Japan that cannot be changed, as well as the problem of how gender and sexuality are perceived by the Japanese media.

*17 October 2023*

# Israel-Palestine War Roils U.S. Politics Top to Bottom

**16 October 2023, by Dan La Botz**

Democratic President Joe Biden immediately announced his support for Israel, at first without initially mentioning at all the safety of Palestinian civilians now under attack. A week after the war began, he called upon Israel not to reoccupy Gaza. dispatched two U.S. aircraft carrier strike groups, to the eastern Mediterranean near Israel. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin both visited Israel to express the U.S. commitment to back it with more military assistance. Israel receives more U.S. military aid than any other country and has received \$3 billion per year for the last ten years.

Blinken also met with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in an attempt to keep the West Bank, also occupied by Israel, from erupting. And Blinken visited the surrounding Arab nations to try to prevent them from entering the war.

While Jews make up only 2.4% of the U.S. population, they make up 18 percent of New York City's population, and while not all Jews are Zionists, many have connections to and strong feeling for Israel. So not surprisingly New York State Governor Kathy Hochul and New York City Mayor Eric Adams joined large pro-Israel rallies in the city.

Senator Bernie Sanders, himself a Jew, declared that, "The United States has rightly offered solidarity and support to Israel in responding to Hamas' attack. But we must also insist on restraint from Israeli forces attacking Gaza and work to secure UN humanitarian access. Let us not forget that half of the 2 million people in Gaza are children. Children and innocent people do not deserve to be punished for the acts of Hamas." Sanders added, "The targeting of civilians is a war crime, no matter who does it. Israel's blanket denial of food, water, and other necessities to Gaza is a serious violation of international law and will do nothing but harm innocent civilians."

Members of the so-called Squad of progressive Democrats in Congress declined to express all out support for Israel. Cori Bush called for an end to U.S. aid to Israel, while Ilhan Omar called to end "unconditional" military aid, and Rashida Tlaib, a Palestinian American, said "this heartbreaking cycle of violence will continue" unless the funds are cut off, but she did not criticize Hamas. Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, who is from New York City, was more cautious, criticizing Hamas' attacks and urging "de-escalation" by both sides.

The Republican Party, involved in a paralyzing faction fight between its far-right and conservatives, has been unable to elect a speaker of the House of Representatives, preventing the passage of legislation for aid to Israel. The party's leading presidential candidate, former president Donald Trump, has been widely criticized by rival Republican candidates, for his remarks that, "I'll never forget that Bibi Netanyahu let us down," Trump said. "That was a very terrible thing."

At the same time there have been pro-Palestinian demonstrations involving Palestinian organizations, progressive Jewish groups, and leftist groups in cities and on university campuses across the country, though the left has been divided. Some protests have appeared to support Hamas, many declined to criticize Hamas, and at some there were not only anti-Zionist but also sometimes antisemitic slogans. Rightwing politicians and media have taken advantage of the situation to tar the left as supporters of terrorism.

The left is challenged to clarify its views on national liberation movements and on questions of unconditional but critical support of such movements.

*16 October 2023*

# At stake in the Polish elections: preserving democracy

15 October 2023, by **Jan Malewski**

This mobilization came after massive feminist demonstrations for abortion rights since 2022 and following a demonstration of several hundred thousand against "high living costs, fraud and lies, in favour of democracy, free elections and the EU" at the beginning of June. The polls, which had previously predicted that the PiS would win on 15 October, are now beginning to indicate that, even with the support of the far right (the Confederation, which is also falling in the polls), it could lose its parliamentary majority after eight years in power.

## PiS's family-oriented and xenophobic policies

When it came to power in 2015, the PiS adopted a number of social measures that broke with the ultra-liberal policies of the Civic Platform (PO) governments: in 2016, a law introducing a family allowance of 500 zlotys per child (compared with a minimum wage of 2,000 zlotys), initially with wage limits for a single child, then from 2019, for each child, as well as the annulment in 2016 of the 2012 law increasing the retirement age to 67, returning to 60 for women and 65 for men. In its election campaign, PiS recalls these measures and promises to increase the family allowance to 800 zlotys (174 euros) next year, hoping to buy

popular votes once again.

But PiS governments have not only further restricted women's rights, but also taken xenophobic and homophobic measures, subjugated the judiciary to the executive, turned the public media into propaganda organs, destroyed education and developed police repression. Its election campaign claims that Donald Tusk (leader of the Civic Coalition around PO) is a puppet of "German enemies", Russia and the European Union, announces an end to the rights of exiled Ukrainians and claims that the Liberals are going to invade the country with "thousands of illegal immigrants from the Middle East and Africa". A referendum was imposed at the same time as the elections, with four questions that echo his chauvinist, anti-immigration election campaign. A challenge to the rule of law...

## A weak opposition and an invisible alternative to capitalism

Against the PiS, the democratic opposition is fielding three lists: the Civic Coalition, the Third Voice (neoliberal centrists and the agrarian PSL party) and the Left, an alliance of social liberals of Stalinist origin who have merged with the pro-LGBTQ+ and anti-clerical Wiosna (Spring) party and the anti-liberal Razem (Together) party.

Tusk is running a campaign in defence of freedom, has ruled out opponents of abortion rights as candidates and has announced that he wants to govern with the left and centre. He has even gone so far as to call for an immediate increase in family allowances (although his group did not vote for this in 2016). He no longer hesitates to mobilise the masses. But has he understood that the reactionary PiS governments are the result of the ultra-liberal policies pursued by the PO governments?

The very idea of an alternative to capitalism does not appear. And, apart from in the speeches of the Left coalition, there is no mention of the 16 million workers.

In the words of Magdalena Biejat, outgoing senator of the most left-wing party in the democratic opposition, Razem: "Do we want to accept that the government will be built by the PiS and the Confederation, who are going to organise for us a hell even worse than the one we have already endured, or do we want this government to be built with the left so that the concerns of ordinary citizens can finally be taken into account? A very limited vision of society..."

The choice on 15 October is therefore between an increasingly dictatorial state and the preservation of a liberal democracy.

13 October 2023

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# The domestic and geopolitical challenges in India - an overview

14 October 2023, by **Pierre Rousset, Sushovan Dhar**

**Pierre Rousset: The invitation to the G20 summit was made, quite unusually, in the name of Bharat and not of India. Is Bharat simply a synonym for India? Can you start by explaining how it was previously used?**

Sushovan Dhar : Let me start with a clarification: the invitations were sent out by Indian President Droupadi Murmu, who self-proclaimed "President of Bharat", for a dinner on the sidelines of the G20 summit. The issue is not unimportant. However, it has generated considerable controversy of late, and it's clear that the ruling BJP government is all too eager to exploit this issue (and the G20 summit) for electoral gain. In fact, the name has been used interchangeably, but the debate is not new. The Indian constitution states that "India, also known as Bharat, is a Union of States". What is new, in fact, is the attempt to use this to relentlessly employ hyper-nationalism. Of course, Bharat is the name of India in many Indian languages, including Hindi, but critics say its widespread use is the latest sign of a nationalist surge in the midst of a banner year for the country.

Recently, 28 political parties (mainly opposition parties) led by the Congress formed an alliance, the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), so the emphasis on rebranding the name *Bharat* may also be partly motivated by this. The BJP wants to show that it is keen to stand up for *Bharat* (the common people) as opposed to India (the settlers and modern elites).

Finally, we can say that the Modi government wanted to use *Bharat* as an electoral gimmick in the first place. It started with slogans like "Make in India" and "India Shining" to impress

the population. As a result, he would lose all the advantages that came with it. In addition, Pakistan had historical claims to the name India, and recently we heard that Pakistan might claim the name "India" if Modi's government officially derecognized it at the UN.

However, it is interesting to note that it is the first time that the opposition set the agenda to which the BJP had to react. It has been just the opposite since Modi came to power in 2014.

**In the present context, Modi's exclusive use of the term Bharat is clearly part of his policy of Hindu hyper-nationalism, Hindutva. How can we describe this hyper-nationalism, and which movements are part of Hindutva?**

Hyper-nationalist narratives of India entered mainstream discourse in 2014, when Narendra Modi, leader of the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), became Prime Minister. In the years since Modi came to power, repression of free speech and dissent has intensified.

Any criticism of the government, the armed forces, or the Hindu religion and its socio-political project, known as *Hindutva* (literally "Hinduism"), is branded as "sedition" and equated with treason for undermining India's sovereignty. The government has used the charge of sedition under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), an archaic anti-terrorism law passed in 1967. The authorities claim that protest movements and dissent against government policies are manipulated by the opposition and financed by foreign entities seeking to divide the country.

Recently, police carried out early morning raids on the offices of a news portal (*Newslick*) and the homes of nearly 50 journalists, activists, and

comedians across India under anti-terrorism laws, reinforcing fears of a crackdown on freedom of expression in the country.

