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The Trump Moment

31 August 2024, by **Daniel Tanuro**



Foreword by Daniel Tanuro to the English Translation

When Ted Franklin and Maura Stephens contacted me to offer to translate and publish *The Trump Moment* I was surprised, honored, and enthusiastic. Surprised, because I did not imagine that this little essay, written in 2017 at the request of a modest publisher — since disappeared — would one day emerge from oblivion. Honored, because it is rather flattering, for a French-speaking author who is not a specialist in the United States, to note that his work, seven years later, has been discovered across the Atlantic by activists, to the

point that they deem it useful to disseminate it in their country, to support their fight for ecosocialism. Enthusiastic, because this translation gives me the opportunity to contribute modestly to their important fight.

The fact that this English translation is produced and edited by the team of System Change Not Climate Change is of particular importance to me. Indeed, the planet is burning, biodiversity is collapsing, the darkest prospects of climate change are irreversibly materializing before our eyes. Hundreds of millions of poor people suffer from it in their flesh (not only in the South but also in the North) — and this is, alas, only the beginning.

In this dramatic context, Trump is the clearest expression of a monstrous trend at work everywhere in the ruling classes: rather the death of millions of innocent people than the exit from fossil fuels; rather barbarism than the slightest breach of the dogma of maximum profit; rather the cataclysm than the just degrowth essential to “take care” of the Earth and humans, in social justice, democracy, respect, and the right to asylum. From Argentina to the Netherlands, from India to France, from Great Britain to Russia, from Israel to China, this repugnant neo-Malthusianism is a universal trait of the extreme right.

“The Trump Moment” will be

published online in the midst of the battle against the threat of Donald Trump’s return to power in the November 2024 presidential election. However, this is not a simple repetition of history, and even less a farce. Despite the candidate’s obvious complicity with Vladimir Putin’s neo-fascist regime, his proven coup attempt, his conviction for sexual assault and another for fraud (as well as multiple other cases that he has managed to quash or postpone), Trump is more dangerous today than he was in 2016. The Republican Party serves at his beck and call, the majority of Supreme Court justices cover for him, the Heritage Foundation is providing him with a turnkey reactionary program and an army of candidates ready to implement it, and an increasing number of big capitalists support him. Finally, his mass base remains very mobilized around his hateful xenophobic, racist, and sexist speeches.

Until very recently, a range of factors — including Joe Biden’s age — allowed Trump to hope to win by betting demagogically on legitimate social discontent with the Democratic Party’s version of capitalist policies, both on the national and international scenes. The specter thus grew of a victory resulting from both the mobilization of far-right voters and the abstention of the working class, as in 2016.

At the time of publication, Joe Biden's withdrawal in favor of Kamala Harris seems to have changed the situation. The difference in form is obvious. The Democratic running mates adopted an adversarial, ironic, and even joyful tone versus the Republican ticket, which Biden couldn't have mustered. "Kamala brings back joy," Harris's running mate, Tim Walz has declared repeatedly. Indeed, Harris and the good-natured Minnesota governor, with his popular joviality, appear to embody the reassuring opposite of the anger, fear, and contempt stoked by the duo of Trump and Vance.

The turn towards a dynamic, offensive (rather than defensive) campaign of the Democrats was probably thought out in general terms behind the scenes before July 21, 2024. Joe Biden's withdrawal was the necessary condition for its immediate emergence. This is, after all, how the ruling class rules when it rules. But even ruling-class political strategists seem to have been taken by surprise at the force of the eruption that occurred after Biden finally stepped aside. It seems that the upbeat spirit

of the Harris-Walz campaign, having gestated behind the scenes, was ready-made for Biden's abdication.

It should go without saying that a change of tone does not make an actual political alternative. The fundamental goal of the Democratic strategists is most certainly to continue the neoliberal and imperialist policies of the outgoing president. For them, there is no other way. But the substance and the form are not separated by a totally watertight wall, especially when electoral mobilization requires making pledges to the working classes. This dialectic appears in Harris' vigorous pleas for reproductive rights: As a man and a life-long Catholic, Biden had a less militant, less passionate tone. Such righteousness also appears in Harris and Walz's denunciation of the violently anti-union proposals in "Project 2025," crafted for Trump by the Heritage Foundation.

Hope is thus rekindled that Trump will be beaten in November — a goal in itself. But, as we say in French, the carrots are not cooked. This is why trade unions, feminist and gender-

rights organizations, community representatives, climate activists, defenders of migrant rights, and other popular forces cannot ignore the challenge to mobilize against Trump.

At the same time, we should have no illusions. Kamala Harris' embarrassed silence on US complicity in Netanyahu's genocidal and ecocidal war against the Palestinian people testifies to this. The same kind of strategic challenge arises in many countries: how to collaborate in the united front for the electoral defeat of the far right while continuing to strive without concessions for an ecosocialist, feminist, internationalist, radically democratic alternative worthy of the name.

We can meet the moment only by building power at the grassroots, in the social movements, to promote from these a broad political recomposition.

August 12, 2024

To download the book as an EPUB or PDF file, go to the [original version of the article](#).

No Fist Is Big Enough to Hide the Sky": 100 Years of Amílcar Cabral

30 August 2024, by B. Skanthakumar

Amílcar Lopes da Costa Cabral was born on September 12, 1924 in the town of Bafata in Portuguese Guinea, wedged between what was then French Guinea and the French colony of Senegal, in West Africa. His parents hailed from Cape Verde (Cabo Verde), an archipelago of impoverished islands in the North Atlantic, some 450 km west of the African mainland.

Under Portuguese rule, the Cape Verdeans were regarded as "civilized" because they spoke Portuguese, were of Christian faith, and adopted western dress. They were classified as *assimilado*: the people in-between the

white settler-colonial regime and the black African population, including in the colonial administrative service in Guinea-Bissau.

As a child, Cabral moved with his family to Cape Verde; his schooling was in conditions of economic hardship. Belying its name, far from green the islands are semi-arid. Uninhabited until the 15th century, the Portuguese claimed the territory, strategically located on the transatlantic maritime route for the slave trade in Brazil and the Caribbean, and later for whale-hunting.

They settled inhabitable areas with whites, and brought captive West Africans to work the land. By the mid-20th century, 69% of the population was deemed *mestiço* (i.e. mixed heritage). The despoliation of its natural resources, through deforestation and over-grazing, was accompanied over five centuries by periodic drought followed by devastating famine, triggering waves of emigration as far afield as New England.

In Cabral's own youth, the droughts of 1941-43 and 1947-48 led to anywhere between 30,000 and 45,000 deaths; he

experienced the former personally.

It is not surprising that in 1945 when Cabral secured a scholarship to the University of Lisbon in the imperial capital, he chose to study agronomy with a particular interest in soil science.

Portugal had been under fascist rule since 1926. There was little democratic space and the Left conducted its activities clandestinely. It was in Lisbon that Cabral would meet and form political ties with African students from other Portuguese colonies. Some of them, like Agostinho Neto and Mário de Andrade (from Angola), and Eduardo Mondlane and Marcelino dos Santos (from Mozambique), would become leaders of the freedom movement in their countries.

Becoming Anti-Colonialists, and More

Their circle studied socialist writing from Brazil, as well as on the African-American experience of racism and deprivation in the United States. They also read and discussed the assertions of Négritude in Francophone Africa via Aimé Césaire (of Martinique) and Léopold Senghor (of Senegal), from which they would later critically distance. They were in contact with the illegal Portuguese Communist Party that operated in secret through broad organizations such as the youth wing of the Movement of Democratic Unity (MUD-Juvenil).

Upon graduation, Cabral joined the Lisbon Agronomic Station, where he conducted research in southern Portugal, a region of stark poverty and not coincidentally highly unequal ownership of land. [1]

In 1952 he chose to return to Guinea to lead the Agronomic Center in Bissau. The following year, taking advantage of his official role, Cabral conducted the first Agricultural Survey of Guinea.

He used this opportunity to travel widely across the mainland territory, to familiarize himself with its

topography, economy, the diversity of its peoples and their practices and customs. This immersion in the reality of this land and its inhabitants would later contribute to his important political text, "Brief analysis of social structure in Guinea."

His activities attracted the attention of the colonial administration, which banned him from living in Guinea. Unable to work or operate there, he joined a private company based in Angola, where he undertook studies on soil conditions and agricultural production.

Over the course of 1955 and 1956, while in Angola, Cabral participated in the formation of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). This underlined his Pan-Africanist vision of solidarity and unity as well as his intransigence against colonialism and imperialism wherever it manifested itself: in Congo, in Cuba, in Palestine, in South Africa, in Southern Arabia, in Vietnam.

On a secret visit to Bissau in 1956, Cabral and five others including his half-brother Luís founded what became the African Party of the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) on September 19. While these pioneer members were of Cape Verdean origin, they were committed to the liberation of Guinea-Bissau too. Other nationalist organizations were from Guinea-Bissau, usually based on personalities and ethnicities, and opposed to union with Cape Verde.

Driven to the Countryside

Initially the underground party attempted to organize among the miniscule working class, and the urban poor in mainland Guinea. When dock workers at Pidjiguiti Quay in Bissau took part in peaceful protest on August 3, 1959, the colonial regime brutally suppressed them, massacring 50 and injuring over 100 in just 20 minutes.

Shocked by this cruel loss of life, and realizing their weaknesses, the PAIGC switched to mobilizing in the

countryside. The leadership at this point were intellectuals from the Cape Verde islands.

They were strangers to the Guinean hinterland, away from its towns that they knew better. This is where Cabral's study of peasant society, including its cleavages along ethnicity and religion, and contradictions including land ownership, gender relations, and socio-political organization, proved invaluable.

If, as Cabral and his comrades concluded, the urban working class was too miniscule and unready for revolutionary change, did this mean that the peasantry would substitute for it? No. The peasantry was the main "physical force" of the liberation movement, but was not "a revolutionary force." [2] Instead, in the absence of a national capitalist class, the petty bourgeoisie — located between the colonial state and the colonized masses — is most likely to wield the functions of state power after decolonization.

This intermediary class, from which many leaders of revolutionary movements across time and space have emerged, has two roads before it, Cabral suggested. They could surrender to their natural tendency to become bourgeois via class location in the state bureaucracy and as compradors servicing foreign capital in commercial relations. Or be reborn as a "revolutionary worker completely identified with the deepest aspirations of the people." These conflicting choices are the dilemma of the petty bourgeoisie in the national liberation struggle. In a famous phrase, Cabral summed it up as "to betray the revolution or to commit suicide as a class." [3]

After some years of preparation with funds, light weapons, and combat training from the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and China, the PAIGC launched its armed struggle on January 23, 1963. [4] Later, Cabral succeeded in negotiating assistance in the form of sugar, tobacco, and uniforms from Cuba, followed by military advisors and medics; and food, clothing and medicine from Sweden and other Scandinavian countries. The enemy was of course

far better armed and resourced, supported by its NATO allies particularly the United States and West Germany, and spewing napalm.

However, before and during the military campaign, Cabral was clear that the political fight was his priority: to breach the “wall of silence” built around Portugal’s subjugation of African peoples. [5] He tirelessly traveled to combat the ideology of “lusotropicalism”: Portuguese colonialism as adaptive to the people of the tropics and neither racist or exploitative.

Cabral was a man of action but also a critical and creative thinker. As his friend Basil Davidson reminded us, “Thought and action, he never separated that sequence, just as he never changed its order.” [6]

Return to Our Own History

It was not colonialism that carried the colonized into history as was claimed for it. Rather, colonialism was an interruption in the history of the people. “In taking up arms to liberate ourselves,” Cabral reminded his audience, “we want to return to our history, on our own feet, by our own means and through our own sacrifices.” [7] As to when history begins, it could not be contingent on the emergence of class and therefore class struggle, as this would condemn societies without class relations, to be people “living without history, or outside history when they were subjected to the yoke of imperialism.” [8]

Instead, he argued it is the “level of development of productive forces ... [that] is the true and permanent motive force of history.” [9] The objective of national liberation becomes the liberation of productive forces grabbed by imperialist domination. This enables the self-determination of the once colonized to progress to a higher form of economic, social and cultural existence. That transformation in the level of productive forces and their system of ownership, in short, the mode of production, is what is called

“revolution.”

Additionally, Cabral had to grapple with the messiness of armed struggle where those bearing arms can become oppressive of those in whose name they claim to be fighting for. At the first Party congress in Cassacá in February 1964, the guerilla units that had operated autonomously were merged into a people’s army, under the control of the political leadership.

He reminded the party leaders and the cadre alike that “we are armed militants and not militarists” (emphasis in the original). He cautioned them to “Hide nothing from the masses of our people. Tell no lies. Expose lies whenever they are told. Mask no difficulties, mistakes, failures. Claim no easy victories. ...” [10]

The Cassacá Congress also marked an important outward turn in the direction of prefigurative politics. The PAIGC began creating institutions for people in liberated areas, conveying a promise of what independence and freedom ought to mean: schools, health centers, elected tribunals, people’s stores where goods could be bartered. Farming food crops for subsistence, artisanal production for skilled work, and the nurturing of small industries were encouraged.

Base committees were formed in liberated areas through popular election from a party-list. Five members were elected, two places being reserved for women, and each assigned an area of responsibility. [11] This structure was crafted in far-from-ideal conditions of war not peace; and in the absence of political competition. However, it was also a first experience and education in participatory democracy.

In one of continuous injunctions to the cadre for their political orientation, he urged them to “[r]emember always that the people do not fight for ideas, for things that exist in the heads of individuals. The people fight and accept the necessary sacrifices in order to gain material benefits, to live better and in peace, to experience progress, and to guarantee the future of their children.”

Slogans and demands, no matter how good and important, are “empty words and without significance for the people if they are not translated into a real improvement in their living conditions.” [12]

As a theoretician and strategist of national liberation, Cabral was insistent that “those who lead the struggle must never confuse what they have in their head ... with the specific reality of the land.” Whatever ideas we have from what we read or what others tell us of their own experience he underscored that “our feet are planted on the ground in our land.” [13]

Foreign military advisors often sought to transplant their battlefield approaches to the war against the Portuguese in Guiné but Cabral resisted them, expressing “reservations about the systematization of phenomena.” [14] He saw it as an error to mimic the experiences of others, since these were based on their unique geographical, historical, economic and social conditions.

At the first Tricontinental Congress in Havana in 1966, he cautioned that no matter how similar the case and identical the enemy, “national liberation and social revolution are not exportable commodities. They are ... a local, national, product — more or less influenced by (favorable and unfavorable) external factors, but essentially determined and conditioned by the historical reality of each people.” [15]

Culture as Resistance

Culture is the other front of resistance and struggle for Cabral. It is both shield and sword. “Culture is simultaneously the fruit of a people’s history and a determinant of history.” [16] It is in his view the dynamic expression of social relationships, principally those between humans and nature, and between humans as individuals, groups of individuals, strata and classes.

However, culture to him was never essentialist nor static. It contained both positive and negative features. It ought to be forged by, and not only feed into, the movement for national liberation. He was careful to differentiate what he meant by culture from that to which the indigenous colonial elite was attached or what was imagined and invented by colonial diasporas.

Cabral was killed on January 20, 1973, aged 48, in Conakry, capital of the Republic of Guinea, which shares a land border with Guinea-Bissau. That is where the PAIGC leadership operated in exile. His assassin was someone he knew, a fellow militant. [17]

However, as Cabral himself had predicted, aware of the imperialist-inspired plots against his life stretching back over a decade, his death did not derail the independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, which was finally declared on September 24, 1973. (18) By then two-thirds of Guinea-Bissau was controlled by the PAIGC.

Moreover, the politico-military campaign he directed in Guinea-Bissau, along with those of liberation movements in Angola and Mozambique, directly contributed to the overthrow in Portugal of “the most long lived fascist State in history ...

and the end of the oldest colonial empire in the world.” [18]

Fourteen years of anti-colonial wars in Portuguese Africa triggered the “Carnation Revolution” beginning with the overthrow of the dictatorship by the Armed Forces Movement (MFA) in Lisbon on April 25, 1974. The new regime soon began the transfer of power in the African colonies to the liberation movements.

What is meant by the “liberation of the people”? Informed by the experience of neocolonialism that followed “independence” and the venality and tyranny of the postcolonial elite that assumed power, Cabral insisted that it is more than the expulsion of colonialists, the hoisting of a national flag, and the playing of a national anthem:

“It is the liberation of the productive forces of our country, the liquidation of all kinds of imperialist or colonial domination in our country, and the taking of every measure to avoid any new exploitation of our people. We don’t confuse exploitation with the color of one’s skin. We want equality, social justice and freedom.” [19]

Why do we return to Cabral in a different time to his? Recently, Ochieng Okoth invokes him among others, to advocate “a new mode of anti-imperialist politics” by way of four combined maneuvers. [20] These may

be adapted as follows.

First, to retrieve the promise of a post-imperialist world embedded in national liberation or anti-colonial Marxism, from a critical reading of its experience. The struggle for freedom cannot stop with the ejection of colonialists and imperialists; but must grow into an attack on the social and economic mechanisms initiated by imperialism.

Next, to engage with the critique of political economy. Without properly unmasking the relations and processes of domination, we cannot make sense of subordination within the international system and within states.

Third, by basing ourselves on historical materialism to understand the motion and dynamics of social change; and the deployment of hierarchy and difference in class societies. To change the world, we need the theory and method to interpret it.

Finally, to revive internationalism through anti-imperialist solidarity across movements be they in the Global North or Global South. To see our struggles as interconnected, while respectful of their specificities.

In all this and more, the life and work of Amílcar Cabral is exemplary.

[Against the current](#)

The Indus Water Treaty

29 August 2024, by Mohammad Ebad Athar, Mona Bhan

But scholars have argued that the allocation of the rivers was a diversionary tactic, meant to undermine Kashmiri sovereignty in the international dispute over Kashmir’s contested territory. [21]

The IWT reconciled significant legal concerns with water rights through technical-engineering resolutions, a

concessionary approach that erased any meaningful and long-lasting conversations on equitable and sustainable water-sharing approaches in the sub-continent.

The Indus Water Treaty ended up privileging India and Pakistan’s sovereign control over Kashmir’s rivers, while making it impossible for

Kashmiris to exert their legal and political rights over critical river resources. That legacy continues in current debates about climate proofing the IWT.

Kashmir exists in the crosshairs of climate change and Indo-Pakistani geopolitical tensions. Climate-proofing the IWT, we argue, will only serve to

greenwash India and Pakistan's extractive control over the Indus River Basin.

Mother India in Labor

On July 8th, 1954, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru gave an impromptu speech at the opening ceremony for the Bhakra Canal. He praised the canal's construction noting that "Mother India is in labor" and "producing things big and small."

Awed by his country's ability to construct such a large-scale infrastructure, Nehru compared the project to "the noblest temples, Gurdwaras, churches and mosques to be found anywhere.... I feel more religious minded when I see these works," he proclaimed. [22]

Several months later, at the official inauguration ceremony for the Bhakra-Nangal dam, Nehru's remarks still articulated wonder and pride for the project. The Prime Minister thanked and congratulated the engineers and foreign advisers involved in the construction, but he also devoted a significant portion of his speech to "all the people," acknowledging "their hard toll and sacrifice."

Reminding the crowd to "remember them and all those who have put their sweat and blood" into the dam's construction, Nehru implored India to "befriend the river Sutlej." Laying down concrete as part of the ceremony, he exclaimed how the dam was "one of the great victories over nature." (3) [23]

Nehru's celebratory language and the sacredness attributed to the dam camouflaged the Indian state's colonial appetite for Kashmir and its rivers, a Muslim-majority territory over which both India and Pakistan claimed sovereignty. The popular imaginaries of dams as India's modern-day temples aligned well with Hinduized narratives of the river Indus as a male warrior God, and of the Indus and Kashmir as cradles of Hindu civilization. [24]

Yet the ceremonies and Nehru's remarks omitted some key stakes. In the early 1950s, Pakistan was entirely dependent on the waters of the Indus, which flowed through India and Kashmir before reaching Pakistan. During his July remarks, Nehru did not mention how India, without Pakistan's knowledge, withheld the flow of the Sutlej River to Pakistan "in order to accumulate a good head of water for the opening ceremony." [25]

This not only contributed to an increased anxiety in Pakistan that India would take control of the entire basin, but also impacted Pakistani farmers who relied on that water supply.

But the second and perhaps most significant consequence of this state building effort was how it further subjugated and silenced Kashmiri sovereignty over the Western rivers of the Indus Basin — Jhelum, Chenab, and the Indus — portions of which flow through Jammu and Kashmir.

As India remained invested in building the Indian state through dams, it was simultaneously cementing its colonial control over the disputed territory of Kashmir, whose unpopular Hindu ruler had provisionally acceded to India in 1947.

Although Nehru had promised Kashmiris that a UN-mandated free and impartial plebiscite would allow them to choose their own political fate, a series of interventions, including arrests and detentions of dissident Kashmiris, clamping down of free press, and the election of pliant client regimes, scuttled people's rights to self-determination.

At the same time, the IWT became an instrument to dilute Kashmiri sovereignty over their land and water.

While the Indian state celebrated the construction of the Bhakra-Nangal Dam in 1954, control over the Indus River basin remained unresolved. Pakistan feared that the Bhakra Nangal project was part of a larger Indian objective to take full control of the basin's water. The Chief of Staff of the Pakistan Air Force anticipated that "the summer of 1954 would be a most dangerous time as regards war with

India." [26]

Taking stock of this escalating situation, the British framed the Indus dispute as potentially "more dangerous than Kashmir," claiming that the coming conflict in conjunction with Kashmir would further contribute "to a prolonged stalemate" over the political future of the disputed territory. [27]

Therefore, avoiding war in 1954 was paramount for the British, even at the expense of Kashmiri self-determination. The British believed that a negotiated settlement for the Indus dispute would serve that purpose.

The IWT Negotiations and Kashmir

The IWT was negotiated throughout the 1950s; as early as 1952 the British Foreign Office and the World Bank agreed that India and Pakistan should be dissuaded from negotiating along legalistic lines and instead encouraged to keep the deliberations at a technical level.

For example, when Pakistan hired the renowned American lawyer John Laylin to assist in its negotiations, Eugene Black, the lead American negotiator for the World Bank, advised Laylin against influencing the Pakistanis "along stiff and legalistic lines." [28]

Rather, Black believed that "if this business can be left to the technical experts under the tactful management of the International Bank and with the prospect of some hard cash from the Bank for development if agreement can be reached, the discussion should go fairly smoothly." [29]

The World Bank maintained it was of paramount importance to "reach an equitable agreement about the division of present water resources" and that to achieve this "it would be necessary to provide, partly at India's expense ... extensive water storage in Pakistan." [30]

We might ask why both the British and

American negotiators pushed for technical solutions in the Indus dispute despite the little progress that was made “in finding a solution either to the financial or to the engineering difficulties.” [31]

Why were technical solutions favored over legalistic ones, especially when Pakistani and Indian attitudes reflected a “right to water” approach? Majed Akther argues that American negotiators such as David Lilienthal and Eugene Black saw the Cold War development of the Indus River basin as the means to avert war between India and Pakistan. [32]

Here the context of impending war in 1954 remains important. The British realized that the “settlement of the Canal Waters dispute” was “becoming increasingly urgent since if it remains unsolved it will go on adding to the friction between India and Pakistan.” “If it were solved,” the British argued, “the resulting release of tension would be considerable, and this would provide a better atmosphere in which to try to settle the Kashmir problem.” [33]

Daniel Haines argues that although the Kashmir issue and the Indus dispute were inextricably linked, the Americans and British had to disentangle Kashmir from the river dispute — and working with technically based solutions while trying to avoid legality did just that. Crafting an international management scheme for the Indus relied on relegating the question of Kashmir’s political future as indeterminate. [34]

Thus, water was political and “truly a matter of life and death” for Pakistan and India, but was considered apolitical when discussed in relation to Kashmir. [35]

As negotiations continued, international management schemes that relied on technical solutions found it difficult to reach a compromise between India and Pakistan. Indeed, the Indus dispute still lingered as of January 1, 1959, with India and Pakistan having failed “in negotiations (to find a compromise) in their dispute over the use of the Indus River.” [36]

While the World Bank’s reputation took a hit for failing to resolve the dispute, so too did the UN Security Council, which had tried unsuccessfully to settle the conflict throughout the 1950s. For the UN Security Council, the Indus dispute was an “undignified wrangle” and “damaging both to relations between India and Pakistan and to the prestige of the Security Council.” [37]

The British Commonwealth, alongside the World Bank and the Security Council, therefore attempted to “dissuade the Pakistanis from pursuing the idea of staging another row on Kashmir” by assuring Pakistan of the Commonwealth’s “readiness to consider” making “a reasonable financial contribution to the implementation of a settlement.” [38]

These international institutions strived for a resolution to the Indus dispute and attempted to avoid a “row” over Kashmir. Although the two issues were entangled, for peace between India and Pakistan, Kashmir had to be extricated from the Indus dispute discussions. The question of Kashmiri sovereignty and self-determination had to be avoided.

International Law and Its Limitations

The IWT is often framed as an international peace treaty that mitigates a large-scale war between India and Pakistan. However, while both states’ sovereignty over the Indus is protected and affirmed, Kashmiri legal rights are completely ignored.

As Fozia Lone observes, the treaty ignores the detrimental effect of non-participation on Kashmiris’ right to self-determination and sovereignty over their natural resources. [39]

When examining the treaty itself, this erasure is blatant. The principal actors, according to the treaty’s preamble, are “The Government of India and the Government of Pakistan,” both of which are “equally desirous of attaining the most complete and satisfactory utilisation of the waters of the Indus system of rivers.” [40]

Throughout the text of the treaty, the Kashmir issue is never mentioned nor is people’s sovereignty over waters located in Jammu Kashmir recognized. [41]

This erasure operates beyond merely excluding Kashmir from formal international legal structures. As Mona Bhan argues, the IWT, and the subsequent construction of multiple dams along the Indus River basin in Jammu and Kashmir, allows the Indian state to assert its sovereignty over the disputed territory.

In other words, dams become tools of occupation for the Indian nation-state that are legalized by international mechanisms such as the IWT.

In their work on the Mekong Basin, Chris Snedden and Coleen Fox illuminate how river basin institutions in the region manipulate discourses of cooperation in the creation of legal arrangements that are motivated by geostrategic aims. [42]

Like the IWT, the 1995 Mekong Agreement sets out to equitably distribute the Mekong waters to the basin’s principal actors (the riparian states along the basin) but also legalizes the ability of those states to utilize dams in counterinsurgency strategies, as is the case in Thailand with the Pak Mun dam. [43]

The IWT’s and international law’s routine failure to affirm Kashmir’s sovereignty and right to self-determination over resources located within its territory has resulted in significant consequences for the region. Massive Indian infrastructural investments and dams have transformed Kashmir’s landscape, displaced indigenous communities, and led to substantial changes in local weather conditions. [44]

Yet the IWT does not acknowledge environmental risks, and contains no mechanisms to combat the increase in earthquakes, floods, and avalanches as result of increased dam infrastructure. [45]

Furthermore, the IWT contains no provisions to address the predicament and proper compensation of displaced communities. Although international

legal frameworks such as the 1962 UN Charter on the “Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources” and the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples affirm a people’s permanent sovereignty over their natural resources, India continues to invest in water infrastructures that undermine Kashmiri sovereignty. [46]

The Hindu Right and the IWT

At 5:30 am on September 18, 2016, armed militants attacked an Indian army base at Uri in Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir, close to the Pakistani border. A heavily forested area, Uri is crisscrossed by the Jhelum River and several other streams of the Indus River basin. Seventeen Indian soldiers were killed in the attack.

The Indian director general of military operations, Lt. Gen. Ranbir Singh predictably denounced the militants as “foreign terrorists, supported and sent by Pakistan.” Mohammad Nafees Zakaria, a spokesman for the Pakistani Ministry for Foreign Affairs, denied Singh’s allegations, instead asserting that India was trying to divert attention away from its oppression of Kashmir. [47]

For those observers familiar with the Kashmir dispute and Pakistan’s and India’s role within it, the Uri attack presents a familiar story in which attacks aimed at the Indian occupation of Jammu and Kashmir are framed by the Indian state as Pakistani-sponsored and sanctioned terror acts, with Pakistan denying Indian allegations, and Kashmiris left to deal with the subsequent consequences.

On the surface, it seems like the Uri attack would have nothing to do with India’s and Pakistan’s long-standing dispute over control of the Indus River basin. Yet Uri’s position along the Jhelum River became significant in the aftermath of the attack. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in a meeting

to discuss the future of the IWT, declared that “blood and water can’t flow together.” [48]

Modi threatened to punish Pakistan diplomatically for its perceived involvement in the Uri attack by taking advantage of its geographic position along the Indus to cut off water flows into Pakistan. Modi essentially suggested that India violate the terms of the IWT and exert its full sovereignty over the Indus.

Modi’s infamous “blood and water cannot flow simultaneously” comment and the suspension of the Indus Water Commission meeting echoed previous arguments for isolating Pakistan diplomatically and legitimizing India’s “rightful” capture of water flowing into Pakistan. These comments contribute to growing Pakistani anxieties that India will act on its threat to cut off water flows into Pakistan.

Pakistan’s Advisor on Foreign Affairs and Security, Sartaj Aziz, responded to Modi’s call for India to block “Pakistan’s” water by calling it an act of war. Pakistan’s Indus Water Commissioner, Jamaat Ali Shah, responded by stating “What should we believe of what the Indian PM says: ending poverty or blocking flow of water into Pakistan. This is open economic terrorism.” [49]

Writing in Pakistan Today, Abbas Hasan cautioned that “the recent threat emanating from India not to honor the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) is a threat to Pakistan’s source of life and must be taken seriously.”

Hasan further argued that “Unless immediate measures are taken we will be risking the source of life in Pakistan.” [50] In an attempt to resolve this issue, Pakistan repeatedly sought out World Bank mediation in the Court of Arbitration. [51]

Kashmir, Pakistani pundits argue, remains the “jugular vein of Pakistan,” and any threat to “Kashmir’s accession to Pakistan” would

significantly harm Pakistan’s economy and viability as an independent nation. [52]

Climate Devastation and Kashmiri Rights

India and Pakistan’s competitive sovereignties over the Indus basin ignore the devastating impacts of climate change on the future of the entire subcontinent.

While the IWT did not anticipate climate-induced changes in the basin, more recently experts have urged that the IWT must “evolve” in order to confront climate catastrophes, which could trigger extreme water scarcity, uncertain floods and droughts, unprecedented heat waves, migrant crises, and even a nuclear war in the sub-continent. [53]

Such reasoned arguments as Betsy Joles outlines to protect “the second-most overstressed aquifer in the world” by renegotiating the terms of the IWT run counter to Modi’s belligerent policies. We worry, however, that the outcomes are very similar for Kashmiris who find their rights and claims to their rivers ignored once again, this time under the pretext of environmental protection and impending climate disasters.

Such seemingly progressive demands to renegotiate the IWT must account for the rights of indigenous Kashmiri communities over their rivers and water bodies.

A just and meaningful “path to sustainability and stability” cannot ever be paved without accounting for the erasure of Kashmiris from the terms of the Indus Water Treaty. Nor can concerns of ecological health camouflage dominant political and economic interests of two nuclear powered states.

[Against the Current](#)

Not all deaths at sea are equal

28 August 2024, by **Dave Kellaway**

Over the past week the tragic sinking of tech magnate Mike Lynch's yacht has been front page news in the papers and on TV every day in both in Britain and in Italy. By now, we all know about the lives and backgrounds of all the passengers. We know for instance that the youngest person lost, Lynch's daughter, was all set to go to Oxford and that Lynch was ready to play a similar tech advisory role with the Starmer government, as he did with Sunak. His lawyer, who successfully won the case against Hewlett Packard, died. Jonathan Bloomer, the international boss of Morgan Stanley, was also lost. These were people who moved at the highest level of capitalist society and had the ears of government ministers.

Mass media attention

The actual sinking has been endlessly replayed in video clips. There have been detailed graphics explaining the dynamics of the accident. The inside pages of the press have been filled with special dossiers about the tragedy. Experts have been brought in to talk in detail about the design of the vessel and the quality of the captaincy in those vital minutes before it sank. The tens of millions of pounds invested in the yacht have been tabulated for us. Both the Italian and the British authorities mobilized its specialized services to help out straightaway. British diplomats dashed to the scene.

There are likely to be court cases about the causes of the sinking and whether the ship's captain could have done things differently. It appears an adjacent yacht, albeit a lot smaller, survived the waterspout without any major difficulty. Given the assets represented by the yacht and the wealth of the people who have died there will be legal processes involving

the insurance companies too for months if not years to come.

Now let us think not about the horrible consequences for the seven people who were tragically lost in the Bayesian but the 66 people, including 26 women and children, who drowned not that far from there just weeks before. Most people would not even know that had happened since it received such scant coverage in the press. Since 2014, it has been calculated that 20,000 migrants and asylum seekers have been drowned in the Mediterranean trying to get to a safe country or to find the same sort of life and security that we all enjoy.

Refugee deaths

We do not know the names of most of these drowned people. Some lists are kept by refugee agencies and charities but are mostly ignored by the mass media. Even these agencies have to end up registering many as unknown. In Lampedusa and other places, the bodies that are washed up are laid in many unmarked graves. We know these drowned people had exactly the same drive and motivation as Lynch's daughter to work for a better life and to fulfil their dreams. We have to rely on a few survivors' accounts that do make the mass media, or fictionalized accounts like the film *Il Capitano* (reviewed here), to get some sense of their story.

There will be no teams of lawyers or insurers haggling over the net worth of individuals or establishing the causes of their deaths. No compensation will be made to them or their families. Instead, they will be treated as "illegals" for exercising their asylum rights as established under international law or the right of movement for their labour - as exists for the capital that Mike Lynch moved around the world without restriction. Their fate will be ascribed to the

villainous people smugglers who "manipulate" these ingenuous people. Very few people will publicise the fact that the small boats trade exists primarily because governments like Britain's refuse to provide safe and legal routes for asylum and spend huge amounts of resources on border security.

Instead of governments rushing all its high tech and specialist resources to the scenes of small boat sinkings, we have the evidence of Greek or Italian coastguards actively trying to avoid taking emergency action. They spend more time trying to argue that the tragedies do not fall within their jurisdictions rather than actually doing their job and saving lives.

Government complicity

Just this week Yvette Cooper, the Labour Home Secretary has stepped up deportations and increased the numbers in detention centres. People are drowning in the English Channel while the British and French authorities conveniently blame each other. It seems that the military technology they use in war cannot be put at the service of preventing any drowning at all in a relatively small sea.

Here in Italy, this week there has been a big controversy on whether immigrants' children born or brought up in Italy should have the automatic right of citizenship as is the case in many countries. One of the hard right government coalition parties, Forza Italia, (Berlusconi founded party) has broken ranks, and its leader Tajani has indicated it supports such a minimal progressive measure. Salvini, the racist leader of the Lega, a coalition partner, is particularly incensed by Tajani's new line. Salvini's new best friend, Vannacci a

reactionary ex-general headed up the Lega slate for the last Euro elections.

He has been busy questioning how “Italian,” Egonu, the star player of the Italian women’s volley ball team that won gold in Paris, really is. Paola Egonu happens to be black, she was born in Italy, of Nigerian parents. A few days ago yet another migrant worker died from the heat in the fields of the agribusiness area of Latina. He is the second in three months to die.

Of course, we do not crudely counterpose the tragic deaths of Lynch and

his friends with the thousands of migrants. All such unnecessary deaths, whether through freak weather conditions caused by global warming and human error or facilitated by European countries’ migration policies, should be mourned. Some idiots on social media, supposedly proclaiming their leftist credentials, have tried to revel in the deaths of these “representatives of the bourgeoisie.” There have been tasteless jokes and attempts to erect conspiracy theories. Socialists should reject such anti-humanist and childish rubbish.

Our focus is on how the mass media interprets and portrays these two sets of events. We want the mass media to report the tragedy of the migrants drowning from the small boats in the same intensity and detail as it covered the Bayesian sinking. We want an honest analysis of what causes the small boat phenomenon and policies discussed and proposed that could stop the drownings within weeks.

We want deaths at sea to be treated equally.

[Anticapitalist Resistance](#)

The global gag rule and women’s abortion rights

27 August 2024, by **Liz Lawrence**

In the context of the forthcoming US Presidential election, in which Republican and Democratic parties take very different positions on abortion rights and in which the Democratic presidential contestant, Kamala Harris, is taking a clear pro-choice stance.

Why birth control is essential for women’s liberation

Decades of feminist campaigning in many countries have led to a widespread understanding among feminists, socialists and labour movement activists that access to birth control is essential for women’s liberation. Many trade unions now have pro-choice policies. Debates around access to birth control, both contraception and abortion, often contain debates about the position of women in society. For conservatives who seek to restrict reproductive rights women should primarily be wives and mothers, living in a traditional patriarchal family, with other activities, such as education,

employment and participation in public life, secondary to the maternal role.

Supporters of women’s equality understand that equal participation in the public sphere, and for women living our lives as full human beings, involves the right for women to choose if, and when, to become mothers. A human being cannot participate equally in education, employment, politics or any other sphere, if life might be disrupted at any moment by unplanned pregnancy, and if their participation in the public sphere is always subject to the assumption that they might leave any position they occupy at any moment on account of pregnancy and motherhood. This stigma of potential maternity was used for generations to deny women equal opportunities in the workplace.

There are questions of bodily autonomy and access to health care involved. For the anti-abortionists the woman’s body is the property of anyone other than the woman, whether it be her parents, husband or the state. Birth control is healthcare. Without access to birth control many women suffer health damage and risk

to life from repeated pregnancies and childbirth.

What is the global gag rule?

The global gag rule is a United States Government ban on foreign NGOs which provide abortion services (including abortion advice) from receiving any US Government funding. It is also known as the Mexico City policy, because this was the venue where it was announced by the US Government at the United Nations International Conference on Population and Development.

This ban also affects NGOs which advocate for abortion law reform such as the decriminalisation of abortion. Even if any abortion-related activities are funded by the NGO from other sources, it still loses all US Government funding. The global gag rule originally ended \$600 million in money for family planning services. International Planned Parenthood lost 20% of its funding. Thus, healthcare organisations were faced with a choice of either losing funding or restricting

the services they provided.

The global gag rule was first introduced in 1985 by President Ronald Reagan. Since then, each successive US administration has decided either to maintain or lift the gag. This has made funding for abortion-related healthcare services a party-political issue in the USA and a matter of increasingly sharp political division. In some countries such matters can be seen as healthcare issues where there is a bipartisan or multi-party consensus, which is based on respect for the right of women to choose and on medical and scientific evidence. In the USA a change of President can almost immediately mean either the lifting or the re-imposition of the global gag rule, with Democratic Presidents Clinton, Obama and Biden all lifting the gag.

In January 2017 President Trump expanded the global gag rule to cover more health areas. It had originally applied to NGOs in the family planning field, but it was extended to all international healthcare assistance and affected nearly \$9 billion in healthcare funding. It thus affected areas like HIV education.

The global gag rule restricted the ability of healthcare workers to counsel clients properly and offer a full range of options or to campaign on healthcare issues. It had a chilling effect on health education and advocacy, similar to section 28 or other attempts by governments to limit sex education and advice by sexual health services. It can thus also be seen as a freedom of speech issue.

The health impact of the global gag

Maternal mortality worldwide is unacceptably high. About 287 000 women died during and following pregnancy and childbirth in 2020. Almost 95% of maternal deaths occurred in low and lower middle-income countries in 2020, and most could have been prevented by access

to better healthcare.

Women in low-income countries have a higher lifetime risk of maternal death. A woman's lifetime risk of maternal death is the probability that a 15-year-old woman will eventually die from a maternal cause. In high income countries, this is 1 in 5300, versus 1 in 49 in low-income countries.

For many women in the world today pregnancy is a life-threatening condition, as it was centuries ago world-wide. This means women go through pregnancy knowing it could lead to their death or permanent injury to health. This takes a toll on both physical and mental health.

