

International *Correspondence*

No 44 • March • June 2020 • IWU-FI

The rebellion of the Chilean people



Coronavirus, health, and capitalism

International *Correspondence*

No 44 • March • June 2020

Magazine of the UIT-FI

International Workers Unity – Fourth
International

International Coordination

Offices:
Mexico 1230
Buenos Aires
Argentina

Telephones
+54 11 4383 7733
+54 11 4383 4047

Internet:
www.uit-ci.org

Layout:
Daniel Iglesias

English Translation:
Patricia Parola
Daniel Iglesias

Contribution:
Argentina: Ar\$80
Rest of Latin America: US\$2
USA: US\$5
Europe: €5
Rest of the World: US\$3

Signed articles do not
necessarily reflect the
position of the leadership of
the IWU-FI but that of their
authors.

SUMMARY

Foreword I

Chile



An ongoing revolution	2
Pinochet's constitution.....	3
"It's not 30 pesos, it's 30 years"	6
Territorial Assemblies: true organisations of struggle	8
The role of women in the struggle of the Chilean people.....	11
For a new constitution and to abolish the fraudulent convention.....	12
Interview: "For a new political alternative" I3	
Chile and the Constituent Assembly slogan	15

France

The fight against pension reform continues.....	16
The political and social crisis deepens	19

Coronavirus

Coronavirus, health, and capitalism	21
The Chinese connection	23
The global crisis of the capitalist economy and the coronavirus.....	24
Let the capitalists pay for the coronavirus crisis, not the working class and the people!.....	26

Iraq

From Tahrir Square in Baghdad	29
-------------------------------------	----

Middle East

Interview: "We must give a perspective to the working classes in an internationalist framework"	31
---	----

Lebanon



In Lebanon, the "October Revolution" continues.....	33
Dangers awaiting the revolutionary process	36

Palestine

The Trump-Netanyahu "deal": The robbery of the century	38
---	----

Peru

Elections in Peru show the crisis of the regime.....	41
The recognition of a working and socialist trajectory	44

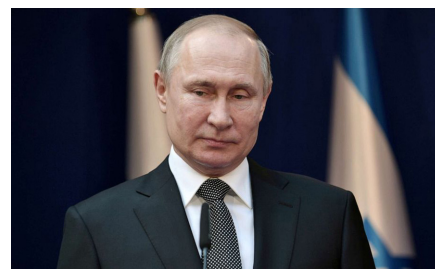


Spanish State

Podemos: End of a Cycle.....	45
------------------------------	----

Russia

Is Putin progressive?	47
Capitalist restoration in the world's largest country.....	50
Russian oligarchs got rich with the theft of state enterprises.....	51
Russia, a sub-imperialism	52



w

World News	53
------------------	----



Young Chileans jump the turnstiles of the Santiago Metro, 18 October 2019

Foreword

This new edition of *International Correspondence* focuses on the popular rebellion of the Chilean people. Since 18 October 2019, there is a before and an after in Chile. “It is not 30 pesos, it is 30 years” was the popular expression with which the mobilised masses responded to President Sebastian Piñera and the entire old bourgeois political leadership of the country. The fight went beyond the demand against the increase in the Metro fares and was against the entire capitalist economic model and the regime inherited from the dictator Pinochet.

The fight has not relented. In the middle of March 2020, hundreds of bangings of pots and pans were recorded from the balconies of houses in populous cities such as Santiago, Valparaíso and Concepción. Piñera faces the repudiation of his figure with harsh chants and shouts that spread to soccer stadiums and musical events such as the Viña del Mar Festival.

Chile’s rebellion is part of a new global wave of mobilisations and protests against the austerity plans of

imperialism, the multinationals and the IMF. The workers, youth and popular struggles of France, Lebanon, Iraq and the Middle East are also reflected in this edition.

The capitalist-imperialist system remains unable to overcome the acute economic crisis opened in 2007/8. The surprising appearance of the coronavirus epidemic is also an expression of this decadence of capitalism. The growth of poverty, overcrowding, environmental changes, and the collapse of the world’s public health systems are the propitious terrain for the emergence and development of old and new diseases. At the same time, the capitalist economic crisis may deepen because of the effects of the coronavirus on the economy. Imperialism and the capitalist governments will seek to continue to unload the consequences of the crisis on the peoples with new exploitation plans. The rebellions in Chile, France, Lebanon, Iraq, Palestine and other social protests, which are growing throughout the world, show that the fight will continue open.

CONTACTING US:

Argentina: Izquierda Socialista: opinalector@izquierdasocialista.org.ar – **Bolivia:** ARPT-FUERZA: laprotesta@gmail.com – **Brazil:** Corrente Socialista dos Trabalhadores: combatesocialista@gmail.com – **Chile:** Movimiento Socialista de los Trabajadores: mst_solidaridad@gmail.com — **Colombia:** Alternativa Socialista: alternativasocialistautici@hotmail.com – **France:** Mouvement Communiste Internationaliste: contact@gsi-qi.org – **Mexico:** MAS: posmas1980@gmail.com – **Panama:** Propuesta Socialista: propuestapanamaut@hotmail.com – **Peru:** Unios en la Lucha: unios_cc@hotmail.com – **Spanish State:** Lucha Internacionalista: luchaint@telefonica.net; – **Turkey:** Workers Democracy Party: iscicephesi@gmail.com — **United States:** Socialist Core: socialistcore@gmail.com — **Venezuela:** Partido Socialismo y Libertad: usi_venezuela@yahoo.com

Recommended Sites: www.uit-ci.org / www.nahuelmoreno.org / www.izquierdasocialista.org.ar (Argentina) / www.cstpsol.com (Brazil) / www.unios.tk (Peru) / www.laclase.info (Venezuela) / www.socialistcore.org (USA) / www.mst-solidaridad.cl (Chile) / www.raetedemokratie.org (Germany) / www.luchainternacionalista.org (Spanish State) / www.iscicephesi.net (Turkey) / www.mci-uitqi.org (France)

In Facebook: www.facebook.com/mst.solidaridad (Chile) / www.facebook.com/linternacionalista (Spanish State) / www.facebook.com/idpgirisimi (Turkey) / www.lavozdelostrabajadores.art.blog (Dominican Republic)



25 October 2019, over a million people on the streets of Santiago

Chile: An ongoing revolution

Jonathan Rios

“Chile changed” can be read on hundreds of walls throughout the country. October 18 marked a before and after impossible to hide or deny. The social earthquake caused by the largest wave of mobilisations since the fight against the dictatorship continues to hit the streets of each city. In some cities, it happens in the heat of a

barricade, in others, when they fill with protesters, when their squares are occupied by territorial assemblies, or when they are scenes of struggle for the Front Line. Chile has changed and nothing will ever be the same.

The Centre for Public Studies (CEP) is a research and survey foundation led by

large Chilean economic groups. Because of its prestige, CEP's is considered “the mother of all surveys”. In its latest instalment, the poll conducted after 18 October, it lambasted the government and the political regime. The results for support and rejection of the main institutions of the country, starting with the government, show the gravity of the crisis.

The deep crisis of the government and the political regime

Piñera has 6 per cent approval and 82 per cent rejection, his government has only 5 per cent approval. Congress and the opposition have 3 per cent support (the poll's margin of error is 3 per cent). This resounding fall takes place in all the institutions of the country. Private companies show 7 per cent support, the Catholic Church 14 per cent, evangelical churches 17 per cent, newspapers 11 per cent, television 8 per cent, traditional political parties 2 per cent, and so on and on.

In the case of repressive institutions, there is a historical decline. For some regime commentators, even during the Popular Unity period, there was no such

level of decline in support. The Armed Forces have only 17 per cent support, and Carabineros [Chilean national police force, who have jurisdiction over the entire national territory] have 17 per cent. A 64 per cent believe Carabineros violate human rights very frequently, 24 per cent say they sometimes do and only 9 per cent say never. The rejection of their use of tear gas is 70 per cent (should never use it) and 19 per cent for sometimes. In the case of the use of pellets, the rejection is 81 per cent, without registering support for their use.

As never before, the figures provided by the study centres reflect what is happening in the country. The Viña del Mar International Song Festival (the most important in the country),

became a parade of artists who spoke directly against the government and supported the struggles, while the public shouted non-stop slogans against Piñera. Outside the festival, the mobilisations almost managed to stop its opening on the first day.

Soccer stadiums and other sporting, musical and cultural events follow the same dynamic. They are not isolated events. Dignity Square (formerly Italy Square, since people changed its name), the epicentre of struggle in Chile, held important calls to mobilisations throughout the summer (against the forecast of many). The same happened in the main cities of the country.

Discontent and the discredit of political institutions have given no truce to the government, which is trying unsuccessfully to build a social base. The miserable perks with which the government wished to stop the conflict vanish as soon as it mentions them. The agreements with its opposition partners only produce mistrust and the path of repression only increases popular hatred. The government uses either path or both at once with partial results and without reversing the offensive of the masses.

The revolutionary situation and its junctures

Since 18 October, Piñera has failed to regain full control of the country. "Those at the top cannot continue to rule as they did before and those at the bottom do not want to continue being ruled as before", said Lenin to explain the characteristics of a revolutionary situation. In Chile, this quotation shows all its topicality, expressed in powerful mass mobilisations. To make matters worse (for Piñera), the expectation of growth of the national economy is less than 1 per cent for 2020, fuelling the social and political crisis with the collapse of the economy.

This revolutionary situation has gone through different stages that allow us to better understand the dynamics of the process. From 18 October to 25 October, the most critical process takes way. At this juncture, the masses

Pinochet's constitution

The constitution enacted in 1980 raised the existence of life senators appointed by the dictatorship, including Pinochet himself and others appointed by the Armed Forces themselves. It also established the "immobility" of the military leaders of the dictatorship. These clauses were only repealed in 1989. But there are many others, which lay the foundations of the Chilean economic model, which are still in force. Thus, article 19 states the state withdraws from the delivery of social services such as health, education or retirement, leaving them in private hands, and participating "only in a subsidiary way". Here we find the basis for what exists in reality— schools, health centres and private AFP (pension funds) for the wealthy and an absolute and total deterioration, bordering on nonexistence, at the state level.

Furthermore, there is no legal concept for "resignation" of the president, who can only be removed through a very complex process, almost impossible to carry out.

Pinochet managed to remain in power for almost a decade more.

Finally, he ended up calling a new plebiscite, where he planned to stay until 1997, but this time he was defeated by the "No". Thus, a much-regimented transition opened, under the legal framework of the 1980 constitution, after some small consensual changes between Pinochet and the different parties of the bosses' opposition at the time.

From that moment on, the "Concertation" between the Socialist Party and the Christian Democracy ruled, along with other minor forces. Thus, the governments of Patricio Aylwin (1990-1994), Eduardo Frei (1994-2000), Ricardo Lagos (2000-2006) and Michelle Bachelet (2006-2010) came to pass. Then the first victory of the forces of the right took place, assuming Sebastian Piñera (2010-2014). At the end of his term, Michelle Bachelet (2014-2018) won again, now with an expanded coalition called New Majority, which the Communist Party was also part of with two cabinet ministers. The last presidential elections marked the return of the right to the government, again with Sebastian Piñera in 2018.

directly confront the police and the armed forces, contesting the streets with mobilisations. The failure of the State of Emergency and the curfews grew with the passing of the days; ending up with the March on 25 October that gathered millions in the main cities of the country. In the capital alone, a million and a half gathered at Dignity Square.

From 26 October to 15 November, a situation opened with massive, daily and national mobilisations. The bosses' opposition (New Majority) and the reformist opposition (CP and Broad Front) try to instil the idea that "we should not remove the government but gain things (social rights) from the government"; they also refuse to organise the working class and the students to enter the fight with general strikes and work stoppages.

On 12 November, the country explodes violently again. Piñera went on the national network to explain he could get the military out again but he was going to privilege the dialogue. On 15 November, the government and the opposition announced the "Peace Agreement", which agrees to legitimise the repression, a change in the constitution led by the political regime, and formalises that Piñera must finish his term in office.

The plebiscite of 26 April and the possible constitutional convention arise from the pressure of the masses. And, at once, it is a political manoeuvre to seek to cushion the mobilisations and protect Piñera. This call was the price the government had to pay to the opposition to stay in power by repressing the masses. It is the currency the opposition asked for, especially the New Majority of the Christian Democrats and the Socialist Party, to be able to stop the uncontrollable process of struggle that surpassed them and put them also in the path of the guilty, of those responsible for misery.

This juncture takes place from 15 November to today, with partial results. The mobilisations are less massive but the government does not manage to deactivate the discontent or the rejection of the government

A program for the struggle



MST's column in Dignity Square

The Chilean MST distributed, as a flyer, a party statement in the great mobilisation of 25 October. There they presented the program of struggle for the changes the Chilean working people need and which we reproduce.

Our call is to continue on the streets, now more than ever. (...) Piñera has to leave with his entire government. We need a new government of the organisations of the workers, of the students and the popular sectors to implement economic measures to in service of the working people.

An economic emergency plan:

- Immediate increase of the minimum wage to CLP\$ 500,000 [USD\$ 600] and an end to layoffs and price hikes.

- An end to misery retirements. End of the AFPs. For the minimum retirement to be set at CLP\$ 400,000 [USD\$ 475].

- Put natural resources at the service of the people: de-privatise and nationalise water to guarantee full access to communities and the entire country. The same with copper, lithium and all the natural riches. Use all these

resources to solve the crisis in health and education.

- Cancellation of the entire CAE debt,¹ without compensation to the banks.

Only by removing Piñera and his government can we advance this fundamental change. Only by removing Piñera can we also get a Free and Sovereign Constituent Assembly convened to end Pinochet's Constitution of 1980 and endorsed by the politicians of the system.

Out Piñera and the military from the streets! Enough of repression!

Trial and punishment to the military repressors! For an economic Emergency Plan at the service of the workers and the people!

Down with the Constitution of 1980! For a Constituent Assembly!

For a government of the workers and the popular sectors!

For the continuity of the mobilisation and a new general strike!

Movimiento Socialista de los Trabajadores (Socialist Workers Movement, MST)

Chilean section of the IWU-FI
24 October 2019

¹ The debt that graduates have.

nor the support for the sector that has continued on the streets. This rather hectic holding pattern begins to crack with the arrival of March. The arrival of students to their study houses promises to bring together one of the most combative sectors of the process and there is no doubt it will make its debut with stoppages and sit-ins already announced. Above all, the impatience of the people for their main demands to be resolved has Piñera running out of time.

The policy of MST in Chile

The government is a headache for the entire political regime. Avoiding

Piñera's fall, which was considered the worst of all ills, has proved too expensive. The levels of support are sinking for Congress and the parties, the churches, the Armed Forces, Carabineros, the media, and businesspeople. There is no sign this dynamic is changing. The government itself has only added rejection during these months. There is a problem if it falls and there is a problem if it continues.

From the MST (Socialist Workers Movement) we have been on the streets since 18 October demanding Piñera's departure as the main demand for the mobilisation. We denounce the support of the false opposition to this

capitalist and repressive government. We demand an end to the repression and the release of political prisoners. We hold the need to coordinate nationally the territorial assemblies and all the organisations of struggle. We are for a worker and popular economic emergency plan that demands an end to layoffs, a rise in wages and pensions, the nationalisation of all basic services and an end to the AFP [Pension Fund Administrator]. Finally, we hold the need for a government of the workers and those who fight, which is the only government that can guarantee the crisis to be resolved in favour of the people.



On the left, Joseph Lluís Alcàzar and "Oso" Rainer in Dignity Square.
On the right, Mercedes de Mendieta, Monica Schlotthauer and Jonathan Rios

The solidarity of IWU-FI

IWU-FI is part of the international solidarity movement with the struggle of the Chilean people. Promoting in all the countries where it has a presence, the actions of solidarity with the popular rebellion for the "Out with Piñera". It also joined the campaign for the freedom of the female and male comrades in prison, for the punishment of the Carabineros and in rejecting the violation of human rights.

This internationalist solidarity was also materialised with the presence in Chile, in the marches and the territorial

assemblies, accompanying the MST militants, of comrades of IWU-FI sections. Among them were Josep Lluís Alcàzar, leader of *Lucha Internacionalista* [Internationalist Struggle] of the Spanish State; Monica Schlotthauer, National Deputy of *Izquierda Socialista* [Socialist Left] at the FIT, Angelica Lagunas, Mercedes Mendieta and Ezequiel Peressini, also members of the national leadership of *Izquierda Socialista*.



Mobilisation in Dignity Square, Santiago

“It’s not 30 pesos, it’s 30 years”

Rainier “Oso” Rios

Leader of MST (Chile)

The Piñera government announced the rise of 30 pesos [USD\$0.04] in the price of tickets for public transport, days later the country exploded in the greatest process of struggle in recent decades. The deep social discontent with the economic model and the constitution of Pinochet took shape in the streets of the country and was much more than those 30 pesos.

During the last 30 years, Chile has been presented as an example of economic and social stability in Latin America. Capitalists of every ilk have been using this myth to explain the

benefits of privatising social rights and natural resources and also of a repressive constitution that limits the right to protest and workers’ strikes, among other reactionary laws.

While imperialism and the great Chilean economic groups benefited from great profits, the people sank more and more every day. A slow and painful transit that became unsustainable. The country has one of the highest per capita incomes in the region and with an almost zero history of economic and social crises in recent decades. However, working families live in a different country.

The relationship between wages and the cost of living is to the total detriment of the people. Half of the working class earns US\$458 or less. According to government data, a family of four is poor if they earn less than US\$628. This is a particularly harsh reality if we consider that, in Chile, practically all social rights have been privatised.

How could millions have survived if these are the hard facts of the economic reality of working families? Getting into debt. According to the Central Bank, families are indebted for 70 per cent of their income. There are bank debts to

finance housing, university loans, debts with commercial houses to buy food or necessities, household appliances or a large etcetera. They have become an unsustainable burden.

This reality does not stop with the arrival of old age. The privatisation of the retirement system has led to a social catastrophe. Retirees live on misery pensions; they are also afflicted by the high cost of medicines and health. Alongside this social sector are more than a million university students who are indebted in thousands of dollars to the banks. By all accounts, the country is full of debtors who cannot live with dignity on their wages.

Along with this social crisis, there is a serious ecological crisis that is leaving large sectors of the country without water or seriously affected by pollution. A dynamic that devours social rights, quality of life, personal expectations and hopes of living better.

An unprecedented social explosion

On the one hand, the absolute majority of the country is affected by capitalist decomposition. From the most impoverished sectors, reaching professionals and the middle class. On the other side, a grossly rich business community, supported by corrupt right-wing and centre-left politicians. From the Pinochet dictatorship through the “democratic governments”, they have all defended without question the interests of multinationals and national business people.

Social discontent not only grew massively among the people but also spread like wildfire over all institutions. The government, parliament, the Church, the armed forces and the police, traditional parties and corrupt union and social leaders are rejected. For the first time in decades, discontent exploded across the country and did so against everyone. The mechanisms of social control, from the repression to the manoeuvres of corrupt political and social leaders, did not serve to contain the fight.

Two and a half months after the

struggle began, on that convulsed 18 October, social unrest and protests continue. The Piñera government, collapsed and agonising, has only been held up by an agreement of the entire political regime to prevent its collapse. A strategy that has pierced the foundations of the little prestige that holds up these same institutions.

Dignity Square and the story of a heroic deed

For a week, high school students challenged the rise in the price of tickets, evading payment at Metro stations. Instead of paying, hundreds of students were jumping over the turnstiles. Piñera decided to brutally end this form of demonstration that was gaining enormous sympathy.

Throughout that week, images could be seen in social networks of violent arrests and repression against students at Metro stations. The wonderful bravery of those first young people was gaining adherents with each act of violence by the *pacos* (cops). On Friday 18 October, Piñera wanted to liquidate the process, causing intentionally chaos in Santiago, by closing Metro stations at the time workers finish work.

Against all odds, hundreds of thousands began to protest, taking over the Metro stations and confronting the Carabineros (the “*pacos*”). The violent day spread to the neighbourhoods, with massive cacerolazos (banging pots and pans as a sign of discontent). At dawn, the capital was filled with barricades and the situation became uncontrollable for Piñera. At 6 am the president declared the State of Emergency and for the first time in decades he took the military out to the streets. That Saturday the fight spread like wildfire throughout the country.

The government had to declare a State of Emergency in the main cities, in the face of the evident advance of historical protests throughout the country. During the week of 18–25 October, Piñera and the bosses tried to contain the massive protests with repression and curfews. For their part, the masses began to defy curfews in the

neighbourhoods by holding assemblies [mass meetings] and protesting during curfew hours. On 25 October a march against repression was called. In Santiago alone, over a million and a half people gathered in Italy Square (in the centre of the capital) and as many again in the rest of Chile. This milestone led to the military's exit from the streets and was the clearest expression of the depth of the social and political crisis.

