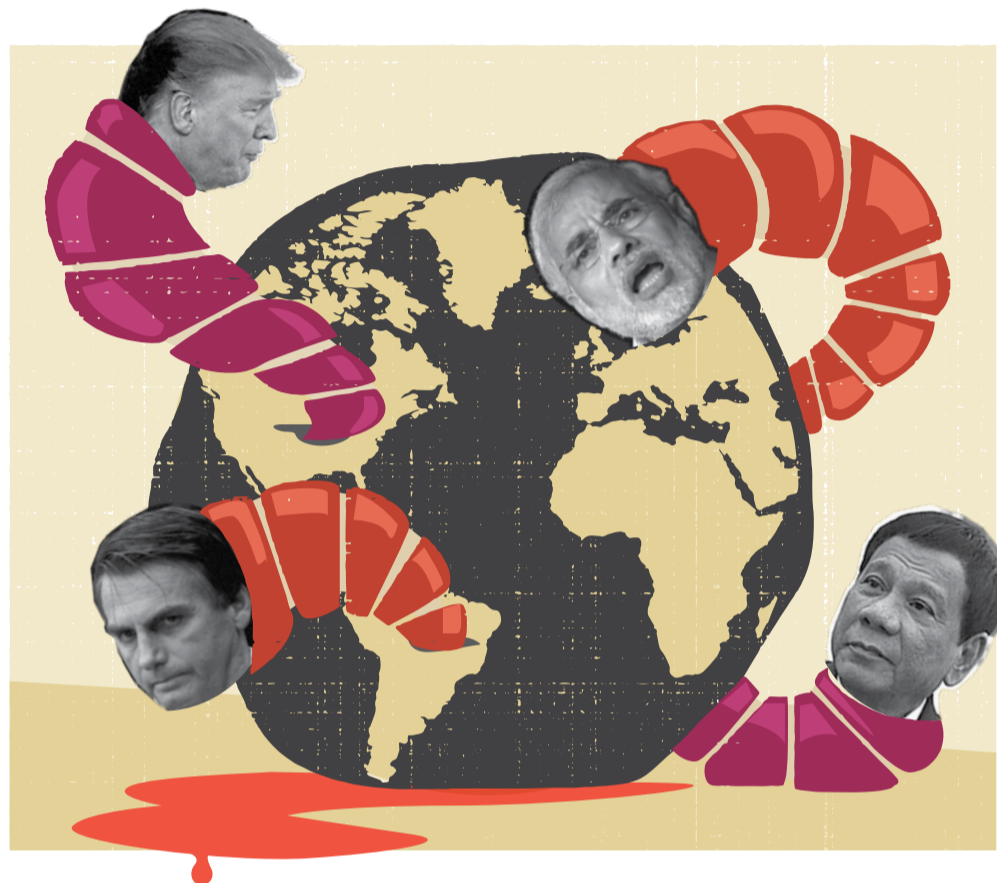




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THE RISE OF AUTHORITARIANISM AND THE FIGHT AGAINST IT



Like maggots crawling out of a decaying carcass, authoritarian parties and politicians have emerged in many parts of the world. All of these parties and politicians practice a vile form of politics based on hatred; crass stereotypes; bigotry; anti-democracy; misogyny; racism; and militarism.

This brew of toxic politics has then been served up as 'anti-establishment' and in the interest of the common people by the strongmen/women that are at the heart of these authoritarian movements. In reality such politics are anti-human and profoundly frightening – it points to the possibility of a future not of hope and greater egalitarianism; but decay, enforced inequality through extreme violence and ethnic cleansing.

Prime examples of hatred

The prime examples of such authoritarian politicians, and who often overtly claim far right credentials, in Europe and North America include the likes of Donald Trump; Front Nationale; Geert Wilders; Danish People's Party; Alternative for Germany; Jobbik; Golden Dawn and the League. All of these parties and politicians share a platform of white supremacy and they are Islamophobic. Their 'anti-establishment' goes no further than blaming immigrants or minority groups for any and all problems. They also claim to oppose the unfairness of free trade, yet deny that internal class rule lies at the heart of economic inequalities that are driving discontent in European countries and the United States (US). Likewise, few of these right-wing fanatics identify capitalism as the cause of people's misery. Given their deliberately shallow and crude analyses, for these politicians the solution is the ridiculous and racist notion of keeping immigrants out, and for many the return to a mythological past – which never existed – of a purely white Europe or North America in which prosperity reigns under capitalism.

