

# FIM

MAGAZINE

## Argentina: the challenge of the revolutionary left

**Plus: The political crisis in France, Donald Trump's programme, Labour and Zionism, the Swiss women's movement, Ireland, repression and resistance in China**



# COVER STORY

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The challenge of the revolutionary left in Argentina

By *Jonathan Frühling* and *Martin Suchanek*

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**Revolutionary Socialist Movement (Pakistan)**  
fifthinternational.org

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marxismus.ch

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# Analysis

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## TRUMP AND HIS PROGRAMME

*International Secretariat*

**T**he expected neck-and-neck race projected by all the opinion polls did not materialise. It became clear early during the night of 5–6 November that the racist, misogynist, right wing populist champion of Make America Great Again, Donald Trump, had been elected US President for the second time. MAGA Republicans now control the Senate and the House of Representatives. With the Presidency this makes what Americans call a trifecta.

### **The results and the voters**

Trump won all the so-called swing states, obtaining 312 electoral college votes, with Harris gaining only 226. He also clearly outperformed Harris in the total of votes

received, with 74,650,754 (50.5%), against 70,916,946 (47.9%). All the other candidates fell below one per cent. Jill Stein of the Green Party and the independent Robert Kennedy, who suspended his election campaign in favour of Trump, both managed to secure just 0.5% of the vote.

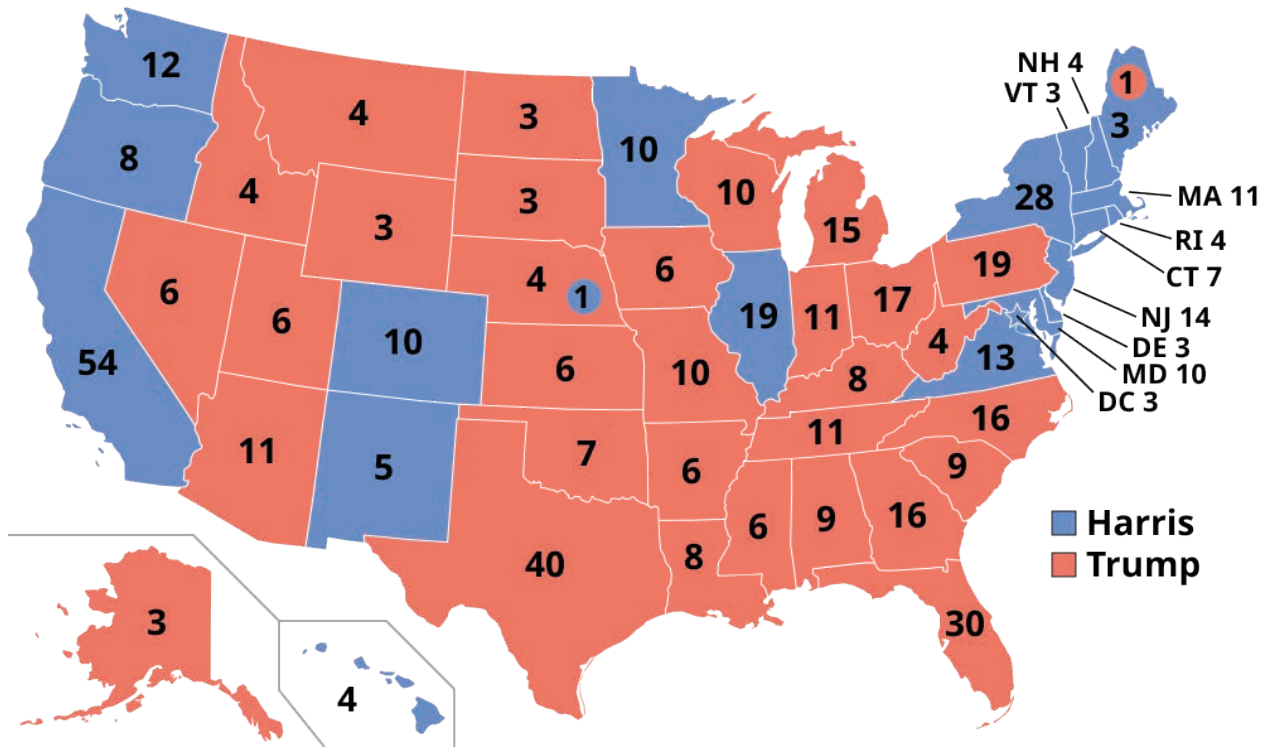
On the other hand voter turnout fell massively since 2020. Although Trump was able to marginally increase his votes (by 434,600), this was not the reason for his success. In 2020, Joe Biden won 81,268,924 votes. By comparison Kamala Harris lost more than 10 million voters!

This is also reflected, of course, in a shift in the proportions among voter groups. Trump led among men by 13 percentage points (in 2020 his lead was only 8%, and, while Harris still scored a majority among women, at 8% it was significantly lower

than Biden's 15% advantage in 2020. Unsurprisingly Trump won among white voters by a wide margin—a 23% majority among white men, and 8% among white women—virtually the same distribution as in 2020. Among black voters Harris lost support from men (56% compared to Biden's 60% in 2020), but improved her score among women (84% compared to 81% in 2020).

The really significant shift, however, concerns Latinx voters. Trump was able to achieve a majority among male members of this population group for a Republican candidate for the first time (plus 12%), while the Democratic advantage among females also shrank massively from 39 percentage points to 22.

In general, Trump and the Republicans were able to win over the majority of the



The 2024 Electoral College results show Trump's election did not break with historic patterns

white working class with their anti-immigrant and protectionist agenda, as they did in 2016, but also to attract other sections of the underprivileged. For example, those who consider their own economic situation to be poor and people with no school-leaving qualifications were more strongly represented among his voters.

Trump, like many other right wing populist forces, relies primarily on the population in rural areas and small to medium-sized towns, while the metropolises often continue to have a Democratic majority. However, it is also quite clear that Trump was able to win the votes of those who have lost income and purchasing power, making inroads into the big cities, despite recent comparatively high overall growth rates in the US economy.

**The reason for Harris's defeat**

The above figures make one thing particularly clear. The defeat of Harris and the Democratic Party was far less due to the mobilisation of Trump and the Republicans than to the Democrats' loss of over 10 million voters. Liberal and left-wing Democratic commentators like to fall back on the explanation that Trump's campaign stoked fear, demoralised

people, spreading lies and bad-mouthing the achievements of US capitalism under Biden's recovery programmes.

True the US economy looked to be doing better under Bidenomics; real GDP averaged 3.4% during his first three years; America has low unemployment levels; wage gains have exceeded inflation. US capital is developing more momentum than the weakening European and Chinese competition and the US stock markets are finally attracting capital from around the world again. Yet a large proportion of US voters regarded the economy as a big negative for the Democrats.

It's just a shame—say these commentators—that a substantial sector of the masses has not registered these successes of US capitalism. Trump's reactionary demagoguery ultimately consists in talking up their long term losses in real income and purchasing power, with the false solution of a racist populist scapegoating of immigrants, variously promising to deport between one and twenty million of them.

In foreign economic policy he threatens a trade war with China and the European Union too, with 60% and 20% tariffs. But the blowback from price increases on

imports and losses to US exports due to rivals' retaliatory actions could hit working class voters as will social spending cuts and the repeal of Obamacare.

But Harris and the Democratic Party's response was not even to counter the feelings of hardship with a Keynesian programme of redistribution from the wealthy few to the working and middle classes, such as FD Roosevelt's New Deal of the 1930s. She responded to Trump's 'doom and gloom' by praising the achievements of the market economy and conjuring up the 'American spirit of enterprise' that she says made her own career possible in the first place. But the fact Harris could not say what she would have done differently to Biden undermined her strategy of 'hope' which had got Obama over the line.

This effect was further intensified by the Democratic Party leadership's strategy of basing their election campaign on winning over 'moderate' Republicans in the swing states. As a result an already lame social programme was further watered down. And of course enlisting Dick Cheney, architect of the Iraq War, and Arnold Schwarzenegger for their campaign also meant making a further

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promise to all sections of US capital that their interests would be protected under a Harris presidency. This strategy is undoubtedly in keeping with the Democrats' utterly capitalist and imperialist character. But it also reflects the narrow worldview of its strategists, since the 'moderate' Republicans' proved to be a political mirage.

Mass deportations at the borders, Harris let it be known, would be her policy too. She even accused Trump of blocking funds for 1,500 additional border patrol agents and 100 judges to expedite deportations, even suggesting that Joe Biden had shown a lack of toughness on people smugglers and 'illegals'.

Rejecting the solidarity movement with Gaza, even after the exit of Genocide Joe, undoubtedly kept many young people at home, as it did environmental, anti-racist and anti-sexist activists, who realised they were no more more than voting fodder.

Despite all this the union bureaucracy, but also the leaders of the reformist left such as Bernie Sanders, the Squad and the Democratic Socialists (DSA) remained loyal to the Democrats and once again tried to 'sell' Harris as the lesser evil. The bulk of the AFL-CIO unions, including 'left' Shawn Fain, president of the United Auto Workers, have once again made it clear how little these apparatuses are willing to break with even the most ailing democratic imperialist party.

Bernie Sanders called Joe Biden 'the most pro-working-class president in modern American history' and said his agenda 'speaks to the needs of the working class'. He also called Biden 'a good and decent Democratic president with a record of real accomplishment', who 'wants to tax the rich so that we can fund the needs of working families'. Of course now, after the event, Bernie is singing a different tune saying, 'It should come as no great surprise that a Democratic Party which has abandoned working class people would find that the working class has abandoned them.' The DSA's so called dirty break tactic means voting for the Democratic candidate as the lesser evil when push comes to shove.

All this makes it clear that the fight for a workers' party as a political alternative to both capitalist parties must be waged in opposition to these apparatuses. The fight against the incoming Trump administration must therefore combine two things. First, a broad united front of the working class and the oppressed against all his attacks. Second, moves towards a workers' party, in the formation of which communists must fight from the outset for the adoption of a revolutionary action programme, without making their participation contingent on this outcome.

### **Trump's programme**

Even though Trump did not present a formal election manifesto, as is usually done in European election campaigns, he and the Republican Party, which he has transformed into a right wing populist party, are entering the new presidency with much clearer ideas than in 2016. In 2023, the arch-conservative Heritage Foundation, a Republican thinktank, presented 'Project 2025', which sets out the strategic direction of a future Trump administration and develops key proposals in all important policy areas, both domestically and externally. Of course the new administration will not adopt all these policies, since other important capital interests and other sectors of the Trump movement will have their say, but they do sketch out something of a strategic line.

The core of Trump's 'America First' basically consists of the assessment that the 'democratic', multilateral path to the restoration of global US hegemony has failed. Rather, rising enemies like China and self-serving allies like the EU are outpacing the US. International institutions and 'bad deals' are imposing draconian regulations on the US, for example in the field of environmental protection. The US is subsidising and underwriting its allies' armed forces and security, while a weak Democratic president squandered more and more influence in the world. Therefore, everything is getting worse and worse.

Meanwhile Trump's speeches have included many tropes from rightwing

conspiracy theorists. At home a cosmopolitan, 'woke', 'multicultural elite', a veritable 'enemy within' has seized control of the government and the state apparatus (the 'deep state'), delivering the country into the hands of its external enemies—not only other states, but also a migrant 'invasion' from Mexico across the border. According to Trump's message, these enemies must be radically eliminated at home.

In foreign policy, starting with mass deportations, he claims there needs to be a change of course, away from multilateralism towards unilateralism, and an international policy strictly oriented towards self-interest (transactionalism), which focuses on those conflicts and wars that can be won quickly and does not waste billions on 'useless ventures' like the war in Ukraine.

### **Domestic policy**

Trump's Presidential Transition Project 2025 includes programmatic cornerstones that the newly elected president wants to get off the ground in the first 180 days of his term.

The economic policy measures include the abolition of many regulations that restrict the freedom of capital – especially job security and protection against unfair dismissal, but also environmental protection. The already inadequate Obamacare healthcare programme is to be abolished altogether, while other social spending is to be cut back massively.

The shift towards renewable energies and the ecological restructuring of the US economy, which were already largely illusory under Biden, are to give way to a shift towards the expansion of fossil fuel extraction, especially fracking. In addition, there will be tax cuts for the rich, especially the super-rich. To enable the US economy to compensate for its alleged disadvantage on the world market, Trump also wants to impose massive import tariffs to make the import of goods more expensive and bring more added value into the US (see below for more details).

All of this very clearly corresponds to the interests of important parts of US capital. Trump and his party are closely



While Israel can depend on unqualified US aid, the prospects for Ukraine are bleak

linked to large monopolies in the energy sector; the media (Google, X Corp), the high-tech industry and US finance capital.

Trump has also announced that he will task Elon Musk, the world's richest man, with forming a Department of Government Efficiency, an advisory board named after a joke cryptocurrency. This will evaluate the work, structure and budget of all government agencies and associated bodies and make proposals for the restructuring of the entire government apparatus.

This is closely linked to the concept of Unitary Executive Theory. Instead of a separation of powers between the various departments of the state apparatus, it is assumed that the presidency is above all powers. This authoritarian turn, which is also to be accompanied by a purge and reappointment to important state functions, is justified by the claim that an 'elite' has seized power and destroyed democracy, which only a 'strong man' can save. Even if Trump and his movement do not represent fascism itself, he will massively exacerbate the bonapartist and repressive authoritarian elements of the US constitution.

Trump's extremely racist and sexist

agenda serves as a means of keeping his voters and supporters in line behind a neoliberal agenda, across class boundaries. The threatened deportation war against migrants, who are said to be an invading army, is deliberately intended to create a mood of permanent tension, of an apparent 'siege' of the USA – and thus also to further legitimise an internal militarisation and alignment of the state organs.

Migrants and people subjected to racial oppression, women and LGBT+ people will be exposed to a climate of permanent agitation, permanent attacks and reactionary legal restrictions. Police powers will be strengthened and then 'naturally' be made available to use against strikes and protests in the event of resistance from the working class or social movements.

### Foreign policy

The reaction at home is matched by the foreign policy agenda. The economic policy aims to strengthen US corporations and US capital not only through domestic tax breaks, but also through a protectionist tariff policy. As we said this will probably provoke a destructive pushback. But despite this, it should not be overlooked that Trump's policy could be quite

successful in the short term.

The US is still the largest economic power, the largest market in the world, by far the most important financial market; the dollar still functions as world money. The US economic position has been strengthened, at least temporarily, under Biden. Ironically, this success of his predecessor directly benefits Trump.

In the short term, the US can certainly impose unfavourable trade conditions and deals on its respective negotiating partners because its weaker counterparts fear a permanent confrontation with the US even more than they fear the imposition of disadvantages. While the EU or China still have their own bargaining power, most semi-colonial countries do not even have that.

But in the longer term, Trump's measures will inevitably intensify the struggle for the redivision of the world. The EU or even China may make some concessions in the current situation, but at the same time they, like Japan or the BRICS countries, will introduce their own countermeasures (protective tariffs, trade agreements, economic blocs). At the same time, they will increasingly put on hold their plans for a free market environmental

transition, which in any case are often only on paper.

In short, the struggle for the economic redivision of the world and the tendency towards bloc-building will intensify dramatically.

In the Middle East, Trump's election means nothing less than a free pass for Israel to continue to commit genocide, to fully expel and marginalise the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, and to establish a permanent occupation in southern Lebanon. Itamar Ben Gvir, Minister of National Security and a convicted supporter of settler terrorist organisations, rejoiced in the Knesset: 'Now is the time for sovereignty, the time for total victory. The time to make the death penalty for terrorists here in Israel law. All kinds of laws that I have no doubt the US president sees as we do.'

Not only the government, but also the opposition in Israel congratulated Trump.

In the medium term, however, his goal is also to re-establish the Abraham Accords Declaration with the reactionary Arab regimes. In return dictatorships and repressive regimes, such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey, will not have to fear US criticism of human rights violations. However, the threat of war with Iran will loom over this entire reactionary reordering of the Middle East.

While Israel is set to continue receiving billions in US support, the outlook for Ukraine is bleak. Not only has Trump loudly proclaimed that he would make peace within a day, he has also threatened a massive reduction in US economic and military aid to Ukraine.

But even if Trump does not want to conclude a peace without a 'deal' for the US economy, the 'peace plan' that, among others, future Vice President J.D. Vance presented as early as spring 2024 effectively amounts to the recognition of the war aims of Russian imperialism. This plan provides for a freezing of the front, negotiations and demilitarisation of a buffer zone. Ukraine would have to make territorial concessions to Russia and commit to neutrality by 2040. This would preclude joining Nato, even if it were to receive some arms—for good money,

of course. The question of a possible EU accession remains unclear.