From that day on, Italy Square was baptised as Dignity Square by the protesters. Since that day, no Friday has ceased to be occupied by those who fight. During the first month and a half, no day could the protests at the site be prevented. Massive, spontaneous, and deeply radicalised.

The repression, which has claimed 29 deaths, 360 mutilated in one or both eyes by pellets, hundreds of thousands wounded by pellets or other methods of repression by the *pacos*, over 2,000 political prisoners, and 16,000 prosecuted for fighting. These figures have in no way diminished the uncontrollable impetus of the demonstrations.

Against this repression, self-defence emerged. The Front Line, groups of protesters who, with shields, gas chambers, helmets, stones and sticks, have become the heroic defence of marches and square occupations. Along with them, there are organised health pickets, pickets of those who collect stones to face the repression, pickets of those who bring water and food to keep the front line strong, and countless tasks that have been created every day.

Dignity Square has been the main stage of this heroic deed. With it are Resistance Square in Valparaíso, Revolution Square in Antofagasta, and hundreds of neighbourhoods, squares and streets throughout the country. Everywhere there has been, there is and there will be protests. As never before, these protests have become the pride of those who carry them out, who feel represented by them and who believe they are necessary. This time we are millions.



Territorial Assembly of Yungay neighbourhood, Santiago

Territorial Assemblies: true organisations of struggle

Since 18 October, the people took to the streets, with radical mobilisations, across the length and breadth of the country. The massive social discontent, incubated for decades, violently erupted against all the institutions of the political regime. Spontaneously, millions took to the streets, and territorial assemblies emerged as they went along. How do they work and what role do they play in the fight? What are the tasks the revolutionists must push in the assemblies?

The ongoing revolutionary process has spawned two important organisms self-organised by the people: the Front Line and the Territorial Assemblies. Both fulfil two essential tasks. The

Front Line expressed the need to defend ourselves against the repression of the government, the Territorial Assemblies the need to organise the fight that takes place in the streets.

Both show the overcoming that the struggle has meant concerning the traditional left and the old bureaucratic unions and student apparatuses. The entire political regime, including the reformist left of the Communist Party and the Broad Front, agree that public order must be imposed with repression and the people must abide by this mandate. At most, they limit themselves to criticising the “excessive repression” by appealing to human rights. Likewise, they pose the

only valid interlocutors of the people are the traditional parties and the union, student and social leaders led, obviously, by those same parties.

They face repression with organised groups which operate with shields, helmets, stones and laser pointers, among other things. It is an absolute overflow outside the old parties and the regime. Above all, they do have massive social support that recognises them as true heroes who defend the manifestations from the brutal *pacos* (police).

For their part, the assemblies also arose spontaneously, driven by the need to organise independently from the old parties and the political regime.



The "Front Line", protected with homemade shields, facing the repression of Carabineros

Emergence and multiplication of the assemblies

On 18 October Piñera declared the State of Emergency. Many regions, including Santiago, are controlled by the military who at night impose brutal curfews. The people do not subside; on the contrary, they go out to defy the repression for the first time in decades. The need to organise asserts itself as an immediate task.

In the neighbourhoods, hundreds of thousands of male and female neighbours begin to gather for *cacerolazos* (banging of pots and pans in protest), almost always in squares. Male and female neighbours, together, begin to dialogue, deciding to confront the *pacos* and the military, and take care of the neighbourhoods from these blood-thirsty agents of the state. Once dialogue opened, the assembly was formed. They resolved to march through the neighbourhood, make barricades or street cuts, and organise self-help and other tasks.

This process takes place at once throughout Chile; new assemblies emerge every day. Over 200 are registered. Youth, women, workers participate in them. They declare their method of operation is democratic; everything is resolved by discussion and open voting among all. Spokespersons are appointed, who are revocable. They declare themselves autonomous from parties and other organisations; they

discuss plans for struggles and specific and national demands.

For their task, organising the neighbourhoods against the Piñera government, and also for their demands, transforming the country to serve the people and the working class, the assemblies not only surpass the old union leaderships and traditional parties but also they transform into embryos of dual power. Piñera represses the mobilisations, the assemblies respond by organising and executing them. Piñera and the opposition reach agreements to end the struggles and impose an institutional process of change (peace agreement), the assemblies reject the agreement and call for the fight to continue.

For national coordination and a single plan of struggles

The emergence of the assemblies brought an actor uncomfortable for the entire political regime. The resonant phrase of "this fight has no visible leaders" is nothing more than the confirmation of the impossibility of the regime to put its leaders at the head of the fight. The Social Unity Roundtable (MUS), which brings together the entire student and union bureaucracy, has failed to play this role, having to settle for a role as second-fiddle.

The real danger for them is that this role be assumed by the territorial assemblies. The conditions are more than favourable: they have a presence

throughout Chile, they are made up of an important part of the most struggling vanguard of the process, and they have significant social support, unlike all the institutions of the regime. Besides, a few months ago the CAT (Coordinating Committee of Territorial Assemblies) emerged, which has gone from being a coordinating committee for the Metropolitan region to having a national presence. In fact, it has already convened its first national meeting, based on the success of its Metropolitan meeting that included 140 assemblies, of which many were from other regions.

From the MST we are promoting, from the beginning, the need to develop these organisms. The first thing is the need to coordinate all the assemblies at the national level in a single organisation. The second thing is that it votes a national plan of struggles and centralising all the mobilisations and coordinating them with students, unions, feminist organisations, indigenous peoples, among others. The third is the need to vote on a national petition that meets the most heartfelt demands of the people, starting with "Out with Piñera", an end to the repression and the release of the political prisoners, an economic plan for a worker and popular emergency, among others.

The most important thing, to give meaning to this fight, is that it declares itself as an alternative of power; proposing to fight for a workers' government and the popular assemblies. We need to take to the last consequences the fight against a government that kills or mutilates our people on the streets, that imprisons those who fight, that denies us any real solution to the serious economic and social situation that has caused this outbreak. How can the same politicians and businessmen who enrich themselves with our hardships give us a solution? We not only need solutions but also a government, a power that guarantees the country's resources are used for the benefit of the people and not for the richest families in the country.

“Male and female political prisoners are organised and we have begun to bring family members together”

We spoke with Carolina Gutiérrez, a relative of 19-year-old Alejandro Carvajal, arrested on 8 November after participating in the marches in Santiago. She participates in the Coordinating Committee for the Freedom of Political Prisoners on 18 October.¹

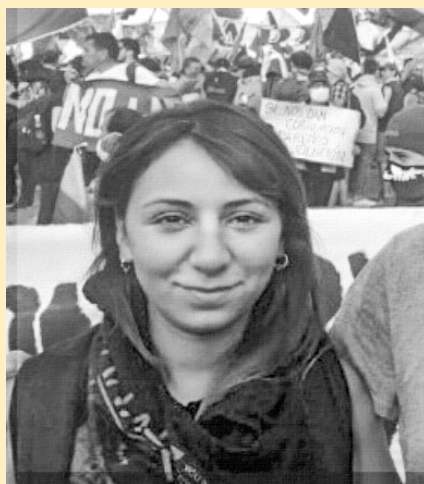
What information do you have about the situation of the prisoners?

We know there are around 300 political prisoners in Santiago 1 Prison. They are fairly organised with internal regulations; they make joint decisions and share the help of families. After the presence of human rights organisations to gather information, they began to put common prisoners in the same cells, prisoners who do not share the organisation of the political prisoners. This is a concern of the families since the common prisoners do not participate in the organisation.

Prisoners have been subjected to repression such as stripping them naked, keeping them locked for 12 hours, leaving them without food or keeping them in unhealthy dungeons in the poorest of conditions. They let us see them only once a week and a maximum of two people at once. Such poor communication increases the anguish of families because we do not know what is really happening or if what we are told is everything that happens to them or just what they are allowed to say. We can't seem to do anything.

How did the initiative to get organised in the coordinating committee come about?

MST comrades from the Yungay neighbourhood proposed us to get organised. But it is difficult because we don't know each other beyond meeting



Carolina Gutierrez

at the door of the prison. We started getting together a few families, we held a press conference and we carried a banner to the marches. It is difficult to coordinate with other families as they are afraid of retaliation at work. We want to bring the families of Santiago 1 Prison together and then expand to other prisons. Also with those who have suffered the loss of eyesight or whose human rights have been violated because in all these cases it is necessary to demand reparation.

Have you received support from the autonomous assemblies?

From the first moment they found out about my cousin's arrest, the Yungay neighbourhood assembly gave us a lot of support and has included the release of political prisoners among their demands. They have a canvas with a photo of my cousin, who lives in the neighbourhood. This has been a neighbourhood of struggle for many years. They are willing to lend us a headquarters or a cultural centre to hold meetings. We also received help from the Brasil neighbourhood assembly.

What appeal do you make to solidarity inside and outside Chile?

We demand the government acknowledge they are political prisoners, their immediate release, trial and punishment of those guilty of human rights violations, and reparation in the form of compensation. And that the Piñera genocidal government leave.

We have put out a call as coordinating committee to unite with all families and for solidarity. We also call on the international media because it is necessary to tell what is happening in Chile and for the defence of human rights.

The figures of the repression

The National Institute of Human Rights released the latest report with the figures of the repression against protesters, from 18 October to 31 January.

Injured protesters, with different levels of severity, 3,746 people. Eye mutilations, caused by shots from Carabineros, 427 people (one or both eyes). Injured by gunshots 2114. Injured by tear gas or tear gas fired at the body, 268 people.

The number of political prisoners rises to over 2,600.

The National Prosecutor's Office combines the numbers of detainees in demonstrations with common criminals to hide the real number. For its part, the Piñera government denies the existence of political prisoners, putting another blanket of doubts about the figures.

Amnesty International, in its document *Human Rights in the Americas: 2019 Report*, describes the situation of repression in Chile since 18 October as the worst human rights crisis since the Pinochet dictatorship.

¹ Interview on *Lucha Internacionalista* [Internationalist Struggle], Supplement to issue 165, January 2020.

The role of women in the struggle of the Chilean people



Choreography of *Las Tesis* in Dignity Square

Suyai Vila

We Chilean women, like the rest of the world's working women, suffer from strong job insecurity. We have access to the worst jobs, especially those which are not formal or have not social rights, nor do we have access to free nurseries in our workplaces. Our minimum salary is US\$ 335, according to data from the Sol Foundation. Higher education is not free for everyone but for a small percentage of the population that gets free scholarships. The pension earned by the most elderly women in our country is US\$ 88, pharmacies have ridiculously excessive and inflated prices, and hospitals, although public, are always paid. We Chileans have one of the most expensive health systems in the world.

The burden of so much precariousness on the standard of living resulted in the insurrection since 18 October to now. The working-class and student women, because of our situation of greater precariousness, were at the forefront of the mobilisations. We are on the front line, fighting against the repressive police, in the territorial assemblies, building committees or women's assemblies to discuss politics among ourselves first

and seeking solidarity with our male comrades. Additionally, during the outbreak, we were the most affected: the number of femicides compared to the previous year increased by 21 cases, understanding that the number is even higher because the data considered by the government is lower because of the conception of femicide it has (it considers only the cases in which the woman was killed by her partner), giving a total of 63 femicides during 2019. Political-sexual violence resulting from the police and the military was expressed with greater impetus against us, according to data from the National Institute of Human Rights (INDH), 108 complaints were filed on 166 cases, of which 59 correspond to adult women and 28 to girls/adolescents. The violence registered by this body claims to be related to sexual touching, forced undressing and rape. And there are cases of femicide and disappearances that the press and human rights organisations have not acknowledged.

On 25 November, a day against gender violence, massive mobilisations were held in Dignity Square in Santiago and the rest of the country. And with

the performance created by the group *Las Tesis*, "A Rapist in Your Way", also known as "The Rapist Is You", the claim against violence exerted by the repressive forces against women expanded to the entire world, denouncing the direct responsibility of the Piñera government against the violence we suffer, showing the solidarity of the women's movement worldwide.

The essence of this process is that the struggles of women in Chile, since the insurrection on 18 October, are the same as those of the people as a whole. The departure of Piñera would mean a profound defeat for the political regime and the economic model imposed by the last military dictatorship and defended by the so-called "democratic governments", and therefore a defeat of all the restrictions and violence we experience as women. This is why it is so important that the slogan with which we will march this 8 March be "Out with Piñera" because it is the slogan that brings together the whole movement, and that for the specific situation of women, it makes more sense even for the conditions of greater precariousness in which we live.

In the face of the 26 April plebiscite

For a new constitution and to abolish the fraudulent convention

On 26 April, a plebiscite will be held in Chile with two ballots or questions related to the possible constitutional reform. Given the enormous pressure of the popular rebellion, the Piñera government and the opposition of bosses' parties and the reformist left agreed to launch the manoeuvre of calling for April a plebiscite to consult on constitutional reform and that, if approved, to go to elections for a Constituent Convention in October, along with regional and municipal elections.

This was called the "Agreement for Social Peace and the New Constitution". In this way, they seek to divert the people into the electoral path or weaken the mass mobilisations demanding "Out with Piñera". This agreement was signed on 18 November at the Casa de la Moneda (government palace) by Piñera and his allied parties such as Nacional Renacimiento (RN) and the Independent Democratic Union (UDI) with Christian Democracy (DC), Party for Democracy (PPD), Socialist Party (PS), Radical Party (PR) and a large part of the Broad Front (Commoners, Democratic Revolution, and Gabriel Boric, the leader of Social Convergence, who signed alone and caused a breach in other sectors of the Broad Front). The CP does not sign but still does not demand "Out with Piñera".

With this agreement, the government and the bosses' opposition

seek to simulate a constitutional change, but which would be very limited. The plan is for the convention to be installed in only 2021, and, to have a "new" constitution in 2022 within the restricted framework set by the regime.

The trap already starts from the plebiscite itself. It will have two ballots with questions on them. In the first one, we must answer by Yes or No to the constitutional reform. In the second ballot, in case of a YES victory, the voter has to opt for a mixed convention of parliamentarians (50 per cent) and voted citizens (50 per cent) or for a constituent convention of people 100 per cent elected by vote.

But the manoeuvre does not end there. The second question on the ballot paper appears to be positive since 100 per cent of the constituents would be elected by vote. But it would not be a truly Free and Sovereign Constituent because the "Peace Agreement" already has established the obligatory nature that whatever the form of the constituent convention, the constitutional changes must be made with a quorum (for all its articles) of two-thirds, disproportionately high. Besides, "the free trade agreements that serve economic groups and perpetuate the interests of billionaires were declared untouchable in either option. It will not even be possible to ask for the early resignation of the government as we are demanding today with Piñera" (MST



Piñera wants a Fraudulent Constituent Assembly

Statement, 16 February 2020).

This is why the MST has been denouncing this manoeuvre and is calling for intervention in the plebiscite with these two slogans: "Let us approve the first ballot for a New Constitution! Let us annul the second ballot with its fraudulent conventions! Or vote YES on the first ballot and cast a blank or spoiled ballot paper on the second question. This is the position that is growing in the meetings and among wide swathes of the Chilean people and youth.

"In short, the two options are so fraudulent that no Chilean who truly goes for the victory of the people can accept them.

"The second ballot should not only be a reason for an objection at the time of the vote count. It must be spoiled with clarity and forcefulness to continue our struggle against Piñera and for a true Constituent Assembly, free of Piñera and the corrupt parliament that acts by passing laws against the social explosion and the dignity of the people" (MST Statement, 16 February 2020).

“For a new political alternative”

The following is part of a long talk¹ we had with Rainier Rios, aka “Oso” (Bear). “Oso” was president of the Student Federation at the Alberto Hurtado University. He currently participates in the Yungay Assembly and is part of the National Directorate of the Movimiento Socialista de los Trabajadores [Socialist Workers Movement], Chilean section of the IWU-FI.

“To succeed, we have a great task ahead of us: to build a new political leadership among the fighters willing to fight to the end for our most heartfelt demands. A leadership that defends democracy that comes from below and that will be prepared to show bare naked the false democracy of the rich and corrupt, willing to confront and defeat the bosses—the real power in the shadows—and the Americans, working for a government of the workers, the assemblies and the people.”

You say that without the help of the parliamentarians, Piñera would have fallen.

Exactly. On the night of 25 October, Piñera was on the ropes. Millions of people throughout the country faced and defeated the state of siege, the curfew, the military and the Carabineros (police). One little push and Piñera would have fallen.

The agreement “for peace and democracy” was the political backing Piñera needed to continue repressing, and he got it.

But the Communist Party (CP) did not sign the agreement and neither did many groups of the Broad Front (FA)?

There are two ways to betray. The



Rainier “Oso” Rios, describing the fight of the Chilean people (Argentina 2019)

way of Gabriel Boric (leader of the Broad Front) is the most shameless because he accepted to sign the agreement. But there is another, less direct way of betrayal. It is a betrayal when the majority of the people demand the exit of the government and this demand is ignored to only demand a Constituent Assembly.

The “pact for peace and democracy” was a manoeuvre by the Piñeraism to continue the repression.

They don’t want to change the constitution but the government was in such a crisis that it understood the Constituent Assembly as offered by the parliamentarians—in a shamelessly fraudulent form, trimmed down and far away from the outburst—was a lifeline and not a commitment to change the constitution. The CP and the Broad Front contributed to this manoeuvre, even if they later criticised it partially. It is true.

The people have identified them

all as traitors.

The people have woken up and know that the right-wing and the parliamentary opposition are ruling to sustain this unfair situation. They know that the CP and the Broad Front also do the same.

Both the right-wing and the New Majority have ruled for the economic groups.

It is so. And the economic groups together with the transnationals are those behind all the politicians who have plundered the country. The terrible thing is they have always had the support of union leaders, like Barbara Figueroa of CUT [United Workers Centre], or student and social leaders who have never wanted to confront them, since they live off this corrupt system. MUS² is not a front of a democratic struggle.

2 Social Unity Roundtable (MUS) is made up of the main trade union, student, environmental, feminist and human rights leaders with predominance of the CP and the Broad Front in its leadership.

1 Taken from *Opcion Anticapitalista* [Anticapitalist Option], No 73, January 2020, paper of MST.

It is the old leaderships that continue to act to defeat our struggle and collaborate with the politicians so that everything remains the same.

One thing that attracted most attention was your call to form a new broad political movement of struggle. Can you explain to us what this is about?

The streets, which have been the stage of our struggle, pose the need to unite all of us who have genuinely dedicated ourselves to building a better future. What does it mean to unite? It means not to let go of the streets because the struggle is essential, but that alone is not enough.

We must broaden our organisation so that the power of the people who have awakened and that exists in the streets is reaffirmed with thousands of neighbourhood assemblies, with unions self-convened and free of bureaucrats, with student assemblies of struggle. To succeed, we need to organise, reflect, and decide democratically.

This double power, which is broad but still embryonic in its organisation, must grow, be centralised to call for broader struggles and more decisive battles. Finally, we are fighting to end the government and we must be consistent.

We must aim to build a new political leadership, broad and of struggle, to install a new government with the only ones who will rule for the people and the workers, those from below and those who are fighting today.

Who should build it?

It must arise from the unity of the comrades who have been carrying out this struggle on the streets, in the neighbourhoods, in the assemblies, in the schools and the marches. Many groups and grouplets are being formed today throughout the country.

We believe those who betray us are quite a few. They are the leaders who are happy to run a union like a personal fiefdom or happy to hold a parliamentary post. Those who like to sit down with the bosses to feel



"Our call is to the comrades who dared to march, build a barricade, and confront the repression"

important and being recognised by them.

The vast majority have never sold out. They are thousands of new comrades and thousands of old left-wing cadres; honest and combative fighters who still remain in the struggle and have repudiated their old traitorous leaders.

Somehow, not so obvious, the Broad Front also set out to build something new, but it turned out to be a complete farce. What should we do so as not to fail? What should be the limits of a movement like the one you are proposing?

The Broad Front was and is an instrumental party whose real aim was to take advantage of a minor reform of the electoral system to win parliamentary seats. It was a party that implicitly bore the label of something different, but in reality, neither by program nor by activity was it. This is why this uprising caught them on the opposite side of the tracks from those who came out to fight. As the rank and file joined in the struggle, the leaders were eager to support Piñera and his repression and to divert the struggle to the fraudulent Constituent.

First: We must all take part in the most important decisions.

Second: We must define that our construction is with those who struggle and on the streets; among the most exploited, the most oppressed by this

system.

Third: Our goal must be that the workers, the assemblies and the native peoples govern.

What should those who join the MST do?

We are all dedicated to the formation of this new political alternative. We struggle to achieve the greatest unity of those of us who have been on the streets since 18 October.

We have set out to organise all our friends, family, work and school mates and those who are for the building of a new political leadership. We propose to hold a weekly meeting to discuss politics and to organise activities to continue contributing to the struggle. Our call is to the comrades who dared to march, build a barricade, and confront the repression so that together we can put this movement in motion.

