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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.

Pull-out poster

Free pull-out poster available with this issue.
Artwork by Darrel Robertson

Lead article continued:

Indeed, since 2008, many voters in numerous countries have been electing authoritarian parties and politicians and have rejected established parties. Indeed, social democratic parties across Europe have shrunk, numerous established parties in countries like India and Philippines have been ousted from power, and even in South Africa an established party such as the ANC has shrunk. Many voters are voting for 'anti-establishment' authoritarian parties and politicians to punish the established parties, and some hope such politicians will be messiahs that bring back a mythical golden age, fix the economy on capitalist lines or at least keep out immigrants that they see as taking their jobs or encroaching on their social benefits.

This has posed a problem for the ruling class in countries such as France, Britain, Italy, Hungary, India, Philippines, Brazil, and to a lesser extent the US. This is because the established parties were the traditional parties of the ruling class. Through these parties the ruling classes could govern through consent, push through their agenda whilst still getting the working class to vote and believe in these parties. With established

parties collapsing, sections of the ruling classes have now turned to authoritarian politicians and parties. It is where the financial support comes from for the likes of Donald Trump, Modi, Bolsonaro, Erdogan and Duterte. Sections of the ruling class are now backing these authoritarian parties and politicians precisely because they scapegoat minorities and immigrants; while keeping class rule, capitalism and the state's coercive power firmly in place. They are now seen by some within the ruling classes as the only means to keep capitalism going under its condition of crisis. The primary means of this is violence or the threat of violence. As such, they also hold out the promise to violently maintain the status quo in the interests of the ruling class, should it be required, under the notion of defending tradition and order. It is precisely why all authoritarian parties strengthen the repressive arms of the state, and it is why sections of the ruling class are funding, backing, joining and founding such parties.

Resistance to authoritarianism

There has been resistance to the rise of these authoritarian parties and politicians. Some of the most effective resistance has been from progressive activists grouped loosely under the banner of Antifa (Anti-fascist Action). Under the banner of Antifa activists have used direct action to combat the rise of authoritarian parties and politicians in countries such as Greece, Turkey, the US, Italy, and Germany. Importantly, these struggles have also resisted capitalism, the state and class rule as part of resisting racism. Nonetheless,

If we are going to fight and defeat the rise of authoritarian politics, we are going to have to create a new society beyond the state and capitalism.

although these have been important struggles, they have

been defensive struggles

– a reflection of the weakness of working class struggles and organising.

One area where there has been an offensive struggle against authoritarian politics has been in the North of Syria. There activists – mainly, but not exclusively Kurdish people – have successfully fought against the authoritarian Assad regime and the fascist Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. These struggles though have not been to defend a parliamentary system. They have rather been about creating a new more egalitarian and feminist society under the name of the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria. Through this, a new system of direct democracy based around federated communes and councils has been created to run society from the bottom up – in other words to expand democracy into all spheres of life in order to ideologically combat authoritarianism. Much of the economy too has been socialised and democratised and is now largely based around democratic workers' co-operatives that produce to meet people's needs. If we are going to successfully fight and defeat the rise of authoritarian politics and parties around the world, we are going to have to create a new society beyond the state and capitalism. The struggle in the north of Syria is important as it gives us a glimpse that this can be done and it stands out as a light in darkness of the rise of authoritarian politics. ■

Editorial continued:

In the context of growing authoritarianism and nationalism, "The current global trend to respond to migration with further restrictions, hostility and from an attitude of fear", writes Abigail Dawson, "is no different in South Africa. With election campaigns not shying away from this trend South Africa is seeing manifesto's which call for 'Secure Borders' and the registration of a political party who's main agenda is to 'remove foreigners.'"