Hinduism is a modern political ideology that advocates Hindu supremacy and seeks to transform India, constitutionally a secular state, into an ethno-religious nation known as *Hindu Rashtra* (Hindu nation). *Hindutva* is the official programme of the BJP, a far-right political party in India. Part of the Indian diaspora, including in the USA, also supports Hinduism. The ideology of *hindutva* is promoted by a set of vigilante, political, and cultural groups collectively known as the Sangh Parivar. The RSS, a paramilitary organisation based in India, is at the centre of the Sangh and defines the priorities and tactics for promoting *Hindutva* ideology.

**Do you use the adjective fascist to describe the RSS in particular? What is the relationship of dependence and autonomy between the RSS, the BJP and Modi? How would you describe the current Indian regime?**

Yes, of course, the RSS is a fascist organisation, even if it might diverge from the classic models of Hitler and Mussolini.

The RSS, established almost 100 years ago, has profoundly shaped Indian society and politics, as well as Modi himself. As Modi completes his second term in office, the RSS's influence is more evident than ever, alarming members of India's religious minorities, the country's left, and secularists, who accuse the RSS of chauvinism and encouraging intolerance and hatred. The organisation imposes its agenda, mainly through Modi's Bharatiya

Janata Party. The Prime Minister, the President, and most of India's cabinet are members of the RSS. The RSS helped shape Modi, who still consults it on policy issues.

The RSS graciously acknowledges that it was Modi's charisma that brought the BJP back to power in New Delhi. Modi also understands that without the RSS apparatus, his charisma alone would not have achieved such an astonishing victory. For the RSS family of organisations, the 2014 victory was unique, quite different from past experiences in 1977 and 1998. However, in the early days of the Modi government, the RSS steered clear of day-to-day politics, preferring to be seen as a moral rather than a political force. Since then, it has increased its influence on the government and its policies.

Today, the RSS's influence is perceptible in national policies affecting everything from education to trade and food. It helps shape India's public school curriculum, which in some BJP-ruled states teaches Hindu scriptures as historical facts. Through its affiliates, it has been able to defeat legislation he doesn't like. It also pressures the Indian government to be more protectionist when it comes to the entry of large multinational companies into the country.

The RSS no longer pretends to be "cultural". Today, RSS bureaucrats run India from New Delhi through the organisation's *pracharaks* (a full-time active missionary who disseminates RSS doctrine) and *swayamsevaks* (volunteers) and set the nation's governance agenda. The BJP no longer claims to be "autonomous" from the RSS. Today, RSS leaders are party leaders and ministers. The RSS's top hierarchy, its chief, the *Sarsanghchalak* (Mohan Madhukarrao Bhagwat), and his team, who claim to remain aloof from formal political power, exert enormous influence, not only moral but also political, on the Modi government. If Modi has charisma and leadership, Bhagwat has organisational know-how, movement, and authority. As both understand each other's strengths and weaknesses, they are making the governance of India a joint enterprise by sharing power.

**More cyclically, by blowing on the members of Hindutva, Modi has his sights set on next year's parliamentary elections. The BJP's electoral hegemony seems to have been challenged in recent polls, and the oppositions are looking to form a united front in an alliance that could take the name I.N.D.I.A... A poll set against a backdrop of communal and chauvinist mobilization would be more favorable to the BJP than if socio-economic issues were to take center stage...**

In fact, it can be surely said that every time there has been an election on (deflected) class issues, the BJP has lost, whereas elections centred on communal connotations and chauvinism have favoured its return to power. If we look at provincial elections, which are no less important, we get a better picture. The BJP's recent defeats in Karnataka and, before that, in Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Rajasthan, etc., are examples where the party was driven from power because it failed to polarise public opinion on issues of communalism and chauvinism. In Uttar Pradesh, however, it has continued to do so, and, as a result, this state is today the BJP's strongest bastion in the country.

Don't forget that the BJP won the 2019 parliamentary elections in the wake of the Pulwama incident, where a "terrorist attack" led to the deaths of 40 paramilitary forces. I don't want to sound like a conspiracy theorist, but this issue remains an enigma for me. Satya Pal Malik, the former governor of Jammu and Kashmir, revealed that the Pulwama terrorist attack was the result of a systemic failure involving glaring security and intelligence gaps. He asserted that the tragedy had been exploited for political ends.

The BJP occupies the moral high ground, advocating good governance and development, while Sangh's affiliates, the VHP and the Bajrang Dal, are free to propagate religious polarization. The party claims that there are no communal riots when it is in power, but communal riots in Manipur and Haryana, both ruled by the BJP, expose the vacuity of this claim.

Haryana's parliamentary elections are scheduled for October 2024. The state elects 10 MPs to the Lok Sabha. The BJP won all 10 seats in the 2019 general elections. The same results in the next general elections might not be repeated without the consolidation of Hindu votes. To achieve this, it will need to mobilise hostile Jat farmers through their Hindu identity rather than caste and economic status. Communal polarisation will help. The states where elections are held are the most threatened by communal polarization. The BJP won 24 of the 25 Lok Sabha seats in Rajasthan, 28 of the 29 seats in Madhya Pradesh, and nine of the 11 seats in Chhattisgarh. These states will hold general elections in December. The BJP would like to create momentum for the 2024 general elections by winning them all. This will require more than just good governance rhetoric. These states could also see the VHP and the Bajrang Dal [[Bajrang Dal, part of the RSS-led Sangh Parivar. This is the youth wing of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), formed during the Ram temple movement, and represents the muscle behind the aggressive Hindutva agenda, which includes issues such as cow protection, anti-conversion activities, and mobilising support against "Love Jihad".

It's the equivalent of Hitler's stormtroopers, better known as the brown shirts, coming to life again

**Can you explain India's electoral system between the federal and state levels?**

The Union Parliament consists of the President, the Lok Sabha (House of the People), and the Rajya Sabha (Council of States). The President is the Head of State and appoints the Prime Minister, who heads the government, according to the political composition of the Lok Sabha. Despite having a prime minister as its leader, the cabinet serves as the government's main decision-making body. A government can be made up of members from several parties, and even if the ruling parties are in the minority in the Lok Sabha, they can only govern if they have the confidence of the majority of Lok Sabha members. As well as being the

body that determines the composition of the government, the Lok Sabha is the main legislative body, along with the Rajya Sabha. According to the Indian Constitution, the total number of elected members of the House of the People must not exceed 550. Currently, the House consists of 543 elected members, who are chosen directly from single-member territorial parliamentary constituencies, i.e., each constituency chooses one representative for the House. Thus, the whole country is divided into 543 territorial parliamentary constituencies.

The Constitution also provides for the appointment, by the President, of two members from the Anglo-Indian community if the latter is not adequately represented in the House of the People. Elections to the Lok Sabha are based on a first-past-the-post system. The country is divided into distinct geographical areas, called constituencies, and voters can each cast their vote for one candidate, with the winner being the one who obtains the highest number of votes. Members of the Rajya Sabha are elected indirectly, rather than by the citizenry at large, by the Vidhan Sabha of each state under the single transferrable vote system. Unlike most federal systems, the number of members elected by each state is roughly proportional to its population. At present, the Rajya Sabha has 233 members elected by the Vidhan Sabhas (provincial legislatures), plus twelve members appointed by the President as representatives of the humanities, sciences, arts, and social services. Members of the Rajya Sabha serve a six-year term, and elections are staggered, with one-third of the assembly elected every two years.

At the provincial level, the Vidhan Sabhas (legislative assemblies) are directly elected bodies responsible for the administration of government in India's 25 states. In five states, there is a bicameral organisation of legislative assemblies, with an upper and a lower house: Vidhan Parishad (Legislative Council) and Vidhan Sabha (Legislative Assembly). Elections to the Vidhan Sabha are held in the same way as elections to the Lok Sabha, with the States and Union Territories divided into single-member

constituencies.

States and Union Territories are divided into single-member constituencies, and the first-past-the-post electoral system is used.

The first citizen of India and the leader of the Indian state is the president. Article 52 of the Indian Constitution stipulates that there shall be a President of India. The President of India is elected indirectly by a single transfer system. The President is elected by an electoral college made up of elected representatives of the government, who form the government after being elected to the state assembly and in national elections. Appointed members of both houses and state legislatures are not eligible to vote in the presidential election. Consequently, the electoral college for the presidential election is made up of (a) the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha and (b) the state legislative assemblies.

The size of the assemblies varies according to the population. The largest Vidhan Sabha is that of Uttar Pradesh, with 425 members; the smallest is that of Pondicherry, with 30 members.

The Vidhan Parishads are made up of representatives chosen by members of the Vidhan Sabhas and local authorities, as well as by graduates and teachers from the state where the Parishads are located. The state governor also appoints certain members to represent the arts, sciences, literature, social services, and cooperative movements. Elections to these Parishads are held under the proportional representation system by means of a single transferrable vote.

Based on the principle of universal adult suffrage, any citizen over the age of 18 may vote in Lok Sabha or Vidhan Sabha elections (prior to 1989, the age limit was 21). The right to vote is independent of caste, creed, religion, or gender. People considered insane and those convicted of certain criminal offences are not allowed to vote.