My opinion is we should not allow others to do this. It must be us and now.

And to those who were or still are part of the old left parties, I would like to remind them it is NOT you; it was your leaders who were the traitors. You must break with those old parties and put yourself on the front line in the formation of this new movement.

If you want to join the MST, our door is open to receive you. If you want to join something new, you will have all the help you need from us and from every new comrade who joins the MST.

Chile and the Constituent Assembly slogan

Mercedes Petit

Leader of Izquierda Socialista / IWL-FI

There are always debates on the left about the use of this slogan. In Chile, the masses deeply feel the demand for a Constituent Assembly and this slogan is present in all mobilisations. This is logical since the 1980 constitution imposed by the Pinochet dictatorship is still in force. It was never repealed, neither by the right-wing governments nor by those of the "Concertation of the Christian Democracy and Socialist Party, which the Communist Party joined in the last government.

This is why the MST, the section of the IWU-FI in Chile, has raised it among its most important slogans to promote the mobilisation. It proposes it linked to other demands that are driving the mobilisation, where the main one is "Out with Piñera!" together with the need to fight for a government of the working class and the popular sectors, to promote the fundamental changes (see declaration in *El Socialista* N 442, www.izquierdasocialista.org).

Also, bourgeois sectors and left-wing parties such as the CP and the Broad Front (FA) have taken up the demand for the Constituent Assembly. But neither the CP nor the FA raises the slogan of the masses "Out with Piñera!" They are only proposing a parliamentary impeachment of the president. Even some sectors of the government are talking about a "new constitution" or a reform. The president of the Senate Jaime Quintana, a bosses' politician in opposition, said: "We are in a constituent moment" (*La Tercera*, 26 October 2019). It cannot even be ruled out that, to

decompress, they will accept a partial constitutional reform or even an election of constituent deputies. This shows that a fair democratic demand as a constituent can also be a trap for the mass movement. The regime's parties can use it to paralyse or divert the revolutionary mobilisation that wants to oust Piñera.

Therefore, amid a popular rebellion like the one that exists in Chile, it is wrong to propose a constituent assembly as the main or "strategic" slogan. The central slogan is the struggle for a workers' government.

Regrettably, once again, sectors of Trotskyism, such as the PTR/PTS, fall into this error. With the signature of Juan Valenzuela (PTR), in *La Izquierda Diario* (LID, the web publication of the PTS and its groups), PTS proposes:

"[...] at the same time that we develop coordination and self-organisation so that the working class becomes the subject of its destiny, we propose the slogan of a free and sovereign constituent assembly." And his final proposal is forceful: "the plan is to overthrow the Piñera government and replace it with a constituent assembly that will assume legislative and provisionally executive functions."

And although Valenzuela mentions in his article the "government of the workers", they leave it aside to synthesise their "strategy" into "self-organisation and constituency".

His explanation is hardly new: "However, we understand that even most workers do not think a new state can emerge from their self-organisation, a government of

workers." So, since the majority does not believe in workers' government, the PTR/PTS proposes the "strategy" of self-organisation and constituent assembly. This is an opportunist capitulation to the illusions in bourgeois democracy the majority of workers have.

The method used by the PTR/PTS to elaborate its program and slogans is opposed to the one Trotsky taught us. He said that a revolutionary party, must "In the first line give a clear honest picture of the objective situation, of the historic tasks which flow from this situation irrespective as to whether or not the workers are today ripe for this. Our tasks don't depend on the mentality of the workers. The task is to develop the mentality of the workers."

For this reason, the strategic slogan in Chile, as in every acute revolutionary process, is not elections to a constituent assembly but to fight for "Out with Piñera" and for a government of the workers and the people.

We need to promote, as the MST does, social demands (salary, retirement, health, education, etc.) and elections to a Free and Sovereign Constituent Assembly and to develop the neighbourhood, student and union assemblies to build an alternative of workers' and people's power.

* Published in *El Socialista*, N0 443, Argentina, 6 November 2019.

** *The Political Backwardness of American Workers*, 19 May 1938, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1940/05/backwardness.htm>.



Paris: Massive demonstrations against Macron's reforms

The fight against pension reform continues

Virginia de la Siega

The railway workers, bus drivers and Metro engineers in Paris felt the 50-day strike. But despite having to return to work, the fight against the pension reform continues in other ways.

The latest issue of *The Economist*¹ asks how President Emmanuel Macron's popularity can be so low when the French economy is a success: it is growing faster than the German economy, and unemployment is falling. The explanation for this conundrum is that France is in a deep political and social crisis because Macron decided to pass, by whatever means, his pension reform.

Despite almost three months of workers' struggle and thousands

of amendments submitted by the opposition, on 24 February they approved the first article of the 65 that the reform has. The absolute majority of the government party (LREM, *La République En Marche!* [The Republic on the move!]) in the National Assembly (the lower house) and the complicity of the senators mean that, if everything continues as it has been, the bill will be approved, although not within the peremptory deadlines that Macron wants. As long as the government does not tire of "parliamentary obstruction" and passes the reform by decree.

Just because the railway and urban public transport workers have lifted the strike, it does not mean the struggle is over. The "punch" actions of the different sectors that go on strike follow one another. The dancers and musicians

of the Paris Opera are performing in the open air. Lawyers go on strike and paralyse the trials by blocking the entrance to the courts. Health and emergency service workers have been on strike for almost a year, and medical chiefs have resigned en masse from their administrative posts. High school students, assisted by their teachers, are also on strike, blocking schools and high schools and refusing to take exams. Feminists dressed as "Rosie the Riveter"² sing against Macron and his reform, which heavily penalises women, and execute his lynching in dance steps.

The question that comes up, again

² **Rosie the Riveter** was a cultural icon of the Second World War, representing the women who worked in factories and shipyards, many of whom produced munitions and war supplies.

and again, is: How is it possible that a mobilisation that has over 70 per cent of the population's support has failed in getting the project withdrawn?

The answer is simple. In 21st-century France, the only way to win against the government is to unify all the struggles and paralyse the country for an indefinite period. So, the real question is another: How is it possible that with the enormous popular support the movement had and has the country has not been paralysed?

The union bureaucracy: Pressuring for better negotiations

It is obviously not the responsibility of the railway workers and public transport drivers in Paris, who fought like lions for 50 days, preventing buses, Metro trains, trams and trains from leaving by picketing with workers from other sectors and members of the anti-reform neighbourhood groups. Those responsible for this frustration are union leaderships.

The role of the CFDT (French Democratic Confederation of Labour) and UNSA (National Union of Autonomous Trade Unions) is a grey area. The CFDT, the trade union centre with the largest number of members in France, agrees with the reform, although it demands some compensation, such as no minimum retirement age and the consideration of the unhealthiness of certain jobs in calculating the retirement age. The UNSA is the leading union among public transport workers. In response to the strike of 5 December, both CFDT and UNSA called for the strike to be lifted for the end of the year celebrations. But it was the UNSA that came off worst: its call to end the strike was rejected in all the transport workers' assemblies.

It is more important to analyse the role of the Interunion —formed by CGT (General Confederation of Labour); FO (Worker's Forces); FSU (Unitary Union Federation); CGC-CGE (General Confederation of Managers and Executives); and

Solidaires)— which proposes the total withdrawal of the reform. The main union of the Interunion is the CGT, the second-largest union in France in terms of membership and the biggest crowd-pullers. To get an idea of its role, on 10 December, the workers of the ports and refineries, sectors where the CGT has great influence, joined the transport strike. After three days of paralysed ports and refineries, the French bourgeoisie was terrified of the danger of fuel shortages and the blockade of the ports. It was then the CGT called for the strike to be lifted. Something similar happened when the EDF (Electricity of France) workers at the nuclear power plants stopped and threatened to paralyse them, or when selective power cuts were made to companies and ministries. While defending the right of workers to take such actions, the CGT called for "responsibility and professionalism" in calling for the measures to be lifted. But the clearest boycott of the strike by the CGT was on 19 December. On that day, when rail and transport workers were on strike for 15 days, CGT General Secretary Philippe Martinez not only had no word of encouragement but called on all workers to "join a new day of interprofessional action" on 9 January. When the strikers demanded the funds of the trade union centres be used to pay for the lost days, none responded.

Throughout the strike, the Interunion and CFDT and UNSA continued taking part in all the meetings called by the government to discuss the reform.

At the height of the struggle, when for all observers the broad popular sympathy with the strike was a symptom the reform had crystallised the people's dissatisfaction with Macron and his government, the CGT not only kept calling for isolated days of strike and mobilisation but never raised a program of unification of all sectors in the struggle. Convinced that with public opinion against it, the government would negotiate, the union bureaucrats used the anger of the workers to put pressure on them and force them to reach an agreement. Not to win the struggle. They applied the same policy that led to the defeat of the struggle against the reform of the labour contract law in 2016, and against the privatisation of SNCF [French Railways] last year. The union bureaucracy still does not seem to realise this government is not in the least interested in popular opinion. They are there to implement their neo-liberal reform at any cost.

The beginning of workers' self-organisation

The positive elements of this strike remain to be analysed. Confronted with the union leaderships that betrayed them, the workers and the social



Railway workers mobilise defending their gains

movement began the experience of self-organisation in the neighbourhoods and around the train stations and bus depots of Paris and Greater Paris. With assemblies voting on the strike almost daily and a calendar of “punch” actions, they channelled solidarity into the strikers.

The most advanced sector of this experience is the RATP/SNCF (Autonomous Transport Company of Paris/National Railway Company) coordination. Based on the experience of the Inter-Station coordination, formed in 2016 during the struggle against the privatisation of SNCF, the railway workers used the three months preceding the strike to prepare for it, establishing links with other sectors of the railway and RATP, whether or not unionised. The assemblies, which brought together representatives from various stations and depots, discussed everything from the continuation of the strike to the criteria for distributing the money collected.

It was thanks to this solidarity effort that the strikers could hold out for 50 days. It was also thanks to the assembly discussions that they understood there was no point in continuing a strike that was becoming a minority and that resuming work was to retreat to return with more strength when the opportunity presented itself. Given the difficulties of the government and the new sectors that are turning to the struggle (although for now none of these can replace them given the importance of public transport), the opportunity may soon present itself.

The workers are drawing up their balance sheet. This new vanguard that is emerging realised that its embryonic nature did not allow it to set itself up in the strike's leadership. At the same time, they are aware, as Karim, one leader of the Pavillon-sous-Bois depot, says that without them “the unions would have had their hands free to call for the suspension of the strike in late December and that would have killed the movement.”¹

1 <https://www.revolutionpermanente.fr/La-coordination-RATP-SNCF-et-l-auto->



Protesters in Marseilles demonstrate against President Macron's reforms

A new workers' vanguard emerges

The strike also brought to light the emergence of a new vanguard of the French working class from the “quartiers populaires” (working-class quarters) of Paris and the big cities. This new vanguard is made up of the men and women who run the trains, the buses, the Metro, who clean the railway stations, who serve the public in the subway stations, or who sweep the streets. Most are the sons, daughters and grandchildren of Arab and African immigrants who came from the French colonies in the 1960s, the forgotten sons of the French Republic.

An example of their presence in the trade union arena is the RS-RATP (Union Rally of RATP, the public transport company of Paris) union, started by bus drivers from the commune of Aubervilliers, on the outskirts of Paris. For obvious reasons, RATP essentially hires men and women of Arab origin to drive the buses in the suburbs. Faced with the isolation they suffer in the official trade unions, a group of young people, mostly Maghrebi from Aubervilliers, formed their union. A few months after its creation, they got 18 per cent of the votes in the 2019 union elections. Their program: unionism without paid

organisation-de-la-base.

union officers.

Ignored, attacked by the fascist right for “not being French” because they are Muslims and have dark skin and frizzy hair, these young people emerge as anti-bureaucratic leaders from the grassroots. Their presence in the disputes and “punch” actions, such as when the SNCF/RATP Coordination occupied CFDT headquarters to protest against the cancellation of the strike, is publicised by social media. The daily *Libération* dedicated an article to them entitled “*SNCF: fils d'immigrés, la voie militante*” (SNCF: children of immigrants, the militant way)² to interview Farid Errouihi, Karim Dabaj and Anasse Kazib, delegates from *Gare du Nord* (Paris North train station). Anasse Kazib, (a member of the New Anticapitalist Party, NPA), has become the most well-known leader of the strike.

The workers need their program

Faced with this situation, once again the CGT leadership shows its lack of vocation to lead the movement. After almost three months of strikes and actions in which the labour and popular movement showed its imagination and its desire to fight, Philippe Martinez had no better idea than to declare to

2 https://www.liberation.fr/france/2018/06/07/sncf-fils-d-immigres-la-voie-militante_1657483.



Workers paralyse 280 km of ParisMetro network

repressions against the yellow vests, they will take part in the mobilisation against police repression. In the cards, there is also the call for a national march against the reform, which will take place in Paris, and a national meeting of coordinating committees and collectives in the struggle.

What the workers have to be aware of is that what is at stake is not only the pension reform but who runs the country. In this battle, Macron has to show the great French bosses he is the only one who can implement the neo-liberal reforms they have been waiting for decades. Macron and his party know they are fighting not just to remain in power for the next two years but for his re-election in 2022. This is why the only initiative that can stop them is an indefinite general strike which combines the determination of the railway and public transport workers with that of other sectors that are already or have been in the struggle, whether or not unionised. The experience of this strike is leading French workers to realise this. What they need to be aware of now is that a program and a national plan of struggle that unites them is indispensable if they are to win. And, why not, as some are putting it, think about why they should not be the ones to rule.

the daily *La Croix*, that “There are strikes. Not at the level, I would like, but there are. But I understand all those who can’t make ends meet and for whom an hour of a strike is one shopping trolley less full at the end of the month.”¹ This is his justification for not extending the conflict, and for declaring that the next day of fighting will be 31 March. Faced with this attitude of the union bureaucracy and the threat that the government will pass the reform by decree, different sectors of the combative unionism and the social

movement are already circulating at the regional and national level calls to take to the streets the day this happens.

In the meantime, the different coordinating committees have organised a calendar of struggles: on 5 March, university lecturers and researchers go on strike. On 5 and 6 March, on the occasion of the disciplinary hearings against the bus drivers who went on strike, the various union and neighbourhood committees and the SNCF/RATP Coordinating Committees are calling for mobilisation in solidarity. On 8 March, workers will take their place in the demonstration for Women’s Day. On 14 March, the anniversary of one of the most violent

¹ <https://www.la-croix.com/Economie/Social/Philippe-Martinez-reforme-retraites-rien-nest-encore-joue-2020-02-10-1201077451>.

The political and social crisis deepens

The problem for the French bourgeoisie is that although the institutions of the Fifth Republic are strong, the political system is very fragile. The two-party system was blown up by the election of Macron in 2017. The Socialist Party is shattered and the

Republicans, although a little better, cannot reorganise. Neither of them recovered from the losses incurred by the deputies, senators, and mayors who sided with Macron. This prevents them from taking advantage of the situation provided by the amateurism

and incompetence of the government.

On 31 January parliament became a laughing stock when LREM majority rejected an amendment to extend the leave of absence from five to 12 days for the death of a child. The argument by Minister of Labour Muriel Pénicaud

was that there was no way the employers could be asked to cover those extra days and she suggested that the co-workers of those affected “donate” their leave days to them. The scandal was such that MEDEF—the French employers’ union—had to come out and say they would gladly pay for the days off and asked for a repeat vote in the National Assembly. Given the scandal and the general discredit this vote caused, Macron had to go out and state the decision of his party’s parliamentarians showed a lack of “humanity” and asked them to reconsider the amendment.

Dealing with the reform is another inventory of the mistakes and unpreparedness by Macron and his gang. The bill the Executive Branch had submitted to the Council of State, the country’s highest administrative authority, was rejected. According to administrative experts, not only there are holes in the reform’s rationale but the feasibility studies are meagre and incomplete. Worse still no one knows how much the point will be worth or how the reform will be financed. The Council of State also declared unconstitutional several articles of the law. To overcome the disaster, the government called the MEDEF and the unions to a National Financing Conference to see who would pay for the reform. Result of the discussions: the president of the big French bosses, Geoffroy Roux de Bézieux, stated they had not asked for this reform and it would only make sense if it was to force workers to work until the age of 64. If no agreement is reached on that point, they will withdraw their support. He declared himself against the condition demanded by the CFDT, the only union that supports the reform.

Meanwhile, the bill presented in the National Assembly faces over 40,000 amendments submitted not only by the opposition but also, some, by the own LREM parliamentarians. The executive planned to get the law passed before the March local government elections so it could be discussed by



Macron faces a strong rejection with thousands on the streets

the Senate and finally adopted before the close of the summer sessions. Faced with the number of amendments, the government is planning applying constitutional clause 49-3, which allows it to have the law adopted without a vote in the National Assembly. But if it does so, it will face a serious political problem: 72 per cent of the population is opposed to 49-3. This has caused a jolt within the LREM. Twenty-one members of parliament have already disaffiliated from the party, and one “leftist” group said they would reject the forced passage of the law.

And all this against the backdrop of local government elections. The few ethnic politicians in the government, who come from either the SP or the Republicans, have realised they will lose big in the big cities, which is what brought them to power. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Public Action and Accounts, who come from the Republicans, the old bourgeois right, decided to run again as candidates in the cities where they were already

mayors. The idea is to have a place to go when the next government restructuring comes after the disaster. Another symptom of the internal crisis is that in several cities, Macronism is divided, with one “official” and one “opposition” candidate. The most glaring case is Paris, where Cedric Villani, a mathematical genius, was excluded from LREM for maintaining his candidacy for mayor against Benjamin Griveaux, a former government spokesperson and a friend of Macron. All of this until last week, when the “official” candidate had to resign when a porn video he had sent to his lover was made public. During this upheaval, Health Minister Agnes Buzyn—the only “presentable” candidate left to Macronism—replaced Griveaux. Only, as all observers noted, the minister is leaving office just as we face the danger of a coronavirus epidemic. This vaudeville opened the possibility of regrouping to the Republicans, who are presenting a former minister of Sarkozy, the only candidate who could face the current socialist mayor of Paris, Ana Hidalgo.



Controls with thermal imaging devices in Wuhan (China) where the coronavirus pandemic began

Coronavirus, health, and capitalism

Miguel Sorans

The global impact of the emergence of coronavirus is undeniable. China is the epicentre of the pandemic but it has already spread to 76 countries. There is a debate about whether or not the danger is exaggerated. But there are other questions just as or more important. The capitalist world and its governments: Are they prepared to respond effectively to the health emergency? Why do cholera, Ebola or dengue fever also grow? China is semi-paralysed. World trade will be affected and there will be a further drop in production. Less health and more misery for the people.

In early March, there were over 95,000 cases of coronavirus in the world. Outside of China, the centres are South Korea (5,000 infected), Italy (over 3,000) and Iran (2,400). All kinds of discussions have been opened. Some say that the magnitude of coronavirus is exaggerated, citing that deaths from flu are much higher. This is true. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), each year between 290,000 and 650,000 people die from the flu. For now, there are about 3,000 deaths worldwide.

We, revolutionary socialists, place ourselves far from the apocalyptic and the deniers. We are not experts

in medical science. But WHO itself and many qualified scientists around the world point out that a final verdict on the scope of this virus cannot yet be given. The origin is not confirmed and there is no vaccine yet. The head of WHO, Tedros Ghebreyesus, said on 12 February "this epidemic can go in any direction". It was a preview of the subsequent global expansion that in March would reach 76 countries, including the United States.

However, for the people of the world, the underlying debate is another. We must ask ourselves: Why do hundreds of thousands die from the flu? Why are eradicated diseases such as cholera or

measles re-emerging? Why is the Ebola epidemic not being halted in Africa and new viruses, such as Covid-19, are emerging? All this has to do with what capitalism is: an unfair, irrational system for the rich. The breeding ground for the growth of the disease is growing misery, overcrowdings, environmental changes, and health systems based on private capital profits. The coronavirus outbreak exposed, for example, the weakness of capitalist China. The dictatorship of the Communist Party of China (CPC) censored and repressed the doctor who issued the first alert. This one-month delay eased the worsening of the epidemic in China and the world.

The panic among the masses is created by capitalist governments. No one trusts them or the public health systems that are in crisis around the world. The policy of the capitalist-imperialist system, starting with the United States, is to reduce state-run public health to favour the private health business (private hospitals and health clinics) and the multinationals of the pharmaceutical industry. There is a collapse of global public health. In Italy alone, the eighth world power, it is estimated that nine million people cannot access health care because they cannot afford it or the local hospital has disappeared.

Cholera, Ebola, measles and dengue fever on the rise

This collapse of capitalism is expressed in the persistence of epidemics of cholera, Ebola, the epidemic resurgence of dengue fever and the reappearance of measles.