A democratically self-organised and united working class is the only force that can resist these attacks and offer an alternative for a world in crisis. But to do so it has to overcome its own crisis of organisation and consciousness. In part one of our series "Class struggle, the left and power" Jonathan Payn argues that, in the context of the neoliberal restructuring of, and attacks on the working class, and the failure of traditional left and working class organisations to mount an effective resistance, it is to the ideas and experiences of the libertarian left we should look for new ideas and forms of organising to effectively resist and replace neoliberalism.

A contemporary example of this is the Rojava Revolution in northern Syria, where huge advances in creating a new more egalitarian and feminist society have been made. Dilar Dilik, a Kurdish activist, explains some of the ideas underlying this revolution, saying that understanding fascism, in order to effectively combat it, "means understanding the relationship between patriarchy, capitalism and the state" and that "Without the hierarchical, hegemonic nature of the state [...] no system of exploitation or violence could survive". ■

GENDER NEWS By Dilar Dirik

PATRIARCHY, FASCISM & CAPITALISM

There have been many attempts to explain the phenomenon of ISIS and its appeal to thousands of young people, especially considering the brutality of the organization's methods. Many came to the conclusion that those who live under ISIS often serve the group because of fear or economic rewards.

But clearly thousands of people worldwide voluntarily joined the atrocious group not despite, but precisely because of its ability to commit the most unthinkable evils. It seems that it is not religion, but a cruel, merciless sense of power – even at the cost of death – radiating from ISIS that attracts people from across the globe to the extremist group.

A Product of Capitalist Modernity

Single-factor theories generally fail to consider the regional and international political, economic, social context that enables an anti-life doctrine like that of ISIS to emerge. We must acknowledge ISIS' appeal to young men, deprived of the chance to be adequate, decent human beings, without justifying the group's mind-blowing rapist, genocidal agenda or removing the agency and accountability of individuals who commit these crimes against humanity. It is crucial to contextualize the sense of instant gratification in the form of authoritarian power, money and sex that ISIS offers in a cancerous society under patriarchal capitalism, which renders life meaningless, empty and hopeless.

Pathologizing the appeal of ISIS behind the backdrop of the so-called "war on terror," instead of situating it in the context of wider institutions of power and violence which in interplay generate entire systems of authoritarianism, will not allow us to begin to understand what drives "good boys" from Germany to travel to the Middle East to become slaughterers. And yet ISIS is only

Internationalist volunteers from the Queer Insurrection and Liberation Army (TQILA), a subgroup of the International Revolutionary People's Guerrilla Forces (IRPGF), flying the rainbow flag in Raqqa, Syria.
Source: Wiki Commons



the most extreme manifestation of a seemingly apocalyptic global trend. With the recent shift towards authoritarian right-wing politics worldwide, one word – once considered banished from human society forever – has re-entered our everyday lives and our political lexicon: fascism.

Clearly, there are immense differences between the contexts, features and methods of various fascist movements. But when it comes to its hierarchical organization, authoritarian thought process, extreme sexism, populist terminology, and clever recruitment patterns, capitalizing on perceived needs, fears or desires among vulnerable social groups, ISIS in many ways mirrors its international counterparts.

Perhaps we can think of fascism as a spectrum, in which established states on top of the capitalist world-system have the means to reproduce their authority through certain political institutions, economic policies, arms trade, media and cultural hegemony, while others, in reaction, rely on more "primitive" forms of fascism, such

as seemingly random extremist violence. There are clear parallels in how fascists everywhere rely on a regime of paranoia, mistrust and fear to strengthen the strong hand of the state. Those who challenge their enemies are labelled "terrorists" or "enemies of God" – any action to destroy them is permissible.

One of the most critical pillars of fascism is capitalism...

Fascism strongly relies on the complete lack of decision-making agency within the broader community. It is nourished by a climate in which the community is stripped of its ability to initiate direct action, express creativity and develop its own alternatives. Any form of solidarity and any loyalty directed at anything or anyone other than the state must be systematically eradicated, so that the isolated, individualized citizen is dependent on the state and its policing institutions and knowledge systems.