Cutting funding for family planning services leads to more unplanned pregnancies, and may increase the abortion rate. Bans on abortion do not stop abortion; they just increase the likelihood that the procedure occurs under unsafe conditions, with higher rates of mortality and morbidity. The World Health Organisation estimates that 45% of abortions are unsafe.

The global gag has also impacted health education and health advocacy, including HIV/AIDS education and support for marginal and vulnerable groups, including workers in the sex industry. When funding for healthcare is cut, it is often the poorest and most vulnerable who are most affected.

How the abortion issue has been politicised

"My name is Ann Richards. I am pro-choice and I vote." This is what Ann Richards, Democratic Governor of Texas said at the Democratic National Convention in 1992. This is a good example of how women and pro-choice activists can be galvanised by this issue, as is happening now with the Kamala Harris campaign for the US Presidency.

The Republican Party has made

alliances with the Christian evangelical right, treating abortion as a key political dividing issue. Ultra-conservatives often pick an issue or two, whether abortion, homosexuality, transgender rights or sex education in schools as a focus for campaigning and as a test of political acceptability.

Right-wing Christian evangelicals and other religious fundamentalists subscribe to a theology in which salvation is linked with conformity to narrowly-defined, traditional gender roles, in which sex is only for reproduction and in which foetal life is given equal or higher status than the life of the pregnant person. Hence the woman who declines motherhood or the person who lives in a same-sex relationship or seeks to change gender cannot be accepted. This is a quest for Gilead, the dystopian society portrayed by Margaret Atwood in "The Handmaid's Tale".

Some Republican politicians are Christian nationalists; that is to say, they want to remove the separation of religion and the state, which was one of the major achievements of the American Revolution and to establish some version of a theocratic state. It can be hard for reasonable and liberal-minded people to appreciate just how reactionary all of this is.

Donald Trump and JD Vance use misogyny to mobilise a section of the electorate and to attack their opponents. It may fire up their base, but it will also turn off many American voters. Vance is mentioned often for his notorious remark that the US was governed by 'childless cat ladies' and the implication that only parents have a right to an opinion or a vote. Such views are off the wall and have sparked many amusing ripostes. Nonetheless they should not be ignored because they express both a serious level of misogyny and contempt for single people.

What happens in the US presidential election has significant implications for women's lives and for reproductive rights and healthcare provision world-wide.

Anti-Fascism and the Fall of Atlanticist Liberalism

26 August 2024, by **Gilbert Achcar**

This interpretation of the fate of Soviet ideology is undoubtedly correct, as the role of the Soviet Union in defeating Nazism was indeed the communist movement's strongest ideological argument after World War II, far exceeding the reference to the Bolshevik legacy of the Russian Revolution. However, what Furet and other anti-communists overlooked is that the liberalism to which they claimed to belong, just as the Stalinists claimed to belong to Marxism, was also based on anti-fascism, the difference being that it combined fascism with Stalinism under the category of totalitarianism. This was and remains the central claim of the Atlanticist type of liberalism, inaugurated by the Atlantic Charter that the United States and Britain concluded in 1941 to cement their alliance in World War II, and which became the basis of the Atlantic Alliance (NATO) established against the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

This Atlanticist ideology turned a blind eye, however, to the imperialist colonial roots of fascism as analysed by the great German-American Jewish thinker Hannah Arendt, for the obvious reason that NATO was established while its member states still ruled over colonial empires throughout the Global South. So much so that the postwar colonial fascist regime of Portugal itself was one of NATO's founders. As the world entered the age of decolonization, the Atlanticist ideology focused on opposing Soviet communism without abandoning its opposition to fascism, but almost limiting the latter to Nazism and the genocide of European Jews that it perpetrated. Thus, the Atlanticist ideology was able to claim a monopoly on representing the values of political freedom and democracy

upheld by historical liberalism, while it was trampling and continues to trample these very values in the Global South.

We have reached today a historical turning point in which the liberal claim that NATO has been wearing as a mask has fallen, at a time when that claim had just reached a new peak with the Alliance's opposition to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its claim to represent liberal values against Vladimir Putin's neo-fascist rule. This latter claim was made despite the rise of neo-fascism within the ranks of NATO itself and its arrival to power in some of its member states, including the United States under the presidency of Donald Trump. Atlanticist liberals continued nevertheless to use anti-totalitarianism, including opposition to fascism and neo-fascism, as the basis of their own ideology, portraying their struggle as a modern version of the struggle of (imperialist) liberalism against fascism in the 1930s, which took place in various countries of the Global North.

Today, the liberal mask has finally fallen from the Atlanticist ideology through the solidarity and collusion manifested by its leaders with an Israeli state ruled by neo-fascist and neo-Nazi factions of the Zionist colonialist movement - a state that is committing in the Gaza Strip the most heinous deliberate genocidal war waged by an industrialized state since the Nazi genocide, along with ongoing criminal abuses against the Palestinian people in the West Bank as well as in Israeli prisons, thus revealing a violent racist hostility towards the Palestinians relegated to the rank of subhuman beings

(Untermenschen) like the Nazis did to the Jews.

In light of this position of the Atlanticists, their liberal claim in opposing the Russian invasion of Ukraine has lost any credibility, just as their liberal claim to oppose fascism and genocide, and uphold other pillars of the ideology formulated by their predecessors after World War II and enshrined in the 1945 United Nations Charter, has become worthless. The great paradox in this historical shift is that the Atlanticists are using concern for the Jewish victims of Nazism as a pretext to justify their stance. They draw from the history of the struggle against Nazism a lesson impregnated with racist colonial logic, choosing solidarity with those who claim to represent all Jews, and whom the Atlanticists have come to see as part of their "white" world, even when they have themselves become criminal perpetrators of genocide, over solidarity with their non-"white" victims.

Thus, Hannah Arendt's theory of the origins of totalitarianism has been proven correct, since an anti-totalitarianism that only sees antisemitic hostility towards Jews as the evil's root, while ignoring the colonial legacy that is no less horrific than the crimes committed by Nazism, such an incomplete anti-totalitarianism is doomed to collapse, marred by an inability to overcome the white supremacist complex that presided over the greatest crimes of the modern era, including the Nazi extermination of European Jews, whom the Nazis saw as non-white intruders in their "living space" (Lebensraum) of white Nordic Europe.

[Gilbert Achcar's blog](#)

New Delhi faces the gravest geopolitical fallout from Sheikh Hasina's exit

25 August 2024, by **Kamal Ahmed**

The prime minister's desperate hold on power finally slipped when security chiefs warned that the advancing protesters would reach Gonobhaban within an hour and they doubted their ability to contain the crowd. Speculation that India, her strongest international ally, would intervene in her favour proved unfounded, and Hasina was left at the mercy of the military, which ultimately facilitated her escape across the border. She wound up at a safe house in Delhi, trying but failing to gain asylum in the United Kingdom. All told, the weeks of protests against her government, which started on university campuses and escalated in reaction to brutal state repression, left at least five hundred dead, including more than thirty children.

The hasty exit deprived Hasina of the chance to address her supporters and her country, as she had planned on doing that day. A week or so later, reports emerged of her describing the speech to her associates and blaming the United States for orchestrating her fall, apparently because she refused to surrender control over St Martin's Island in the Bay of Bengal. Hasina's son denied all of this, but it could not have helped her already rocky relationship with Washington DC, which months ago had criticised the sham election that gave Hasina a fourth consecutive term in power.

Friendless in the United States, rebuffed by the United Kingdom – and, reportedly, also Europe and the United Arab Emirates – Hasina is finding few places to turn to. China and Russia, earlier her vocal supporters, also appear too distant or too reluctant to help. For now at least, the deposed despot remains moored in Delhi, her presence there a daily reminder to the people of Bangladesh of New Delhi's role in enabling her

reign. Unsurprisingly, the Bangladeshi public's ire against India is only growing.

India likes to think of itself as the big brother in Southasia, and in New Delhi, too, Hasina's exit created shockwaves – in this case for the Indian big brother's failure to protect his little sister in her time of need. New Delhi struggled to issue a coherent response to the developments in Bangladesh for nearly 24 hours after Hasina fled. This delay was especially notable as India had previously been quick to label the growing protests against Hasina's rule, and her repression of them, Bangladesh's "internal matter". Now, even as thousands of Indian citizens returned home due to deteriorating security in Bangladesh, New Delhi remained silent until the Indian government convened an emergency all-party meeting.

The fact that New Delhi called an all-party meeting – something typically reserved for national-security emergencies – highlighted India's concerns over a potential influx of refugees from Bangladesh, which it has allegedly faced during past periods of turmoil. No such influx arrived this time, but India also has other security concerns in the country – not least that rebel groups from its restive Northeast could find safe havens across the border. That worry, to some extent, explains New Delhi's heavy investment in keeping Hasina in power and on its side, but acting as cheerleader to the despot has clearly now given New Delhi exactly the kind of instability it wants to avoid.

Since returning to power in 2009, after first holding office from 1996 to 2001, Hasina managed a delicate balancing act in Bangladesh's foreign policy, drawing praise for navigating

the geopolitical rivalry between China and India. Over time, the balance increasingly favoured India and the bilateral relationship deepened to an unprecedented level. Beneath the surface, however, widespread public discontent built up against what many perceived as India's exploitative relationship with Bangladesh – encapsulated, for example, by a highly controversial and skewed deal to buy power from the Adani Group, a conglomerate intimately tied to the Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi. This discontent erupted into a non-political "India Out" campaign following India's overt backing of the questionable re-election of Hasina and her Awami League party in January 2024.

As New Delhi got closer to Hasina, it successfully thwarted China's attempt to establish a deep-sea port in the Bay of Bengal, despite Bangladesh previously adding two Chinese submarines to its naval fleet. China's efforts to gain access to existing maritime ports in Chittagong and Mongla were similarly frustrated, while India secured concessions to use these ports and reportedly obtained management rights in Mongla. Hasina also agreed to India's proposal to establish a radar surveillance network along Bangladesh's coastline, and opened up new areas of cooperation, including defence procurement and collaboration on space technology.

One of Hasina's most controversial concessions was granting India corridor facilities for transporting goods through Bangladesh via road, rail and riverine routes. While bilateral trade quadrupled during Hasina's 15-year rule, it remained lopsided, with Indian exports to Bangladesh valued manyfold higher than Bangladesh's meagre USD 2 billion in exports to India. Following

the “India Out” campaign, Indian exports to Bangladesh and tourism earnings from the country saw steep declines, reflecting popular resentment towards India’s unwavering support for Hasina’s authoritarian regime.

While the “India Out” campaign, driven primarily by social-media influencers, gained momentum after the Modi government’s strong backing of Hasina’s re-election, the ground for anti-India sentiment had already been laid by decades of grievances. These included the frequent killing of civilians along the two countries’ border by India’s Border Security Force, the lack of reciprocity in the sharing of waters from common rivers like the Teesta, regular derogatory comments in Indian politics about Bangladeshis regarding alleged illegal migration, and a perceived hypocrisy in India’s stance over the rights of religious minorities.

Hasina’s disgraceful exit has necessitated a re-evaluation of India’s policy towards Bangladesh. There is a clear divide among Indian politicians and analysts, with some still denying that the uprising was a popular reaction to a brutal dictator and instead blaming it on Islamist forces or various international conspiracies. The more perceptive observers are noting Bangladeshis’ growing resentment against India’s perceived attempts to subvert their desire for democracy, justice and the rule of law through such things as spreading misinformation, stoking communal tensions and sheltering Hasina.

In fact, Bangladesh’s latest election was not the first non-democratic vote in Hasina’s favour that received New Delhi’s full approval; in 2014 and in 2018, India had backed Hasina

through unfree elections that returned her to office. This record has drawn lots of criticism within Bangladesh, including from Muhammad Yunus, the Nobel laureate and chief adviser of the interim administration installed in Hasina’s wake. “If there is a fire in the brother’s house, how can I say it is an internal affair?” he asked, expressing disappointment with India’s stance. On another occasion, he warned that destabilising Bangladesh would have repercussions throughout the surrounding region, including Myanmar and the seven states of the Indian Northeast.

The fallout of India’s deep-rooted support for Hasina and the Awami League is that it now requires an urgent recalibration of its policy towards Bangladesh. The United States, too, must reconsider whether allowing India a free hand in its “backyard”, as Washington DC did, was a wise decision. While some US State Department officials, including a former ambassador to Dhaka, advocated for stronger measures to ensure a free and fair election in Bangladesh earlier this year, their efforts were stymied by intense lobbying from security advisers in alignment with the Indian view. The recent insurrection in Bangladesh may force a reassessment of this approach, with an understanding that concessions to autocratic regimes in pursuit of the United States’s larger Indo-Pacific strategy carry the risk of further unrest.

By going so deep with Hasina, New Delhi has painted itself into a corner. In contrast, China’s swift response, expressing willingness to work with the new interim government, underscored its adaptability. Beijing had been eager to elevate its relationship with Hasina, and even invited her for an official visit

following her dubious election victory. But India’s diplomatic manoeuvring made New Delhi Hasina’s first official overseas destination after regaining power, and her subsequent trip to Beijing yielded little in terms of the economic relief Bangladesh desperately needs as its economy continues to struggle. China will now have to navigate its relationship with Bangladesh’s new leadership, particularly where it concerns the Belt and Road Initiative that has brought capital investment to the country at the cost of heavy debt.

Russia, another staunch supporter of Hasina’s regime, now faces its own challenges in Bangladesh. For years, it accused the United States of interfering in Bangladesh’s domestic politics, and dismissed calls for transparent and inclusive elections as disguised attempts at regime change. Here again, Hasina’s downfall may prompt a re-evaluation of Russia’s interests in Bangladesh, particularly in light of its investments in a nuclear power plant that has seen costs balloon to over USD 12 billion. As Bangladesh’s new leadership will be scrutinising these projects, Russia may need to reconsider its approach.

And similar scrutiny could await Indian investments as well. The Hasina government’s power deal with the Adani Group had already raised major red flags over its pricing, which heavily favours the Indian conglomerate. A closer look into its workings and how it came to be may bring out especially embarrassing revelations for the current Indian government, whose closeness to Adani is an open secret. The storm for New Delhi in Bangladesh could then get even worse.

[Himalmag](#)

Cost of living crisis sparks nationwide protest in Nigeria

24 August 2024, by **Baba Aye**

There were calls for the president to speak to the people, although the organisers stressed that they were more concerned with their demands being met than a mere presidential speech. Eventually, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu addressed the nation on Sunday. Not surprisingly, his speech was high on self-praise but low on any serious content about how people's hardship would be ameliorated, beyond empty promises that these hard times would lead to greater prosperity in an undefined future.

In the course of his speech, he alluded to the protests being the design of "a few with a clear political agenda to tear this nation apart", with a barely veiled threat to "ensure public order". At the same time, he urged those protesters "who desired a better and more progressive country" to call off the protests and embrace dialogue.

Some reformists in the ranks of protesters, as well as some who are clearly fifth columnists, have echoed the call to end the protests in the wake of the president's speech. Indeed, some, including a few ex-leftists, had asked the protesters to leave the streets after the first two days, saying their point had been made and, with violence in a number of states, there was no need to continue at the barricades.

But such positions do not represent the mood in the trenches of this movement. In Lagos, Abuja and across the country, the spirit of resistance has remained unbowed, despite increased attacks by the police and thugs aligned with the ruling party.

The road to #DaysOfRage

"We rather die of bullets than to die of hunger; we cannot stay at home and die of hunger".

The main driver of this national protest is excruciating hardship and

pangs of hunger driving millions of Nigerians to the edge of sanity and life itself, as a result of the economic policies of the current government. It has been the most thorough-going in implementing neoliberal policies. In fact, whilst speaking to business czars in Germany last November, President Tinubu declared that he deserved Guinness World Records recognition for economic reforms.

During his inauguration on 29 May 2023, he simply announced that the "petrol subsidy is gone". This resulted in an immediate 240% increase in the fuel pump price. The currency also lost 70% of its value against the dollar, having been devalued in June 2023 and again at the beginning of 2024. An electricity tariff hike of upwards of 300% has devastated homes, businesses, schools and hospitals.

Consumer price inflation, which averaged 13% between 2002 and 2022, now stands at 34%. What this means in concrete terms to working people in the country is that millions of people can barely feed themselves, pay their rent, or afford healthcare in a country where over 76% of health expenditures are out-of-pocket. People now die from easily treatable ailments.

Meanwhile, the working class demand for a living wage, as the new national minimum wage, was treated with contempt. After much ado about nothing, organised labour settled for an increase in the national minimum wage from N30,000 to N70,000, which was signed into law in July. But real wages have actually declined and sharply so, once again. When N30,000 was agreed upon in 2019, its value was \$83.50 (the value of the 2011 minimum wage of N18,000 was \$115.68). But the new minimum wage of N70,000 is worth just \$46.35. Working people in the informal economy are in an even more terrible state. There is hardly anywhere to turn to for credit. And other working people can hardly find money to pay for things purchased from them.

The generalised state of hardship and

hunger of working people in the country was a recipe for rebellion.

The first wave burst out spontaneously at the beginning of February in the North Central state of Niger and Kano in the North West. Within two weeks it had spread to several states, including in other geopolitical zones, in both the Northern and Southern parts of the country. The entry of the Nigeria Labour Congress, when it declared 27-28 February as nationwide workers' protest days, further generalised the momentum, even though the unions mellowed after only the first day. The wave continued into March in an atmosphere of an impending general strike, which the trade unions had created but failed to live up to. This contributed significantly to the petering out of that first act of an unfolding moment, of which the August #DaysOfRage is the second Act. But even at that time, it was clear to any discerning eye that the first round of protests heralded what could be a period of intense mass resistance to the state and its policies.

Propositions for #DaysOfRage to protest hunger in the land and #EndBadGovernance started circulating on several social media platforms in the wake of the revolt of the Kenyan youth. It was initially inchoate. The Take It Back movement, which was part of this discursive emergence online, stepped in, with Omoyele Sowore, its National Convener, conducting an online poll to distil out a shared set of demands. As calls for the action became sharpened, and the set date of 1-10 August drew closer, liberal reformists like the Labour Party's Peter Obi, as well as the Nigeria Labour Congress and Trade Union Congress, made it clear that they were not going to be part of the protests, but urged the government to respect the protesters' freedom of association and expression. Meanwhile, groups on the Left, with little if any traction in the emergent movement laid claim to being its 'leaders'.

For its part, the Nigerian state

brought out its whole bag of tricks to prevent the mass action from taking place. Several state officials issued threats that the government would smash any attempt to organise the #DaysOfRage protests. Blackmail and scaremongering were also thrown in for good measure. Pastors, bishops, imams, traditional rulers, academics and a host of such 'well-respected' people were brought in to echo the ruling class positions: the protests would lead to chaos, protests have never achieved anything, fifth columnists would hijack the protests even if they started as peaceful demonstrations, etc. The nefarious ethnic card was also shamelessly played, particularly in Lagos state, the metropolitan heart of Nigeria. A few days to the kickoff date of the #DaysOfRage, Lagospedia, an X account with over 41,000 followers which claims to proclaim the virtues of Lagos, launched an #IgboMustGo campaign.

All these did not work. The mood of a huge movement on the horizon was palpable. The state and its minions changed tactics. They started trending fake news that the protest had been postponed to 1 October, the Flag Independence Day. There were swift rebuttals from several quarters of people organising towards the protest movement.

The final card of reaction, before the movement was unfurled, was an attempt to tame it. Several tactics were brought to bear. The most strategic was a series of court orders on the eve of the protest, which limited demonstrations to designated venues where the state envisaged it would curtail disruption of public activities. Security forces' show of strength was displayed in several major cities. And by the dawn of 1 August, they were strategically positioned in every state capital to nip the protests in the bud or at least kettle them into insignificance.

Dynamics, trajectories and

prospects

The only consistent form of violence, across virtually all states, was that unleashed by the state and its sponsored agents.

There are peculiar dynamics to the demonstrations in different regions, as well as different states in the same regions. These partly reflect the nature of the social forces and the elements of differences in the histories of their repertoires of resistance. A lot has been said about the protests degenerating into violence, including by President Tinubu. Even Ebun-Olu Adegboruwa, who had stepped in as solicitor (attorney) for the organisers of the protest a few days earlier, issued an appeal to the protesters on 2 August to "withdraw themselves from the protest grounds" and "suspend the protests immediately and indefinitely", because "the protests were said to have been hijacked with sponsored agents".

What these sorts of appeals failed to appreciate is not only the diverse nature of violence but that the only consistent form, across virtually all states, was that unleashed by the state and its sponsored agents. In some instances, the police worked hand in hand with thugs to attack rallies. In most cases where the thugs acted alone, in the first few days, they were repulsed by the large numbers of demonstrators. Where the police acted alone, they were bolder, firing tear gas and even live bullets, resulting in fatal casualties. Violence was also unleashed by protesters in several Northern states, especially in response to police violence. A tragicomic case was that of a policeman who was killed by his colleague while firing at protesters in the North Western state of Katsina.

Once the genie of violence was let out of the bottle, burning and looting ensued. The state governments stepped in to protect property and reinstate order. Katsina state government declared a 24-hour curfew in Dutsinma local municipality and a 12-hour curfew in all other local government areas in the state. Five other states, spread across the three geopolitical zones in the North, have

also put curfews in place. Organisers of the protests were arrested in their homes over the weekend, and police launched house-to-house searches to recover "looted properties".

In the North East and North Central states affected, protesters defied the curfews after a few days of compliance. On 3 August, protesters took to the streets again in Kano, the second largest city after Lagos. One of the protesters is reported to have said, "We would rather die of bullets than die of hunger; we cannot stay at home and die of hunger". Interestingly, several protesters in Kano marched with the Russian flag raised high. A similar situation played itself out in Katsina two days later, even though Russia has dissociated itself from this. Protesters were not only waving the Russian flag in these states, they were also calling for a military takeover to save the poor masses, like what they assumed is the situation in the Sahelian states, particularly Niger, with which they share history, culture and even kith and kin.

Violence in the southern states was largely one-sided, from the police and thugs. But this was not wholly so. In Delta state, a policeman shot and injured a protester on 2 August. The hitherto peaceful protest became violent. Youths and market women sought to lynch the local government chair, who luckily escaped unhurt.

In Lagos, the epicentre was around the Gani Fawehinmi Freedom Park at Ojota, a major entry point into the state, with thousands of protesters coming from different parts of the state each day. It had also been the Lagos epicentre of the January 2012 #OccupyNigeria uprising, and it was designated as the place for the protest by the state, with a catch; protesters were to go into the gated park. They resisted, and the police were forced to concede. There were other rallying points, such as in front of the Lagos State House of Assembly at Alausa. But none drew the kind of crowd that was at Ojota.

The enthusiasm of protesters there was palpable. On Friday, the barricade coordinators suggested a weekend break; there was a loud shout of no, in response. The following day, there

were up to 5,000 people at the rally ground. It was, however, agreed to have it low-key on Sunday. In the wake of President Tinubu's speech on Sunday, fifth columnists tried to use the opportunity of the planned low turnout and the absence of most of the comrades who had provided leadership there to demobilise, claiming the protest had been called off. This deception, coupled with a much more massive anti-riot presence, resulted in declining numbers of protesters there on Monday. There were less than a thousand people, the least since the protest started.

Interestingly, Monday was when a protest could be held in Ondo state, where thugs had attacked activists rallying for a protest on Day 1 of the #DaysOfRage. This could inspire action in some of the remaining seven states.

Causes of protests not going away

The ongoing nationwide protest is the third massive protest movement in 21st-century Nigeria, after the 2012

#OccupyNigeria uprising and the 2020 #EndSARS Rebellion. But, while 2012 and 2020 started as largely spontaneous popular responses with no set time, these #DaysOfRage started with clearly defined commencement and end dates. Within the "structurelessness" and "leaderful" "leaderlessness" that defined #EndSARS and most of the unfolding autonomist-inspired social movements since #OccupyWallStreet, a sense of organisation is emerging. This is largely possible because of the role of a nationwide radical, non-sectarian Left platform: the Take It Back movement, which was equally central in cohering the demands and mobilisation of the #EndSARS movement.

Organised labour might also be losing its relevance as the social force representative of the working class. What happened on Day 1 and Day 2 was effectively a general strike. But it would be crucial for the emergent movement to be able to go beyond passive involvement of rank-and-file workers to active engagement in building working people's power.

It is also significant that this protest's demands started where the

#EndSARS demands ended before it was drowned in blood; #EndBadGovernance. Fostering an understanding of the necessity of system change and revolutionary democracy from below, rooted in working people's power, to "end bad governance" is of utmost importance for the Left's political work in the unfolding period. This would, amongst other things, help dispel the illusions in Putin, Russia and military vanguardism of any sort.

It is now past halfway through the #DaysOfRage. In light of the repression and chicanery thrown at it, the protest movement has, to a great extent, been a success. Much more important than the coming few days is the soil it has ploughed for the seeds of a coming storm, which is likely to come quite soon.

As the protest organisers pointed out when the state was finding people to hold responsible as mobilisers for the protest, the key mobilisers are hunger and generalised hardship in the land. And there is no sign that any of these are going away soon.

[Amandla](#)

From the "ruling realism" to the realism of the oppressed

23 August 2024, by **Nima Sabouri**

On the morning of 6th August, Reza Rasaei, a 34 year old Kurdish political prisoner and one of the detainees of the Jina Uprising, was executed after enduring months of imprisonment and torture. This state murder, along with the execution of 23 other prisoners during the week prior, occurred at a time when the Islamic Republic of Iran is in the middle of its most acute foreign political-military tensions, especially following the assassination of Hamas' political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran.

The occurrence of these executions at this moment, in addition to the issuance of the death sentence for two women political prisoners (Sharifeh Mohammadi and Pakhshan Azizi), is part of a mass murder campaign that has seen the execution of more than 200 other prisoners since the 21st of March 2024 alone (the first day of the Iranian calendar). In 2023, at least 853 persons were executed, about 300 more than in 2022. This accelerated campaign of state killings shows that for the rulers of the Islamic Republic, the main battleground is inside the

country, where the regime faces a huge mass of oppressed and angry people. The execution of prisoners, whether political or "non-political", is actually a tool to intimidate and terrorize this "dangerous crowd".

A day following Rasaei's execution, 29 other prisoners were executed in two prisons in Karaj, a city in north-central Iran. On the same day in the women's section of Evin prison in Tehran, prisoners who held a sit-in in protest of Rasaei's execution were brutally attacked. Some were physically hurt

so badly by the prison guards (amongst them Nobel Peace Prize recipient, Narges Mohammadi) that they had to be treated in hospital.

While the Islamic Republic, in spite of the hype, treats its foreign opponents as always with huge caution (so much so that it even informs them in advance and in detail of its performative military strikes), it does not recognize any limitations or considerations when confronting actual and potential opponents inside the country. This is because the rulers of the regime think that the balance of power in the domestic arena is in their favor (unlike in the foreign arena), and also because, based on their long experience in international politics, they know only too well that they will not be held accountable to any body at the international level for even the most heinous killings and atrocities they commit inside the country. This impunity rests on a core tenant of the international power system — an unwritten custom that dictates non-interference of governments in each other's "internal affairs". The effect of this has been that the rulers of Iran and other dictatorial regimes have a green light to attempt to completely suppress their own "citizens", which would also be an "optimal" solution for the global powers to outsource the maintenance of the dominant order to the dictator regimes.

In the domestic sphere, the regime also hopes that the long-term practice of suffocating voices through maximum repression will still work, so they attempt to control the consequences of oppression and repression with more oppression and repression, via intimidation. This is why, for example, in recent years, we start our mornings every day with news of fresh executions.

Having said that, the situation described above is not as static as it seems. Under the shell of suppression, there exists a flow of resistance. Continuous executions are actually a state-tool of intimidation to curb these resistances. Some visible examples of

this resistance-flow (despite the intensification of state repression) are: the stands by justice-seekers (families of those killed by the state), daily and civil resistance of women*, frequent strikes and protests of workers (including retirees, teachers, nurses, industrial workers, oil and gas workers, etc.), the resistance of the marginalized and oppressed nationalities (Kurds, Baloch, Ahwazi and others), environmental protests, and also the continuation of the resistance of prisoners in dozens of prisons across Iran. The noteworthy point is that, at least in the current phase, the intimidation function of increasing executions has not been as effective as the rulers had expected. For example, parallel to the increase in executions, the range of the prisoners participating in the hunger-strike of the "Tuesdays of No to Execution" campaign in Iranian prisons has expanded (as I write, it is the twenty-eighth week of this campaign).

Furthermore, even if the rulers of Iran's Islamic system have forgotten the fate of their former political relatives, such as Omar al-Bashir (of Sudan), they are now fearfully witnessing how the anger and determination of the oppressed in Bangladesh has marked a humiliating fate for another one of their political relatives.

It is for all of those reasons that for the rulers of the Islamic Republic, the main battlefield has always been inside the country; that is, their "main enemy" or the main obstacle to the expansion of their absolute power has been the oppressed, angry and desperate masses. The confidence of the rulers in recognizing this main enemy, and their ruthless determination in advancing this fateful battle, is due to the knowledge they have, more than anyone else, of the depth of the multiple crises they have created during the life of their sinister political system. These crises are so deep that even if they (presumably) want to, they can not provide any

ointment to reduce the suffering and anger of the masses. In addition, the successive waves of mass uprisings in Iran since December 2017 have revealed the extent of the gap and antagonism between the state and the oppressed.

Therefore, the Iranian rulers' awareness of the irreversibility of the path they have taken is the main theme of their "political realism". This "ruling realism" has determined the main strategy of their governance beyond the ideological and religious sediments of the past. Based on this "realistic" strategy, the main goal of the Islamic Republic is nothing but maintaining the survival of its political system, under any conditions and at any cost. This goal partly explains why the Islamic Republic has increasingly embraced militarism, especially in the last two decades, and has so tightly mixed its capitalist economy, domestic politics, and foreign policy with militarism.

Since capitalism, despite the diversity of its local and regional children, is a global system, the imperialist mechanisms supporting this system also operate on a global scale. This is how - for instance - the glorious revolution of the Sudanese peoples, in the absence of global solidarity, has been surrounded by global and regional powers and is caught in a "war of the generals", with the aim of destroying its revolutionary surpluses in famine, mass displacement and mass killing.

The current and nascent political revolution in Bangladesh reminds us, however, once again, that revolution is a manifestation of the "realism of the oppressed" — that there is no other way to freedom. This is, in itself, an emancipatory realism, even though its transformative power can only be realized through deepening the revolution and solidarity of the oppressed on a global scale.

16 August 2024

Source [World Without Prisons](#).

Why we are closing our center for displaced women in Lviv

22 August 2024, by **Collective**

In this publication, we'd like to summarise our work, tell you more about our experiences that we may not always have covered. And to answer the question of what we plan to do next.

Why is the refuge closing?

To be honest, the closure of the refuge is a great sadness, not only for the crisis team that opened the refuge, but also for all the teams in our organisation. Visitors to our events will have realised that for two years, our organisation's office was a small room in the large refuge building. That's why, very often, lunches at the office took place in the communal kitchen with the refuge residents, over conversation and coffee. Our community events were held in the attic, where the children who lived in the shelter played at other times, outside of the events. So it's a very important place for our whole organisation. And it is very dear to us. We believe that the shelter has fulfilled its original function as a temporary 'home'.

We have also maintained this shelter entirely thanks to international donors, and it has now become impossible for the crisis team to raise the funds needed to continue its work.

It is important to stress that the issues of funding and the feasibility of continuing activities have come together to form the same situation: it has become more difficult for associations to find money for shelters, whereas municipal shelters have free space and the capacity to accommodate more people.

What can we say about our work with refugees?

First of all, it certainly came at the

right time! We opened such a large shelter when the temporary shelters set up in the kindergartens and schools of Lviv closed their doors. We received a lot of criticism about the fact that six months of large-scale war had already passed and the associations had only just started to do something about it. We didn't have the same resources as the state to launch a large-scale reception and shelter people in one day. We had no premises and no staff. We needed time to find funding, to plan and, finally, to carry out work that we had never done before. But we managed to meet the needs of the situation very quickly.



In particular, in June 2022, when a large number of temporary shelters were closed in schools and kindergartens. This is where the story of our shelter begins. We sent out announcements to various groups of displaced people. When the refuge opened on 1st June, just one family, the Kiselyovs, whom you have probably heard about in our articles, came to visit us. They liked the place and chose a room. Within half an hour, everyone started coming: the refuge was full from day one!

We think the same applies to the closure of the refuge. At the moment, the situation in the Lviv region, with the influx of people, with the number of people who intend to stay here, is fairly predictable, but not chaotic. Many people have been living here for years, there is a small influx of new people, and people always choose to stay, or to move to places close to home, so that they can at least get there.

That's why temporary shelters like ours are no longer an urgent need for

the city at this time. We have fulfilled our function and the time has come to abandon the provision of accommodation services. However, if you are looking for somewhere to stay in Lviv and the surrounding area, please contact the Displaced Persons Assistance Center on +380505554461.

According to the national rules for social services, a social service such as a refuge has certain requirements for the organisation of space. For example, it specifies what a bed must look like and how many square metres must be available per person. The new Resolution 930 also clearly describes the requirements relating to the rules of residence and the behaviour of employees and residents. This means that there are general rules: no drinking, no smoking, no fighting, and so on. In fact, social work requires a much greater involvement of one person in the life of another. And that has its advantages and disadvantages. The main question we have been thinking about throughout our work is to what extent our help should have limits and to what extent these limits are objective in the current situation.

Let me give you an example that struck me during a conversation with another colleague. She was telling me about a family of elderly men and women that she had taken into her accommodation center. They arrived with no papers, just a bag of belongings: everything had been burnt. My colleagues welcomed them, gave them clothes and food, and helped them find their papers. Then the question arose as to whether they should find work. They helped the man in this family find a job on a building site. On his first day working on the site, he had an accident and died. The same social workers, employees and volunteers from the shelter helped to raise funds for the funeral ceremony.

And they buried the man. This case often makes me think about these boundaries: do they need to exist in today's situation? These days, social assistance has already gone beyond any possible classification of social services, even in cases like this.

What did we do while the refuge was in operation that we didn't think of?

We investigated the disappearance of Black Pearl cream from a bedroom, helped a 60-year-old woman learn to literally say "no" and stand up for her boundaries. We've helped her look for food, we've raised funds for her rehabilitation after a kidney transplant. We carried out repairs to a house where the residents of our refuge were about to move. We organised songs, parties and picnics. And we tried to figure out: how many kilos of food do you need for a picnic for 50 people?

We put an end to fights. We have developed methods to help people accept the help of a psychologist. For example, we asked two people at odds to cook borscht together. Together we produced a magazine about the lives of the residents of our home. We helped them find jobs, we listened to them... We placed a mentally handicapped person in supported housing, we helped her overcome an eating disorder, we tried to get someone out of a suicide attempt, we played with children, we taught a disabled woman how to write, we organised film clubs, we talked to

support them... We didn't manage many things. Maybe we didn't know how to do it properly, maybe we were too busy with our own affairs to think about it. We're very proud of the crisis team who took responsibility for this work. Speaking of these people, I'd like to recall a quote from a cartoon where one character says to another, "Yeah, I like people who don't do stupid things": "Yes, what I like most are people who don't worry about things like reality". We had to find solutions on the fly. In some situations, there was no solution and the whole team got together for a glass of wine and a pizza. We attended many supervision meetings during which we cried like crazy and said "no, we'll never go back to that refuge".



And there were moments when we got together, hugged each other and told each other how cool we were, that we'd done an incredible job. That's why working in a refuge wasn't about living your own life or that of your family and friends. It was about living the lives of 20 people who lived in our refuge every day: with their problems, their joys. We rejoiced at their successes, we mourned their failures and we were angry when new restrictions appeared. To sum up, I would like to say that, given the fact that we met these people in such a situation, this work was marked by a great deal of tenderness and care.



*Extraction PDF IPCC WG3 report:
from scientific rigor to social fable*

If I had the opportunity to say something to all the people who lived with us during that period, I would say that it was very important to me. During the first two difficult years of the full-scale invasion, when I was separated from my family, who are now living under occupation, I wasn't able to help my family. It was very important for me to be able to help and be useful. It was a mutually beneficial relationship. We helped you as much as we could to keep going, and you helped us. I think we all needed each other to be able to survive this war and try to get on with life.

The shelter is closing, but we are continuing to help women in crisis. We plan to continue our digital literacy courses and recruit for the 'Moving On' retraining programme. The difficult but invaluable experience we have gained at the shelter will certainly lead to new social projects. We're working towards victory!

The text was prepared by Katya, crisis coordinator. With a lot of love!

Feminist Workshop

Translation Patrick Le Tréhondat

Charting a new course for Hong Kong's struggle

21 August 2024, by Yuet Zi

Under the shadow of the National Security Law, Hong Kong has entered a "post-movement" era. Hong Kong's struggle for democracy and self-determination is at the lowest point in

its history. This essay is an attempt to understand Hong Kong's current political situation, reflect on the experience of the mass movement of 2019, and chart a new course for the

future of the Hong Kong people's struggle for democracy and self-determination.

Why was the 2019 uprising defeated?

We can attempt to understand why by reflecting on three ideas that strongly influenced the democracy movement's strategy at the time: Benny Tai's "Ten Steps to Mutual Destruction", the doctrine of "burnism" (燒) in itself, and the framing of Hong Kong's struggle as a "revolution in one city".

I hope that my tentative ideas will ignite discussions among fellow Hongkongers in the democracy movement who are still fighting today.

Part 1: Mutual Destruction and "Ten Steps"

The doctrine of threatening mutual destruction, also known as "laam chau" or "burnism" (燒), which emerged during the 2019 uprising, has failed. It is a doctrine of defeatism, and a strategic, programmatic, and ideological dead end.

The beginning of the endgame

By 2020, the street movement had run out of steam. After the battles of CUHK and PolyU, frontline protesters were already worn down by mass exhaustion, injuries, and arrests from months of fighting the police. The decentralised months-long campaign to make Hong Kong ungovernable during the period of "Flowering Everywhere" (遍地開花) through widespread and sustained disruption of transport and infrastructure was ultimately suppressed. The "Triple Strike" on August 5, 2019, which was supposed to be a citywide general strike, failed to gain traction and ended the next day. The regime refused to make any further concessions. Fear and anxiety over COVID-19, as well as the government's exploitation of the pandemic to crack down on public gatherings, had a demoralising and demobilising effect on Hongkongers.

Had an uprising of the size and scope of 2019 happened elsewhere, it might have been sufficient to overthrow the regime, or at least to force concessions and win reforms. However, Hong Kong is not a

sovereign polity but instead exists in a quasi-colonial, vassal-suzerain relationship with the People's Republic of China. The Hong Kong SAR government did not hold the power to meet the demands of the democracy movement. It was the SAR government that bore the brunt of the pressure from the protest movement, but the actual power to grant the concessions demanded by the democracy movement lay with the Chinese central government.

The 2019 uprising was highly sophisticated, militant, and tenacious. The movement attracted widespread international attention, but was effectively confined to Hong Kong. It failed to spread to mainland China. Nor was there any mainland Chinese democracy movement or social unrest to distract or put additional pressure on the Chinese regime. Although it was a thorn in the side of the CCP, the 2019 uprising in Hong Kong failed to pose a sufficiently significant threat to the CCP's rule over China. After a year of intense and bruising struggle, time was running out for the democracy movement.

The nature of Hong Kong's political system

The 2020 LegCo election presented an opportunity for the pro-democratic leadership to take the movement down a new avenue of struggle. They sought to reinvigorate the struggle for democracy by returning to the electoral and legislative arena. This was despite recognising that even a pro-democratic majority in the LegCo would not necessarily translate to actual law-making or policy-making power, due to the inbuilt constitutional constraints of the LegCo under CCP rule.

A pro-democratic majority in the LegCo would not by itself be able to grant the "Five Demands". This is because real decision-making power lies with the executive, not the legislature, under Hong Kong's "executive-led" and undemocratic political system.

Related to this was also the fact that the appointment and dismissal of the Chief Executive and their principal officials is not something over which

the people of Hong Kong—or, as it turned out, the Chief Executive herself—have any power. The final say rested with Beijing.