Researchers estimate that each year there are between 1.3 and 4.0 million cases of cholera in the world and between 21,000 and 143,000 deaths from this cause.¹

The current Ebola epidemic in the Democratic Republic of Congo is the tenth since 1976 and the second most serious in history after West Africa in 2014–2016 (11,000 deaths in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea). As of

October 2019, 3,197 cases had been reported, of which 2,136 cases died (overall fatality rate of 67 per cent).

In the first seven months of 2019, 364,808 cases of measles had been reported worldwide. The disease was considered eradicated. A figure three times bigger than for the same period in 2018 (129,239 cases). Considering the fragility of surveillance systems in many countries, it is estimated the actual number of cases is likely to be 10 times higher.

In 2019, 3,139,335 cases of dengue fever, a mosquito-borne infection, were reported and caused 1,538 deaths. Brazil remains the country with the highest number of infected people: 2,226,865. There is a strong resurgence in Paraguay and Argentina. With HIV, although mortality has dropped by 33 per cent since 2010, in 2018, for example, 770,000 people died.

The report “A World at Risk” by the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board (GPMB), headed by Gro Harlem Brundtland, former Norwegian Prime Minister and WHO Director-General, says they regret that current efforts to prepare for these outbreaks as with Ebola are “insufficient”, and the recommendations made in previous reports “were ignored by world leaders” (*Infobae*, 18 September 2019).

Multinationals, vaccines and the health business

The health crisis for the people is aggravated by the inhuman voracity of the private pharmaceutical industry taken over by large multinationals. For them, epidemics and diseases are good business.

For example, the personal net worth of Stephane Bancel, CEO of American laboratory Moderna, grew after the company sent an experimental coronavirus vaccine to the American National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases for clinical trials on humans, which boosted the company's stock price.

There is a dispute between different capitalist countries and, mainly from their private laboratories, to discover

a vaccine on their own and have a patent to sell that product. “The British pharmaceutical giant Glaxo Smith Kline (GSK) has already begun to develop a project. The race is fast and the first one will take the biggest prize” (*Clarín*, Argentina, 5 February 2020).

It has reached such a point that the director of WHO himself, the Ethiopian Tedros Ghebreyesus, denounced “some rich countries are holding up information about cases of coronavirus; I claim greater international solidarity to fight the epidemic in China” (*Clarín*, 5 February 2020).

The capitalist must pay for the coronavirus crisis

The capitalist-imperialist system and its governments do not guarantee an adequate response to this humanitarian crisis, which is affecting millions. They are taking measures such as suspending massive sporting or artistic events. They encourage panic to cover up a major disaster without dealing with the root problem.

The people of the world must take to the streets and demand real measures from their governments in the emergency. Let those at the top, the capitalists, take responsibility. We must demand urgent funds be turned over to substantially increase health budgets to attend to the health emergency. Funds to, among other measures, expand and improve health facilities, to give salary increases to all health professionals, to make new hires and to give free medicines to all. These funds should come out of high progressive taxes on business groups, financial capital and the non-payment of the foreign debts. For a single, state-run national health system, with free consultations, treatments, and medicines paid for by the state and administered by users, doctors, the workers and the professionals in the sector. For the nationalisation of the laboratories of medical specialities and to make them function under the control of the workers and health scientists and doctors.

5 March 2020

¹ <https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/cholera>.

The Chinese connection

We all know the coronavirus epidemic began in China in December in the city of Wuhan, capital of the Hubei Province. At the time of writing this article, the number of cases had reached over 80,000. From there it spread to the world. Why did it originate in China?

Nicolas Maduro gave one of the most absurd versions. He warned, “the coronavirus might be a weapon of war being used against China and now against the peoples of the world in general” (*Infobae*, 28 February 2020). Not even the Chinese government suggested such a thing.

We must seek the causes of the emergence and development of coronavirus in the social crisis that exists in capitalist China. In its tremendous social inequalities with about a billion workers and peasants living in exploited, overcrowded, and miserable conditions compared to some 400 million rich and upper-middle-class people.

This epidemic shows the true face of the CPC dictatorship when imperialism and the bourgeois media have been praising it as an example of the “modernity” of capitalism. While sectors of the reformist left, such as Chavismo, Lulismo or Castroism, praise it as an example of a so-called “Socialism of the 21st Century”.

In the first researches about the origins of the coronavirus, they suspected that it emerged in the massive public markets of Wuhan, where live animals are sold: from chickens, pigs to birds and reptiles, which often are slaughtered in the market. They also sell everything from foxes and bats to snakes. They believed that some of these animals may have transmitted the virus. The Chinese government justified these practices, which are unhealthy and prohibited in many parts of the world, as an “ancestral cultural” issue. When in reality these markets, which take place in China and other parts of the world,



City of Wuhan, where the pandemic began

results from the misery and inequality of the people. It is a tradition that originates from the misery and famine generated by capitalist exploitation.

The coronavirus epidemic also takes place within the framework of the deterioration of the Chinese health system because of privatisations. Since the 1949 revolution, the system has been state-run and free. With the capitalist restoration, “45 per cent of the country’s urban population and 80 per cent of the global population do not have any kind of health insurance, recently admitted by Vice Minister of Health Gao Qiang” (Andres Oppenheimer, *Cuentos Chinos* [Tall Tales], page 61, Editorial Sudamericana, 2005).

The repressive and censorial management of the dictatorship reveals the seriousness of the coronavirus epidemic. For this reason, the data on deaths and infections are dubious, since the only source of information is the CPC.

The most serious case of censorship and repression was to ophthalmologists Li Wenliang. On 30 December, he issued the first alert that authorities did not take into account. To make matters worse, days after this call became known, officials from the public security office (police) showed

up to warn him he was “committing a serious offence”. Unfortunately, the doctor had already caught the virus and died on 7 February.

The dictatorship, by denying this warning, probably deepened the worsening of the epidemic and its connection with the rest of the world. The repudiation of the central government was such that they had to remove the two main leaders of the CPC from Wuhan to contain the people’s hatred.

The other side of the coronavirus is the consequences in the world capitalist economic crisis. China is the world’s largest exporter, and the record fall in industrial production because of the closure of enterprises will hurt the whole capitalist world. It already transcends China’s frameworks. Everything related to the tourism industry, for example, is affected. Oil production and prices are falling. The crisis of the capitalist economy that has been going on since 2007 will deepen. The multinationals are worried about their huge profit losses in China and the world. Imperialism and its governments will try to deepen their austerity plans and plunder of the working class and the people. The wave of people’s revolts shows that it will not be that easy for them.



A Stock Market crash was coming, coronavirus was just the spark

The global crisis of the capitalist economy and the coronavirus

Miguel Sorans

On Monday, 9 March, the world stock markets collapsed. A new “Black Monday” for the world capitalist economy. Wall Street stopped trading for 15 minutes. The price of oil fell to US\$33 a barrel. In January, it was at US\$63. The price cut is an emergency move that Wall Street set up during the 2008 crisis to avoid panic selling. But the panic had already settled in between the capitalists, finance capital and the multinationals. And it’s not just because of the coronavirus.

Wall Street suffered its worst crash since 2008. All the stock markets in

the world fell. In Mexico and Brazil, governments devalued currencies.

Many economists and business analysts attempt to attribute the new explosion and collapse of the capitalist economy to the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. The consequences of the coronavirus undoubtedly have an influence. But the coronavirus is not the central cause of the new global economic crash. The coronavirus pandemic is very important. Already over 110,000 people are infected worldwide and it affected about 100 countries.

The coronavirus deepens the existing acute crisis of the world capitalist economy. The capitalist-imperialist system still cannot overcome the acute economic crisis opened in 2007—2008. This is demonstrated by reality.

“The world capitalist economy has already slowed to a near ‘stall speed’ of about 2.5% a year. The US is growing at just 2% a year, Europe and Japan at just 1%; and the major so-called emerging economies of Brazil, Mexico, Turkey, Argentina, South Africa and Russia are basically static. The huge economies of India and China have



Two tourists sit in an empty San Marco Square in Venice, Italy on 8 March 2020

also slowed significantly in the last year. And now the shutdown from COVID-19 has pushed the Chinese economy into a ravine.

“The OECD – which represents the planet’s 36 most advanced economies – is now warning of the possibility that the impact of COVID-19 would halve global economic growth this year from its previous forecast. The OECD lowered its central growth forecast from 2.9 per cent to 2.4 per cent, but said a ‘longer lasting and more intensive coronavirus outbreak’ could slash growth to 1.5 per cent in 2020.” (<https://braveneweuropa.com/michael-roberts-disease-debt-and-depression>)

The coronavirus added “more fuel to the fire” of the capitalist economic crisis. The coronavirus emerged in China (see “China: Coronavirus and Dictatorship”, in Spanish at www.uit-ci.org, in English at <https://www.facebook.com/WITFIUK/>). China is the world’s largest exporter, and the record fall in industrial production because of the closure of companies is already having a negative impact on the whole capitalist world. It already transcends China’s frameworks. Everything related to the tourism industry, for example, is affected. Oil production and prices are falling. The crisis of the capitalist economy that has been going on since 2007–2008 will deepen. Multinationals are worried about their huge profit losses in China

and the world. The speculative games of the stock markets and oil prices only express the quest to save the wealth of the world’s billionaires. The big problem for humanity is that imperialism and its governments will deepen their austerity plans and plunder of the working class and the people.

The sudden appearance of the coronavirus pandemic is also an expression of the decline of capitalism. The growth of poverty, overcrowding, environmental changes and the collapse of the world’s public health systems are the breeding grounds for the emergence and development of old and new diseases.

Capitalists must pay for the economic and coronavirus crisis

To make matters worse, the coronavirus pandemic is not stopping around the world, although they say that in China the cases have dropped. At the time of writing, there are already over 110,000 infected people in the world, 3,800 dead and over 100 countries affected. Italy has declared the country under quarantine.

The capitalist-imperialist system and its governments do not guarantee an adequate response to this humanitarian crisis that is affecting millions (see “Coronaviruses and the Rise of Dengue Fever”, *El Socialista* No. 451, www.izquierdasocialista.org.ar). They take measures such as suspending

massive sporting or artistic events. They encourage panic to cover up a major disaster without going to the root causes.

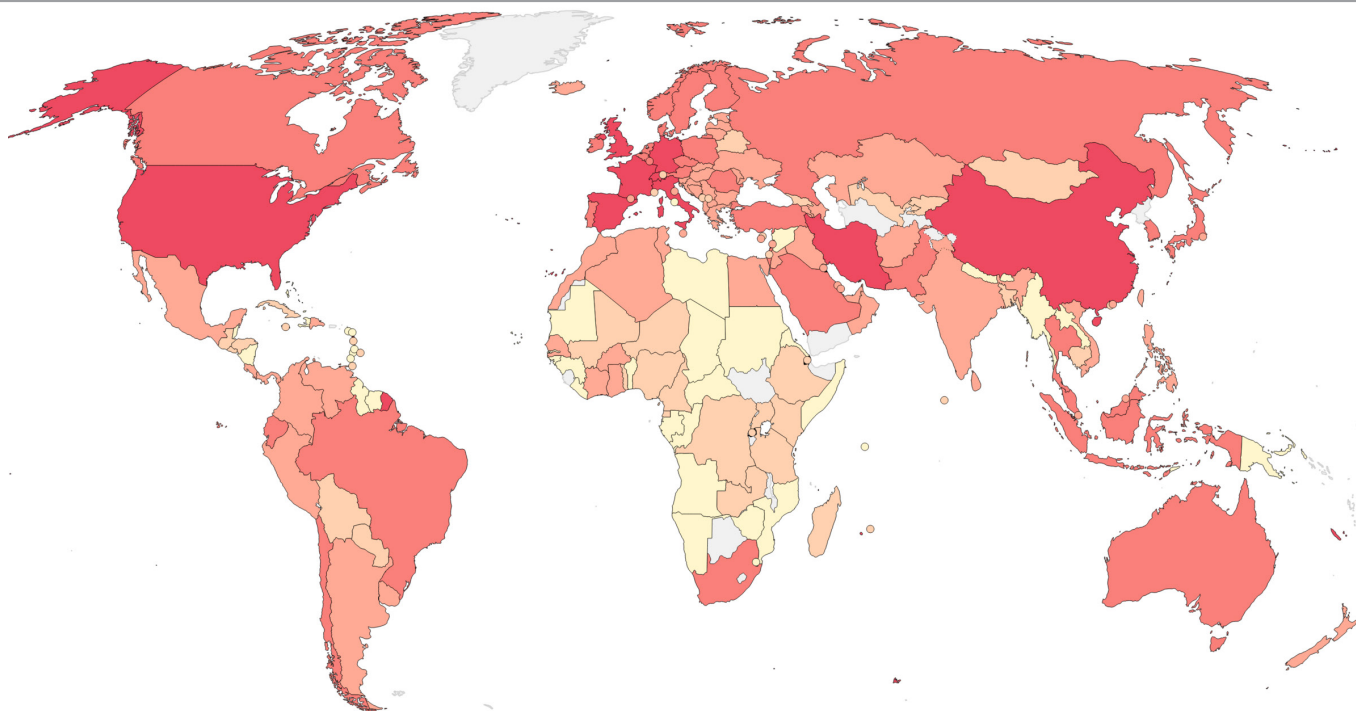
The people of the world have to come out and demand real measures from their governments in the face of the emergency. Let those at the top, the capitalists, take charge. We need to demand that urgent funds be turned over to increase health budgets to attend to the health emergency. Funds to, among other measures, expand and improve health facilities, give salary increases to all health professionals, make new hires and provide free medicines for all. That these funds come out of high progressive taxes on business groups, financial capital and that foreign debts be not paid. For a single, state-run national health system, with free consultations, treatments and medicines paid for by the state and administered by users, doctors, workers and professionals in the sector. For the nationalisation of the laboratories of medical specialities and that they function under the control of the workers and scientists of health and medicine.

As we said above, imperialism and its multinationals will want to use the coronavirus to launch new attempts to further exploit the people. There is already talk of hundreds of thousands of redundancies and suspensions in the companies. They will seek to lower wages with greater currency devaluations in the semi-colonies and greater plundering with the mechanism of the foreign debt.

The workers and the people cannot pay the capitalist crisis and the coronavirus. No layoffs or suspensions. No to the payment of the foreign debt. Money for health and jobs. Let the companies and those above take charge of the crisis.

The rebellions in Chile, France, Lebanon, Iraq, Palestine and other social protests, which are growing in the world, show that the fight against the austerity plans and for the defence of the life of the peoples continues.

9 March 2020



Map of the coronavirus pandemic as of 28 March 2020

International call

Let the capitalists pay for the coronavirus crisis, not the working class and the people!

The world is suffering a calamity. The coronavirus pandemic is spreading out of control. There are hundreds of thousands infected and thousands of dead. What is happening in the world is unprecedented. Borders are being closed; millions of people and countries are being quarantined. The crisis of the health systems under capitalism becomes clear. There are powerful elements of chaos. Panic and uncertainty grow in millions of people not only because of the fear of contagion but also because there is a great distrust of those at the top, of capitalist governments and regimes.

Trump and Bolsonaro, for example, continue to minimise the coronavirus.

The coronavirus can affect anyone. But those who suffer the most, and will suffer the consequences of the pandemic, are the workers, the popular sectors, the exploited and oppressed of the world. We are suffering from the loss of lives, but there are also social consequences on the people. World trade has been affected and there will be a further fall in production. Multinationals will want to make the working class and the people of the world pay for this. Amid the coronavirus crisis, the capitalists want

to save their profits and wealth. They want to cut wages, layoff or suspend without pay. They don't care about the health and safety of the workers.

The capitalist-imperialist system does not guarantee an adequate response to this humanitarian crisis affecting millions. For the revolutionary socialists, the priority is to contain the spread of the coronavirus (Covid-19) and ensure the lives of millions. And for this, we need to fight by any means possible amid the forced quarantine to impose emergency measures in defence of the working people and the popular sectors.

The global health crisis is the responsibility of capitalism

This calamity we are experiencing is the responsibility of the capitalist-imperialist system. Capitalism is an unjust, irrational system for the rich. The breeding ground for the growth of the disease is the increasing misery, overcrowding, environmental changes, and health systems based on the profit of private capital.

The emergence of a new and serious disease like the coronavirus and the continued existence of cholera, Ebola, tuberculosis epidemics, the epidemic resurgence of dengue fever, and the reappearance of measles, they all reveal the collapse of capitalism.

We must seek its causes in the conditions of misery experienced by billions. Over 1.3 billion people are in a situation of “multidimensional poverty”, they lack the fulfilment of needs such as health, education, drinking water, electricity, housing (data from the UN’s World Poverty Report 2019). Twenty-six billionaires (among them Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos, Warren Buffett, Mark Zuckerberg, Amancio Ortega, and Carlos Slim) own the same amount of money as 3.8 billion of the poorest people on the planet. They ask insistently we wash our hands to avoid contagion, but 2.1 billion people in the world lack access to safe drinking water.

Capitalist environmental destruction is also a factor in the spread of new infectious diseases. Even the UN itself, as an imperialist agency, has warned of this.¹ The actions of the multinationals contribute to the poisoning of water by industrial waste and open-pit mega-mining. Jungles and forests are being transformed into

deserts, and plant and animal species are being wiped out. This is the abyss to which capitalism leads us. Never like now is more ratified the historical dilemma of Socialism or Barbarism.

The coronavirus outbreak also revealed the weakness of capitalist China. The dictatorship of the Communist Party of China (CPC) censored and repressed the doctor who issued the first alert at the end of December 2019. This delay of months facilitated the worsening of the epidemic in China and the world.

The health disaster in both the imperialist countries and the semi-colonial countries is coming to light. The data from Italy show the seriousness of the pandemic and that in 10 years the different capitalist governments have burst the public health system, draining €37 billion from the health budget. This is repeated all over the world. In all countries, the state public health system had collapsed before the pandemic began. The private health care business has been favoured. Today we see the consequences. The European press reports, for example, that a coronavirus test in the Spanish state, in private clinics, costs between €300 and €800. In the United States, a country that has almost no state public health, it was reported to be at US\$3,000 or US\$4,000 in a private service. Obama installed a very precarious system that Trump questioned. In semi-colonial countries, this is aggravated.

Let the capitalists pay for the coronavirus crisis

Given the severity of the pandemic, the capitalist governments do not guarantee an adequate response to stop it and save millions. The multinationals (Exxon Mobil, Facebook, Amazon, Wal Mart, Cargill, Bayer-Monsanto, Microsoft, Ford, Toyota, Nike, Alibaba, or Johnson & Johnson) and the big business and financial groups (JP Morgan Chase, Bank of America, Citigroup, HSBC, or Goldman Sachs) want to save their profits over the health of the masses. And the capitalist governments endorse this

logic of exploitation. This policy is best expressed by the head of imperialism, Donald Trump, who continues to downplay the pandemic and has declared that the economy comes before health. He calls for maintaining production and avoiding quarantines or measures to safeguard millions. The same thing is being done by ultra-reactionary governments like Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. Boris Johnson, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, who also denied the importance of the pandemic, has ended up with the virus.