In any case, it will be a thoroughly imperialist peace that will in fact result in the division of the country and annexations in the east and southeast of Ukraine by Russian imperialism and domination of the west by Western imperialism. The right of Ukraine to self-determination certainly plays no role in this deal.

A second break in Trump's policy compared to that of Biden is also closely linked to Ukraine. The new US president regards the EU and its leading powers, especially Germany, as competitors, not as allies. There is, of course, some truth to this. Germany is, of course, also fighting in the battle for the redivision of the world, with the EU representing a means to an end, albeit a blunt one.

This ambivalent character of the relationship between the USA and the EU is evident in the question of rearmament and Nato. Trump, like all other US governments in recent decades, is demanding a massive increase in defence spending and 'responsibility' on the part of the European states. Otherwise, the USA is threatening to 'withdraw'. At the same time, rearmament is also in the interest of the European imperialist bourgeoisies themselves. But they fear widespread opposition to the reduction in working class living standards that such expenditures would necessarily imply.

In the short term, Trump's presidency will deepen the crisis of the EU and increase internal contradictions. Already Germany is in its second year of recession, with a broken coalition and a car industry faced with major closures. France too cannot form a government or agree on a budget.

Trump's pressure, combined with a pacification of Ukraine, could also lead to a reorientation of (parts of) the European bourgeoisie. In the short term, they will swear by the transatlantic partnership, but some sections of the ruling class will also bring an alternative policy towards Russia and China into play again. Above all however, the EU is faced with the question of whether it itself is capable of stronger capitalist unification under the leadership

## Palestine, a Marxist analysis

Workers Power

PRINKIPO

### PALESTINE, A MARXIST ANALYSIS

Palestine: A Marxist Analysis charts the struggles of the Palestinians against colonisation, settlement and ethnic cleansing.

That history has forged a nation whose very survival is a challenge not only to Israel and its imperialist backers but to the regional powers that have repeatedly betrayed it.

Its future is bound up with the revolutionary overthrow of the existing world order – its refusal to submit is a beacon to all the oppressed.



of Germany and France, or whether a multi-speed Europe will emerge.

The real main enemy of the US, however, is the second largest, rising imperialist power—China. The planned reduction of spending on wars and Nato bases in Europe, the demands on these allies to increase their military spending are aimed at freeing up US resources for the main economic, political and military conflict.

The strategic considerations of Trump advisors and conservative thinktanks assume that the US cannot afford to get involved in prolonged military and thus economically costly conflicts in several different places. In this view, the war over Ukraine ultimately weakens the US's ability to focus on the Pacific and China. The fundamental issue is to stop and contain the expansion of China as an imperialist power in economic and geo-strategic terms.

That is why countries like Taiwan and South Korea play an important role—although there is pressure for them to increase their military budgets and bear more of the costs. For example Project 2025 calls for Taiwan to quadruple its defence budget. In the short term this will not change relations with Taiwan, but it will of course raise the question in the country as to whether there is no alternative to the US alliance in the long term. In any case Trump's policy will inevitably lead to an intensification of the main global antagonism of the imperialist order, between the USA and China.

### **On the character of Trumpism**

As insane and irrational as Trumpism may appear, it does represent a strategy of US imperialism to halt the long-term decline of its hegemonic position. The rise of Trump therefore also reflects, indeed primarily reflects an internal contradiction inside the US ruling class. To this end, the Republican Party itself has been politically transformed into a populist party, including a populist movement, able to mobilise on the streets.

This includes an alliance of different classes or class factions under the leadership of parts of finance and monopoly capital. To establish and maintain this

imaginary, false unity, populism must resort to the opposition between the 'people' and the liberal, left-wing, 'woke' socialist 'elite' which has betrayed the people and seized power. This elite has also conspired with foreign 'powers'—migrants, China, the old EU, etc.

This reactionary ideology is necessary to present Trump's supporters with a scapegoat for the massive deterioration of living standards that his neoliberal and protectionist policies will bring to the mass of his voters. This is why there is an intrinsic link between neoliberalism in the US and racism, nationalism, authoritarianism, sexism and religious obscurantism. Trumpism needs irrationalism, but it is not simply 'unreasonable', as the bourgeois centre claims, but an aggressive form of pursuing imperialist interests.

### **Dangers and tasks**

The new US government therefore poses an extreme danger to the working class and the oppressed, not only in the US itself but worldwide. To name just a few:

- It increases the chance of completing the genocide in Gaza and the pogroms in the West Bank.
- It increases the likelihood of US sponsored 'deals' at the expense of oppressed nations.
- It will intensify the struggle of the imperialist powers for the redivision of the world bringing the dangers of regional wars and a clash between the camps nearer.
- It will foment racism at home, encourage the impunity of killer cops and establish a terrorising border force regime.

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## **THE SELECTION OF JD VANCE AS VP AMOUNTS TO A RECOGNITION OF RUSSIAN WAR AIMS**

● It will encourage white supremacists and fascists, and attacks on democratic rights.

● It will support bigoted 'religious' anti-abortion campaigns.

● It will launch massive cuts to federal social aid programmes, attacks on trade union organising and the left.

● It will launch a political purge of federal employees.

● Last, but certainly not least, it will lead to an increase in global temperatures and in turn devastating extreme weather events, not least in his beloved Florida.

No serious resistance can be expected from the Democratic Party. Their alternative to Trump is ultimately just an alternative strategy for restoring US hegemony. They are part of the problem, not the solution.

As long as the US left, the trade unions and the social movements do not break the political stranglehold of Democratic Party, they will make no political impact. Only by breaking this can they become a driving force in the struggles against the incoming administration. To do this, they need to pursue a united-front policy, a joint mobilisation in the struggle with all the forces of the working class and the oppressed, especially the trade unions.

This means nothing less than building an independent party of the working class, one that is rooted in the workplaces, in the trade unions, in the neighbourhoods and among all sections of the class, whether 'people of colour' or 'white', whether 'legal' or 'illegal'. Such a party needs an orientation to the liberation from exploitation of the whole working class. In this regard, cross-class left-populist or green parties do not represent any step in this direction, but rather a petty-bourgeois dead end.

The task of the US working class and the movements of the socially oppressed is to finally and irrevocably break their organisations from the Democrats, especially the trade unions, and found the party of the US socialist revolution. This must start with mobilising against the man to be sworn in as President of the United States on 20 January 2025. ■





In 2023, more than 300,000 women took to the streets for the feminist strike on 14 June

# SWITZERLAND: PERSPECTIVES FOR THE WOMEN'S STRIKE

*Rosa Favre*

**T**he 2019 Switzerland women's strike saw the biggest mobilisation to date with half a million participants. The 2023 strike was not as successful but, even so, 300,000 were on the streets on 14 June. According to union officials, the strike was still a crowning success, since it was more radical than 2019 and could still mobilise on such a scale, despite frontal attacks by the bourgeoisie that demonised the movement. To accept that, however, would be to think that the masses of working women

who were present in 2019 have somehow become less radical in 2023. That would be ridiculous.

So, if women felt abandoned by men, frustrated by the misogynistic wave they were facing, and aware of the burden placed on their shoulders during the Covid-19 crisis, why didn't they join the movement on the streets in equal or greater numbers?

Women in the francophone region did strike in similar numbers to 2019 but in German-speaking Switzerland, the movement did lose its fighting power. This is because, despite coordination at

the national level, each cantonal section of the trade unions mobilised separately. As a result, everything depended on local activists and there were many places and sectors of the economy where there was almost no agitation and little protection against threats of dismissal against strikers.

The 2023 strike was largely a strike of youth and students. Since young people have very little experience in the workplace, most of the banners carried slogans against sexualised violence, sexual liberation and for the emancipation of queer youth, whether sexual or

regarding gender identity. A lot of the slogans denounced everyday sexism or unwanted sexual comments. However, almost none of them addressed the most important event of the year: the setback of women's rights in the form of the increase in the retirement age. This has made the strike largely petty bourgeois in nature, a setback from 2019.

### Problems of the strike

The women's strike has lost class consciousness and the existing leadership of the movement is responsible for this. In fact, it consists of the trade unions, which in turn are largely run by social democratic bureaucrats who benefit from industrial peace.

An exception in the organisation of the strike is SolidaritéS, a party that comes from the Trotskyist tradition and is an observer of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI). It also focused on LGBT+ issues and presented its intersectional vision to the trade unions. But, at the same time, it adapted to the bureaucracy and made concessions over the social and economic demands of the strike, so as not to jeopardise its own positions in the apparatus.

On the other hand, we cannot expect that a strike that achieves nothing and only happens sporadically over the years will be able to maintain its mobilising potential in the working class. To fan the flames of the class struggle, it is not enough for a social movement to stand still. It must grow and secure new achievements. The successful years were linked to victorious labour struggles, international movements with clear demands (such as the #MeToo movement) and opposition to attacks on retirement provision. There were also noticeable effects on elections and surrounding countries after the strikes. In 2023, women suffered a defeat at the ballot box because the Swiss People's Party won, giving no reason to participate in a strike, which was previously seen as something of a celebration. And only recently, the Federal Supreme Court ruled that a mitigation of the sentence is appropriate for 'short' rapes!

### Involvement

In order to maintain itself during a period of retreat, the movement must recognise two lessons:

1. It is necessary to involve more and different sectors of the economy in the strikes, by building action and strike committees.

2. The actions must be prepared and planned further in advance.

For this, the movement must not oppose actions lasting several days (as was done in 2019 by the leadership of SolidaritéS) and it must also break with the reactionary idea of industrial peace. In the longer term, this would open up the potential for a general strike.

Involving new sectors also means involving men in the struggle. Men were the big absentees in the strikes of 2019 and 2023. This is symptomatic of a programme that does not seek to build a unity of struggle among workers, and of grassroots organisations that focus too much on one of the genders. The trade unions therefore need a Marxist perspective that sees equal potential in women and men as far as the fight for equality under labour law is concerned. Of course, it is possible that only women are involved in strikes. This was also the case in the first days of the 1917 February Revolution. But Russian women would never have been able to fight for their political rights if they had not fought together with men. It is therefore indispensable for future actions to involve working men.

We also have to take note of major differences between the French-speaking and German-speaking regions of Switzerland. In the former, radical left-wing organisations such as SolidaritéS had a great influence on the course of events. This was not the case in the latter. The Movement for Socialism (FSO, which is also close to the USFI and is much stronger in the German-speaking cities of Zurich and Basel) did not want to invest as much time in building the women's strike as SolidaritéS. As a result, the organisers were more combative in the French-speaking part, while in German-speaking Switzerland, social

democrats were largely at the head of organising the strike.

### Bureaucracy and class peace

Leadership of the strikes by the trade union bureaucracy, which has arguably betrayed the Swiss working class the most, is a central obstacle to the women's strike. The bureaucracy of the trade unions supports the so-called 'labour peace', an agreement concluded with the employers' associations in 1937 that commits the trade unions to class collaboration and effectively prohibits the right to strike. The Swiss proletariat has been disarmed, having lost its most powerful weapon against the bourgeoisie. We must win that back at all costs. This is the primary struggle that all class struggle forces in the trade unions must wage.

At the same time, the trade union leadership is closely linked to the Socialist Party. This is another reason why the demands of the women's strike start from the assumption of class collaboration. For example, they call for the creation of committees to supervise equal pay in companies but they say nothing about who sits on such committees, whether they should be organs of workers' control or social partnership.

There is another element of activist culture that needs to be changed: we need to reject bourgeois federalism, which paralyses our struggle. The federal structure allows individual trade union and SP bureaucrats to sabotage a nationwide struggle for liberation at a lower level if they prioritise labour peace rather than the needs of grassroots trade unionists. All activists must stand firmly together and overcome the chauvinism of their time and place, whether that is cantonal, national, ethnic, male or cisheterosexual. Trade union and SP bureaucrats who do not respect national decisions should be replaced—through democratically organised elections within the trade unions or the movement as a whole.

Of course, this discussion ties in with the creation of a body that can mobilise workers at the national level. That would be essential for a general strike. It is therefore important to build an organisation

that is not dismantled after every strike, but forms a permanent structure. This will allow for the involvement of women in a consistent way, and hopefully lead to expansion into industries where women are dominant, and also progressively increase male participation.

A chauvinist attitude can also be found in the rejection of 8 March (International Women's Day) as a strike day. In Switzerland, we often prefer to take pride in national achievements, rather than internationalist and communist history. This is another element which shows the reformist tendency and direction of the movement, which prefers to boast of concessions made 40 years too late, rather than the glorious victory of the women of Petrograd over the tsarist repression on 8 March 8.

### Current attacks

We were forced to listen to bourgeois politicians telling us we had to work one year more when the retirement age was raised from 64 to 65 because it is 65 for men. As a consequence, the bourgeoisie's malignant view of equality between the sexes means even more unpaid work. In fact, in 2016, it was estimated that women do free work worth CHF 247 billion, a third of Switzerland's GDP.

The downplaying of the actual roots of inequality is clear to proletarian women: inequality in the division of reproductive labour, sexualised violence, etc. This is also why women voted massively against raising the retirement age. But the Swiss men who voted were imbued with a rare machismo.

On September 25, 2022, 50.57% voted for its increase for women from 64 to 65 years. In the end, it was a defeat for the entire working class. This year, the bourgeoisie will let us vote on whether to raise it to 66 or even higher—in the name of civil equality for women and men of course. In the coming struggle against the raising of the retirement age, the women's strike will be an indispensable tool that can build solidarity between the sexes and thus be a weapon against the capitalist offensive on the living conditions of the proletariat. It is essential to



The narrow horizons of the movement can be seen in the choice of 14 June, not 8 May

give new life to this movement.

The creation of a fighting body that goes beyond the cantonal borders is essential for the success of the struggle for individual reforms. To free ourselves from sexist violence and oppression, we must fight together with women, minorities, and men around the world. Solidarity and internationalism is our motto!

We think the following demands should be discussed in the movement in order to advance the debate in Switzerland about a programme of women's and LGBT+ liberation. However, they do not yet represent the full programme:

1. First of all, we must defend the retirement age of women. The increase to 65 is not only a frontal attack on women's living standards, but also a battering ram against the working conditions of the entire working class, led by the instrumentalisation of sexism. The workers' movement, together with the women's

strike, must launch a militant campaign to defend the retirement age. This blow against the offensive of the bourgeoisie must go further than the simple defence of past gains of the working class. Workers' productivity has risen steadily, but so has the retirement age. What kind of society has to increase both? Furthermore, we demand a national pension independent of capital, with full benefits and pensions for part-time work.

2. We cannot rely on benevolent capitalists or male partners, nor can we trust the state to accurately evaluate and value this vital work, which is primarily carried out by multiply marginalised people. Therefore, we must radically reduce working hours (7-hour day, 4 days a week) with no loss of pay and demand parental leave that does not discriminate against women in the workplace. Only the joint struggle of the working class against capitalism and the state can enforce these demands. And only under a democratically planned economy can reproductive work and its

unequal distribution be tackled in the long term. Social and environmental crises such as Covid or climate change will only increase the need for reproductive work. We must fight to ensure that these crises are not blamed on women, LGBT+ and people of colour.

We demand that reproductive work be socially organised instead of being loaded onto the nuclear family. We want to establish committees in the workplaces that organise the work of raising children (and other reproductive work that happens in the family unit, such as caring for elderly parents or sick relatives) publicly, under the control of the working class. The existing private housework must be divided equally among the sexes.

4. It is necessary for all workers to democratically decide which industries are desirable for the good of all, and which belong in the dustbin of history. We want more reproductive work of better quality, which means—something has to be given up. We don't care about the car or oil industry. We don't want fast fashion or other consumer mania. The decision on which industries should be kept alive must be decided democratically in factory and district committees.

5. We want delegates of women of the working class in bodies of workers' control, which guarantee that equal pay exists in all companies, with self-determined criteria. Women are often paid less than men, whether for reasons of discrimination or for part-time work to provide for their families. Working women will not be told anything by bourgeois economists who want them to believe that their plight is a just and rational product of a 'just' and 'rational' society that oppresses them. On the contrary, working women are trying to understand the reasons for their hardship and are discovering the irrationality of class society and its patriarchal excesses—and will radically oppose all those who take it for granted and as a necessity. Because that's not it: just look how good it is for the men of the capitalist class! Similar methods and arguments can be repeated for people of colour and LGBT+ people.

6. We demand that companies that

violate equality be expropriated and nationalised without compensation, under workers' control.

7. We are in favour of women's full self-determination over their bodies. They must not be exposed to sexist and sexualised violence, whether physical or verbal. They must be able to wear all the clothes they want—a skirt, hijab or mini-shorts—without having to endure sexist or condescending remarks. Women, trans people (and men too) deserve proper sex education, which includes not only heterosexual but also homosexual sex and transgender health. This also means an all-round transformation of health care. We need a single public health insurance fund that includes the unconditional right to abortion, menstrual products, contraception and gender-affirming care, as well as a mechanism to fight against sexism and racism in the health care system.