That is why one of the most critical pillars of fascism is capitalism, as an economic system, ideology and form of social interaction. In the value system of capitalist modernity, human relations need to be reduced to mere economic interactions, calculable and measurable by interest and profit. It is easy to see capitalism's ability to dispose of life in the name of larger interests as running parallel to ISIS' wasting of lives for the sake of its pseudo-caliphate of rape, pillage and murder.

The Oldest Colony of All

Perhaps most crucially, fascism could never emerge if not for the enslavement of the oldest colony of all: women.

Of all oppressed and brutalized groups, women have been subjected to the most ancient forms of institutionalized violence. The view of women as war spoils, as tools in the service of men, as objects of sexual gratification and sites to assert ultimate power persists in every single fascist manifesto.

The emergence of the state, together with the fetishization of private property, was enabled above all by the submission of women.

Indeed, it is impossible to assert control over entire populations or create deep-cutting social divisions without the oppression and marginalization of women, promoted in male-dominated history-writing, theory production, meaning-giving practices, and economic and political administration. The state is modelled after the patriarchal family and vice versa. All forms of social domination are at some level replications of the most comprehensive, intimate, direct and harmful form of slavery, which is the sexual subjugation of women in all spheres of life.

Different structures and institutions of violence and hierarchy – such as capitalism or patriarchy – have distinct features, but fascism constitutes the concentrated, inter-related, systematized collaboration between them.

And this is where fascism and capitalism, together with the most ancient form of human domination – patriarchy – find their most mo-

Gender news continued:

nopolized, systematic expressions in the modern nation-state.

Previous regimes over the course of history had despotic characters, but always relied on moral codes, religious theologies and divine or spiritual institutions to be seen as legitimate by the population. It is a particularity of capitalist

modernity that it sheds all pretensions and claims to morality in relation to law and order, and exposes its obscenely destructive systems for the sake of nothing but the state itself.

Without the hierarchical, hegemonic nature of the state, which monopolizes the use of force, the economy, official ideology, information and culture; without the omnipresent security apparatuses that penetrate all aspects of life, from the

media to the bedroom; without the disciplinary hand of the state as God on Earth, no system of exploitation or violence could survive. ISIS is a direct product of both: ancient models of hierarchy and violence, as well as capitalist modernity with its particular mindset, economy and culture. Understanding ISIS – and fascism more generally – means understanding the relationship between patriarchy, capitalism and the state. ■

All forms of social domination are at some level replications of the most comprehensive, intimate, direct and harmful form of slavery, which is the sexual subjugation of women in all spheres of life.

GUEST ARTICLE By Bruno Lima Rocha

RIGHT-WING RISING: A COMPREHENSIVE LOOK AT WHAT'S HAPPENING IN BRAZIL

'Women is Resistance. Fascists will not Advance' reads a banner at a demonstration against then-presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro in Porto Alegre, Brazil. 29 September 2018.

By Caco Argemi CPERS / Sindicato.
Source: Wiki Commons



Latin America's largest country finds itself in a complex political moment. Brazil is the 8th economy worldwide but has yet to realize its full potential as a world power. It is a country of many coexisting qualities that combine to make a vibrant whole.

Brazil is often a mystery even to those of us who make a living studying it, and it can be a fascinatingly open and tolerant society – one where anything and everything is welcome. The October 2019 presidential and general elections in Brazil challenged that notion. An extreme right wing candidate, Jair Messias Bolsonaro, rose to power in a contested victory. This was the last straw in a mounting political crisis with multiple causes and, the way it looks at the moment, even more consequences.