**Are there any past, present or future constitutional issues in what is still often referred to**

**(incorrectly) as the world's largest democracy?**

The Indian Constitution has had several shortcomings since its inception. The winner-take-all electoral system established by the Indian Constitution on the Westminster model has been one of the electoral system's biggest shortcomings. Previously, it had continued to give the Congress huge parliamentary majorities even as its share of the popular vote began to dwindle. The BJP took advantage of this, and since 2014, Modi and his entourage have had a disproportionate presence in Parliament in relation to their share of the electoral vote.

The BJP wants to empty the Indian Constitution of the minimal progressive values it contains. It has succeeded in overturning the federal architecture envisaged by the Constitution. It has done this by imposing a universal GST (General Sales Tax) across the country, leaving the states without the power to decide which tax rates to impose on which products (with the exception of alcohol and petroleum products), a right conferred on them by the Indian Constitution.

Secondly, the Modi-led central government has repeatedly encroached on the rights of states, as enshrined in the Constitution. The most blatant examples are our labour codes and the three agriculture laws passed by Parliament, although the farm laws were later repealed under popular pressure. The labour codes encompass 29 existing labour laws. Labour is on the "concurrent" list, meaning that it can be legislated both by the Centre and by the States. But the Modi government adopted the codes because it was in a hurry to please the corporate sector by introducing hiring and firing policies, fixed-term employment, an increase in working hours, and a reduction in minimum wage norms. It then pressured state governments to develop rules under these codes so that they could be implemented. The agricultural laws also dealt with farming, which falls under the state list. They were repealed earlier this year under immense pressure from the farmers' movement.



**Freezing or reducing welfare funds:** Time and again during Modi's reign, state governments have had to beg and demand the release of central funds for this or that program. The most blatant example is the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), for which central funds are still insufficient, with states accumulating huge debts. The Modi government has also cut funds for a number of central programmes, including education, SC and ST scholarships, child and maternal nutrition, minority development programmes, and others. This not only jeopardised welfare programmes and deprived citizens of much-needed benefits but also put a strain on state governments as they had to continue spending from their depleted resources. The policy of cutting social funds—an integral part of the neoliberal dogma to which Modi and the BJP subscribe—has worsened the fiscal position of the states and made them weaker and more dependent on the central government.

**Repeal Article 370:** This is the greatest betrayal of the Constitution and the greatest sign of the Modi government's subservience to the RSS. In a legal sleight of hand, the government has repealed Article 370 of the Constitution, thus ending the special status granted to Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), the Indian-administered region of Kashmir, when it joined India after independence. The Modi government has also divided the state into two Union Territories, headed by the Centre. It is now trying to fix Assembly seats through delimitation to secure the prospects of its own victory in the impending elections. The Kashmir Valley, meanwhile, has been turned into a military camp; the Internet has been cut off for over a year and a half, and thousands of people have been imprisoned. The ludicrous claim that this movement was "integrating J&K with India" has proved hollow, as the killings continue and the religious divide continues to be stoked.

Moreover, during the state of emergency, Indira Gandhi's government, through the 42nd Constitutional Amendment, inserted the words "socialist" and "secular" in the preamble to make India a

"sovereign secular socialist democratic republic". Although there have already been several attacks on the country's secular ethos, the Modi government now intends to eradicate all references to the notions of secularism and "socialism".

There are many other examples of flagrant violations of the Constitution and democratic values in the country. The systematic attack on and weakening of educational and other institutions, the attempt to rewrite history, etc., are just a few examples. Official announcements have been peppered with proclamations that education must be rooted in "culture" and "traditions", and that India was a "knowledge superpower" in the past, before Muslim invasions and British colonialism.

India was proud of its sacred constitutional precepts. All the more so as other countries in the region have undergone a precipitous shift to prioritise ethnicity or religion and define belonging and nationhood in the narrowest possible sense: Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, and Myanmar. But the differences between these countries and India are now fading fast, and not just because of hotheads or crowds taking to the streets. The official establishment, with its silence, declarations, and formalisation of new laws and norms, is indistinguishable from the sentiments that guide the crowds. The actions of the rioters, as well as those of the Union and state governments, mark a clear retreat from the democracy that India claims for itself.

**China was absent from the G20. Why do you think that is? Border conflicts and the new maps of disputed border zones published in Beijing? Economic competition between the two powers?**

When the world's most powerful leaders gathered in New Delhi last month, it was strange to see that China's Xi Jinping wasn't among them, having never missed a G20 summit since coming to power in 2012. As is often the case with Beijing's opaque decision-making, no explanation was given for Xi Jinping's apparent decision not to attend a major global gathering to which China has given

high priority in the past.

However, in the context of the rivalry between China and the USA, analysts believe that Mr. Xi's absence from the G20 could also be a sign of his disillusionment with the global governance system and existing structures, which he sees as too dominated by American influence.

There's an element of deliberate snub to India here, but it could also be a statement that Xi Jinping believes there are different important governance structures and that the G20 may not be one of them. Beijing has bristled at New Delhi's growing ties with Washington, particularly its involvement in the Quadrilateral (Quad), a US-led collective security group decried by Beijing as an "Indo-Pacific NATO". China sees India in the anti-Chinese camp and therefore has no wish to add value to a major international summit organised by India.

**To what extent can India offer an alternative for capital wanting to reduce its dependence on China? In comparison with other countries, such as Vietnam? We're talking about economic ecosystems that have consolidated China's drawing power, and which are not easy to replicate...**

A recent report by the Rhodium Group, a neoliberal research group, points out that American and European companies are shifting their investments from China to other developing markets, with Mexico, Vietnam, Malaysia, Mexico, and India receiving the great majority of this redirected foreign investment. These companies are turning their backs on the world's second-largest economy, even as its share of global growth continues to rise. The value of announced US and European investment in India has soared by some \$65 billion, or 400%, between 2021 and 2022, according to Wednesday's report, while investment in China fell to less than \$20 billion last year after peaking at \$120 billion in 2018.

Official Indian circles and the media have been euphoric about these recent developments. At a time when the

Indian economy is beset by many uncertainties, not least the growing crisis in job creation, news of a transfer of investment from China to India will be a boost for the Modi government. Economists, analysts, and pundits believe that more and more jobseekers, especially young people, are looking for low-paying casual jobs or falling back on unreliable self-employment, even though the Indian economy as a whole is expected to grow by 6.5% in the fiscal year ending March 2024, which is a world record.

Urban unemployment in India soared during the COVID-19 pandemic, peaking at 20.9% in the April-June 2020 quarter as wages plummeted. Although the unemployment rate has fallen since then, there are fewer full-time jobs available. It's worth noting that in 2022/23, the Indian economy grew by a stronger-than-expected 7.2%, boosted by government capital investment. But private consumption, which accounts for 60% of Indian GDP, grew by only 2-3% in the second half of the year as pent-up spending and base effects faded.

Despite a large and steadily growing market, an abundant supply of cheap labour, and decent economic growth, India is struggling to attract enough foreign capital to raise overall investment and growth rates and take advantage of the current favourable geopolitical situation.

Inward foreign direct investment (FDI), including reinvested earnings and share purchases, fell by 16.3% to \$71 billion in the fiscal year to March 31. FDI *nett* fell even more sharply, dropping 27% to \$28 billion, against a backdrop of increased profit repatriation.

Surprisingly, this comes at a time when countries and companies are keen to reduce their exposure to China and seem to view India favourably for its potential to become the world's next factory.

Supporters of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government claim that the current decline is a temporary phenomenon and that the situation should soon improve. However, it's no secret that Vietnam has so far been a

far greater beneficiary of investment from companies moving towards a "China plus one" supply chain.

Behind the key figures, we can see that FDI into India from Asian countries such as Singapore, Japan, and the United Arab Emirates actually increased substantially last year. It is flows from more traditional FDI sources, such as the USA, Mauritius, the Netherlands, the Cayman Islands, and Germany, that have declined.

Reports also indicate that Chinese factories are moving, but not to India or Mexico. Companies looking for alternatives to China are discovering that the country's vast interior still offers great advantages.

**In the absence of Moscow and Beijing, Modi has done well to present himself as the spokesman for the South, or the non-aligned as some call it, a formula with progressive historical connotations. But the global context and political regimes have changed a lot since the 50s and 60s. What do you think?**

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi claims that his country is "becoming the voice of the South". In times of polarisation, rising India has acted aggressively to defend developing countries, seeking compromise and vowing to make their voices heard in America.

The Modi government claims that, with the help of other developing nations, India persuaded the US and Europe to soften a statement on the Russian invasion of Ukraine so that the forum could focus on the concerns of the poorest countries, including global debt and climate finance. India also presided over the admission of the African Union to the G20, putting it on an equal footing with the European Union.

There's no denying that, at a time when a kind of new Cold War between the USA and China seems to be framing all global discussions, India's discourse has a certain appeal. Neither the United States nor China are particularly popular with developing countries. The United States is criticised for focusing more

on military power than on economic assistance. China's centrepiece—its infrastructure initiative, "Belt and Road"—has provoked negative reactions, as Beijing has opposed the renegotiation of a crushing debt that has left many countries facing the risk of default.