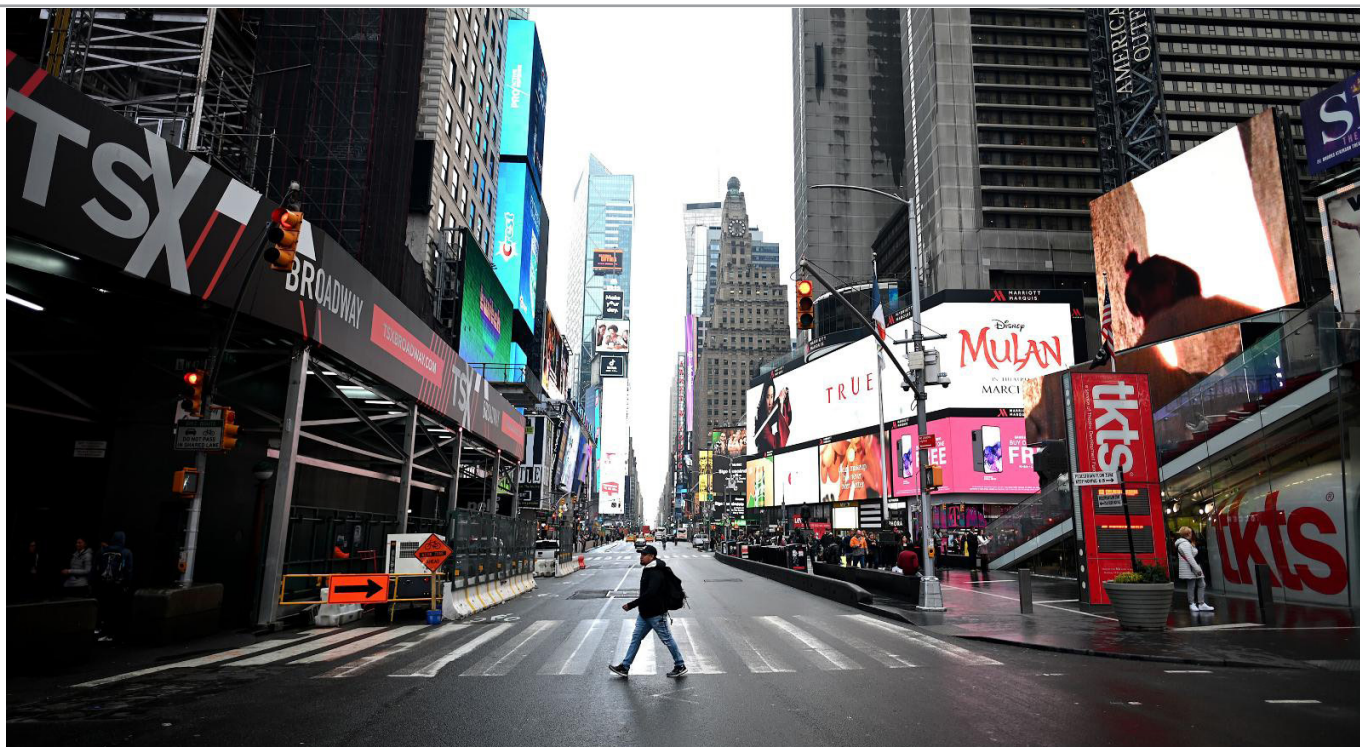
Meanwhile, the United States and the European Union grant billion-dollar state subsidies to save the banks, the multinationals and to avoid the collapse of the bourgeois states, instead of spending additional extraordinary funds, extracted from the great fortunes of the world’s billionaires, on health.

With this same logic of putting capitalist interests before the life and security of the working class and popular sectors, factories and workplaces are kept open, and not only those that provide basic supplies. There are no compulsory safety measures for workers who have to be in essential jobs. It is this contempt for working-class life —shared by the Conte government in Italy, Sanchez-Iglesias in the Spanish State, and other governments— that has provoked a strong response in the form of strikes in northern Italy that finally forced a halt to non-essential production. With similar aims, other partial strikes and protests such as *cacerolazos* (banging of pots and pans), “*balconazos*” (massive clapping from balconies) are taking place in the Spanish State, France, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, and Argentina.

The outbreak of the coronavirus crisis, which has paralyzed economic activity, lights the fuse of the existing crisis of stagnation and retreat of the

¹ “Environmental and human health are intricately intertwined, and many emerging infectious diseases are driven by activities that affect biodiversity. Changes to the landscape (through natural resource extraction and use, for example) can facilitate disease emergence in wildlife, domestic animals, plants and people” (*Global Environment Outlook 6: Summary for Policymakers*, p. 10, a report by 250 scientists commissioned by the UN and completed in early 2019).





New York Times Square empty because of coronavirus

capitalist economy opened in 2007. The coronavirus is not the cause of the capitalist economic crisis but it contributes to deepening it. The IMF had already said there was a global stagnation before this new crash of the stock markets and oil prices. Everything shows there will be a before and after the coronavirus. When the coronavirus is over, there will be a very serious social crisis for the mass movement. The multinationals, imperialism, and their governments will attempt to compensate the crisis losses with new austerity plans, plunder, and exploitation of the masses. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) is already talking about the possibility of losing 25 million jobs. The capitalists, the superrich, not the peoples of the world, should pay the crisis of the coronavirus and its consequences.

Already, amid the coronavirus tragedy, companies have fired workers or suspended them without pay or with pay reductions. From now on, we must mobilise from below, to demand measures that will stop the pandemic and losing lives, measures in defence of the working class and the popular and poor sectors of the world.

The IWU-FI calls to fight for a global emergency plan for the workers and the people:

That urgent funds be turned over to increase health budgets drastically, to deal with the health emergency. Funds for, among other measures, the expansion and improvement of health facilities, salary increases for all health professionals, new recruitment, free medicines for all, and health and cleaning supplies for all.

That the funds for the health emergency come out of high progressive taxes on business groups, financial capital, and the non-payment of foreign debts.

For a single, state-run national health system, with free consultations, treatment and medicines paid for by the state and administered by users, doctors, workers and professionals in the sector. For the nationalisation of private health care, of the laboratories of medical specialities. They must function under the control of health and medicine workers and scientists.

For the setting up in all workplaces of hygiene and health committees, with the power to implement the cessation of tasks in all non-essential activities or those lacking necessary safety measures. Price control of medicines and all

essential products to avoid speculation.

A general reorganisation of production under workers' control, to meet the needs of the health emergency.

No to the use of the coronavirus for militarisation measures or to restrict freedoms and the right to protest. Unrestricted defence of democratic rights.

Prohibition of layoffs and suspensions. Distribution of working hours among all workers with the same pay. No to wage reductions. Implementation of insurance for the unemployed, self-employed and the millions who work without contracts and labour rights.

To face the coronavirus crisis and what will come after the pandemic, we call for the widest unity of action of the workers, popular, youth, women and environmental organisations, and the anti-capitalist and socialist left, to coordinate a movement of an international struggle for the workers and popular emergency plan in the way to the struggle to the bitter end to finish this capitalist-imperialist system and impose governments of the working class and the people.

**International Workers Unity–
Fourth International (IWU-FI)**

28 March 2020



Iraq. 39,309,789 inhabitants (2019)



Demonstrations in Baghdad

From Tahrir Square in Baghdad

Cristina Mas

Leader of *Lucha Internacionalista* (Internationalist Struggle)

Since 1 October 2019, Iraq has been experiencing a popular revolt led by a youth, with casual jobs or unemployed, who are questioning the country's political system, inherited from the American occupation of 2003. In these five months, there were square occupations and demonstrations in the capital, Baghdad, and nine southern provinces, mostly Shiite. They confront the capitalist government dominated by Shiite parties and supported by Iran after the withdrawal of most American troops ordered by Obama, which has only caused suffering and misery among the Iraqi popular

classes. The repression has already left 550 dead.

The demonstrators demand jobs, basic services and an end to the endemic corruption of the regime that puts the country's enormous oil resources in the hands of multinationals and an elite that uses them to feed its clientele networks. The demonstrations demand the end of the regime. They reject the tutelage over the country by both Iran and the United States, with 5,000 American soldiers still left. They are demanding changes in the electoral law to hold elections with guarantees. These are simple demands taking into account the massive impoverishment

of most of the population, even more so in a country with very rich energy resources. And the movement is so massive and persistent that it has forced the resignation of Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi who took weeks to be replaced by businessman Mohamed Allawi, a minister in the past and who is also rejected by the demonstrators. They do not want a change of faces; they want a change of regime.

The regime has responded with fierce repression: there are over 550 dead, mostly from live ammunition and tear gas canisters fired directly at the head by the police or armed militia, and some 25,000 injured.

Despite the repression, the mobilisations do not abate

The mobilisations began on 1 October in response to a call from a group of activists through social networks. The protest was called on a Tuesday to differentiate it from the demonstrations on Fridays, a holiday in Muslim countries, called by Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, who gained popularity for his defence of the poor and his fight against US occupation. In the early hours, few people came to Tahrir Square in Baghdad, among them were the tribesmen of the popular ex-commander of the anti-terrorist forces, General Abdel-Wahab al-Saadi, who had just been dismissed by the government. But by midday, tens of thousands of young people from the working-class districts arrived, denouncing the misery. The police responded with tear gas, water cannons and then live fire. In response to the brutal repression, protests erupted on the same day in the south main cities —Nasiriyah, Maysan, Al Diwaniyah, Babil, Karbala and Najaf.

The Shiite militias, organised after the Iraqi army disbanded in the face of the expansion of Daesh (the Arabic acronym for “Islamic State”) and which the Iranian general Qasem Soleimani put under the orbit of Teheran, supported the police in the indiscriminate repression of the protests, with death squads that every day killed unarmed demonstrators in cold blood. The government cut off the internet and imposed a curfew on different towns. They forced the protesters to leave the square and move to the popular neighbourhoods, where they erected barricades and burned tires to defend themselves. The militias controlled the square and even killed activists in their homes. But, far from intimidating the protesters, the repression inflamed the protests even more. In several towns, the headquarters of the government parties were set on fire and Iranian consulates were attacked. On 25 October, the movement resurfaced to vindicate the victims and demand the overthrow of

the system, and this time it went to the bridges over the Tigris that lead to the Green Zone, where heavily protected embassies and government buildings are. The police and army blocked them with tear gas grenades “breaking skulls”, ten times heavier than those used to control demonstrations, according to Amnesty International. The images of young people with these smoking projectiles embedded in their heads lying in the streets were shocking.

The underlying tension

After the 2003 invasion, the United States imposed a regime based on the sectarian distribution of power among ethnic and religious groups. Each competes for resources, especially oil, and builds its client networks. It is a corrupt regime that has benefited the elites and plunged most into misery. Only those well connected to the governing parties get public contracts, corruption is systematic, each group plunders public resources to set up their businesses in all sectors, from agriculture to private education. Despite years of privatisation, the state remains the primary employer but in practice, the public companies work for private interests. Four of the eleven million workers have informal and casual jobs and only one per cent work in the oil sector.

After the war with Iran in the 1980s, the embargo imposed by the United States since the 1990s, the first Gulf War in 1991, the sanctions, and the 2003 invasion ordered by the triad of the Azores (George W. Bush, Tony Blair, and Jose Maria Aznar) on the country’s infrastructures, such as water and electricity supplies, are in tatters, not to mention the health and education systems. There is no future for young people: the IMF estimates youth unemployment to be at least twice the official figure of 20 per cent. University students had been mobilising against unemployment for months before the October uprising. Young people unemployed and with casual jobs have been the main component of the protests in 2011, 2018, and now.

Despite the repression, working youth and students returned to their places. Only those who have experienced it know the extent of the people’s strength and creativity: drivers of tuk-tuks (motorcycles with cabins to transport people) have dedicated themselves to evacuate the wounded to hospitals; from the tents of volunteer medical teams in the squares, unions and parties have also erected their tents to support the movement; those who cannot be in the mobilisation bring water and food to the demonstrators; helmets and masks are distributed; talks and workshops are organised. Almost all the unions have expressed solidarity with the movement, although there have been no strikes.

One of the most complicated moments was the assassination of Soleimani by the United States, in early January, which the pro-Iranian militias tried to use to silence the denunciation against the regime and its Iranian ally. However, protests continued, both against the US and Iran.

Allawi was appointed prime minister on 1 February and has the support of Sadr, who turned politically and stopped supporting the movement to order his followers out of the squares: some even took part in the repression. But, as it has happened in Lebanon with Hezbollah, the bourgeois and reactionary character of these organisations, which once stood up to imperialism, and may do so again, comes to light when they are confronted by a people’s movement calling for the end of a regime of which they are openly a part of. Muqtada al-Sadr is now trying, with Iran, to put an end to the mobilisations and get an agreement from the Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish parties to prop up the new prime minister, who has been rejected in the streets.

But the movement seems ready to confront those who have betrayed it: on 13 February, tens of thousands of women took to the streets in Baghdad, Nasiriyah and Basra in response to Sadr’s demand for an end to the mixed demonstrations and vindicating the role of women in the Iraqi revolution.

Joseph Daher, The Alliance of Middle Eastern and North African Socialists

“We must give a perspective to the working classes in an internationalist framework and link the issues of exploitation and oppression”

*Joseph Daher is a Swiss-Syrian socialist activist, academic and founder of the blog Syria Freedom Forever. He is the author of "Hezbollah: Political Economy of the Party of God" (Pluto Press, 2016) and "Syria after the Uprisings, the Political Economy of State Resilience" (Pluto Press and Haymarket, 2019). He was interviewed in Barcelona by Cristina Mas for **International Correspondence**.*

After the crushing of the 2011 revolutionary wave in Syria, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, and Libya, we see unprecedented popular movements in Algeria, Sudan, Lebanon, and Iraq. Is this a second act?

It is a continuation of the revolutionary processes that began in 2010–2011. These are long-term processes, so there will be ups and downs. In late 2018, we were facing a general crushing of the revolutionary process and, in the early months of 2019, we witnessed the fall of two dictators, Omar al-Bashir in Sudan and Bouteflika in Algeria. And in October, there were very important popular uprisings in Iraq and Lebanon, which challenge both the sectarian system and the neo-liberal economic system. In all these processes, they have the same motivations: the rejection of authoritarianism but also the rejection of neoliberal policies and austerity in these countries.

There are differences between these processes, but there are also common elements. Which sectors are protagonists in the mobilisations?

They are the workers, in the formal or informal sector, public service employees and part of the impoverished



Joseph Daher supporting the Palestinian people

middle class as well. This is the main body. This does not stop some sectors of the bourgeoisie trying to profit from these popular uprisings for their reasons.

Is there a more general dynamic in response to the international economic crisis?

Absolutely. We see it in Lebanon and Chile. Both popular uprisings burst in the face of new regressive taxes. There are also the issues related to the right to self-determination, to popular sovereignty: I am in Barcelona, and I am in solidarity with Catalan comrades, but we also notice, for example, in Hong Kong the desire for more democracy. We find this desire for popular sovereignty also in the countries of the Middle East and North African region. It is a deeper crisis of neoliberalism, decades of the so-called structural austerity policy, a euphemism for the policies of austerity and privatisation, of casualisation of labour. We saw the same everywhere, from Haiti to France, with the yellow vests. Fukuyama announced the end of history. On the contrary, it is not

a victory for neoliberalism, there has been a fundamental crisis since 2008 of the neoliberal system. Besides, the concern is that this hegemony of the neoliberal crisis and its ruling class has not necessarily ended up benefitting the radical left. And, unfortunately, we see the emergence of extreme right-wing groups and religious fundamentalists. We still don't see the radical left taking advantage of this hegemonic crisis of neoliberalism and its ruling class. The need to create a political alternative, a leadership, an inclusive, social, economic, anti-capitalist and democratic program that takes into account the problems of exploitation and oppression without differentiating between them. And that is the real challenge for the radical left around the world.

What lessons do you draw from the revolutionary processes during 2011 in the Middle East and North Africa?

We have seen an unprecedented popular explosion, revolutionary movements, although it is now difficult to recognise them after the wars and

interventions. But what characterises a revolutionary process is the participation of the masses through non-institutional channels and, sometimes, situations of dual power. This happened in some countries, to varying degrees, not everywhere, but it had a regional and international echo. Popular movements followed in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Occupy movement, the 15-M [15 May] in Spain. It reminded us there are revolutions, we can have changes from below, by millions of people organising through strikes or demonstrations. The lesson is that without mass organisations, whether workers' or feminists', a party that provides a political alternative, a political perspective for the working classes, it is very difficult to see a regime change; because the fall of the head is not enough. In Tunisia, in Egypt, the head fell but there was no radical change. In Egypt, the situation is worse than under Mubarak.

So, in reality, the challenge for the radical left was to create the conditions to help the self-organisation of the workers at all levels, and in this context, I think there is a lesson to be learned. If Tunisia and Sudan are in a less bad situation, it is because there are two important pillars: an organised workers' movement (and we must note its limits of reformist and nationalist leadership, but the UGTT and the Sudanese Professionals Association have played a driving role until today in the defence of democratic and social rights) and a women's movement, which in both countries has also played a very important role. They have already won significant victories. In Syria, we see that the absence of organised unions and mass feminist movements played a negative role although there were situations of dual power, much more pronounced: the state had disappeared and we saw the local coordination



Idlib destroyed: 700,000 people have been displaced

committees, local councils, but it was not enough and they were very limited in terms of their democratic character and the participation of women or minorities.

It is an issue at the international level because we often see in popular movements the rejection of organisations that claim that "horizontality" would be more democratic. And we see that on the contrary, that is not democracy. Democracy is also the ability for workers to organise, to have this perspective beyond what is the spontaneity which is necessary but not enough.

How do you see the situation in Syria?

Catastrophic. The war continues. The military offensives of al-Assad's despotic and criminal Syrian military regime with the help of Russia and Iran have displaced over 700,000 people in Idlib. Over 90 per cent of the Syrian population lives below the poverty line: without humanitarian aid, and without the money they receive from refugee relatives, it would be very difficult for them to survive. There is terrible inflation. One dollar has risen from 52 Syrian pounds to over 1,000, a terrible devaluation of purchasing power, and therefore a catastrophic economic situation. More than half the population is displaced inside or outside

the country.

For several years now there has been an international consensus that al-Assad must remain, so, unfortunately, the regime is still in place thanks to political, military and economic help from Russia and Iran but also thanks to the acceptance of other countries at regional and international level.

That said, it suffers from major contradictions: among the sectors that have remained passive or even within their ranks, many criticise the role of the militias which continue to kidnap. We saw in January, demonstrations in Sweida to protest against the economic crisis, the lack of services. We see that in Daraa, which returned to regime control in 2018, there is still resistance because several armed opposition brigades have been able to keep their weapons and the so-called reconciliation process went badly, and there were killings. There have been over 100 acts of resistance with sit-ins and demonstrations in the city in the last six months. This is no small thing.

The positive thing is that there is an accumulation of political experience in the region. We also have to learn from our mistakes and build, I hope, a new resistance with this accumulated experience.



Demonstrations against the "WhatsApp" tax, Beirut, Lebanon, October 2019

In Lebanon, the "October Revolution" continues

Görkem Duru

The revolutionary masses' uprising that started on 17 October 2019 against the government's IMF-supported austerity policies continues in Lebanon. The government of Saad Hariri has been trying to implement austerity policies since April 2019 to create a way out of the economic crisis benefitting the country's bosses. As part of this plan, the aim was to implement capitalist policies such as the further withdrawal of the state from public spending, cuts in public wages and an increase in the tax burden of the working people.

The Lebanese took this austerity plan as the starting point of a rebellion against the current order for the working people, who have already been experiencing serious difficulties in accessing electricity, clean water

and healthcare, and whose purchasing power had already declined because of the economic crisis. On 17 October, two developments took place that spontaneously led the masses to take to the streets and start a revolutionary process. The first was a government announcement that apps such as WhatsApp that allow making internet calls would be taxed \$0.20 per day. The second was a fire that started in the country's largest forests on the night of 13–14 October. Because of the privatisation of public resources and their use for the benefit of the bourgeoisie, the government failed at adequately responding to the fire, which ended up damaging the Lebanese nature reserves in a significant way, destroying nearly three million trees and the burning of an area of about 1,200 hectares.

During the mobilisation, the Lebanese workers were questioning the capitalist destruction policies and the resulting injustices in income distribution, poverty, and unemployment. As makers of these policies, the government and the current sectarian regime in the country were the primary targets of the masses on the streets. They blamed the regime built with the support of imperialism following the Taif Agreement signed in 1989 in the aftermath of the 1975–1990 civil war. This regime aimed at hiding all class and social conflicts in the country behind a veil of sectarian distinction. The country's administration was shaped accordingly thanks to the proposed Constitution. For instance, the Constitution stated the President had to be Maronite Christian, while the Prime Minister had

to be a Sunni Muslim, and the Speaker of the Assembly, a Shiite Muslim. The leaders of these groups, who were the arms merchants of the civil war era, transformed into bourgeois bosses thanks to this “new order” and control a significant portion of the country’s economic resources. They implemented the capitalist neoliberal policies in Lebanon in collaboration with imperialism. They added wealth to their wealth through practices of favouritism and massive corruption, all shaped by sectarianism. It was precisely for these reasons that the Lebanese workers, who took to the streets on 17 October, demanded the building of a secular order against the existing sectarian regime. The integrated nature of the economic, democratic and social demands of the Lebanese masses, which appeared on the stage of history with the desire not to be ruled as before, gives the revolutionary process in the country its continuing character.

The continuing nature of the mobilisation

The uprising started on 17 October quickly spread to much of the country. Masses filled the squares in important cities of the country, such as Beirut, Beqaa, Tripoli, Nabatieh, Tyre, and Zouk. Facing the quick spread of the uprising, the government had to take a step back and withdrew its plan to tax WhatsApp and similar applications used for internet calls. However, this government pullback did



Thousands on the streets ousted the Prime Minister

not make the masses leave the streets and return home. The anger of the Lebanese workers, youth and women was already aimed at the government that tried to suppress the uprisings with violence. Realising he could not hold on to power in the face of these intense mass mobilisations and strikes, Prime Minister Saad Hariri announced his resignation on 29 October. This was the first major victory of the revolutionary mobilisation of the Lebanese workers.