8. The police and military are known to be very sexist, racist and homophobic. These institutions are irredeemable. These are their characteristics under capitalism. Women must be oppressed in order to keep them in their role as unpaid and super-exploited workers. That's why the police can't take complaints of sexualised violence seriously, and invading armies rape women and their daughters. These institutions are rotten and must be completely abolished; starting by cutting their funding. We want to replace them with bodies of armed and organised workers: workers' militias that enforce the rule of the proletariat and all marginalised groups, thus representing an open counter-power against the rule of the bourgeois police and army.

The struggle for a women's strike, which becomes a full-scale political strike against pension reform and other demands, is an integral part of the class struggle. But in order to achieve such a perspective, in the trade unions and in the movement more generally, we must also advocate the building of a new revolutionary workers' party as an alternative to reformism and bureaucracy, combining the struggle for women's liberation with that for socialist revolution. ■

# THE SWISS WOMEN'S STRIKE: A BRIEF HISTORY

*Rosa Favre*

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In Switzerland, women's rights have always been achieved a little later than in other European countries. We did not get the right to vote at the national level until 1971, while it was introduced in Germany and Austria in 1918 and in Italy in 1945. This is six years after even the USA generalised the right to vote without discrimination, i.e. finally allowed black women to vote.

## Background

This Swiss delay can be explained by many complementary factors. During the imperialist wars, the warring countries had to employ masses of female labour to keep the economy running. Because of Swiss neutrality, there was not the same drafting of women into the workforce. The contradiction between their increased exploitation and the lack of civil rights thus entered the mass consciousness less and later in Switzerland and was not resolved. Another factor is that because of the country's federal structure, many activists for women's suffrage have focused on the cantonal level. For this reason, three cantons, all in French-speaking Switzerland (Vaud, Neuchâtel and Geneva), introduced women's suffrage as early as 1960. However, six years had to pass before other cantons followed suit.

Similarly, equality between men and women was not enshrined in the Constitution until 14 June 1981. In neighbouring countries, this happened as



The first feminist strike in 1991 was the biggest mobilisation since the 1918 general strike

early as 1946 (France) and 1949 (Germany). However, as is usually the case with such laws, they failed to actually be implemented. The most shocking thing is how some cantons managed to de facto ban women from voting until 1991. It was not until 20 years after the right to vote was won at the national level, and ten years after equality between the sexes was enshrined in law, that the Confederation forced its implementation in the canton of Appenzell Innerrhoden.

### Origins of the strike

In 1991, ten years after the introduction of gender equality in the constitution, the Swiss Trade Union Confederation (SGB) organised the 'Women's Strike'

to mark the anniversary. The slogan was 'Ten years of equality ... on paper!' The ineffectiveness of the authorities in implementing the law in concrete terms was condemned and some solutions were proposed: ban wage inequality, protect women from sexualised violence in the workplace, affordable childcare and force men to participate in reproductive work to the same extent as women do. Since the call for a women's general strike went far beyond a simple parade during leisure time, it was vehemently opposed by bourgeois ideologues in the media and parliament. They described the action as 'excessive'. One member of parliament even presumed to call it 'stupid'. But it was not only men who were against a strike: liberal and conserv-

ative so-called feminists also had no solidarity or sympathy for the cause.

The reason for the successful mobilisation, which could only be trumped by two other actions in Swiss history, lies in the workers' movement. The starting point was the strike of watch workers in Vallée de Joux, an enclosed high valley in the Jura, who wanted to stand up against the exorbitant wage differences between the sexes and were able to inspire various trade unionists for their cause, among them Christiane Brunner. The success of this was not only dependent on successful union mobilisation, but the movement took place in a particular international context, when large strikes were also taking place in America and Europe and the actions and ideas spread internationally.

14 June, 1991 still marks one of the greatest days for social movements in Switzerland. On that day, 100,000 women went on strike for equality between the sexes, and a total of 500,000 took part in one way or another. It was the largest work stoppage that Switzerland had seen since the general strike in 1918. The shock wave can still be felt in workers' history today and the mere mention of the strike causes fear and terror in the bourgeoisie, although it was coordinated by the Social Democratic Party (SP) and the social democratic-led trade unions, which are also well embedded in the bourgeois system, and very few demands could be enforced immediately.

### **A critical balance sheet**

Although the militant strike in 1991 opposed the bourgeois anti-strike dogma, only a few demands were formulated. While fighting for actual rights that the state claims to grant to an oppressed group is a great tactic for civil rights activists, it has its limitations. It is tailing capitalism on its own terrain.

A succinct argument is that capitalism is incapable of granting us the rights it promises us. In fact, gender oppression is woven into the basic functioning of the capitalist system, which cannot afford, for example, to wrest domestic work and thus women's unpaid reproductive work from the private sphere. Therefore, although formal, legal equality of the sexes can be achieved under capitalism, it cannot achieve *de facto* equality. For an actual end to gender-specific oppression, for true equality, the capitalist mode of production must be overthrown altogether.

The demands of the 1991 strike were all good and important in terms of content, but not enough, and the organisers believed that demands for abortion rights and maternity leave were too ambitious. Also, no effort has been made to address the specific needs of people of colour or LGBT+ people. Their feminism was therefore not only reformist, but also exclusionary. It is therefore not surprising that some of the most prominent leaders of the 1991 strike, such as Martine

Chaponnière, later became increasingly Islamophobic.

### **Reprint**

In 2011, a new edition of the strike was initiated, but it suffered a sharp loss of fighting power. The women of the bourgeois parties, who had abhorred the idea of a strike in 1991, did now defend the necessity of a strike. This time, however, there were only a few thousand women on the streets.

In response to the #MeToo movement, the SGB decided in 2019 to organise a new version of the strike, again on 14 June. This was called both a 'women's strike' and a 'feminist strike'. In German-speaking Switzerland, it was largely known by the former name. This time, 500,000 people were on the streets. In contrast to 1991, the demands focused on intersectional feminism. Specific demands were made for racialised women as well as LGBT+ people. The call to organise this strike was born from the women's assembly of the SGB, through the initiative of women from the Association of Public Service Personnel (VPOD). After a call via Facebook, about 200 women, not all of them unionised or otherwise organised, met in June 2018 to initiate the 2019 strike. They then built up structures for its organisation throughout Switzerland.

Finally, on the day of the strike, many spontaneous actions took place: manifestos were written and specific demands for certain sectors of the economy (especially in the public sector) were raised. Women who worked in the private sector generally had a harder time striking because of the even greater risk of repression by capital. But this did not stop women in the public sector from expressing solidarity and making demands for their sisters in the private sector. For example, employees and students of the University of Lausanne made demands for cleaning and cafeteria staff employed by private companies.

### **Consequences**

Seeing such a mass of working women on the streets has been an inspiration

to working women in other Western countries. The strike was in the news in the UK, Germany, Austria, the USA and other countries, always accompanied by a commentary on the story of the extraordinary day on which Swiss women went on strike.

As in Spain, these strikes were an example of how the struggle for women's liberation can transcend the limits of petty bourgeois and bourgeois activism. In fact, the strike is entirely a form of struggle of the proletariat. Even if not every action so titled is really a strike, the actions in Switzerland were strongly linked to company actions and were under trade union guidance.

As already mentioned, bourgeois women oppose the use of the strike tactic. But these same women are not ashamed to use feminism as a tool to reinforce their dominance over working women. Above all, they fight for quotas in top and leadership positions and against everyday sexist acts, while the permanent structural oppression of women under capitalism remains untouched.

This liberal feminism pits men against women and in no way allows proletarian women to maintain control over their own emancipation. That is why it is rejected by most proletarian women. What the strikes in Switzerland and Spain have shown women all over the world is that there is a connection between the struggle for more women's rights and the fight for better working conditions, in short, that the question of equality is also a class question.

Therefore, the 2019 strike was a real success, capable of mobilising working women. Therefore, it has earned the trust of workers and provided a platform for change. Logically, we should expect the movement to grow because of this. But the leading role of SP reformism and the trade union bureaucracy, as well as the influence of bourgeois and petty bourgeois feminism, would prove to be a barrier in the years that followed, leading to stagnation and setbacks for the movement. ■

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# FRANCE: THE GOVERNMENT OFFENSIVE AND THE TASKS OF REVOLUTIONARIES

*Marc Lassalle*

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**S**ince the last European elections in June, France has entered a new political phase characterised by a deep instability and violent attacks against the working class in an overall context of the rising far right. Macron's gamble, to dissolve the National Assembly and trigger a general election at the end of June to regain a governing majority was a total failure. The new parliament consists of three major blocs: the New Popular Front (PS, PCF, Greens, FI and other smaller forces) obtained a plurality (193 MPs), but far from an absolute majority (289). The RN greatly increased its representation to 125. Macron's coalition was heavily defeated but maintained a sizeable parliamentary group (164) thanks to the 'republican front' where left-wing voters support the best-placed candidate in each constituency against the RN. The traditional

right-wing party, the Republicans (LR), heir of the gaullist parties, was reduced to the role of junior partner with only 47 MPs.

While the left parties claimed victory and insisted on their popular mandate to form a government, President Emmanuel Macron spent the summer engaged in a series of delaying tactics. Only at the beginning of September was Michel Barnier (LR) appointed PM. Barnier, 73, a lifelong professional politician, is hardly a symbol of the renewal of political life that Macron promised to introduce. A reactionary catholic, he has cobbled together a hybrid government, combining the most traditional and reactionary wing of LR together with ministers representing Macron's party and other centre-right allies. The central problem of the government is that it does not command a majority in the assembly, and therefore could easily fall if the NFP and RN both support a motion

of no confidence. Since the constitution prohibits a new general election before the summer, France faces a year of weak government, and opaque and cynical negotiations and parliamentary manoeuvres.

During the formation of the Barnier government, Macron was in daily contact with Marine Le Pen soliciting her tacit support. On several occasions she and Jordan Bardella, the new rising figure of RN, voiced their ambition to keep the government on a short leash, and clearly want to obtain major concessions. This was already clear in Barnier's first public statement, when he said that immigration is 'intolerable' for French society. Interior minister Bruno Retailleau, a former advisor to the arch-reactionary monarchist Philippe De Villiers, has made clear he intends to pass a new anti-immigration law, granting national preference to French citizens (a similar draft law last year was struck down by the constitutional court). Retailleau and Barnier met Italian ministers preparing a 'hub' (in reality a prison) in Albania to deport migrants arriving in Italy, although this has also been declared illegal by Italian courts. Retailleau's claim that 'civil rights are neither intangible nor sacred' is an indication of the very real danger posed to millions of workers of non-French origin, and in fact to France's multinational and multiracial working class more generally.

The government's first test is to prepare the 2025 budget. In a context of anaemic economic growth and rising state debt, Barnier is searching for €60bn worth of cuts and tax increases. While the initial message was that part of this could come



Trade unions organised a day of action on 1 October—without a plan to escalate the pressure

from taxes on large corporations and the super-rich, it soon became clear that the whole manoeuvre is directed against the public sector and the workers. In the current discussions (the budget is currently under debate in Parliament), various reactionary measures are considered: slashing 4,000 teaching posts, cuts to the local government budget, the health system, public sector workers, pensions. While the debate in parliament is chaotic, it is likely that the government will use anti-democratic rules of the Fifth Republic (the bonapartist 49.3 clause of the constitution allows a government to bypass parliament) to pass the budget. This will require the passive support of RN—which in turn depends on major concessions on immigration and spending.

### The New Popular Front

Since the elections, the NFP has focused on the question of the government. After weeks of internal negotiations, they appointed Lucie Castets, a high-level official in the Paris local administration, as their candidate for prime minister. After Macron's choice of Barnier, the NFP denounced a 'democratic robbery', with placards proclaiming 'Macron has stolen our vote' paraded on demonstrations

organised by La France Insoumise. That, however, was both the high point and the end point of the street mobilisation. Since then, the NFP has limited its arena of activity to parliament. LFI proposed a motion to impeach Macron which failed to even be put to a vote. The NFP claims many 'victories' in amending the budget law; however, what they do not say is that the final document will almost certainly be the original one, or worse, as the government has both the will and the undemocratic tools to have it approved without a vote, or with the tacit consent of the RN.

An equally symbolic opposition is being organised on the streets by the CGT, the main trade union federation. They oppose the budget law, and insist that the working class should not pay for the crisis, but they limited the mobilisation to a single day of action at the beginning of October, a rather traditional autumn demonstration—and far short of what is needed.

Faced with government attacks, as well as a new wave of factory closures and sackings (180 closures over the last 12 months with 90,000 jobs in danger according to CGT), revolutionaries need to propose a battle plan to the working class. An important factor is the depth and breadth of

workers' illusions in reformism. Last year, millions marched against the pension reform and, according to polls, 80% of the population opposed the 'reform'. However, the deliberate decision by the reformist trade union leaders not to call a general strike, coupled with the weaknesses of revolutionaries, derailed that movement and led to a defeat. This year, millions of workers turned to the political forces linked with the working class, especially the PS and LFI to stop the RN and obtain a victory at the political level.

This pressure from below explains the quick formation of the NFP, the large mobilisation in its favour, including large demonstrations, the unusual support by CGT, and the millions of votes it secured in the working class and immigrant areas. It also explains why Macron's original tactic—to split PS or at least a part of it from the NFP to form a centre-left government—did not succeed. Given the support from below, the PS, while divided, decided to play the NFP card, having in mind the strong possibility of new elections within a year.

### The far left

Without doubt the most opportunistic position among the radical political groups is that advanced by NPA-Anticap-



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italiste, led by Philippe Poutou and Olivier Besancenot. They decided to enter the NFP, and Poutou stood under its banner in the general election. In September they were still arguing that ‘the experience of NFP, while fragile, carries within itself the possibility of going beyond the logic of fragmentation of the last decades. The NFP (if we continue and reinforce it) can serve as a framework to this dynamic of unifying and raising the class consciousness embodied in a front and a programme. The beginning of convergence within the NFP of forces of the social movements, and political forces, is a step forward’. (*Revue l’Anticapitaliste*, no. 159, September 2024). Only a month later, the ‘step forward’ has disappeared, the NFP is referred to in the past tense, and the NPA-A claims instead that we must create ‘frameworks of common reflection and action to build the balance of forces sufficient to engage the struggle against Macron, the government Barnier and RN’. Or, put another way, ‘to impose the urgent measures of the NFP, we know that we can only count on ourselves!’ (*L’Anticapitaliste*, 723, 3 October 2024).

If this is the case, it is legitimate to ask what is the balance sheet of NPA-A’s participation in the NFP? Unfortunately, no serious analysis is to be expected from these grossly opportunistic leaders whose longstanding ambition to join the ranks of the reformists led them to jettison the entire NPA project. It is easy to predict that they will follow the path of other USFI sections, dissolving into reformism and disappearing into political irrelevance.

The *Révolution Permanente* group (FT), on the other hand, does recognise the need to propose a political perspective to the workers. However, they orient this mainly towards a reform of the political system:

The preparation of a battle plan that culminates in a general strike to oust Macron and to obtain our most urgent demands must be the priority for a mass movement. ... The implication of this is to demand that the power be placed in the hands of a single Assembly, to vote the laws and govern, freed from the control of a Senate, of a Constitutional Council

or of the President of the Republic. ... Given that the majority of the population still has expectations towards general elections, as it was shown by the upward jump in participation in the general elections, deemed decisive, a single Assembly would accelerate the political education of the workers and popular classes and would facilitate the struggle for a workers government’ (*Révolution Permanente*, “The political crisis of the Fifth Republic and revolutionary politics”).

The problem with this position, clearly geared towards discussion with the voters and supporters of LFI, is its opportunism and its ambiguity. The Fifth Republic certainly has an antidemocratic, bonapartist character, and certainly many workers are opposed to the politics of Macron and would like to get rid of him. However, the main problem is that what we need is not a ‘more democratic bourgeois democracy’, but a different type of state altogether. If workers have the strength to get rid of the Fifth Republic, they certainly have the strength to create their own organs of struggle and of government, rooted in the factories, workplaces and neighborhoods. To propose the objective of a new democratic system is at best a diversion from other more substantial objectives.

Lutte Ouvrière has a correct analysis of the class character of the Barnier government and of course denounces capitalism. They pose the need for a revolutionary party:

As long as the workers do not build a party for themselves, based in the factories and in the working class areas, a party that does not aim to provide ministers to manage the state of the bourgeoisie but a party of conscious workers, preparing the fight against the capitalist class and its expropriation, their interests will be trampled. (*Lutte de Classe*, 9 September 2024). However, despite the impressive intervention of LO in the working class, they never set out the transitional demands that can serve to guide the militant vanguard of the working class as to the route from its current struggles to the expropriation of the bourgeoisie. In fact

they actually deny the validity of such demands in the present conditions, deferring their use to periods of revolutionary crisis.