The term "non-aligned" is increasingly used to describe this new trend in international politics. The Non-Aligned Conference in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, in 1961 is where the word first emerged, which built on the foundations laid at the Asia-Africa Conference held in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955. At the time, non-alignment concerned countries led by movements rooted in the profoundly anti-colonial project of the Third World, seeking to establish the sovereignty of new states and the dignity of their peoples. This moment of non-alignment was killed off by the debt crisis of the 1980s, which began with Mexico's default in 1982. What we have today is not a return to the old non-alignment, but the emergence of a new political atmosphere and a new political constellation that is precisely seeking its place in the imperialist ladder.

**Solidarity with peoples must not be identified with alignment with states... It's worth remembering this at a time when the BRICS are expanding.**

As we know, "BRICS anti-imperialism" is not necessarily anti-capitalism. In other words, Putin, Modi, Ramaphosa, Xi Jinping, and others may say certain things against the US, but that doesn't mean their domestic policies favour the poor or the working class. Unfortunately, many progressives are caught up in the anti-American rhetoric of the BRICS, and they see a strong virtue in the Sino-Russian bulwark against the world's greatest imperialist hegemon, the United States. I think they are misled by the apparent radical anti-imperialist rhetoric designed to conceal a deep conservatism and attacks on their own working-class constituents.

It is in this context that we must insist on the solidarity of peoples, or what in the good old days was called proletarian internationalism. The unity of peoples the world over takes into

account the social nature of states and, as such, runs counter to the interests of states that seek to perpetuate the capitalist order.

**India is part of variable-geometry alliances, like the Quad... Joe Biden seems to have realized the futility of hoping to win New Delhi over to an exclusive alliance. Yet he is well aware of the extent to which this country contributes to bolstering Russia's oil revenues, which are vital to support its war effort in Ukraine. Long gone are the days when Modi was persona non grata in the United States after the massacre of Muslims in Gujarat!**

Modi has gone from being *persona non grata*, unwelcome on American soil, to a celebrity guest at the White House summit. For almost ten years, the United States refused to issue a visa to Modi, who was accused of taking part in the religious riots that killed most of the Muslims in the Indian state of Gujarat in 2002. Against this backdrop, Modi's arrival in New York after becoming India's Prime Minister had the air of a victory lap.

Modi's celebration in Washington can be seen as the culmination of the growing closeness between India and the United States, which began after the end of the Cold War. Today, India is increasingly perceived in the West as a counterweight to China's power ambitions, which has made the country more attractive to its European and American partners. India is also one of the few countries to navigate between China and Russia, on the one hand, and the West and its allies, on the other. It is a member of the China-led Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the BRICS group of emerging countries, as well as being part of the Quadrilateral, the informal anti-China alliance led by the USA.

India has established itself as a major interlocutor with the world's major

powers. However, New Delhi's rise to power has more to do with recent geopolitical developments than with the Indian government's diplomatic dexterity. As it happens, Narendra Modi's rise to power in India coincided with major geopolitical changes in the world, which is now deeply polarized. The seeds of these divisions had already been sown with the war in Crimea, but they have been exacerbated in recent months, particularly since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The years marked by COVID-19, by worsening the humanitarian and economic situation, deepened the divisions, which exploded in the post-COVID period with the outbreak of war in Ukraine.

**To conclude, where does the political and social left stand in India? How are its various components trying to cope with a very difficult situation, when national security laws allow repression to strike indiscriminately?**

Unfortunately, the Left in India is at its nadir. I'm talking about the political and social left. India's once-mighty left-wing movements are facing the greatest challenge in their history as Narendra Modi's ultranationalist party consolidates its grip on power. This moment of crisis calls for Indian socialists to completely rethink their theory and strategy.

The Indian Left is at its lowest ebb, probably at the worst moment in its history. The mainstream of the parliamentary left, represented by the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist), has no vision of anti-capitalist struggle and is losing its electoral base. Long reduced to an electoral force with a dwindling cadre base that clings to old Stalinist truths when they think of Marxism, their cadres, with a few exceptions in a few places, have lost the capacity and interest to pursue the politics of popular mobilisation around genuine and justified grievances. The

crisis facing these parties is far worse than that facing Congress. In the 2019 assembly elections, these two parties collectively won just one seat in the other supposedly leftist bastion, Kerala, and four seats in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, thanks solely to their pre-poll alliance with the far-left Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), or Dravidian Progressive Conference.

The Maoist organisations are largely confined to the forests of central India, isolated by their political sectarianism. Among the various Maoist groups that have evolved towards parliamentary politics, the CPIML (Liberation) is the most important force, present throughout the country. Unfortunately, the radicalism of the organisation, which had been a point of attraction in the early 1990s, is limited to university campuses such as Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. The party's general orientation, while clinging to a certain variant of Stalinism, is geared towards parliamentarianism.

It is seeking to fill the vacuum created by the withdrawal of the main communist parties through the electoral process. It is currently desperate to integrate itself into the anti-BJP electoral alliance in India and possibly win a few seats.

The Left must provide a counternarrative to the two major nationalist narratives, that of the Congress and that of the BJP, in an era of duelling hyper-nationalism.

This alternative must be secular and democratic. Democratic in the sense that the people must have a choice as to whether or not to embrace the nation.

The fight against Hindu hegemony cannot be separated from the counter-transformative project of building democratic socialism, either.

12 October 2023

Source: [ESSF.J](#)

# Mobilization against the high cost of living and corruption in Ghana

13 October 2023, by **Paul Martial**

Nana Akufo-Addo was elected in 2017 on the promise of a “Ghana Beyond Aid”, expressing the desire for the country to no longer be dependent on international financial institutions and development aid from rich countries.

## Economic crisis

For the President of this English-speaking state in West Africa, this in no way meant committing to an alternative economic path.

This paradigm shift meant changing the country's sources of funding, giving priority to borrowing on the international markets and putting an end to the succession of IMF plans, some fifteen since independence. The only result of this policy has been an increase in interest rates to around 8%. As a result, Ghana devotes half of its revenue to repaying its debt, which stands at around 63 billion dollars.

The main source of wealth is limited to the export of raw materials such as oil, gold and cocoa, without any processing policy. In the case of

cocoa, for example, Ghana is not integrated into the value chain to increase its resources.

## Corruption

In addition to Nana Akufo-Addo's liberal policies, the country is plagued by corruption. Be it in the oil sector, with the trial that has opened against Technip FMC, or the resignation at the beginning of 2020 of the anti-corruption prosecutor who denounced the interference of the presidency in judicial affairs. A presidency that also had to part company with its Secretary of State for Finance, caught red-handed asking for bribes, and its Minister for Sanitation and Water, who had more than a million dollars at home.

## Mobilization

The drop in purchasing power is hitting Ghanaians hard, including those in the middle classes. Shopkeepers have lowered their

curtains several times in protest at inflation, which stands at almost 37%. In the absence of social measures, protests against the high cost of living and corruption are a regular feature of life in the country and have rapidly taken on a political dimension. Civil society activists have set up “#AriseGhana”, which organises street demonstrations. Like “Y'en a marre” in Senegal or “Balai Citoyen” in Burkina Faso, a youth organisation has also been set up, “#FixtheCountry”.

The most popular slogan is undoubtedly “#OccupyJulorbiHouse”, a play on the words “Jubilee House”, which refers to the presidential palace, and “Julorbi”, which in Ga means “Thieves”.

The government's only response to these protests has been disproportionate police repression, to use Amnesty International's expression. In this respect, Ghana is far from being an exception.

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

# A Surprise Attack-but Nothing Surprising About It

12 October 2023, by **Dan La Botz**

Hamas's attack, launching missiles targeting civilian areas, murdering and kidnapping civilians, men, women and children, is a horrifying violation of international humanitarian law. But Israel's massive bombing of Gaza—claiming to focus on military

targets but hitting residential buildings, hospitals, and mosques—is just as terrible. Israel's government says it will impose a complete blockade of Gaza and the two million people who live there, an unconscionable act. Its minister of

defense has called Palestinians “human animals”—genocidal language—and announced a plan to carry the war into Gaza, suggesting it will be devastated, which can only be catastrophic.

Although Hamas's guerrilla attack on Israel took everyone by surprise, there is nothing really surprising about it. Since before the founding of Israel, Zionists have attacked Palestinians, taking their land and driving many of them from their homes and their country. Since 1948, Israel has continued the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, seized land and water, and established an apartheid state that makes Arabs within Israel's borders second-class citizens.

Gaza is a territory of about two million people, one of the most densely populated areas on the planet. With no control over its borders, it has been called the world's largest prison. It is an apt description. The Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem—which together make up the State of Palestine—have been under Israeli military occupation since 1967. Though Israel supposedly "disengaged" from Gaza in 2005, the United Nations and human rights groups still consider Israel an occupying power responsible for the well-being of the population and demand that the occupation be

brought to an end. The Israeli occupation has led to repeated military conflicts—and now this latest violent attack.