The "Ten Steps" to "Mutual Destruction"

A way out was found in the doctrine of "laam chau". The proponents of "laam chau" in the leadership of the democracy movement believed that they could leverage Hong Kong's status as an international financial centre and China's interface with the West against the CCP. They believed that the CCP would be unwilling to sacrifice the "golden goose" without which its meteoric rise and continued status as an economic superpower would not be possible. They believed that the CCP would not resort to overly draconian repression that would undermine Hong Kong's liberal institutions and rule of law, on which its reputation as a safe haven for foreign investment into China was seen to depend. If the CCP had to resort to such draconian repression, this would both kill off the "golden goose" of Hong Kong and turn the CCP into an international pariah.

As a result, Benny Tai came up with the **"Ten Steps to Real Mutual Destruction"**, combining "laam chau" with the opportunity presented by the 2020 LegCo elections, as the way forward for the democracy movement. The starting point was for the pro-democracy camp to win a "35+" majority of seats in the 2020 LegCo elections. After that, the opposition-controlled LegCo would exert pressure on the regime by vetoing all government bills, including the annual budget, to paralyse the government and trigger the resignation of the Chief Executive, in accordance with the Basic Law.

According to the "Ten Steps", the Chinese central government would then be forced to intervene by declaring a state of emergency over Hong Kong, replacing the leaders of the Hong Kong government, and conducting mass arrests of pro-democracy leaders. This would lead to the escalation of the uprising and necessitate a bloody crackdown. Finally, China would be sanctioned by the West.

One way to understand the “Ten Steps” is as a bet against the resolve and ability of the regime to defeat an opposition-controlled LegCo highly committed to resistance, up to and including the use of metaphorical “scorched earth” tactics. In other words, the “Ten Steps” was a political gamble in the form of a bluff.

The “Ten Steps” envisioned that the only way the CCP could overcome the resistance of the opposition-controlled LegCo was through increasingly draconian and norm-violating measures, culminating in the deployment of the People’s Liberation Army into Hong Kong to carry out a bloody crackdown reminiscent of the Tiananmen Square Massacre. The ensuing fallout would result in the “mutual destruction” of both the CCP and Hong Kong. The political calculation was that the cost of “restoring order” to Hong Kong would be so high that the CCP would rather back down.

The pro-democratic leadership acted on this calculus by organising primary elections for the pro-democracy camp in July 2020 to achieve a “35+” majority. In a declaration entitled “Inked Without Regret”, a majority of primary candidates pledged, if they were elected, to use the LegCo’s veto powers under the Basic Law to force the Chief Executive to grant the “Five Demands”. For this, they were jailed for conspiracy to commit subversion under the NSL in the “Hong Kong 47” case.

The “Ten Steps” can thus be understood as a radical bargaining tactic based on the threat posed by an opposition-controlled LegCo with the will to resist until “mutual destruction” to force the regime to the negotiating table.

The alternative interpretation is to take the “Ten Steps” at face value and assume that it really did seek the “mutual destruction” of the democracy movement and the regime as an end in itself, and that its ultimate goal was really to provoke a bloody crackdown by the CCP. This would supposedly lead not only to sanctions from the West, but also to the severing of ties and the ostracization of China as a barbaric dictatorship by the

international community. The idea was that such a defeat would at least cost the CCP dearly.

In this case, the “Ten Steps” can only be seen as a doctrine of defeatism. It is silent on the question of what happens to Hong Kong’s struggle for democracy and self-determination after “mutual destruction” is achieved. It had already preordained the tragic defeat of Hong Kong’s struggle for democracy and self-determination and offered no way out for Hong Kong’s democracy movement. It had already conceded defeat and was merely trying to take the regime down with it.

A fatal miscalculation

Either way, the pro-democratic leadership’s “way out” in 2020 was to fall back on the pan-democrats’ old tactic of filibustering in the LegCo. Their escalation of the struggle for democracy did not seek a rupture with the legal and constitutional framework, but to push it to its limits until the CCP backed down or there was “mutual destruction”.

However, such a strategy was based on the fatal assumption that the CCP would stand by and allow the pro-democracy camp to win a majority of seats in the 2020 LegCo elections in the first place.

On July 31, 2020, two weeks after the July primaries, the Hong Kong government, no doubt under orders from Beijing, resorted to the simple expedient of postponing the 2020 LegCo elections through the colonial-era Emergency Regulations Ordinance, cynically justified on public health grounds in the face of the looming COVID-19 pandemic.

Of course, this was a blatant political manoeuvre intended as a preemptive strike against “35+”. The momentum of the 2019 uprising was such that a pro-democracy victory in the LegCo elections was highly likely. The goal of a “35+” pro-democratic majority in the LegCo was certainly within reach. This was confirmed firstly by the pro-democratic landslide in the 2019 District Council elections, and secondly by the massive public turnout of more than 600,000 voters for the historic pro-democracy primary

elections in July 2020. This was a very impressive result, especially since the primaries were repeatedly condemned by the regime and subjected to repressive state interference.

But by postponing the elections, the regime pulled the rug out from under the pan-democrats and regained the initiative for its counteroffensive.

The LegCo elections were postponed by a year until December 2021. In the meantime, the National Security Law was used to detain most of the leading activists, legislators, and election candidates of the democracy movement. The Chinese Communist Party intervened directly through the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress (NPCSC) to impose “reforms” in 2021 to Hong Kong’s electoral system, reducing the amount of directly elected LegCo seats to twenty out of ninety and requiring candidates to be vetted by the Committee for Safeguarding National Security and the National Security Department of the Hong Kong Police.

The CCP did not need to deploy the PLA or People’s Armed Police into Hong Kong to defeat the 2019 uprising. The Hong Kong government’s exercise of colonial-era emergency powers to postpone the 2020 LegCo election, and the Chinese central government’s intervention through the NPCSC to impose the National Security Law and the 2021 electoral “reforms”, were sufficient.

This required the CCP to violate “One Country, Two Systems”, but as we shall see, this was not that big of a deal. It did not lead to “mutual destruction”.

Even if the COVID-19 pandemic had not occurred, the regime would never have allowed the formation of an opposition-led LegCo. It would have easily found other means to prevent the “35+” plan from coming to fruition. This includes the electoral “reforms” and the mass disqualification or incarceration of all pro-democracy candidates and legislators, which the regime ended up doing anyway, after postponing the elections, by jailing the “Hong Kong 47”.

The master's tools will not dismantle the master's house

The pro-democratic leadership's attempt to escalate the struggle within the boundaries of the legal and constitutional framework failed. It was based on a fatal miscalculation of the balance of power between the democracy movement and the CCP within Hong Kong's non-sovereign political structure.

It assumed that the regime would somehow allow the formation of an opposition-controlled LegCo that sought a regime change and would pose an existential threat to its rule not only over Hong Kong, but all of China by extension.

When push comes to shove, the constitution is just a piece of paper, and democratic norms and customs might as well only exist as a figment of the pan-democrats' imagination. The pro-democratic leadership overestimated their own ability to escalate the struggle within the legal and constitutional framework—terrain on which the regime has every advantage due to Hong Kong's "executive-led" system. They underestimated the speed, ease, and ruthlessness with which the regime could preemptively neutralise such a threat. Finally, their inherent ideological conservatism prevented them from imagining a rupture with the regime's legal and constitutional framework.

The lesson to be learned from the failure of the "Ten Steps" is that if the Hong Kong people are to successfully carry out a democratic revolution in the future, they must have their own sources of political power that cannot be unilaterally annulled by the regime, as the prospect of an opposition-controlled LegCo was by Carrie Lam's emergency decree.

For the people to overthrow the regime, they cannot rely on the laws and loopholes of the regime's own political system. It does not make sense to play by the rules when the regime can change the rules at a moment's notice. After the NSL, Article 23, and the regime's electoral "reforms", the electoral front no longer exists, but it was never viable

as a route to revolution in the first place. Even if we manage to seize hold of the master's tools, they will never dismantle the master's house. We must not fall into the trap of playing the regime's institutional games.

Instead, Hongkongers must draw on their own collective power as the people. During the 2019 uprising, the whole of Hong Kong society was mobilised to take part in the struggle. The mass movement of the Hong Kong people proved that they have the will and the power to fight not only against the Extradition Law and police brutality, not only for democracy and to uphold "One Country, Two Systems" and the rule of law, but also for the right to determine their own destiny. This is the power of the million-strong marches of 2019, including the "2 Million+1" march on 16 June; the storming of the LegCo on July 1; the attempted "Triple Strike" on August 5; the "Hong Kong Way" on August 23; "Hong Kong's Dunkirk" on September 1; the period of "Flowering Everywhere", when the mass movement spread to the neighbourhoods of Kowloon and the New Territories; the militant occupations of the Baptist, City, Chinese, and Polytechnic

Universities in November; the New Union Movement; the five-day health workers' strike in February 2020; and the Lennon Walls, mutual aid networks, volunteer medical teams, citizen journalists, self-organised protest groups, "parent cars", nightly neighbourhood rallies, street battles, and barricades throughout 2019.

The 2019 uprising gave us a glimpse of what we could accomplish by our own power, but the mass movement, lacking sufficiently visionary leadership or consciousness, did not react quickly enough or go far enough. A later section in this essay will discuss how the power that is latent within us, the people, can be channelled towards the seizure of power from below when the next great social eruption or crisis occurs.

Part 2: Destruction

Not Mutual

According to "laam chau", the consolation prize if the democracy movement and the struggle of 2019 were defeated would be the escalation of the New Cold War between China and the West. This would be bought at the grievous cost of the crushing of Hong Kong's freedom and autonomy and the demise of Hong Kong's democracy movement.

The 2019 uprising was defeated, and Hong Kong's democracy movement was subsequently crushed. But as it transpired, the CCP was able to "have its cake and eat it too".

The catastrophic breakdown of relations between China and the West envisaged by the proponents of "laam chau" did not materialise. What few sanctions the West has imposed on the CCP have been limited and ineffective, failing even to inconvenience the targeted Chinese and Hong Kong officials, let alone to persuade the CCP to end the crackdown and restore democracy, the rule of law and "1C2S" in Hong Kong. In fact, to be sanctioned by the West has become a point of pride for Hong Kong and Chinese officials today.

Although Western governments have offered lifeboat schemes to attract Hongkonger immigrants as a boost to their own economies and labour markets and have condemned the regime's crackdown on the democracy movement, they have refrained from doing anything substantial that would meaningfully disrupt their relations and trade with China. If the embattled Chinese economy implodes, it will be under the weight of its own contradictions, not because of the disjointed Western sanctions enacted to "avenge" the demise of Hong Kong's democracy movement.

The new political order that the regime has imposed through repression has spooked Western investors and businesses, prompting an exodus of foreign capital, talent and business from Hong Kong. But having withdrawn from Hong Kong, Western corporations have very little stake left in the city's political situation. The demise of Hong Kong's

status and relevance as an international financial centre will not lead to “laam chau”, as the CCP regime can survive without Hong Kong, but will instead hasten Western government’s abandonment of the Hong Kong people and their democratic struggle.

The mirage of “mutual destruction”

Since 2020, Hong Kong’s democracy movement, student movement and labour movement have all been crushed by the regime. All the progress towards democratisation since the Handover has been undone. Whatever limited electoral democracy and political freedom existed in Hong Kong before, no longer exists. The lifting of the “zero-COVID” policy in Hong Kong did not lead to a political thaw, but to the normalisation of white terror without any pretence of pandemic control. The Chinese government has even explicitly repudiated the Sino-British Joint Declaration, saying it is a “historical document” that “no longer has any practical significance”.

“One Country, Two Systems” was destroyed along with Hong Kong’s democracy movement, but this destruction did not cost the CCP all that much. It certainly was not mutual. International attention did not stay the CCP’s hand.

The failure of the “Ten Steps” to achieve “mutual destruction” should not be surprising, given that the CCP was the regime which perpetrated the June 4th Tiananmen Square Massacre. Nevertheless, the same regime soon after achieved massive success in its economic wooing of Western investors, corporations and governments, paving the way for its emergence as a superpower in the 21st century.

Similarly, Western governments stood by during the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 as the Hungarian revolutionaries were massacred by the Soviet army, and during the Prague Spring of 1968 as the Warsaw Pact invaded and placed Czechoslovakia under military occupation.

As it was in the past, so it is today.

The governments of the West have short memories and other priorities. The June 4th Tiananmen Square Massacre did not stop the British government from handing Hong Kong over to the CCP on schedule come 1997. Regardless of whether it is because Western governments lack the will or the ability (or both) to “Free Hong Kong”, the reality is that we cannot expect our salvation to come from these quarters.

Hongkongers are not pawns

Following the defeat of the 2019 uprising and the subsequent crackdown, many Hongkongers emigrated overseas, where they regrouped to form a diasporic Hong Kong democracy movement. Elements of this diasporic democracy movement place the focus of the struggle on lobbying Western governments to sanction, divest, and decouple from China, framed in terms of resisting the CCP (共产党) on the “international front” (国际战线).

Resisting the CCP is important, but it must not hijack our struggle. The CCP is the obstacle that stands in the way of our right to democracy and self-determination. How to overthrow the CCP is of paramount importance, but it is still only a means to an end. The endgame of our struggle is not just the negative goal of taking down the CCP, but the positive goal of achieving democracy and self-determination. The “international front” is only one front among many. Our struggle should not be reduced to seeking revenge by convincing the West to punish the CCP.

Such a view robs Hongkongers of their agency. It leads to seeing Hongkongers as merely expendable pawns of the West in its geopolitical rivalry with China.

Who are the agents of the revolution?

Democracy cannot be subcontracted, and neither can self-determination. Nor is the right to democracy and self-determination something that is bestowed (赐予) on people by states or governments. Democracy and self-determination can only be fought for and won (争取) by the Hong Kong people

themselves, just like how the “Revolution of Our Times” can only be carried out by the Hong Kong people. Our destiny is in our own hands. After the revolution, it will be the Hong Kong people who build and participate in their own democracy, who decide their own destiny, and who write their own history.

It is a utopian fantasy to sit idly by and wish for the collapse of the Chinese Communist Party regime, hoping that whatever regime comes after will grant the Hong Kong people democracy and self-determination. Instead, the Hong Kong people must fight to achieve democracy and self-determination by themselves, on their own terms, regardless of whether whoever rules over China is willing to grant them these demands.

Revolution is the only way out

A democratic revolution is the only way out in the post-NSL and “post-movement” era. This means the overthrow of CCP rule over Hong Kong and the seizure of power by the Hong Kong people. Such is the only way to achieve our democratic aspirations. This does not just mean the resignation of the Chief Executive and their principal officials. Instead, the Hong Kong people must realise their own demands by forming their own organs of grassroots political power (in other words, a self-constituted revolutionary government over Hong Kong) through which to exercise their right to democratic self-government and self-determination. A later section in this essay will discuss how this can be achieved.

This moment of revolution is the culmination of a revolutionary struggle that may take decades, carried out by a revolutionary democratic movement that must operate underground in Hong Kong with support from the Hongkonger diaspora. Thus, there must not only be an “international front” but an “underground front” as well. The task of building this revolutionary democratic movement both in diaspora and on the ground in Hong Kong should be our main priority today, with Hongkongers being both the subjects and the agents of this work.

The Hong Kong people have never had to wage such a struggle before. But the experience of the Hong Kong people's struggle over the past three decades cannot be so easily forgotten or repressed. Although the 2019 uprising was defeated, its experience has been etched indelibly into the collective memory of the Hong Kong people and the history of Hong Kong. The experience of the 2019 uprising, in which the Hong Kong people took part in their millions, is their greatest asset in the struggle.

Part 3: Revolution in One City?

The question of Hong Kong independence

The slogan of Hong Kong independence emerged as a response to the failure of the democracy movement to achieve its ultimate goal of democracy and self-determination for the Hong Kong people within the pan-democrats' framework of "democratic reunification". It was also a response to the CCP's systematic erosion of Hong Kong's autonomy that violated the spirit, if not necessarily the letter, of "1C2S". Finally, it was posed as a solution to the "China factor" blocking the progress of Hong Kong's struggle.

However, we must not confuse the failure of the democracy movement to achieve tangible gains with the traditional pan-democratic emphasis on the role of Hong Kong's democracy movement in building a democratic China. We cannot reject the notion of solidarity or a common struggle between the Hong Kong and Chinese democracy movements. It is wrong to view Hong Kong's struggle for democracy as separate and divorced from the struggle for democracy in mainland China.

The fantasy of a "revolution in one city" is simply not possible. Hong Kong is not Taiwan, and even Taiwan has to contend with the Chinese behemoth across the strait. Even if there is a successful revolution that overthrows CCP rule over Hong Kong, it is certain that the CCP will intervene militarily against it if it

remains in power in the rest of China. If such a military intervention occurs, it would certainly be successful. No Western power will intervene militarily to save Hong Kong from a PLA invasion, not least because it would trigger World War III.

Only the people of mainland China can overthrow the CCP, and to this end, the Hong Kong democracy movement must support the growth and development of a mainland Chinese democracy movement.

The lesson of the Prague Spring and the Hungarian Revolution

With the exception of Romania, the democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe in 1989 were carried out by mass protest movements using civil resistance to pressure their national ruling classes to implement democratising reforms and cede power through a democratic transition.

The victory of these relatively bloodless democratic revolutions was only possible because the suzerain power—the Soviet Union—was unable and/or unwilling to intervene to prop up the Communist regimes in their satellite states. After the withdrawal of Soviet support and protection, the demoralised Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, facing economic collapse and lacking popular legitimacy, realised the futility of clinging on to power and gave in to the popular uprisings.

The counterpoint to the revolutions of 1989 is the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and the Prague Spring of 1968. The Hungarian Revolution was a bottom-up armed revolution of the Hungarian masses, led by students and workers, against Soviet rule. The Prague Spring was a top-down process of democratisation and liberalisation initiated by reformists in the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. But neither the popular revolution that had successfully seized power from below in Hungary nor the reformist regime in Czechoslovakia were able to resist the Soviet Union and its war machine on their own. The Hungarian people had organised revolutionary militias to defend themselves against the Soviet invasion of Hungary, but

their armed resistance was crushed by Soviet tanks. Western governments stood by as the Hungarian revolutionaries were massacred by the Soviet army and as the Warsaw Pact invaded and placed Czechoslovakia under military occupation. The domination of the suzerain power was temporarily overthrown, but because the suzerain regime remained in power across the rest of its empire, it was able to reimpose its domination through military force.

The parallel is clear. As the Brezhnev Doctrine was for the Eastern European countries struggling to free themselves from Moscow's yoke, so is the "China factor" for Hong Kong's struggle for democracy and self-determination. As the national uprisings against Soviet rule in Hungary and Czechoslovakia were crushed piecemeal, so too will a "revolution in one city" confined to Hong Kong be crushed by the CCP. Any revolution that takes place in Hong Kong alone, even if it succeeds in overthrowing the Hong Kong government, seizing power, and bringing about democracy, will not survive unless the CCP is overthrown across all of China as well.

This task cannot be entrusted to Western governments who will readily abandon our cause as soon as it no longer serves, or conflicts with, their interests. It can only be carried out by the Chinese masses fighting alongside the people of Hong Kong, East Turkestan, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia, for whom this is not just a common cause but a matter of life and death.

The post-revolutionary political order

One contemporary nativist vision for the fate of mainland China is that of a "Shina-explosion" (中国爆炸), which envisages a balkanised China that would pose no threat to an independent Hong Kong. This is their way of removing the "China factor" from the equation of Hong Kong's struggle.

This is unprincipled and erroneous. A violent breakup of China after the fall of the CCP, possibly leading to a second Warlord Era, will benefit no one, cause immense human suffering,

and threaten the very existence of Hong Kong. The catastrophe of the Yugoslav Wars or the civil wars in Libya and Syria (among other such tragedies) must not be repeated.

The survival of a free and democratic Hong Kong depends not only on the overthrow of the CCP across all of mainland China, East Turkestan, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia. It also crucially depends on the establishment of a free, democratic, and stable post-revolutionary political order in China out of the power vacuum left by the overthrow of the CCP. As principled democrats, this is what we must stand for.

Why we must support the Chinese democracy movement and struggle

The call for the Hong Kong democracy movement to support and unite with the mainland Chinese democracy movement has nothing to do with Chinese patriotism, nor is it merely a subjective moral obligation. It is objectively necessary for the success and survival of our democratic revolution.

A sceptic could argue that no mainland Chinese democracy movement has existed since the crushing of the 1989 democracy movement. The White Paper movement of 2022 and its politicisation of an entire generation of Chinese youth and citizens has disproven this. While there is no organised mass movement or civil society, tens of thousands of spontaneous protests still occur in China each year. At this point in time there is in fact more active struggle ongoing in China than in Hong Kong.

But even at the nadir of our struggle, Hong Kong's democracy movement still has a lot to offer to the struggle against the CCP. Hong Kong's democracy movement embodies an unbroken historical continuity of struggle, which encompasses the collective memory, experience, knowhow, and social networks of each generation of Hong Kong dissidents and activists since Hong Kong society's first political mass mobilisation in 1989. These are intangible resources that have survived the smashing of the

democracy movement in Hong Kong, and the dissolution of its institutions and organisations.

Outside of Hong Kong, the continuity of this struggle is assured by the newest generation of the Hong Kong diaspora, who, within a short span of a few years, has reincarnated Hong Kong's democracy movement abroad. It is not just a thin layer of exiled activists who have fled abroad either, but hundreds of thousands of Hongkongers with firsthand experience of the past three decades of struggle. They constitute a mass base for the continuation of the democracy movement in diaspora.

Hongkongers must understand that their struggle does not exist in a vacuum, isolated to the territory of Hong Kong or the Hongkonger diaspora, but is part of a larger China-wide struggle against the CCP for democracy and self-determination.

Instead, Hongkongers must realise their historical potential to play a leading role in the formation and growth of a new Chinese democracy movement, and by extension, to shape the nature of the post-revolutionary democratic political order in China.

The formation of a Chinese democracy movement will be a lengthy and arduous process, but one in which we as Hongkongers, with our long and storied history of resistance against the CCP, can play a vital role and make an important contribution. We must dare to invert the defeatist slogans of 2019—"China Today will be Hong Kong Tomorrow" or "Today Hong Kong, Tomorrow Taiwan"—and say instead "Today we take Hong Kong, Tomorrow we take China".

Part 4: What next for Hong Kong?

Our blueprint for revolution is one which casts Hongkongers as the agents of the democratic revolution. The Chinese Communist Party regime will be overthrown not through foreign military intervention but by a revolution of its own subjects.

We believe that an opportunity for

revolution will come in the future, because the current political order is not only illegitimate, but dysfunctional, and prone to crisis and chaos. It is in these moments of crisis that social eruptions can occur, and opportunities for revolution emerge, and we must be ready to seize these opportunities. The work of preparation begins today.

The new political order in Hong Kong

The underlying social, economic, and political contradictions that led to the 2019 uprising have not been resolved in the slightest. These contradictions, and the hardships they cause, will be exacerbated by the autocratic and bureaucratic rule of the Hong Kong government. This new era of repression will also be an era of regression.

The Hong Kong people cannot expect a quid pro quo of authoritarian rule in return for stable governance, economic growth, material prosperity, and a high standard of living.

After the 1967 riots, the British colonial government in Hong Kong enacted sweeping reforms to public education, social welfare and services, and poverty alleviation; built enough public housing to house more than half of Hong Kong's population; and established the Independent Commission Against Corruption to purge the police force and civil service of institutionalised corruption. Although the British Hong Kong government did not concede to popular demands for decolonisation and democratisation, and responded to social upheaval with open repression, it was still able to legitimise its rule by reducing deprivation and by providing social stability and economic development.

The crushing of the 1989 democracy movement in mainland China was soon followed by the Chinese economic miracle of the 1990s and 2000s. In lieu of democratisation and liberalisation, the CCP was able to re-found its right to rule on the basis of delivering "common prosperity". But this alternative source of legitimacy is drying up as China is beset by a myriad of structural economic and

demographic crises that the Xi regime is unable to resolve.

Likewise, the Hong Kong government will not be able to rebound from its rock-bottom legitimacy (see the 2023 District Council elections turnout) through such a quid pro quo today. Hong Kong's social and economic development had long since reached its peak as an international financial centre servicing capital and investment flows between the West and China. The government's past and present efforts to diversify Hong Kong's economy (Hong Kong Science Park, Cyberport) and revive economic growth (the ridiculous "Night Vibes" and "Happy Hong Kong" campaigns) have not borne fruit.

Hong Kong's value as an international financial centre is for the regime to lose. This cherished status is already beginning to crumble in the ever-tightening grip of the National Security Law and as a result of the exodus of foreign and domestic capital and talent away from Hong Kong that the regime's imposition of its new order has precipitated. The obituaries in the international media (and Xiaohongshu) for Hong Kong's status as an international financial centre are not hyperbole.

The regime has gleefully celebrated its pivot to autocracy as the beginning of a new age of opposition-free, business-friendly, and "patriots only" governance, unfettered by institutional checks and balances. Rampant state-capital collusion and socioeconomic inequality under Hong Kong's system of crony capitalism will become even more severe. The housing crisis in the world's most expensive residential property market will continue to fester. The government will continue to sacrifice the needs and interests of the common Hong Kong people to satiate the greed of Hong Kong's business elite, who make up the regime's power base.

For example: the Hong Kong government is today facing a structural budget deficit, which it cannot easily solve due to its non-sovereign status. It will be ordinary Hongkongers who will bear the brunt of the government's efforts to cut its operating costs by slashing public

spending on education, healthcare, and social welfare. Land or market reform is out of the question, because this would shake up Hong Kong's economic structure that is designed for the benefit of the regime's power base: the big corporations, including the real estate developers, and the tycoons. Instead, the regime will continue to plough taxpayer money into environmentally ruinous white elephant projects to create an illusion of growth and progress.

Things will get worse

The fundamental contradiction at the heart of Hong Kong's existence is the regime's denial of the Hong Kong people's right to democracy and self-determination. This fundamental contradiction is the cause of Hong Kong's democracy movement, and it is also the source of Hong Kong's myriad socio-economic ("livelihood") problems and injustices.

Even the mitigation of this fundamental contradiction is beyond the regime's capability. The new political order that it has imposed has hollowed out its capacity for self-correction.

The regime insists on total unanimity of support and loyalty from the political establishment as a prerequisite for political participation. Its recent priorities included the disciplining of its ornamental lawmakers in the rubber-stamp LegCo to ensure that bills are passed unanimously with "all yes votes"—meaning that there are not only no votes against, but no blank votes or abstentions either. It has already shown that it will not tolerate even loyal opposition from the pro-Beijing ranks (see Paul Tse). It denounces all critical or opposing voices in society as "soft resistance" or "foreign pawns", and constantly invokes the bogeyman of the "black-clad violence" and "Hong Kong's version of a colour revolution" in 2019.

This is a sign of the regime's own insecurity. It knows that its legitimacy is paper-thin and cannot withstand meaningful criticism or scrutiny, even when such criticism or scrutiny is necessary for course-correction and

thus survival. Its ongoing campaign of repression against imaginary threats to national security reflects its own paranoia and fear of the Hong Kong people, whose uprising in 2019 thoroughly terrified the regime. It knows that until Hong Kong's fundamental contradiction is resolved—and it cannot resolve it—the potential for another 2019 can only be suppressed, but never extinguished, thus necessitating a permanent and normalised state of high-pressure repression.

But this permanent state of repression is like a fever. It protects the regime from the people by repressing society and suppressing dissent, but harms the entire body politic of Hong Kong. Hong Kong's continuing downward economic spiral post-NSL, amid the withering away of its status as an international financial centre, is proof of this, as is the emigration wave. This is the double-bind in which the regime finds itself, and which will be its undoing.

The Hong Kong government's bungled response to the COVID-19 pandemic is just a taste of things to come under the regime's new style of governance. Its draconian "zero-COVID" policy was motivated neither by scientific rationality nor by the needs of the Hong Kong people, but by a slavish desire to imitate "zero-COVID" in mainland China to demonstrate its fealty to the Chinese Communist Party regime and to Xi Jinping. Even the interests of Hong Kong's business elite, who are the regime's power base, were sacrificed on the altar of "zero-COVID".

The Xi regime's pandemic control policies were so excessively oppressive that they directly led to the White Paper protests of 2022, despite decades of depoliticization and social atomisation following the crushing of the 1989 democracy movement. The same kind of unlimited bureaucratic absolutism, corruption, nepotism, normlessness, misrule, and deprivation that is characteristic of life under Chinese Communist Party rule is what is in store for the Hong Kong people.

But this also means that another social eruption like the 2019 uprising or the

White Paper protests may happen in the future. After all, there is a limit to the amount of suffering that people will tolerate before they are forced to revolt (暴动). Deprivation and desperation caused by unchecked bureaucratic misrule and economic exploitation pushes Hong Kong and Chinese people closer to their breaking point every day.

What we can learn from the White Paper movement

The White Paper movement illustrates how the root cause of social eruptions is the accumulation of contradictions past the breaking point of a dysfunctional political order. The potential for social eruption can never be extinguished by state repression, surveillance, or censorship. No matter how sophisticated or brutal these measures are, they can only suppress the symptoms but cannot treat the root causes of dysfunction.

In fact, the less open a regime is, the more likely it is to be blindsided by a future social eruption. Since there are no longer any pressure valves for the expression of discontent or dissent under the current severe repression, such discontent will continue to accumulate under the surface of society until it erupts all at once with little or no warning. The Chinese Communist Party's vast "stability maintenance" apparatus failed to predict or prevent the White Paper movement.

Spark and kindling

The event that sparked the White Paper movement was the Ürümqi apartment fire on 24 November 2022. The wave of protests that ensued across China was a spontaneous response to the tragedy of the fire, but also an explosion of all the pent-up anger and frustration over the deprivation and suffering caused by the CCP's pursuit of "zero-COVID". A single spark can set the prairie ablaze. But a spark will lead to nothing if there is no combustible material—kindling—already present.

What would such kindling be? On an objective level there must be severe dysfunction in the economic and political order that the regime is

unable or unwilling to address. Its credibility and legitimacy must be seriously undermined. There must be deprivation and suffering so that the dysfunction is a pressing and urgent problem that directly affects people's personal lives. It must be obvious that the system is dysfunctional and in peril.

But there is also the consciousness of the people to consider. This is the subjective component of the kindling without which it cannot be set alight.

The Sitong Bridge protest

The importance of the Sitong Bridge protest to the White Paper movement cannot be understated. Peng Zaizhou's one-man protest on 13 October 2022 put forward demands explicitly linking the deprivation and suffering under "zero-COVID" to Xi Jinping's dictatorship and the totalitarianism of CCP rule. His protest linked the symptoms of dysfunction to their root causes. It also articulated solutions to the dysfunction—not only an end to "zero-COVID" but an end to censorship, dictatorship, oppression, and one-party rule, the overthrow of Xi Jinping, and freedom, democracy, citizenship, and the rule of law for the Chinese people. Finally, it stated how these demands could be achieved—by going on strike at school and at work. Despite intense censorship, these slogans and demands were widely disseminated across the Chinese internet.

It was these demands first articulated by Peng Zaizhou at Sitong Bridge that one month later were being echoed in the streets of cities across China during the White Paper protests.

Peng Zaizhou's ideas prefigured the demands and outlook of the White Paper movement. They gave the Chinese protesters not only the language but also the ideological framework to express their discontent and opposition in clear anti-authoritarian and pro-democracy terms. If the Sitong Bridge protest had not happened, it is likely that the White Paper movement would not have had its explicit, unprecedented, and subversive political content. It is possible that without its core pillar of political demands, the White Paper

protests would not have been able to coalesce into a nationwide movement at all.

Sowing ideological seeds

Peng Zaizhou's ideas were seeds sown by his act of protest. But seeds can only sprout if the conditions are right for them to germinate.

These conditions include not only the composition and chemistry of the soil, but also the climate and the availability of water, oxygen and sunlight. These ideological seeds lay dormant until the Ürümqi fire exposed them to the right conditions.

One such condition would be the failure of Chinese censors to prevent news of the fire, the high death toll, and comments blaming strict containment measures from spreading across the Chinese internet. The censors had also failed to stop the viral spread of images and videos of the massive Foxconn riot in Henan just a few days before the Ürümqi fire. The scenes of hundreds of workers battling with Chinese police and successfully breaking out of lockdown had galvanised viewers and primed them to take action. Chinese urban society at the height of "zero-COVID" proved fertile ground for these ideas to take root and sprout. Protests bloomed like flowers across China. These were not just anti-lockdown protests, but echoed the political demands of the Sitong Bridge protest.

Hongkongers can learn from the experience of the White Paper movement to inform our blueprint for Hong Kong's struggle. The task at hand today is twofold: to sow the ideological seeds of the democratic revolution, and to make sure that the soil is sufficiently fertile and suitable for these seeds to take root and sprout under the right conditions (天时地利人和).

To forge a revolutionary democratic movement, we must not only spread ideas through agitation, propaganda and political education, but also organise and build networks. We must support and participate in social and economic struggles—clandestinely when necessary, but, where possible without attracting state repression, on

the front lines.

The aim is to build the revolutionary consciousness, capability, and confidence of the Hong Kong people, who are the agents of the revolution. This must go beyond coming up with abstract slogans or aphorisms. We must continue to “gather warmth around the fire” (聚火) and, as Václav Havel suggested, to resist social atomisation and build community by “living in truth”, but this alone is not enough if we want to win. Those who are overseas must continue to attend pro-democracy rallies and gatherings and keep the faith, but that is not enough either. Nor is it enough to merely say that “We’ll be back”. We must be able not only to resist tyranny (抗暴), but also to overthrow the regime and then seize power when the opportunity emerges.

To turn an uprising into a revolution, we must not only have the right ideas and goals, but also have the means and the ability to put these ideas into practice and carry out the democratic revolution.

Before the next social eruption happens, we must build a revolutionary organisation or party of hardcore activists and cadres that will apply this blueprint to its pursuit of the democratic revolution. It will be this organisation or party that will carry out the agitation, propaganda, political education, and organising and activist work to build the revolutionary consciousness, capability, and confidence of the Hong Kong people in preparation for the moment of revolution. It must act as the institutional memory of Hong Kong’s struggle for democracy and self-determination, passing on the hard-won lessons and experience of past struggles to future generations of Hongkongers. To guide its actions, it must have its own political programme for the kind of democratic and sovereign post-revolutionary Hong Kong that it wants to build.

The slogan that defined the 2019 uprising—“Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution of Our Times”—was first used by Edward Leung in 2016 after the defeat of the Umbrella Movement. Despite the regime’s incarceration of Edward Leung and the failure of his

localist electoral project, this slogan was not forgotten. Having incubated in people’s subconscious in the intervening years, it resurfaced in 2019, embodying the unprecedented radical spirit of the uprising and the mass movement. But the slogan’s greatest strength—its near-universal appeal—was also its greatest weakness. Everyone had different or even contradictory interpretations of what it really meant, and so it ultimately represented nothing. There was no concrete political programme or demand behind it. What would a real “Revolution of Our Times” mean, and what would it look like?

Our blueprint for revolution

Our ultimate goal is still to achieve democracy and self-determination for the Hong Kong people, but it can no longer be framed through the reformist lens of demanding dual genuine universal suffrage within the defunct framework of “One Country, Two Systems”. Nor should we seek to restore “One Country, Two Systems”, which was fundamentally flawed and undemocratic.

The only way out for Hong Kong and Hongkongers is a democratic revolution. This means the overthrow of CCP rule over Hong Kong and the seizure of power from below by the Hong Kong people through a self-constituted revolutionary government.

How does a democratic revolution happen? One answer is that an uprising can become a revolution if the conditions are right.

No one could have prophesied the 2019 uprising or the White Paper protests. We don’t know what the tipping point that causes the next great social eruption or crisis will be.

At the same time, we can believe in the possibility of such a social eruption or crisis in the future. This possibility will always be present as long as contradictions remain unresolved, and continue to accumulate, under the regime’s unsound and illegitimate political order.

Brutal repression and oppression does not automatically rule out the

possibility of a social eruption happening. This is proven by the uprisings against the repressive regimes of Myanmar, Sudan, Iran, Belarus, Tunisia, Egypt, and the other countries of the Arab Spring. It is in the moment of these eruptions that revolutionary opportunities emerge.

The crisis that leads to a social eruption will inevitably be a polycrisis, arising from the accumulation of political, geopolitical, social, economic, demographic, environmental and ecological contradictions under CCP rule. An unforeseen catastrophe such as a natural disaster, a man-made accident, or a pandemic like COVID-19 could be the straw that breaks the camel’s back. Attacks by the regime on people’s livelihood, way of life, or cultural heritage, such as the Hong Kong government’s Star Ferry fare increase in 1966 or its decision to demolish the Queen’s Pier in 2007, may provoke struggles that could spark a social eruption.

But even if the objective conditions for a revolution are present, the occurrence of such a catastrophe will not automatically lead to a democratic revolution and the overthrow of CCP rule if the subjective conditions are not sufficient. The 2019 uprising was the culmination of a sophisticated and mature democracy movement that was born in 1989 and grew and developed over more than thirty years of continuous and persistent struggle since then. This movement was smashed after its defeat in 2019, and must be rebuilt in a new form.

History has already proved that a revolution from the top-down, along the lines of “35+” and the “Ten Steps”, is not possible in the context of Hong Kong’s non-sovereign political structure. And there can be no revolution from the bottom-up unless the agents of such a revolution—the people—are sufficiently prepared and organised to seize the opportunity when it emerges.

Xi Jinping could die suddenly without a successor, plunging the CCP into a succession crisis. Infighting within a divided ruling class can weaken and expose the regime and embolden the people to challenge its power. A clear

example of this was the rift between Zhao Ziyang and Deng Xiaoping in 1989, which provided an opening for the Chinese democracy movement at the time to rise up. Another example is the indecision and inaction of Carrie Lam's government, and the **apparent disunity** between the Chief Executive and the Executive Council, in 2019. This allowed the uprising to continue to grow and gain momentum until Beijing stepped in to take control of the situation. But power vacuums are temporary by nature. If there is no revolutionary democratic movement of the people that is capable of taking power after the regime collapses or is overthrown, then someone else will eventually step in to take control—like the military dictatorships or reactionary Islamist forces that rose to power in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

As the saying goes, “opportune timing is important, environmental conditions even more so, but most critical of all is the human element” (人定勝天). We may not have control over the objective conditions for a democratic revolution, but the subjective conditions are certainly within our grasp. The point, then, is not to fantasise about how or when the “Shina-explosion” will happen, but to work out what we will do if or when such an opportunity presents itself and to prepare accordingly so that we will be ready.

How does an uprising become a revolution?

An uprising becomes a revolution when the people seize power. Not only must they storm the government (like the storming and short-lived occupation of the LegCo on July 1, 2019) to overthrow the regime, they must also form organs of grassroots political power.

It is true that most uprisings do not have revolutionary demands or aspirations from the beginning. The 2019 uprising had begun as a mass protest movement without revolutionary demands or aspirations. But an uprising can develop into a revolutionary situation, as the masses rapidly become politicised, the status quo is shattered, and the regime discredits itself by resorting to naked

violence to stay in power. During an uprising, the task of the revolutionary party is to be the catalyst that brings the uprising to a revolutionary ferment.

The revolutionary party must intervene at every level of the uprising and the mass movement to make the case for a revolutionary seizure of power from below, where the people form their own organs of grassroots political power.

What might this look like? It has never been tried in Hong Kong. Let's try to imagine how resistance can be developed into revolution by drawing on the experience of the 2019 uprising.

At the height of the 2019 uprising, weekly (and even nightly) mass gatherings took place at local shopping malls, public squares and plazas, and MTR stations, which were usually where the neighbourhood's Lennon Wall was located. They often took the form of “Sing With You” and “Shop With You” rallies. These spontaneous mass gatherings of citizens in local public spaces must be transformed into permanent and structured forums for democratic discussion, decision-making, and the exercise of collective power at the local level.

How can this happen? If a bunch of self-styled revolutionaries turn up at a mass gathering and proclaim the formation of a revolutionary assembly with the aim of “seizing power” in the abstract, no one will take them seriously. Instead, the revolutionary party must organise and empower the citizens present at these gatherings. The party's activists must motivate the gathered citizens to go beyond the mere chanting of slogans, which too often was all that happened at these gatherings, and towards organising themselves to achieve immediate goals in response to present circumstances.