The position of NPA-R is different. They recognise that deep democratic illusions persist in the working class, but attribute this to the illusions created by the leaders of the NFP. They mainly address the rank and file workers and recognise the need for a type of action programme:

We need a battle plan to “stop the country”. We need to tackle the problem at the root; the bosses’ offensive that deepens the inequalities by lowering the wages, degrading the working conditions, multiplying the job cuts, destroying the public services useful for the people. Only the struggle of the workers and youth can stop this and inverse the balance of forces. Struggles going to the end, without being blocked in the false social dialogue or limiting themselves to the parliamentary calendar. It is in this effort that we must put all our forces, starting now, against a combat government of Barnier-Macron-Le Pen serving bosses in their offensive’. (NPA-R, 9 September 2024)

### **A programme of action**

We share this perspective. However, it is crucial to develop and articulate it, taking into account three considerations:

First, this perspective must be embodied in a real and concrete battle plan, that is, in a series of transitional demands that address the crucial issues of the class struggle today and which provide workers’ struggles with both definite goals and also a method of struggle. This series of demands should be further coordinated into an emergency plan for the workers class, that is an action programme.

Among the most urgent demands are:

- Stop the job cuts, stop the factory closures. The workers of Michelin in Cholet show the way: strike against the closures, occupation of the factories, link these struggles nationally. We demand the expropriation of these factories under workers’ control.
- Make the bosses and the rich pay:

after the first round of austerity measures by Michel Barnier, others will follow. The huge state subsidies granted to the private sector must be exposed. The workers in the state sector, in the banks and finance houses, in the private sector must open the books and reveal the huge amount of profit and property accumulated.

- Defence of the public services. No to job cuts, no to austerity budgets in the public services. Workers in these sectors must speak out as they are doing in the health sector. They must reveal the real destruction of public services taking place, most notably in the hospitals, in the education sector, in the universities.

- Stop deportations, stop racist discrimination, no to national preference, open the borders. The attacks on immigrants' civil rights will also weaken their organisation and expose them to super-exploitation and police repression. That weakens the entire working class.

Only a major national movement can stop these simultaneous attacks. Separate isolated struggles must be linked together. Committees of action must be set up in the workplaces and in the working class and immigrant areas.

Second, as soon as we address the working class and propose a new series of struggles, a big question will arise. In 2023, millions of workers marched and went on strike against Macron's pension 'reform'. That struggle was defeated. Without analysing that defeat and proposing how to overcome that failure, it is impossible to convince the masses to initiate a 'struggle that goes all the way to the end'.

Third, it is impossible to ignore the illusions in reformism that continue to be held by millions of workers. It is not just LFI planting these wrong ideas in the workers' heads. Reformism has planted deep roots in the country over almost 150 years, and it is embodied by mass organisations with their apparatuses and their own deep roots in the working class. The recent elections revealed the extent to which reformism lives in the political consciousness of the masses.

We cannot simply ignore these illusions, but must find ways to unmask the reality of reformism, even when—especially when—it pretends to be radical. An action

programme should contain specific and concrete demands addressed to the leaders of the mass organisations of the working class, in the first place the CGT. The CGT is a mass union, gathering together the most combative rank and file activists. The headline of a recent CGT leaflet reads: 'the government is very fragile: we can make it turn back!' This is certainly true, and we must take CGT leaders at their word. Certainly, we can defeat the government, but it is also certain that we will not be able to do so on the basis of the CGT's tactics.

In each workplace, in each factory, we must demand that the local trade union leaders, in the first instance those of the CGT, build links with other factories under attack and take concrete steps for united action. At the regional and national level similar demands must be addressed to the higher level of the trade union bureaucracy. We must demand unified dates across the country for demonstrations against the bosses' attacks and the government, national demonstrations, national days of strikes, up to and including a national general strike, uniting private and public sector, one which is not limited in advance to one day.

Ultimately, we must organise the rank and file to be able to fight for these demands and impose them on the national

trade union leaderships where they do not take them up. This will expose in the eyes of the workers the reality behind the reformists' 'left' rhetoric. Similar demands can be raised within the ranks of PCF and in the more militant branches of France Insoumise.

French workers face a serious attack by the Barnier government. However, it is true that the government is fragile, as is the President, and a resolute and coordinated action by the working class can stop it and impose a defeat on him at least as severe as the one he plans for us. Revolutionaries must set up a real battle plan to defeat them, based on the accumulated lessons of the international class struggle, and most importantly taking advantage of the indispensable value embodied in the method of transitional demands which demonstrates to the proletarian vanguard the way in which the struggle 'to the end' begins from the partial struggles 'of today', and is, moreover, the only certain way to secure a definitive victory. Formulating such a programme of action that addresses these burning questions is the task of the hour. Given its size and politics, the NPA-R can and must take the lead, and in so doing, become a driving force for the creation of this movement. ■



## INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME

The programme of the League for the Fifth International, adopted in 2023, charts a strategy for the international class struggle.





Keir Starmer has regularly boasted that he is proud to be a Zionist

# LABOUR'S CENTURY OF SUPPORT FOR ZIONISM

*Dave Stockton*

**L**abour's commitment to the colonisation project in Palestine dates from the same year as the Balfour Declaration, 1917, which Labour leaders have frequently celebrated and even painted in socialist colours. The Declaration was endorsed by the Labour Party and the TUC in their December 1917 War Aims Memorandum, drafted by Arthur Henderson and Sidney Webb.

The Memorandum stated:

'Palestine should be set free from the harsh and oppressive government of the

Turk, in order that this country may form a Free State, under international guarantee, to which such of the Jewish people as desire to do so may return and may work out their salvation free from interference by those of alien race or religion.'

The representatives of the Palestinian people who came to Versailles and to subsequent peace conferences overwhelmingly opposed it. But their objections were brushed aside, as were those of the various Arab leaders to whom Britain had promised independence.

The left wing of the Zionist movement, Poale Zion (Workers of Zion, or Labour

Zion), which affiliated to the Labour Party in 1920, sponsored a series of annual conference resolutions supporting the Palestine colonisation project.

The Zionists' colonising community, the Yishuv, through its labour front the Histadrut, pursued a policy of employing Jewish labour only in factories, commercial enterprises and collective farms (kibbutzim) many of which it actually owned. When the Palestinian communists joined the Third International, they were immediately expelled from the Histadrut.

The second Labour Government of 1929–31, under Ramsey MacDonald, had

already taken office, when, in August 1929 rioting broke out in Jerusalem in which 133 settlers were killed. A government commission of enquiry was sent out under Colonial Secretary Sidney Webb. It produced a White Paper which identified the root of the hostility between Palestinians and Zionist settlers as the expulsion of peasants from land bought from their absentee landlords, and recommended limiting levels of future Jewish immigration.

The Zionists in Britain under Chaim Weizmann, head of the World Zionist Organisation and a key figure in the achievement the Balfour Declaration, protested vigorously to MacDonald, who promptly took the Palestine issue out of Webb's control and binned the White Paper that the Commission had drafted. A grateful Weizmann later commented that:

This enabled us to make the magnificent gains of the ensuing years. It was under MacDonald's letter that Jewish immigration into Palestine was permitted to reach figures... undreamed of in 1930.

In 1935, Labour's new leader Clement Attlee issued a statement fully endorsing the Zionist colonisation project:

The British Labour Party recalls with pride that in the dark days of the Great War they associated themselves with the ideal of a National Home in Palestine for the Jewish People, and that ever since, the annual Conferences of the Party have repeatedly reaffirmed their enthusiastic support of the effort towards its realisation.

After Hitler came to power in 1933, the harassment of Germany's Jews stepped up as did their emigration to Palestine and the purchases of land and expulsion of the fellahin (small tenant farmers and labourers). This, and the displacement of Arab labour in the towns, created a combustible mass of unemployed workers in the towns and cities of the British Mandate, which the League of Nations had recognised in 1922.

In 1936 when the Palestinian workers'

general strike broke out and turned into a great popular uprising, Labour condemned it, repeating the Zionist claims that it was antisemitic and organised by feudal reactionaries. Labour MP Herbert Morrison, the head of London County Council, asked in the Commons why 'the ringleaders of the strike and the murders' had not been rounded up. He was outraged that they were threatening 'one of the finest moral efforts in the history of mankind' and claimed that the whole thing was organised by 'agents of Herr Hitler and Signor Mussolini'.

After Empire troops finally suppressed the uprising in 1939 with the aid of Zionist militias, in part armed and trained by Britain, the impending Second World War dictated a major change of British policy. Britain needed to hang on to Egypt's Suez Canal and the adjacent oil fields of the Arab kingdoms and this required conciliation with the conservative Arab monarchs of Transjordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. The new policy was spelt out in the Tories' 1939 White Paper. This sharply restricted Jewish immigration, as well as land sales to the Yishuv, while openly rejecting a sovereign Jewish state and holding out promises of Palestinian self-government in the future.

At its May 1939 conference, the Labour Party condemned these immigration restrictions. But at the same time it stopped well short of supporting large scale entry of the refugees from Hitler's Germany to Britain. Nor did it deter Clement Attlee and Ernest Bevin, as ministers in Churchill's war cabinet, from helping implement this policy over the protests of the Zionist movement. This initiated a temporary divorce between Labour and Zionism, during which it was the left of the party that continued the former support.

Then, as the war was drawing to a close in December 1944, the Labour Party Conference, meeting in London passed its strongest pro-Zionist motion to date:

There is surely neither hope nor meaning in a 'Jewish National Home' unless we are prepared to let Jews, if they wish, enter this tiny land [Palestine,

not Britain – Ed] in such numbers as to become a majority... Let the Arabs be encouraged to move out as the Jews move in... The Arabs have many wide territories of their own; they must not claim to exclude the Jews from this small area of Palestine, less than the size of Wales.

This motion was passed soon after the appalling conditions of the concentration camps and the existence of gas chambers in them was becoming known via reports from the advancing Red Army, but before the true scale of the Holocaust was revealed. This undoubtedly aroused an entirely progressive wave of solidarity among rank and file workers, but this is not what motivated the leaders of the Labour Party, who saw the opportunity to create a Jewish nation in the Palestinians' homeland and protect Britain's borders from an influx of Jewish immigrants.

However, the landslide victory on 5 July 1945 meant Labour was now responsible for the British Empire, then at its maximum territorial extent, but near bankrupted by the costs of war. Though at Yalta and Potsdam, the conferences that divided up the world, Britain still posed as one of the 'Big Three', it had run up huge debts to US imperialism. Despite pocketing the Sterling balances of its Dominions and colonies, held in the Bank of England, Britain soon had to go cap in hand to the US for loans.

In these conditions, control of oil supplies from the Middle East and the ownership and military control of the Suez Canal were of vital importance to British imperialism, quite apart from serving its energy needs. Ernest Bevin, the Foreign Secretary, expressed Labour's problem very clearly:

His Majesty's Government must maintain a continuing interest in the area, if only because our economic and financial interests in the Middle East are of great importance to us and to other countries as well. I would like this fact faced squarely. If these interests were lost to us, the effect on the life of this country would be a considerable reduction in the

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standard of living... The British interests in the Middle East contribute substantially not only to the prosperity of the people there, but also to the wage packets of the workers of this country.

Here in the words of the former leader of the Transport and General Workers' Union, is the worldview of the labour aristocracy of an imperialist power, that is, of a reformist socialist who needed a prosperous capitalism to be able to afford social reforms.

Preserving the Empire, rebaptised as the Commonwealth, was essential to the material basis for socialism in Britain—unless a Labour government committed to heavily taxing or, God forbid, expropriating the private wealth of British capital, which it never would. To defend 'its' empire, the Labour government also needed the support of the conservative monarchs of the Arab states.

Therefore in the immediate postwar years, the establishment of a Zionist settler state by wholesale dispossession of the Palestinians was—for the time being—a threat to British imperialist interests. This, rather than Bevin's supposed anti-semitism, was the root of the clash with Zionism. It could be reversed the moment Israel became an asset to British imperialism—and its new master, US imperialism.

But as soon as Labour Britain made clear its change of front, the Zionists began a war of terror against the British forces in Palestine. The Irgun, the militia of rightwing Revisionist Zionism, bombed the British administrative headquarters for Palestine in the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, on 22 July 1946, killing 91 people.

Nevertheless, within the Labour Party, support for Zionism remained strong, even within the Cabinet and particularly from leftwingers, including regular writers in *Tribune* such as Richard Crossman and John Strachey. Crossman, a member of the Cabinet Defence Committee, was even privy to the terrorist plans of the mainstream Zionist military force, the Haganah.

These tensions can be gauged from a pamphlet co-authored by Crossman and

Michael Foot, entitled *A Palestine Munich*. As the name suggested it drew the parallel between the appeasement of Hitler before the war and the Labour government's refusal to completely endorse the Zionist demands. It asserted:

The government of the Judean State would be eager to negotiate a treaty of alliance with Great Britain ... such a treaty would leave in British hands the port of Haifa and such airfields and installations as we require... Britain would be in a far stronger position than she is at present.

Those, like the Alliance for Workers Liberty, who paint the Zionist campaign against the Mandate as some sort of anti-imperialist or national independence struggle, ignore what was actually going on: the denial of the then-majority of the country's population to self-determination. Events soon revealed this.

Under pressure from US imperialism, the Labour government suddenly announced that it would withdraw British troops from Palestine by 15 May 1948. A similar 'scuttle' policy in India led to the chaotic partition and the death of over a million people. In Palestine it encouraged and magnified the Palestinian Nakba. British forces watched from their barracks as hundreds of villages and major cities like Haifa were ethnically cleansed, the latter of 75,000 of its inhabitants. On 9 April 1948 the Irgun, led by future Israeli premier Menachem Begin, conducted the massacre of Deir Yassin, in which between 90 and 140 defenceless men and women and 30 children were murdered.

The well-armed Haganah, its strike force the Palmach, plus the rightwing terror squads like the Irgun and Lehi (the so-called Stern Gang), were now turned on the Palestinian people. Three quarters of a million were expelled from their homes and lands, leaving the Zionists with 77% of the territory of the former Mandate.

The Labour-aligned *Daily Herald*, which around this time had a circulation of two million, reported on these events but offered no editorial comment.

Neither did the Fabian *New Statesman* nor the Labour left's *Tribune*. Their silence makes them colluders in genocide.

A *Tribune* editorial, dated 20 August 1948 and headed 'Let's stay in Africa,' reflected the tendency's brazen imperialism: 'Africa offers huge material resources which can be exploited for the benefit of Britain and the world'. A subsequent issue declared the new British Commonwealth could be 'a great partnership of planned enterprise. Only thus can the economic menace to the colonies be countered. Only thus can Britain remain a great power.' (11 February 1949).

The establishment of the state of Israel, and the defeat of the pathetic forces of the Arab monarchies that attempted any sort of intervention, provoked a series of Arab nationalist movements and coups by radical officers across the Middle East. The new Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser, after the Americans had rebuffed his appeals, oriented towards the Warsaw Pact. The US then withdrew finance from the Aswan Dam project. On 26 July 1956 Nasser announced the nationalisation of the Suez Canal.

True to form, Labour's leader Hugh Gaitskell roundly condemned Nasser's nationalisation and likened Nasser to Hitler, calling on the Tory government to supply Israel with arms. The British and French secretly agreed with Israel that its forces would invade Egypt and advance across Sinai to the Suez Canal, which they duly did at the end of October. Then Britain and France also invaded 'to keep the two sides apart'.

However, it soon became clear that Britain and France did not have the support of US President Eisenhower, so Labour backed off and condemned the whole adventure, not for any anti-imperialist motives, but simply because America, now the predominant world imperialist power—and one that Britain was economically and militarily dependent on—said no.

### **Labour left turns against Israel**

Thereafter, every one of Israel's expansionary wars—always dressed up as self-defence of course—saw Labour

rally to the Zionist cause, under Harold Wilson, James Callaghan and Michael Foot. Labour supported Israel during the Six Day War, which saw the remainder of Palestine occupied and the settlements there remorselessly extended.

Harold Wilson, prime minister from 1964 to 1970 and from 1974 to 1976, called Israel ‘a wonderful experiment in Socialist politics’. He wrote a book in 1981 called *The Chariot of Israel*, on America and Britain’s repeated support for Israel’s wars.

The *Times of Israel* accurately summed up the near total Labour endorsement of the Zionist project:

On both the left and the right of the party, there was strong support for the newly established Jewish state: Nye Bevan, the revered founder of the National Health Service; Michael Foot, a future Labour leader; Barbara Castle, one of the most senior female politicians of the time; and fellow stalwarts of the left such as Eric Heffer and Richard Crossman were all prominent backers of Israel.