I heard an activist compare the Hamas attack to the Attica rebellion. It is not a bad comparison. If you put prisoners into a cage and torture them, they will rebel.

Although the left's sympathies have been and will quite rightly remain with the Palestinian people, one can have no sympathy with Hamas. Hamas is a right-wing, religious fundamentalist, nationalist organization, in fact not so different in those respects from the current government of Israel. Hamas's politics bring nothing good to the Palestinian people or to the region. Resistance to oppression by legitimate means is of course justified. But the attack just launched on Israel involved horrifying war crimes. In addition, it was a strategic failure, since as could have been foreseen, it will almost surely lead to massive and equally inhumane Israeli slaughter of Palestinian civilians, and could also

set off a wider war in the Middle East. For decades those on the democratic left have stood for either a one- or a two-state solution based on a democratic secular government (or governments) in Israel/Palestine, in which all people would have equal rights. Although either vision for the region seems incredibly utopian at the moment, only a movement working for a secular, democratic state can provide a path forward. Meanwhile, the left should continue to oppose the Israeli government and to demand that the U.S. government stop providing it with billions for arms.

The left must stand with Palestine. But that does not mean standing with Hamas.

October 10, 2023

Source [Foreign Policy in Focus](#).



# Nagorno-Karabakh condemned to famine in the indifference of the international community

11 October 2023, by **Élodie Gavrilof**

Cut off from the rest of the world, and especially from Armenia, the inhabitants, ethnic Armenians, see the spectre of a disastrous famine looming, imposed by the Azerbaijani authorities, who wish to force them into exodus.

Neither Russia, although it is supposed to be close to Armenia, and whose peacekeeping forces are deployed in the region, nor Western countries are intervening to prevent the looming humanitarian catastrophe. How can we explain this?

**Decades of conflict, sometimes violent, sometimes “frozen”**



This map shows the distribution of land following the peace agreement in 2020. The ethnic Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh are now cut off from Armenia, with the areas



separating the two territories having been taken over by Azerbaijan

Nagorno-Karabakh is a region that has been disputed between Armenia and Azerbaijan since the fall of the Soviet Union. In the 1920s, this area, populated by more than 90 per cent Armenians, was annexed to the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR). In 1991, after the fall of the USSR, Nagorno-Karabakh proclaimed its independence. Baku sent in the army. Supported by Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh (called Artsakh by the Armenians) ended up, in 1994, winning this war with a very heavy toll (several tens of thousands of deaths). On this occasion, Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh conquered lands from Azerbaijan over which they decided to retain control, in order to establish a sanitary cordon around Nagorno-Karabakh and to be directly linked to each other.

In the nearly thirty years since, Armenia, which itself has never recognized the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh, did not sign any peace treaty with Azerbaijan. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan prepared its revenge, [keeping its refugees in temporary accommodation](#) despite the wealth generated by hydrocarbon exports (unlike Armenia, Azerbaijan has significant oil and gas reserves).

In 2018, a velvet revolution took place in Armenia. It brought to power the journalist and until then political oppositionist Nikol Pashinian, which raised hopes, now almost evaporated, of democratization and the fight against corruption. Vladimir Putin saw a parallel with the Orange Revolution (2004) and the Revolution of Dignity (2013-2014) in Ukraine, as well as with the Rose Revolution in Georgia (2003). This is why he did not intervene in September 2020 when, while the borders were closed and the world's eyes were glued to the Covid-19 statistics, Azerbaijan violently attacked Nagorno-Karabakh.

After forty-four days, Armenia and Artsakh, poorly prepared, had to admit defeat. The protocols of November 9, 2020 provided for the return of the districts of Kelbajar, Aghdam and Lachin to Azerbaijan, and the installation of a Russian peacekeeping

force on the Lachin corridor, in order to ensure security along this essential route for the transit of goods and people between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

## The impact of the war in Ukraine

The war in Ukraine has shaken up the relationship of forces in the region. The sanctions adopted against Russia have officially put a stop to Russian hydrocarbon exports to Europe. But a few days before the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Ilham Aliyev, the [irremovable and very authoritarian president of Azerbaijan](#), who succeeded his father Heydar Aliyev in 2003 Aliyev after his death, went to Moscow, where he met Vladimir Putin. During these discussions, Azerbaijan's capacity to increase its gas exports to Europe was discussed.

In November 2022, Azerbaijan concluded an agreement with Russia: part of Russian gas is exported to Azerbaijan, which is then re-exported to Europe. The EU buys gas from Baku, turning a blind eye to its real origin.

[Ursula von der Leyen's declarations](#) according to which the EU has succeeded in putting an end to its energy dependence on Russia are therefore just smoke and mirrors, and intended to maintain an acceptable diplomatic posture as part of the European response to the invasion of Ukraine. The consequences of this posture are, however, extremely serious for Armenians.

By concluding its gas agreement with Azerbaijan, Europe has strengthened the position of a dictatorship all of whose indicators are even more alarming than those of Russia, in its region and on the international scene. Convinced that no one would come to the aid of the Armenians anymore, and finding themselves in a position of strength against Russia, the Azerbaijani authorities blocked the Lachin corridor from December 12, 2022.

At first, the country sent fake eco-activists, who blocked the corridor

under so-called environmental pretexts. This operation was easy to see through: on the one hand, Ilham Aliyev himself encouraged the demonstrators, and on the other hand, the [real Azerbaijani eco-activists were arrested in the context of other demonstrations](#). On April 23, 2023, under the eyes of Russian peacekeepers, and despite the 2020 agreement, Azerbaijan set up a checkpoint in Lachin. Nothing and no one was able to enter or leave without the agreement of the Azerbaijani authorities.

## The strangulation of Nagorno-Karabakh

From December 2022, it was the [ICRC which took over which took over](#) transporting patients from Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. To do this, it always came to an agreement with the local Azerbaijani authorities. However, on July 29, 2023, and despite the prior agreement of these authorities, the Azerbaijanis [stopped the convoy carrying Vagif Khachatryan to Yerevan for urgent care](#). He was [accused of participating in the Meshali massacre on December 22, 1991](#), when Armenian soldiers killed twenty-two Azerbaijani villagers. However, the [investigations carried out in particular by the Armenian rights defender](#) showed that the person who participated in these crimes was a homonym, because the arrested man had only enlisted in the army the following year.

Furthermore, all Armenians took part in the conflict at one time or another. If participating in one of the wars becomes a crime, the entire population is threatened with arrest. [Armenophobia is systemic in Azerbaijan](#), especially since the end of the USSR. In school textbooks, [Armenians are depicted as bloodthirsty barbarians](#). Official Azerbaijani theses present the Armenians of Karabakh as intruders having settled by force on lands stolen from the Azerbaijanis. They are also doing the same thing with the Republic of Armenia, thus showing that the project was never to recover

Nagorno-Karabakh but to complete the land connection between Azerbaijan and Turkey. Any researcher in the human sciences knows, however, that demography is plural within the confines of empires like the Caucasus.

Furthermore, if all war crimes must be condemned, then in order to build peace, war crimes committed by Azerbaijan should also be prosecuted. However, this is not the attitude of Baku, on the contrary, as shown in particular by the Ramil Safarov case. In 2004, during a NATO-sponsored exercise in Hungary, this Azerbaijani soldier murdered Armenian soldier Gurgen Margarian in his sleep with an axe. Sentenced to life in prison in 2006, he was extradited in 2012 to Azerbaijan, where he was welcomed as a hero and pardoned by Ilham Aliiev himself. The invocation of war crimes – exclusively Armenian – is used by the authorities in Baku to justify their actions targeting the Armenian populations of Nagorno-Karabakh.

On June 15, 2023, Azerbaijan finally [banned the ICRC from passing through the Lachine corridor](#),

accusing its employees of trafficking, including cell phones and cigarettes. While no food has been able to be transported there since December 2022, at the end of July 2023, a convoy of 19 trucks transporting 400 tonnes of food aid was [blocked in Kornidzor, the last village before the border](#).

Flour stocks are gradually dwindling, and residents are now relying on a less rich mixture to make some bread. On Facebook groups, residents organize themselves and exchange their last reserves for a little formula milk, or a few chocolates for the children. They now queue all night in the hope of getting a loaf of bread. Transport is at a standstill due to lack of fuel. A 40-year-old man [died of starvation on August 15](#).

On August 16, 2023, Armenian authorities called on the UN Security Council to end the blockade. Demonstrations regularly take place in Yerevan, in front of the UN headquarters, but also in other cities around the world, such as Paris, Sydney or Los Angeles. The situation there is deteriorating day by day, and

is undermining any hope of peace in the region; This is also what [a feminist collective for peace in Azerbaijan](#) denounces.

Peace cannot be achieved under these conditions, but that is not what the Azerbaijani authorities are seeking. Their policy is intended to force Armenians in the region to leave or die, and that is why on August 18, the Lemkin Institute for the Prevention of Genocide published [an alert on the dramatic situation in Nagorno-Karabakh](#).