While sharing racism, nationalism and a commitment to some form of capitalism, not all of the authoritarian parties and politicians in Europe

and North America share exactly the same economic policies, at least on the surface. While all rile against the 'establishment' and claim to be for the 'common' people and even 'anti-globalisation', some like Trump on a domestic front follow a rabid form of neoliberalism that has involved huge tax cuts for corporations, which he falsely sells as a stimulus to encourage investment in production and create jobs, along with slashing welfare for the working class and increasing the state's coercive powers. Yet others on the far right, like the openly fascist and neo-Nazi Golden Dawn in Greece (who are not in power), rhetorically are proponents of bringing back the welfare state for ethnic Greeks under a racialized Keynesian form of capitalism.

Such politicians and parties are not just present in the heartlands of imperialism, they are also to be found in parts of Asia and Latin America.

In India there is Narendra Modi. He harks back to a mythical golden age in India when only Hindus were supposedly citizens and seeks to ultimately ethnically cleanse India of people that are part of religious minorities – such as Christians and Muslims – who he blames for the country's ills. He also has no opposition to keeping India's caste system and patriarchy in place. In Brazil, the far right misogynist Bolsonaro has vowed to kill progressive activists in formations such as the Landless People's Movement (MST). He is also fanatically anti-immigrant having called people from Africa, the Middle East, and the Caribbean coming to Brazil the "the scum of humanity".

During his rise to power, Recep Erdogan in Turkey – an authoritarian Muslim fundamentalist

and right-wing nationalist – he riled against the Kurdish minority in that country blaming them for all tribulations in Turkey; while claiming that he would provide social welfare for all ethnic Turks should he become president. Once in power, however, he imposed further neoliberalism on the Turkish working class; but the one frightening promise he did keep was to ethnically cleanse hundreds of Kurdish villages. As the economy declined, far from moving away from neoliberal policies that were driving the crisis, he began to blame unnamed foreign powers for Turkey's economic woes.

Why the rise of authoritarianism globally

The reality is that the rise of authoritarian politicians can largely be traced back to the worldwide crisis of capitalism that erupted in 2008. In the prelude to the crisis, established political parties around the world had imposed neoliberal policies that set the stage for the crisis. In European countries it was mostly the established social democratic parties, which had often governed for decades, which had imposed these policies; in the US it was both the Republicans and Democrats; and in many countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America it was former liberation movements.

It is these policies that freed up financial capital, due to the deregulation of the sector at the heart of neoliberalism, which set the crisis off: unregulated financial institutions speculated on debt derivatives on a massive scale and these turned out to be worthless. Along with this, in most countries, neoliberal policies that allowed corporations to shift to regions of the globe where wages were lower gutted manufacturing jobs. Adding to the working class's misery,

...the rise of authoritarian politicians can largely be traced back to the worldwide crisis of capitalism that erupted in 2008.

established parties then bailed out the very same corporations that were central to the crisis and made the poorest pay for it by ransacking social benefits. Since then, such established parties have been unable to resolve the capitalist crisis – all they have done is to protect the interests of their class: the ruling class.

The attack of neoliberalism has also re-structured the working class. There has been a breaking down and weakening of the traditional organisations of the working class, such as trade unions. The working class has become more fragmented. Permanent lifelong jobs have largely disappeared, and there has been a rise in low paid, precarious, casual and contract jobs. In many countries unemployment has grown and the share of wages to GDP has declined. Coupled to this, the ruling classes around the world have pushed the ideology of individualism and large sections of the working class have inculcated this dominant notion. The consequences have been that progressive working class struggles have been weakened and it is in this context that authoritarianism has been arising.

EDITORIAL

The global economic crisis continues to deepen, making global capitalism increasingly unstable. The ruling class globally has responded by attacking the working class and making it pay for the crisis by transferring the costs and burden of the crisis onto the working class and poor – leading to increased poverty, unemployment and inequality.

In this issue of Workers Worlds News Shawn Hattingh looks at how, in diverse countries around the world the ruling class has also responded to the instability by turning to authoritarianism in order to maintain its power and access to opportunities to accumulate and control wealth. Often by tapping into legitimate demands and grievances and exploiting people's dissatisfaction both with the status quo and the failure of the institutional left either to effectively resist neoliberalism and austerity or build an alternative. As the Pink Tide in Latin America turns a darker shade of brown with the election of extreme right wing president Jair Bolsonaro, our guest writer Bruno Lima Rocha takes a comprehensive look at what is happening in Brazil.