Following the resignation of the PM, the main debate among the ruling bourgeois blocs was on how to get the sectarian regime through this revolutionary process with no harm. The entire bourgeois leadership, who secured their economic interests thanks to the sectarian character of the regime, tried to “soothe” the

masses with the promise the new government, formed for the sake of not “plunging the country into chaos”, would make certain reforms. However, the continuation of the deepening economic crisis in the country and of the austerity policy implementations the capitalists use to make the workers pay the bill for the crisis resulted in a quick loss of belief among the masses in the “reform” promises made by the parties of the order.

According to data from the previous year, the country’s gross domestic product was US\$ 51 billion, while the amount of public debt had reached a level of US\$ 86 billion in the first quarter of 2019. The bosses implement wage cuts using the crisis as an excuse and the number of workers fired in the last four months amounts to 160,000. The purchasing power of the working people has melted because of the depreciation of the Lebanese lira against the dollar by about 60 per cent combined with increasing inflation. Even the World Bank had to announce that 50 per cent of the Lebanese population will be pushed below the poverty line if the economic situation in the country continues in this way. In addition, banks set limits on foreign cash transfers and imposed restrictions on the amount of foreign cash that the Lebanese could withdraw from their accounts.

Banks and the banking system at



Protests over the worsening crisis

large allowed the bosses and power holders to smuggle money abroad while trying to seize the money of the common man. Thus, they became the targets of the uprisings. The working masses felt, even more, the effects of the destruction caused by the capitalist exploitation policies in combination with the economic crisis. New slogans have been developed against the political parties and their representatives who tried to keep the sectarian regime alive: “All of them go!” “Let’s bring all corrupt leaders to account!”

Such was the atmosphere in which the new government was established on 21 January, in the aftermath of Saad Hariri’s resignation. The masses continued mobilising against the new government and the regime from the start while the bourgeois parties and sectarian structures that dominate Lebanese politics are all united around the new government to protect the regime. This is shown by the support from Hezbollah and Maronite Christian deputies to the new government established under the leadership of the former Education Minister Hassan Diyab.

“All of them go!”: A workers’ government is possible!

The uprising that spontaneously erupted on 17 October had been going on for over four months despite all the manoeuvres of the regime. Even though there occurred partial withdrawals, the Lebanese masses have been mobilising for a considerable time, revealing their anger towards the capitalist system of exploitation and the regime.

This anger is also visible in the demands of the masses and how they have evolved. The uprising that started spontaneously under the leadership of workers, women, the youth, and the unemployed continues while generating, again spontaneously and unconsciously, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and anti-authoritarian demands. Demanding the eradication of injustice in income distribution, targeting banks and the capitalist economic model, asking for the



Lebanon has 6,850,000 inhabitants.
Beirut is its capital, with a population of around two million

elimination of the sectarian regime which serves as the lifeblood of the imperialist capitalist order, seeking the construction of a secular regime, and saying “all of them go” show that the masses are targeting the current order.

It is precisely at this point that it is necessary to delineate a regime/power that could guarantee a break from the current order and favour workers’ political independence from capitalism because it is not possible for the masses to protect their achievements or to secure their demands under the rule of the bourgeois parties.

The only way out is the building of a political and organisational form that could lead the struggle of the masses along with an urgent action program. Such a program of urgent action needs to orient the democratic, economic and social demands of the masses towards a perspective of breaking away from the regime, imperialism, and capitalism. All of them go! Nationalisation of all banks and privatised public institutions without compensation! Implementation of a central and planned economy. Establishment of independent public committees to fight against corruption and to prosecute, under the supervision

of these committees, those who were involved in it. Establishment of defence committees to prevent attacks of sectarian and counter-revolutionary groups on the mass mobilisations. Disengagement from the sectarian regime and creation of an independent and sovereign constituent assembly to produce a new constitution in favour of workers, women, and the youth. A program that includes such a list of demands would improve the perpetual nature of the masses’ struggle and pave the way towards a possible workers’ government.

To advance the revolutionary process in the country and to break away from capitalism, and the regime, it is crucial for the Lebanese revolutionaries to bring together the masses and their local coordination and self-organisation organs such as neighbourhood committees around an urgent action program with such a perspective. The ability to build such an alternative in Lebanon will be decisive for the future of workers’ mobilisations which are fighting for similar demands both in the region and in the world arena.

Görkem Duru

29 February 2020



Hezbollah General Secretary Hassan Nasrallah repudiated the protests and called to stop mobilising. He was ignored

Dangers awaiting the revolutionary process

Görkem Duru

Historically and during recent revolutionary uprisings, we have witnessed time and again the kind of methods used by the bourgeois parties to provoke the withdrawal or defeat of the mass movement during revolutionary processes where the class struggle has risen, given that the bourgeois parties' interests are inherently tied to the survival of the current capitalist system of exploitation. The revolutionary process in Lebanon is not immune to the possibility of facing such counter-revolutionary methods. Indeed, the state and regime forces have already tried to implement many of these methods throughout the process.

One of them is violence and repressive policies used against the masses, and the sectarian policies used by the state apparatus and paramilitary

forces. In Lebanon, the army and the police forces arrested hundreds of people as they forced the mass mobilisation to retreat using tear gas and plastic bullets against the masses.

Hezbollah's role

The armed sectarian groups of the civil war era had gained a legitimate status before the state by becoming legal political parties after the civil war. However, some of them still have their armed paramilitary forces. Perhaps the most important of these is Hezbollah. While it received the most votes in the 2018 Lebanese parliamentary elections, it proved in the revolutionary process in Syria to be once again one of the leading counter-revolutionary actors of the region. Even though the paramilitary forces of Hezbollah and

similar groups have attempted to attack the mobilisation, the masses have been able to stand their ground against these sectarian attacks.

Obviously, violence is not the only method that Hezbollah and similar sectarian political groups could use to burn out or divide the mass movement, especially considering the fact the political system of Lebanon was built on sectarianism in collaboration with imperialism. As said before, almost all structures with hidden paramilitary forces inherited from the civil war times have their political parties. There are social and economic solidarity organisations established by these sectarian parties to expand and consolidate their bases within this political spectrum shaped by inter-sectarian divisions. A function of these



Algeria. The Algerian rebellion is part of the second wave of the struggles in the region

organisations is to cover the dynamics of class or social-based struggles within the working-class by setting up sectarian distinctions. Another of their functions is to soothe discontented people within their ranks through favouritism and financial aid. However, as these sectarian organisations are all intertwined with the capitalist system through their political parties, financial institutions, bosses, etc., the economic crisis has shaken their foundations as well. The diminishing share of the cake caused by the economic crisis brought the concentration of capital in the hands of the bourgeoisie of this sectarian organisation while increasing corruption. This, in return, led to the questioning of the sectarian regime and its leaders in the eyes of the Lebanese workers and opened the path towards the development of the dynamics of social and class struggle.

Sectarian political structures, whose interests depend on the survival of the regime, are trying to influence the masses politically by changing tactics and attempting to infiltrate into the mobilisation. The regime parties resort to democratic reactionary methods. For instance, the rhetoric of the new Prime Minister Hassan Diab is a textbook example of this situation. Diab emphasises the country is going

through an important process and assures us they will prepare a more democratic electoral law to address people's dissatisfaction with the regime. While the masses are seeking an exit from this order by way of mobilising for their economic, democratic and social demands, the sovereigns, who strive for the end of mobilisations to ensure the continuation of the capitalist exploitation system, attempt to channel the revolutionary process towards elections, ignoring the economic and social demands of the workers.

Another approach that can be described as dangerous for the course of the revolutionary process in Lebanon is the proposal developed from within the mass movement by the old Stalinists, new civil society mindsets, who follow the stageist understanding of revolution: the withdrawal of the sectarian parties from the government, the establishment of a more "democratic" order with the coming to power of technocrats, and economic reforms over time. The message of the reformists to the masses that seek an alternative to the capitalist economic model and its regime is this: "better capitalism is possible."

The second wave

Mass movements experienced the results of the above-mentioned dangers

during the first wave of the revolutionary process that started in North Africa and the Middle East in 2010: Muslim Brotherhood governments based on sectarian foundations, democratic reactionary methods in case of Tunisia, and the counter-revolutionary methods of the regime, regional countries, radical Islamists and of imperialism with Syria.... Mass mobilisations in Algeria, Sudan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran in 2019 make up the second wave of the revolutionary process in North Africa and the Middle East, considering their demands, methods of struggle, vanguards and character. Despite the efforts of the regime forces to shear the revolutionary mobilisation away from its course, the determination of the Lebanese workers in their struggle for their demands is proof that the masses advance considering the lessons learned from the first revolutionary wave in the region. However, a revolutionary leadership has still not emerged from the mass mobilisations that occurred in Lebanon or the region. As revolutionary internationalists, we must offer political, organisational and programmatic support to the struggle of the Lebanese workers in line with the lessons we learned from the first wave of uprisings.



Palestinian demonstrators burn pictures of Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu, during a protest against the peace plan, in the south of the Gaza Strip (January 2020)

The Trump-Netanyahu “deal”: The robbery of the century

Simon Rodriguez Porras

On 28 January, meeting in Washington, Trump and Netanyahu jointly launched a project for territorial division and a series of political, military and economic conditions for solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In fact, their goal is not to provide a starting point for negotiations with Palestinian representatives, who were not present in Washington,

but to give explicit US endorsement to the historic aspirations of Israeli colonialism. To defeat this project, it is urgent to strengthen the solidarity of the peoples to the heroic resistance of the Palestinians.

The joint appearance of Trump and Netanyahu, presenting the “agreement of the century”, tried to score a symbolic victory for each of them amid the adverse circumstances they were going

through. A political trial was taking place against the New York tycoon for having extorted from the Ukrainian government, demanding from it to open investigations that harmed the electoral position of Democratic pre-candidate Joe Biden in exchange for diplomatic favours and military aid. The ultra-right-wing Netanyahu, meanwhile, was trying to lift his campaign in the run-up to the third parliamentary election

in a year, with three convictions for corruption weighing on him.

The text, with the misleading label “Peace to Prosperity”, claims to be the culmination of the 1993 Oslo Accords, which established provisional bases for the functioning of a Palestinian National Authority and whose perspective is the establishment of two states, Israel and Palestine. In this sense, it is the fatal confirmation of all the forecasts of the critics of the capitulation of the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), headed by Arafat and Abbas. As the Palestinian intellectual Edward Said explained two decades ago, “Oslo was designed to segregate the Palestinians in non-contiguous, economically unviable enclaves, surrounded by Israeli-controlled borders, with settlements and settlement roads punctuating and essentially violating the territories’ integrity. Expropriations and house demolitions proceeded inexorably (...) along with the expansion and multiplication of (Zionist) settlements, military occupation continuing and every tiny step is taken toward Palestinian sovereignty—including agreements to withdraw in minuscule, agreed-upon phases—stymied, delayed, cancelled at Israel’s will. This method

was politically and strategically absurd. (...) The four million Palestinian refugees—now the largest and longest existing such population anywhere—were told that they could forget about return or compensation” (Edward Said, *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After*, 2000, p. 360–361).

Legitimising the Zionist occupation

Trump and Netanyahu’s proposal is the legitimisation of what Israel has done since 1967 by trampling all UN resolutions: it contemplates the recognition of Zionist sovereignty over the settler settlements in the West Bank; Jerusalem would gain the status of capital of the Zionist state, and the colonialists would take over the Jordan River Valley. Three hundred thousand Palestinians from Palestinian-majority settlements in Israeli territory would be stripped of their citizenship according to the 1967 borders and integrated into Palestinian territory. The right of return and economic compensation would be denied to six million Palestinians who had been expelled from their lands since the 1948 Nakba and who would no longer be considered refugees under the agreement. They could not even move to the hypothetical Palestinian pseudo-

state without Israeli endorsement. Israel would gain recognition of its racist and denominational definition as a “Jewish” state.

The resulting Palestinian state would not have the powers of a national state. It would be an entity similar to the Bantustans established by the racists in South Africa during the apartheid dictatorship, deprived of the right to defend itself militarily, without control of its borders or its air and sea space. As compensation for the extensive territorial losses regarding the 1967 borders, for the recognition of the Zionist enclaves in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, inhabited by some 600,000 Zionist settlers, or losing the Jordan River Valley, the Palestinians would receive land in the Negev desert.

To sweeten the poison, Trump promises the investment of US\$50 billion in the Palestinian territories, Egypt and Jordan, a false compensation that adds another humiliating dimension to the proposal.

The conditions are so brutal that even the collaborationist Palestinian National Authority (PNA) headed by Mahmoud Abbas cannot consider it a basis for negotiation. Before the UN Security Council on 11 February,

Israel’s fascist terror

The colonial regime exercises systematic violence against the Palestinian people. There is no limit to the repressive monstrosity of Israel, whose crimes range from kidnapping and torturing political prisoners, to shooting down commercial aeroplanes, to stealing the organs of Palestinian corpses killed by Zionist forces at the Abu Kabir Forensic Institute.

But it has failed in imposing acceptance of the colonial order. Trump and Netanyahu’s announcement sparked a new wave of protest. Two thousand people protested in Gaza, thousands more in Ramallah. In the three weeks since 28 January, at least

four Palestinians have been killed and dozens injured by Zionist forces in Gaza and the West Bank, while 14 colonialists were injured in a run-in with soldiers by a Palestinian fighter who was later arrested. At least 50 homemade rockets were fired at the colonial entity, which responded by bombing Gaza heavily.

On 23 February, the Zionist soldiers appealed to one of their usual practices, by kidnapping the body of one of the killed Palestinian fighters near the border fence that separates the Gaza Strip from the Israeli entity. The Zionists ran over the body with a backhoe machine. They shot a group

of Palestinian protesters who tried to remove the body, resulting in two injuries. The backhoe then removed the crushed body with its shovel. The incident was filmed and sparked worldwide outrage.

The Zionist colonial entity is the only government in the world that has an official policy of confiscating cadavers. The Israeli Supreme Court ratified this practice in 2019, endorsing that they use the bodies for extortion by Israeli negotiators. Israel keeps hundreds of abducted bodies, some from the 1967 war.

Abbas declared that “we are being offered a Swiss cheese with holes in it, a fragmented state that no one would accept... (Israel) is absolved of all responsibility for the crimes the Israelis have perpetrated against our people and our land.” Despite this, he did not repudiate the role of the US as a mediator, only that it should not be the only mediator.

Indonesia and Tunisia submitted a proposal for a resolution to the UN Security Council, condemning the plan but failed to obtain support from nine of the 15 member countries. Despite having the right to veto, the US threatened economic retaliation if a resolution was voted against it. Zionist Ambassador Danny Danon argued that only if Abbas is replaced could negotiations take place. Zionism already had applied the manoeuvre of vetoing its interlocutor against Arafat in his last years and against Hamas after he won the 2006 elections. It can pressure on or even kill the Palestinian leaders, but what it has not achieved and will not achieve is the acceptance of colonial submission by the Palestinian people.

The crisis does not close, it deepens

Trump's aggressive policy against the Palestinian people can quickly meet with serious resistance and generate effects contrary to those expected. The US

government, by closing the Palestinian diplomatic mission in the US and eliminating its financial contributions to the UN agency in charge of serving Palestinian refugees and the PNA, is weakening the Palestinian bureaucracy and its ability to contain the people. The PNA was a guarantor of the Oslo Accords as an auxiliary of Zionism, including in repressive tasks. There can be changes in the Palestinian movement if there is a large mobilisation that the bureaucracy cannot stop.

Twenty per cent of Israeli citizenship is Palestinian. It is an important minority that would live in a Palestinian state but not in the fiction of an apartheid state that Israel pretends to formalise.

Besides the renewed Palestinian mobilisations against the criminal plans of the US and Israel, the project has economic consequences. The Palestinian authorities suspended the import of beef from Israel five months ago, to which the Israeli military authority that administers the West Bank responded by blocking Palestinian agricultural exports to Jordan and through Zionist ports. The balance of agricultural imports and exports between Israel and Palestine is negative for the Palestinians: they export €80 million and import €550 million. Therefore, the decline in trade is especially harmful to Zionist farmers.

The US ambassador to Israel,

a fanatical Zionist named David Friedman, will head a bi-national committee to discuss in detail the implementation of the annexations contemplated in the plan. Netanyahu intends to move forward with implementing the plan in an accelerated manner to create new factual situations. Thus, the construction of 6,000 houses for Zionists in East Jerusalem was announced on 20 February.

Some Zionists warn about the dangers of unilateral annexation and consider that Trump's actions weaken Israel in the long term. By representing a significant tactical shift from traditional US policy, it generates polemics that weaken the consensus of bourgeois politicians in the US on the question. What is most serious, it further weakens the false policy of a two-state solution. A March 2017 poll by the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research shows that 57 per cent of Palestinians do not believe in a two-state solution. We, revolutionary socialists, stand with the Palestinian people's historic demand for the end of the racist state of Israel and the establishment of a single, secular, democratic, non-racist state throughout the Palestinian territory, in which Jews, Christians, Muslims and atheists of any origin or ethnicity would have equal rights. This would mean the death of the racist and colonial project of Zionism and imperialism.

Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel

Israel's endless criminal activity has fuelled international condemnation and the growth of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign in much of the world, including the United States. Such is the fear that international solidarity with the Palestinian people provokes in Israel that Trump and Netanyahu's plan includes the demand that the Palestinian people abandon the BDS campaign and any other similar campaign. This shows the importance

of extending and deepening this campaign.

On 12 February, the UN Human Rights Council published, three years later, a list of 112 companies operating illegally in Israeli-occupied enclaves within the West Bank. The list is dominated by 94 Israeli companies, but also mentions transnationals such as Airbnb, TripAdvisor, Expedia and Booking. Since 2015, the European Union has been demanding a label of origin for the products of the

enclaves, considered in violation of UN resolutions on the Palestinian issue, but there are no sanctions for the companies operating there. It is fundamental to promote the rupture of diplomatic, commercial and cultural relations with the colonial entity of Israel, and to denounce the role played by allies of Zionism such as the United States, Russia, India and the corrupt Arab monarchies in maintaining the oppression of the Palestinian people.

Elections in Peru show the crisis of the regime

Javier Leonforte

On 26 January, parliamentary elections were held in Peru. Nine parties surpassed the 5 per cent threshold, entering the Congress, but the party that received most votes got only 10 per cent, showing a great dispersion and crisis of the bosses' parties. The Frente Amplio (Broad Front) got 9 congressmen with 6.2 per cent at the national level (over 900,000 votes) and its most voted congressman was our comrade Enrique Fernandez Chacon (with 130,000 votes). A historic Trotskyist leader of Unios, a member of the International Workers' Unity, Fourth International (IWU-FI), he was the fourth most voted candidate in all of Peru.

The big losers were the parties that dominated the previous Congress, the so-called "Fujiaprism" (the alliance between Fujimori's followers and APRA). The Popular Force of Fujimorism fell from 73 congressmen to 15. For the first time, the historic APRA (American Popular Revolutionary Alliance), founded in 1924, did not win seats, falling to 2.8 per cent after the suicide of its last leader Alan Garcia (president between 1985–1990 and 2006–2011). The masses identified both parties as to the great corrupt and sell-out parties responsible for the country's crisis. Keiko Fujimori (who as a presidential candidate got 48 per cent in 2011 and 49 per cent in 2016 losing both re-runs) returned to prison immediately after the elections, suffering the same fate as the main bosses' politicians in Peru, including all their past presidents.

Accion Popular (Popular Action) —lead by Belaunde Terry, president in 1963–1968 and 1980–1985— which won the office of mayor of Lima in 2018, was the great bet of the bourgeoisie and imperialism to capitalise on popular discontent. But he did not achieve the expected support, getting only 10 per cent. For example, in Lima, Accion Popular got 36 per cent in the municipal elections of 2018 and fell to 9 per cent in 2020. This is the party that will preside over the new Congress in agreement with the government of President Martín Vizcarra, who did not present any candidates of his own but supported the "governability pact" of Accion Popular, with Alianza Para el Progreso (Alliance for Progress), Somos Peru (We Are Peru) and Podemos Peru. These are bosses' parties that are divided and do not have a solid popular base. They were partners of Fujiaprism and defend the current economic model. Actually, a few days before the elections, four of Vizcarra's ministers had to resign because their corrupt links with multinational Odebrecht were proved.

For this reason, Unios in the Frente Amplio characterised that "the elections did not close the crisis of the regime" since no bourgeois party got massive popular support. This takes place within the framework of their failure to impose the Tia Maria mining project and the growing social unrest and questioning of the economic model. With a "growth" of over 20 years for big business, they did nothing but increase poverty and social inequality, with tax exemptions and privatisations that benefit concentrated capital, flexibilization and casualisation of

labour for the great popular majorities and a brutal plundering of natural resources.