For example: in response to the Yuen Long triad attack on July 21, 2019, local citizens' or residents' self-defence committees could be formed out of these mass gatherings. These popular self-defence committees could bring together frontline protesters,

non-violent *woleifei* protesters, and local *kaifong* to defend their community from the regime's gangsters and maintain public order and security in the absence of the police.

In addition, local strike support committees could be formed out of these mass gatherings to organise and coordinate community support for the “Triple Strike”. These strike support committees could raise money for a strike fund and coordinate actions such as sit-ins, boycotts, blockades and marches to complement the “Triple Strike”.

Throughout the 2019 uprising, these semi-regular local mass gatherings have also acted as semi-permanent supply hubs where frontline protesters could pick up gear and supplies donated by pro-democracy citizens. The logical next step would be to transform these supply hubs into local command centres for coordinating frontline militant action; for example, to coordinate citywide efforts by protesters to break the police siege of the Polytechnic University in November 2019, or to plan the defence and expansion of “liberated zones” at the Chinese, Baptist, and City Universities, where student protesters had occupied campuses and erected barricades in the same month.

In addition to organising and empowering citizens at the neighbourhood level, the revolutionary party must also organise and empower workers in the workplace to seize power not only at the community level but also at the economic level. Pro-democracy citizens, students, protesters, and *kaifong* can all play a supporting role, but it is the workers who are the ones to go on strike.

Therefore, strike committees composed of elected worker representatives must be formed in workplaces to organise and coordinate strike action, with the ultimate goal of bringing about a citywide and sustained “Triple Strike” that can paralyse the economy and overthrow the regime. These strike committees could be formed out of spontaneous mass gatherings by workers at workplaces. They could also be formed out of preexisting trade union bodies,

although this is now unlikely given the regime's smashing of Hong Kong's labour movement and its ongoing repression of trade union activity since the National Security Law. We can draw on the experience of *Solidarność* in Poland and the South Korean labour movement, among others, to learn how workers can be organised and empowered despite repressive conditions to participate in struggles, build their revolutionary consciousness, capability, and confidence, and ultimately seize power at the economic level at the moment of revolution.

It is from such ad hoc forums, formed to achieve immediate goals in response to present circumstances, that local organs of grassroots political power can emerge organically. They could then consolidate into more permanent and structured bodies. At the community level, they could take the form of Neighbourhood Assemblies. At the economic level, they could take the form of Workplace Assemblies. It would then be these Neighbourhood and Workplace Assemblies, operating on the basis of direct democracy, that would take over the running of society and the economy from the regime.

The revolutionary seizure of power from below requires seizing control of key infrastructure from the regime, including the airport, port, MTR, telecommunications network, transportation, public utilities, and hospitals, and bringing them under democratic control. This can only be done by workers themselves through Workplace Assemblies, because only workers know how to run their workplaces, although the local community and external stakeholders, including consumers and service users, must also be given a say. In education, Campus Assemblies could be formed out of campus occupations to bring schools and universities under the joint democratic control of students and faculty.

The Neighbourhood and Workplace Assemblies that emerge can be the building blocks for a citywide revolutionary government, which could take the form of a Hongkongers' Democratic Assembly. It would be an independent and self-constituted

organ of political power claiming sovereignty over the entire territory of Hong Kong, composed of elected representatives. Acting through the Neighbourhood and Workplace Assemblies, the Hong Kong people themselves will be the executors of the will of this Hongkongers' Democratic Assembly.

The revolutionary seizure of power from below also requires the physical dispersal of the regime. In 2019, LegCo was stormed and many government offices and buildings were attacked. These institutions should be occupied and taken over. If this is not possible, the facilities should be wrecked to prevent the regime from using them. During the period of "Flowering Everywhere", local *kaifong*, outraged by police brutality and the indiscriminate tear-gassing of residential neighbourhoods, protested outside district police stations on a near-nightly basis. The logical next step would be to storm these district police stations and either occupy and take them over or wreck them. During the George Floyd protests in the United States in 2020, protesters besieged the Minneapolis Police Department's Third Precinct police station for about twelve hours. When the exhausted police inside ran out of supplies, they were forced to abandon the police station, allowing the protesters to storm it and burn it down. For the next few days, this part of Minneapolis was a police-free zone.

However, the existing CCP regime is unlikely to collapse immediately. For a period of time, two governments will exist simultaneously in Hong Kong. There will be an unstable situation of "dual power" between the regime and the people. The Hong Kong people must be able to resolve this situation of "dual power" in their favour.

This is what a real "Revolution of Our Times", a real "Occupy", and real "Hong Kong independence" would truly look like. This is also what real "laam chau" would look like. The regime can only resolve this situation of "dual power" in its favour by suppressing the revolutionary government through force of arms.

Could the 2019 uprising have turned into a revolution?

When Carrie Lam postponed the 2020 LegCo elections, this obvious ploy to preemptively prevent the formation of an opposition-controlled LegCo destroyed the regime's credibility and legitimacy. The Hong Kong government was revealed to be a puppet of Beijing. The imposition of the National Security Law a month prior killed off any remaining prospect of winning the "Five Demands" in the short term, and achieving democratisation via gradual reform in the long term.

At this point in time, it would have made sense to put forward the slogan of a "self-constituted Hongkongers' Democratic Assembly". Not only would it replace the LegCo that the Hong Kong people had lost, but it would finally allow the Hong Kong people to seize control of their own destiny and exercise democratic self-government over society. It would be the logical conclusion of the democracy movement's long-standing demand, restated as part of the 2019 uprising's "Five Demands", for the implementation of dual genuine universal suffrage. The "Revolution of Our Times" would no longer be an abstraction devoid of meaningful political content, but a genuine political revolution within the grasp of the Hong Kong people.

If this slogan had managed to gain widespread popular recognition, the struggle would have undergone a qualitative shift, changing from a pro-democracy protest movement to a revolutionary democratic movement.

But this would not have been possible in 2019, because it would be to completely "switch tracks" from the preexisting reformist premise and outlook of the democracy movement, which was all the Hong Kong people had ever known. To begin to talk about overthrowing, rather than protecting, "One Country, Two Systems" and the rule of law in Hong Kong, would already be a significant ideological and rhetorical challenge because it would be a complete about-face from the framework of the democracy movement up until this point.

If the pro-democratic leadership had not limited themselves to loud

protestations and resigning en masse from the LegCo, and had called for the formation of a Hongkongers' Democratic Assembly following the postponement of the LegCo elections, they would be faced with the difficult task of explaining to the Hong Kong people why they were now calling for a revolution to seize power from below when only yesterday they had been talking about Western sanctions against China, "burnism", and the "Ten Steps to Mutual Destruction".

Even if there had been an organised revolutionary party to put forward such a slogan, it would have been extremely difficult to redirect the momentum built up by the hitherto entirely reformist course of the democracy movement over the past three decades towards uncharted revolutionary ends.

Such inertia could not have been overcome, at least not in the extremely narrow and rapidly closing window of opportunity before the regime's imminent counteroffensive.

On a broader level, the subjective conditions for a democratic revolution were insufficient. The Hong Kong people demonstrated an unprecedented level of sophistication, militancy, tenacity, and courage in their struggle during the 2019 uprising. But the revolutionary consciousness, capability, and confidence of the mass movement, and of Hong Kong workers in particular, still fell short of what was needed for the uprising to ripen into a revolution. This reality was summed up by a slogan popular among frontline protesters around the time of the failed "Triple Strike" on August 5: "If the adults are willing to go on strike, the kids wouldn't have to lead the charge" (小朋友唔使上街). In "Dawn Actions" during the period of "Flowering Everywhere", frontline protesters blocked roads, disrupted traffic, and sabotaged infrastructure across the city during the morning rush hour to prevent commuters from going to work.

This was a substitutive attempt by the vanguard of the mass movement to paralyse the economy in the absence of a genuine workers' strike. This strategy culminated in the militant

occupations of the Chinese and Polytechnic Universities that aimed to cut off the Tolo Highway and the Cross-Harbour Tunnel respectively. Not only was this strategy unsuccessful owing to the inherent power imbalance between the police and frontline protesters, but it led to more frontline protesters being brutalised and arrested by the police, inflicting unsustainable losses on the mass movement.

Finally, even if everything went right in Hong Kong, there is still the "China factor" to consider. The Xi regime was in the ascendant in 2019. Mainland Chinese civil society and activist networks had been smashed by state repression. There was no mainland Chinese democracy movement, let alone one capable of overthrowing the CCP. The 2019 uprising failed to spread to mainland China. Any revolutionary democratic movement that emerged in Hong Kong would be isolated and crushed, suffering the same fate as the Paris Commune in 1871.

Conclusions

In the moment of a social eruption, it is the preexisting ideas in people's minds that become their frame of reference for determining their demands, their vision for the post-revolutionary future, and their tactics and strategy for achieving their goals. A social eruption is like a thunderstorm after a long drought. Ideas that had laid dormant in people's subconscious for many years sprout and blossom overnight. What kind of ideological seeds are already present in the soil at the time of the social eruption, and how widespread these seeds are, determine the level and substance of people's consciousness.

The presence or absence of these seeds determine whether an uprising can turn into a revolution, or fails to adapt to the situation and is crushed or perverted by other actors with ulterior motives.

We cannot wait until the moment of the next social eruption to come up with our revolutionary programme and long-term vision. Nor can we wait until then to begin organising and

building our forces. By then it will be too late. The task of planting the seeds and laying the groundwork for the democratic revolution must begin today.

Our ultimate goal is a free, democratic, and sovereign Hong Kong where the Hong Kong people can fully exercise their right to democratic self-government and self-determination. This can be achieved through a democratic revolution carried out by a revolutionary democratic movement of the Hong Kong people. For this to happen, there must be a revolutionary party to forge the revolutionary democratic movement by building the revolutionary consciousness, capability, and confidence of the Hong Kong people.

Part 5: The Hongkonger Community of Struggle

What is a "Hongkonger"?

Hongkongers are the agents of Hong Kong's struggle for democracy and self-determination and the "Revolution of Our Times". What constitutes this Hongkonger identity and community? What is its history and its future?

The regime does not recognise the concept of a "Hongkonger" or "Hong Kong citizen" or "Hong Kong national", but only "Hong Kong Permanent Residents". This is a depoliticised and decontextualised definition that casts the residents of Hong Kong as a servile population—as objects of colonial rule—but not a people.

The Chinese Communist Party refers to the Hong Kong people as "our Hong Kong Chinese compatriots". Chinese nationality law claims that all residents of Hong Kong of Chinese ancestry are Chinese nationals.

Such totalising logic conflates ethnicity with nationality. It defines the residents of Hong Kong, of whom a vast majority are of Chinese ancestry, as a subcategory of Chinese nationals. By claiming ownership over

the Hong Kong people as a subcategory of Chinese people, the Chinese Communist Party justifies both its rule and Chinese sovereignty over Hong Kong, and the denial of the right to self-determination for the Hong Kong people.

Being a “Hong Kong Permanent Resident” or having a Hong Kong Special Administrative Region passport has little to do with being a “Hongkonger”. Nor does it have anything to do with being Chinese.

“Hong Kong people” vs. “Chinese people”

For 156 years since 1842, Hong Kong was under British colonial rule, which only ended with the Handover in 1997. Though geographically located in China (unlike Taiwan, which is an island), Hong Kong existed as a distinct but not sovereign polity separate from Qing, Kuomintang, and Communist rule over the rest of China.

The trajectory of Hong Kong’s modern historical development was distinct and divergent from that of mainland China. It was a period of immense development at breakneck pace. Under British rule, Hong Kong grew from a scattering of small fishing villages into a sprawling world-class metropolis of 7.5 million people. Hong Kong’s role in the global economy also followed its own unique historical trajectory—first as a British military supply hub and springboard for further ventures inland, then as an entrepôt, then as a major export-oriented manufacturing hub, and finally as an international financial centre.

As a separate polity with its own territory and population, Hong Kong developed its own system of government, institutions, borders and immigration policy, economic, legal, and educational systems, society, culture (including cuisine), and language. “One Country, Two Systems” promised the retention of these unique features after the Handover.

Hong Kong people have their own way of life that culturally and psychologically differentiates them

from Chinese people. This distinct way of life includes Hong Kong’s separate political and economic structure, but also the worldview, cultural referents, collective memory, language, religion, and social customs, norms, and values of the Hong Kong people.

All this was recognised and institutionalised by the CCP under the Sino-British Joint Declaration and “1C2S”, which guaranteed that “the previous capitalist system and way of life shall remain unchanged for fifty years”, according to the principle of “Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong” with “a high degree of self-government”.

This distinction is historically constructed. It emerges from Hong Kong’s distinct and divergent trajectory of modern historical development, not from the existence of a prehistoric indigenous Hongkonger nation, race, ethnicity, or ancestry.

However, this historical distinction between “Hong Kong people” and “Chinese people” as recognised by the CCP is only sufficient to justify, at most, internal self-government, but not external self-determination, for Hong Kong. “One Country, Two Systems” explicitly precludes self-determination for the Hong Kong people or a sovereign Hong Kong polity. Today, “1C2S” has been torn up by the CCP.

The historical distinction between “Hong Kong people” and “Chinese people” is necessary but not sufficient for the constitution of the Hongkonger community of struggle. A person can be a born and bred “Hong Kong person” who might even have a strong sense of belonging and civic pride with regard to Hong Kong, and at the same time identify as a patriotic “Chinese” and be loyal to CCP rule over Hong Kong. Many former loyalists of British colonial rule have become the most staunch supporters of the current regime, including former Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam and opportunists like Maria Tam.

There is also the fact that a significant minority of Hong Kong people are “blue ribbons” who still vote for pro-

Beijing political parties in the sham elections. The opposition-free 2023 District Council elections had the lowest voter turnout in all of Hong Kong’s history, with a total of 1.19 million votes cast. In the 2019 District Council elections, which the pro-democracy camp won by a landslide with 1.67 million votes, 1.23 million people still voted for the pro-Beijing camp. What makes us Hongkongers different from these “Hong Kong people”?

The Hong Kong people’s struggle and search for identity

Key to Hong Kong’s democracy movement since the Handover has been the struggle to preserve Hong Kong’s distinct culture, heritage, language, and way of life. Major episodes include the anti-Article 23 movement, the campaigns against the demolition of Lei Tung Street, Edinburgh Place Ferry Pier, and Queen’s Pier, the anti-Hong Kong Express Rail Link movement, and the anti-Moral and National Education movement.

This was a protracted political struggle: on one side were a significant section of the Hong Kong people, and on the other side was the Hong Kong government, acting as a proxy for Beijing’s drive to assimilate Hong Kong people into the Chinese nation and thus consolidate the Chinese Communist Party’s ownership over Hong Kong.

By participating in this struggle, the Hong Kong people were confronted with the question of what it meant to be a “Hong Kong person”, and what Hong Kong meant to them as their home. The political resistance of the Hong Kong people inspired, and in turn was inspired by, a cultural and artistic movement that promoted a local Hong Kong identity and collective memory.

This movement sought not only to preserve Hong Kong’s heritage and preserve Hong Kong’s way of life, but also to define and deepen the identity of a “Hong Kong person” to which many now felt attached. It also sought to develop alternative ways of understanding and connecting with Hong Kong’s history and heritage that

differed from the regime's narrative of "patriotic reunification". This was an important step towards the constitution of the Hongkonger community of struggle.

The political struggle of the Hong Kong people was not framed only in negative terms but also in positive terms. Since the Handover, the Hong Kong people have fought for the realisation of democracy, in the form of dual genuine universal suffrage, within the framework of "1C2S" and in accordance with the promises made by Articles 45 and 68 of the Basic Law.

This was a progressive struggle to realise a specifically democratic vision for Hong Kong's future. It was explicitly a struggle for greater and genuine democratic self-government, for democratic and liberal values, and for the right to self-determination, not merely to defend Hong Kong's unique identity or "Hong Kong's interests".

The political struggle of the Hong Kong people both shaped and was shaped by the emergent Hongkonger community of struggle. It has imbued that political community with a collective heritage, culture and ethos of struggle.

A Community of Struggle

The collective experience of the Hong Kong people, not only of oppression and suffering, but also of resistance and empowerment, created a strong sense of solidarity and comradeship in the course of the struggle. This was another important step towards building the Hongkonger community of struggle.

For example, it was the excessive and unprecedented use of tear gas against student protesters on 24 September 2014 that launched the Umbrella Movement and gave a new generation of politicised youth a baptism by fire. Similarly, it was the sheer brutality of the police response to a protest against the Extradition Law on 12 June 2019, televised live on the news, that outraged the Hong Kong public and sparked the popular uprising against the regime. Popular anger at unfettered and indiscriminate police brutality sustained the mass

movement throughout 2019 and 2020.

Since Hong Kong society's first political mass mobilisation in 1989, the Hongkonger community of struggle has grown and developed in step with Hong Kong's democracy movement, maturing in the course of the struggle for democracy and self-determination. It was while chanting "Hongkongers, Add Oil" that the Hong Kong masses stood their ground, braving the police tear gas not as atomised individuals but as members of a community of struggle. United against the regime, it was in the crucible of the 2019 uprising that the Hong Kong people were forged and tempered into a community of struggle. The Hongkonger community of struggle came of age in the mass movement of 2019. It was their finest hour.

On a broader level, it was the broken promise of gradual democratisation under "One Country, Two Systems", and the continuing encroachment on Hong Kong's autonomy and the Hong Kong people's way of life, civil liberties, and political freedoms, that bound them together in their search for a political alternative to the crumbling status quo. Out of the collective disillusionment with Hong Kong's handing-over to China, which turned out to just be a continuation of undemocratic external rule, there emerged a newfound desire not only for autonomy but for democracy and self-determination and even independence.

This collective experience of struggle, the shared dream of a free and democratic Hong Kong, and a sense of a collective destiny belonging to the Hong Kong people alone, was the central pillar around which the Hongkonger community of struggle coalesced.

Democracy and Self-Determination

The Hong Kong people are being oppressed by an external power, the CCP regime, in which they have no representation or participation and over which they have no control. The Hong Kong people have also experienced a significantly different trajectory of historical development, and are therefore distinct, from the

main body of this regime's subjects (i.e. the Chinese people, excluding Taiwanese, Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Mongolians). These factors give the Hong Kong people the right to self-determination up to and including independence, including by way of referendum or revolution.

Hong Kong was handed over by the British to the Chinese with the Hong Kong people having had no say in the matter whatsoever. The British government had presented the Sino-British Joint Declaration as a *fait accompli* to the Hong Kong people. From one suzerain to another, the Hong Kong people have had neither democratic self-government or self-determination. Their struggle to achieve these aspirations has always been suppressed by their rulers, be they British or Chinese. Hong Kong's first democratically-elected Legislative Council, elected in 1995 just prior to the Handover, was unilaterally dissolved by Beijing upon its assumption of sovereignty over Hong Kong.

The exclusive right of the Hong Kong people alone to decide, as a sovereign polity, on their future and the nature of Hong Kong's relationship to China, up to and including independence, is the only recompense for this historical injustice.

A Community of Collective Destiny

The desire for democracy and self-determination is not shared by all Hong Kong people. It is that section of the Hong Kong people who assert for themselves a separate identity and destiny apart from the Chinese people, and who fight for their right to determine this destiny by themselves alone, who constitute the Hongkonger community of struggle. This is a community forged in struggle, to which the struggle is a necessary but not sufficient component of its identity.

And it is this struggle for democracy and self-determination that sets this community of Hongkongers, who constitute a self-conscious community "for itself", apart from previous generations of Hong Kong people, who are merely a community "in itself".

In the run-up to the Handover, large swathes of Hong Kong's population chose to emigrate to escape the imminent transfer of sovereignty to CCP-ruled China. Only a privileged minority had the means to escape. However, the majority of Hong Kong people chose to remain in Hong Kong. To them, Hong Kong was not a "borrowed place living on borrowed time", but a place and community which they had come to call home. A significant portion of them and their children went on to fight in the rising tide of struggle since the Handover, spurning Beijing's insistence at the time for Hong Kong to remain an "economic city" and not become a "political city".

In doing so, this section of the Hong Kong people gained an awareness of themselves not merely as a "Hong Kong resident", and beyond a culturally-constituted but politically-ambiguous identity of a "Hong Kong person". After all, do "blue ribbons" or "Kong pigs" (豬豬) not speak Hong Kong Cantonese, dine at *cha chaan tengs*, and consume Hong Kong culture too?

In an evolutionary step up from the self-interested, apolitical, and atomised "Homo Economicus", this section of the Hong Kong people identified with the higher cause of democracy and self-determination and fought and sacrificed to realise this aspiration. They became aware of themselves as members of the Hongkonger community of struggle: someone who asserts the separate and collective destiny of that community, who shares in its collective destiny, and who fights for the right of their community to decide its collective destiny.

A "Hongkonger", in other words, can be defined as a member of the Hongkonger community of struggle. The Hongkonger identity and community is one that is intrinsically political, and we must not forget our roots. A "Hongkonger" is someone who fights for the right of the Hong Kong people to democracy and self-determination—to decide their collective destiny and the future of their home by themselves. It is the struggle to realise this dream that defines us. Without this dream or this struggle, we would all just be "Hong

Kong Chinese" or "Kong pigs".

Different people will have different visions for which path our collective destiny should take. This includes for example the question of whether a post-revolutionary Hong Kong should be its own country, independent from mainland China, and the question of Hong Kong's post-revolutionary relationship with mainland China more generally. Our revolutionary movement must be one which is pluralistic and capable of resolving these differences fairly and democratically without recourse to violence or coercion.

The struggle may have been suppressed for the time being, but the Hongkonger community of struggle endures. The Hong Kong people have not given up. The wave of emigration following the defeat of the 2019 uprising is different from previous waves of emigration in that those who left would have directly experienced and participated in the highly sophisticated and militant struggle for democracy over the past twenty years. Most of them would identify not only as "Hong Kong people" but members of the Hongkonger community of struggle. In exile, this latest and newest generation of the Hong Kong diaspora has already regrouped to continue the fight for democracy and against the CCP.

The Community of Struggle and the democratic revolution

The Hongkonger community of struggle is one that, like all communities, remains constantly changing and in flux. It was forged in the struggle for democracy in Hong Kong, and it has evolved and matured with the struggle over the past thirty years. Now that this phase of the struggle has passed into history, what is the future of the community of struggle?

This community of struggle is an inherently political construct, inseparable from the struggle for democracy and self-determination. The successful achievement of democracy and self-determination for the Hong Kong people is the necessary precondition for the next step in the evolution of this community

of struggle. This is when, at long last, "Hong Kong Permanent Residents" become citizens in a Hong Kong Democratic Commonwealth, and when the Hong Kong people, hitherto objects of colonial rule, becomes a Hong Kong *demos*. This is the beginning of the collective destiny that the Hongkonger community of struggle seeks to realise.

After the defeat of the 2019 uprising, the only way to realise this collective destiny is through a democratic revolution.

Victory in this struggle is the precondition for the Hongkonger community of struggle to achieve its self-realisation as a *demos*. Our victory in this struggle will not only mean the preservation of our identity, history, collective memory, and way of life. Victory will also mean the full flowering of post-revolutionary Hongkonger identity, society, and culture as that belonging to a sovereign and independent community in full control of its own destiny.

This creative endeavour in the post-revolutionary era will be one in which the whole Hong Kong people can participate freely, openly, joyously, and with pride, without fear of repression and retribution.

A Hong Kong nation?

The concept of a "nation" is inherently ambiguous and subjective. Fortunately, it is a moot point. The right of the Hong Kong people to democracy and self-determination and to decide their own destiny, up to and including independence, and the legitimacy of our demand for that right, does not depend on the prior or current existence of a Hong Kong nation. And regardless of how a "nation" is defined and whether Hongkongers meet this definition, the existence of the Hongkonger community of struggle and its collective destiny is already an undeniable fact.

Nations are formed through the passage of time but also by historical processes, including political struggle. The American and French Revolutions marked the beginning of the modern American and French nations. It was

through these revolutions, which were revolutions for democracy and self-determination, that these nations were born.

I do not think that a Hong Kong nation exists yet, because the Hong Kong people have never been in control of their own destiny. I think that for a nation to exist, it must be a community which possesses historical agency and sovereignty. The Hongkonger community of struggle can thus be seen either as a proto-Hong Kong nation, or as the vanguard of an emergent and unfinished Hong Kong nation. It is the future Hong Kong *demos* in embryonic form.

Our history—the history of the Hong Kong people—lies in our struggle for democracy and self-determination. It is our heritage and our legacy. It is something over which we can claim authorship and ownership. It is in this struggle that Hongkongers become historical agents who carve their own path through history, rather than history being something that happens to us as objects of colonial rule.

If there is to exist a future free and sovereign Hong Kong nation in full control of its destiny, this must be something that the Hong Kong people fight for and create for themselves. And the only way to do that is through a democratic revolution.

Mainlandisation

In the Hongkonger diaspora today, there is deep anxiety about how the Hongkonger identity can be passed on to children born in exile to Hongkongers, and fear that the current generation of Hongkongers will be the last.

The regime's efforts to promote "patriotic reunification" will now go unopposed with the suppression of the democratic struggle in Hong Kong. These efforts include the replacement of Liberal Studies with patriotic education in Hong Kong schools, the suppression of civil society groups promoting Cantonese and local Hong Kong culture, and the erasure of Hong Kong's distinct heritage.

There is also deep anxiety among diasporic Hongkongers about the

irrevocable change to Hong Kong's demographic make-up through the increased immigration and settlement of mainland Chinese in Hong Kong, articulated through the metaphor of a "blood transfusion" (输血) where mainland Chinese immigrants take the place of Hongkonger emigrants.

But Hong Kong has always been an immigrant society. And for all of Hong Kong's history, the overwhelming majority of immigrants have been from mainland China. Hong Kong's population is 92% ethnic Chinese. Mainland Chinese immigrants to Hong Kong do not displace the local population as settler-colonists, or segregate into their own parallel society, but for the most part assimilate and integrate into Hong Kong society. Edward Leung was born in mainland China before his family settled in Hong Kong. Jimmy Lai came to Hong Kong as an illegal immigrant at the age of twelve. Nathan Law was born in Shenzhen and moved to Hong Kong at the age of six.

There is also the fact that almost the entire leadership of the puppet Hong Kong government are born and bred "Hong Kong people". And if we determine who is and is not a "real" Hongkonger according to their ancestry or bloodline, the logical conclusion of such an approach would be that the original "real" Hongkongers are in fact the clannish, thuggish, and stalwartly pro-Beijing "Indigenous Villagers" of the New Territories—who enjoy special privileges granted by the British and retained after the Handover, and who because of their privilege are the staunchest supporters of those currently in power (be they British or Chinese)—to the exclusion of all subsequent immigrants to Hong Kong and their descendants.

As the struggle for democracy and self-determination made "Hongkongers" out of "Hong Kong residents", so too can participation in and identification with this struggle make "Hongkongers" out of mainland Chinese immigrants through membership in the Hongkonger community of struggle.

One important caveat must be made. The emerging social strata of "Hong

Kong drifters" (*gangpiao*, "漂") differs from previous generations of mainland Chinese immigrants to Hong Kong, many of whom were refugees, in that the *gangpiao* do not necessarily want to settle in Hong Kong or assimilate into local Hong Kong society. As mostly well-educated and high-earning professionals seeking to work but not to settle in Hong Kong, the *gangpiao* are less so immigrants and more so expatriates. A parallel can be drawn between the *gangpiao* and Hong Kong's British expatriate community. The *gangpiao* have formed their own pro-Beijing political parties, which have gained entry into the Legislative and District Councils following the regime's purge of Hong Kong's political opposition. The current HKSARG Secretary for Innovation, Technology and Industry, Dong Sun, who communicates in Putonghua rather than Cantonese, embodies the *gangpiao*.

The *gangpiao* do not yet constitute a minority colonial ruling elite. The upper echelons of Hong Kong's government and civil service, once occupied exclusively by rotating British colonial administrators, have not yet become positions reserved for mainland Chinese. With the exception of the PLA Hong Kong Garrison and the Chinese central government's Office for Safeguarding National Security in Hong Kong, mainland Chinese in Hong Kong are still subject to Hong Kong law, not above it. The regime does not favour mainland Chinese in Hong Kong by granting them exclusive rights or privileges that local Hongkongers do not have. Hongkongers are not yet second-class citizens in their own home, and indeed look down on the mainland Chinese immigrants swelling the ranks of the city's working class. But if any of the above comes to pass in the future, then China's relationship to Hong Kong will become one that is explicitly colonial in nature. Thus, Hong Kong's struggle for democracy and self-determination will also become one against Chinese colonialism as well.

Continuing the struggle

Members of the Hongkonger community of struggle must not forget that their identity and community are rooted not only in cultural and

historical differences, but also in the struggle for democracy and self-determination and against tyranny and injustice over the past three decades. Membership in this community of struggle has nothing to do with blood ties, ancestry, place of birth, immigration status, or genetic make-up.

It is this struggle that has driven the emergence of the Hongkonger community of struggle and Hong Kong people's identification with it. Where there is tyranny, there will be resistance. And where there is struggle, there Hongkongers will be.

Keeping the Hongkonger identity and community alive means continuing the struggle, not only against the CCP and its attempts to erase our identity and collective memory and atomise our community, but above all for our right to democracy and self-determination.

The First Generation or the Last Generation

Faced with the prospect of passing into history as the last generation of the Hongkonger community of struggle, the need for a democratic revolution becomes crystal clear. The choice we face today is whether to be the last generation of the Hongkonger community of struggle or the first generation of Hong Kong revolutionaries who will bring about the "Revolution of Our Times".

If we are to be this first generation of Hongkonger revolutionaries, we must possess a sense of historicity in understanding our own struggle. We must remember that future generations of Hongkongers will be looking back through time to judge and learn from our actions today, which will constitute the history of the Hongkonger community and the future Hong Kong *demos*.

How we conduct our struggle, the values we hold high and which we fight for, who we choose to ally ourselves with—each of these choices

that we make will together define the nature of the post-revolutionary Hongkonger polity and *demos*.

The defeat of the 2019 uprising need not be the end of Hong Kong's struggle for democracy and self-determination. Our present and future actions have the potential to recontextualise and revalue past events. A victorious democratic revolution in the future can transform the significance of the 2019 uprising from a tragic defeat to a preparatory dress rehearsal for the "real deal".

The mass movement of 2019 was not initiated by "foreign forces" but by the Hong Kong people themselves. It was not to serve the agenda of "foreign forces" that the Hong Kong people fought, but because of their own desire for democracy and self-determination. Will we be pawns in the geopolitical rivalry between China and the West, or free agents of history fighting to determine our own destiny?

20 August 2024

The pro-Maduro left abandons the workers and people of Venezuela

20 August 2024, by Ana C. Carvalhaes, Luís Bonilla

An ever smaller, but still numerous, sector, full of intellectuals, echoes the argument of the São Paulo Forum [54], according to which, in order to save Venezuela and the region from US imperialism, it is necessary to support the government of Nicolás Maduro at any cost. This cost, of course, includes the possibility that, unlike in previous times, Maduro may not have won the elections because, after all, he has so far refused to prove his victory.

According to this logic, based more on classical geopolitics than Marxism, anything is justified, and indeed necessary, in order to 'not hand over' power in Venezuela (and its oil) 'to the right'. According to this geopolitical

logic, the fact that Nicolás Maduro won or lost the election is secondary to the 'progressive nationalist' imperative of preventing US imperialism, embodied by opposition candidate Edmundo González, from taking up residence in Miraflores Palace and thereby jeopardising state ownership of PDVSA (Petróleos de Venezuela SA), which owns one of the largest oil and gas reserves on the planet. Another section of these neo-madurists, it's true, focuses less on oil and more on the tragedy it would be to recognise the defeat of Maduro, seen as a leftist, against a backdrop of the advance of the extreme right in the world and in the region. For both groups, however, there is no option but to stick with Maduro – not even a

negotiation between the two sides of the Venezuelan dispute, as Lula and Gustavo Petro propose, probably with the aim of agreeing a division of powers between the two parties, including some guarantee of democratic rights and the integrity of PDVSA.

History, facts don't matter

As a reminder, what is the dividing line between right and left - discourse and action? Maduro certainly maintains a form of rhetoric with a lot of left-wing verbiage. He says that his government is a 'military-police-people's alliance' that is anti-imperialist and for socialism. He needs to legitimise himself internally and

externally as Chávez's successor, when all he has done is roll back the achievements and legacy of the years of progress of the Bolivarian process. Beyond appearances, the fact is that his policy since 2013 has been to encourage the enrichment of a new business sector in the country and, like a Bonaparte, to negotiate between the different fractions of the Venezuelan bourgeoisie, new and old (with the exception of the one most closely linked to the Yankee far right, which is Maria Corina Machado and Edmundo González) in order to remain in government.

Taking an openly authoritarian path, Maduro has always favoured business sectors, in particular oil industry contractors and services, whose profits feed the new bourgeoisie, and many of which have been handed out to the upper echelons of his armed forces and police. (Hence the alliance...) More than 800 luxury cars were confiscated from the 100 odd people involved in the PDVSA-crypto mega corruption case in 2023, which was symptomatic of the moral decline among government leaders. [55] Even under the intense fire of Western imperialist sanctions against Venezuela - which started with the Obama administration, passed through Trump and became more flexible with Biden - he has never taken any measures to confront the globalised financial system and its domestic supporters. He has allocated a substantial part of the dwindling national budget to private banks to guarantee the sale of foreign currency to private companies and rentiers, which has become a policy for subsidising and favouring the rich. [56]

At the same time (since decree 2792 of 2018), the government has banned strikes, the presentation of demands, the right of the working class to mobilise, the organisation and legalisation of new unions, while prosecuting and sending to prison union leaders who question internal practices in companies, or simply ask for a pay rise and health insurance. This was the case at Siderúrgica del Orinoco (Sidor), the largest concentration of the proletariat in Venezuela: after mobilising for wages and benefits between June and July

2023, they were victims of intense repression. Leonardo Azócar and Daniel Romero, union delegates, have been imprisoned ever since. [57]

The 'anti-imperialism' of Maduro and his entourage doesn't stop him from now delivering the oil that the US needs through Chevron and other big foreign companies (like Repsol), in a context where the US Treasury authorises them to extract Venezuela's black gold, while prohibiting the companies from paying taxes and royalties to Venezuela. [58] The acceptance of these neo-colonial conditions shows the limits of Maduro's anti-imperialism.

The sanctions against Venezuela have become more flexible under Biden (facing pressure because of the war in Ukraine), but Maduro continues to maintain the discourse that everything is the fault of the sanctions, as a pretext to move forward with a structural adjustment that fundamentally affects working people. In political terms, within Venezuela, the discourse on US sanctions (which are real, concrete and detestable) has lost its political effectiveness in the face of the ostentatious, luxurious lifestyle of those who now rule the country.

The working class as an accessory element

Analysing the situation of the Venezuelan working class as the basis of left-wing analysis has been replaced by the fashion for the 'geopolitics of oil'. This binary geopolitics only sees the contradiction between imperialism and the Venezuelan state (undoubtedly an important contradiction in reality). It doesn't have enough dialectic to take into account, in a scenario of multiple contradictions, the material and political situation of working class people, their aspirations and options. It's as if this were an ancillary issue, or a secondary contradiction. The 'mantra' of Maduro supporters, to justify their omission of class analysis, is the need to prevent the right from coming to power, ignoring the fact that Venezuela has a government that applies the structural economic recipes of the right, only with left-wing rhetoric. It would be enough to

talk to the workers themselves (not to the pro-bosses bureaucracy of the CBST), at Sidor or PDVSA, among teachers and university professors, to see the terrible material situation in which they live (minimum wage of US\$4 a month, average salary of US\$130 a month, 80% of which is made up of bonuses), amid the worst loss of democratic freedoms in decades for their organisation, mobilisation and struggle.

The new geopoliticians of progressivism are putting the issue of the 28J elections on the agenda of the international mainstream media (CNN, CBS and others), only from the other side of the road. They are not defending the interests of Maria Corina Machado and Edmundo González, but those of Maduro and the new bourgeoisie, with the false axiom that Maduro is equal to the working class, without analysing what Maduro's anti-worker and anti-popular policies have been. They fall into the trap of 'legal fetishism' by limiting their analysis of the situation to the results of the elections, but they also do so without class criteria. The issue is not just that Maduro and the CNE have not shown how they did the sums to give the president victory in the 28 July elections, but also how this situation affects the structure of the concrete democratic freedoms in which the working class operates and survives.

If there is no transparency and legitimacy in the national elections, in which the registered candidates represented different shades of bourgeois programmes, it is difficult to think about restoring the minimum democratic freedoms that the working class needs to defend itself against capital's offensive on its labour (the right to decent wages, the right to strike, freedom of association, freedom to mobilise, express opinions and organise in political parties). The working class is fundamentally interested in how the situation after the 28J allows or restricts, in the short term, the freedoms it needs to express itself as an exploited class. But this contradiction does not enter into the logic and discourse of the new progressive geopolitics.

Compromising omissions and silences

These 'progressives' are not concerned about the repression of the trade union and political organisation of the workers and the people [59], nor that Maduro prevented any left-wing sector of the PSUV from taking part in the country's most recent elections - even at the cost of infiltrating, judicialising and attacking the leadership of the Popular Electoral Movement (MEP), the Fatherland for All Party (PPT), the Tupamaros and the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV) itself, in order to intervene in it! [60] Maduro's supporters fail to mention that, after 28 July, the government intensified repression, no longer against the middle class, but fundamentally against the working class, sending around 2,500 young people to prison with the discourse of re-education, which means subjecting them to vexatious public rituals of brainwashing.

They are silent on the construction of two maximum security prisons for those caught protesting or inciting protests on social media. They ignore the imprisonment of several opposition politicians and the direct threats made on television to others - for example by the minister of the 'hammer', Diosdado Cabello, against the former mayor of Caracas Juan Barreto, or Vladimir Villegas, the brother of the Minister of Culture. [61] If the threat to public figures is like this, it is worse in the territories of ordinary people who are not media figures. Recently, we've seen the deployment of plainclothes security forces to threaten activists - as happened on Saturday, 10 August, against Koddy Campos and Leandro Villoria, leaders of the LGBTQI community in Caracas. As we saw in the following days in the traditional Chavista stronghold of 23 February in Caracas, where activists' houses were marked with an X of Herod by government officials to scare them against the possibility of demonstrations.

The geopolitical left is silent about the death toll after 28J (around 25, according to estimates by human rights organisations and social movements), spreading the narrative that it was only right-wingers. This is not only untrue, but constitutes a step backwards in the human rights gains

made in the post-dictatorship periods in the region.

Geopolitical progressivism replicates the mirage of a popular government that no longer exists, which has been erased by Maduro's transformation and anti-labour policies. They seem to be asking the Venezuelan working class to fight for their rights only within the framework that Maduro allows, so that they can feed, from afar, the utopia that they can't build in their own countries. This progressivism doesn't see that the growing popularity of the right-wing candidate has been a result of the banning of any possible left-wing alternatives. The electoral success of the Machado-Gonzalez ticket has been largely a result of mistakes by Maduro and his supporters.

What about oil?

All the serious facts mentioned above are considered by the supporters of Maduro's 'victory' to be secondary 'democratic-formal' details in the face of the danger of having the 'squalid' right once again in government in Venezuela. The reasoning is as devoid of class criteria as it is devoid of basic observation of the country's reality.

Since November 2022, as part of the war in Ukraine, the US Treasury Secretary has authorised Chevron to exploit and export Venezuelan oil, on the condition that it pays no taxes or royalties to the Venezuelan government, which constitutes neo-colonial conditions that were not even known in the governments prior to Chávez and which have been accepted by Maduro. Since then, Venezuela has once again been a stable supplier of oil to North America. This explains Biden's delicate balancing act and U.S.'s long wait for the efforts of the progressive triad of Lula, Petro, AMLO (from which AMLO withdrew last week).