The situation in Nagorno-Karabakh has provoked only timid reactions on the international scene, and many states are calling on both parties to reopen traffic in both directions. At the UN, only France and Malta have denounced Azerbaijan's attitude. In Europe, no one, apart from a few Armenian activists, denounces the gas agreement. To end the blockade, a much stronger response is needed in the face of Azerbaijan's attitude.

*This article was first published on August 28, 2023 in [The Conversation](#). It was updated on September 22.*

## Fruitless "joint struggle" between nuclear states

10 October 2023, by **Karen Yamanaka**

However, it is clear that both countries' respective national interests were pursued at the meeting. Kim Jong-un was welcomed by Putin during his visit to Russia, showing Putin's extreme concern about the current situation in Russia caused by his invasion of Ukraine on 24 February last year. Putin has recently taken hostile military actions against neighbouring countries in the Far East and has strengthened military ties with North Korea. China, on the other hand, has watched the recent Russian-North Korean rapprochement with mixed feelings.

### Reversal of position from previous Putin-Kim meeting

It was the Kim Jong-un's second summit with Putin, after the pair met in 2019. The meeting, the first in four years, highlighted the solidarity between the two countries against "imperialist military intimidation". It shows that both countries' perceptions of the US are different from those of 2019. Putin's title has been upgraded

from "Your Excellency" to "Comrade". It shows North Korea's assessment that Russia is more united in its "anti-imperialism" than China. It was Russia, not North Korea, that proposed the meeting. Unlike the 2019 meeting, the relationship between the two countries was reversed due to the pressing issue of securing artillery shells on the Russian side. Putin, who has a habit of being late, showed an unusual attitude by arriving at the meeting place 30 minutes early to wait for Kim Jong-un. After his meeting with Putin, Kim Jong-un travelled to Vladivostok. He then returned home without any prior

plans, on an itinerary marked by generous treatment from Russia, including an introduction to Russian military intelligence.

## **Putin's impatience and fear of neighbouring countries**

Putin's impatience is reflected in his unusual treatment of Kim Jong-un. The Russian army is currently facing an uphill battle in the war in Ukraine with the Ukrainian counteroffensive to retake territory. In addition, the large-scale military exercises that have been held every year in different regions of Russia have been cancelled this year. [11] Isolated by the war in Ukraine, Putin's impatience also became a fear of Russia's neighbouring countries. Putin's impatience was clearly shown at the commemoration of the end of the Second World War in Sakhalin, in the Russian Far East, which was held for the first time on September 3 this year. A small military parade was held during the first commemorative ceremony attended by former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. But it was a small march, not far from the military parade in Moscow. This is the reality of the Russian army in Sakhalin. These situations have also led to Russia's hostile military actions against neighbouring countries in the Far East, which have led it to strengthen military ties with North Korea.

## **China's position on the situation in Ukraine**

The Putin-Kim meeting also highlighted China's complex and delicate political position. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning was asked about China's position on the Putin-Kim meeting at a regular press briefing on September 12, just before the meeting. Mao avoided directly answering the question. The fact that the Chinese Foreign Ministry

spokesperson declined to give an assessment of the Putin-Kim meeting indicates that China's position on Kim Jong-un's visit to Russia is complex and delicate. On September 13, the day after the regular press briefing, the China Central Television (CCTV) reported on the Putin-Kim meeting. The CCTV assessed the meeting as a strengthening of Russian-North Korean military power and a more hard-line stance against the US. They said that the tough US approach to North Korea had brought Russia and North Korea closer together. North Korea has expressed support for the Russian invasion of Ukraine. China, on the other hand, has adopted a neutral stance and has not officially announced any arms assistance to Russia. Russia and North Korea have clearly defined the current situation as the "New Cold War" and have taken a confrontational stance towards the US. But China is avoiding an all-out confrontation with the US.

## **North Korea's and Russia's respective intentions**

At the Putin-Kim meeting, North Korea sought to obtain maximum support from Russia in exchange for military supplies and other assistance to the extent that it would not affect its own defence. Russian support means the country's accumulated expertise in the mass production, maintenance and operation of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles in North Korea. North Korea also needs Russian technology for strategic weapons and satellite launches. But the mass production, maintenance and operation of weapons requires an economic base. The North Korean regime is facing a severely deteriorated economic situation due to international sanctions, floods, and the Covid-19 pandemic. [13], drawing international condemnation. In the same year, the international community imposed tough sanctions on North Korea.

At the time, North Korea accused China and Russia, which supported the sanctions, of being "the countries that followed the US". [15] These gifts

symbolize the nature of the meeting. Both countries are seeking to deepen (albeit limited) military cooperation. In addition, Russia will also help North Korea in the space sector, including launching satellites. North Korea launched two ballistic missiles into the Sea of Japan on 13 September, the day Putin and Kim Jong-un met at the Russian launch base at the Vostotchny cosmodrome.

This is the first time North Korea has launched ballistic missiles when its leader is outside country. Kim Jong-un's visit to Russia was highly performance-oriented. Launching ballistic missiles from his own country on the day of the meeting is believed to have been intended to give the summit a high profile. North Korea's nuclear and missile technology has already reached a significant level with the visits of Russian technicians to the country. But to take advantage of this, they need to significantly strengthen their own economy. North Korea's most urgent task is probably to improve its food situation rather than to build up its military force. There was no agreed document and no joint press conference to mark the meeting. The purpose seems to be to increase the spillover effects of the summit by concealing what happened in the meeting between the two leaders. But the main reason would have been to evade UN sanctions resulting from the documentation of military cooperation agreements. In conclusion, the Putin-Kim meeting did not lead to a fundamental change in the framework of military cooperation between Russia and North Korea. Russia and North Korea have no common values. The "joint struggle" between the two countries, which is based solely on the pursuit of mutual interests, is futile. Kim Jong-un's visit to Russia was made at the request of Putin. However, his decision to visit Russia under these circumstances shows that he is not a "strategic leader".

Meanwhile, the situation in North-East Asia is becoming increasingly tense. Ten days after the Putin-Kim meeting, South Korean President Yoon Seok-yeol held the first major military parade in a decade amid rising tensions. He said that the use of nuclear weapons would end the North Korean regime. In

response to Yun Seok-yeol's hard-line policy, North Korea enshrined the policy of strengthening its nuclear forces in the constitution at a key parliamentary session on September

26-27. The invasion of Ukraine decided by Putin is not simply a regional conflict. Russia has set in motion a process that could lead to higher levels of imperialist interventionism and possibly a Third

World War between nuclear-armed powers. [<https://truthout.org/articles/debt-abolition-activists-gear-up-for-countersummit-as-world-bank-and-imf-meet/>].

# Andorran women take to the streets to demand that abortion is no longer a crime

7 October 2023, by **Collective**

This small state, a "parliamentary theocracy" wedged between France and Spain, is governed by medieval legislation. Two co-princes decide on women's right to control their own bodies: the Bishop of Urgell, a traditionalist opposed to abortion, and... the President of the French Republic.

## Solidarity with Vanessa Mendoza Cortés

Vanessa Mendoza Cortés, president of Stop Violències, has been taken to court by the Andorran president, Xavier Espot Zamora, for "defamation". In 2019, during a session of the UN Committee against Discrimination, she denounced the ban on abortion in her country! Thanks to an international solidarity campaign, the threat of a prison sentence has been lifted, but she faces a €30,000 fine.

To show our solidarity with Vanessa, a combative and colourful demonstration marched through the city, where slogans in several languages rang out for two hours:

"Long live the feminist struggle", "If the Pope were a woman, abortion would be legalized", "Church, keep your hands off our ovaries", "Separation of Church and State", "Macron and Espot resign", and so on.

Demonstrating alongside the Andorran women were feminists from Ireland, South Catalonia and Latin America, as well as representatives of neighbouring French trade unions (FSU, Solidaires and CGT from Haute-Garonne and Pyrénées-Orientales), the Collectif pour les droits des femmes 66 and the NPA, the only political party present. As an expression of the reactionary pressure in this principality, at the end of the demonstration and out of sight, several women who had been unable to take part for fear of losing their jobs or residence permits came to express their solidarity with the Stop Violències struggle.

## Against the yoke of theocratic and reactionary regimes

The demonstration ended under a blazing sun, with several delegations taking the floor to demand that Vanessa's prosecution be dropped and that Andorran women and all those under the yoke of theocratic and reactionary regimes be granted the right to abortion. And to denounce the collusion between the Espot government, the Andorran Church and French presidents who have nothing but contempt for women's right to decide and indifference for those who die because they were unable to make the choice to have an abortion.

The [women's anthem](#) was sung in French, Spanish and Catalan. And to round off this magnificent initiative of internationalist and feminist solidarity, which strengthened the determination of our Andorran comrades in their fight, we joined together in a "witches' circle" with a symbolic brazier in the middle to throw patriarchy, the Church, capitalism, racism and homophobia into the fire! The fight goes on. Let's see more of you at Vanessa's trial before the end of the year!