While the ruling class internationally has been united in its attack on the working class and poor, the crisis has also precipitated increased conflict between different sections of the ruling class both globally and domestically. Globally this has taken the form of intensified intra-imperialist rivalry and increased competition between rival factions of domestic ruling classes over declining opportunities to accumulate wealth both through the state and private sector. Dale McKinley offers a critical left perspective of the Venezuelan crisis, arguing that it is not only the result of, "imperialist geopolitics and right-wing capitalist rule" prior to the rise to power of the late Hugo Chavez in 1998 but also, "the ways in which political power has been pursued and wielded by the post-1998 Bolivarian state and the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela".

In South Africa the effects of the global crisis of neoliberal capitalism have been deepening poverty, higher unemployment and increased inequality as the ruling class has sought to transfer the costs of the crisis onto the black working class majority. Intensified competition over declining opportunities to accumulate wealth both through the state and the resources within its borders helped set the stage for a major battle between the two main sections of the ruling class in South Africa; old white capital and the new BEE elite, each represented by a rival faction within the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and its government. While the crisis this precipitated within the ANC led to a slight loss of support in the national elections, the ANC retains its grip – with Cyril Ramaphosa, bedfellow of old white capital, at the helm. With this, as has already begun, we can expect more austerity and neoliberal attacks on the working class.



By Dale T. McKinley

THE PEOPLE, THE PARTY & THE STATE: A CRITICAL LEFT PERSPECTIVE ON THE VENEZUELAN CRISIS

The roots of the present political and socio-economic crisis in Venezuela are not simply to be found in the long history of imperialist geopolitics and right-wing capitalist rule that preceded the rise to political power of the late Hugo Chavez in 1998 and the pursuit of his accompanying 'Bolivarian revolution', with Nicolas Maduro now in the driver's seat. They are also to be found in the ways in which political power has been pursued and wielded by the post-1998 Bolivarian state and the ruling 'United Socialist Party of Venezuela' (PSUV).

As Mike Gonzalez so convincingly argues in his new book any assessment of what has happened in Venezuela over the last 20 years must acknowledge that the initial and decidedly social movement resistance that carried Chavez to power did not translate into the same once state power was captured through the electoral process.

In conceptual and practical terms what this meant was that, 'the logic of grassroots democratic impulse from below was translated into the occupation of the state ... the movements demanded a direct, participatory democracy – not a new version of the representative system.' In other words, the political and ideological imperative - of a revolutionary strategy - was, and is, not simply to occupy and utilise the institutional power of the state, but to transform the way in which power is derived and used, wherein the state (and then only transitionally) becomes the vehicle, the and struggle, not the other way round.

Such a core contradiction, which is not unique to Venezuela but which applies to many other situations (such as South Africa), is most often masked by a more immediate 'post-independence economic 'honeymoon' period. In the case of Venezuela, the high oil prices during the early years of Chavez's rule allowed for massive social grassroots collectives and formations as well as a very real decline in the levels of poverty for the majority.

promised and greatly needed, given that oil accounts for the overwhelming majority of revenue generated by the Venezuelan state and economy, did not happen. Here it must be noted that nationalised in 1976, long before Chavez came to power; what Chavez did was to use oil industry revenues for radically different purposes.

priations of other industries were largely 'purchases and often in reaction to the disinvestment a longer-term anti-capitalist strategy in which the socialisation of industries could open the door to industry with the global capitalist market did not fundamentally change.

The combined result was that within a few years huge amounts of economic and political power were being concentrated within a still heavily bureaucratized state, and after 2007, in the upper echelons of the ruling party, the PSUV.

Alongside this corruption, through the vehicles of spread, precisely because the state itself, its core relationship with the capitalist class and the power relations therein, remained largely unchanged.

globe including South Africa, many of the new occupants of the state (in this case, Chavistas), regardless of whether they came from the ranks of the working class or not, gradually became co-opted by the state itself, and the ruling party in charge. Instead of bringing the power and voice the state and the party that largely took the lead, ensuring that the majority of 'people's representatives' carried out the decisions of the state and party. In turn, a deepening relationship of and the majority of the population of workers and the poor.

To his credit but far too late, Chavez recognised much of this. In one of his last documents before his death in 2013, he admitted that 'far from transforming the state, the state had transformed and corrupted' his government.