Though the bulk of Labour’s parliamentary party (PLP) has always continued this tradition, not least because Israel is a strategic ally for America and Britain enabling their oil companies to dominate and exploit the Middle East, in the 1980s the party’s grassroots switched heavily towards the Palestinians. This was embodied in the person of Jeremy Corbyn.

Corbyn himself harks back to a decade when Foot, a former editor of *Tribune*, became party leader from 1980 to 1983

and when the left, under Tony Benn, was very influential, though it never came near to controlling the Parliamentary Party. By then Foot’s left days were long over; his deputy was the rightwing bruiser Denis Healey after he narrowly defeated Tony Benn’s 1981 challenge for the role.

The Labour membership’s support for Palestine grew in the period around the 1982 Lebanon War, which confirmed beyond doubt the aggressive, expansionist nature of Israel, with atrocities like the Sabra and Shatila massacres. These were carried out by Lebanese Phalangist militias but under the protection of the IDF forces, overseen by Ariel Sharon, another war criminal who would later serve as Israel’s prime minister. These events were too much for the likes of Tony Benn and Eric Heffer to stomach and they left Labour Friends of Israel. This was the year in which the Palestine Solidarity Campaign was founded and the left under Ken Livingstone dominated the Greater London Council and Ted Knight the Lambeth Borough Council.

But the weakening and purge of the left by Neil Kinnock, the Keir Starmer of his day, in the years after Labour’s stunning defeat by Thatcher in the 1983 general election, was magnified by the defeat of the 1984–85 Miners’ strike. The late 1980s and 1990s saw a decline in support for Palestine in the Party’s ranks. Under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown after 1997, the pro-Israel position was time and again reaffirmed with the fig leaf of support for the Oslo Accords and the mirage of a two-state solution.

**The Corbyn experience**

A major change—potentially—occurred in the summer of 2015 with Jeremy Corbyn’s surprise election as party leader and the near trebling of the membership which accompanied it. Corbyn promised that a Labour government, led by him, would recognise Palestine’s right to exist as a sovereign state. He pledged, if he were prime minister, to cut off arms sales and military cooperation with the settler state.

Corbyn had long condemned the siege of Gaza. As leader of the opposition he denounced the slaughter of unarmed demonstrators there in the Great March of Return 2018, in which 223 unarmed demonstrators, 46 of them children, were killed and 9,204 wounded by IDF snipers.

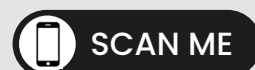
Such promises of support for the Palestine cause were unprecedented for a British party leader, so it was no surprise, to revolutionaries at least, when within months of his becoming leader, the huge rightwing majority in the Parliamentary Labour Party joined ranks with the traditionally conservative Jewish Board of Deputies to unleash an unprecedented campaign of defamation and vilification against him and the entire left wing in his party. The Tory and the Liberal press, notably the *Guardian*, as well as the public broadcaster, the BBC, took up the charges of antisemitism with gusto.

Coming on top of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement, (BDS), in which anti-Zionist Jews in Israel and abroad play a prominent role, this sent the rightwing governments of Israel into a frenzy of campaigning against the friends of the Palestinians.



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Nevertheless, Labour's Annual Conferences in 2018 and 2019 passed resolutions by big majorities demanding an end to the illegal occupation of Palestinian land. The 2019 Conference vote was hailed by delegates cheering and waving dozens of Palestinian flags. Typically, Zionists denounced it as a Nuremberg Rally. Even as late as 2021 under Keir Starmer, Conference voted adopted the following:

Conference resolves to support "effective measures" including sanctions, as called for by Palestinian civil society, against actions by the Israeli government that are illegal according to international law; in particular to ensure that Israel stops the building of settlements, reverses any annexation, ends the occupation of the West Bank, the blockade of Gaza, brings down the Wall and respects the right of Palestinian people, as enshrined in international law, to return to their homes.

These resolutions indicate two things: first, that the ordinary members of the Labour Party and its affiliated trade unions are and remain overwhelmingly sympathetic to the cause of the Palestinian people; and secondly that the representatives of those members and unions do not and never have controlled the party's MPs, the headquarters bureaucracy or, with one brief exception, its leader.

In 2017, because of the Tories' civil war over Brexit and Corbyn's successful taking up of the arguments against austerity as a deliberate policy to run down the NHS, education and social services, Labour came close to winning the election. It later emerged, through the leaking of a series of Labour HQ WhatsApp messages, that party functionaries were actively colluding to deny Corbyn a victory, by diverting resources away from marginal seats and towards some far 'safer' seats held by rightwing MPs. A long delayed report into the incidents by Martin Ford KC exposed a racist and sexist culture deeply embedded in the party bureaucracy.

After the election the 'antisemitism' witch hunt was stepped up. On 26 May 2016, the International Holocaust

Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), had adopted a so-called working definition of antisemitism. This was now utilised to create a new definition of antisemitism which included all but the mildest criticism of the racist basis of the state of Israel and its apartheid like treatment of the Palestinian.

Actually it was the appended eleven examples, rather than the 32-word definition, that explicitly brought criticism of the state of Israel within the scope of antisemitism. This included 'comparing Israeli policies to those of the Nazis', 'claiming the creation of the Jewish state was a racist endeavour' and 'holding Israel to higher standards than other countries'.

When the Labour NEC excluded these 'examples' from its acceptance of the definition, this provoked a letter in three Jewish papers, signed by 68 rabbis, that talked of an 'existential threat to Jewish life in this country' that would be posed by a Jeremy Corbyn-led government. Stephen Pollard, editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*, even wrote, 'I have always felt safe in Britain, my country. If Corbyn takes power I will no longer.' This prompted the drafter of the IHRA definition, Kenneth Stern, to warn in 2019 that 'right wing Jewish group took the "working definition"... and decided to weaponise it'.

Corbyn and Momentum responded in a weak and defensive manner rather than launching a counterattack on the Labour right and the pro-Israel forces in the British Establishment. Momentum's founder, Campaign for Labour Party Democracy veteran Jon Lansman, was a committed Zionist. He resisted any attempt to allow the party's grassroots a democratic internal life, thereby preventing the rank and file from rebuffing the right wing's onslaught on the party's pro-Palestinian supporters.

Worse, Lansman issued a statement, on Momentum's behalf, admitting that there was indeed a problem of antisemitism in the Party. Thereafter it systematically failed to defend those falsely accused of antisemitism, including a high proportion of Jewish supporters of Corbyn.

Poale Zion had relaunched itself in

2004 as the Jewish Labour Movement (JLM), which in 2016 committed itself to driving anti-Zionist forces out of the party on the false assertion that anti-Zionism was a modern form of antisemitism. In 2018 the JLM asked the Equality and Human Rights Commission to investigate antisemitism in the party.

Anti-Zionist Jewish party members fought back by founding Jewish Voice for Labour in 2017, first as a home for non-Zionist Jews and later as an explicitly anti-Zionist organisation. Over the next five years its members were systematically targeted for disciplinary action and expulsion of one sort or another, mainly by the JLM. Corbyn offered JVL activists little or no support.

Why did Corbyn put up such an ineffective defence of his supporters? Certainly, this did not placate the right who were determined to get rid of him from the party, not simply from the leadership. He was suspended from the PLP for saying on Facebook, that the scale of antisemitism in the Party, as revealed by the EHRC report in 2020, had been 'dramatically overstated for political reasons.'

Corbyn, like Tony Benn and the entire Labour Left, saw the party as a 'broad church' and neither wanted nor dared to counter-attack its right wing, since a split would damage its electoral prospects, such as happened in 1983 when the right wing splinter SDP caused a catastrophic election loss for Labour. This is the fundamental flaw in the left's parliamentary cretinism. The left needs the right to win elections, yet the right does not need the left and will always sabotage them if the latter look like getting anywhere near to power.

### **Return to Zion**

Following the 2019 defeat, Corbyn resigned. New leader Keir Starmer promised to stick to Corbyn's policies, an experience he was soon to drop. But on no issue was he so immediate and brazen as in his support for Israel:

I do support Zionism... I absolutely support the right of Israel to exist as a homeland... I said it loud and clear—and

meant it—that I support Zionism without qualification. (Interview with *Jewish News*, 14 February 2020)

He continued his clampdown on criticism of Israel, by MPs, local councillors and the ordinary members, as antisemitism. Corbyn was suspended from the PLP and barred from standing as a Labour candidate in Islington North; the constituency party itself was closed down.

Two years on from the resolution of 2021, Labour conference witnessed a very different spectacle from the delegates waving Palestinian flags. Starmer received two standing ovations at the 2023 conference, when he declared his support for Israel over Gaza and condemned Palestinian resistance as terrorism. He rejected calls for a ceasefire, saying ‘that would leave Hamas with the infrastructure and the capabilities to carry out the sort of attack we saw on 7 October’.

The Labour Party’s public position from the outset of the 2023–24 Israeli war on Gaza has been staunch support for its ‘right’ to do so. This continued over weeks and months after the 7 October Hamas attacks, when Israel’s collective punishment of Gazans far exceeded in scale these killings. Sir Keir Starmer even said in a radio interview that Israel had the ‘right’ to cut off access to water, food, and electricity to civilians in Gaza—brazen breaches of international law

A deeper motive, besides his ‘unconditional support for Zionism’, was to prove to the ruling class that in his hands the party could be safely entrusted with the worldwide interests of British imperialism. He underlined this by rarely appearing without a giant union flags behind him. Labour’s 2024 election material and membership card also carried prominently images of the same flag, while the word ‘genocide’ was expunged from 2024 conference literature, even in the advertisements for fringe meetings.

More recently Labour’s Foreign Secretary David Lammy, when asked in the Commons by Conservative MP Nick Timothy to clarify that ‘there is not a genocide occurring in the Middle East’, and that to use words like ‘genocide’ in

connection with Gaza were ‘not appropriate’ and were ‘repeated by protesters and lawbreakers’, replied, ‘I do agree with the honourable gentleman.’ Lammy then added that terms like genocide should only be used ‘when millions of people lost their lives in crises like Rwanda, the Second World War, the Holocaust, and the way that they are used now undermines the seriousness of that term’.

Lammy’s rescinding of 30 out of 360 weapons export licenses to Israel and his decision to restart Britain’s funding of Unwra need to be seen in this light. They do not represent a more hostile attitude to Israel and support for the Palestinians; rather they are an attempt to placate popular outrage at Israel, while keeping their core support for the Zionist state intact.

And though many of the big general trade unions like Unite, Unison and GMB, are affiliated to the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, they have remained muted on the Gaza genocide and most of their general secretaries absent from demonstrations, while hundreds of thousands, including many of their members, have thronged the streets of London and other major cities for over a year. Sharon Graham, left wing general secretary of Unite, even condemned those pro-Palestine who called on her members in the arms industry to boycott supplies to Israel.

In fact this indifference, even hostility,

**LABOUR'S  
UNCONDITIONAL  
SUPPORT FOR  
ZIONISM IS  
BOUND UP WITH  
ITS SUPPORT  
FOR BRITISH  
IMPERIALISM**

should come as no surprise. Labour in government, as we have shown, always assures the ruling class that Britain’s interests as an imperialist power and those of its US protector are paramount. And when push comes to shove the major trade unions look to Labour ministers for favours, leaving it to a few of the smaller or unaffiliated unions like the RMT railway and transport union or the NEU education union, to express more principled internationalist opinions and appear on Palestine Solidarity Campaign platforms.

This near absence of speakers and banners of the big battalions of the labour movement from the mass Gaza solidarity movement is not because the majority of its members support Israel’s atrocities or endorse its long history of driving Palestine’s indigenous population from their lands. No sympathy for Israel grips the British working class. Opinion polls clearly show that this is not the case. Ipsos’ October opinion poll shows 73% of Britons are for an immediate ceasefire and an even greater proportion among Labour voters.

Now with Labour in government and Israel banning Unwra from providing the minimal aid to Gaza and the West bank so it can complete its genocide, it becomes a burning task to exert maximum pressure on Starmer to break off all Britain’s military supplies and cooperation with Israel, to stop blocking condemnation of the genocide in the UN Security Council, to send massive medical, food and reconstruction aid to Gaza and the West Bank as partial reparation for Britain’s historic and ongoing crimes against the Palestinian people.

Labour’s disgraceful record of support for Zionism shows that Britain’s imperialist Labour Party is no genuine party of the working class and that the need for a revolutionary party committed to the struggle against all the rival imperialist powers, especially our own, and to active support for all those oppressed by them, is now more urgent than ever. ■





The far right are exploiting a housing crisis to attack refugees and asylum seekers in violent protests

# IRELAND: ELECTION CHALLENGES FROM LEFT AND RIGHT SEEN OFF — FOR NOW

*Bernie McAdam*

**T**he General Election result in Ireland will see Fianna Fail and Fine Gael form the backbone of the next Irish government with the aid of one of the smaller parties or Independents. The recent Fianna Fail/Fine Gael/Green coalition had been in government since 2020 with Fine Gael in power for 14 years and Fianna Fail in power for 18 years previously. Indeed, either one or the other has run the state for just over a hundred years.

The recent Budget was designed to soften up the electorate with some small real income gains and one-off payments. But in reality, this was a cynical electoral ploy which has not seriously enhanced

living standards of working class people, who have been savaged from all the years of austerity. This miserly Budget must be viewed against the backdrop of staggering windfall corporation tax receipts; by September it was €17.8 billion for the year, plus an Apple tax of €14 billion.

The government lost its battle not to receive unpaid tax from Apple having already wasted €8 million in legal fees. Previously the European Court had found Ireland guilty of giving Apple illegal tax advantages, and, despite protests, the Irish government was forced to accept the money! This demonstrates the semi-colonial status of the Irish economy as much as its role as a lucrative tax haven for imperialist corporations.

After over a decade of austerity, and with a serious housing and healthcare crisis, both FF and FG were experiencing a significant decline in their support. Sinn Fein looked poised for government, riding high in the polls at 32% in October 2023. But the last two general election results have seen a relatively equal distribution of votes and seats for these three main parties. Thus FF and FG have not significantly improved their performances, nor declined further, whilst SF's forward momentum has been halted.

Although the immigration issue has altered the political dialogue in Ireland, it has not significantly altered the seats in the Dail. The far right electoral challenge fizzled out but we should not underestimate the ability of the current batch of right-wing TD's to stoke the fires of anti-immigrant hysteria. The far right's anti-immigrant riot in Dublin last November, the attacks on migrant centres and camps, the uptick in racist assaults, have all shaped and set the pace for other parties' anti-immigrant policies. Sinn Fein in particular, have been spooked and now ironically proclaim their opposition to 'open borders' and speeding up deportations.

### **Government to blame**

So while the far right influence has had a knock on effect, it is the Irish government which has been responsible for the recent crisis which has spawned the growth of

the racist far right. First of all, the government decided to house as many of the Ukrainian refugees in accommodation as possible, whilst all other migrants had to fend for themselves. This resulted in homeless camps which became easy targets for fascists. Then Taoiseach Harris, his government having created the problem, hypocritically raged over 'shanty towns' in Ireland and subsequently shut down the camps around the International Protection Office, only to place the refugees in tented accommodation elsewhere in County Dublin.

Refugees are not the problem. There has always been a housing crisis! The government's entirely inadequate response has been accentuated by their inability to deal with the housing crisis despite their healthy budget surplus. Ireland has a shortage of 250,000 homes, it has a chronic shortage of affordable homes to buy or rent and there are around 140,00 vacant dwellings in the state. Fianna Fail and Fine Gael have for too long protected the interests of multinational corporations, property developers and absentee landlords. Their government's neglect and discriminatory policies have fueled the rise of the far right.

We must demand the use of the government's corporate billions and tax the super-rich to fund the rollout of our emergency policies to accommodate all the

**DESPITE  
PROTESTS,  
THE IRISH  
GOVERNMENT  
WAS FORCED  
BY THE EU TO  
ACCEPT €14BN IN  
UNPAID TAXES  
FROM APPLE**

homeless by repurposing vacant commercial and corporate properties and launching a major house building programme. A massive programme of socially useful public works to provide full employment and develop the economic and social infrastructure is required. Working class communities should be involved in drawing up an audit of social needs as part of a democratically developed plan of production under workers' control.

We also urgently need a workers' united front to defend all migrants under attack and smash the fascist terror squads. The far right will not stop at refugees, but will target any so called 'traitors', as they have done already with their attacks on Sinn Fein and People Before Profit TD's. Organised self defence is a necessity and needs to be seriously prepared for, as part of building a trade union-oriented anti-racist and anti-fascist movement.