The beginnings of the country's current political crisis can be traced back to 2003. However, the steady momentum which ultimately led to Bolsonaro's election likely began on August 31st 2016, when President Dilma Rousseff was impeached during the second year of her term. Dilma succeeded Lula in 2010 and was re-elected. She was previously his Minister of Energy (Minas e Energia). After, she served in the Ministry of Government (Casa Civil), which is the most important branch of national government in Brazil outside of the presidency. Rousseff's impeachment establishes a new phase in Brazil,

known as the end of New Republic (1985-2016). The 31 years after the end of Brazil's military dictatorship (1964-1985) was the result of a national agreement reinforced through a new National Constituent Assembly and the creation of the Citizenship Constitution. An agreement was reached between traditional political oligarchies, military commanders, media groups, federal judges and federal public prosecutors. Put simply, one could say that Nova República's Agreement resulted in the recognition of political and social rights, as well as a legal system that aimed to organize people to fight for their rights as citizens.

Despite the agreement, high levels of state violence prevailed in Brazil, perpetrated frequently by militarized police forces (an unfortunate remnant of the military dictatorship and consequence of the country's Military Assistance Program in the 1960s). Gangs or cartels ("commandos") based in prisons or slums

also regularly contributed to high rates of crime. The government maintains a sad record of social injustices. Murders of peasants, indigenous Brazilians, and African-Brazilian were a regular occurrence. Our society carried this inner conflict for three decades. The resulting trauma was translated into positive political advancement - the election of a former union organizer and political prisoner to the presidency. Next came a former guerrilla fighter, and then another ex-political prisoner.

Lula, followed by Dilma, never promised radical social change. But a new phase in the national agreement began regardless.

Brazil's working and middle classes were lifted out of poverty through economic policies that favored the country's majority. A large structural part of the national economic policies were based on the export of commodities. Much of the government's economic goals were also created in agreement with privately-owned companies inside the oil and gas sector and engineering. State-sponsored contracts and the expansion of public debt made up the core of Brazil's national development. The success of this system

There were several fragile aspects of Brazil's economy, even during the country's period of economic boom.

depended on exports of soy beans, raw sugar, iron ore, crude petroleum, frozen bovine meat, agriculture products (high intensive agriculture, based on fertilizers and technology), and some industrial products (For a more complex description of the Brazilian economy, see here: <https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/bra/>).

There were several fragile aspects of Brazil's economy, even during the country's period of economic boom. But three in particular contributed heavily to the crisis that preceded Dilma's impeachment. The first was that Brazil's economy was based on finances. Because of global currency competition, the international debts of Brazilian companies became unmanageable. The second is typical in which the economy is still based country still based primarily on exports. The collapse of this sector in Brazil began after the 2008 financial crash (the global speculation fraud that started with US-based mortgages and spread throughout the globe). China reduced its amount of primary imports, a decision that negatively impacted worldwide prices. The third is an operation led by the federal police and prosecutors, waged through the media, named Projeto Pontes (https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BRASILIA1282_a.html), initiated in February 2009. The operation was a key part of Operação Lava Jato (Operation Car Wash), similar to the Operazione Mani Pulite carried out in Italy during the 1990s.

During the 2014 national election, Dilma was reelected. She had maintained her alliance with oligarchic parties (including PMDB, her vice president Michel Temer's party – a central part of the conspiracy to impeach Rousseff). After a difficult first round against several candidates, Rousseff faced off against Senator Aécio Neves (PSDB, Minas Gerais state). She won on a platform challenging the state of Brazil's government goals and social programs. However, a month after winning the presidency, Dilma nominated a "Chicago Boy" for the Ministry of Economics. Joaquim Levy destroyed Rousseff's legitimacy among low and middle-class voters. It was the perfect storm - a fragile and unpopular administration, Operation Car Wash criminalizing Brazil's economic and political model through the media, plus the actions of self-proclaimed Neo-Pentacostal and ultraliberal youth "movements" - was enough to move Congress into action.

It would be near impossible to explain what is happening in Brazil without a comprehensive analysis of recent history. The rise of Jair Bolsonaro and Brazil's far-right is complicated. And it would not have been possible if it weren't for Brazil's long and chaotic political history, as well as the ability of the right to imitate the success of similar political ideologies in the United States. ■

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CLASS STRUGGLE, THE LEFT AND POWER

Twenty-five years into democracy the black working class majority in South Africa has not experienced any meaningful improvements in its conditions. The apartheid legacy of unequal education, healthcare and housing and the super-exploitation of black workers continues under the ANC and is perpetuated by the neoliberal policies it has imposed.