You have to be careful when talking about the U.S. embargo on Venezuela. There are embargoes and embargoes. The sanctions that have affected food, medicine and spare parts for buses and cars that move the people have contributed decisively to the exodus of four to five million workers. But Venezuela has managed to become the

sixth largest supplier of oil to the US, overtaking countries like the UK and Nigeria [62], without the new revenues from this 'oil opening' improving the material living standards of the people at all.

What is at stake in Venezuela is which sector of the ruling classes - be it the old, 'squalid' oligarchic bourgeoisie or the new business sectors linked to the 'Bolivarian' military, enriched under Maduro - controls the oil business. So it's a dispute over who gets the lion's share of the oil revenue. Any one of them will guarantee the geostrategic supply of oil to the Western capitalist powers and will increasingly restrict the distribution of oil income to the people - because this is in the nature of capitalist, bourgeois sectors, and because the nature of the fossil-exporting mono-extractivist state has not been touched by the Bolivarian process. Because Maduro, despite his rhetoric, is neither a socialist nor an anti-imperialist. It is naive and ill-informed to imagine a Maduro with a programme and enough courage to confront the imperialist plans to put the oil that Venezuela can produce back on the world market. It is a huge mistake, in the name of supposed sovereignty that Maduro is defending, to turn a blind eye to the growing authoritarian tendency of the regime against the disgruntled workers and people.

It is also tragic, it should be said, that the geopolitical Madurists continue to believe that Venezuela's salvation will come from what is, in reality, its historical curse: its oil wealth. Something that even the great Brazilian developmentalist Celso Furtado, without being a socialist or ecologist, already pointed out as a major problem for the country he lived in in the 1950s.

Is there a way out?

It's clear that the strength acquired by the right-wing opposition, which has already been defeated at the ballot box several times by Chávez and once by Maduro, and which now has its most extremist wing, the oligarch Maria Corina Machado, at its head, is a tragedy. An even greater tragedy is the fact that this extreme right wing may have won or come very close to

winning the elections - there is no other reason for Maduro's insistence on refusing to publish the results and repressing the people so harshly. Precisely for this reason, because a peaceful solution is difficult and simply handing over the government to this sector is hard to swallow, the way to avoid the 'bloodbath' with which both sides threaten Venezuela may be the one indicated by the governments of Brazil and Colombia: presentation of the results, negotiations between both sides, first of all with Maduro himself (the group of governments has refused to have talks with the opposition and review the results it presented). While it is possible to expect minimum democratic freedoms to be guaranteed, the release of political prisoners, a halt to repression, broad trade union and party political freedom, it is also possible to negotiate clauses protecting PDVSA.

At the moment, supporting the negotiated solution proposed by Colombia and Brazil - which has the support of Chile and the repudiation, of course, of dictator Daniel Ortega - is the right policy, because it is much more prudent, more timely and much more favourable to the workers and people of the country. This policy is at odds with an increasingly authoritarian regime, which represses young people, trade unionists and left-wing opponents, and is less naive and bureaucratically biased than simply endorsing the government's irregularities and arbitrariness. On the one hand, it makes it possible to argue that the extreme right should not carve up PDVSA and slash the few remaining social achievements. On the other hand, it doesn't start from the mistaken premise that Maduro and his bureaucratic-bourgeois military entourage will guarantee Venezuelan 'sovereignty' over anything.

National sovereignty and popular sovereignty

Latin American progressivism, like third-worldism and the Stalinist-influenced left, uses the term sovereignty by confusing two different meanings: national sovereignty and popular sovereignty. Of course, national sovereignty is usually a condition for the full exercise of

popular sovereignty. The problem is that the very different regimes (and currents of opinion), both progressive and reactionary, appropriate the defence of national sovereignty in the face of pressure from the world market and imperialism.

National sovereignty was at the centre of the anti-colonial and national independence movements, as well as the national-developmental populisms of the 20th century. But it has also been at the heart of military dictatorships (like those of the Latin American Southern Cone in the 1960s and 1970s), theocratic dictatorships (like Iran), state bureaucracies and, as we see with Modi and Trump, extreme right-wing governments. Yes, the defence of national sovereignty and even confrontations with imperialism can be carried out under very regressive regimes. For us, the defence of national sovereignty makes sense in conjunction with the defence of popular sovereignty, the democratic self-organisation of the masses, the conquest of freedoms and rights that strengthen the historic bloc of the working classes, which can build alternatives to global capitalism and the imperialisms that structure it.

In the same way, after the Stalinist experiences of the 20th century, we cannot mechanically identify peoples with their political leaders, who may or may not represent them, in a relationship that is always dynamic. When this relationship breaks down - as it has or is breaking down in Venezuela - democratic freedoms become a fundamental element in any struggle for sovereignty, both popular and, incidentally, national. Therefore, there will be no forces to guarantee Venezuela's sovereignty over its territory and its wealth without the recovery of popular sovereignty.

Isn't democracy important?

Bourgeois-democratic regimes are not the regime to which we socialists strategically aspire: we dream of and fight to build grassroots democratic organisations, direct democracy, popular power - as embryos of a new and more vital form of democracy, exercised by the workers and popular sectors - in the processes of the revolutionary offensive. But is formal

democracy so despicable that we don't care about elections, or about rigged results?

In a world increasingly threatened by a constellation of extreme right-wing forces, the fight is and will be, for a long time, in defence of freedoms and democratic rights, even of institutions of bourgeois-democratic regimes against the onslaught of the extreme right - as we have already experienced with Trump, Bolsonaro, Erdogan, Orbán and so on. Where does that leave a left that despises democracy to the point of endorsing the manipulation of elections for the peoples and workers of the world and in countries (more and more of them) where the fight against the far right is vital?

Those who call themselves left-wing and endorse repressive regimes also do a very ill service, from a strategic point of view, to the necessary process of political, theoretical and practical construction of a new anti-capitalist utopia - capable of once again enthusing broad layers of youth, women and working people. A new mass anti-capitalist left must be democratic, independent and confront authoritarian 'models', or it won't be anything at all.

However, there is still one question that should be more important than any other for all socialist activists and organisations in Latin America and the world: how do we look in the eyes and expectations of the workers, the people and what remains of the non-bureaucratic left in Venezuela? Will all those sectors to the left of the PSUV and covertly critical within the PSUV itself, today fragmented, persecuted, some imprisoned, many in full activity against government repression, be abandoned to their fate? [63] For us, supporting their struggles, encouraging their unity to resist, helping them to survive and breathe is the priority internationalist task. Everything else, that doesn't take them into account, may be geopolitics, but internationalism it is not. After all, the only strategic guarantee of a sovereign Venezuela, of better living and working conditions, of reorganisation and popular power in the medium term, is in the hands of those social and political forces who

were the protagonists of the golden years of the Bolivarian process and

not in the hands of the gravediggers of the process.

18 August 2024

The Fightback on Reproductive Rights

19 August 2024, by **Marian Jones**

Recent conservative Court decisions, particularly the 2021 *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* case, have had a significant impact on the rights of pregnant people, the indigent, and broad health care access. In *Dobbs*, the Supreme Court ruled that the right to abortion is not protected by privacy under the 14th Amendment's Due Process Clause of the Constitution, effectively overturning *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*. Because of *Dobbs*' preemption, many abortion-related lawsuits have been lost, new bans have been passed, and the criminalization of pregnancy is at an all-time high. All of which is causing uncertainty and barriers to care, thus exacerbating health care disparities.

Since the *Dobbs* ruling, numerous court cases have challenged existing abortion protections, leading to the prohibition of abortion services in many states, with 13 states having trigger laws to outlaw abortion as soon as *Roe* was overturned. [64]

Many of these states, particularly in the South, have a large number of poor women, disproportionately Black and Latinx, who will likely have to travel outside of state to get abortion services. Those who cannot may seek telemedicine to get medicated abortions. However, medical abortions can be more painful, causing severe cramping over a longer period than surgical abortions. A number of states—Colorado, Massachusetts, New York, California, Vermont, and Washington—have shield laws that protect medical providers who may offer abortion services to people living in red states that ban or restrict abortion access in the wake of *Dobbs v. Jackson*. However, these laws may be challenged in court, but for the

time being, from October to December 2023, an average of 8,000 people per month in red states received medical abortions from doctors protected by shield laws. Aid Access and the Massachusetts Medication Abortion Access Project operate nationally, while the groups Abuzz and Armadillo, ship to states with abortion bans, but not to every state. [65]

The bans on abortion not only block immediate pregnancy-related treatment but also exacerbate existing health disparities. Abortion seekers are more often than not Black and indigent, and already have children. Because of the multiplicity of oppressions that pregnant people of color face, including racial oppression, it is more difficult for them to afford the transportation, social support, and childcare needed to go to a clinic for an abortion. Still, in the United States Black women account for the highest percentage of abortions. [66]

The impact of abortion bans on marginalized communities, particularly women of color, and the efforts of grassroots organizations to promote reproductive justice and equitable health care in a post-*Roe* world are deeply intertwined. These movements have sparked legal challenges, political action, and grassroots efforts to push back against the erosion of reproductive rights. Despite setbacks, the fight for reproductive freedom continues to gain momentum across the country.

Grassroots organizations are playing a crucial role in advocating for the rights and well-being of women of color and vulnerable populations in the post-*Roe* world. Many reproductive rights groups have long been fighting to increase access to abortion, including prominent ones

like Planned Parenthood and NARAL; many more have emerged or are ramping up their efforts in the wake of *Dobbs*. [67] Grassroots organizations like The Feminist Front and the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice are working to address these disparities and promote reproductive justice. [68]

In addition to working with other groups to provide assistance to reproductive justice groups in the Southwest, The Feminist Front also organizes seminars on reproductive justice and how abortion relates to white supremacy. In 2022, they protested Arizona's Senator Kyrsten Sinema for not defending abortion rights and staged a sit-in in her office. [69]

Issues of economic and racial justice, as well as the rights of immigrants, are central to the work of the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice, which has been concerned about the situation of migrants in detention facilities and fights for legislation that addresses immigration in its entirety. Because of the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* and multiple anti-immigration policies in Texas, it is very difficult for immigrants to go across state boundaries to have the procedure. Fears about deportation and run-ins with the authorities only make matters worse. By focusing on the rights and welfare of migrants in detention facilities and fighting for fair and inclusive immigration policies, the Latina Institute seeks to tackle these issues from an intersectional perspective.

In response to the increasing restrictions on abortion, grassroots abortion funding organizations have emerged to help individuals afford

abortions and the associated costs, such as travel, lodging, and childcare. These funds have played a crucial role in assisting people seeking abortions, particularly in states where access has become more limited. For example, Michelle Colon, founder of Shero in Mississippi, organized volunteers to drive women to Illinois, a journey of at least 10 hours, to obtain abortions. Laurie Bertram Roberts heads the volunteer-run Mississippi Reproductive Freedom Fund, which helps individuals access abortion services in Mississippi. Another organization, the Yellowhammer Fund, operates in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Both of these organizations are part of the National Network of Abortion Funds, a crucial network consisting of over 80 abortion funds across the country that help lower-income individuals access abortion services. [70]

The number of individuals providing such assistance is dwindling, however, leaving fewer options for those in need. Fundraising increased for many of these organizations following the Dobbs decision, but they are now sounding the alarm that support is weakening as media coverage fades. For instance, there was a danger that, without further funding, the resources of The New York Abortion Access Fund would be exhausted by October 2023. Thankfully, this did not come to pass. [71]

Private medication abortions, which are increasingly popular among abortion rights activists, now constitute over 50 percent of all abortions in the United States. [72] Telehealth services like Hey Jane, Choix, and Abortion on Demand have expanded in states where abortion remains legal. [73] Since the Dobbs decision, virtual-only telehealth providers have facilitated 7,461 abortions per month in the first nine months, up from 4,025 per month before.

Additionally, underground networks run by groups like Las Libres and Red Necesito Arbotar have emerged to supply Americans with abortion pills from countries such as Mexico and India. [74] These networks provide an alternative for individuals who cannot or do not want to use official channels to access abortion care.

Grassroots formations can only do so much. Recent losses in the realm of reproductive rights beyond the scope of grassroots and underground networks include legal challenges like the outlawing of transporting a minor for an abortion in Tennessee, the imposition of legal penalties and fines for transporting individuals seeking abortions over state lines in Oklahoma and Idaho, and the enforcement of a six-week abortion ban in Florida, while in Alabama, in vitro fertilization has been prohibited. [75] The recent ruling in Alabama classifies frozen embryos as “human” whether or not they are inside or outside of the womb, causing several fertility clinics to stop treatment. The Alabama Supreme Court ruled that frozen embryos can be treated as children under the Wrongful Death of a Minor Act of 1872, stating that they are persons from conception, regardless of being in or out of the womb. [76] This judgment can be traced back to a recent wrongful death lawsuit involving a patient who accidentally destroyed frozen embryos at a clinic. While the right has been advocating for this prohibition privately, they are also cautious about discussing the issue publicly, as they fear it could alienate voters due to its severity. [77] The backlash has been so bad, in fact, that lawmakers in the state are trying to walk back the Alabama Supreme Court’s ruling. [78]

Former President Donald Trump, who has taken credit for *Roe v. Wade* being overturned, recently said abortion laws should be left to states. [79] Trump claimed falsely on Truth Social that the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* was universally desired (“we have abortion where everybody wanted it from a legal standpoint”). [80] He’s now saying he believes “the states will determine by vote or legislation, or perhaps both, and whatever they decide must be the law of the land.” [81] He’s also refusing to take a position on a national abortion ban wanted by members of his party. [82]

However, there have been some legal victories in the fight against abortion restrictions. Since the Dobbs decision 23 states have raised legal challenges against abortion bans. [83] Two red states, Kansas and Kentucky, had ballot amendments to end the right to

abortion, but both failed. Kansas voters rejected a proposed constitutional amendment denying abortion rights, while Kentucky voters rejected a ballot measure denying constitutional protections for abortion, a fight that was led by Democratic Socialists of America and Kansans for Constitutional Freedom, among others. [84] Kentucky, however, has since passed a law outlawing abortion with very few exceptions. [85] Both ballot initiatives were defeated, sending a message to the GOP that their stance on abortion is extreme and at odds with public opinion.

Religious freedom challenges in defense of abortion have also arisen in several states. [86] In Florida, Indiana, Missouri, Kentucky, Utah, and Wyoming, individuals from a variety of religious backgrounds have argued that abortion bans infringe on the free exercise of their religion or violate state constitutional protections against the establishment of religion. Indiana’s Court of Appeals has granted a minor victory to individuals challenging the state’s abortion ban, arguing it violates a 2015 religious freedom statute, and it upheld the appeal filed by four people and Hoosier Jews for Choice. [87] In Missouri, Christian, Jewish, and Unitarian Universalist leaders sought a permanent injunction against an abortion ban, arguing that state lawmakers who supported the ban were imposing their personal religious beliefs on everyone. [88]

In some states, abortion will remain legal and available because the states have had policies in place prior to the Dobbs decision that protect access even in the absence of *Roe*. Since the Dobbs ruling, over forty lawsuits have been filed in multiple states, challenging abortion restrictions on the grounds that they infringe on various constitutional rights. [89] For instance, the right to privacy was cited as a basis for challenging Florida’s 15-week abortion ban, using the state constitution’s privacy clause as a legal argument. Similarly, in South Carolina, the right to privacy temporarily protected the right to abortion, blocking a six-week abortion ban. However, subsequent bans were later upheld after the state legislature passed new laws and new justices

joined the court.

In Wyoming, a judge temporarily blocked a ban on the abortion pill, citing the right to privacy. [90] This case is still ongoing, and abortion pills remain legal. Wellspring Health Access (WHA), Wyoming's only full-service abortion clinic, one of the nonprofits that brought suit over the abortion pill, is also separately suing the state to block a law imposing a near-total ban on abortion. WHA sued the state to stop its abortion "trigger ban" and won a preliminary injunction. The judge ruled that the ban could harm the plaintiffs before their lawsuit was resolved.

In response to a lawsuit by the Center for Reproductive Rights, a federal district court in Arizona temporarily blocked a law that gave fetuses, embryos, and fertilized eggs the same rights as Arizona citizens, deeming it "unconstitutionally vague." [91] However, abortion remains illegal in Arizona due to an old law from the Civil War era. [92]

The Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs* has also had repercussions beyond abortion access. Organizations that assist pregnant individuals in Texas are now subject to civil and criminal liability. This has led to a

chilling effect on reproductive health care providers in the state, with many hesitant to offer services for fear of legal repercussions. However, a U.S. District Judge issued an injunction to protect *Fund Texas Choice* from criminalization, ruling that the Texas attorney general cannot seek legal relief against providers or practitioners who help abortion seekers travel outside of Texas. [93] This ruling is critical as it stops states from being able to overreach and expand past their boundaries, and it serves as a beacon of protection in the midst of ongoing legal battles surrounding reproductive rights in Texas.

The recent conservative judicial decisions, particularly the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* case, have had a profound impact on women's rights and health care access. These decisions have resulted in defeats in abortion-related legal cases, increased uncertainty and more barriers to care, and exacerbated health care disparities. Since many states have enacted abortion bans or restrictions that disproportionately affect marginalized communities, these groups suffer the most from these decisions. This further exacerbates health care disparities, as marginalized communities already face challenges in accessing quality

healthcare. Grassroots organizations and reproductive rights organizations are working tirelessly to address these challenges and promote reproductive justice. Despite setbacks, the fight for reproductive freedom continues, with individuals and organizations advocating for accessible and equitable healthcare for all.

Because of the centrality of abortion to both Biden's re-election campaign and the genocide in Gaza, it is possible that the abortion issue might rescue the Democrats from their current predicament related to the war in Gaza. There are new opportunities and challenges for organizations fighting for reproductive justice in the United States as reproductive justice issues seem to be swiftly becoming a cudgel for Democrats trying to convince an angry electorate to vote for them. How they will use this leverage is yet to be seen. Over 60 percent of adults in the United States think that abortion should be legal within certain limits. However, millions of women in this country still oppose abortion rights. Among those who defend abortion rights, a portion still vote for Trump or advocate not voting at all even though Biden is clearly in favor of reproductive rights.

[New Politics](#)

Tensions, dangers and opportunities in a period of crisis

18 August 2024, by Fabrice Thomas, Franck Gaudichaud

It is in this "tense" context that, for more than twenty years in a number of countries, reactionary governments of various persuasions have alternated in power with governments often described as "progressive", also with fairly varied orientations linked to different national contexts. The characteristic feature of recent years (at least since 2016) seems to be an

acceleration in the pace of this alternation, sometimes in the form of "electoral disengagement". The "progressives" have evolved in much more stale and social-liberal versions, and the reactionary conservative governments much more radical versions.

Authoritarian offensives

On the right, in Brazil, Argentina and Chile, we have seen the emergence of the political forces embodied by Jair Bolsonaro, Antonio Kast and Javier Milei, clearly positioned on the far

right, and advocating class politics aimed at brutally repressing all social movements, asserting their hatred of LGBTQI+ and feminists, and their xenophobia, the better to allow the ultra-neoliberal economic measures demanded by capitalism in crisis and the imperialist powers. Faced with them, the progressive movements and the parties of popular nationalism (such as the Workers' Party in Brazil or the Bolivian Movement Toward Socialism, for example) have appeared to be increasingly on the defensive, largely disconnected from the popular struggles (from which they had partly emerged), disappointing in their weakly redistributive economic policies, when they were not openly fighting their popular support and critical movements on the left.

The limitations and contradictions of progressive policies have facilitated the return or emergence of far-right forces. In some countries, on the other hand, we have witnessed forms of sui generis regression without a swing to the far right, where it is the forces of popular-nationalism that are sinking into authoritarianism and repression: in Venezuela, first of all, where the crisis of the Bolivarian process seems bottomless (despite the prospect of presidential elections on 28 July) and - in its most abject version - Nicaragua under the thumb of the Ortega clan.

From North to South, the situations are obviously very varied, but a few common points can be identified. Violence in societies has increased everywhere, whether it is linked to drug traffickers and mafia networks, landowners and paramilitaries, transnational mega-projects, or simply to employer repression backed by increasingly repressive state apparatuses, supported by an arsenal of emergency laws and the militarisation of the public sphere. The first victims of this violence are, of course, the popular classes in general, in both urban and rural areas, and in particular the indigenous populations, the tens of millions of migrants who cross the continent every year, and trade union, feminist and environmental activists. In a number of cases, especially among communities of indigenous peoples, self-defence (including through community policing, as in Mexico) is

the response. But in many other cases, particularly in the Southern Cone, this violence is used above all by governments or reactionary movements to promote an all-out repressive policy and increasingly repressive regimes, which deploy propaganda often based on a patriarchal vision of the family and the social order, but also on promises of economic growth and the fight against elite corruption, with nationalist, identity-based and messianic overtones. This partly explains the success of Bolsonaro, Katz and Milei among the working classes. . The terrible paradox of this trend is that the violence caused by the widespread precariousness of life, the scale of informal work (more than 50% of the working population in Argentina) and the neoliberal extractivist system hits the oppressed classes hardest and becomes an argument in return for them to accept, or even desire, "radical ruptures" which are capitalised on politically by the extreme right, while the anti-capitalist lefts are still too weak and often fragmented.

The difficulties of the "progressive" currents

Another common factor is the weakening - and sometimes discrediting - of the social and "plebeian" movements that had led and sometimes won major struggles. These movements had been the leading edge of the anti-neoliberal resistance movements of the 1990s-2000s and the basis on which the "progressive" governments had built their electoral victories, sometimes with a clearly post-neoliberal and anti-imperialist discourse (Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador). Once in power, most left-wing governments and their charismatic leaders tried to contain, stifle or channel these movements.

In the Cold War years, coups d'état and military dictatorships were the response of the ruling classes and US imperialism to the rise of popular struggles, faced with the "danger" of revolutionary victories (as in Cuba and

Nicaragua). Since the beginning of the 21st century, there have certainly been several coups d'état, often more "institutional" than simply "politico-military", but the response of those who uphold the capitalist order has generally been to prevent any radical advances by the lefts in power, while supporting the emergence of new conservative forces, riding on the disappointment of the popular classes with progressive governments. Anti-progressivism has also been made possible by Washington's manoeuvres in the region, in its struggle against the now central influence of China, and by an extremely aggressive global media agenda in the hands of major groups and also reactionary evangelical churches.

Crisis and renewal on the left

A third salient point, and perhaps the decisive one, is the deterioration in global economic conditions since 2008-2009, and particularly the fall in world prices for the raw materials that provide the bulk of the foreign currency resources for most of the countries in the region. The extractivist policies pursued by all the progressive governments had enabled them to redistribute resources in a way that benefited the most vulnerable sections of their populations, and facilitated the (re)construction of public services. With their financial room for manoeuvre shrinking, far from compensating for this loss with a policy (particularly fiscal) aimed at attacking the privileges of the dominant classes, these governments have on the contrary shifted their policies towards more and more neoliberalism, and have deprived themselves of the support of large sections of the popular classes. It is on the basis of these profoundly worsened economic and social conditions that the most radical right-wing has been able to flourish in many countries.

Here again, however, in Latin America's many and varied regions, this general observation needs to be qualified. We should also point out that since the election of Andrés

Manuel López Obrador in Mexico in 2018, a left-wing progressive (or “left populist”) orientation confirmed hands down by the recent victory of Claudia Sheinbaum, several countries have seen the development of a “late progressive” (to use the expression of Marxist sociologist Massimo Modonesi): after Mexico, we saw the victory of Gabriel Boric in Chile, then Gustavo Petro (2022), preceded by the return of the MAS to power in Bolivia (2020) and followed by that of Lula Da Silva (but on the side of the right) in Brazil in 2023. On the other hand, where right-wing and extreme right-wing parties have managed to come to power through the ballot box, they have so far failed to hold on to power for long, even though they seem to

have succeeded in winning over large sections of the popular and middle classes.

Ultimately, the period is dominated by contradictory trends and headwinds, reflecting the scale of the crisis and the disarray running through Latin American and Caribbean societies, while sustainable alternatives with a democratic and emancipatory outlook are struggling to take shape. Despite everything, this is also a period of political opportunities for the radical and ecosocialist lefts to build movements that can rise to the challenges of the present: the anti-capitalist experiences and regroupments under way in Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Puerto Rico and

Chile are, in this respect, central to the future.

In our different articles, with the examples of Puerto Rico, Brazil, Mexico and Argentina, we will find some of these characteristics, both common and contradictory, but also the important differences between the processes underway and the complex situations facing the popular classes and our anti-capitalist comrades on the ground, in the face of all the dangers that threaten them. Threats which are also ours, from Europe, and which confirm more than ever the imperative need to build and consolidate internationalism on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as on a global scale.

What the Election of AMLO's Protégé Means for Mexico

17 August 2024, by **Dan La Botz**

The Mexican federal elections took place in less-than-ideal circumstances. There were by the end of April, some 30 assassinations of candidates, a dozen kidnappings, dozens of other death threats, and scores of violent attacks on political events and candidates. All of this is an expression of the pervasive criminal violence in the country due to the drug cartels that sometimes assassinate candidates who are not to their liking. In the state of Chiapas, rife with violence that AMLO has failed to prevent, [94] in a shocking incident, Sheinbaum herself was stopped at a checkpoint by armed men, one of whom told her, “When you get to power, remember the mountains, remember the poor people. That’s all we have to say. We are not against the government; we are here so you see the disaster that is Comalapa.” Comalapa is a small town in the Lacandón Jungle on the Guatemalan border that has been the scene of violence. AMLO dismissed the incident as “propaganda.”

The fairness of the election also

remains in question. In 2022, AMLO’s supporters in Congress carried out a “reform” of the electoral system opposed by many sectors of society and particularly by human rights groups that warned the reform would make elections less fair. In addition, the new, weaker National Electoral Institute (INA, formerly IFE), had its budget and staff cut largely due to AMLO’s governmental austerity program, and became less effective. Though there was little doubt that Sheinbaum would win the election by an enormous margin, the INA’s reforms and lack of resources may affect congressional and local races.

There is also AMLO’s Trump-like domination of the media, working in the last few months to promote not only himself as usual, but also Sheinbaum’s campaign. His *mañaneras*, or morning press conferences, held nearly every morning for six years, were watched with love by 13 million people, about 10 percent of the population. They were also streamed by major media

such as UnoTV, Grupo REFORMA, MILENIO, and NMás, often getting 70 million views in a nation with about 90 million adults. On Wednesdays, the *mañaneras* was dedicated to the questions “¿Quién es quién en las mentiras?” (Who’s who in the lies?) in which AMLO denounced the media and the reporters that dared to question him and his policies. He called them fake journalists, biased, even “scum journalists.” This in a country where during his presidency 37 journalists have been murdered and five more disappeared, often because they were reporting on the cartels and sometimes on their ties to government officials.

The Candidates and Coalitions

The left—that is, democratic forces, progressive social movements, and grassroots working people—had little or no role in this election. A small group of far-left political groups,

unions, feminists, and LGBTQ activists have created what they call “an Independent, anti-capitalist and anti-patriarchal Left Bloc, [95] but no left party has been able to achieve ballot status and no far-left candidates were up for election to major offices. Three candidates stood in the election held on June 2. Sheinbaum headed up the coalition called Suigamos Haciendo Historia, “Let’s Keep Making History.” The second candidate, Xochitl Gómez, heads the “Fuerza y Corazón por México,” or “Strength and Heart for Mexico,” made up of three former ruling parties, the National Action Party (PAN), the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), and the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). And, third, Jorge Máynez represents the Movimiento Ciudadano or Citizens Movement Party.

We have to say a few words about the several parties that support these various candidates, though they will not be very nice words because there is little good to be said about them. Let’s take them up in reverse order, from the weakest to the strongest.

First, we have Jorge Máynez, the smiling, handsome young candidate of the Citizens’ Party, a middle-class party that claims to stand for political reform, but Máynez’s record belies that. He began his political career in 2010 in the Nueva Alianza, New Alliance Party, created by the powerful, ambitious, corrupt, and unscrupulous union bureaucrat Elba Esther Gordillo; his candidacy for the state congress of Zacatecas was also supported by both the corrupt PRI and the opportunistic Green Party. Later he was elected to the Mexican Congress, serving from 2015 to 2024, not noted for anything special, and then became head of the Citizen’s Party of which he was the presidential candidate.

Then we have Xochitl Gálvez, a businesswoman, the candidate of the “Strength and Heart” coalition made up of three former governing parties of Mexico. First, PRI, the party that governed Mexico under various names from its founding in 1929 until 2000, a nationalist, developmentalist, corporatist party that reached an accommodation with the bourgeoisie, dominated peasants leagues and labor

unions, established a *modus vivendi* with the drug cartels, and ruled through corruption and violence. Second, PAN, the party of the Roman Catholic Church and big business, which governed Mexico from 2000 to 2012. And third, PRD, which originated from a reform movement founded by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas within the PRI, and which later became an independent party in 1989—but within a decade became corrupt. (AMLO who had been a PRD leader left with a good chunk of its members and founded his party, Morena). These three parties making up the Gálvez coalition had become utterly discredited in the minds of a majority of Mexicans who deserted them to support AMLO and Morena. Gálvez played the populist card, claiming that her humble background gives her a better understanding of the common people and she promised to keep all social programs for the poor in place and to improve them. She failed to convince the Mexican people, most of whom saw her as the representative of the corrupt parties of the past.

Finally, we have Sheinbaum, the candidate of Morena, the handpicked successor to AMLO and dependent upon him. To understand her, we must know him. AMLO was for decades the charismatic, authoritarian leader of a populist party. He and his party have a broad base of support among Mexico’s working people and the poor, buttressed in part by the social programs he has promoted. Morena is full of ordinary people, peasants, workers, school teachers, and the lower middle classes who have put their faith in AMLO. At the same time, he made it clear over his entire political career and especially during his six years as president, that he wanted to be in the good graces of the U.S. government and to promote foreign and domestic capitalist investment. To call AMLO’s and Morena’s policies social democratic would be a mistake both because there is nothing democratic about him or the party and the social aspect is limited. This is the populist leader and the principal political party that has put Sheinbaum in power.

The other two parties in Sheinbaum’s coalition, are both politically corrupt

satellites: the Green Party and the Labor Party. Mexico’s Green Party (PVEM) is an opportunist outfit that was previously allied with the then-leftist PRD and then later with the right-wing PAN. The Greens have no principles. The Labor Party (PT) has nothing to do with labor unions or socialist politics, but is a small Stalinist sect that once had a base among poor people in Chihuahua. Its thuggish leader Alberto Anaya sent greetings to Kim Jong Un in 2019, saying, “The Korean people’s heroic struggle for the country’s sovereignty and the dignity of the nation and peace of the Korean Peninsula and the rest of the world serves as a model of all the revolutionaries and the progressive peoples struggling for global independence.” Ugh.

Sheinbaum herself has many assets. She is a highly educated woman, trained as an environmental scientist. She is a youthful and attractive-looking 61-year-old woman, charming in her way, comfortable speaking to the press and to business groups, able to read a speech, if rather stiffly. Though she lacks the common touch, she can take selfies with supporters and gladhand the crowd. She was capable of holding her own, against Xochitl Gálvez in the national debate as each slung mud, accusing the other of corruption.

Antisemitism is pervasive in Mexico, and Sheinbaum has been the victim of it, though she doesn’t assert her religion or ethnicity. Mexican Jews work to keep a low profile. Former PAN president Vicente Fox baited her for being both Jewish and a foreigner because her grandparents were Bulgarian Jewish immigrants. Sheinbaum, her eyes on the political prize, responded by saying that her parents were born in Mexico and that she is “100 percent Mexican.”

Sheinbaum claims to be an environmentalist, the science in which she has been trained. Yet she has supported AMLO’s spending of several billion dollars for the construction of the new Dos Bocas oil refinery, arguing that it will make Mexico energy self-sufficient and provide cheaper gas for cars. Nor did she speak out when AMLO spent billions to upgrade several older refineries.

Still, she says she will emphasize green energy alternatives in the future.

Though she has called herself a feminist, she has spent the last six years working with AMLO who has been widely criticized by the feminist movement, particularly for disregarding and even denying the problem of femicide, the high rate of murders of women that persisted during his presidency. And Sheinbaum has had little relationship to feminist activists, proving incapable of communicating with them. During her term as mayor of Mexico City, she came into conflict with the women's movement activists of Okupa Cuba who had taken over a human rights office and radio station on Cuba Street in Mexico City to call attention to the issue of violence against women. Sheinbaum approved the dispatch of the police to evict them. [96]

Sheinbaum and the Legacy of AMLO

Sheinbaum is fundamentally an apparatchik and politician, a creature of the party and the state who dutifully worked her way up, first elected as head of a borough of Mexico City, later serving as AMLO's secretary of the environment, and then as head of the Federal District, effectively the mayor of Mexico City. She inherits the role as head of the government, but she has not demonstrated any personal charisma and has so far not had an opportunity to govern independently. Some believe that AMLO, with his enormous popularity will continue to be the power behind the presidential throne. Mexicans may think back to the era of Plutarco Elías Calle, who served as president from 1924 to 1928, but then between 1928 and 1934 pulled the strings of three puppet presidents (Emilio Portes Gil, Pascual Ortiz Rubio, and Abelardo L. Rodríguez). Will AMLO pull Sheinbaum's strings, or will she be her own person?

In any case, Sheinbaum is inheriting the governmental structures, the bureaucracy, policies, and the

successes and failures bequeathed to her by AMLO. The most important development of AMLO's six years as president was the increased militarization of the country. AMLO initially said he would deal with the cartels "con abrazos, no balas," that is, with hugs not bullets, but the continued violence that took the lives of thousands led him to create a new national guard, originally made up of 60,000 soldiers that quickly grew to 100,000. This is in addition to the 260,000-member Mexican Army, and about 100,000 sailors and marines, and 500,000 notoriously corrupt police officers. Under AMLO, the army, the navy, the marines, and the national guard dealt with the cartels, handled immigration, owned and managed banks that distributed social welfare payments, and ran the airports and the new Maya Train.

All of these military and police forces failed to end the violence that has characterized Mexico since former president Felipe Calderón unleashed the drug wars in 2006. Conflicts among cartels and between the cartels and the authorities have since then taken an estimated 300,000 lives in addition to 100,000 or more kidnappings, and there are about 30,000 homicides every year. (The U.S. population of 333 million is more than two and a half times that of Mexico's 127 million, but has about 26,000 homicides per year.)

The cost to the citizens of all this policing has been great. The United States under both presidents Trump and Biden maintained a close relationship with Mexico and its justice system. Yet the U.S. State Department itself reports that,

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: unlawful or arbitrary killings by police, military, and other governmental officials; forced disappearance by government agents; torture or cruel, inhuman, degrading treatment or punishment by security forces; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; restrictions on free expression and media, including

violence against journalists; serious acts of government corruption; insufficient investigation of and accountability for gender-based violence, including domestic or intimate partner violence; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex persons; and crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting persons with disabilities.

Impunity and extremely low rates of prosecution remained a problem for all crimes, including human rights abuses and corruption. There were reports some government agents were complicit with international criminal gangs, and prosecution and conviction rates were low for these abuses [97]

AMLO proved unable to eradicate the cartels. Far from it. The drug cartels, one of Mexico's five biggest sources of income (together with manufacturing, tourism, oil, and immigrant remittances), earn profits estimated between \$13 billion and \$50 billion per year and are believed to employ 175,000 people. There are no indications that Sheinbaum will reduce the role of the military nor that she has any other approach to dealing with the drug cartels.

AMLO's failure to deal with the country's violence forms part of a broader failing in terms of human right. Human Rights Watch's report on Mexico in 2023 stated:

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who took office in 2018, has made little progress in addressing Mexico's serious human rights challenges, including extreme criminal violence, abuses against migrants, gender-based violence, attacks on independent journalists and human rights defenders, torture, disappearances, and extrajudicial killings [98]

And the Successes She Inherits?

Sheinbaum also inherits what are seen as the major successes of AMLO's regime. In foreign policy, AMLO's primary preoccupation, like that of all Mexican presidents, was to maintain Mexico's subordination to the United States on the best possible terms. For AMLO this meant a willingness to act to assist U.S. presidents Donald Trump and Joseph Biden in stopping Central American migrants on Mexico's southern border in order to reduce the pressure on the U.S. border. Sheinbaum has said, "The relationship with the U.S. must be one of respect without subordination." If so, she would be the first Mexican president to achieve that, but in reality, it is impossible given U.S. economic domination and political and military power.

Domestically AMLO focused on encouraging both Mexican and foreign investment in Mexico on completely normal capitalist terms. The United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), ratified during AMLO's term, provides the framework for \$1.78 trillion in trade between the three countries in 2022, growing by 27 percent since 2019. While there have been many disputes among the three and while there have been some improved protections for labor, this is a standard capitalist business arrangement and there is otherwise nothing particularly progressive about it. Speaking to a group of corporate executives during her campaign, Sheinbaum told them that maintaining Mexico's attractive climate for business was job number one.

The most frequently heralded progressive developments for which AMLO has been credited are the social programs, principally payments to the poor. As a candidate, AMLO had promised that he would put "the poor first." His government abolished many universal government social programs and instead gave cash payments to certain vulnerable groups, particularly the elderly and students under 15 years of age. Money for the poor is distributed through 13,000 banks run by the military. While left

governments as part of their concern for working people generally create social programs, some view AMLO as cynically using these programs to build support for his party, himself, and now for Sheinbaum. As Vanessa Rubio wrote in *Americas Quarterly* in late 2023,

To cement his popularity, the president has used social programs for clientelist purposes with great effectiveness, along with an appealing (albeit polarizing) narrative and strong disenchantment with the traditional political class. Welfare and pension program spending has tripled, from \$8 billion in 2018 to \$24 billion in 2023. Most resources are allocated to AMLO's social programs, primarily a basic universal pension, youth education, and training program, "The Young Building the Future" (*Jovenes Construyendo el Futuro*).

But spending for these programs is expected to increase next year, an election year, by an additional 25%, reaching \$30 billion, according to the 2024 budget submitted by the Finance Ministry early in September for Congress' discussion and eventual approval. While their effectiveness is questionable—the programs reach a lower number of poor households compared to previous administrations, and only 50% are deemed to have an adequate design according to independent evaluator Coneval—these social programs have proven to be a political and public perception success. [99]

AMLO's administration allocated billions to help the poor, but didn't always spend all of it. Records of what was spent for social programs were not transparent, making it difficult to really understand their impact. Some fear that such targeted programs contributed to corruption, though the evidence for that was not clear either.

Some programs simply failed. The Young Building the Future signed up a

million young people to get jobs but found work for only 15,000. Máximo Ernesto Jaramillo-Molina in an article titled "More for the Rich, Less for the Poor" argues that government data shows that—while more funds than ever are going to social welfare programs—significantly more of that money is going to the rich and less to the poor. And in 2020 Oxfam reported that 60 percent of Mexico's poor were ineligible for three of the main social welfare programs. At the same time, military spending increased and often exceeded what had been budgeted. [100]

Mexico's poverty and inequality are also in large part a result of the existence of a large informal economy made up of businesses or the self-employed. In both cases these are untaxed, unregulated, and not participants in the government's social security institutions that provide workers with health care and pensions. These are men and women who work as street vendors, employees of small shops, or delivery workers directed by apps, among many others. Wages are generally low, but hard to measure. The informal sector represents 29 percent of the total economy, while informal employment represents 59 percent of total employment.

Human Rights Watch assessed the economic situation in 2023 in this way:

The poverty rate has fallen under López Obrador's presidency, from 41.9 percent in 2018 to 36.3 percent in 2022, according to the official poverty analysis agency. However, extreme poverty has remained unchanged and the number of people without access to health care has more than doubled. Analysts have pointed to a major increase in the minimum wage and a near-doubling of remittances from Mexicans abroad as possible contributors to the drop in poverty. [101]

The formal working class—people with regular jobs with legally registered

employers —did better under AMLO. His administration increased the national minimum wage from around US\$4.40 per day to approximately US\$5.00. In the border region, closer to the United States where things are more expensive, the minimum wage was set at US\$9.00 per day.