7 October 2023

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

# World Bank/IMF meetings: Counter-summit



# of social movements Marrakech, 12-15 October 2023

6 October 2023, by **Attac-CADTM Morocco**

That's why we're organizing a counter-summit in Marrakech from 12 to 15 October, the International Day of Indigenous Resistance and the commemoration of the assassination of Thomas Sankara, the revolutionary, pan-Africanist president who was executed shortly after calling for a united front against debt. Let's make his legacy a reality, denounce the criminal policies of the IMF and the World Bank, denounce their practices and unite against their debtocracy!

These two undemocratic institutions have been marginalizing and even excluding the states of the global South since they were founded in 1944. They continue to contribute to the neo-colonialism of the richest countries and the richest in general, and they exacerbate climate change, to the detriment of the peoples of the South and the periphery of the North.

We, the social and climate movements, trade unions, women's, small farmers' and indigenous peoples' organizations, non-governmental organizations and citizens of the world, are calling for and participating in the organization in Marrakech of a summit of social movements against the summit of the established order.

Our counter-summit will be an opportunity to show alternative paths to those of the World Bank and the

IMF; to forge links and thus strengthen our movements, particularly with a view to COP28; to discuss, from the people's point of view, the difficulties we are currently facing - economic, ecological, cost of living, repressive, gender-related, racial - and for which the World Bank, the IMF and their allies have a historic responsibility.

It's time to shout loud and clear that 80 years of a financial dictatorship that has maintained and reinforced the oppression of the peoples of the South by the rulers of the North is enough. That more than 500 years of plundering nature and the peoples of the South in the name of Western interests is enough. That the people come first, not the profits of multinationals, governments and the rich.

It's time to rise up and weave a network of struggles and alternatives to sow the seeds of a society in which the common good, respect for planetary limits, food sovereignty and climate and social justice take precedence. We will be the ones who decide our future, and we reject the one that the World Bank, the IMF and their allies want to impose on us. The time has come to put an end to their ideological colonialism!

So it's time to say that if they don't

cancel our debt, we will repudiate it. Because the real debt is that of governments and multinationals, their historic, climatic, ecological and social debt to the people, and to the people of the South in particular!

It's time to learn from and forge links with popular, ecofeminist, anti-racist, peasant and indigenous struggles. Those who have nothing, but who are not resigned to being the employees of a climate-destroying capitalism.

We dare to think that our mobilization will ensure that the World Bank and the IMF will not be celebrating their 80th anniversary next year, but will already be calculating and honoring their old debt to the people. That we will thus be sending them, as the pillars of capital, into the dustbin of history.

Let's get together in Marrakech from 12 to 15 October, on the occasion of the forthcoming annual meetings of the WB and IMF, to talk, share and organize the struggle and build our society, our way of life. Join us there! We look forward to seeing you in Marrakech.

To join us in Marrakech or support our initiative, please check our [linktree](#) (we will get in touch with you as soon as possible)!

Source **CADTM**.

## Suella Braverman's speech shows Tory culture wars' election strategy



**5 October 2023, by Phil Hearse**

A sizable portion of the Conservative Party's ever more right wing base will support Home Secretary Suella Braverman's bid for the party's leadership after the next election.

In 1968, right-wing Tory MP Enoch Powell made his famous "rivers of blood" speech, predicting a race war if non-white immigrants came to Britain in large numbers. Home Secretary Suella Braverman's speech at a right-wing US think tank predicted "truly colossal" numbers trying to break into Britain. Powell's 1968 speech led to his ostracism from the political mainstream, including in the parliamentary Conservative Party. By the time Margaret Thatcher became prime minister in 1979, Powell's racist views had won the day in the Conservative Party. Now Suella Braverman wants to go much further and put in question Britain's position in the 1951 convention on refugees.

In fact, her speech to the American Enterprise Institute aimed to do three things. First to reinforce her position as the main spokesperson of the Tory right; second to position herself to take the leadership of the Tories if they are defeated in the general election; and third to define the anti-immigrant centre of gravity of the Tory platform for the next election.

## **Braverman aligns with global far right anti-immigrant rhetoric**

The different Tory factions are also hammering out a wider "anti-woke" stance for the election. Racism against immigrants comes first, then opposition to climate change action, and if the Tory right has its way, anti-LGBT prejudice as well. In other words, Braverman wants to pull the Conservative Party into line with the likes of Giorgia Meloni in Italy, Marine

Le Pen in France, the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), and the rabid pro-Trump right of the American Republican Party.

Braverman's speech, however, highlighted a reality: the number of refugees from climate change, war, racism, and anti-gay oppression is likely to grow. But her dystopian nightmare of millions on the move in the short term is wrong. Millions would like to leave the disasters that the West has inflicted on the Global South, but most cannot afford to move, do not want to risk a dangerous trip, and do not want to leave their families and communities. Only a small minority of those on the move want to come to Britain.

Of course, we should be helping the many thousands of refugees with safe legal routes. European governments want to put all the blame on the gangsters who provide the overcrowded boats on which thousands of refugees have died. But the European governments are themselves mainly responsible for the deaths in the Mediterranean and the Channel.

There should be a Europe-wide agreement for each country to take a proportion of the refugees. Italy and Greece have a point when they complain about having to accept a huge number of refugees, while other European countries just try to keep them out. The insistence that refugees must stay in the first safe country they arrive in is out of date. As each country tries to strengthen its own borders against refugees, the Schengen Agreement guaranteeing free movement within the European Union is being shredded.

The fascist and semi-fascist right in Europe and North America all have a position against trans rights, but most of them are hostile to "LGBT lobbies" as well. Probably this kind of social conservatism will not play so well in Britain, where multiculturalism is deeply entrenched in the form of really multicultural cities, mixed

marriages and partnerships, and in a tradition of art and music. Anti-racism grew up in the 1970s in opposition to Powell and the fascist National Front and gave a voice to the lived experiences of many millions of people from multicultural communities and multicultural classrooms too.

Braverman's speech included an anti-LGBT position that has been widely noted: her claim that many people are seeking asylum solely on the basis of being gay or trans. But this is the result of the acceleration of anti-gay and anti-trans persecution in a swathe of African countries where corrupt rulers play to the gallery of anti-LGBT prejudice fuelled, especially by reactionary Pentecostal Christianity. Being gay is illegal in dozens of African countries, where it can lead to harsh imprisonment or, in the case of four, to the death penalty. LGBT people facing persecution come from a wide range of other countries, including Iran and other countries in the Middle East.

## **Climate disasters will drive more migration**

The climate change disaster in the Global South is going to drive more people to take the highly risky journey to Europe and the United States. It is going to be the central issue of the coming decades. The likes of Donald Trump, Giorgia Meloni, and many other far-right leaders will advance anti-immigrant culture wars, as will the British Tories. Labour leader Keir Starmer and his shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper adapt themselves to anti-immigrant hostility and mainly criticise the Tories only on the basis of their inefficiency at keeping refugees out, not on the basis of challenging their racist and reactionary anti-immigrant position. The storm of criticism of Suella Braverman's speech shows there is a huge well of potential support for clear pro-immigrant positions from the

# Class Struggle Returns to U.S. as Strikes Spread from Actors to Auto Workers

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

We look here at the actors' strike, but before doing so we should remind ourselves of the gradually building momentum in the labor movement. Starbucks workers organized and struck, and as of today 354 stores with almost 9,000 workers have unionized, but none has won a contract. In April 2022 Amazon workers in New York City voted to unionize, but so far, they too have no contract. And they lost union representation elections at other Amazon facilities.

Railroad workers planned to strike in late 2022, but in December President Joe Biden and Congress used the Railway Labor Act to prevent a strike and impose a contract later accepted by the unions. The Teamsters union planned to strike UPS, but in July of this year they reached an agreement with many gains, though, because the leadership decided not to strike, they failed to improve the lot of many part-time workers.

Next came the writers and actors who shut down an industry that employs over two million workers of all sorts. The writers struck in May and the actors joined them on the picket lines in July, the first industry-wide shutdown in over 60 years. They were striking some of the most powerful

corporations in America. The employers, the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers, represents the major motion picture studios such as Paramount, Sony, Universal, Disney and Warner Brothers, the principal television networks (including ABC, CBS, FOX and NBC), streaming services like Netflix, Apple TV+, and Amazon, as well as some cable companies.

Both unions were responding to changes in the industry with the rise of streaming services that grew phenomenally during COVID. They are also concerned with the rapid developments in artificial intelligence (AI) that threatened both writers and actors.

All of this led to greater determination. Some 11,000 film, television, news, radio and online writers won a major victory after a 148-day strike. With the industry desperate to get new shows online and in movie theaters, the workers won job guarantees and higher pay. They also won guarantees not to be replaced by ChatGPT. But some 150,000 television and movie actors, who walked out in May, are still on strike.