Within this framework of crisis and dispersion, new political phenomena were expressed. The most voted candidate was Daniel Urresti, a military man who got 400,000 votes, but he went back from the million votes he got in 2018 and faces trial for his repressive actions in the army and the rape of a peasant woman. The surprise was the "fish"¹ Frepap (Popular Agricultural Front of Peru) who came second with 8.3 per cent, an evangelist and messianic religious sect, encouraged by other similar phenomena in Latin America such as Bolsonaro in Brazil or Añez in Bolivia but still incipient. And Antauro Humala (arrested for a military uprising in 2005 and brother of former President Ollanta Humala) got 7 per cent, with a "radical" nationalist reactionary discourse. The emergence of these new phenomena distortedly reflects the search for alternatives the mass movement is carrying out in the face of the failure of the traditional parties.

"Together for Peru" is an alliance made up of Veronika Mendoza and her "New Peru Movement" together with the Communist Party (Stalinists who control the CGTP trade union bureaucracy) and the CP "Patria Roja" (Red Nation, Maoists who control the traitorous trade union bureaucracy of the SUTEP) who abandoned the Broad Front with an opportunist policy. They formed this alliance with Yehude Simon (former Prime Minister of Alan Garcia and politically responsible for the

¹ The Frepap has a fish as its logo. (Translator)



Unios activists and sympathisers, who carried out a great campaign with blood, sweat and tears

massacre against the indigenous people in Bagua—known as “Baguazo”—and now arrested for corruption) and all together they did not overcome the 5 per cent threshold. The same fate befell Vladimir Cerron (former governor of Junin, also convicted of corruption) of Peru Libre (Free Peru), who was presented as the third option of “the left”.

The Broad Front is hegemonised by Marco Arana’s Land and Freedom, an environmentalist current linked

to liberation theology and the social and indigenous movements that face the plundering of the mining multinationals. Unios acts in the Frente Amplio as an independent organisation.

Enrique Fernandez Chacon, the workers’ representative

In the Frente Amplio of Lima, our organisation Unios promoted the candidacies of Enrique Fernandez Chacon and Carlos Portillas, a unionist worker of the Nestle factory, with an

independent revolutionary program whose axes were: “The dissatisfaction of the Chilean people and the resistance to the austerity measures of the Ecuadorian people show the exhaustion of the economic model at a continental scale. Without a doubt, these struggles, added to the closing of Congress, are the backdrop to these elections in Peru. Our demands go toward attacking the model and its consequences, to replace it with one at the service of the workers and the people, against corruption

Hugo Blanco’s support

Who is Enrique Fernandez? I know and have known him for many years. He is a tireless fighter. He was a combative unionist worker.

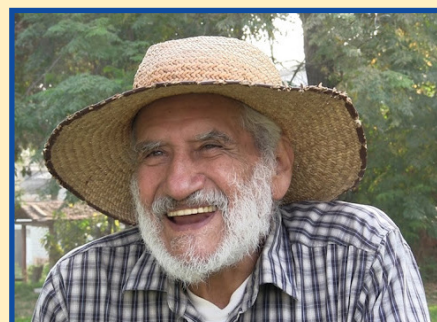
When it fell upon us to go as deputies to that reactionary den which is the Peruvian parliament, he behaved in a combative manner, denouncing this and taking advantage of the fact that, because he was a parliamentarian, he used to be invited to a meeting in a union, in a slum, or somewhere outside of Lima. He used the occasion to denounce the reactionary character of the parliament

and to show that the way forward was the collective struggle of trade unions, indigenous communities and other popular organisations.

His life has been a long struggle for social justice.

Currently, among other tasks, he is the editor of the combative monthly publication “Lucha Indigena” (Indigenous Fight) in which I am the director.

His return to parliament should be a success for the oppressed Peruvian people.



Hugo Blanco, historical leader of the Peruvian peasantry

21 January 2020, from Mexico, Hugo Blanco Galdos, 86 years old.

and for a Constituent Assembly. Only a government of the workers and peoples can guarantee its realisation". (See "Proposals for an emergency plan of UNIOS in the Frente Amplio for the January 2020 elections" at www.facebook.com/unios.peru).

With Enrique's candidacy in Lima, we tripled the votes from the municipal elections of 2018. The Frente Amplio got 6.2 per cent at the national level and nine congressmen, becoming the first force of the left and the only one with parliamentary representation. In the campaign, they recognised Enrique as a Trotskyist, for representing the left formed in the union and social struggles, opposed to the reformist left that integrated the governments of Alejandro Toledo (2001–2006) and Ollanta Humala (2011–2016). The same left that promotes class conciliation supported the former mayor of Lima, Susana Villaran (2011–2014), who is now also in prison for receiving bribes from Odebrecht.

From Unios we faced the logic of the "lesser evil" of a "left" formed in the NGOs whose aim is to be ministers, ambassadors or officials of some bourgeois government of the day. The campaign of Enrique Fernandez Chacon and Unios in the Frente Amplio was to build a revolutionary party to fight for power, defend the workers' class independence and the building of their organisations in the struggles. These postulates were recognised in our vote, as conclusions of a radicalised vanguard of tens of thousands of workers, youth and popular sectors of Peru. Unios in the Frente Amplio carried out a militant campaign for class independence, distributing tens of thousands of flyers in the working-class and popular neighbourhoods and supporting the social demands of those at the bottom.

The Vizcarra government wants to push for "political reform" and impose its bourgeois agenda on the new Congress. The agenda we are taking to Congress with Enrique's seat

is against the economic model; it is the agenda of demands for wages, against labour flexibilisation, for pensions and retirement, against the AFPs (private pensions system), and for a decent education and health. There are very strong movements of struggle, which is why we had the slogan "with the vote you also fight", representing the demands to change the economic model. The great concern of the bourgeoisie, expressed in its entire addicted media, is that the economic model should not be touched.

Unios has stood firm against the debacle of the rest of the left in Peru, that was great merit, and now, with

the historic election made, many new comrades have come forward. As part of the electoral balance sheet, we held a great event, an open meeting and a political school on "The Marxist vision of society. Why do we the workers must rule?"

The mass movement is looking for new leadership and with Unios we participate in the elections and in the struggles to continue growing. With Enrique's seat and its new militant forces, Unios is today the embryo of the revolutionary party the workers need to fight for power. This is our strategic project.

"Rebuilding a revolutionary party"

In the middle of the election campaign, Enrique participated in a debate among leftist unionists where he stated: "The comrades (of Veronika Mendoza's Juntos por el Peru) are right to point out that this situation can only be changed by a new constitution, but I don't think it will be that way. Let's suppose that tomorrow we arrive at a Constituent Assembly, elections are called. Who would win them? Let us think, there have been several countries that have made a new constitution: Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, and not much has changed. In Peru we had a constituent assembly in 1979, of which I was a part, we had just defeated a military dictatorship with the force of the workers in the streets, so it somehow reflected the combat that had taken place. I don't know if you have noticed who was part of that constituent assembly. The president of the CGTP, the president of the federation of bank employees, the president of the national agrarian confederation, the president of the national federation of metalworkers and miners, and other peasant and union leaders, but we were only 30 per cent. We managed to put forward some demands, but nothing more. What I want to tell you is that

we have to fight for power. Power is scattered because the criterion of defending and building revolutionary parties has been abandoned. With what instrument are we going to fight for power? By doing only unionism? It is not so. There is no other way out but to do politics. Why do we have to leave it in the hands of the rich? We have to build revolutionary parties again to fight for the seizure of power, and only then can we begin to change things. Participation in Congress is important because it allows us to run for office in some way. But do you think they would ever allow us to have a majority of the left movements in Congress? Do you think the bourgeoisie is stupid? What I want to say to you, comrades, is that we should not encourage false illusions. Rather let us begin to build strong organisations, and also to take up the unions again with strength, to begin to fight because instead of there being four or five unions per company, there should be only one. Democratic unions and the leaders consulting absolutely everything with the rank-and-file". (From the recording of the speech on 17 January 2020 at the Federation of Textile Workers).

The recognition of a working and socialist trajectory

Carlos Enrique Fernandez Chacon was born on 11 July 1942 in Lima, Peru. His parents were Moises Fernandez Mondejar, a textile worker, and Eloisa Chacon, a service worker. He was the fifth of 15 siblings. He attended primary school and only two years of technical education (automotive) at night school, always in the populous neighbourhood of Rimac.

He started work very young, which allowed him to get involved in the workers' problem from his adolescence and it was not until 1965, at the age of 23, that he assumed a union representation when he started working for General Motors Peru. Nicknamed "Cocheo" (Car-maker), he was an outstanding leader of the metallurgical union in general and particularly of the automotive union, first at General Motors and later at Volkswagen. During his youth, two events marked his entire life: the Cuban Revolution of 1959-1961 and the peasants seizing lands in La Convencion Valley, Cusco, led by Hugo Blanco. The same seizure of lands that initiated the agrarian reform in Peru in 1962.¹

Although he already had different interventions in politics before 1968, it was in that year that he became a member of the Fourth International. He became a Trotskyist with the Argentinian Nahuel Moreno, an identification he maintains to this day. He met his "teacher" Moreno for the first time when the Argentinian Trotskyist leader was imprisoned in Peru in 1969, in the Lurigancho prison. In 1971, he was a founder of the Socialist Workers Party (PST) of Peru and internationally in 1982,



Carlos Enrique Fernandez Chacon

the International Workers' League — Fourth International. In 1997, he joined the International Workers' Unity — Fourth International (IWU-FI) where he is now.

As a militant and union leader, he was part of the reconstruction of the CGTP (Workers' General Confederation of Peru) that Jose Carlos Mariategui founded. He founded or co-founded many trade unions, which earned him recognition as one of the most important trade union leaders in Peru. Because of his political and trade union activity, he was fired, imprisoned, and tortured on several occasions.

In 1978, with other leftist political currents, he founded FOCEP (Workers, Peasants, Students and Popular Front), to participate in the elections for the Constituent Assembly of that year in which he was elected as one of the 100 congressmen who made up the Constituent Assembly presided over by Victor Raul Haya de la Torre, founder of APRA.

In 1980 he was part of the Workers to Power front, integrating the presidential formula with Hugo Blanco and Ricardo Napuri. Fernandez

Chacon also ran for Congress in the Lima district and he was elected for the 1980–1985 period.

On one occasion, in a debate, he was questioned about not having the skills to be a parliamentarian, to which he responded: "I am not a legislator, I am a permanent revolutionary, who occasionally serves as a parliamentarian, more so the factories I have taken over with the workers to demand their rights, rather than for the bills presented. Come by my office and you will always see it full of workers and unions in the struggle, I don't think you can say the same."

In 1985, he was a part of a presidential formula, with Ricardo Napuri and Magda Benavides (a bank union leader) and then he did not run again for several years. In 2003, he founded the organisation UNIOS en la Lucha (Together in the Struggle) along with a group of young people he met in the struggles that ended with the fall of Fujimori and whom he won for Moreno's Trotskyism.

In 2018, faced with a crisis in the Frente Amplio, he decided to run in his internal elections and was chosen as the candidate for mayor of Lima, achieving 90,000 votes (1.6 per cent) and being the revelation in the televised debate for his emotional speech in defence of workers, and pensioners.

In 2020, at the age of 77, he was once again elected as a congressman for Lima, with a historic individual vote, the second-highest in the history of a leftist leader (second only to the legendary Hugo Blanco). He continues his political life by building the organisation UNIOS, Peruvian section of the International Workers' Unity–Fourth International (IWU-FI), of which he is a member of its Moral Control Commission, in recognition of a life dedicated to the revolution and at the workers' service.

1 Refer to the book *Peru: Two Strategies — The peasant rebellion headed by Hugo Blanco and the polemic with putschism (1961-1963)*. Available for downloading from www.nahuelmoreno.org.



Pablo Iglesias and Pedro Sánchez, in the formation of the government alliance

Podemos: End of a Cycle

Javier Leonforte

The formation of the PSOE-Unidos/Podemos (UP) government consecrates the end of the Podemos cycle. A party born at the beginning of 2014, still under the winds of 15–March, with incorrect political expressions, denouncing the “political caste”, unashamedly vindicating those from below. It had a meteoric rise: in four months it ran for the European elections with 7.98 per cent of the votes and five MPs. In 20 days of registration, it gathered 100,000 members; and in October 2014, 200,000. On that date, the polls had Podemos in first place in the general elections. In January 2015 in Greece, Syriza reached the majority with two votes away from absolute.

But the experience of the Tsipras government, betraying the “No” vote in the referendum that it had called for a break with the EU memoranda, was decisive in shattering the enormous illusions it had raised. At the end of 2015, Podemos (We Can) got 20.68 per cent of the votes and 69 MEPs.

A meteoric rise to begin immediately the decline, *a return without having arrived*. Despite the electoral unity with Izquierda Unida (United Left), the sum of the two forces lost votes and barely maintained the Podemos deputies. From election to election the decline is continuous. In barely six years the apparatus controlled by Pablo Iglesias has abandoned one after another the

popular demands to adapt them to a supposed left-wing of PSOE.

And yet, at the moment of greatest weakness—with a net loss of over 15 per cent of votes in six months—after the November 2019 elections, Unidos-Podemos (United–We Can) enters the PSOE government. Not as an expression of strength but as weakness, as a flight forward faced with the need to close an internal crisis that threatened to destroy Podemos. But the entry into the government certifies the end of the *Yes We Can* party, as thousands of workers and people’s throats have shouted.

As soon as they form a government, Pablo Iglesias rushes to close the internal

crisis, to liquidate any hint of resistance. On Friday, 17 January, he convened the State Citizens' Council of Podemos to announce the convening in March of the third state congress, in which he will again run as a candidate for the General Secretariat. Vice President Iglesias warns the party that from now on the members of Podemos who are part of the government will not speak "in the name of United We Can, but in the name of Spain." In the name of Spain? Of monarchic Spain, heir to the Franco regime! End of the journey.

A picture is worth a thousand words. The CUP-PR (Popular Unity Candidacy) presented in the Congress of Deputies a request for the appearance of King Felipe VI in the Interior Commission given the news made public by the anti-corruption prosecutor of the bribes paid by the Spanish State to Saudi Arabia: in the Table of the Congress, Unidos Podemos voted in favour of his non-appearance! And his silence in COP25, United Nations Climate Change Conference that was opened in December by the murderer Piñera with all the honours in Madrid, while the Chilean people suffer terrible repression.

Sanchez-Iglesias: coalition government?

Aware of Iglesias' weakness, Sanchez structures the government so Podemos remains in the shadows. In June 2018, Sanchez appointed a government with 17 ministers, with a vice-presidency. Today, the PSOE has 17 ministers with three vice-presidencies. And Podemos? Well, a vice-presidency was created for Pablo Iglesias for Social Rights and Agenda 2030, associated with four new ministries: Yolanda Diaz (IU) Labour, which loses Social Security, the part that moves all the money from pensions; Alberto Garzon (IU, PCE) Consumption, which comes from Health; Irene Montero with Equality, which breaks away from Justice and Historic Memory; Manuel Castells Universities, which comes from Science. New ministries and a vice-presidency give positions to Unidos Podemos but

ensuring that their policies in those ministries do not generate economic problems to the austerity plan. Let us recall that from January 2020 onwards, Article 135.2 of the Constitution comes into force, which prevents the generation of a deficit outside the framework established by the EU. That is to say, Podemos, which denounced the urgent approval of article 135 in the Constitution, will have to apply it.

The other major political problem is in Catalonia. Iglesias has already made it clear that his chair is worth more than the Catalan people's right to self-determination and he will not raise his hand to stop the state's repression.

For Sanchez, Podemos is useful in trying to neutralise the popular mobilisations that will surely denounce his submission to the factual powers. In pensions, we have the first example. COESPE (State Coordinator for the Defence of State Pensions) has had a strong political influence from Podemos, to the point of making scandalous announcements before the elections or now flattering the government. The next date in the struggle for decent pensions is the general strike in the Basque Country on 30 January. COPE pronounces itself against it, although it is an obvious and indisputable leap that the struggle in defence of pensions will become a struggle of the whole working class.

We need to build an alternative

Podemos denies from the beginning the existence of internal parties. Izquierda Anticapitalista (Anticapitalist Left), which was part of in its origin, had to dissolve to stay a part of it, at levels of despotism and a lack of internal democracy. Rejecting any recognition of parties, the leaders formed in a clique. Podemos shortened the process of political degeneration by not having an internal opposition. The circles isolated and marginalised from the simple application of the directives taken in the leadership. It is a hierarchical party, using computerised voting to increase the weight of the leadership and isolate any attempt to emerge from the ranks.

This Bonapartist and bureaucratic structure was at the service of imposing an electioneering and reformist policy, which contrasted with the illusions and needs of the tens of thousands of members.

Anticapitalist is the left current in Podemos that encourages a sector that claims to be Trotskyist. Raul Camargo is its spokesperson. In an interview with *Cuartopoder* magazine on 20 November, he stated that "governing with them (PSOE) means an obvious break with the founding lines of Podemos" and announced a conference for March to decide whether to break with Podemos but the steps towards a break have already begun.

The entry of Podemos into government leaves a huge space to its left. In the last elections the CUP-Per la ruptura (Popular Unity Candidacy – For Breaking Up) decided to take a step and present itself to the elections to visualise the need to build an alternative that breaks with the Monarchy and with capitalism; an alternative of the workers and the people. The results were limited because the debate was late and there was no time to extend the initiative to other forces. But the task is essential. If solidarity among the people advances, the state is weakened and so is the repression it can exercise. But these processes never occur in the cold. They need to respond to processes of worker and social mobilisation that connect with the needs of the workers of the peoples.





Pablo Iglesias and Pedro Sánchez, in the formation of the government alliance

Is Putin progressive?

◀ Silvia Santos, Miguel Lamas ▶

Vladimir Putin, the Russian leader who has held the maximum power since 1990 and who led the stabilisation of capitalist restoration in the country, announced a change in the constitution that would keep him in power indefinitely.

For many who call themselves “anti-imperialists” and “21st-century socialists” this is good news since Putin would be progressive because he supposedly “stands up to the United States” and is “anti-imperialist” and even has a progressive domestic policy. Is any of this real?

Putin has been the “strongman” since 2000. He began as Prime Minister under Boris Yeltsin, who

then appointed him as his successor. He was elected president three times (1999–2004, 2004–2008 and 2012–2018) and between 2008 and 2012 he was a Prime Minister under President Dmitry Medvedev who, at the end of his term, nominated him as a candidate for president.

He was re-elected for the fourth time as President of the Russian Federation in May 2018, with 74 per cent of the votes, until 2024. This percentage of voting is on valid votes but the electoral participation did not exceed 60 per cent and with one of his main opponents excluded through a “legal” manoeuvre, the “liberal” Alexei Navalny, who called for a boycott of the elections.

Putin, a new Tsar?

Putin and his party have been losing electoral support. In the 1990s, Putin achieved high popularity based on the economic stabilisation after the deep crisis that followed the liquidation of state enterprises. The consolidation of Russian capitalism achieved stability based on overexploitation and low wages of workers, and high prices of hydrocarbons, gas and oil, the main export. But Putin’s authoritarian regime, the low salaries, the cost of housing, the regression in health care and public education, the enormous social inequality (with 70 super-millionaires with fabulous profits), generated a growing popular discontent.

In the legislative elections of 8

October 2019, Putin directly committed fraud to keep his legislative majority, banning the participation of opposition candidates. This led to very low participation, close to 21 per cent of voters. The most important opposition party, Russia of the Future, led by the liberal Alexei Navalny, whose axis is against corruption, was prevented from running. Navalny called for mobilisations and his tactic was to get the voters to vote for the party that had the best chance of beating United Russia, Putin's party. Putin won, but lost 20 seats in Moscow to the Communist Party of the Russian Federation because of the punishment vote.

After these rather disastrous legislative elections for the government, Putin announced, at the end of 2019, that he would change the constitution. And he appointed a "responsible team" to draft the constitutional changes among his edicts, which could keep Putin in power after 2024 (when his fourth term expires, according to the current constitution he cannot stand for re-election again). In this "team", there are 75 names of celebrities among whom there are hardly any experts in constitutional law, but there are well-known faces in the country such as the athlete Yelena Isinbaeva, the paediatrician Leonid Roshal, the Cossack General Nikolai Doluda or the actor Alexander Kalyagin, together with musicians, artists, some deputies and other public figures.

They announced that a referendum would approve the constitutional change. However, as the method of elaboration with Putin's friends without debate of different proposals in society, or popular election of representatives defending the different proposals in a Constituent Assembly, it will approve whatever Putin wants. The referendum will probably be an anti-democratic formality with massive abstention. Apparently, according to some reports, it would not be a "re-election" as president, but the creation of a "Council of State with superpowers", which would be headed by Putin himself as a modern "eternal"



Anti-corruption protests in Kaliningrad, March 2017

Tsar (Tsar was the equivalent of an emperor in Russia before the 1917 revolution).