These troubles are part of the world's troubles; this neoliberalism is part of global neoliberalism. As the global economic crisis deepens, the global ruling class is making the working class pay, transferring the costs to workers and the poor, leading to increased poverty, unemployment, inequality and insecurity. And so in South Africa neoliberal oppression is piled on top of national oppression.

The only force capable of changing this situation is the working class locally and internationally. Yet to do so, struggles need to come together, new forms of organisation appropriate to the context are needed; and they need both to be infused with a revolutionary progressive politics and to learn from the mistakes of the past.

Some such struggles have occurred over recent years, including the historic platinum mineworkers' strike and farmworkers' strike in 2012; but the many struggles have not yet pulled together into a new movement.

Outside the ANC alliance, there have indeed been many efforts to unite struggles – but these have largely failed to resonate with the working class in struggle and form the basis of a new movement.

Nowhere is this more evident than with the newly-formed Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party (SRWP) – which got less than 25 000 votes

in the national elections, despite the fact that the union that conceived it, Numsa, claims nearly 400 000 members.

This series, of which this article is the first, argues that part of the reason why these initiatives have and will continue to fail is because of the theoretical conceptions of class and power that are prevalent on much of the left, and their strategic implications for movement building towards socialism.

NUMSA's non-moment

When the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) announced its resolutions, following its historic 2013 Special National Congress, to break with the ANC and SACP and to form a "United Front against neoliberalism", many on the left were hopeful that this would give working class movements the new ideological and organisational direction they need.

The United Front, Numsa said, was not about building a new organisation, party or labour federation but "a way to join other organisations in action, in the trenches", gaining community support for Numsa campaigns and building "concrete support for other struggles of the working class and the poor wherever and whenever they take place".

It looked as if there hopes were not misplaced when, for example, unemployed youth and community activists across the country responded

positively to Numsa's call by supporting the 19 March 2014 actions against the Youth Wage Subsidy. Branches were set up and, despite initial scepticism, community activists joined.

By August 2017, however, the Johannesburg branch of the United Front had declared that, "After the initial enthusiasm, there is now a feeling the UF has largely collapsed, with only a couple of local structures still active." Numsa had shifted its focus and resources to establishing a "Movement for Socialism" because "the working-class needs a political organisation committed in its policies and actions to the establishment of a socialist South Africa".

Having gained some community support for its campaigns, including the United Front itself, the success of the United Front in building working class unity going forward depended on whether Numsa would reciprocate by putting its resources and capacity at the service of building "concrete support for other struggles of the working class and the poor wherever and whenever they take place".

Instead, Numsa put its energies into calling for a new workers' party, while presenting itself as the vanguard of the whole working class, and in so doing missed its moment.

The SRWP won't set you free

Numsa undertook to "conduct a thorough-going discussion on previous attempts to build socialism as well as current experiments to build socialism" and "commission an international study on the historical formation of working-class parties, including exploring different type of parties – from mass workers' parties to vanguard parties". But it already knew what it was aiming for. It had said that a new political party

was on the cards – to replace the SACP, which had become corrupted by the neoliberal state, as the political vanguard of the working class.

The potential of the United Front approach for building working class unity is precisely because it accommodates ideological differences in order to build the unity of working class formations in struggle. But Numsa still looks to the legacy of Communist Parties. And these parties have historically used united fronts to create unity in action in struggles against capitalist attacks, but also with the aim of winning over the majority in these struggles to their programme – in this case the formation of a new party, that they would lead – under their Party leadership and no one else's.