One big concern among the actors is being replaced by "digital doubles." The studio can ask an actor to go into the "orb," that is the photogrammetry booth where hundreds of cameras record his image as he makes different expressions and takes different poses. Once the photos are taken, as Scientific American explains, "visual effects (VFX) artists take the model from two-dimensional to three-dimensional." The 3-D image is then attached to a visual "skeleton" moved by an actor or by animation and placed in the appropriate background. Studios may not need any actors, though they may still want the pretty face.

The striking actors took some encouragement from the writers' settlement, but it's been a very long strike. Some writers have continued to march on the picket lines with them as have some striking hospital workers. And both actors and auto workers picketed in front of the HBO and Amazon offices in Manhattan. For both unions, it will be a hard fight. The class struggle is back, and while the results have been mixed so far, these workers' actions represent a sea change in American society.

*1 October 2023*

## More than 1,000 people attend MPs' call for action

## 3 October 2023, by **Adrien Guilleau**

Jean-Victor Castor (MDES candidate) is a former secretary general of the MDES and a former figurehead of the UTG (Union des travailleurs guyanais) in the years 1990-2000. Davy Rimane (LFI candidate) was spokesman and signatory of KPLD (Kolektif pou Lagwiynn dékolé) in 2017 and general secretary of UTG éclairage (EDF) until his election. Both had received the support of Philippe Poutou in the second round in 2022, Castor was then opposed to a Mélenchon-backed candidate, and Rimane opposed the outgoing LREM MP.

### For an increase in French Guiana's budget

Since their election, this is the third major meeting organised to tell the Guianan population about the progress and, above all, the difficulties of their exercise in the National Assembly. Yet never before has there been such a large turnout. The aim of the meeting was to begin preparing for an offensive against the French state in the run-up to the next budget vote. The MPs want to significantly increase the allocation to French Guiana to enable the necessary structural and economic catching-up

from which the territory suffers so much.

The creation of the university hospital, which should be operational by 2025 (a commitment won during a general strike in 2020 during the covid crisis) is an opportunity to commit the State to building new hospitals in Cayenne and Kourou. Similarly, the demographic boom in French Guiana, which officially passed the 300,000 mark this year, means that a large number of new primary and secondary schools need to be built, and the government needs to make a commitment to match the real needs! Finally, there is a pressing need to build roads to open up the interior of French Guiana, in order to reduce the threat of disruption to territorial continuity, as the bankruptcy of Air Guyane, the only operator to the landlocked communes, sadly reminds us!

Cost-of-living allowance and political demands

An increase in the budget allocated to French Guiana could also make it possible to introduce a cost-of-living allowance for all workers in the public and private sectors. At present, only civil servants, certain contractual civil servants and employees in key sectors such as the space centre and the port benefit from such a bonus. As Davy

Rimane pointed out, this measure would enable thousands of workers to gain in "living standards". The cost of living in French Guiana is 40% higher than in France, according to a recent study by INSEE.

Other historic demands were also put forward, such as the total retrocession of land (95% of the 8 million hectares in French Guiana belong to the State) and political autonomy (the French government is blowing hot and cold on this issue, despite the fact that it is enshrined in the 2017 Guiana agreements), in order to put an end to the "isolation of French Guiana", as Jean-Victor Castor pointed out. Although no date has yet been set, further meetings are expected to take place in order to collectively draw up a list of demands and get the ball rolling in terms of mobilisation and bargaining power with the government. As far as the social forces are concerned, the UTG (Guyana's main trade union centre) has aligned itself with the rally, having called for a massive turnout. It's hard to say at this stage how events will turn out, but the initiative of the Guianan MPs is as original as it is interesting! To be continued...

22 September 2023

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## Week Three—The UAW Strike Expands Again

### 2 October 2023, by **Dianne Feeley**

Compared to Stellantis' previous position of demanding the right to close up to 18 plants, this marked a step forward.

At the same time, negotiations with Ford and GM were proceeding slowly. This too was a surprise. Many labor

analysts had been predicting that the UAW and Ford were close to a tentative agreement after the breakthrough negotiations with Ford the previous week.

On September 22 Fain had announced Ford had agreed to reinstate COLA,

move all current temporary workers to permanent status after 90 working days, eliminate the lower tier at parts distribution sites and offer a two-year job security package for laid-off workers. However, Fain stated, there was more to negotiate - but perhaps Ford management thought they were

done.

The 10:00 am UAW update was delayed by half an hour while the negotiating team looked over the Stellantis proposal and the decision made to pause on Stellantis workers walking. Instead, the strike has expanded to Ford's Chicago assembly plant and GM's Delta Township assembly plant in Lansing, Michigan.

This brings the total number of strikers to 25,000, one-sixth of the total number of UAW autoworkers at the Detroit Three. The strategy of taking on all three corporations and expanding the strike depending on the state of the negotiations is distinctly different from the old-time strategy of targeting only one corporation.

Inviting the community to join the picket lines, Fain emphasized how the unity of workers pressures all three corporations. From the UAW's negotiating standpoint, each corporation can't sit back after making progress at the negotiation table one week but rather will be judged by how well they continue to do the following week - as Ford just discovered.

For the 125,000 UAW members still at work, they too are part of the Stand Up strategy. They wear red to work on Wednesdays, talk about the negotiations with others on the job

and monitor supervisors, who are not allowed to change rules given that the contract is expired.

This means that workers can refuse all voluntary overtime but also that they can perform their job as the instructions explicitly require, and nothing more. They are learning how to "work to rule," which means maintaining one's pace and providing no solutions to the everyday problems that develop.

Fain denounced violent incidents over the past week in Michigan, Massachusetts and California where strikers were attacked by vehicles or threatened with guns.

Perhaps the most serious incident occurred on September 26, when five strikers were hit by a car leaving GM's distribution center parking lot in Swartz Creek, Michigan and two were taken to the hospital. (The driver and two passengers were later identified as janitors from a contracted company; GM later banned them from their facilities.)

In response to some commentators who assert that strikes hurt everyone - workers, corporations and consumers alike - Fain asserted that "a union that's not prepared to strike to win is like a fighter with one hand tied behind his back. Without the

strike weapon, the war on workers is a rigged fight."

Fain notes that solidarity is what makes unions powerful. He pointed out that power was what brought President Joe Biden to the picket line and voice his support for the strikers' demands. But it is not the power of the president - either of the United States or of the UAW - that will win a successful contract, but the power of ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

Confident that the Stand-Up strategy is working, Fain quoted Martin Luther King's "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice" and concluded that it is the UAW family and supporters that are the force currently bending the arc.

To join a picket line at one of five assembly plants now on strike, or at one the 38 [distribution centers](#). Most are being picketed around the clock. Different locals are also organizing caravans to other work sites and you are welcome to join.

If there are no plants or distribution sites in your area, leaflet one of the Detroit Three dealerships. You can find [information](#) for the dos and don'ts for leafleting a dealership and a couple of leaflets to use.

Source: [Solidarity webzine](#).

# Macron, Charles III: from one monarch to another, under the BP sun

## 1 October 2023, by **Thierry Labica**

It's true, eight years and tens of billions in arms sales by BAE Systems, Thales and Dassault to the Middle East's super-cop - the absolute monarchy of Saudi Arabia - for its atrocious war in Yemen, maintain the friendship in the emulation, admittedly competitive, with the world's leading arms buyer.

In the background, we hear the British Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, justifying his decision to postpone the measures banning the sale of petrol and diesel cars until 2030. According to him, such measures would entail "unacceptable costs" for ordinary people.

There is something "positive" in this

cautious combination of reasonableness and consideration for ordinary people: temperatures of 41 degrees in London (and parts of the world becoming uninhabitable), against a backdrop of ever-increasing poverty and the proliferation of food banks, or the collapse of the National Health Service, would not be "unacceptable costs". This

clarification from the British Prime Minister, who himself ranks ahead of the King in the annual list of the country's wealthiest individuals, may well have been necessary.

## **Fossil power: a multinational and its Prime Minister**

The element of reason, therefore, should not escape us. The postponement decided by Sunak duplicates at government level the directions already taken by the oil industry. Last February, British Petroleum announced that it was revising downwards its plans to reduce hydrocarbon production: in

May 2022, BP had declared a target of reducing its production by 40% by 2030 compared with its 2019 level. In February 2023, BP announced that the target reduction would no longer be 40%, but 25%.

No mystery: since - and thanks to - the war in Ukraine, BP has made the highest profits in its history. In 2022, at £28 billion (over €32 billion), the company has more than doubled its previous year's profit, making 2022 the most profitable year since its creation 114 years ago. The same is true of the other British oil giant, Shell: 40 billion euros in 2022, a record year since it was founded 115 years ago.

Incidentally, Sunak, like the short-

lived Liz Truss before him, both have direct and close personal links with Shell and BP respectively. While this is not the whole story, it does tell us a great deal about the porous nature of the current power bloc.

At the beginning of July, ahead of the pomp and circumstance of the ceremonies to welcome a monarch and then a pope in September, Macron had the good idea of decorating Patrick Pouyanné, the head of TotalEnergies, with the Légion d'honneur. So many signals of what to expect from a "climate transition" in the hands of the Franco-British fossil party.

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