It was into this reality that then Vice-President Nicolas Maduro entered, as the new leader of the PSUV and state (noting the very elitist, party-centric and anti-democratic parallel reality of Maduro being personally 'chosen' by Chavez as his proceeding Presidential elections, the underlying domestic problems have remained, along with a newer set of international political and economic These have taken on a three-tiered form.

Firstly, the fairly rapid collapse of global oil prices. This has, over the last 2-3 years in particular, contributed to a huge decrease in state revenue generation and the accompanying

devaluation of the national currency as well as with the social and economic consequences of the more historic failure to diversify the economy, this has left Venezuela a virtual hostage to the political-ideological whims and economic warfare of the core capitalist countries, regardless of the closer, but ultimately fragile, ties forged with the

Secondly, a renewed offensive by the United States and other capitalist states globally and PSUV government, back their domestic political opponents (largely in the form of opposition leader Manuel Guaidó) and put further barriers in the way of Venezuela's access to capitalist commodity, trade and currency markets. While it is particularly clear that the Trump admini-

continues to 'play its usual role' to access and control Venezuela's natural wealth US-multinationals, as Gonzalez points out, 'the reality is that the choice is between several (even if

And thirdly, an increasingly commandist, corrupt and militarised style of governance. This was, and continues to be, underlain by a growing intolerance of internal criticism amongst the state and PSUV leadership alongside an arrogance of power towards many of those who are suffering under an ever-intensifying domestic socio-economic crisis of basic needs and services. party leadership and bureaucracy have alienated themselves from the everyday lives of the poor and average working person.

One of the primary results has been a steady erosion of domestic political support for Maduro

and PSUV from millions of working class and poor people. This is a reality which was the main reason why Maduro and the PSUV lost the Maduro claimed, because of the 'betrayal' or a lack of 'loyalty' among poor and working-class Chavistas, who either stayed home or voted for the opposition.

There certainly have been, and to a lesser power through projects [such as] neighbourhood communes and workers cooperatives'. However, much of this effort has foundered on an intensi- state, despite radical rhetoric to the contrary, has by the 2016 announcement of the Arco Minero project, which has involved scores of foreign mul- of the Orinoco Basin'. Since then, according to Gonzalez, the region has witnessed increasing militarisation and environmental destruction.

South African and international leftists and progressives must rightfully condemn the imperialist manoeuvres of the USA and other core capitalist countries and defend the right of the Venezuelan people to decide their own political and economic future. But, it is crucial that the mistakes of the past should not be repeated, ANC's South Africa. Namely, to offer uncritical elitism of much of the leadership within the state and ruling party; the centralisation of authority

and general bureaucratisation of the state; and, the intolerance of dissenting political views and activities and increasing numbers of workers and the poor.

In the wise words of Manuel Sutherland, a younger generation Venezuelan the "progressive governments" with the same wisdom and insight that it applies to right-wing anti-working class regimes. There is no reason to ignore the problems that arise ... the left should instead collaborate in an urgent search for meaningful proposals ... If the Titanic sank, there name of solidarity and anti-imperialism."

The left should criticise the "progressive governments"

*Several of the arguments here are made by Mike Gonzalez in his new book, *The Ebb of the Pink Tide: The Decline of the Left in Latin America* (Pluto Press, 2019)

ILRIG STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF THE ROJAVA REVOLUTION & A CALL TO END THE ISOLATION OF JAILED KURDISH LEADER ABDULLAH OCALAN



Very few South Africans are aware that currently in the north and eastern parts of Syria (Rojava) a revolution as progressive, profound and potentially as far reaching as any in history is taking place. There, an alternative system to the state, capitalism and patriarchy is being built and it holds the potential to inspire the struggle for a better, more egalitarian Middle East and indeed world.

Since 2012, when the Syrian state in the area collapsed, people in Rojava – Kurds, Turks and Arabs – have established a federation of communes and councils, based on direct democracy, to run society without a hierarchical and patriarchal state. In the process a genuine democratic form of people's power has been created, in

which women play a key role. On the economic front, they have been attempting to replace capitalism with a communal economy. At the heart of this experiment are worker self-managed co-operatives that produce not for profits, but to meet people's needs. These co-operatives are in fact accountable to everyone in Rojava through

the federated communes and councils.

Over the course of almost 7 years, the people of Rojava – mainly through democratic militia – have fought off the many dangers that have been posed to the Revolution, which have included the forces of the Syrian state, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the Turkish state.