While Numsa has broken with Cosatu and the SACP organisationally, it has not broken with them ideologically. The Numsa bureaucrats' belief that they are the vanguard of the working class and their insistence on building a party to contest state power are founded on the same ideological certainties and theoretical understandings of class, power and the nature of the state as the SACP – with the same strategic implications that, invariably, will have the same disappointing outcomes.

If we really want to build a movement for socialism, and to avoid merely replacing one set of rulers for another, the authoritarian left needs to rethink its understandings class, power and the nature of the state in light of the imperial evidence and learn from the mistakes of the past, instead of repeating them and expecting a different outcome.

This series aims to contribute to that discussion. ■



The only force capable of changing this situation is the working class

HOSTILE HOSTS & A FORGOTTEN HISTORY

2019, leading up to a national election, has had an unwelcoming beginning for non-nationals living in South Africa.

Government officials in various departments have made streams of accusatory comments against them. People not born in but who consider their current home South Africa have fallen victim to blame for widespread corruption and mismanagement. This is an opportunist strategy by officials who fail to recognise the historical feature of migration in building the country they attempt to govern.

Migration from the SADC region has featured in South African history from the 1800's, making black African migrants an intricate part of South Africa's social, economic and political life.

A country that has been built and relied on migrant laborers is being seen to turn its back on the lives of many people who consider this place part of their understood home. Changes in migratory patterns have occurred post-1994, with migrants coming from further north on the continent, however these numbers are far fewer than the exaggerated figures described by officials.

The current global trend to respond to migration with further restrictions, hostility and from

an attitude of fear is no different in South Africa. With election campaigns not shying away from this trend South Africa is seeing manifestos which call for 'Secure Borders' and the registration of a political party who's main agenda is to 'remove foreigners'. This hostility is becoming a normalised response to a historical and continued movement of people through the region.

The Department of Home Affairs (DHA) had a White Paper out for public comment in February 2019. DHA has and still prides itself on having a non-encampment policy for refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented

migrants. However, amendments to a progressive Refugee Act and A White

Paper claiming efficiency are pushing for the implementation of processing centers at Ports of Entry (PoE). This has come into discussion while a simultaneous process of closing Refugee Reception Offices has been occurring since 2010. These proposed processing centers will result in people having to be kept at border posts until, and if, their documentation status is determined. The existing system for legalizing people's stays in South Africa is in collapse. For those seeking protection and refuge from war and conflict, and others naturally seeking a better life and opportunities the road to being documented is treacherous. Closing Refugee Reception Offices, current backlogs, maladministration coupled with bribery manufactures illegality. It is not a



People's March Against Xenophobia, Johannesburg. April 2015. By Dyltong. Source: Wiki Commons

matter of people wanting to be illegally in South Africa but a system that generates illegality. This is made clear in the recent White Paper which states that the mandate amongst other things is to be 'citizen-focused'. This defies the notion that South Africa belongs to everyone who lives in it, as stated in the Freedom Charter.

Following on shortly from the White Paper a call for public comments was made for the Prevention and Combatting Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill, a new Act enabling hate speech, including xenophobia, to be criminalized and for measures to be put in place to combat and prevent such crimes through national legislation. The timing of the call for comments of these policies bring into light the contradictory spaces we are working with. On one hand a department that is moving towards insitutionalizing discriminatory and restrictive policies based on someone's

origin. On the other hand, a proposal for a progressive piece of policy which could criminalize the rhetoric which so often uncovers itself behind policies of efficiency and regularization.

Policies to combat and prevent hate crimes such as xenophobia are valuable. Civil society should be the drive in using such tools for holding people accountable. However, until such a time a movement is waiting to be built which represents all those who live in South Africa: Migrants, both domestic and foreign, unrecognised asylum seekers and refugees. Only then will we realise that access to health care, education and social services are not burdened by 'foreigners' but by a system restraining what was granted to us all. As politicians and ministers plan for this election period historical reflection and empathy is required to know that the path to dignity knows no borders. ■

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).