Still, not all that much changed for the poor under AMLO. Julio Boltvinik, who writes the “Moral Economy” column for *La Jornada*, a paper that has supported AMLO, demonstrated that in August 2023 there were 98 million poor people in Mexico, just as there were when AMLO took office in 2018. And Sheinbaum plans to maintain AMLO’s policies.

Taxes are a related issue. AMLO refused to carry out a fiscal reform that would provide more money for social programs and government projects. Mexico has among the lowest taxes in Latin America, and the OECD reports that tax evasion in Mexico has been estimated to be around 27 percent of the total revenue of the main taxes, accounting for 3 percent of GDP. AMLO has not raised taxes on the rich nor done much to end tax cheating, both of which would be good governance if not structural reform.

The other major progressive

accomplishment attributed to AMLO is the establishment of what we might call a new regime of labor union legality. And this is important and a genuine advance. When AMLO’s term began, almost all of those workers were controlled by a corporatist system of labor relations where the state protected its “official” labor unions, which in turn protected employers from real unions, keeping productivity high and wages low. Most workers could not vote for the union they wanted, could not vote on the contract, and risked their jobs if they spoke up. For the first time since the 1920s, independent labor unions can achieve legal recognition, workers can engage in strikes, and unions have greater protections thanks to the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement. USMCA protects workers’ rights to negotiate collective bargaining agreements without fear of state repression. USMCA provides a valuable tool. Most economists believe the general impact of the new treaty is negligible, but the USMCA Annex 23-A required Mexico to improve collective bargaining and Annex 31-A created the Rapid Response Labor Mechanism. [[102]

There is a good deal of debate about whether or not AMLO in his six years in office nearly succeeded in recreating a corporatist party like that

of the PRI, that is, a party based on control of both the party and mass organizations such as the labor unions that it controls. AMLO’s support for labor law allowed him to incorporate into his political operation reform-minded union leaders such as Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, head of the miners’ union, giving Morena a labor contingent of some significance. AMLO will, no doubt, want to see this process strengthened and extended, which would enormously enhance his party’s power. If under Sheinbaum the relationship between Morena and the unions strengthens, we could see the recreation of something like the PRI, but on the basis of an even more conservative political economy. The question is whether the unions can maintain their independence and internal democracy.

Perhaps once she sits on the presidential throne, Sheinbaum will become a strong independent leader and become the feminist and environmentalist she claims to be, capable of breaking with the authoritarian populist party and the militarist policies that AMLO has left her. Maybe she will prove to be a genuine progressive, left leader. But this seems pretty unlikely.

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Kivu prey to warlords in DRC

16 August 2024, by **Paul Martial**

Rwanda’s intervention

Originating from a former rebel group, the M23, since its alliance with Congolese politician Corneille Nangaa, has set itself the goal of renovating the Congolese state. Above all, it acts as Rwanda’s Trojan horse. Although for several months Kigali denied any support for this militia, President Paul Kagamé is now taking responsibility for this military

intervention in the DRC. It would be difficult to do otherwise, given the number of Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) soldiers present on Congolese territory. They are estimated to number more than three thousand, with heavy and sophisticated weaponry. Officially, the aim of this intervention is to eliminate the Front Démocratique de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR). This militia, originally made up of genocidal Hutus who had taken refuge in the DRC under the French military operation

Turquoise, was perceived as a threat by Rwanda. In reality, the invasion is a good way for the Rwandan elite to plunder the region’s mineral wealth.

Governmental incompetence

The DRC’s Tshisekedi government is unable to defend the integrity of the territory because of the serious shortcomings of the DRC’s armed forces (FARDC). This structure is a

sort of millefeuille made up of former militiamen who, as conflicts and peace agreements have progressed, have been integrated into the army without receiving any training and very little equipment. This is due to mismanagement and a high level of corruption within the military hierarchy. The sums allocated for armaments are misappropriated; petrol and sometimes equipment are resold; pay, when received, is miserly. As a result, the FARDC does not worry much about the M23.

The Congolese authorities have taken several measures. Externally, they have unsuccessfully urged the UN force, MONUSCO, to play an offensive role against the M23. They called on South African forces, which deployed 2,900 men with little result. Faced with such a situation, Tshisekedi threatened FARDC soldiers who fled the fighting with the death penalty. He has also developed a nationalist rhetoric, with the risk of stigmatising

the Banyamulenge community, Congolese Tutsis suspected of favouring Rwanda. The government enjoys a near-consensus against the Rwandan aggression, which is obviously very convenient for absolving itself of its own responsibilities.

The reign of militias

The DRC authorities rely on some of the many militias operating in the east of the country, primarily the FLDR. These armed groups all present themselves as *wazalendo*, or 'patriots' in Kiswahili. This legitimises their existence and allows them to enjoy impunity for the many human rights violations they commit. The government has tried to formalise these alliances by creating the *Volontaires pour la Défense de la*

Patrie (VDP) (Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland), ensuring that its members can later join a hypothetical armed reserve for the defence of the DRC.

On the ground, the difference between VDP and *wazalendo* is non-existent. While the latter have succeeded in halting the advance of the M23, their use has been denounced by human rights activists. Most of their leaders have been charged with war crimes or crimes against humanity. There are profound differences, and even competition, over control of territories and access to resources. Most often they boil down to a racket on the people, who have no choice but to flee in order to survive, piling up in refugee camps. There are more than a hundred such camps around Goma.

2 August 2024

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

Challenges and opportunities in Puerto Rico

15 August 2024, by **Democracia Socialista (PR)**

Just over a week ago, the New Progressive Party mobilized 292,332 people to vote in its primaries. This number barely exceeds that of the 2020 primaries, in the midst of a pandemic. Moreover, no internal force has triumphed over the primary process: Jennifer González will be the candidate for governor, but she will support Pedro Pierluisi's candidate for resident commissioner, William Villafañe. Similarly, the choice of other candidates does not seem to reflect the existence of a strong sector in particular, but rather support for isolated individuals. In addition, the results of the primaries themselves are being challenged due to mismanagement of the process, suggesting a wider crisis.

Also just over a week ago, the People's Democratic Party mobilized 134,579 people to vote in its primary. That's

82,452 fewer than in the 2020 primary, in the midst of the pandemic: 217,031 people. The final result reflects the process that preceded the primary: bland. And finally, this week, a majority of the Puerto Rico Supreme Court ruled in favor of disqualifying the coalition candidacies of the Movimiento Victoria Ciudadana (Citizens' Victory Movement).

If we juxtapose the low turnout in the bipartisan primaries and the Supreme Court ruling, it is to emphasize that they go hand in hand. Faced with the collapse of the neo-liberal political parties and the threat posed by the progressive alliance of the Movimiento Victoria Ciudadana with the Puerto Rican Independentist Party (PIP), the property-owning classes and neoliberal parties have sought to maintain themselves in power and government by manipulating the

electoral process. They have used the electoral process for as long as it has been useful to them, but their commitment to democracy stops when it comes into conflict with their interests, and they defend them by every means at their disposal, including the repressive institutions and forces of the state that they still control.

Political and judicial disqualification during bipartisan crisis

In a leaflet distributed at the first demonstration organized at the start of this political and judicial coup

d'état, we wrote: "The disqualification of Victoria Ciudadana's candidates is part of a wider strategy aimed at defeating Alianza País, the union of progressive electoral forces that has challenged the domination of the employers' parties in power over the last six decades and, consequently, the big economic interests that hide behind them.

The Alianza País program includes decolonization, debt cancellation, the cancellation of privatizations and the strengthening of unionization rates and labor rights. It is therefore a program that reverses decades of neoliberal, colonial and anti-worker public policies. The sectors that make up the Alliance include important sectors of environmentalists, trade unionists, feminists and communities in struggle. The Alliance therefore defends the cause of working people in order to increase their political participation in the spheres of government in Puerto Rico. The disqualification is not the first blow, but the most recent and strongest in a process that has included the imposition of a new electoral code, the outlawing of coalition candidacies and a process of lawfare against active members of the movement."

While the above refers to the Court of First Instance, the content is unfortunately not rendered obsolete by the Supreme Court ruling. The fact that a legal appeal was lodged to maintain Ana Irma Rivera Lassén (a member of the Movimiento Victoria Ciudadana, editor's note) as a candidate for the post of Resident Commissioner may have more to do with political fears than legal considerations: if her candidacy was not certified, the real possibility that the Alliance would opt for Rivera Lassén to stand on the PIP ballot paper as a candidate for Resident Commissioner must have shaken the two-party system (in particular the Popular Democratic Party) and the dominant classes

Our struggles within the

movement

Democracia Socialista is one of the founding forces of the Movimiento Victoria Ciudadana, and a significant number of our activists are actively involved in this project. For us socialists, electoral participation is a tactic for advancing our demands in a political arena that attracts the attention of large sectors of the population. Electoral participation in no way implies blind faith in electoral processes or institutions. As socialists, we also recognize that most institutions are founded to defend the interests of the power-ful.

In this sense, we not only saw the court's decision as a blow to Victoria Ciudadana and Alianza País, but, from our point of view, it can also be seen as an opportunity, as a chance to continue to denounce the deep crisis of the existing institutions and the possibility of overcoming it, of replacing these institutions with others that are at the service and within the reach of the majority, through democratic mobilization and the collective actions of workers. We have succeeded in promoting the idea internally, in the various networks that function as the movement's base committees, that the ruling of the Court of First Instance was political and not judicial: the real motivation for this ruling is not a failure on our part to comply with the rules, as various commentators have claimed, but the fear of the parties in power of losing this power, and of seeking to remain in government under any pretext.

Faced with a political coup d'état, we proposed a political response: growing mobilizations, the search for international support, the creation of a broad front that would go beyond the movement but defend the candidacies and the right to decide at the ballot box. We believe that political struggles can be strengthened when social contradictions are accentuated, which enables us to put forward our proposals and our transitional demands as an alternative, while reiterating the need for social mobilization to achieve this. We know that the fear of the dominant classes is that the electoral participation of the

Movimiento Victoria Ciudadana, through the Alianza País with the Puerto Rican Independence Party, will substantially increase its presence in the legislature or even that it will defeat the two-party system in the vote for the executive. Both are possible at the moment. And those adversely affected by the Supreme Court's decision are not just the voters of Movimiento Victoria Ciudadana and Alianza País, but all the social sectors involved in the struggle.

The difficulties of the struggle

As members of the Victoria Ciudadana leadership, we were not so successful in convincing people of the importance and, above all, the urgency of militancy and mobilization in defense of the candidacies. While the grassroots of the movement demanded and expected more action, more mobilization, the Day for Democracy demonstrations were insufficient and sporadic. This is not to say that we really believed that a reversal by the Supreme Court was possible. But in the absence of massive mobilizations, it could only be - and it was - unfavorable to democracy. On the other hand, it should be noted that the political possibilities of Alianza País are paradoxically emerging at a time when existing social organizations are weakening: the workers' movement is still weakened - despite some important recent victories - and the environmental movement is in disarray. Only the feminist and LGBTIQ+ movements retain a strong capacity to mobilize, although they are also fragmented.

This situation has severely hampered one of our calls expressed in the leaflet quoted above: "As Democracia Socialista, we consider that denouncing this judicial coup d'état should not be the responsibility of the organizations that make up the Alliance alone, but of all the progressive sectors in the country: trade unions, community organizations, environmentalists, feminists. The partial initiatives of each sector are important". Whatever the reason, the reality is that few

organizations or sectors responded to our call. The problem for the capitalists, however, has several dimensions: the blows dealt to Victoria Ciudadana and Alianza País may lead to its strengthening in the eyes of the electorate; they have not strengthened the New Progressive Party or the People's Democratic Party, while Proyecto Dignidad has yet to present itself as a force capable of winning key seats in government. [103]

What's more, the Supreme Court ruling has deepened the crisis of the ruling classes by continuing to expose their desperate desire to maintain political power. Neither the whitewashing by the employers' press nor the "independent" analysts have been able to halt the rapid discrediting and bankruptcy of the parties and institutions.

The struggle continues

With the Supreme Court's decision, there is no institutional possibility of obtaining the possibility for these candidatures to appear on the ballot paper. However, just as political creativity led to the formation of Alianza País despite the ban on coalition candidacies, Victoria Ciudadana and Alianza will have to find a way to promote as many candidacies as possible in 2024. This could involve strategic direct nomination campaigns, combined with mobilization days with other sectors, militant activities that should include the formation of a veritable army of activists to monitor the ballot. This is

the only way we can achieve a breakthrough in the electoral field.

But for any electoral breakthrough not to be ephemeral, it will require the strengthening and continued growth of social mobilizations, which in turn could contribute to the development of class consciousness in ever wider sectors. Within and outside Victoria Ciudadana, socialists must continue to build democratic alternatives, taking advantage of all that the crisis of the existing institutions continues to reveal. In this sense, the Alliance will have to use the electoral terrain to go much further than it has done so far.

Developing self-activity

The *Verano del 19* - which celebrates its fifth anniversary this year - should serve as a framework or example of what can be done: large-scale mobilizations that go beyond institutional frameworks to achieve their objectives. [104] Pressure exerted on the streets can transform social structures in ways that are impossible through traditional channels. Contrary to what was widely believed in the summer of 2019, we must now encourage - with conviction - greater self-organization of the sectors in struggle, rather than praising spontaneity, and promote the consolidation of the Alliance as a political alternative capable of transforming this country. Above all, we need to consolidate a movement of hope based on the possibilities of change. Although the two-party system is still in crisis and continues to lose support, apathy, disinterest

and demobilization are capable of developing and could halt the long-awaited transformation. We must therefore fight to counter these potential apathy, disinterest and demobilization with proposals for participation, mobilization and concrete action.

Faced with the disqualification of the four candidates, what demands should we put forward? Once again, as the summer of 2019 has shown, the rejection of what already exists sometimes proves to be a sufficiently strong demand. Victoria Ciudadana and Alianza with the PIP have hundreds of viable candidates at all levels: mayoralties and municipal mandates, the two bodies of the national legislature, the resident commissioner and the post of governor. The mobilizations should push for the rejection and left-wing reclamation of what is possible, which should include defending the vote for all these candidates while fighting against the corruption, looting and usurpation of agencies, structures and all that remains of government institutions.

However, there is no doubt that this will not be the last blow that the big economic interests will seek to inflict. There is no doubt that they will seek to further block Victoria Ciudadana's participation in 2024. To anticipate and take the offensive, we propose the self-organization of the sectors in struggle, their organic link and their constant mobilization. Let the fear of the ruling classes be justified and let their nightmares soon become reality

12 June 2024

Cameroon: The right to love and be loved

14 August 2024, by **Paul Martial**

Homophobic

politics

King Nasty is the stage name of Brenda Biya, who is none other than the daughter of Paul Biya, President of

Cameroon, a country that is particularly repressive towards the LGBTQIA+ community.

Article 347-1 of the Cameroonian Penal Code provides for a prison

sentence of up to five years, accompanied by a fine of 200,000 CFA francs. The presidential party, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM), like most other parties, regularly conducts homophobic campaigns that most often result in acts of violence against people suspected of being homosexual. A very convenient diversion for the country's elites to make people forget their disastrous policies in terms of health, education and purchasing power.

It is also a way for these leaders to appear as defenders of the nation and the authenticity of African culture against a supposedly decadent West. They do not hesitate to use oft-repeated untruths in which Africa is

the only continent without sexual diversity, despite numerous works by historians demonstrating the opposite.

In her recent interview with the newspaper *Le Parisien*, Brenda Biya mentioned the wrath of her brother, Franck Biya, who is preparing to succeed his father and the presidential couple's request to remove her post on X. She refused and is still waiting for a dialogue with her family. Some will point out that she is not risking much for her coming out, living in Switzerland, being the daughter of the president with a comfortable income. However, Brenda Biya assumes this announcement as an act of militancy against the criminalization of homosexuality: "This law existed before my father was in power. I find it unfair and I hope that my story will

change it."

LGBTQIA+ rights defenders like lawyer Alice Nkom, who has defended people presented as homosexual for two decades, have not been mistaken: "I salute the courage of Brenda Biya, who assumes her fundamental right to love and be loved" The same goes for Shakiro, a transgender activist, who has been the victim of assault and imprisoned several times, forcing her to flee her country. As for Brenda Biya, she is calling for the release of the twenty or so detainees accused of homosexuality who are languishing in the government's jails.

29 July 2024

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

Fascists blocked by mass mobilisation

13 August 2024, by **Dave Kellaway**

Young people, ethnically diverse, along with recognisable older left activists, were ignoring all the 'official' advice from the police, local mosque leaders, the local MP and the Labour Party generally to stay away. Leave it to Sir Kier and your new government of public service. Tough sentences, new anti-riot police squads and denunciations of mindless thuggery would take care of the situation - move along, nothing to see here.

Already when we got off the train and saw the end of the high street people were three or four deep on the pavement. By 7.15 there were already several thousand people at Hoe Street outside the immigration solicitors the fascists had promised to attack. By 7.30 you could not see the end of the demonstration - it filled the whole road. Someone spotted far right agitator Calvin Robinson with a small entourage, but it was quickly apparent that the right could muster no real presence.

Left groups like the Socialist Party,

the Socialist Workers Party, the Revolutionary Communist Party and Anti-Capitalist Resistance attended with their banners. Demonstrators held up placards, but the overwhelming majority were not their members or even their supporters but Londoners appalled at what the fascists did last week. Groups had come up from South London and from neighbouring boroughs. Many were present from local ethnic minority communities.

Homemade cardboard signs with original slogans were held high - always a sign that this was a real mass mobilisation and not just the radical left. Stand Up to Racism had worked hard to help coordinate the protests. Some local union branches had their banners. On a national level, in striking contrast to the Labour Party, there had been calls to come out and support anti-fascist demonstrations from some union leaders.

People chanted 'Refugees Welcome Here', 'Whose streets, Our streets', 'We are the people...', 'The people

united will never be defeated'. Nobody struck up: No to mindless thuggery, Tougher sentences now or more police riot squads.

Starmer, after some delay, had finally added 'far right' to the thuggery epithet by the time of yesterday's demonstrations. But at no time had the Labour Party made calls for people to demonstrate against the fascists. Even less was there one word in defence of refugees or migrants, which everyone could see was the key target of the fascists.

No Labour spokesman told the truth about what the fascists were doing in Rotherham, Tamworth or elsewhere. These were fascist pogroms against migrants, asylum seekers, Muslims and Black people. It was not - as a lot of the media presented it, 'anti-immigrant protests', as if they were standing around with placards or giving out leaflets. No, they were out to burn down refugee hotels, to injure and kill people. Improvised road blocks checked cars to see if there were white or Black people in them.

Social media posts blatantly called for this violence.

Both the Tories and Labour fail to challenge the fascists' narrative about migrants and asylum seekers. They say stop the boats, they say there are too many immigrants and back local racists who want to close down the 'tax payer funded' hotels. Labour is terrified about being seen as soft on migrants. Instead of providing safe and legal routes for asylum seekers or recognising that immigrant workers are essential for both public services and the economy, Labour talks up new anti-terrorist style squads to stop the boats and pledges to cut migrant numbers.

Labour's whole strategy at the recent election was to win back Tory voters, particularly in the Red Wall seats where some of the worst fascist violence took place. Rather than challenging prejudices and mounting a huge campaign with the real facts about migrants they adapt to their reactionary views. Yes, they won the election handsomely but Farage's Reform UK won four million votes and we are now seeing a revitalised band of street fascists.

Last night does give some hope. You could feel the exhilaration and confidence in the crowd as they really felt how we can reclaim the streets. The national failure of the fascists to repeat last week's violent disorder exposed their organisational limits. Although they can get 15,000 in Trafalgar square on a one-off mobilisation they cannot organise and coordinate actions in 40 different places.

The far right overwhelmingly draws from atomised layers of society, sometimes radicalised by alt-right and QAnon style conspiracies that inculcate racism and culture war pseudo concerns about the dangers of vaccines, immigration and trans existence. They are pushed into these views by both social media but also by the so-called mainstream, by opportunistic politicians and

journalists who lend credence to prejudice to build their careers.

Prosecutions have exposed how many of them are small business owners rather than representative of an imagined working class anxiety over the erosion of vague nationalist abstractions. As was the case with the January 6 United States Capitol attack, those who participated were often privileged but insecure people susceptible to the divisive rhetoric of the powerful because this mirrors their alienated lives. But almost as concerning as those who showed up to terrorise the vulnerable, are the many more who merely echo their views and uncritically repeat racist and bigoted ideas.

Faced with a well organised mass anti-fascist movement the weaknesses of these formations was thankfully exposed. Thousands also turned out notably in Newcastle, Birmingham, Bristol, Liverpool, Finchley, Oxford, Sheffield, and Brighton on a weekday night at relatively short notice. The media and politicians have overdone the importance of social media to downplay how the anti-migrant narrative and austerity have helped the fascists. Social media exists in a wider social context, and it is contradictory. Yesterday a lot of people heard about the mobilisations via social media as well as through the efforts of established anti-racist organisation.

Watching breakfast TV across the channels this morning we can see victories have many new found parents. The media and the political establishment had told people to stay away from the protests. All the front pages of the press, including the reactionary Daily Mail and Daily Express, which often run anti-migrant stories, were exultant about the way the people had turned out to roll back fascist violence.

At least one ex-police chief on BBC breakfast news had the good grace and honesty to accept that the mass mobilisation was the decisive factor last night and not the capacity of the

police or just the deterrence of tough sentences. Local Walthamstow MP, Stella Creasy, who before last night had called on people to stay away, was hypocritically praising the mobilisation in the aftermath.

What is not said publicly is an important political reality. Currents outside the Labour Party today have a certain capacity to mobilise thousands of people independently. We have seen this with the Palestine solidarity movement; we are seeing it today with the anti-fascist movement. There are now a number of independent MPs who can support such movements - Jeremy Corbyn and the four independent 'Gaza' MPs put out a statement backing the counter mobilisations. If the radical left can work in a non-sectarian, united way then we can achieve significant progress.

We need to work within the social movements that have emerged against racism, in solidarity with Palestine, to oppose runaway global warming, as well as with independent MPs, the small number of Labour left MPs who defy Starmer and above all inside the unions to keep building a fighting alternative to a government that is betting everything on a partnership with capital. Its policies will not generate the radical structural change that can reduce inequality and cut the ground from the fascists who exploit people's anger at austerity and disillusion with politicians.

Yesterday as a battle won and as Socialist Worker aptly put it - fear changes sides. However the fascist threat remains and the eco system which feeds it - Reform UK and the mainstream political consensus defining migrants as the 'problem' - means they are not going away anytime soon. Our website and groups like Stand up to Racism will keep you informed about the upcoming protests.

8 August 2024

Source: *Anti*Capitalist Resistance*.

Laundering Carbon—The Gulf’s ‘New Scramble for Africa’

12 August 2024, by **Adam Hanieh**

Kenyatta Ngusilo (C), a member of the Ogiek community, watches as his storehouse burns in Sasimwani Mau Forest, 2023. Hundreds of Ogiek people were left homeless after the Kenyan government evicted alleged encroachers. James Wakibia/SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images

Reports suggested that Blue Carbon—a company privately owned by Sheikh Ahmed al-Maktoum, a member of Dubai’s ruling family—had signed deals promising the firm control over vast tracts of land across the African continent. These deals included an astonishing 10 percent of the landmass in Liberia, Zambia and Tanzania, and 20 percent in Zimbabwe. Altogether, the area equalled the size of Britain.

Blue Carbon intended to use the land to launch carbon offset projects, an increasingly popular practice that proponents claim will help tackle climate change. Carbon offsets involve forest protection and other environmental schemes that are equated to a certain quantity of carbon “credits.” These credits can then be sold to polluters around the world to offset their own emissions. Prior to entering into the negotiations of the massive deal, Blue Carbon had no experience in either carbon offsets or forest management. Nonetheless the firm stood to make billions of dollars from these projects.

Environmental NGOs, journalists and activists quickly condemned the deals as a new “scramble for Africa”—a land grab enacted in the name of climate change mitigation. In response, Blue Carbon insisted the discussions were merely exploratory and would require community consultation and further negotiation before formal approval.

Regardless of their current status, the land deals raise concerns that

indigenous and other local communities could be evicted to make way for Blue Carbon’s forest protection plans. In Eastern Kenya, for example, the indigenous Ogiek People were driven out of the Mau Forest in November 2023, an expulsion that lawyers linked to ongoing negotiations between Blue Carbon and Kenya’s president, William Ruto. Protests have also followed the Liberian government’s closed-door negotiations with Blue Carbon, with activists claiming the project violates the land rights of indigenous people enshrined within Liberian law. Similar cases of land evictions elsewhere have led the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Francisco Calí Tzay, to call for a global moratorium on carbon offset projects.

Beyond their potentially destructive impact on local communities, Blue Carbon’s activities in Africa point to a major shift in the climate strategies of Gulf states. As critics have shown, the carbon offsetting industry exists largely as a greenwashing mechanism, allowing polluters to hide their continued emissions behind the smokescreen of misleading carbon accounting methodologies while providing a profitable new asset class for financial actors. As the world’s largest exporters of crude oil and liquified natural gas, the Gulf states are now positioning themselves across all stages of this new industry—including the financial markets where carbon credits are bought and sold. This development is reconfiguring the Gulf’s relationships with the African continent and will have significant consequences for the trajectories of our warming planet.

False Accounting and Carbon Laundering

There are many varieties of carbon offset projects. The most common involves the avoided deforestation schemes that make up the bulk of Blue Carbon’s interest in African land. In these schemes, land is enclosed and protected from deforestation. Carbon offset certifiers—of which the largest in the world is the Washington-based firm, Verra—then assess the amount of carbon these projects prevent from being released into the atmosphere (measured in tons of CO₂). Once assessed, carbon credits can be sold to polluters, who use them to cancel out their own emissions and thus meet their stated climate goals.

Superficially attractive—after all, who doesn’t want to see money going into the protection of forests?—such schemes have two major flaws. The first is known as “permanence.” Buyers who purchase carbon credits gain the right to pollute in the here and now. Meanwhile, it takes hundreds of years for those carbon emissions to be re-absorbed from the atmosphere, and there is no guarantee that the forest will continue to stand for that timeframe. If a forest fire occurs or the political situation changes and the forest is destroyed, it is too late to take back the carbon credits that were initially issued. This concern is not simply theoretical. In recent years, California wildfires have consumed millions of hectares of forest, including offsets purchased by major international firms such as Microsoft and BP. Given the increasing incidence of forest fires due to global warming, such outcomes will undoubtedly become more

frequent.

Again, this estimate depends on an unknowable future, opening up significant profit-making opportunities for companies certifying and selling carbon credits. The second major flaw with these schemes is that any estimation of carbon credits for avoided deforestation projects rests on an imaginary counterfactual: How much carbon would have been released if the offset project were not in place? Again, this estimate depends on an unknowable future, opening up significant profit-making opportunities for companies certifying and selling carbon credits. By inflating the estimated emissions reductions associated with a particular project, it is possible to sell many more carbon credits than are actually warranted. This scope for speculation is one reason why the carbon credit market is so closely associated with repeated scandals and corruption. Indeed, according to reporting in the *New Yorker*, after one massive carbon fraud was revealed in Europe, “the Danish government admitted that eighty per cent of the country’s carbon-trading firms were fronts for the racket.”[1]

These methodological problems are structurally intrinsic to offsetting and cannot be avoided. As a result, most carbon credits traded today are fictitious and do not result in any real reduction in carbon emissions. Tunisian analyst Fadhel Kaboub describes them as simply “a licence to pollute.”[2] One investigative report from early 2023 found that more than 90 percent of rainforest carbon credits certified by Verra were likely bogus and did not represent actual carbon reductions. Another study conducted for the EU Commission reported that 85 percent of the offset projects established under the UN’s Clean Development Mechanism failed to reduce emissions. A recent academic study of offset projects across six countries, meanwhile, found that most did not reduce deforestation, and for those that did, the reductions were significantly lower than initially claimed. Consequently, the authors conclude, carbon credits sold for these projects were used to “offset almost three times more carbon emissions than their actual contributions to climate change mitigation.”[3]

Despite these fundamental problems—or perhaps because of them—the use of carbon offsets is growing rapidly. The investment bank Morgan Stanley predicts that the market will be worth \$250 billion by 2050, up from about \$2 billion in 2020, as large polluters utilize offsetting to sanction their continued carbon emissions while claiming to meet net zero targets. In the case of Blue Carbon, one estimate found that the amount of carbon credits likely to be accredited through the firm’s projects in Africa would equal all of the UAE’s annual carbon emissions. Akin to carbon laundering, this practice allows ongoing emissions to disappear from the carbon accounting ledger, swapped for credits that have little basis in reality.

Monetizing Nature as a Development Strategy

For the African continent, the growth of these new carbon markets cannot be separated from the escalating global debt crisis that has followed the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. According to a new database, Debt Service Watch, the Global South is experiencing its worst debt crisis on record, with one-third of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa spending over half their budget revenues on servicing debt. Faced with such unprecedented fiscal pressures, the commodification of land through offsetting is now heavily promoted by international lenders and many development organizations as a way out of the deep-rooted crisis.

The African Carbon Markets Initiative (ACMI), an alliance launched in 2022 at the Cairo COP27 summit, has emerged as a prominent voice in this new development discourse. ACMI brings together African leaders, carbon credit firms (including Verra), Western donors (USAID, the Rockefeller Foundation and Jeff Bezos’ Earth Fund) and multilateral organizations like the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. Along with practical efforts to mobilize funds and encourage policy changes, ACMI has taken a lead role in

advocating for carbon markets as a win-win solution for both heavily indebted African countries and the climate. In the words of the organization’s founding document, “The emergence of carbon credits as a new product allows for the monetization of Africa’s large natural capital endowment, while enhancing it.”[4]

ACMI’s activities are deeply tied to the Gulf. One side to this relationship is that Gulf firms, especially fossil fuel producers, are now the key source of demand for future African carbon credits. At the September 2023 African Climate Summit in Nairobi, Kenya, for example, a group of prominent Emirati energy and financial firms (known as the UAE Carbon Alliance) committed to purchasing \$450 million worth of carbon credits from ACMI over the next six years. The pledge immediately confirmed the UAE as ACMI’s biggest financial backer. Moreover, by guaranteeing demand for carbon credits for the rest of this decade, the UAE’s pledge helps create the market today, driving forward new offset projects and solidifying their place in the development strategies of African states. It also helps legitimize offsetting as a response to the climate emergency, despite the numerous scandals that have beset the industry in recent years.

Saudi Arabia is likewise playing a major role in pushing forward carbon markets in Africa. One of ACMI’s steering committee members is the Saudi businesswoman, Riham ElGizy, who heads the Regional Voluntary Carbon Market Company (RVCMC). Established in 2022 as a joint venture between the Public Investment Fund (Saudi Arabia’s sovereign wealth fund) and the Saudi stock exchange, Tadawul, RVCMC has organized the world’s two largest carbon auctions, selling more than 3.5 million tons worth of carbon credits in 2022 and 2023. 70 percent of the credits sold in these auctions were sourced from offset projects in Africa, with the 2023 auction taking place in Kenya. The principal buyers of these credits were Saudi firms, led by the largest oil company in the world, Saudi Aramco.

Beyond simply owning offset projects

in Africa, the Gulf states are also positioning themselves at the other end of the carbon value chain: the marketing and sale of carbon credits to regional and international buyers. The Emirati and Saudi relationships with ACMI and the trade in African carbon credits illustrate a notable development when it comes to the Gulf's role in these new markets. Beyond simply owning offset projects in Africa, the Gulf states are also positioning themselves at the other end of the carbon value chain: the marketing and sale of carbon credits to regional and international buyers. In this respect, the Gulf is emerging as a key economic space where African carbon is turned into a financial asset that can be bought, sold and speculated upon by financial actors across the globe.

Indeed, the UAE and Saudi Arabia have each sought to establish permanent carbon exchanges, where carbon credits can be bought and sold just like any other commodity. The UAE set up the first such trading exchange following an investment by the Abu Dhabi-controlled sovereign wealth fund, Mubadala, in the Singapore-based AirCarbon Exchange (ACX) in September 2022. As part of this acquisition, Mubadala now owns 20 percent of ACX and has established a regulated digital carbon trading exchange in Abu Dhabi's financial free zone, the Abu Dhabi Global Market. ACX claims the exchange is the first regulated exchange of its kind in the world, with the trade in carbon credits beginning there in late 2023. Likewise, in Saudi Arabia the RVCMC has partnered with US market technology firm Xpansiv to establish a permanent carbon credit exchange set to launch in late 2024.

Whether these two Gulf-based exchanges will compete or prioritize different trading instruments, such as carbon derivatives or Shariah-compliant carbon credits, remains to be seen. What is clear, however, is that major financial centers in the Gulf are leveraging their existing infrastructures to establish regional dominance in the sale of carbon. Active at all stages of the offsetting industry—from generating carbon credits to purchasing them—the Gulf is now a principal actor in the new forms of wealth extraction that connect the African continent to the wider global economy.

Entrenching a Fossil-Fuelled Future

Over the past two decades, the Gulf's oil and especially gas production has grown markedly, alongside a substantial eastward shift in energy exports to meet the new hydrocarbon demand from China and East Asia. At the same time, the Gulf states have expanded their involvement in energy-intensive downstream sectors, notably the production of petrochemicals, plastics and fertilizers. Led by Saudi Aramco and the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, Gulf-based National Oil Companies now rival the traditional Western oil supermajors in key metrics such as reserves, refining capacity and export levels.

Rather, much like the big Western oil companies, the Gulf's vision of expanded fossil fuel production is accompanied by an attempt to seize the leadership of global efforts to tackle the climate crisis. In this

context—and despite the reality of the climate emergency—the Gulf states are doubling down on fossil fuel production, seeing much to be gained from hanging on to an oil-centered world for as long as possible. As the Saudi oil minister vowed back in 2021, “every molecule of hydrocarbon will come out.”[5] But this approach does not mean the Gulf states have adopted a stance of head-in-the-sand climate change denialism. Rather, much like the big Western oil companies, the Gulf's vision of expanded fossil fuel production is accompanied by an attempt to seize the leadership of global efforts to tackle the climate crisis.

One side to this approach is their heavy involvement in flawed and unproven low carbon technologies, like hydrogen and carbon capture. Another is their attempts to steer global climate negotiations, seen in the recent UN climate change conferences, COP27 and COP28, where the Gulf states channelled policy discussions away from effective efforts to phase out fossil fuels, turning these events into little more than corporate spectacles and networking forums for the oil industry.

The carbon offset market should be viewed as an integral part of these efforts to delay, obfuscate and obstruct addressing climate change in meaningful ways. Through the deceptive carbon accounting of offset projects, the big oil and gas industries in the Gulf can continue business as usual while claiming to meet their so-called climate targets. The Gulf's dispossession of African land is key to this strategy, ultimately enabling the disastrous specter of ever-accelerating fossil fuel production.

[Merip](#)

Key Points About the Failed Military Coup and its Aftermath

11 August 2024, by **Pablo Stefanoni**

July 30, 2024

The tanks in Plaza Murillo could very well have led to tragedy given the increasingly turbulent political climate. With MAS fractured into two wings—Evistas, supporting former president Evo Morales, and Arcistas, aligned with Luis Arce—stability is no longer guaranteed. On the afternoon of Wednesday, June 26, the commander general of the Army, Juan José Zúñiga—who refused to recognize his dismissal by the president the prior night—occupied the emblematic square with tanks. He even used one tank to force open the door of the Palacio Quemado, the ancient seat of government today shared with the adjacent Casa Grande del Pueblo. Confusion about the intentions and strategies at play prevailed throughout the event, as many government officials barricaded their offices with furniture to prevent any breach by the uniformed men.

Tensions had been brewing ever since General Zúñiga's allusion to the impossibility of former President Evo Morales's renewed run for the office of President, which culminated in calling Morales a "mythomaniac." In an interview with the local program *No Mentirás* on June 24, the military chief said "legally, Evo Morales is disqualified. The CPE (Political Constitution of the State) says that he cannot serve more than two terms, and yet the man was reelected. The Army and the Armed Forces have a mission to enforce the Constitution. That man cannot be president of this country again."¹

Zúñiga was referring to a controversial ruling by the Plurinational Constitutional Court (TCP) which, in a decision on another issue, included an interpretation of the 2009 Constitution that would exclude the three-time president from running in the presidential race.² While the constitution states that individuals may only serve two consecutive terms, the court's interpretation states that individuals may serve two terms in total—consecutive or not. Morales presented the decision as a political proscription by the "endogenous right," part of a larger strategy that he called a "black plan" to remove him from politics, orchestrated, according to him, by the Ministers of Justice and

Government, Iván Lima and Eduardo del Castillo.

The threatening statements made by Zúñiga, who was appointed commander of the Army at the end of 2022 by President Luis Arce Catacora, unnerved the ex-president and Evistas, who began to speak of a "self-coup" in the making. On his X account Morales denounced "the types of threats made by Juan José Zúñiga, the general commander of the Army," saying that they "have never been about democracy. They must be disavowed by the commander in chief of the Armed Forces [Luis Arce], otherwise they prove that what they are really organizing is a self-coup."³ Morales daily criticizes the Arce government, which he considers a traitor to the so-called "process of change."

But it was not just the ex-president. Zúñiga's threats were in violation of military regulations as well as also the Constitution, leading to Arce's decision to dismiss him. This dismissal was interpreted by the military chief as an expression of "contempt" in the face of his loyalty to the president. On Wednesday, June 26, the day he had been summoned to be formally relieved, according to the newspaper *El Deber*, Zúñiga arrived at Plaza Murillo with armored vehicles and hooded soldiers.⁴ This is how the country came to witness a General acting as if he was a "social movement," organizing an attempted coup d'état, and confronting President Arce face to face upon forcibly entering the Palacio Quemado.⁵ The president's collaborators shouted to Zúñiga that he was indeed a golpista (coup plotter) and demanded he withdraw his uniformed men.

Zúñiga's isolation and lack of political or social support possibly explains his attempt to paint his rebellion as political. He said he was going to free "political prisoners"—including former president, Jeanine Áñez, and the former governor of Santa Cruz, Fernando Camacho—and restore democracy. "The elite have taken over the country, vandals who have destroyed the country," he harangued at the doors of his armored vehicle, in front of the palace and Parliament. His argument that "the Armed Forces

intend to restructure democracy, so that it is a true democracy, not only for the owners who have been in power for thirty and forty years" fell on deaf ears.

The internal and external reaction was overwhelming. Even opponents currently in prison such as Áñez and Camacho condemned the military action.⁶ So did former presidents Carlos D. Mesa and Jorge "Tuto" Quiroga.⁷ Outside the country, leaders of diverse ideological persuasions—with the exception of Argentine Javier Milei, who left it in the hands of his Foreign Minister—called for the defense of institutions and condemned the subversives.

Meanwhile, parent organizations such as the Central Union of Peasant Workers of Bolivia (CSUTCB) and the Central Obrera Boliviana (COB), as well as Evo Morales, who continues to be the leader of the unions of coca growers of Chapare in Cochabamba (he has his offices and his fish farming enterprise there), called for a general strike, for roadblocks, and for a large march to La Paz.

Arce, for his part, gave a brief speech, and amidst the possibility of confrontations in Plaza Murillo, also called for mobilization. Yet, the protesters were expelled with tear gas, and he prepared to name a new military command of the armed forces.

Arce, who had apparently promised not to run for re-election in 2025, later decided that he would seek a second term. Evo Morales, who attempted one re-election after another, ignoring the letter and spirit of the new Magna Carta, maintains that he was removed by a coup d'état in 2019 and that he has the right to run for the presidency again. This dispute has paralyzed the Legislative Assembly at an economic time when the pre-2019 economic boom is now years in the distant past.

Without a rebellion in the military or police barracks, Zúñiga's hope of maintaining the uprising and managing to stay in his post by force was running out. He was not helped by his involvement in at least one case of embezzlement (the payment of the Juancito Pinto bonus during Evo

Morales' government), or by his generally lackluster career performance. The military man who had been considered very close to Arce appears to have acted on his own impulse. His withdrawal from Plaza Murillo resembled a stampede, with protesters chasing the straggling soldiers.