### **Sinn Fein, no left alternative**

The ruling parties have firmly rejected any coalition with Sinn Fein, no doubt a punishment for their historic association with the armed struggle against Britain, despite clear evidence of SF's embracing of parliamentary democracy north and south of the border. This has not stopped around 20% of the voting electorate continuing to give SF their support. But this does not make them a genuine left-wing alternative, indeed their recent accommodation to the racist right further damaged their left wing credentials. But it was unsurprising to hear in the recent election campaign from two Cork Sinn Fein TD's that Sinn Fein were now running with the idea of leading a left-wing coalition government with the Greens, Labour, Social Democrats, People before Profit-Solidarity and Independent lefts.

However, most of the small left-of-centre parties would prefer the real deal coalition with their bourgeois masters in FF/FG anyway. Despite the collapse of support for Labour and the Greens due to the experience of their previous coalitions, they still crave for government inclusion. Of course, the Greens now only have one TD. The Labour Party

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and the Social Democrats, though, have increased their number of seats in the Dail to 22 between them, but even the Social Democrats have not ruled out coalition with FF/FG.

So Sinn Fein's 'left government' is hardly a realistic proposition, and, even if formed, would be left-wing in name only. Sinn Fein is not a socialist nor a workers' party with organic and representative links to the organised working class, even though a significant slice of working class people vote for it. The political vacuum on the left in Ireland has always reflected the historic absence of a mass workers' party based on the trade unions.

A Sinn Fein government would be as pro-capitalist and pro-imperialist as it is in the Stormont administration in the north, where it has implemented Westminster austerity and copper-fastened partition. It has done this in coalition with the DUP, one of the most reactionary parties in Europe. Their natural home would be a coalition with FF in the south, however unlikely, but even a Sinn Fein-led government without the FF or FG would not automatically make it a left-wing progressive one.

Sinn Fein have frequently made clear their desire to be a safe pair of hands to the southern ruling class in their respect for and defence of corporate power in the state. Pearse Doherty, Deputy Leader, even flew off to London to meet with and allay the fears of investors and asset managers. And if Sinn Fein isn't going to go after big business as Doherty insists, then how else can working class living standards be defended and improved? Socialists can give no political support to a Sinn Fein-led pro-capitalist government, though obviously socialist TD's would demand and vote for any progressive legislation in the Dail if or when it is introduced by Sinn Fein.

### **People before Profit**

People before Profit (PbP) is the only left-wing party standing in the elections which has definitively ruled out any coalition with the two main bourgeois parties. PbP's electoral bloc with Solidarity (Socialist Party) has now been reduced

from five to three TD's in the Dail, with only an increase of 5,000 first preference votes. Its lingering electoral base was originally secured on the back of its high profile in the victorious anti-water charges movement a decade ago. More recently, PbP has been the key player in building and initiating action in defence of migrants and anti-racist struggles from Dublin to Belfast, from Cork to Dundalk, and it has been active in many community and housing campaigns and has played a prominent role in the Palestine solidarity movement. It was the only left group worthy of a vote in the election.

Electing a strong contingent of PbP TD's could have posed the question of what kind of mass party does the Irish working class need and could this be the vehicle for it? In that debate it will be incumbent on socialists to be absolutely clear why a new party of workers has to be a revolutionary one. We have to go beyond fighting for reforms which are disconnected from the goal of abolishing capitalism and replacing it with socialism.

We need to build a bridge between the two through a programme of transitional demands which also pose the kinds of workers' organs of struggle that can mount a challenge to the capitalist state. In short, we need a new revolutionary party with a revolutionary action programme basing itself on the daily struggles of workers in opening up the fight for socialism.

Unfortunately, PbP does not have that perspective. It is a more reform-based movement with loose organization, rather than a cohesive party which could operate more effectively in a democratically centralist way. Whilst acknowledging the need for social struggles and workplace militancy, there is a deference to electoralist priorities. Their attitude to the question of what sort of government the working class needs in Ireland betrays a serious mistake in accommodating to SF.

PbP continues to insist that support for a Sinn Fein-led government (or entry into it) without FF or FG would be welcome, despite the fact that Sinn Fein cannot be trusted 'to carry through a consistent left programme' and that its 'working class

aspirations' need to be put to the test. The problem here is that there are no working class organisations or 'people power' bodies to hold Sinn Fein to account. If Sinn Fein can slide to the right outside of government imagine what they would do when in government under the pressure of the US, UK and EU imperialists as well as Ireland's own capitalist class. It can be categorically stated that Sinn Fein will not carry out any kind of a consistent left programme.

Of course, not all PbP members are sold on this 'tactic' as they watch SF scamper to the right, especially on immigration, and no doubt the debate will continue. But it serves no useful purpose to create the illusion that they should do a 'left-wing deal' e.g. by supporting Mary Lou McDonald as Taoiseach in advance of the election! Far better to warn workers in advance that a Sinn Fein-led government will be committed to maintaining the capitalist system. It will have nothing to do with a genuine workers' government. If we want to put Sinn Fein to the test, then through our campaigns and trade union work, alongside their rank and file members, we demand their leaders struggle in the interests of workers by developing a clear strategy for working class action. We will not curry favour by cosying up to Sinn Fein, but through honest and sharp criticism of their pro-capitalist politics.

It is also true that a real workers' government, outside a period of rising class struggle, is not an option after this election, but a revolutionary socialist party should be explaining why we need one. On all the burning questions facing Irish workers we should be addressing how a workers' government would best defend and extend their interests. It would have to base itself on organs of struggle and accountability like action committees, workers' councils and workers' defence squads that would create an alternative centre of power against the capitalist state. The urgent task for revolutionaries right now is to elaborate a revolutionary programme in the struggle for a Workers' Republic and in building a new revolutionary party in Ireland. ■

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# Feature

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## The challenge of the revolutionary left in Argentina

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Chainsaw-wielding president Javier Milei has launched a major attack on workers' rights and living conditions. In a country that hosts one of the largest collections of revolutionary groups, many look to Argentina, and specifically the FIT-U for inspiration. As part of our discussions of the fundamental questions of today's class struggle with the ITO and the ISL, *Jonathan Frühling* and *Martin Suchanek* analyse the political situation and perspectives facing the revolutionary left.



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rgentina is being wracked by a severe economic crisis. In the first quarter of 2024, GDP shrank by 5%; in the summer inflation hit 271%. 60% of the population live below the poverty line, 15% do not have money to buy enough food—and the trend is rising.

Since December 2023 the ruling class has had a loyal servant in self-described ‘anarcho-capitalist’ president, Javier Milei, who carried a chainsaw to rallies to symbolise what he would do to government social spending. His aim is to throw the full burden of the crisis onto the backs of the working class—laying off government employees, slashing subsidies on transport and energy and reducing fiscal transfers to deprived regions. With the election of Donald Trump, he now has a strong supporter in the White House and the dominant international financial institutions like the IMF located in Washington.

Though his party, La Libertad Avanza, holds only 38 out of 257 seats in the congress, seven of the upper house’s 72 seats, and none of the regional governors, the bourgeois parties have, in general, been willing to support all his anti-working class measures. His first major blow was the Decree of Necessity and Urgency (DNU), the so-called Omnibus Law, which included privatisation of state-owned assets, and restrictions on workers’ rights, including the right to protest. Though his government has come into conflict with sections of the ruling class and the traditional political elites in congress, the passage of the so-called ‘Basic Law’ in June represents an important, if partial, victory for Milei over his opponents.

His government is concerned with nothing less than a fundamental neoliberal reordering of the country by destroying all the essential achievements of workers, the unemployed, and the various social movements. It is not just about extreme cuts in spending and the deterioration of services under the impact by inflation and unemployment, but about inflicting a strategic defeat on the working class.

As a country with powerful social movements, this would have reverberations across the entire region. Milei's policies—and any resistance, or lack of it, they provoke, will be closely observed well beyond Latin America. The working class and the socially oppressed urgently need to unite all their forces in the fight against Milei. Everything is at stake.

### **The electoral alliance FIT-U**

Milei's programme has been dealt with in detail in our press, which can be found on our website. In this article, we turn our attention to the response of Argentina's well organised far left. Over the past decade, Argentina has witnessed the growth of a variety of groups emerging from a Trotskyist tradition. The largest of these have been grouped together in the Left and Workers' Front—Unity (FIT-U), with five deputies in parliament.

The FIT-U was founded in 2011 by the Partido Obrero (PO), the Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas (PTS) and the Izquierda del Trabajadores por el Socialismo (IS). In 2019, the Movimiento Socialista de los Trabajadores (MST) joined. The FIT-U's stated goal was to 'prepare workers for the task of fighting for their own government'.<sup>1</sup> In 2011, the FIT-U won 590,000 votes, though it failed to enter parliament. In 2013, it sent two deputies to Congress, where it has maintained a small presence since. In 2021, the coalition received just under 1.3 million votes and five MPs. Initially, four deputies were from the PTS and one from the PO. When half the seats in congress were elected in 2023, this fell to just under 800,000, demonstrating that the FIT-U's vote is highly elastic; despite the economic crisis and the political crisis of Peronism, the bloc cannot take a consolidated increase in support at the polls

1. Christian Gebhardt, "Argentina: Presidential election end Kirchner Era", *Neue Internationale* 205, December 2015.

for granted.

Historically, the Argentine workers' movement has been dominated by Peronism, a bourgeois populism which exerted a powerful influence in sections of the trade unions. The Peronist Justice Party oscillated between right-wing and repressive governments, and reforming trends associated with European-style social democracy which ensured Peronism maintained its hold on the main trade union federation, the CGT, and a large part of the working class electorate.

Fluctuations in numbers notwithstanding, the FIT-U banner has been able to attract the support of a section of the workers' vanguard and most politically progressive parts of the social movements during election periods. This represents the embryo, or the possibility, of a turn towards class independence for Argentine workers. Therefore, the question posed to the FIT-U almost from inception, has been—how can it go beyond an electoral bloc, to becoming a force that organises the vanguard of the working class, and those breaking from Peronism, into a powerful force challenging for leadership in the class struggle beyond the ballot box?

### **The 2011 programme**

The original 2011 programme of the FIT-U was expanded in 2019 and constitutes its fundamental basis to this day.<sup>2</sup> It contains a number of immediate and transitional demands, including the expropriation of the banks and large companies under workers' control, and culminates in the demand for a 'government of workers and the people, achieved through the mobilisation of the exploited and oppressed'.

It remains unclear, however, how this government is to be created. Is it through the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and the smashing of the bourgeois state apparatus—or by 'mobilising massive pressure' on the existing political system? Neither workers' councils nor militias make an appearance. Their absence robs the programme of any indication of how a revolutionary break with the bourgeois system and its state can come about. The compromised product of an electoral bloc founded on the basis of a limited consensus, we

2. FIT, "Programmatic Declaration of the Workers' Left Front", July 2011.

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characterised the programme as centrist at the time, and it remains so today.<sup>3</sup>

As a totality, the programme represents a compromise whose common positions only accentuate the the programmatic differences between the component organisations on the trade unions, Peronism, and tactics in the unemployed movement, to take just a few notable examples. As in the domestic arena, so in the international sphere, the FIT-U organisations have taken different—or even diametrically opposed—positions on central questions. In preserving the consensus basis of the bloc, the groups have so far failed to open up these questions to discussion and clarification amongst the bloc’s supporters, instead preserving their organisational freedom of manoeuvre and polemic.

### **An electoral alliance**

Thus the FIT-U is, in reality, an electoral alliance, and at that, one that does not carry out joint activity or campaigns. At large demonstrations, such as the two 24 hour general strikes against Milei’s ‘reforms’ in January and May 2024, the groups agree only on who will march or where their stands will be set up. There is no common activity outside of elections, which take place every two years.

This leaves the FIT-U perceptible to the masses only as a logo appended to the materials of the component organisations, and, principally, through the parliamentary work of its deputies, who have, nevertheless, achieved a high profile.

Accordingly, there is no collective and permanent political leadership. There is, equally, no means by which FIT-U voters can become active within it outside of electoral work, unless they join one of the four organisations. Inevitably, the precondition of joining one of the propaganda groups poses an insurmountable obstacle to the FIT-U fusing itself with, and drawing in, wider layers of its working class support into organised political activity, discussion and decision making—assuming an element of collective ownership over the bloc’s programme, perspectives and strategy.

This self-imposed cordon sanitaire between the political organisations and their periphery is

without doubt one of the reasons why the bloc is stagnating and unable to capitalise on its support by drawing more people into activity. In the present situation of ruling class offensive, however, it is essential to develop, within the class struggle, a political party that can develop a perspective to defeat Milei and thus act as a rallying point for the millions of workers and youth seeking just such a programme.

But, unfortunately, recent years have demonstrated that the FIT-U’s has responded to this objectively posed necessity by congealing as an electoral bloc. And yet it is precisely this on this electoral terrain—the least important arena—that there is stagnation.

### **The 2023 programme**

It flows from this that there should be a lack of progress on the programmatic level. Indeed, the 2023 election programme, “10 Points of the Left Front”, represents a political retreat from the founding programme.<sup>4</sup> The ten points do address the central needs of the masses and raise demands that include an important part of an immediate programme for the working class, as well as demands directed against the exploitation of natural resources by agribusiness, oil and mining companies and the IMF.

But, unlike the founding programme, there is not a word (in a general election programme) about the all-important question of government. There is no demand for the constitution of workers’ and popular councils, let alone the organisation of self-defence against attacks by the police, or overcoming the power of the state and the establishment of a workers’ socialist republic. Even at the level of the immediate class struggle, one finds no mention of the need to form a workers’ united front against the attacks of the Milei government, let alone any demands which could be the basis for one.

Quite rightly, the four groups in the FIT-U did not limit their own electoral propaganda to the common platform, but also raised their own demands that go beyond this. All of them repeatedly advocated the perspective of a workers’ government (or a workers’ and people’s government); all propagated the necessity of large-scale mass struggles,

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3. Gebhardt, “Argentina: What next for the radical left?”, October 2013, <https://fifthinternational.org/elecciones-argentinas-cual-es-el-camino-seguir-para-la-izquierda-0/>

4. FIT, “Diez puntos del Frente de Izquierda”, <https://www.frentedeizquierda.org.ar/landing/programa.html>

up to and including a general strike. But—unlike in 2011—none of this was reflected in the FIT-U programme.

At the same time, the FIT-U is touted as a ‘revolutionary front’ in the election campaigns, even though it plainly does not itself advocate or embody a revolutionary programme of its own, and knows no common activity other than running for election. In our opinion, there is a deep contradiction here. On the one hand, the FIT-U attracts hundreds of thousands of workers and youth who are looking for an answer to the deep crisis in Argentina and an alternative to Peronism. But it does not offer these people a political leadership beyond the election. Nothing remains of its promise at its founding to ‘prepare workers for the task of fighting for their own government’. The four member organisations (and other competing groups) are left to do this themselves.

This means that the FIT-U falls short both of its potential and of the current tasks of the class struggle. In Argentina today we are witnessing a class confrontation that can only end in a fundamental alteration in the balance of forces, either with a deep, counter-revolutionary defeat or with a revolutionary victory. Although this struggle may be drawn out, it will not last indefinitely and, in particular, the corrosive forces of inflation and impoverishment threaten to wear down the masses sooner rather than later, even if the government is slow to implement reactionary legislation.

At this point, we must acknowledge the concrete difficulties that exist. The fact that the FIT-U still exists only as an electoral alliance is of course not simply due to the fact that everyone benefits financially from the electoral successes, but also to deep differences between the four groups. Equally, if the four organisations merely effected an organisational merger and united only as permanent factions, as the French NPA became, this would not solve those differences and transform the FIT-U into a fighting party with an operative strategy.

Nevertheless, the intensification of the class struggle demands that the forces within the FIT-U should develop a plan for taking forward the development of a revolutionary party capable of acting as the leadership of millions. The individual groups of the FIT-U, large as they are in comparison to those

in similar countries, can hardly do this individually nor by a simple aggregation of their forces.

What is the means by which the FIT-U, or parts of it, can become the motive force in the development of such a party? The precondition to answering this question is to pose it in the first place; to understand that the task of creating a revolutionary leadership—a party—is a task flowing from out of today’s struggles, not tomorrow’s.

### **The organisations of the FIT-U**

Let us now look at the three largest organisations in the FIT-U, which have roughly equal weight in the Argentine left. We will see that they differ considerably in their assessment of the situation in Argentina, their development tactics and in their policies within the FIT-U.