Russia's political regime

Under the shape of a formal democracy where there are elections and the vote exists, the true essence of the regime is not at all democratic. What exists in Russia is an authoritarian bourgeois regime, with methods inherited from Stalinism, with the prohibition of rallies and street demonstrations if they are not previously authorised; with censorship, persecution of the LGBTBI community; with kidnappings and even murders of people from the surrounding area who are not loyal to the orders of the "boss". A real oligarchy linked to the big oligarchs who own companies, or worse still, a mafia organisation with all the evils inherited from Stalinism, which holds the reins of power and continues to be a prison for the peoples that make up the Russian Federation.

Trade union activities are also totally restricted, with state-controlled unions serving the policy of exploitation and low wages. It is no accident that Putin is a man who comes from the KGB, the sinister secret services of the Stalinist USSR.

We know little about workers' strikes in Russia, as the regime prevents these events from coming to light. What we know is that there are questionings and demonstrations against Putin and the regime.

What we do know about the protests in Russia

Despite the harshness of Putin's regime, there were many protests and demonstrations against corruption in Russia in 2017 and 2018. The protests began in March 2017 after the release of the film "Don't Call Him Dimon" and continued until May 2018 in response to the fourth election of Vladimir Putin.

The wave of mobilisations and protests that covered several cities led the police to act by arresting hundreds of activists.

By March 2017, the situation in the country was already tense. The discontent was triggered by the alleged corrupt activity of Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev (Dimon to his friends), presented by the Anti-Corruption Foundation denouncing the improper demolition of apartments in Moscow and prolonged strikes by truck drivers related to the toll system (ongoing since 2015). On 26 March 2017, national protests against corruption in the Russian federal government took place simultaneously in over 100 cities across the country. They were caused by the lack of adequate response from the Russian authorities to the investigative film "Don't Call Him Dimon", which received over 27 million hits on YouTube. Riot police, wearing armour and helmets, had arrested over 1,000 demonstrators in the centre of Moscow. As the crowd, numbering in tens of thousands,



Zardana, in the province of Idlib, in the north of Syria, after the air raids of al-Assad

cheered, booed and sang: “Shame on you!”, “Medvedev, resign!” and “Putin is a thief!” On 12 June 2017, a new wave of mass protests occurred.

After Aleksei Navalny’s arrest on 29 September, hours before a planned demonstration in Nizhny Novgorod, a new wave of protests was announced for 7 October, Vladimir Putin’s birthday. Protests and uprisings continued in 2018 with the trend towards radicalisation: they arrested a record number of protesters on 5 May, two days before Putin’s inauguration. Mass rallies were held in over 60 cities across Russia.

On 14 November 2019, Orthodox artists, doctors, teachers and Orthodox priests launched a campaign against Vladimir Putin’s repression in Russia. Actors, television greats, film directors and other names in Russian entertainment launched a major campaign for an artist who was sentenced to three and a half years in prison after being violently attacked by police during protests in Moscow against Vladimir Putin’s government. (*Infobae*)

Another person who appears to be leading the opposition is blogger and lawyer Lyubov Sobol, who was arrested after going on a hunger strike for 21 days.

State television records the protests as “orchestrated from abroad” accusing those involved of wanting to change the constitutional order by force.

This reflects the classic fear of the Kremlin / Putin that popular unrest could escalate sharply and place in danger of an overthrow their regime and government, as happened in Georgia, Ukraine and elsewhere.

Putin’s Russia supports the genocidal dictator in Syria

In Syria, Putin acted in common with the US, showing there is nothing anti-imperialist or progressive about him. The fact is that both, Putin and Trump, are sharing roles in the Middle East, with the same aim: to liquidate the uprisings of the Arab peoples against their dictators, as was shown in Syria.

The popular uprising of 2011 against al-Assad’s dictatorship was repressed by fire and sword, with bombings on cities and at certain times the use of internationally banned chemical weapons. Russia’s role was one of full military support to the genocidal al-Assad regime, dependent on Moscow, which was responsible for the vast majority of the 500,000 deaths and 4 million exiles.

In October 2015, then Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin

said Syria could become a model of cooperation with the United States: “The most important thing is that we treat each other as allies in the same war”. He added that the first aim was to “defeat terrorism” (which according to the Russians are all the enemies of al-Assad, the Islamic State —ISIS— and also the rebel militias of the Syrian Free Army).

We reproduce parts of a document by “Syrian writers, artists, journalists, democrats and laymen opposed to Assad’s regime”, dated 11 September 2016, to show the role of Russia in alliance with the United States against the Syrian people.

“We are participants in the struggle for democracy and justice in our country, our region and the world. We unreservedly, and in the strongest language, condemn the Russian and US approach of intervening in our internal Syrian affairs.

“At least since 2013, these two powers have been working to co-opt the Syrian liberation struggle under the rubric of the ‘war against terror’. This is a war that has failed to score a single success since its outset and has led instead to the destruction of a number of countries.

“Three years ago the two imperialist nations signed a reprehensible deal

on chemical weapons that resolved a problem for the United States, Israel, and Russia, and even for the Assad regime, which had just murdered 1,466 of its subjects. The deal, however, did not resolve any of the problems facing the Syrian people. Rather it gave free rein to an extremely criminal regime that kills Syrians, destroys their villages and communities, and drives them into exile. (...)

“Three years into this contemptible deal —with the death count now at around half a million Syrians— Russians and Americans have agreed to freeze the current situation so that the two military powers can carry on their endless war against terror. The agreement remains silent on the untold number of detainees held in brutal

conditions, and includes no call for lifting the blockade on besieged areas (...)” (Full statement and signatures can be found at <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/syrian-writers-artists-and-journalists-speak-out-against-us-and-russian-policy/>).

There is nothing progressive about Putin

The facts show without a doubt that Vladimir Putin is the head of a reactionary bourgeois regime, repressive and exploitative of his working people.

His frictions with the United States are part of a dispute over his capitalist interests and business and his zones of influence. But on the whole, they are part of the same austerity policies they agree to at the G20 meetings.

Their support for Maduro, for example, is not a defence of Venezuela against a possible US imperialist invasion. It is against the Venezuelan people in their democratic struggle against the Maduro regime and the misery it brings. Russian support for Maduro seeks nothing more than its economic convenience from its investments in Venezuela and to get payment in cheap Venezuelan oil in return.

Both in Putin’s internal, anti-worker policy, as in his policy towards the subjugated nationalities dominated by Russia and its international policy, there are no progressive elements at any point in favour of the social or democratic struggles of the oppressed of the world.

Capitalist restoration in the world’s largest country

Russia, like China, starts from having been powerful bureaucratic workers’ states in the era of “real socialism”, both in the military and in the scientific aspects. Let us recall that Russia sent the first satellite and the first man into space, Yuri Gagarin, before the United States. The fact they were already powerful states made it possible that, in the framework of the “world economy” dominated by the big monopolies, the restoration of capitalism —with specific differences between both countries— allowed them to jump stages to become in a reasonably short-time from bureaucratic workers’ states, into sub metropolis or sub imperialisms. If we add to this the fact that Russia is the largest country in the world, occupying part of Asia and part of Europe, with 17 million km² and 146.8 million inhabitants. It has the largest untapped reserves of energy and mineral resources in the world. It is considered the largest energy superpower and has the largest reserves of forest resources

and a quarter of the world’s unfrozen freshwater. It is a complex country.

To complete the data, Russia has an authoritarian and reactionary regime, which limits democratic and union freedoms by imposing rates of super-exploitation of labour. We can thus better understand the current definition of Russia.

With a nominal GDP (2018) of US\$ 1,719 billion, it occupies the eleventh place, proving to be a power. But it is in the GDP per capita where the colossal difference between the US and Russia is demonstrated: its GDP per capita is US\$ 11,946, while in the US it is US\$ 62,850. Even the GDP per capita is much lower than that of Germany (US\$ 44,400) or Spain (US\$ 28,000), ranking 69th in this category, even behind Argentina.

Russia is a great military power; it has a powerful nuclear armament and an arms and aerospace industry that competes with the United States. In total nuclear warheads, the US has 6,450 while Russia has 6,850 and China 280. If we look at the major

arms exporters, the US has 36 per cent of the market while Russia follows with 23 per cent and China with 5.2 per cent of the market. Its economy is centred on energy exports. Europe has become more dependent on Russian gas. For example, Russia supplies almost 30 per cent of Germany’s gas. Its business relations are mainly with European and also Japanese multinationals. Over 50 per cent of Russia’s foreign trade is with the European Union. But additionally, Russia is also a powerhouse in food production, being the world’s leading exporter of wheat and replacing the Americans in 2015–2016.

But the policy towards Ukraine after the annexation of Crimea/Donbas earned Russia economic sanctions, making its economic recovery problematic. These international sanctions are hampering its economic growth, which is between 1.5 and 2 per cent per year, below what one would expect from Russia. The IMF estimates an increase of 1.5 per cent in 2019 and 1.7 per cent in 2020.

Russian oligarchs got rich with the theft of state enterprises

The new Russian bourgeoisie based their original accumulation of capital on the theft of state property, the appropriation, through corruption and trickery adjudications of wild privatisations of large state properties because of capitalist restoration. Their former managers bought almost all state enterprises from the Stalinist bureaucracy.

This first period of looting of public property was catastrophic, with a reactionary extra-austerity under President Yeltsin, with an economic fall of over 50 per cent of GDP, big banking and financial scams and mass layoffs.

Putin was portrayed as the saviour, the leader who brought order and stability but he was part of Yeltsin's circle of power and was his successor.

Under Putin's "reign", the economy was arranged around large capitalist conglomerates that had won the race to steal the state economy. Rising gas and oil prices allowed for a few years of relative stability.

But there is another secret to the consolidation of capitalism: the misery of wages has been maintained in a country with a highly skilled labour force, both professional and technical. Today, the minimum wage is equivalent to US\$176. In mid-2019, Vladimir Putin admitted that living conditions in the country had worsened in recent years.

He promised: "We are working to reverse this trend". As it is often the case in capitalism, the misery of wages has its counterpart in the increase of surplus-value, i.e., of corporate super-profits.

Gazprom is among the giant mixed companies (state-owned and with private participation, associated to different oil companies in the world),

one of the largest energy companies in the world (US\$31.9 billion profit in 2010). In second place was Rosneft (oil and gas) with about US\$10.7 billion of net profits. Third place went to Lukoil (oil and gas) with about US\$9 billion in profits. TNK-BP (oil exploration, refining and marketing), in fourth place, made a profit of US\$6.54 billion; Russian Railways (RZhD) came in fifth place with about US\$4.7 billion.

AvtoVAZ is the largest Russian car manufacturer, they produce LADA. It is a joint-stock company. Japanese manufacturer Nissan controls 25 per cent of the stock and is looking to expand its share.

Among the foreign multinationals in Russia are French Total, Anglo-Dutch Shell, Japanese Mitsui and Mitsubishi, and Spanish Repsol, all in hydrocarbons. Japanese company SBI Holdings owns SBI bank. However, foreign investments are much lower than in China.

Russia has a class of super-rich, among the richest in the world, beneficiaries of the theft of public companies, oil wealth and the exploitation of cheap, skilled Russian labour, the famous oligarchy. Some of them:

Leonid Mikhelson: Chairman of the Board, Novatek. Fortune: US\$24 billion, he is the largest independent gas producer in Russia.



Roman Abramovich, the main owner of investment company Millhouse, his fortune: 12.4 billion dollars. In 2003, he bought English football club Chelsea

Vladimir Lisin: Chairman of the Board, NLMK. Fortune: US\$21.3 billion, he controls the Novo Lipetsk Metallurgical Plant and the largest shooting and sports complex in Europe; Fox Cove, in the Moscow region.

Vagit Alekperov: Chairman of NK Lukoil. Fortune: US\$20.7 billion.

Alexei Mordashov: Chairman of the Board, PAO Severstal. Fortune: US\$20.5 billion.

Gennady Timchenko: Member of the Board of Directors, Novatek and Sibur. Fortune: US\$20.1 billion. He is Vladimir Putin's close friend'

The most famous Russian businessman in the West is Roman Abramovich, the main owner of private investment company Millhouse LLC, his fortune: US\$12.4 billion. He bought the English football club, Chelsea, in 2003. In 2005, Abramovich sold 73 per cent of Sibneft to Gazprom in 2005 for \$13 billion, and this helped him become the richest man in Russia in the mid-2000s, although there are now several who beat him in the accumulation of billions.



Russia, a sub-imperialism

The Russian Federation is a conglomerate of 21 republics (plus Crimea, which is annexed from the Ukrainian territory and is not recognised as part of Russia by most states), 46 regions, 9 territories, 8 federal territories, 4 autonomous districts, and one autonomous region.

Russia's character as a sub-imperialist country is clear in its relationship to both the countries belonging to the Russian Federation and also the countries of the region, primarily the former Soviet republics. With the capitalist restoration, the economic links became ones of large private companies of economic semi-colonisation (exploitation) in most of the politically independent countries of the former USSR. They include Russia, Armenia, Belarus (whose government has even discussed the possibility of merging with the Russian Federation), Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Moldova, Candidates to join are Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Syria (which never belonged to the USSR but already had close relations). Another expression of its sub-imperialist character is its role in militarily supporting small states that have emerged from the break-ups of the former Soviet republics,

with little international recognition (among them South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Transnistria, Artsakh and Lugansk, part of Ukraine occupied by pro-Russian separatists). It also has companies in Latin America and Europe.

Military bases abroad

The first thing to say is that there is no comparison to the United States. Moscow has military bases in 11 countries, basically in the former USSR states. The case of Ukraine, now, after the annexation of the Crimea to Russia, in theory, and through facts, the Sevastopol base is already in Russian territory while before it was leased. It would seem Russia is even planning to deploy nuclear weapons. They estimate that 13,000 troops are deployed in the area.

In Syria, Russia has two military bases: the Tartus naval base and the Khmeimim airbase, and thousands of soldiers and bombers who played a decisive role in the war and genocide.

Faced with sanctions, Russia's policy has been to advance in diversifying its relations with dozens of countries around the world, as happened at the recently concluded Fifth Eastern Economic Forum.

In his work "Imperialism, the Higher

Stage of Capitalism", Lenin describes the conditions of imperialism: "Imperialism is capitalism at that stage of development at which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital is established; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun, in which the division of all territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed." (VI Lenin, *Collected Works, Vol 22* December 1915–July 1916, Progress Publishers, Moscow, p. 265–266.)

Clearly, the Russian transnationals do not weigh if compare them with the imperialists. Fiat, GM, VW, Bayer, Hoechst, which make up powerful monopolies, incomparable with the Russian companies. And this is very important, the economy is central to the definition of imperialism, not the military aspect. Today's Russia is a state that subjugates other countries to a semi-colonial relationship, although it does not yet have the role of world domination of the United States, the European Union or Japan, which we define as imperialists.



Dominican Republic

Popular mobilisation against electoral fraud

The municipal elections of 16 February were surprisingly suspended four hours after they began when voters and opposition candidates reported that only the candidates of the ruling Dominican Liberation Party (PLD) appeared on all electronic ballots, while opposition candidates did not appear in at least half of the automated voting centres. The outrageous attempt at fraud failed and the government's attempts to escape the disaster by blaming the opposition for alleged "sabotage" added fuel to the fire.

A wave of protests and banging of pots and pans punished the pro-US government of Danilo Medina. Plaza de la Bandera [Flag Square] in Santo Domingo, in front of the Central Electoral Board, became a concentration point for self-organised protesters that grew, reaching its peak in the massive protest on 27 February which was estimated to have brought together over 100,000 people. They forced the government to suspend its

investigation into the criminalisation of the opposition.

The business community and the bourgeois opposition parties, absent from the protests in the square, opted to ask for a political pact with the government and request greater OAS involvement in the investigation of the 16 February event, although OAS has been complicit with the government. In this way, they are trying to safeguard the regime. Despite this, PLD is shaken, and the country enters fully into the dynamic of struggles in the region.

India

Hindu Paramilitaries Attack Muslims During Trump's Visit

On 23 and 24 February, Trump visited India, the second-most populous country in the world. As the head of US imperialism signed agreements on gas with his counterpart Prime Minister Narendra Modi and to sell him US\$3 billion in weapons, the streets of New Delhi were burning. Paramilitary groups of Hindu fundamentalists, supporters of the ruling BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), attacked Muslim communities with the collaboration of the police, leaving over 40 dead and 200 wounded. By not mentioning the issue during his visit, Trump gave his tacit approval to the fascist violence.

The attack is part of the

government's repressive policy to crush popular protests against the Citizenship Act passed in December by the Indian parliament, which conditions citizenship on religious criteria. The government of India, which is a close ally of Israel, seeks to emulate Zionism and destroy the formally secular character of the state, rendering millions of Indian Muslims stateless.

Colombia

National strike on 25 March

On 25 March, a national strike will be held, called by the National Strike Committee (CNP), which includes the various Colombian trade union centres and the educators' federation (Fecode), among other social organisations.

The government of Ivan Duque has been implementing an austerity package backed by the IMF, the World Bank and the OECD, which involves structural reforms in pensions, the labour sector and in taxation, to make the workers and the people pay the consequences of the global capitalist economic crisis.

The strike on 25 March will take place amid many assassinations of social leaders in the territories and regions where mining and agricultural projects are advancing with transnationals and private groups and also organisations linked to drug trafficking. This strike is part of the actions agreed at the Second Meeting of Social Organisations of the CNP that met in Bogota on late January and follows the powerful strike of 21 November last year, which was a great day of struggle that put Colombia on the map of popular protests and rebellions that have been taking place in Latin America and the world.

So far, the CNP is more interested in negotiating with the government than in pushing forward the struggle against the package of austerity measures. However, the strike on 25 March can become an action as significant as the strike of 21 November.



Towards the Seventh IWU-FI World Congress

Silvia Santos, member of the IWU-FI International Secretariat



Closing ceremony of the Sixth World Congress. Buenos Aires, June 2017

In mid-July 2020, the Seventh Congress of the International Workers' Unity-Fourth International (IWU-FI) will be held. This was resolved by the meeting of its International Executive Committee (IEC) in Buenos Aires on 28, 29, 30 November and 1 December. Representatives of its sections in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Peru, Mexico, Spain, Turkey and Venezuela were present. The Congress will be named Leon Trotsky, remembering him 80 years after his assassination in Mexico at the hands of Stalinism. The Congress will be open to invitations to revolutionary organisations, groups and militants from Latin America, Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and the United States who share with IWU-FI the need to unite the revolutionaries based on a minimum revolutionary program, in the perspective of achieving workers' governments in the struggle against imperialism, the IMF and the capitalist governments.

Within this framework, the international meeting highlighted the revolutionary wave of struggle that

is crossing the world. It discussed, in particular, the popular rebellion in Chile and decided to redouble the international solidarity campaign for "Out with Piñera" and for the freedom of political prisoners. The IWU-FI also ratified its support for the general strike in France, the people's revolts in Lebanon and Iraq, the mobilisation of the Catalan people for their self-determination and the freedom of their political prisoners, the youth in Hong Kong for their freedoms, and the struggle in Bolivia against the de facto government of the reactionary right.

We are convinced the new wave of struggles opens new opportunities to fight for overcoming the crisis of revolutionary leadership. The solution will not come from a single organisation. We reject any self-proclamation. For this reason, the IWU-FI, on the way to its Seventh Congress, is oriented to seek agreements based on minimum revolutionary points that can bring us together and unify us with revolutionary currents, groups and sectors that come from other political traditions and experiences. •



Argentina

8M: On the streets for our rights

The demand against gender violence gained strength in the days of the 8-M (8 March) and 9-M (9 March) in the main cities of the world. With great strength, women took to the streets to demand their rights, which are systematically denied by all the capitalist governments in power. The same governments that are trying to unload their economic crisis on the backs of women workers have found enormous resistance in the feminist movement that is saying enough with the adjustment and austerity plans. This is why the poorest of the poor, those who work double or triple shifts, those who earn less than males for the same work were the real protagonists of this new day of struggle.

Historically, 8 March was born as a date to unite women workers around the world in their struggle to improve living conditions. Its origin goes back to the textile workers of New York who in March 1908 took to the streets en masse to demand a reduction in the working day, better wages, and the right to vote. A century later, the best tribute to those New York women workers was not to abandon the streets and continue fighting for a dignified life, a life worth living, a life where there is no room for violence, rape, disappearances or femicide.

In Panama, under the slogan “Workers yes, exploited and violated no”, in Mexico, with “The nine no one moves” and “a day without women”, in Argentina with the green headscarves for “legal, safe and free abortion”, in Brazil for “Justice for Marielle” and in Chile, on the front line demanding “Piñera out”, women continue making history and have shown once again their enormous strength. It is important to give continuity to these days and to continue fighting for all the pending demands to conquer each one right on the road to achieving true emancipation, without the chains of capitalist oppression and exploitation.



Turkey



Mexico



Spanish State