Upon being arrested, along with Vice Admiral Juan Arnez, the former commander of the Navy, Zúñiga claimed to have been acting on the orders of the president: "President [Arce] told me 'the situation is very screwed, something needs to be prepared to raise my popularity.'"8 A grenade had been activated that would last for the next few days. The idea of a self-coup in the strict sense seems to be contradicted by the very thread of events—what exactly was the plan? In reality, the events were more like a series of uncoordinated acts, explicable only within the framework of eroding institutions and the poor management of MAS.

How did things get so unstable? Upon Morales' return to power in December 2020, relations between him and Luis Arce, his candidate chosen from exile in Argentina, who served as Minister of the Economy for more than a decade, quickly wore out and ended in an open dispute for power. Arce, who had apparently promised not to run for re-election in 2025, later decided that he would seek a second term. Evo Morales, who attempted one re-election after another, ignoring the letter and spirit of the new Magna Carta, maintains that he was removed by a coup d'état in 2019 and that he has the right to run for the presidency again. This dispute has paralyzed the Legislative Assembly at an economic time when the pre-2019 economic boom is now years in the distant past.

The shortage of dollars and fuel reveals an exhaustion of the economic model that has been place since 2006.

This is when Evo Morales was elected as the first indigenous president of Bolivia and which, in the midst of a spectacular political epic, began the "democratic and cultural revolution," which on the economic level deployed a "prudent populism" that was very careful not to increase the fiscal deficit and accumulate reserves.

Arce himself recently acknowledged that the diesel situation has become "pathetic" and ordered the militarization of the fuel supply system. This militarization aimed to avoid state-subsidized diesel from being smuggled to neighboring countries. The economic crisis has particularly affected Arce, who, without much personal charisma, built his legitimacy as the minister of the "economic miracle." On the political level, collaborations between the Executive and Judicial Branches have weakened the Legislative Branch, who in their majority are divided along political lines between Arcistas and Evistas, with each side accusing the other of "playing into the right's hands."9 Judicial authority has also been extended, a fact denounced daily by Evistas.

The Senate president, Andónico Rodríguez, a coca grower unionist trained by Evo Morales as a sort of successor, tweeted after the military retreat: "From self-extended magistrates to a supposed coup or self-coup, the Bolivian people are sinking into uncertainty. This institutional disorder, where the authorities illegally extend their mandates and democratic principles are undermined, is leading the country to a situation of chaos and mistrust, worsening the crisis and threatening the stability and well-being of the country."10 Rodríguez is not alone in holding these sentiments. The aftershocks of the uprising will continue. Far from coming to a truce in the MAS space, the internal struggle will only intensify.

Part of the dispute is over the principles of the Movement toward Socialism (MAS), a party of social movements that showed its capacity for electoral mobilization in 2020. This capacity extends even in difficult contexts, such as the one experienced under the government of Áñez and of the Minister of Government Arturo Murillo (who was later arrested in the United States for corruption). The congresses of each wing have been brought to court, with their eyes set on 2025, the year of the Bolivian bicentennial.

A weak opposition, associated with the authoritarian, inefficient and corrupt government of Jeanine Áñez, has found it incredibly difficult to find new figures. They have turned to fueling the "ch'ampa war" between Evistas and Arcistas who view the conflict as an "internal" dispute.11 But in the midst of regional and global electoral volatility, this approach by the right carries risks, even though the electoral base around MAS remains strong and the experience of Áñez functions as a reminder for social and indigenous movements.

It is still too early to know how the failed coup attempt will impact power relations within MAS, which today no longer exists as a unified party. After overcoming the challenge of the military rebellion, Arce now faces political crossfire from Evistas and opposition groups, who have already begun to talk about the "political show." This open acknowledgment of the political spectacle devalues the political capital that Arce could have obtained from the national and international support for his institutionalism, defense of democracy, and his decision to confront the "coup General" head on.

July 30, 2024

[Spectre](#)

After Hasina's resignation, struggle

continues

10 August 2024, by Badrul Alam

Later on the same day, at 4 pm, the Bangladesh Army's Chief of Army Staff, General Waker-uz-Zaman, declared on national television that the army would take responsibility for maintaining law and order. He added that an interim government would be formed to run the country's day-to-day affairs, and promised to hold a fair and free election soon. Army leaders met with the president, Mohammed Shahabuddin, that evening and discussed the formation of the interim government. Shahabuddin also called the leaders of different political parties in the parliament, including the main opposition party—the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). They all agreed to form an interim government.

However, the coordinators of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement instead proposed forming an interim government with those who have led the mass movement. They said that they would not accept any other form of government without their consent, especially an army-led one. They underscored their paramount goal, which is removing all discrimination from society. The student coordinators reckoned that there is still a lot of work to do though Hasina has now fallen, and expressed their interest in being part of the interim national government as well. They urged all students and other people to defend the revolution, and be alert to ensure that no other reactionary forces could take advantage of the uprising.

Moreover, they proposed Dr. Muhammad Eunos as the chief of the advisory committee for the interim government. Though Hasina's regime has long targeted Eunos, his policies are not without controversy. He is well-known for endorsing microcredit

for solving social ills, and has a higher standing in the NGO sphere than among marginalized communities. Some leftist organizations and parties have already criticized him as the trump card of US imperialism.

So, despite Hasina's resignation, the struggle over the power vacuum continues in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, the movement that started on July 15 amidst the killing of six students at Dhaka University and after the death of Abu Sayed, a 4th-year honors English student at Begum Rokeya University who was shot to death in broad daylight by police in Rangpur, reached an important culmination on August 5.

On her last day, the dictator still had her last bite, with her security forces claiming at least 39 more lives. Ultimately, the dictatorship could not sustain itself amidst the pressure of millions of students and people. In Hasina's final moments as prime minister, security authorities defied her dictates and refused to shoot any more civilians. They gave her two options: either to cling to power or give up and escape. She chose to flee the country. Hasina used all the tools of repression at her disposal against the people to retain power, but was defeated in the end.

The students' movement began with the demand for reforming a discriminatory quota system. The increasingly repressive measures taken by Hasina compelled them to expand their demands, including the call for the resignation of multiple Awami League officials and compensation for families of those who were killed or injured in the protests. The students engaged in a diversity of actions, including civil disobedience. Hasina branded the

protestors as 'razakar' (traitors during the independence struggle in 1971 who collaborated with Pakistani war criminals), leading the students to escalate their demands and strategy. They developed nine demands as Hasina resorted to further repression. Later, they focused on one key demand—demanding Hasina's resignation—which they successfully won.

The autocrat had also announced an all-out curfew across the country on July 18 in order to suppress the student movement. However, the students and masses ignored the curfew and continued to take the streets. Later, the regime escalated even further and declared that soldiers would shoot protestors on sight. However, all the measures they took were boldly broken by the masses of students. They stood on their feet before the bullets of the army and police by offering their lives without hesitation.

Since July 15, more than 339 students have been killed by the police, according to a major daily news outlet. But, according to a private survey, the death toll may be even higher—numbering over thousands. Thousands of students have been injured and tortured: some have lost their eyesight, and others have body parts mutilated.

Ultimately, Hasina's latest reign lasted around 16 years. Her regime marked widespread human rights violations, corruption, plundering of the state's wealth, forced disappearance of activists, extra-judicial killings, holding fake elections, etc. She should be tried by international tribunals for her human rights violations and complicity in genocide.

The ultra-right governs Argentina: The end of an epoch?

9 August 2024, by **Adrián Piva**

In what follows, we will try to develop this argument by presenting the main factors of the economic-political process that made Milei's triumph possible. In the conclusions we will summarise the overall approach, provide some elements to characterise the government based on what has happened during its first months and discuss future perspectives.

The global scenario: between the crisis of neoliberalism and the rise of the far right.

The 2008 global crisis marked the beginning, after the 2009 global recession, of a phase of weak growth (poor growth rates in the European Union, continued stagnation in Japan, slowdown in China since 2012), global pressures for productive restructuring (deepening of trends towards automation and robotisation - the so-called industry 4.0 - expansion of platform capitalism, reorganisation of work processes and changes in the structure of the exploitation relationship, etc.). This existed alongside a crisis of coordination of the responses of nation states to global events (lack of coordination of monetary and fiscal policies in the face of the 2008 economic crisis, inability to act jointly in the face of the climate crisis, difficulties in global coordination of responses to the COVID-19 pandemic) and global geopolitical tensions (Syrian crisis since 2011, tensions between the USA and China, the war in Ukraine, reactivation of the Palestinian question, etc.) (Roberts, 2018; Nava and Naspleda, 2020; Piva, 2022).

The common denominator of these different dimensions of the capitalist phase we are going through is the crisis of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism has been defined in various ways. [1] But when the term is inflated to include the most varied aspects, even

the most general ones, where neoliberalism is identified with any attack on the working class or project for the restoration of class power, the essential issue is lost: the matter of the specific form of the capitalist offensive and of the subordination of labour. The meaning of the term must then be clarified or it must be abandoned.

Here we consider neoliberalism as a specific form of political domination structured by market coercion, that is, the demobilisation and individualisation of the working class and the disciplining of companies and people through mechanisms of extension and intensification of competition. The combination of restrictive monetary policies, market deregulation and trade and financial openness was essential to the articulation of these mechanisms. This definition does not ignore the role of violence in the imposition of neoliberalism, it only points out that this is a general feature of every capitalist offensive, not its specific feature. Nor does this definition ignore the fact that commercial coercion is essential to capitalist domination, based as it is on the dispossession of producers and their transformation into sellers of labour power. But it emphasises that the transformation of market coercion into the structure of political domination is specific to neoliberalism. Finally, it allows us to differentiate neoliberalism from other phenomena with which it was historically associated, such as internationalisation and productive restructuring, but which are features of a stage that includes and exceeds neoliberalism. In particular, the productive internationalisation that has taken place since the late 1960s and, above all, since the mid-1970s, is a source of tension between an

increasingly global accumulation of capital and the national character of political domination, structured by national states. The weakening of the capacity to regulate accumulation in the national space and the erosion of the mechanisms of political integration of the states that this implies, tend to create problems of domination (Hirsch, 1996).

Neoliberalism was a response to these problems of domination through demobilisation and individualisation of the workers. This crisis, therefore, reopens these issues once more. An indication of this is the chronic political instability that has affected a variety of countries and continents since the global crisis of 2008, particularly the crises or problems in the functioning of political systems and the processes of polarisation. But since the late 1980s, the generalisation of neoliberal policies - through the Washington consensus - has established a *de facto* coordination between the various states and has consolidated an imperialist hierarchy with the USA at its head. The crisis of neoliberalism therefore explains the problems of coordination and the re-making of global geopolitical tensions, that is, the imperialist crisis.

The crisis of neoliberalism was marked by global waves of class struggle. The first, between the late 1990s and early 2000s, had its epicentre in South America, where a regional crisis of neoliberalism took place, but which was part of the massive protests against globalisation. This cycle of insurrections against neoliberalism (Thwaites Rey and Ouviaña, 2019) opened the period of left-wing neopopulist governments in the region. The second wave, between 2010 and 2012, was the first after the global crisis of 2008, and was marked

by the Arab Spring and the experience of Syriza in Greece. Since the late 1980s, the class struggle has been overdetermined by the collapse of so-called real socialism. But the exhaustion of Latin American left-wing populisms, the failure of Syriza and the drowning in blood of the Arab Spring marked the character of the third global wave of protests and rebellions of 2018-2019, probably the most global of the three: the complete absence of popular alternatives.

A scenario of weak growth, pressures for capitalist restructuring, political crises, geopolitical tensions, protests and the absence of popular alternatives, this is the framework for the rise of the new right, the extreme right and the growing extension of the so-called "hybrid regimes" (Levitzki and Way, 2004). It can be said that the new authoritarianisms and the rise of the extreme right are part of the search to break a balance of forces that prevents an exit from the phase opened with the global crisis of 2008.

As we said above, the crisis of neoliberalism in much of South America dates back to the beginning of the new century, before the global crisis of 2008. In this sense, the last expansive phase at a global level of the neoliberal period, between 2002 and 2008, was part of the conditions of possibility of the cycle of neo-populist governments and of a process of accumulation with neo-developmental characteristics, especially due to its impact on the terms of trade. This also explains the apparent paradox that the end of this cycle coincided with the global crisis of neoliberalism and, in particular, with the beginning of the slowdown in China. As such, it meant the dissolution of the global foundations of neo-populisms.

The dissolution of the foundations of an era

The dissolution of economic foundations

Since 2012, Argentina has been going through a long phase of economic

stagnation and a tendency towards crisis, both with local and global causes. The global causes— weak global growth and pressures for productive restructuring, have already been presented. The local causes can be found in the tendency towards external restrictions on accumulation and the exhaustion of the local productive base, whose last profound restructuring was in the first half of the 1990s, which heightened global pressures for restructuring (Piva, 2021). As a result, fiscal adjustment and currency devaluation were not enough to relaunch accumulation and, in the absence of productive restructuring, are only capable of generating recession and spiral the relationship between devaluation and inflation. The core of the explanation of the dynamics and temporality of the stagnation phase is found in a balance of forces that has blocked successive attempts to advance in said restructuring.

However, more than ten years of stagnation and a tendency towards crisis have led to a deterioration in the living conditions of workers, particularly the poorest. How does this affect the power relations between capital and labour? It is a recognised fact in the various literature on labour and labour conflicts that there is a positive/negative relationship between the improvement/deterioration of workers' living conditions and the capacity for collective action of the working class. In Wright's terms (1983), the worsening of workers' living conditions weakens the structural capacities for action by workers as a class. While in the short term, phenomena of deprivation can lead to the rise of workers' struggles (especially in the presence of prior organisation) in the long term the inverse association prevails. In particular, the consolidation and deepening of the heterogeneity of the working class, especially the division between formal and informal workers, has affected these capacities. [2]

The dissolution of its political form: exhaustion of Kirchnerism and failure of anti-Kirchnerism

The dissolution of the economic foundations of the expansionary phase that began at the end of 2002

undermined the conditions of possibility of the neo-populist strategy of Kirchnerism, that is, the temporal (postponement) and spatial ("two models of capitalism") displacement of the antagonism between capital and labor. Since 2003, the reconstruction of state power and the construction and reproduction of consensus have developed on the basis of a strategy of gradual satisfaction of popular demands. The mismatch between expansionary fiscal and monetary policies and a process of accumulation dependent on the export of industrial commodities, with poor productivity increases and a tendency towards external restrictions resulted in unbalanced growth and entry into a regime of high inflation. The recreation of both real and notional Peronist political policies mobilised anti-Peronist practices and representations that are still current in broad social groups, especially among the "middle classes."

With the expansionary phase coming to an end, Cristina Kirchner's second government (third Kirchnerist government) sought to advance a gradual adjustment ("fine tuning"). But faced with the erosion of its bases of legitimacy, it transformed the emergency measures (exchange controls, partial closure of the economy, etc.) into a mechanism for postponing the crisis. The beginning of the stagnation phase and the evidence of exhaustion of the political strategy deepened the ruptures and desertions and, finally, led to the electoral victory of the right-wing coalition "Cambiamos" (Let's Change.)

The Macri government attempted to restore neoliberalism, but at first it was only able to partially advance the adjustment and then the quest to implement the triple reform (labour, pension and tax) collided with popular resistance in the large mobilisations of December 2017. The years 2018 and 2019 were ones of deep crisis that ended with the return of Peronism to government.

The Frente de Todos (Everyone's Front or FdT) was a coalition of different fractions of Peronism that internalised the pressures from above for restructuring and from below for its blockage. Once in government, it

lacked direction and defined leadership, confirming that the exhaustion of Kirchnerism left Peronism without a strategy.

The exhaustion of Kirchnerism and the failure of anti-Kirchnerism dissolved the axes that had structured the political system since its reconstruction after the 2001 crisis.

The demobilisation of workers and popular forces [3]

We previously pointed out the short- and long-term relationship between the deterioration of workers' living conditions and labour conflict. With the beginning of the phase of stagnation, and based on a process of accumulation of forces that continued after the 2001 insurrection, a cycle of high frequency of labour conflicts and an increase in the mobilisation of unions and social movements in the streets began in 2012. During 2017, in an adverse context for union negotiations, while labour conflict declined, street mobilisation, politicisation and acts of violence in a context of mobilisation grew strongly. The clashes with security forces in Plaza Congreso (Congress Square) on December 14 and 18, 2017 were the peak of this process as well as of the unity of unions and the social movements.

However, a demobilisation process began in 2018. In this process, the impact of the crisis on structural capacities for action of the working class played a relevant role, something that was already evident in the fall of labour conflicts in 2017. But so did the institutional channelling of the conflict after the relative deinstitutionalisation during 2017.

The formation of the FdT and the expectations surrounding the elections were particularly relevant in this regard. The accession of Peronism to government deepened the link between the institutionalisation of the labour conflict and popular demobilisation. The decline in the number of labor conflicts was prolonged, street protests and the

unity in action of unions and the social movements were reduced. This developed at the same time, and on the basis of, the fall in real wages and the increase in informality.

Mobilisation of the Right

One of the most relevant phenomena of the last two decades was the beginning of the anti-Kirchnerist mobilisation of the middle class, back in 2006 and 2007. It was the de facto rupture of the alliance in the streets that made possible the "piquete y cacerola" (pickets and saucepans) insurrection of December 2001. The massive coming together of these social groups behind the agrarian bourgeoisie in the 2008 tax rebellion was a qualitative shift. It was the birth certificate of a social right that would be the basis of a right-wing political alliance. But the large mobilizations (cacerolazos) of 2012 and 2013 were still necessary, which showed the growing middle class protest and the transition to the opposition of sectors that until then had voted for Peronism or at least were hesitant. Between August and October 2019, during Mauricio Macri's re-election campaign, after the electoral catastrophe of the open, simultaneous and mandatory primaries (PASO) of Juntos por el Cambio (Together for Change or JxC, formerly Cambiemos), the mobilisation of that base showed the transformation of the social right into a political subject, which was confirmed in the protests called by the right around the Covid pandemic.

However, the failure of the right in government and the destructuring of the connecting axis of the political system since 2003 (Kirchnerism - anti-Kirchnerism) deeply affected the political constitution of that subject. This was evident in the shift to far-right positions, first, in the figure of Patricia Bulrich, central to the pandemic and post-pandemic protests, and then, purged of any nuances, in the figure of Milei. [Perhaps a good indicator of this process is the evolution of the phenomena of collective violence: while in 2017, 24 out of 31 recorded acts of collective violence were categorisable as

popular violence, in 2022 only 11 out of 27 were. Could this be an indicator of a process of accumulation of far-right social forces?]]

The demand for order

But the process of a swing towards the ultra-right could only end with a genuine growth of the demand for order, with its penetration into broad sectors of the working class.

The temporary prolongation of the crisis has effects that can only be measured at the microsocial level. The crisis ends up affecting everyday sociability, eroding the social order at the most basic levels through a whole series of dysfunctions of varying degrees. The growing insecurity linked to common crime and the rise of drug trafficking is very real and affects workers above all. In a regime of high inflation that disrupts the lives of the working class and permanently affects their income, the demand for order ends up encompassing all levels — economic, social and political — and becomes the articulator of a broad set of demands of all kinds.

During Macri's government, this was the basis of a speech that attempted to identify the restoration of the authority of capital in the workplace and at a social level with the restoration of order. Milei's speech deepens this identification, stripped of any reference to the republic and democracy, leaving only an authoritarian gesture.

The Elections [4]

The vote for Milei condensed all of these determinations. In the PASO of August 13 and in the general elections of October 22, 2023, LLA obtained around 30% of the valid votes cast (PASO) and valid positive votes (general), which was enough for them to win by a narrow margin in the PASO and in the general elections second, 7 points behind Peronism. However, 69.6% of eligible voters voted in the PASO (a historically low percentage in Argentina since the return of democracy) and 77.04% in the general election. The rise of

Peronism in relation to the PASO indicates that a significant part of the abstention rate came from the Peronist vote. But Milei also grew between the PASO and the general elections - which hides the percentage of valid positive votes - and this explains why, despite the enormous electoral mobilisation of Peronism in the general elections, it did not exceed 37% of valid positive votes, below its historical floor of 40%. An analysis of the vote for Milei in Greater Buenos Aires (the belt surrounding the City of Buenos Aires), which has been historically Peronist, shows the similarity of the voting profiles between LLA and Peronism. Milei had his best performance in the strongholds of Peronism and in those that were Peronist and that had oscillated between Peronism and the right since 2011.

In turn, the sociodemographic profile of the districts where Milei had his best performance in the PASO and General Elections is similar to that of Peronism: he achieved better results where there was greater informality in the labour force. This dispute between Milei and the Peronist vote is reinforced when we observe two facts from the provincial elections. First, Milei managed to win in 5 of the 6 provinces in which Peronism, which had been in power until then, lost the gubernatorial elections (Chubut, San Juan, San Luis, Santa Cruz and Santa Fe) and in 4 of the provinces that he managed to retain in elections separate from the presidential elections (La Pampa, La Rioja, Tierra del Fuego and Tucumán). In the general elections of October 22, Peronism was able to reverse the result in the 4 provinces where provincial Peronism had won the local elections, but only in one of those it had lost (Santa Cruz). Secondly, in the runoff, the LLA candidate's huge difference over Peronism (56% to 44%) is largely explained by Milei's electoral performance in the provinces of northwestern Argentina (NOA), a historical bastion of Peronism. While Macri lost in the NOA in the 2015 runoff by 57.2% to 42.8%, Milei won by 50.6% to 49.4%.

All of this shows a connection between the rise of the vote for Milei and the crisis of the Peronist vote. As

Peronism has historically been the electoral tool of the working class, the crisis of the Peronist vote at the expense of the extreme right expresses, at a political level, the process of disaggregation of workers' behaviour that we saw at the level of social struggle. It is the political moment of the process of workers' demobilisation and disorganisation.

But a similar analysis of the vote for Milei in two provinces with a consolidated anti-Peronist vote (Santa Fe and Córdoba) shows that in those provinces, both in the PASO and in the general elections, the vote for Milei shares the profile of the vote of the right, the winner in previous elections. And in the runoff, he was able to attract the majority of the JxC vote at the national level.

The concentration of the Peronist and anti-Peronist votes in Milei's figure indicates, on the one hand, the destructuring of the axes that have been forming the political system since 2003, but at the same time raises the question of the political meaning of this fusion. A probable hypothesis, based on what has been said so far, is that they are united by the demand for order and that a significant part of the Milei vote (not all of it, of course) expresses an authoritarian turn in a large portion of society.

In conclusion: the authoritarian core of Milei's rise and future prospects

There is a close connection between the demobilisation of the working class and the popular movement, the increased support for the demand for order and the rise of Milei. It is about the dissolution of the social bond, the disaggregation of behaviours at the economic, social and political level and their reintegration as a mass through the figure of the authoritarian leader. The pandemic accelerated the processes of collective disaggregation, making authoritarian mediation more urgent as a reconstitutive form of the social, in a framework of persistent

crisis, destructuring of the political system and absence of popular alternatives. But this process can only be condensed and reproduced through state mediation.

The authoritarian repoliticisation of the class struggle is a common feature of a whole series of political phenomena, many of them developed within the framework of the rule of law, others in the form of "hybrid regimes". It is nothing more than the development of authoritarian state mediation as a response to the crisis of neoliberal mechanisms of market coercion. In far-right experiences such as that embodied by Milei - and many hybrid regimes take on that character (Erdogan, Putin, Bukele and a long etcetera) - it unfolds as a tendency towards institutional rupture with bourgeois democracy, it aims - and the degree to which this tendency develops depends on the power relations it encounters - to constitute itself as an authoritarian regime based on personal leadership.

But Milei's future raises many questions. Most of the far-right leaders who have come to power are not neoliberals (as in the case of Trump) or have been pragmatic in their objectives of monetary policy, free trade and state reform as soon as they governed (the case of Bolsonaro). His maximalism unfolds at the level of conservative and authoritarian politics. Milei's authoritarian project demands a transformation of the State - the suppression or reduction of some functions, but, at the same time, the development or creation of others - not their minimisation. If Milei tried to fully advance his ultraliberal programme, it would undermine its own foundations. Moreover, the world we face is very different from that of the 1990s: in that time, free trade was advancing, the USA was the head of the informal empire and international financial flows and local financialisation processes made it possible to defer economic imbalances; today, free trade is stagnating in a framework of trade and currency wars, the imperialist crisis generates global instability, global financial flows are highly volatile and the deepening of local financialisation faces structural restrictions.

The first months of Milei's government prioritised a deep offensive against workers, rather than the unification and liberalisation of the exchange market or a trade opening: a brutal devaluation of more than one hundred percent, an unprecedented fiscal adjustment based on the liquidation of pensions and salaries of state workers, a sharp recession that began to cause suspensions and layoffs in the private sector and the attempt, so far failed, to advance a deep labour reform via a decree of necessity and urgency (DNU) and a broad reform of the State through the so-called "Omnibus Law." These two failed attempts were the result of Milei's maximalist orientation, which has brought him into conflict with the traditional political elite, to whom he proposes subordination or confrontation. Milei's strategy tends - objectively, more or less consciously - towards institutional rupture; although the conditions for this do not seem to exist. The Armed Forces have been a weak player in Argentine politics since the end of the military dictatorship in 1983 and support for Milei does not seem to translate, at least for now, into mobilisation and organisation to sustain a radical authoritarian turn. Nevertheless, the processes of building an authoritarian society are gradual. The Ministry of Security's policy has limited street protests and the government's maximalism has been accompanied by a discourse unprecedented for a president in Argentina, at least since 1983, which tends to naturalise McCarthyism, misogyny, LGBT-phobia, etc.; to

encourage harassment and political persecution in networks and public institutions; and to vindicate the repressive actions of the security forces.

Some of these dimensions were present during Macri's government, but they did not configure a systematic action as is happening now. The hypothesis that the clash with the political elite will end in an impeachment trial that will remove him from office ("soft coup") cannot be ruled out. But what would the outcome be if there was no popular intervention? The fundamental questions, therefore, are what is the scope of the previous demobilisation process and to what extent can it be reversed? After the great mobilisations by the Confederación General del Trabajo (General Confederation of Labour or CGT) on January 24, of the feminist movement on March 8 and of the people as a whole on March 24, we can only hope for a strong popular response from below that shakes and cracks the institutional scene, creating a new situation. That is what we hope for and that is what we are acting for.

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"Everyone knows what happened"

9 August 2024, by **Yoletty Bracho**

"Everyone knows what happened" is the phrase that was in the mouths of Venezuelans just after midnight on 28 July 2024 when the results of the presidential election were announced. It was then 29 July, and we learned from Elvis Amoroso, President of the National Electoral Council (CNE), that

President Nicolás Maduro Moros had been re-elected with 51.2% of the votes cast, while the candidate of the traditional opposition, Edmundo González Urrutia, had obtained 44.2%. However, this announcement contradicted a series of indications to the contrary: during the day, results

unfavourable to Maduro seemed to be emerging from the old bastions of *Chavismo*, particularly in the popular urban districts. So what happened? What can the left make of this latest Venezuelan presidential election? And how can we imagine a way out that respects democracy and the votes cast

by the Venezuelan people?

Doubts and demoralisation: the left divided under Madurist pressure

Identifying with the left in Venezuela while opposing Nicolás Maduro's government is no easy task. The accounts I was able to gather during a month of discussions with various left representatives, including people who still claim to be members of the *Chavista movement*, show how difficult it is to organise when you are the target of the government's political and social repression. This was all the more obvious during the election period. A former *Chavista* minister told me: "It's impressive to see that the right has been able to have its candidate, but that it's us on the left who are not allowed to have a candidate. We have no representation in these elections". [105]

Indeed, many people have told me of their concerns about the decision to be taken on election day. For these left-wing activists, members of grassroots organisations, many of whom had also been intermediaries in public action under the *Chavista* governments, the question was whether or not to go and vote on 28 July. On the one hand, because voting for Edmundo González Urrutia seemed impossible. There was no way these people could vote for María Corina Machado, the leader of the traditional opposition, who in the past has been able to forge alliances with such repulsive figures as Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro and Javier Milei. But what about voting for Nicolás Maduro? The man who for years has kept the popular left out of government? The man who has managed the economic crisis by making the poorest people pay for the corruption within the oil company and the effects of US economic sanctions? He who repressed the popular classes during the People's Liberation Operations (PLO) between 2015 and 2017, which left thousands of young

black men from the neighbourhoods dead? [106] No, that wasn't possible either. So, for some of these activists, the only option seemed to be abstention. A solution that contrasts with years of claims by *Chavismo* that the vote is a fully-fledged political tool for resolving conflicts between Venezuelans.

There are also some divergent positions: among the people I spoke to, one decided to vote for González Urrutia to "block" Maduro. The other said that it was his duty as a *Chavista* to vote for the opposition, to show the president in power that he no longer represented the ideals of this political movement. There are still other options: among the trade union, Trotskyist and Communist forces that have had more or less close relations with *Chavismo*, the blank vote seems to be the most popular. This requires voters to make a little technical effort. Let's not forget that voting in Venezuela is electronic. It is done by machines installed in polling stations, which both transmit the votes to the National Electoral Council (CNE) and issue a voting receipt which is deposited in a ballot box. The only way to obtain a blank vote is to initiate the voting process on the touch screen, wait the three minutes given in total to vote, and collect a "voto nulo" receipt. The machine does not immediately offer an option for expressing this choice.

But beyond the electoral choice, there is the question of the collective and unitary organisation of leftists who oppose the Maduro government. Divided between political parties, trade unions, social movements and other plural spaces (think-tanks, literary reviews and so on), the convergence of struggles seemed difficult before the election, when the various parties criticised each other for their divergent positions with regard to the history of the Bolivarian Revolution. Questions of language are becoming central strategic issues: at a general meeting that was seeking to build an alliance between organisations for the post-election period, it was surprising to see that certain words had been dropped from the everyday vocabulary. We no longer speak of "people power" or "the people", but rather of "workers"

and "elite pacts". It's a sort of victory for the trade union forces and certain Trotskyist parties, who can boast that they never joined the ranks of the *Chavistas*.

In this context, a well-known activist and researcher working on issues of violence and the popular neighbourhoods told me: "It will be the moment after the elections that will bring us together. With just a few days to go before the election (19 July), we can still talk about reclaiming the oil company by making it work through cooperatives, or nationalising the private clinics... but after the election we'll know whether we're going to have the space we need to fight for our social and collective rights, or whether we're going to have to fight simply for the right to exist politically".

This opinion converges with that of a leader of a major organisation defending the right to housing for the popular classes: "Nicolás can't win. They don't have the votes. And if Nicolás takes the election by force, we'll have nothing left to do but defend our ability to engage in politics". According to conversations and political expressions from these same players since the election, they seem to agree that it is the second option that is gaining ground.

28 July: the end of revolutionary democracy?

On the eve of the election I went to visit community leaders in a popular district in the west of Caracas, a historic bastion of *Chavismo*. Their positions had changed from those I had been told a month earlier. They were convinced that the *maquinaria electoral*, in other words, the electoral mobilisation structures of *Chavismo*, could win the day. After a month of discussions with various sectors of the Venezuelan left, this was the first time I had heard such a statement. Even more astonishing, a *Chavista* activist told me: "and even if we don't win, we have to win. The danger is too great". These people, identified in their neighbourhoods as *Chavista* activists,

are afraid of what might happen if the traditional opposition wins. In fact, another expression runs through the streets of Caracas and social networks: *ahora vamos a cobrar*, “we are going to make them pay our dues”. The traditional opposition seems to be referring to what they see as a new strategy that should enable them to claim this election, unlike what Henrique Capriles Radonski did in 2013 against Nicolás Maduro, an election they see as having been stolen even though the CNE audit confirmed Maduro’s victory.

But for the historic activists of *Chavismo* it sounds different: *cobrar* would be more like a material and physical attack on where they live, their activism, themselves and their families. A well-known researcher who has been involved in negotiations in Venezuela for many years understands these fears: “Unfortunately, the discourse of the most radical traditional opposition does not reassure the *Chavistas*, which prevents progress from being made, including in the highest negotiating bodies”.

On 28 July, the day of the election, Caracas and the rest of the country were calm. Even though irregularities were reported when the polling stations were set up, Venezuelans had been queuing up to vote since the evening before. Nor was it the “electoral fiesta” that *Chavismo* has historically claimed. In a country where election days have always been days of strong movements, of citizen mobilisation, of family reunions, friendships and activism, this time everything seems strangely calm, certainly too calm. It was hard to find people to spend the day with and wait for the results, apart from the closed meetings organised by NGOs on their premises to monitor the technical aspects of the election. In the east of Caracas, in an upper-middle-class neighbourhood, the absentees are making themselves felt: the older generations are voting, but their young people, who have been living abroad for years, are not present. With over seven million Venezuelans living abroad, representing a third of the country’s population, it is now the popular neighbourhoods that are being emptied of their middle

generations.

The announcement of the results came late. Very late. On 29 July. This is not exceptional in itself, but one detail casts doubt. Since the end of the afternoon, when the polling stations closed, we understand from various accounts that the results were not being transmitted to the CNE, or that the witnesses authorised by the same council and representing the political parties were encountering difficulties in obtaining the minutes recording the results in their respective polling stations. What is more, we understood from various sources that González Urrutia’s representatives were forbidden to enter the CNE’s tabulation office, where the general election results are printed and validated by the members of the Council and the representatives of the political parties.

After midnight, the president of the CNE announced Nicolás Maduro’s victory, after denouncing a terrorist attack on the results transmission system. The attack was overcome, allowing the electoral authorities to issue results after obtaining, according to them, 80% of the reports from the polling stations. In Venezuela, only the CNE has the right to announce results. These are announced once they show a so-called irreversible trend, i.e. one that cannot change even after the arrival of the missing results.

The difference announced by Amoroso between Maduro and González is 700,000 votes. The 20% missing votes represent more than 2 million votes. Reversing the results was still mathematically possible. And the testimonies from the polling stations and the popular mobilisation that followed say a great deal.

Popular and citizen’s mobilisation: democracy in the face of repression

At 7 am on 29 July, Caracas was still asleep. Having crossed the city from

west to east, I was surprised to see how empty it was, whereas the capital usually wakes up with the sun, between 5.30 and 6 am. A few hours earlier, a friend of mine, an ecologist and feminist activist, was worried: “Six more years of this is too much! What are we going to be able to do?”. [107] She and her mother, who had worked at the CNE in the past, had no explanation for the supposedly distant terrorist attack. According to their knowledge, it’s not possible. But even more important is the conclusion drawn by this activist who fights for ecofeminism in an oil-rich country where the right to abortion is still penalised by law: “The only thing I still trusted was the electoral system. But now it’s like with the *apagones* (widespread power cuts that took place in 2019), then it was an iguana that came and cut everything off, and now we have no proper explanation, only results that we have to take at their word”. [108]

If at 7 am everything was calm, a few hours later the city began to move. And not just in Caracas, but in the rest of the country. A popular revolt swept through the streets. The *cacerolazos* (saucepan concerts) turned into street mobilisations. These mobilisations go beyond political organisations, beyond the binary divide that has historically been at the heart of analyses of Venezuela. Women and men from the popular classes, many of whom were undoubtedly supporters of *Chavismo*, were taking to the streets and demanding that their votes and their right to live in a democracy be respected. These mobilisations were not being led by the Venezuelan right or by US imperialism. In many ways, they go beyond them, and the leaders of the traditional opposition are finding it hard to channel them. [109]

The same applies to the Chavista government, whose response was very quickly one of repression. In just three days, more than a thousand people were imprisoned. There have already been more than twenty deaths and a number of people have disappeared. Maduro announced the construction of new high-security prisons where forced labour and re-education would be used “as in the old days”. [110] Back then, it was during the last military dictatorship of the 20th

century, that of Marcos Pérez Jiménez who, as the current president of Venezuela recalled in his speech, put prisoners to work building roads. "Let them go and build roads", he said. One of my acquaintances, a researcher, is sheltering in her home a woman whose child was a victim of the PLOs and who was an observer at her polling station. [111] The police search the neighbourhoods for observers and take them to the prisons. Testimonies are multiplying about the repression and the control by the security forces and paramilitary organisations of the neighbourhoods from which the demonstrations originated. We are witnessing the criminalisation of popular revolt and its relentless repression.

A way out through

Latin American diplomacy and internationalist solidarity

The Venezuelan political conflict is being mediated by various international players. The role of Latin American diplomats is central. Countries governed by the left, such as Brazil, Colombia and Mexico, have called on the Maduro government in a press release for a public audit of the votes cast on 28 July, as the only institutional tool that would enable a sovereign exit from the tensions, doubts and repression that are weighing down the Venezuelan

people. Far from Anthony Blinken's assertions that the United States directly recognised González Urrutia as the winner of the elections, thereby provoking even more tension, Latin American diplomats are doing the hard work of maintaining channels of dialogue with the parties involved in the conflict and seeking to build negotiations between these players.

The international left can play their part. Our comrades and the Venezuelan people as a whole need our support. Calling for respect for democracy is undoubtedly the best way forward in this situation. "Everyone knows what happened", including our comrades who are now seeking to build a political space worthy of the name. We owe it to the popular struggles of which they are the spokespersons.

Joe Biden's Crime Against Humanity

8 August 2024, by **Gilbert Achcar**

The truth is that Biden has so far shown that he is closer to the second case than to the first with regard to the genocidal war that Israel continues to carry out in the Gaza Strip. The US president's behaviour towards Benjamin Netanyahu's government has clearly retreated from the semi-critical approach he had begun to adopt after realizing how costly his total complicity in the Zionist aggression against the Palestinian people is electorally, especially among traditional Democratic Party voters, as it is even resented within the party itself. The current onslaught on Gaza is the first war waged by the State of Israel with the full participation (and not just defensive support) of the United States, without which an onslaught of such destructive and deadly intensity would not have been possible in the first place.

Ever since Biden faced the consequences of his support to the Zionist genocidal war, including the

pressures exerted on him by a wing of his own party to at least make an effort to stop the onslaught that reached a horrific level from its first weeks, we saw his administration adjust its position and allow the UN Security Council to issue a call for a ceasefire, after having prevented this for months (see my article "How Biden Mutated into a Dove", 11 June 2024). We also saw the Biden administration make some effort to reach a "ceasefire" - in fact, a cessation of the genocidal war that the Zionist state is waging unilaterally and without any noteworthy "exchange of fire" (despite the usual media exaggeration and boasting in the camp opposing Israel, following a bad habit established by the Arab nationalist regimes in the 1960s). The Biden administration, with help from Egypt and Qatar, has been making strenuous efforts to reach an agreement to stop the "fighting" (more accurately to stop the killing and genocide) and exchange captives between the Zionist government and Hamas.

That was until Biden succumbed to pressures from within his party, as well as from his party's supporters and major funders, urging him to announce that he would stop seeking a second presidential term. Since then, that is, since he was freed from having to take into account the pressures related to the Gaza war that he was subjected to electorally and partisanly, his position regressed to the collusion of the "proud Irish-American Zionist" with the "proud Jewish Zionist", as Netanyahu put it during his farewell visit to the frail US president. The regression of Biden's position was evident in the way he reacted to Israel's recent assassination of Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran.

Commenting on the assassination, the US president merely said that it "doesn't help" the ongoing efforts to reach an agreement between the Netanyahu government and the Hamas leadership - a very euphemistic statement indeed. The assassination of the head of the

Palestinian movement's political bureau is in fact a major stab in the back of those efforts, which the Biden administration had prioritized in its recent regional diplomatic activity. Ismail Haniyeh was the administration's main interlocutor, and the latter was betting on pressures exerted upon him so that he pressures in turn Yahya Sinwar, Hamas's leader in Gaza, in order to achieve the desired truce.

Haniyeh's assassination in Tehran had an even more serious impact than its impact on the negotiations regarding the war on Gaza, as it constituted a highly dangerous escalation in the confrontation between the Zionist state and the Iranian regime. It will necessarily lead to a response from Tehran that could trigger, even if unintentionally, a spiral potentially leading to a large-scale regional military confrontation. In other words, by giving his green light to carry out

the assassination, Netanyahu risked involving the United States in a potential war that could be worse than all the wars that Washington has fought in the Middle East to date. Instead of reprimanding his "proud Jewish Zionist" ally, Biden once again demonstrated his "ironclad commitment" to defending Israel by instructing his administration to rush to send military reinforcements to the region in order to protect the Zionist state. As for the administration's pretence of continuing its efforts to reach an agreement, it is totally hypocritical, since it knows full well that the assassination killed that prospect and that Netanyahu's goal was precisely to kill it. Biden acted as if he had prior knowledge of the assassination plot and did not object to it, but rather supported it.