### **Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas – PTS**

The PTS is probably the third largest organisation of the FIT-U in terms of numbers. It was formed in 1988 as a split from the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) founded by Nahuel Moreno (1924–1987). It is the Argentine section of the Fracción Trotskista (FT) and is also by far its largest individual section. We previously analysed its theoretical basis in 2016.<sup>5</sup>

The PTS sees its policy as a break from Morenoism and a restoration of a revolutionary Trotskyist tradition. In fact, this year it has developed an action programme which sets out ten demands for Argentina.<sup>6</sup> First of all, it is very commendable that, in contrast to many who consider themselves Trotskyists, it has published an up-to-date programmatic document, and this goes far beyond the election programme of the FIT-U. However, it must still be described as a centrist, not a revolutionary, programme, although it does make this claim for itself. It calls for the nationalisation of industry under workers’ control, a monopoly of foreign trade, and a series of important democratic and social measures. But, on the question of

5. Gebhardt, “Orthodox Trotskyism or Workerist Maximalism?”, *Revolutionärer Marxismus* 48, August 2016, <https://arbeiterinnenmacht.de/2018/04/03/orthodoxer-trotzkismus-oder-workeristischer-maximalismus/>

6. PTS, “10 puntos para unir al pueblo trabajador, la juventud y las mujeres contra Milei y el poder económico saqueador”, 17 March 2024, [https://www.laizquierdadiario.com/spip.php?page=gacetilla-articulo&id\\_articulo=252046](https://www.laizquierdadiario.com/spip.php?page=gacetilla-articulo&id_articulo=252046)



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government, it remains vague. At the end, it says:

In the face of the pacts behind the backs of the people and against the IMF regime, we defend the struggle for a free and sovereign Constituent Assembly as a democratic body to challenge all the institutions that have governed us. A more generous democracy would facilitate the struggle for a government of workers based on their own democratic organisations within the framework of the international struggle for socialism from below.

In our opinion, the slogan of the Constituent Assembly is not a central slogan for Argentina today, and certainly not one to prepare the struggle for a workers' government through its 'broader democracy'. On the contrary. Even though we support demands for democratic rights and, for example, the abolition of the bicameral parliament, Argentina has been an established bourgeois democracy for decades. The slogan of the Constituent Assembly does not have any decisive political power here, and we consider it to be more of a distraction from the essentials in view of the tasks ahead. Why?

Like the PTS and all other groups of the FIT-U, we consider an indefinite general strike to be essential to stop Milei's attacks. However, unlike temporary, one-day 'demonstration strikes', such a strike inevitably poses the question of power. Milei's government will try to break it, the union leaderships will try to choke it off, if they can't prevent it. Therefore, mass assemblies, the election of strike committees, a nationwide leadership and coordination of the movement, as well as self-defence organs against police or military repression are needed, plus agitation among the soldiers for them to refuse to participate in the repression of the movement, indeed, to go over to the side of the workers.

Councils of workers' delegates can emerge from action and strike committees, and workers' militias from the self-defence organisations, creating a dual power situation that can that can only be resolved progressively by installing a revolutionary workers' government; i.e. the rule of the working class. However, the necessity of the smashing of the bourgeois state, the building of workers' or

soldiers' councils or the establishment of self-defence committees do not appear in the PTS's 'transitional programme'.

Another problem concerns the assessment of the situation by their last congress and the perspectives derived from it. The PTS understands the current situation as a defensive situation, in which there are favourable conditions in the coming months to strengthen itself by participating in struggles in the factories, at the universities and in the neighbourhood committees. While they are aware that the government's attacks will continue, they do not expect there to be a decisive defeat for the working class in the near future. However, it also does not assume that it is possible to build a party that can organise the vanguard of the class and fight for leadership of it. The level of class struggle, they say is too low for that.

We consider this assessment to be wrong in two respects. On the one hand, the capitalist side is waging the struggle with extreme intensity. On the other, broadening, and intensifying even defensive struggles will tend to transform the issues into ones which pose the question of power.

The level of class struggle is actually extremely high—but nevertheless the camp of the workers and oppressed still remains far behind the requirements of the hour, for which Peronism and the trade union leaderships in particular bear political responsibility.

In this situation, in our opinion, a revolutionary force, for all the importance of partial struggles for propaganda and agitation, must stand for a generalisation of class resistance. At the individual company or sectoral level, the balance of power is more unfavourable than at the level of society as a whole, especially in a deep economic crisis, and central problems of the class such as inflation cannot be solved purely on a sectoral basis.

In accordance with its party building concept and its analysis of the situation in Argentina, the PTS sees no need to turn the FIT-U into a political regroupment project. The FIT-U hardly appears in its publications overall. If it is mentioned, it is only as an electoral front and with the aim of broadening the visibility and acceptance of general left-wing politics. This is probably also due to the fact that the PTS currently has four members of parliament and

thus has great weight within the FIT-U. Opening up the FIT-U to the unorganised could jeopardise its position of power, and a concretisation of its programme could scare off parts of the more moderate voter base. This, in turn, could jeopardise the further successful development of the PTS, which is why it prefers to leave everything as it is.

### **Movimiento Socialista de los Trabajadores – MST**

The largest force within the FIT-U, together with the PO, is the MST. It was formed in 1992 as a split from the Morenoite MAS. The international organisation associated with it is the Liga Internacional Socialista (LIS) / International Socialist League (ISL)

The MST is particularly strong in the private health sector and in the unemployed movement or piqueteros. A peculiarity of Argentina is that unemployed people, if they want to receive their state support, have to go to unemployed organisations and as such also participate in demonstrations. This is intended to give weight to the social movements in Argentina, also because many people are unemployed. The MST has its own unemployed organisation, Unidad Piquetera, which allows it to mobilise many thousands of people for its demonstrations. The aim is to be able to carry out agitation among the unemployed through these organisations and thus to gain contact with the most precarious strata of the working class. It also tries to intervene with these organisations in the neighbourhood committees that have formed since the crisis in Buenos Aires, often grouped around public kitchens.

The MST sees the present situation as very critical. According to it, the attacks of the Milei government are aimed at fundamentally transforming the country. This leads to polarisation within the population. Therefore, it recognises that the social forces fighting against Milei in recent months can grow into even greater confrontations with his government. In addition, the MST recognises the social movements have the potential not just to fight the government but to overthrow it.

Such an upheaval was seen in 2001–2. Under the Radical Party president Fernando de la Rúa, a mass movement of demonstrations broke out, including *cacerolazos* (pot banging), general strikes, factory occupations, including the imposition of workers'

control, plus unemployed workers' road blockades. In a short period five presidents came and went, yet the absence of a workers' political alternative enabled the Peronists to return to power and do deals with the IMF, first under Eduardo Duhalde and then Nestor Kirchner and later Christina Kirchner-Fernandez.

The MST is well aware that its own weight is not enough to lead the decisive battles. For this reason it seeks to transform the FIT-U from a purely electoral front into a collective organisation of all the fighting sectors. The MST sees the need for these activists to go beyond their separate struggles and organise politically. Peronist administrations held office for a long periods and ultimately brought corruption, inflation and cooperation with the IMF, thus preparing the ground for Milei's election. That is why large parts of the masses are deeply disillusioned with this leadership and want to reorient themselves. Due to the already existing popularity of the FIT-U, it can thus become a rallying point for leftists and give rise to a new and united movement. In an open letter to the other organisations of the FIT-U the MST writes:

The country is facing a new stage, a stage with more social confrontations and more political disputes. The FIT-U must face this situation, not only alongside the daily struggles and in direct opposition to the government, the state governors and employers' associations, but also as a political alternative. More rebellious, more democratic, and more open to those who share our ideas of change to work together toward workers' government and socialism.<sup>7</sup>

To achieve this, the MST advocates that there should be an open congress of the FIT-U in which all activists from the universities, the district committees, environmental activists, women's rights activists, left-wing intellectuals and trade unionists can participate. At such an open congress, in which thousands of people would participate, it would like to discuss democratically the future form of the

7. Sergio Garcia, "Argentina: the challenges the left faces in a new political stage", 14 December 2023, <https://lis-isl.org/en/2023/12/14/argentina-desafios-de-la-izquierda-ante-una-nueva-etapa-politica/>

FIT-U. It would like to argue at such a congress that the FIT-U opens up to a membership of individual activists, that it creates local groups and a democratically elected leadership. In this way, it is to become more rebellious and democratic and transform itself into a party in which the individual organisations are organised as currents. It proposes that the different currents agree on a draft programme and, where they cannot reach agreement, table it for debate and voting among a wider membership. We consider this approach to be sensible in principle—but it remains to be seen precisely what programme the MST itself would propose.

But in addition to the ‘left’ or the ‘revolutionaries’, we believe that a proposal must also be aimed at the various trade union federations, especially the 7 million strong Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT), as well as to the Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina (CTA), and the smaller federations to break all their links with the bourgeois parties, particularly the historic ties to the Peronists (PJ) and begin the formation of an Argentine workers’ party around an action programme for defeating and bringing down Milei. Linked to this must be support for a movement of rank and file members within the big federations’ to break the stranglehold of the corrupt and dictatorial union bureaucracy.

## **Partido Obrero – PO**

The Partido Obrero is the the only one of the four groups of the FIT-U not to result from a split in from Nahuel Moreno’s MAS. It was founded in 1964, around the Journal Política Obrera and its historic leader Jorge Altamira, though in 2019 it split with him. It assesses the situation in Argentina in such a way that the current government will either end in a decisive defeat for the working class or it will manage to overthrow the government and open a path to solving the crisis in their interest.

Like the MST, the PO also has a piquetero organisation under its leadership. It bears the name Polo Obrero. It believes that the piqueteros, which emerged from the popular uprisings of 2001, have played a pioneering role in the struggles of this millennium. Polo Obrero is one of the largest piquetero organisations in Argentina and is therefore also affected by strong repression by the government, which the PO describes as the most violent

attack against its party in its history. This refers to over 120 state raids on soup kitchens across the country and the political persecution of piquetero activists.

Programmatically, the PO outlines some demands in its political declaration, which it published on 3 July 2024. Among other things, it calls for a halt to cooperation with the IMF and debt payments. The banking system and foreign trade should be nationalised and the entire economy be placed under the control of the workers. This is to be accompanied by an increase in wages and pensions and their indexation to inflation. The establishment of a workers’ government and the expropriation of factories without compensation are also mentioned. To achieve this, a general strike needs to be organised.

However, the programmatic part of the text is extremely short and does not mention the same crucial questions that we have already mentioned above with regard to the PTS. In its action programme of 23 July 2023, it briefly formulated its understanding of a workers’ state. It is to be a state of a new type and consist of representatives of the class who can be elected and recalled, who form the government. In the new state, the bourgeois organs of repression are to be replaced by workers’ militias. Judges and public prosecutors are also to be elected. These are all important points, but they are more of a maximum demand than a battle plan for how to become active for such a government in the here and now.

In order to organise a general strike, the various organisations of the PO, and the PO itself, should regroup activists, agitate among them and fight with them for the most important demands of the day. The aim is to show the workers the treacherous role of Peronism. Local meetings of trade union activists, neighbourhood assemblies and youth meetings are intended to help recruit new activists for the party and increase its influence in these sectors.

However, there is no call in the recent PO congress documents to join forces with the other organisations within the FIT-U for these demands.<sup>8</sup> It is striking that the FIT-U is actually not even mentioned in the Declaration, nor in its action

8. “Tasks and Conclusions of the 29th Congress of the Workers’ Party”, June 2024, <https://prensaobrera.com/politicas/las-tareas-y-conclusiones-del-xxix-congreso-del-partido-obrero>

programme or its 'Tasks and Conclusions of the 29th Congress of the PO'. Nor is there any mention of the united front tactics to be directed against the bureaucracies of the CGT and the CTA. The PO therefore has no tactics at all for breaking the working class away from Peronism and uniting it. But this would be absolutely essential if the PO really wants to overthrow the government within Milei's term of office, unless it thinks it can do so entirely on its own.

### Perspectives for the struggle

Like the MST, we believe that the FIT-U should be opened up to membership by class-struggle trade unionists, social activists and anti-capitalist youth. Local groups and a permanent leadership must be formed to plan and execute the activities of FIT-U. In addition, the debate on a new programme should be started immediately. A large public congress, as demanded by the MST, can be the start of such a development. In this way, the FIT-U can transform itself from a pure electoral front into a new workers' party that can actually offer a perspective to the impoverished masses. Such a political force could also actually challenge the Peronist trade union leaders and force them into a united front by appealing to their membership. Only in this way can the entire class be drawn into the struggle and left forces become the leadership of the working class.

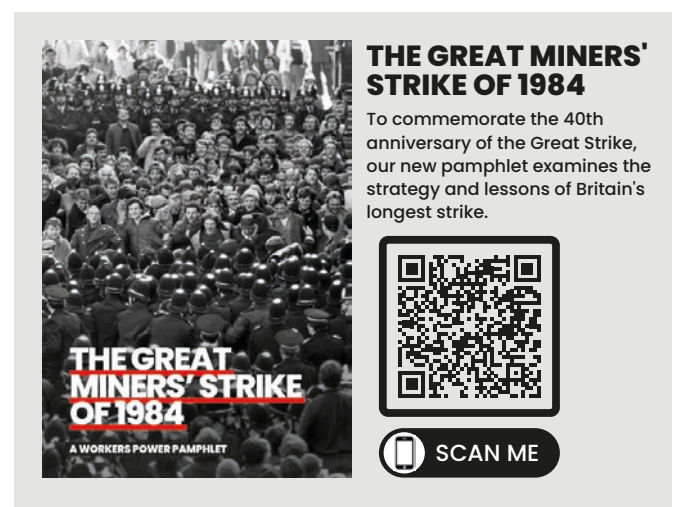
The economic crisis and coming attacks will certainly set even more people in motion in the coming months. So the possibility for such a development is currently there. But, if the defeats become too heavy, then the hope and thus the fighting power of the working class will be broken. So there is no time to lose.

All leftists and revolutionaries must be aware that it is not enough to keep fending off Milei's individual attacks. His government is waging an undisguised class war from above. If he can continue to implement his programme, his model threatens to destroy not only the lives of the Argentine working class, but also those in other countries. That's why it must be the task not only to fend off the attacks, but to get themselves out of a defensive posture. In other words, the demands for the nationalisation of certain sectors under workers' control, as well as the

expropriation without compensation of companies that are closed or are planning mass redundancies, which the FIT-U is raising, are correct. However, they can only be successfully implemented if the groups involved decide to launch joint campaigns with the aim of getting the unions moving and ultimately overthrowing the Milei government.

Ultimately, only an all out and indefinite general strike can stop the government's attacks. At the same time, however, that would pose the question of power in society as a whole—whether a bourgeois government should continue to exercise power or a workers' government based on the fighting organs of the general strike, arming the workers and smashing the repressive apparatus, relying in the army on soldiers' councils that oppose the officer corps. Such a workers' government would not only have to revoke Milei's bills, but also implement an emergency programme against inflation, poverty and to reorganise the economy in the interests of the masses.

But a socialist revolution also needs a revolutionary workers' party. The FIT-U faces the challenge of laying the foundations of one in the here and now, otherwise the victory of an extreme counter-revolution threatens. But this also means that it must cease to exist as a mere electoral front. Rather, it must become a party based on a revolutionary programme of action, in which all trade unionists, piqueteros, and all other activists of social movements who want to fight for such a programme can become members. ■



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**THE GREAT MINERS' STRIKE OF 1984**  
A WORKERS POWER PAMPHLET

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# Documents

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## A STATEMENT ON DISCUSSIONS

*International Socialist League,  
International Trotskyist Opposition,  
League for the Fifth International*

The International Socialist League, the International Trotskyist Opposition and the League for the Fifth International have agreed to begin a process of collaboration, exchange and discussion with the aim of trying to reach a fusion of our international organizations before the end of next year.

**T**his convergence arises from profound agreements on the characterization of the world situation, the revolutionary policy towards the main events of the current class struggle and a common perspective on the need to regroup revolutionaries on a programmatic and principled basis and a sound democratic centralist method to

advance in the construction of a strong International.

The three organizations came together at the Milan Internationalist Meetings, where we noted significant agreements regarding our analysis of the world situation, the characterization of China, Russia and the inter-imperialist conflict, and the revolutionary policy towards Ukraine and Palestine.

We see a perspective of a deepening

systemic crisis of capitalism, with growing unequal social and political polarization, with a rise of right-wing and extreme right-wing expressions, even reaching the government in many countries, combined with resistance, mass mobilization movements, strike waves, rebellions, revolutions and the emergence of a new and young radicalized militant vanguard in the world class struggle. However, while one pole advances in consolidating a political representation with the extreme right in the lead, the other pole fights in the streets but does not materialize a clear political representation. The crisis of the revolutionary leadership of the working class and popular masses is more acute than ever. Hence the need for a new International rooted in the worldwide struggles of the exploited and oppressed to build a leadership and a program based on the legacy of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg and the experience of over 150 years of the working class movement's struggles against the bureaucracy, bourgeoisie and imperialism.