The experiments in Rojava have been heavily influenced by the vision of Democratic Confederalism, which has a central role in the Kurdish national liberation struggle in Syria, Iran, Turkey and Iraq. The first person to outline the vision of Democratic Confederalism – a form of libertarian socialism – in the early 2000s was one of the key leaders in the Kurdish national liberation struggle, Abdullah Ocalan.

For almost 20 years, Ocalan has been imprisoned by the Turkish state on the island prison of Imrali. The Turkish state imprisoned Ocalan for his role in the Kurdish freedom struggle and as the leader of the Kurdish Workers' Party – which the Turkish state claims is a terrorist organisation.

In this regard, it must be noted that the Turkish state has, over the last several decades: engaged in systemic ethnic discrimination and cleansing against Kurdish citizens of Turkey; used its military and intelligence forces to harass, jail and kill thousands of Kurdish people living in the south of Turkey and in the process, razed over 3 000 Kurdish towns to the ground; and, regularly launched military operations in northern Iraq and Syria targeting Kurdish liberation forces and civilians.

For 10 years Ocalan was the only inmate on the island. Under the neo-fascist regime of Erdogan, Ocalan has been kept in total isolation since April 2015 and has been denied any visitations, including by family members and lawyers. Since late 2018, hundreds of people involved in the Kurdish national liberation struggle have been on

a hunger strike demanding an end to the isolation of Ocalan.

In January 2019, the Turkish state also began to make plans for the invasion of northern Syria to end the Rojava Revolution. The Turkish state fears the Rojava Revolution will spread into Turkey itself and they do not want an experiment in direct democracy, feminism, ecology, anti-statism, and anti-capitalism to succeed. Already in 2018, the Turkish state invaded part of Rojava, Afrin, and are now unleashing plans to invade the rest of north and eastern Syria. These plans have been condemned by the peoples of the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (as Rojava is now known) and they have called for a genuine international peacekeeping force to be deployed to prevent the invasion.

As the International Labour Research and Information Group (ILRIG) we support the Rojava Revolution, including its goals of creating a feminist, anti-capitalist and stateless society. We offer solidarity to the comrades involved in the current hunger strike and support their calls for the Turkish state to end the isolation of Abdullah Ocalan. We stand with the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria and oppose any invasion, including the current threat by the Turkish state to undertake military actions against the Rojava Revolution. Furthermore, we call on other progressive movements in South Africa to support the Rojava Revolution and the associated struggles for Kurdish national liberation, and for the South African Government to recognise the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria and its right to be free from the threat of invasion from any aggressive state forces. ■

If comrades wish to offer support and solidarity they can also contact the **Kurdish Human Rights Action Group** based in Cape Town at admin@khrag.org

UPCOMING EVENTS

2019 ILRIG Political Schools APPLICATIONS OPEN!

Instead of having one national Globalisation School this year ILRIG, breaking with 16 years of tradition, will host two smaller provincial political schools: one in the Western Cape and one in Gauteng.

While attendance is by invitation only, for activists with which we work, ILRIG will consider applications from other progressive and working class activists depending both on what we think they would stand to gain from participating, and what they could contribute to the school (in terms of bringing new experiences, theories and insights etc.).

- Applications must include your:
- Name, age and gender.
- Where you are from (geographically and organisationally);
- What struggles you are involved in or constituencies you work with, and;
- Motivate why you want to participate in the School (i.e. what you think you can contribute to the school, and what you hope to gain from it).

Send applications by email, fax or private message to the contacts listed below.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

Are you involved in progressive struggles or grassroots workplace/community organising that needs solidarity or that you think more activists should be made aware of? Do you have an analysis of or insights into a struggle or social/political/economic issue or development – whether local, regional or international – that is of interest or relevance to progressive/working class activists and struggles in South Africa that you would like to share? Do you have questions/comments about or disagreements with something published in Workers' World News?

Send us your article (max. 600 words) by email or Facebook private message and we will consider publishing it in a future issue.



CALLING ALL CULTURAL ACTIVISTS

We would love to feature your artwork advocating for alternatives to capitalism, fascism and patriarchy. Please help us make this an inspiring publication by sending us your poetry & songs, photography & graphic design, paintings & drawings, reports & manifestos of cultural activist interventions etc.

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WWW.ILRIG.ORG

The site allows viewers to find out more about ILRIG, its history, staff and board. It provides an interactive space for interested people to engage with ILRIG's work on globalisation, read articles, contribute to discussion, and order publications. Website members will receive regular updates on issues of interest.



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