A Bolivarian honeymoon

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 radical (anti-capitalist) politics of the grassroots/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 democracy didn't fit with the logic of electoralism, but the 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 property of the grassroots/people's democracy and struggle, not the other way round.

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

However, the economic diversification that was 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 the Venezuelan oil industry had officially been nationalised in 1976, long before Chavez came to power; what Chavez did was to use oil industry revenues for radically different purposes.

At the same time, the nationalisations/expropriations of other industries were largely 'purchases and often in reaction to the disinvestment or flight of a specific capitalist', not the result of a longer-term anti-capitalist strategy in which the socialisation of industries could open the door to both socially useful diversification of the economy and worker/people's control of production and distribution. While more taxes and royalties came flowing into the national budget, the relationship of the supra-state and more specifically the oil industry with the global capitalist market did not fundamentally change.

The State corrupts

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 patronage and clientelism, began to flourish and spread, precisely because the state itself, its core relationship with the capitalist class and the power relations therein, remained largely unchanged.

As with so many other examples across the 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 of grassroots organisations/social movements into the heart of decision-/policy-making, it was 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 dependency developed between the state/party 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.

The crisis intensifies

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 successor). Even though Maduro/PSUV won the preceding Presidential elections, the underlying domestic problems have remained, along with a newer set of international political and economic realities that have only intensified the crisis. 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 a massive spike in the inflation rate. Combined 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 likes of Russia and China.

Secondly, a renewed offensive by the United States and other capitalist states globally and in the region to politically isolate the Maduro/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 administration/USA imperialism continues to 'play its usual role' to access and control Venezuela's natural wealth for the profit motives of US-multinationals, as Gonzalez points out, 'the reality is that the choice is between several (even if differentially experienced) imperialisms': American, Russian and Chinese.

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. The truth is that a significant section of the state/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 2015 election for the National Assembly not, as 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 extent continue to be, attempts to 'build popular power through projects [such as] neighbourhood communes and workers cooperatives'. However, much of this effort has foundered on an intensified bureaucratisation and a 'lack of democratic control from below'. Further, the Maduro/PSUV state, despite radical rhetoric to the contrary, has continued its commitment to a 'renewed and expanded extractivist program in conjunction with multinational capital.' This is best exemplified by the 2016 announcement of the Arco Minero project, which has involved scores of foreign multinationals exploiting 'the huge mineral potential of the Orinoco Basin'. Since then, according to Gonzalez, the region has witnessed increasing militarisation and environmental destruction.

Lessons for the Left

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, such as those in the case of Mugabe/ZANU-PF's Zimbabwe, Dos Santos/MPLA's Angola or the ANC's South Africa. Namely, to offer uncritical support and largely dismiss and/or turn a blind eye to: the corruption and capitalist lifestyle 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 of internal party/state critics and increasing numbers of workers and the poor.

In the wise words of Manuel Sutherland, a younger generation Venezuelan Marxist economist: 'The left should criticise 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 is no justification for denying the wreckage in the name of solidarity and anti-imperialism.' ■

The left should criticise the "progressive governments" with the same wisdom and insight it applies to right-wing class regimes.

*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)



'No more socialism' reads a banner at an anti-Maduro demonstration convened by Interim President Juan Guaidó in Caracas, Venezuela. 2 February 2019. By Alexcocopro. Source: Wiki Commons

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.).

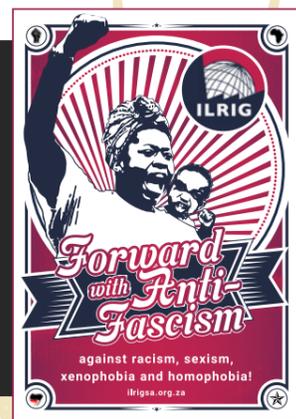
- Applications must include your:
- Name, age and gender.
- Where you are from (geographically and organisationally);
- What struggles you are involved in or constituencies you work with, and;
- Motivate why you want to participate in the School (i.e. what you think you can contribute to the school,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