Indeed, the US president revealed that his "ironclad commitment" is actually unconditional, to the point that it remains valid even when Israel's

behaviour contradicts the US government's interests - its material interests (the high cost of a potential war, especially since Washington is already facing great difficulties in continuing to support the Ukrainian government in confronting the Russian invasion) as well as its political interests (the United States' image in a large part of the world and among a large part of humanity). Joe Biden will alas not stand in the dock before the International Criminal Court - that much is sure. There is no doubt, however, that the court of history, which is the fairest of criminal courts, will include his name prominently on the list of perpetrators of crimes against humanity.

[Gilbert Achcar](#)

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Slouching Toward November

7 August 2024, by **Against the Current Editors**

As our readers will already know, whatever grades may be assigned to Biden's handling of the economy or NATO or immigration, trade policy or anything else, on Israel and Gaza it's below F-minus: G for Genocide.

In this respect at least, the none-too-soon end of Biden's candidacy is a partial victory for the pro-Palestinian solidarity struggle - those "uncommitted" primary votes, the college encampments, the sit-ins and local resolutions demanding ceasefire.

It's not that the ascendancy of Kamala Harris is a solution, or that her record on Palestinian rights is any better on substance - but the movement for Palestine has moved the needle of public opinion and shown that the catastrophe in Gaza can't be shoved back into the twilight.

The International Court of Justice

ruling on the illegality of Israel's occupation of the West Bank - although international law in practice does not apply to Israel, due to the permanent U.S. dispensation - is also a helpful embarrassment for Washington's enabling of ethnic cleansing.

Will Arab and Muslim communities rightfully enraged by the Biden enabling of Israel's genocide, despite Harris' complicity, be prepared to give her at least a hearing? Can she show enough decent compassion for the Palestinian people's unending catastrophe - if not an alternative policy - that they might listen? Too soon to predict, but it might make the difference in Michigan and perhaps the national outcome.

The Road to Monarchy?

Mostly, however, we want to focus here on the condition of U.S. politics that have brought us to the present moment of slouching toward November's "existential," yet uninspiring, election.

The Republican Party shows the spectacle of a well-oiled and lavishly funded cult, with the providential gift of an attempted assassination having elevated Trump to demigod status. A substantial sector of billionaires and corporate elites have come over to Trump, and the monarchist Supreme Court majority's "immunity" ruling overtly paves the way for the coronation of King Donald I.

This time around, Trump's royal court

would be the far-right cadres of Project 2025, who may have made the mistake of going too public with their Christian-supremacist agenda and mass deportation camps, tax cuts and civil service purge plans. Trump's announced economic policies based on massive tariffs and permanent tax cuts for corporations and billionaires would be both inflationary and ruinous for the budget, although no one knows how seriously to take them.

And since by the third year of Trump's term he'd be older than Biden is now, his alt-right protégé J.D. Vance would be poised to run for a full two terms. Vance's statements about women as "childless cat ladies" taking over political life, it must be said, are stunning even by MAGA standards.

As for Trump himself, his unhinged comment at the Christian-nationalist Turning Point Action's "Believers Summit" encouraged attendees that "you'll never have to vote again" in the event he's elected. (New York Times, July 26, 2024) In this climate, the threat is clear and present of the planned destruction of even the flawed democratic structures that have evolved under the ambiguous rubric of the U.S. Constitution.

The Trump-Vance agenda includes open cheerleading for Israel's Gaza genocide and rampant ethnic cleansing of Palestine - along with indifference if not active support for Russia's drive to turn Ukraine into another Gaza. (In this respect, at least they're consistent.)

Whatever the outcome this November, four years from now the United States along with the rest of the world will be experiencing climate-change disasters of magnitudes we can barely imagine now. The restoration of full-scale death-to-the-environment Republican policies would go a long way toward making the global crisis irreversible.

With Biden's stumbling candidacy, the Democratic leadership's apparent incapacity to remove him began by mid-July to look like a mixture of paralysis and panic. As Against the Current will go to press shortly before the Democratic convention, it's an open question whether it's able to generate the cohesion, unity and

energy to defeat Trump.

In any event, the Democrats' ability to deliver on promises to restore abortion rights, expand environmental protections or anything else would be dim at best in what are likely to be closely divided Houses of Congress, quite possibly with either or both under Republican majorities.

But these short-term projections get nowhere near the depth of the U.S. political crisis.

Paradoxically Speaking

The Republican Party, of course, is no meaningful sense a populist, let alone a "workers' party." As much if not more than ever, it's a party of plutocracy, privilege and unrestrained corporate greed. Yet astonishingly it captures a large working class vote, both union and nonunion.

That Includes for example an estimated half of working Teamsters, which of course is why Teamster president Sean O'Brien turned up to speak at the Republican convention, leaving delegates a bit unsure what to make of his denunciation of companies' and "both parties'" trampling on working people's rights. (But they got over it quickly enough.)

On the other side, UAW president Shawn Fain doubled down on the union's early endorsement of Biden, instantly and predictably coming out for Harris. What's regrettably missing in each case is an open, democratic discussion within the unions' memberships about whom they would support, including possible third-party options - the kind of healthy activating process that's urgently needed as we are increasingly witnessing a reckoning moment for the future of labor and progressive politics.

While the working-class Republican vote is certainly disproportionately (not exclusively) white, this cannot be attributed solely to racism, Christian fundamentalism, the appeal of Hulk Hogan or other glib conventional explanations. These are all real, but the plain fact - as we are not unique in

pointing out - is that both capitalist parties for four decades now embraced a gospel of globalization, deregulation and technocracy that left behind huge sectors of the population, abandoned whole regions of rural and smaller-town America, and widened inequality to the most obscene levels.

We might add here that these are generally the communities most heavily impacted by climate-induced disasters, while drill-baby-drill politicians spew contempt on any programs ("Green New Scam") or regulations that might alleviate the slide toward ecocide.

Housing, access to education, medical care, food security and hopes for a decent future are slipping away from tens of millions of people. A shocking proportion of U.S. households (37 percent by some accounts, although the statistic's meaning is contested) would scramble to meet a \$400 emergency expense. It's not so much a question of absolute poverty as one of deepening anxiety, insecurity and fear that naturally gives to resentments that can be readily manipulated by rightwing opportunist fake-"populism."

None of this is exactly "breaking news." Bernie Sanders has been talking for decades about the ravages of policies that enrich "the billionaire class" and "the one percent" at the expense of the great majority. Reverend William Barber of the New Poor Peoples Campaign eloquently appeals for a multiracial movement drawing on the reality that a majority of the poor and insecure in America are white.

The Democratic Party is institutionally uninterested in the moderate social-democratic reforms that have made Bernie Sanders overwhelmingly popular - Medicare for all (single-payer health care), free public college tuition, stopping corporate welfare. Still less is the Democratic establishment prepared to embrace Rev. Barber's movement in the streets.

In the vacuum of the absence of appeals to genuine pro-worker and yes, authentic populist solutions, false and even crazy explanations arise -

not spontaneously, but from the bottomless lagoon of the rightwing conspiracy industry. Inflation is rampant (in fact it's easing), crime is skyrocketing (actually it's falling, despite weekly mass shootings), the border crisis is Biden's creation (it's 100% bipartisan), illegal immigrants are bringing a crime and drug wave, and voting in droves (they aren't, of course), and on and on.

Facing the most anti-labor, plutocratic and anti-civil rights Republican Party in at least 80 years, the Democrats can only turn to the stereotypical "suburban moms" to compensate for the erosion of their labor voting base and weakening of support in other sectors, especially the critical and growing Latine communities.

Ever since the unhinged Supreme Court Dobbs ruling, the Democrats have been able to ride a wave of energy for abortion rights, which may save them in 2024 as well. African American women, who were essential to Biden's 2020 election, will provide a critical base of support rallying around Kamala Harris. With Biden out (and Harris's VP choice pending), the outcome is up for grabs.

Crisis for the Left

Again, we are not talking a stand here on the voting options discussed in the

opinion pieces in this issue of Against the Current. We will comment briefly on a perennial issue vexing the left in this country.

In our previous issue (#231, July-August 2024), Part One of historian August Nimtz's extensive exploration of "What Does It Mean to Vote?" (the second part appears in the forthcoming issue) lays out a lesson that Karl Marx learned as long ago as 1850: the working class or the revolutionary party should never subordinate its independent electoral expression to supporting a liberal or lesser-evil bourgeois choice.

That is excellent guidance, then and now. Sadly, in the United States of America, the most politically backward country in the "developed" capitalist world, there is no working class party of any stripe - small, medium or large, reformist or revolutionary or anything in between. Nor is there a populist or mass movement party in this country or on the immediate horizon.

Politics in the United States, with some local exceptions, remain trapped in the Republican and Democratic capitalist duopoly. The Green Party is a progressive option, one that still represents potential rather than class-based reality. Breaking from this grip is partly a task for the socialist left,

but depends more critically on the emergence of mass social insurgencies of labor and oppressed people's communities.

The outcome of the November election may, or may not, stave off the immediate prospect of a full-blooded far-right presidency with its sickening consequences for democratic rights in the United States, for any hope of environmental policy, for forces of democracy and social justice in many parts of the world.

What will not change is the enormous inequalities that are choking our society, the ever-expanding military budget, and escalating tensions with rivals for world imperialist domination.

We see in today's upsurge in solidarity for Palestinian freedom, as we've seen before in the struggles for marriage equality, Queer and trans rights and the response to racist police brutality, organized movements from below do make a difference in politics. Whether in resistance to Trump's semi-fascism or in confronting another Democratic administration, our movement-building responsibilities remain paramount.

[This is a pre-publication version of an editorial statement for the forthcoming September-October 2024 issue of Against the Current](#)

Central African Republic: looting as retribution

6 August 2024, by **Paul Martial**

Scorched earth policy

This counter-offensive extended to the country's main towns, but was accompanied by widespread violence against civilians perpetrated by Wagner's mercenaries. Entire villages

were razed to the ground and the Russian soldiers claimed more victims than all the armed rebel groups put together.

The challenge for Wagner is not just to preserve the power of the President of the Republic, Faustin-Archange Touadéra, but to get his hands on the diamond and gold mines previously

exploited by the armed militias. Although the militias have been weakened, they are still present in the country's rural areas.

Although the Russian authorities regained control of Wagner's activities in the CAR following the death of Yevgeny Prigozhin, the company's founder, the mercenaries retain a

large degree of autonomy and continue to expand their business by trying to diversify into log exports and brewing.

But the Russians are no longer alone and must now rely on the Rwandans. For the moment, everyone is respecting a *modus vivendi*.

Interested aid

The Rwandan contingent represents 20% of the 14,000 soldiers of the Minusca led by Valentine Rugwabiza, a Rwandan businesswoman and diplomat. Other Rwandans head up local UN agencies such as the UN

Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Food Programme (WFP), as well as structures such as the World Bank. At the same time, almost 850 special forces soldiers reporting directly to the Rwandan government have been deployed.

While the Rwandan forces have a much better reputation among the civilian population than Wagner's mercenaries, they are also widely used to secure the economic activities of the mining companies owned by the Crystal Ventures holding company, which is linked to the RPF, Paul Kagame's ruling party. These mines exploit rare earths, in particular

tantalum used in electronics and niobium to produce steel alloys. In addition to the numerous companies created and benefiting from tax exemptions, the grabbing of arable land - more than 40,000 hectares where large Rwandan farms have been set up - has been denounced by the opposition.

Whether Russian or Rwandan, these armed forces from undemocratic countries are helping to strengthen Touadéra's authoritarian power. They are secure in the knowledge that the constitutional referendum abolishing term limits has been passed. As a reward, they plunder the country's natural resources with complete impunity.

Indian coalition government: a defeat For Hindu nationalism

5 August 2024, by **Sushovan Dhar**

Fictions and truths

Many people were surprised by the outcome. Most had predicted a landslide victory for Modi. After six weeks of voting, the BJP, which has been in power for ten years, gained only 240 seats (272 are needed for a majority), down from 303 in 2019. This places Modi in a tight situation leading the Nationalist Democratic Alliance, a coalition of fifteen parties that includes smaller regional parties. His opponents call it a "moral defeat". After all, the 73-year-old Modi sought 400 seats in the Lok Sabha (lower house of Parliament) so that he could amend the constitution.

Despite this unexpected setback, the autocratic leader celebrated his win, calling it a historic achievement, as people put their trust in (his) alliance for the third time. Yet his party lost even in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous and impoverished state, in the north of the country.

Uttar Pradesh has also emerged as the

latest laboratory of Indian fascism in the last decade. There, in the city of Ayodhya, Narendra Modi inaugurated the Ram temple in January 2024, built on the ruins of the Babri mosque. A symbol of the overwhelming might of Hindutva, led by an ultra-nationalist whose ambition is to transform secular India into a Hindu nation. The BJP lost in Ayodhya too.

Modi will now be forced to rely on his alliance partners, shocking for someone accustomed to enjoying unrestricted power and authority for more than 20 years. Not only has the political landscape changed and Modi been substantially weakened, but he is now facing a freshly rejuvenated opposition, out to challenge his omnipresence in Indian politics and society. These were amply evident in the first few sessions of the newly convened parliament.

In the days to come, the BJP will also have to fight several state legislative elections, where the opposition alliance, bolstered by the results, will challenge them strongly.

Modi-magic under challenge

The Modi-magic has generally ceased to work. The personality cult built around the supreme leader has proved inadequate during the elections. But what changed so suddenly? The poor results are attributed to unemployment, a profound socioeconomic crisis, and all-pervasive inequality that has reached new heights. Also, Modi's mismanagement of the Covid crisis, during which at least five million Indians died, has been one of the prime factors, slowly brewing discontentment with his regime.

Economic results are good on paper (6.8% growth in 2024, according to the IMF), to the extent that India is now the world's fifth-largest economy, ahead of the UK. But other indicators are poor. According to data from Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), India has one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the

world, at 45.4%. The general unemployment rate is 8%, which may not account for numerous types of underemployment and disguised unemployment. India is a country where 92.4% of the workforce is estimated to be employed in the informal sector. While infrastructure is now more developed, as evident with the near doubling of airports (from 74 to 140), public debt has increased (82% of GDP), and employment-generating industries are lacking. The IMF has also warned that general government debt might surpass 100 percent of GDP shortly.

One of the biggest crises faced by the country is profound rural distress, with rural incomes declining consistently since the beginning of 2022. A never-ending inflationary spiral puts basic goods more and more out of reach for rural households, exacerbating this loss of purchasing power. Over and above that, the Modi government did nothing about the agrarian crisis that has been underway since the 1990s, when India adopted neoliberal measures that hit the agrarian sector hard. Even though agriculture contributes approximately 18 percent of the country's GDP, it employs nearly 45 percent of the workforce—close to 594 million people, according to latest estimates.

The agrarian crisis and agrarian distress in India have resulted in rural-indebtedness. Numerous reports submitted to the government on farmers' suicides have pointed out clearly that indebtedness among rural households has been a major cause. The National Sample Survey Office's (NSSO) Situation Assessment of Agricultural Households and Land and Livestock Holding, 2019, released in 2021, revealed that around 50% of Indian agricultural households are indebted. This is a colossal figure considering that there were 93,094 million farm households in the country in 2019.

Failure of religious polarisation

The masses emerged as the most powerful agency in the current elections. Results show that the BJP lost 38 seats in the constituencies that saw active participation in the farmers' struggle. While the Modi regime couldn't be unseated, the election results do not fully capture the mood of the masses in the streets. Let's not forget that everything was stacked against the opposition in this, the least free and fair national election in India's history of independence. The ruling party had a huge advantage over the opposition when it came to administrative machinery, media, and finances.

Can we interpret the mandate as one for a secular and democratic India? Yes, in a certain way but only partially. Modi sought unquestioned public endorsement for his ten years of authoritarian rule, and support for the next five years of dissolving the country's bourgeois-democratic fabric. The voters declined to approve his plans. Even amongst the voters that supported his Hindu majoritarian politics, the communal appeal did not prevail over all other considerations, despite his ferocious anti-Muslim remarks.

This result punctures his image of invincibility and is also a personal defeat for him. It is certain that the country's democratic backsliding to an outright autocratic state has been halted, if only for the time being. This will possibly open up democratic spaces, both within and outside the parliament. The agenda of the BJP, together with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)—a right-wing Hindu nationalist, paramilitary organisation—was to amend the constitution, with the help of an overwhelming (more than two thirds) majority, to create a Hindu state. This is now postponed for the time being. The BJP-RSS' Hindu majoritarian project has suffered a critical electoral blow, but is not entirely defeated.

The future uncertain

The rejuvenation of the opposition space will surely open up spaces for dissent and defiance. As economic conditions worsen for an overwhelming majority of the country, we will witness more and more protests and revolts in the days to come. But will spontaneous and episodic uprisings be sufficient to defeat the fascists? Let's not ignore the fact that we are up against a formidable power that can retaliate strongly. The global right-wing wave also has negative consequences for Indian politics. The BJP has demonstrated an ability to bounce back from electoral defeats owing to the strong grass-roots network of the RSS across the country. The repressive machinery shows no signs of relenting. The action taken by the BJP to target author Arundhati Roy, in a prosecution for 'hate speech', indicates that they want to pursue repression more vigorously.

So it is too early to be conclusive. The BJP has lost an absolute majority but has not been vanquished. Any exaggeration of the opposition's achievements can take us down the wrong political path. However, the election results have not only raised questions about Modi's invincibility, but have also returned the country to a coalition government after a decade of one-party control. A strong government with total control of the parliament wouldn't have augured well for the working class.

A weak government would certainly open up options for the Left and social movements. In order to exploit that, we need a clearly articulated strategy that is able to create a counter-hegemonic narrative, based on a strong anticapitalist transformative vision, with a strong democratic component. However, the Left is hardly a force to reckon with in the current Indian political landscape, even though they have been able to increase their parliamentary presence from 6 to 9. It is high time that we need a New Left that can fight against Hindu hegemony and is not separated from the transformative counter-project of building democratic socialism either.

Reducing this conflict to a rivalry between Algeria and Morocco aims to wipe the Sahrawi people off the map

4 August 2024, by **Fabienne Dolet, Fatimetu Mohtar Ali**

Western Sahara is still a 'Non-Self-Governing Territory' according to the United Nations (UN), and has been since the end of Spanish colonisation in 1976. The territory is claimed by Morocco and is at the heart of the rivalry between Morocco and Algeria, which supports the Polisario Front's claim to full independence for Western Sahara, a goal it has pursued for nearly fifty years. Despite the 1991 ceasefire, Western Sahara is still under the domination of Morocco, which represses Saharawi militants. Fabienne Dolet spoke to Fatimetu Mohtar Ali, from the Association de la Jeunesse sahraouie de France. (Saharawi Youth Association of France)

What is the role of the Saharawi Youth Association of France?

Our role as young people in France is to publicise our cause, to campaign and to help our compatriots in the refugee camps and in the territories occupied by the Moroccan regime. It was in this context that the association was created, with the aim of raising awareness of the Sahrawi struggle in French society. Unfortunately, French society is not sufficiently informed about the illegal occupation of Western Sahara and France's role in it.

Since the end of the fighting in 1991, the issue has still not been resolved between Morocco, Algeria and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR)?

This subject is very important because it touches on an argument frequently used by the Moroccan regime's propaganda to make us invisible. Reducing this conflict to a rivalry

between Algeria and Morocco aims to wipe the Sahrawi people off the map. Algeria is a fraternal country and a very important supporter of our struggle, but it must be understood that this conflict is not a rivalry between Morocco and Algeria. It is about an illegal occupation by Morocco, the systematic repression of Sahrawis in the occupied territories and the forced displacement of an entire people.

In reality, Algeria is not the only ally in the region. Mauritania, which initially tried to lay claim to the southern regions of Western Sahara during the illegal treaties of Madrid, finally recognised the SADR in 1984. But it is not the only country to support the SADR. Under Gaddafi's government, Libya was also a major supporter in the region. The SADR is not just a fantasy, it is a reality, a country recognised by more than 84 countries around the world and a founding member of the African Union. So the argument that 'these are just separatists financed by Algeria' makes no sense at all, and a quick search will tell you that.

The Western Sahara is coveted. Does it have natural resources?

Yes, indeed, the Western Sahara is a very rich region. In particular, it has the world's largest phosphate reserve, as well as the world's second largest fishing reserve. There is also gold, oil and other resources. This is why several foreign companies, including many French companies such as Azura, Total, BNP Paribas, Société Générale, Crédit Agricole, Axa Assurances, Transavia and UCPA, are contributing to this illegal occupation by exploiting its natural resources.

What is the current situation of the Saharawi people?

The situation is very complicated. Our people are divided in two: those who have been living in refugee camps for over fifty years, in one of the most uninhabitable places in the world, where they face a very precarious situation with extreme temperatures and sometimes limited access to drinking water and food; and those who live in the occupied territories, suffering daily aggression, arbitrary arrests and suffocating oppression by the Moroccan regime.

The armed struggle resumed after the Moroccan regime violated the ceasefire in November 2020, when the Moroccan army opened fire on Sahrawi civilians who were peacefully demonstrating against Morocco's illegal use of the Guerguerat crossing. At present, the Polisario Front is at war with the Moroccan occupying forces, a conflict that is largely ignored by the world due to heavy Moroccan propaganda supported by France, Israel and the United States.

Does France have a role to play? And why?

France plays a very important role in this conflict. Historically, when Africa was decolonised by the UN, France was Morocco's main supporter of the illegal occupation of Western Sahara and the genocide of the Sahrawi people. It also supported Morocco with logistics and funding during the sixteen year war against the Polisario Front. Even today, military support for the Moroccan occupation continues, as the investigations by *Disclose* (an investigative journalism website)

show, revealing images of planes and

ships sold by French companies involved in the illegal occupation of

Western Sahara.

Protesters in Bangladesh Want an End to State Repression

3 August 2024, by **Lydia Silva, Promise Li**

Promise Li: Can you describe why the mass protests erupted against the government of Sheikh Hasina? What has been the government's response?

Lydia Silva: The protests began when the Supreme Court of Bangladesh revived a quota reserving 30 percent of government jobs for descendants of freedom fighters who participated in Bangladesh's war of independence, reversing a reform to the quota system the people won in 2018.

This quota system started in 1972 when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the key leader of the independence movement, introduced it to a war-torn country to recognize those who fought in the independence struggle. However, there was discontent against it from the start, and there have been movements against the quota system on and off ever since, like the mass protests in 2008 and 2013 that were unsuccessful.

In 2018, the quota remained at 56 percent: 30 percent for the descendants of freedom fighters, 10 percent for women, 5 percent for ethnic minorities, 10 percent for specific districts, and 1 percent for people with disabilities, leaving 44 percent for merit-based candidates. This meant that working-class students with high scores could be deprived of jobs and opportunities by those privileged by the quota.

Students led a massive antiquota movement that year and gained substantial public support. They successfully compelled the government to reduce the quota for government jobs. But problems

remained regarding the fair implementation of the quota system.

In June this year, the Supreme Court reversed the 2018 reforms, which renewed the students' antiquota movement. Initially, the movement was confined to public universities. Sheikh Hasina's government responded with violence and refused to engage in dialogue with the student leaders, which could have spared the country the atrocities we have seen in recent weeks. The government instead waited in silence for the court's verdict and ignored the campus movement.

Moreover, Hasina further incensed student protestors by asking on national television, "If the grandchildren of the freedom fighters don't get quota benefits, should the grandchildren of Razakars get the benefit?" "Razakar" is a derogatory term that refers to those who assisted the Pakistani army's murderous suppression of the Bangladesh freedom fighters during the 1971 war.

Students took Hasina to be smearing their movement as traitorous, responding with the slogan: "Ami ke? Tumi ke? Razakar! Razakar! Ke bolechhe? Ke bolechhe? Shwoirachar! Shwoirachar!" ("Who am I? Who are you? Razakar! Razakar! Who says so? Who says so? Who says so? Dictator! Dictator!"). Though, in my opinion, the movement could have used more strategic slogans that distanced us from those traitors in 1971 and gave less space for criticism; pro-government forces weaponized this to further degrade the movement's demands.

The Chhatra League, the student wing of Hasina's ruling Awami League, has a long history of attacking critics and movements. Its members were given the green light by an Awami League minister on national television to "silence the protestors." We saw many students shot dead in videos that circulated on social media, though the same minister denied such killings had taken place.

Whether the murders were done by the Chhatra League, or by other groups in the opposition that took advantage of these provocations in the time of despair, still remains to be confirmed. All we know now is that many are dead and injured, after the protests quickly escalated and spread across the country, from private university students to other civilians.

The government first attempted to suppress the protests by closing all educational institutions while torturing and brutalizing the protestors. Military and border guards were deployed, and they declared a nationwide shoot-on-sight curfew and shut off internet and telephone communications across the country. The government now registers over two hundred protestors killed and thousands injured.

Promise Li: What is unique about this year's protests against the quota system? Can you say more about the student leaders' relationship with other opposition groups? How would you characterize the political composition of the broad opposition against Hasina?

Lydia Silva: This time, the quota

reform protests express the prolonged frustrations that the youth and other working-class people have felt toward the government. Our national elections are increasingly unfair, and the government is becoming more autocratic than ever before.

There are tens of thousands of graduates each year roaming the streets unemployed, and many hope to secure civil service jobs. There is also widespread corruption in every possible government sector. In addition, Bangladesh has other economic grievances like rising inflation and the cost of living, alongside government mismanagement and human rights abuses.

These are all triggers that contributed to the quota reform protests. There may have been new developmental projects like the Padma Bridge, Karnaphuli Tunnel, and the Dhaka Metro Rail in recent years, but more is needed to make up for the day-to-day exploitation faced by the lower classes that struggle to keep up with minimum living standards. What was a movement to fight for a fair chance for working people to obtain government jobs without discrimination in 2018 has become a broader mobilization that speaks to widespread systemic issues.

Since Bangladesh's independence, the youth and student movements have been the backbone of mass struggles against our ruling governments. A broad coalition of opposition parties and civil society organizations, including left-wing and progressive groups, support the students today. Student leaders have been clear from the beginning that students should be prioritized for participation in the movement, no matter which political student wing they belong to. Participants are encouraged to keep aside their political differences in this broad movement.

There are tens of thousands of graduates each year roaming the streets unemployed, and many hope to secure civil service jobs.

However, the main opposition parties and their student wings — the right-wing Bangladesh Nationalist Party

(BNP) and the Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami (also known as “Jamaat-Shibir” when referred together with its student wing, Islami Chhatra Shibir) — are instrumentalizing the broad student movement, benefiting from the political instability to mobilize their own agendas against the Awami League.

The BNP's policies have not been favorable to the working class, just as their youth wing has not addressed young people's needs around unemployment and educational reform. They focus on supporting large infrastructural projects but with little attention to grassroots economic development. Their rule in the past had also seen widespread corruption and instability.

For its part, Jamaat-Shibir has tried to push fundamentalist Islamic policies, with ministers comparing women to consumer goods and threatening women's right to work for not wearing a burqa. Their founders were the actual Razakars who opposed the Bangladesh independence struggle and committed many crimes during the war.

In the past, the BNP allied with Jamaat-Shibir, even appointing some of these war criminals as ministers. Jamaat-Shibir infiltrated the movement to irresponsibly carry out armed attacks against state assets and personnel to create more misunderstandings between the government and student protestors. I participated in the mass protests in 2013 as a secondary school student demanding justice against Abdul Quader Mollah and other unprosecuted Jamaat-Shibir war criminals, and witnessed the violence and havoc Jamaat-Shibir supporters caused in their countermobilizations.

Promise Li: What is the state of the Left in Bangladesh, and what is the role of left-wing and socialist organizations in the opposition and this student-led movement?

Lydia Silva: Unfortunately, the Bangladeshi left has lost significance in recent years due to ideological divisions or the alliances of certain groups with the ruling party. The two

largest left parties — the Workers' Party and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JASAD) — have affiliated with the Awami League, which has helped to divide the Left.

The Workers' Party is a Marxist-Leninist formation that formed from a broad coalition of left groups in the 1980s and still has links to some labor, peasant, and marginalized groups' struggles. JASAD is a social democratic party that advocates for reforms within the bourgeois system, emphasizing their promotion of welfare policies and other social justice causes.

Though the Awami League has always been ideologically centrist and nationalist, they attempted to strategically ally with parts of the Left to address issues like right-wing fundamentalism, especially with the growth of al-Qaeda-linked terrorist activities. Because there has been little prospect for building a popular left alternative, the Workers' Party and JASAD have built alliances with the Awami League to counter the BNP and fundamentalist groups.

Outside of the parliamentary left, other left organizations add a critical voice in the opposition by focusing on issues of economic inequality and peasant and workers' rights. The Left Democratic Alliance is a coalition of a few smaller left groups. While each is active in social movements, like the Socialist Party of Bangladesh, it's unclear how effective the coalition is in terms of the bigger picture. The oldest standing left party in Bangladesh, the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), is still actively opposing the ruling government, but it suffers from weak leadership and also internal divisions.

The Left in Bangladesh has weakened itself over time as the parties continue to produce splits rather than unifying. This is unfortunate because the Bangladeshi left has shown that when united, we can be a pivotal voice. Left groups have joined together with labor, peasant, and minority movements for wage increases and better working conditions. Many of us have collaborated to apply pressure against the government's leasing of our natural resources, like oil and gas,

to foreign countries.

Bangladesh is largely financially dependent on the garment industry, and left parties have been a vital presence among garment workers and unions. Along with labor leaders and organizations, left-wing groups demanded the government to raise garment workers' wages. Last year, garment workers won a minimum wage increase from 8,000 to 12,500 BDT (though this was far less than their original demand).

Promise Li: Your organization, the Bangladesh Krishok Federation, has been a key force in organizing landless peasants and other marginalized groups for decades. Can you say more about your group's work, and how it relates to youth and student organizing?

Lydia Silva: The Bangladesh Krishok Federation (BKF) has 1.6 million members across forty-nine districts in Bangladesh. Our medium-term program is to mobilize farmers and landless people to fight for genuine and comprehensive agrarian reform in the country, so that they can have access to cultivable land and food sovereignty and can live with dignity.

We also support small farmers in their efforts to obtain fairer prices for their agricultural products, organize quality seed banks for exchange among peasants, and connect poor peasants with public services. The BKF provides legal and medical services as well for our members, especially those attacked by petty bourgeois land grabbers and those who face charges for their participation in khas (unused, government-owned) land occupation movements. Through agitation, we successfully won the redistribution of lands across the country to landless peasants.

The BKF is affiliated with other mass organizations, like the Bangladesh Kishani Sabha (for women peasants), Bangladesh Adivasi Samity (for ethnic minorities), and the Bangladesh Chhatra Shava (for students). I am on the central committees of both the BKF and Bangladesh Chhatra Shava.

Bangladesh Chhatra Shava originated from a large student unity forum emerging from the BKF, which now organizes independently from us.

In 2022, Chhatra Shava was formed and now has almost three thousand members across the country, mostly active in the Dhaka, Barishal, and Dinajpur districts. It has been campaigning over issues like gender equality and educational reform: for example, holding the government accountable for not having fulfilled its promise to make one public school free of cost in each district, and advocating for the supply of affordable textbooks for underprivileged students in rural areas. It also seeks to promote political education through lectures and book clubs, including reading Marxist texts.

I also belong to the Communist Party of Bangladesh (Marxist-Leninist), along with other party cadres who are active members of the BKF. Our group endorses Leon Trotsky's belief in permanent revolution — the idea that the socialist revolution must be international, with the working class leading it in a continuous process. This contrasts with other left groups in Bangladesh that come from a more traditional Stalinist or Marxist-Leninist approach, like the Workers' Party.

We also adhere to Antonio Gramsci's principle that Marxists must establish a counterhegemony of workers, peasants, and other toiling masses across society, from the economic to the cultural spheres, against bourgeois hegemony. Creating this counterhegemony is a precondition for revolution, which we can achieve by strengthening the struggles of the subaltern classes across the country, while developing organic intellectuals among rural indigenous communities.

Most of the youth in Chhatra Shava and CPB (ML) are children of farmers and informal sector workers who also organize around demands for peasant rights, land reform, access to wastelands, climate justice, agroecological farming, and so on. We

are already hearing about and supporting the children of our peasant members who have been injured while participating in the movement in their districts.

Promise Li: What do you see as the next stages of the struggle?

Lydia Silva: The fight is not over. The government has reformed the quota system again, but there are still more than six thousand protestors under arrest from the nationwide crackdown. Student leaders are still being arrested and taken away from their homes and hospitals. Some are persecuted for their affiliation with opposition parties, while many are innocent civilians who may remain imprisoned indefinitely.

The police are conducting random searches on people's phones on the streets to look for any affiliation with the movement. I know of a seventeen-year-old who was granted a seven-day sentence, which was only canceled upon mass pressure. Nonetheless, he was sent to a juvenile correctional facility until further investigation.

Among the students' list of demands, only the one about the quota reform has been won. The government has still not taken any responsibility for the killings and tortures, bringing the guilty to justice, and publicly apologizing to families whose children were massacred just for trying to find decent jobs to end the generational poverty they have experienced, or the toddler who has been shot in the head on the balcony of her own home.

There was also someone who was shot dead for simply delivering food and water to the protestors in solidarity, and this footage has gone viral. Though the arrested students called off the protests in a public statement, some other student leaders who have not been arrested are still trying to carry on the protests. We must continue to build momentum and call for international solidarity. We hope that justice prevails for the students as they push for further reform.

Source: [Jacobin](#)

West Africa: rivalry and division between leaders

2 August 2024, by **Paul Martial**

A new confederation

On Saturday 6 July 2024 in Niamey, the capital of Niger, the three Sahelian countries met to announce the creation of the Confederation of Sahel States. The aim is to strengthen their ties by forming a joint force to combat rebellions, particularly jihadist ones, and by adopting a mutual defence pact. Other measures have been adopted, such as the pooling of resources for agriculture, transport, energy and water. The introduction of a common currency was mentioned. There are also plans to set up an investment bank and a stabilisation fund. In addition, local languages are to be promoted in the national media.

Some observers point out that weaknesses do not add up to strength. The economic and security situation is deteriorating. The incessant power cuts in the capitals and inflation are far from being overcome. Recently, Bamako airport in Mali was paralysed for lack of fuel to refuel aircraft.

In all three countries, the jihadists are succeeding in carrying out deadly attacks against the armed forces, while the latter, with the participation of their Russian auxiliaries, are

constantly committing acts of violence. In Takalote, for example, Malian soldiers and Russian mercenaries killed eight people. These were not Islamists, but members of the pro-government militia led by General El Hadj Ag Gamou, the current governor of the Kidal region. The Confederation summit ended with an official break with ECOWAS, which was deemed to be too close to the West, and France in particular.

A decried ECOWAS

In response to coups d'état, ECOWAS has illegally instituted an economic blockade and even envisaged military intervention in Niger. Some are talking about the risk of ECOWAS breaking up. Senegal's brand new president has been tasked with trying to bring the three Sahelian countries that have seceded back into the fold. His sovereignist stance should help to renew the dialogue, even if success seems unlikely.

ECOWAS leaders are also facing the same problems, particularly on security issues, with jihadists increasingly intervening in coastal countries, particularly in Benin and Togo. The project for a joint armed force of around 5,000 men faces a major difficulty, that of funding,

estimated at nearly 2.6 billion dollars. Finally, the President of Nigeria, Tinubu, has been re-elected to the presidency of ECOWAS, although he seems more concerned about his country's catastrophic economic situation.

Pan-Africanism by and for the people

The Confederation and ECOWAS are instruments against the people. The former brings together coup plotters who intend to stay in power for ever. Their confederation was founded without any debate in their respective countries, all of which suffer human rights violations.

As for ECOWAS, it has never ceased to endorse electoral farces and other constitutional manoeuvres designed to keep presidents in power for life or to organise dynastic successions. The implementation of a genuinely pan-Africanist policy cannot be done without the full and complete participation of the people, favouring respect for democratic rights, which is the antithesis of ECOWAS or the Confederation, since one is nothing more than a friendship of (mostly) badly elected presidents, the other a union of coup plotters.

Had the dead of Majdal Shams been Jewish...

1 August 2024, by **Gilbert Achcar**

The Zionist government naturally strived to use the massacre in its propaganda drive aimed at portraying

those it is fighting, whether Palestinians or Lebanese, as barbarians, and itself as being

engaged in a "clash between civilization and barbarism" as Netanyahu put it in the idiotic speech

that he delivered before the US Congress a week ago. This came during a session that will go down in history as an additional sign of the decadence of US institutions, a session during which a majority of the attending members of Congress stood up and sat down at a pace that made them look like participants in a collective aerobic exercise!

The White (and Blue) House rushed to condemn the Majdal Shams massacre, describing it as “horrific” and accusing Hezbollah of carrying it out. Washington’s official position in this case goes beyond the usual hypocrisy that leads it to mourn every Jewish child killed by fire coming from an Arab source while almost turning a blind eye to the 15,000 Palestinian children killed so far by Israel’s bombs, a major part of which Washington supplied to its ally. What goes beyond the usual hypocrisy this time is that Washington has shared the Zionist government’s treatment of the Golan Heights as if it were Israeli territory, while it is occupied Syrian territory according to international law and in the view of all countries of the world, except for the Zionist state and its US godfather.

Washington was in line with the international consensus since 1967 until Donald Trump, a close friend of the Zionist far right, came to power and decided to recognize Israel’s sovereignty over the Golan in March 2019. It is worth noting in this regard that the Biden administration decided to maintain this blatant violation of international law and support for Zionist expansionism. This position,

along with Biden’s backtracking on the promises he made during his 2020 election campaign to reverse Trump’s decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel and to move the US embassy there in line with this recognition, as well as Trump’s decision to close the Palestinian representative office in Washington, were foreboders of Washington’s subsequent collusion with the Zionist aggression on Gaza, and a first instalment offered by the “proud Irish-American Zionist” to the “proud Jewish Zionist”, as Netanyahu described Biden and himself in celebrating their “forty-year” friendship during their recent meeting in Washington.

The Arab identity of the natives of the Golan Heights (Zionist settlers have almost equalled them in number, which is what the Zionist far right is trying to achieve in the West Bank) and the clarity of the legal status of the plateau in the eyes of the entire world, except for Israel and the United States, these two characteristics made the Israeli condemnation of the Majdal Shams massacre too an unusually hypocritical condemnation, quite pale indeed compared to what would have happened had a similar massacre occurred against a group of young Jews, whether within the internationally recognized borders of the State of Israel or even among settlers in the Golan Heights.

It is therefore probable that Netanyahu will content himself with a painful but limited retaliatory strike targeting Hezbollah and that he won’t launch a comprehensive war against

Lebanon, knowing full well that it would be more severe on the Israeli interior than the Zionist war on Gaza. The likely limitations of the upcoming strike were indicated by the abstention of the two neo-Nazi ministers, Smotrich and Ben-Gvir, in the vote to authorize Netanyahu and War minister Galant to manage the retaliation, especially since Smotrich had called for seizing the opportunity of the Majdal Shams massacre to kill Hezbollah’s Secretary-General, Hassan Nasrallah.

The Zionist government will not launch a comprehensive attack on Hezbollah before ending its aggression on Gaza, and unless it secures unconditional US support in a confrontation that may well include Iran and turn into a regional war. In other words, the Zionist government will not launch a comprehensive war on Hezbollah unless Donald Trump wins the US elections next November. Otherwise, it will content itself with resorting to painful but limited strikes, which is what it has been doing since last October, and will limit its demands to what is consistent with UN Security Council Resolution 1701 adopted in the wake of the 33-day war in 2006, as it has done until now, knowing that it is the limit of what is internationally supported.

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Source: [Gilbert Achcar blog](#)