We agree on the characterization of China and Russia as emerging imperialist powers that are beginning to compete with a Western imperialism that is still hegemonic but in decline. We see a dynamic of a sharpening of the global inter-imperialist

dispute between the US and China and their respective allies, which will lead to increasing friction, conflicts and regional and proxy wars. Although a direct global confrontation is not the most probable scenario in the short term, we face a global stage in which that perspective may arise in the future and only the victory of socialist revolution on a planetary scale can avoid it.

We agree on the revolutionary policy towards Ukraine, where we identify the combination of two processes: the invasion of a country by the imperialist power that historically dominated it; and the global inter-imperialist conflict that is also being waged in the trenches in Ukraine. To the extent that there is not a direct confrontation between NATO and Russia, we identify the resistance of the Ukrainian people to the invasion of Russian imperialism as the predominant process. Therefore, a revolutionary policy implies supporting the resistance for it to win and defending the right to self-determination of the Ukrainian people, as well as of the Donbass, and at the same time confronting Zelensky's anti-workers policies and fighting for the dissolution of Nato.

We agree that there is no possible solution for the Palestinian people without defeating the genocidal state of Israel and replacing it with a single, secular, democratic and socialist Palestine within the framework of a voluntary federation of socialist republics in the Middle East. And that the struggle for this goal implies supporting the resistance of the Palestinian people, as well as that of Lebanon, and of any other people attacked by the Zionists, and building a revolutionary leadership that fights for socialist revolution throughout the Middle East against Israel, the Arab regimes and all bourgeois leaderships.

These points of agreement are substantial. It is not a question of agreeing on two or three arbitrary, conjunctural/contingent issues, but on the global perspective, the main events of the class struggle and the central tasks of revolutionaries in the world.

It is no less important that we also agree on the need to regroup revolutionaries internationally on the basis of a

principled revolutionary program and a healthy method of construction, a democratic centralism that allows us to discuss everything in an atmosphere of camaraderie, to process nuances and disagreements, to intervene in the class struggle with common international positions and campaigns and to assist each other in the construction of our national organizations.

In this way, we believe it is possible to help overcome the theoretical, political and methodological limits of a large part of the current political currents of Trotskyism, whose politics and models of construction have been proving inadequate for facing the global reality for decades which has caused increasingly recurrent crises and splits in the different tendencies.

The currents we, who are in a process of confluence, come from have not been exempt from mistakes that we intend to correct. On the basis of this critical evaluation of the past, we see the need for a patient convergence of diverse experiences, taking the best elements that each current has to contribute, but in the service of laying the foundations of a new revolutionary tradition that we will build together.

In a series of meetings in recent months, the ITO, the L5I and the ISL have confirmed that there is a basis of sufficient political and methodological agreements to begin a process of discussions, exchanges and coordination with the goal of merging our forces.

We have begun a work of coordination and joint intervention and a process of debates on the program, strategy and tactics for the world revolution with this goal. Although divisions and splits have long predominated among revolutionary organizations, from the ISL, the L5I and the ITO, we promote a dynamic of unity and fusion. It is a process that is open to the integration of other revolutionary forces that share the need to regroup in order to contribute to the construction of a revolutionary international that, over time, can become the political representation that the working masses need and lead them towards the world socialist revolution. ■

# ONE YEAR OF THE GENOCIDE IN GAZA

*International Socialist League,  
International Trotskyist  
Opposition, League for the Fifth  
International*

**O**ctober 7 marks one year since Hamas invaded border defenses in southern Israel, attacked military targets, took hostages—mostly civilians—and returned to its bases. The operation took Israel by surprise, shattered the myth of its invulnerability and paralyzed the process of 'normalization' of its relations with the complicit Arab states sponsored by US imperialism. The pain over the death and mistreatment of unarmed civilians cannot hide the fact that the essential party responsible for the violence is the Zionist and colonialist state, which has committed ethnic cleansing and genocide against the Palestinian people since the end of the first world war, in 1918, under the protection of the British imperialism, with a dramatic jump when the Israeli State was founded in 1948, 76 years ago.

2. In retaliation for Hamas's actions, the Israel Defense Forces have relaunched a brutal war against Palestine, especially in the Gaza Strip. The relentless bombing of homes, hospitals, schools, bakeries and refugee camps; the cutting off of water, electricity and internet; and the blocking of international humanitarian and health aid have so far caused more than 200,000 Palestinian deaths, 41,000 of them from bullets and bombs, tens of thousands more from malnutrition and lack of medicines—mostly women and children—some 10,000 under the rubble, 95,000 injured, nearly two million displaced and

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the destruction of all basic infrastructure. On top of this massacre, Zionist troops and settlers attack Palestinian residents in the occupied West Bank.

3. In the last week, the State of Israel has multiplied its attacks on Lebanon. First it detonated thousands of beepers and then it unleashed bombings against civilians in the south, thus opening up the possibility of an escalation of war throughout the Middle East. So far, its offensive has caused hundreds of deaths, thousands of injuries and a massive displacement from southern Lebanon and the areas of Baalbek, Bekaa and Hermel towards Beirut, the capital. It is the largest attack on that country since the Zionist occupation in 1982, an aggression that Israel now intends to repeat. The assassination of Nasrallah and the invasion of southern Lebanon is turning into an all-out war against Hezbollah and the entire Lebanese people. At the same time, as a result of the Lebanese economic collapse, the capacity of hospitals and humanitarian aid institutions is exhausted.

4. During the past year, Israel's attacks and armed operations have also reached Syria, Yemen and Iran, always with the economic, political and military support of the United States, Western imperialism and their governments. Israel also has the explicit or implicit complicity of the new imperialisms of Russia and China and of the majority of the capitalist governments of the Arab countries. Beyond their anti-Israel rhetoric, the reactionary and theocratic Iranian regime has not supported the Palestinian resistance in practice in accordance with its expectations. At the same time, the greatest threat to the possibility of genuine peace in the region is Zionist-imperialist oppression.

5. Despite the enormous disparity of forces and the massacres, Israel has still not managed to overcome the Palestinian resistance, dismantle Hamas or recover the hostages. At the same time, in the main imperialist countries, the Arab world and globally, with the youth at the vanguard, there are massive demonstrations, encampments and other actions in solidarity with Palestine and boycotting Zionist interests that expose Israel's criminal role. Activists

challenge the repression and persecution of complicit governments. This growing rejection has pressured the International Criminal Court and UN agencies to issue resolutions condemning Israel, demanding a ceasefire, the arrival of humanitarian aid and an end to the occupation of new territories. But they limit themselves to formal declarations, without effective sanctions. The only decisive tool for victory remains Palestinian resistance and the active solidarity of the Arab peoples and the entire world.

6. The far-right government of Netanyahu, the Likud and the religious parties is deepening its anti-Palestinian offensive of a clearly pogromist character. The protests in Israel criticize the government and demand that it negotiate the exchange of prisoners with Hamas, but they support Zionist domination. Progressive anti-occupation sectors are very much in the minority. On the other hand, the Palestinian Authority of Abbas and the PLO in the West Bank play a role of more or less open collaboration with Israel. As for Hamas, Hezbollah and other bourgeois and jihadist nationalist leaderships, their political project is a capitalist and Islamic fundamentalist Palestinian state in the style of Iran, which we consider reactionary and authoritarian. We are separated from this strategy by irreconcilable differences, which is why we encourage the construction of a new revolutionary, socialist and internationalist Palestinian leadership.

7. Despite these fundamental differences, we unconditionally support the cause of the Palestinian people for their liberation and self-determination, their right to defend themselves by all means at their disposal, and to return and recover their usurped homes and lands. We call on the youth, workers and peoples; on human rights and popular organizations, on anti-Zionist Arab and Jewish activists in the United States, Europe, the Middle East, the Maghreb and the entire world to redouble their mobilization in repudiation of the State of Israel and in support of Palestine. The first task of revolutionary socialists is to promote the greatest possible unity of action against the

Zionist genocide and in solidarity with the Palestinian people. We extend this support to the Lebanese people, today under attack with impunity by Israel.

8. There has not been, there is not and there will not be any just and lasting peace in the Middle East as long as the oppression of the Zionist, theocratic and terrorist State of Israel, artificially positioned as a pro-imperialist gendarme of the Arab peoples, persists. Nor with the failed two-state policy that imperialism and its allies are trying to recreate, nor with a capitalist and Islamist Palestinian state. To play a progressive role, the Israeli working class and youth must break with Zionism, reject its war and support the Palestinian cause. Peace will only be possible with the definitive defeat of the oppressive Israeli state and its replacement by a single, secular, democratic and socialist Palestine within the framework of a regional socialist revolution.

9. The undersigned organizations propose:

The broadest international mobilization in defense of and in solidarity with the Palestinian people against Zionist apartheid and genocide. Solidarity with the people of Lebanon in the face of Israel's aggression.

- An immediate ceasefire and an end to Israeli attacks on Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon and Syria. Zionist troops and settlers out of Gaza and the West Bank.

- Demand that governments break diplomatic, economic, academic and military relations with Israel. Support for the BDS campaign: boycott, divestment, sanctions.

- Freedom for all Palestinian detainees in Israel. Right to return for Palestinian refugees and to recover their lands and homes. Full equality of rights.

- For the destruction of the Zionist State. For a single, secular, democratic and socialist Palestine from the river to the sea, where all peoples live in peace.

- Down with the Arab monarchies and capitalist governments, accomplices of Zionism and imperialism. For a federation of socialist republics in the Middle East.

- US and all imperialists out of the Middle East! ■

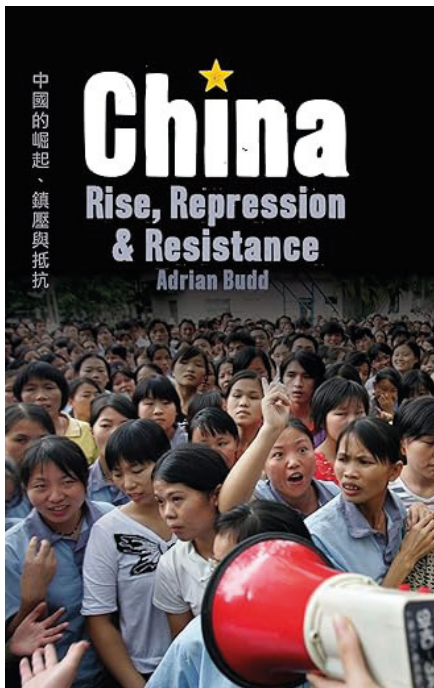
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# Reviews

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## CHINA: RISE, REPRESSION, RESISTANCE

Peter Main



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*China: Rise, Repression and Resistance* by Adrian Budd, Bookmarks, 2024, 254 pages, £10.00

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**T**his is a useful and informative book covering China's development since the early 20th Century. In his introduction, the author, Adrian Budd, explains that it differs from much writing on China in that, '... it does not explore how Western business can benefit from the opportunities China offers. Nor does it echo the concerns of mainstream writers over the perceived threat China poses to Western values'.

He distances himself from a 'dwindling number of people on the Left' who still believe that China is a socialist state but also from those who '... argue that the

system of economic planning and the role of state firms make China a non-capitalist or a transitional economy situated between capitalism and socialism'.

Budd's own position is simply that of Tony Cliff, namely that after the victory over Chiang Kai-shek's Guomindang in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) established a state-capitalist regime, modelled on the Soviet Union. Cliff's theory argued that, although there was no market competition through which the law of value could dominate the soviet economy, 'international competition takes mainly a military form, the law of value expresses itself in its opposite, viz, a striving after use values'. Unfortunately, Budd



carries over this theoretically incoherent scrambling of Marxist categories into his analysis of China, as we shall see.

A rather cursory first chapter deals with events from the early years of the last century, the politics of the Chinese Communist Party, CCP, the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the zig zags of policy under Mao Zedong and the early 'reform' measures introduced by Deng Xiaoping after Mao's death in 1976. These were, so to speak, the preparation for the much more dramatic changes introduced after 1992, a date whose significance will be seen later.

### **State capitalism and restoration**

The second chapter covers the economic consequences of China's dramatic transformation into the 'workshop of the world' after 1992 in much more detail, tracing the way in which internal developments interacted with international pressures. The combination of a huge migration from the countryside to entirely new cities in the coastal provinces, the reconfiguring of State Owned Enterprises into commercially oriented, and often privately owned, businesses and the influx of Foreign Direct Investment into Special Economic Zones, together allowed rates of exploitation that guaranteed profits while undercutting practically all other countries' exports.

However, for Budd, no major change took place, merely a 'sideways move from state-capitalism to a hybrid of state and private capital'. That is not to suggest he plays down the scale of the changes. He emphasises, for example, that some 60 million workers lost their jobs between 1995 (note the date) and 2005, that with those jobs they also lost guaranteed housing, education and health services.

At the same time, he records the huge population transfer from countryside to towns as perhaps 350 million peasants became wage-earners, proletarians in Marxist terms. The growth rates achieved, particularly after joining WTO in 2001, are of course well known and hardly need to be underlined.

For Budd, it seems, despite their enormity, these were all just superficial changes,

nothing fundamental changed, this was just a 'sideways move'. We disagree. After 1978 and Deng Xiaoping's rise to power there certainly were 'market reforms', particularly in agriculture, that began to erode the bureaucratic planning system. We would regard these, and similar reforms affecting management rights in industry and the first experiments with Special Economic Zones, as 'quantitative changes' in the political economy of China.

However, in November 1992, after the Tiananmen Massacre and the bloody repression of the subsequent nationwide protests, and after witnessing the effects of the 'big bang' in Russia and Eastern Europe, the Congress of the CCP decided to dismantle the entire planning system and to combine privatisation and 'corporatisation' to ensure that 'commercial standards' would be enforced. Unlike in Russia, this dismantling would itself be planned to ensure stability of the regime.

The wholesale implementation of this programme essentially began in 1995, when the managers of State Owned Enterprises were empowered to sack everyone not employed productively on their 'core business'. In practical terms, this meant that, for example, the managers of the Twentieth Century Steel Works, near Beijing, who had previously been responsible for a workforce of about 1 million providing housing, hospitals, public transport, education and other services in the city that surrounded the steelworks, could sack almost all of them.

The same thing happened across the whole industrial core of the economy. The previous system showed none of the characteristics of a capitalist economy; the new one enforced those characteristics with brutal efficiency. This was not a merely quantitative change, this was qualitative, it was the destruction of one set of property relations and the forcible imposition of a completely different set of property relations.

This was the restoration of capitalism and it promoted the development of a new capitalist class with the right to use the productive forces for the maximisation of profit. At the same time, however, the CCP's strategy for restoring capitalism to

China also maintained the bureaucratic regime through which it ruled. The roots of that regime were in what, following Trotsky, we have called the 'bureaucratic caste' whose origins lie in the pre-1949 'liberated zones' but which really came to control China and Chinese society with the imposition of the planning system, copied from Soviet Russia, after 1952.

### **Class, party, and state**

The power and ubiquity of the CCP is recognised by any commentator on China, Budd picks up the term 'party-state' used by Martin Hart-Landsberg (and others) to characterise it. As a journalistic turn of phrase that is understandable enough but for a Marxist it is at the very least a misleading collapse of two distinct categories into one amalgam. This is not a pedantic point; it matters because it implies that overthrow of the party would constitute the overthrow of the state and that is dangerously wrong.

When the CCP dismantled the planned economy and restored capitalism, it created the basis for a conflict of interests between the bureaucratic caste upon which it was based and the new capitalist class whose growth it had initiated. From being parasitic on the planned economy it was bound to become parasitic on the capitalists' economy.

For the first couple of decades after restoration, however, there was little tension between caste and class. Although horizontal, integrated planning had been dismantled, the new corporations and state trusts still needed administrators and officials and the vast network of provincial and local government still played a central role in 'managing' the rapid economic development that soon took off. For the nascent class of capitalists, long standing connections were financially advantageous and the party regime ensured relative social order in which to do business.

Over time, however, the relationship has to change. On the one hand, the capitalists are becoming stronger and more experienced, more conscious of their specific, and varying, interests, while, on the other, the caste tends towards disintegration as many become capitalists themselves and

even those who remain in post increasingly identify with 'their' region, industry or profession rather than the central state. One consequence of this, to varying degrees, is the reflection of these disparate interests within the party itself.

### **The fruits of accumulation**

The almost unprecedented rates of growth in the early years of the century came to an end with the global financial crisis of 2008. Surprisingly, Budd does not refer to the wafer thin profit rates of 2007–8 that resulted from cut-throat competition between Chinese exporters themselves once they had effectively driven the competition out of business.

He does, however, deal with the consequences of the huge stimulus programme with which Beijing tried to restore equilibrium. Much of the \$570 billion package went into infrastructure and fixed capital investment and on a scale that even pulled some other countries out of recession. In addition, he points to the much less publicised instruction to banks to lend to local government, suggesting this amounted to three times as much as the central funding and, in time, contributed to the local government debt crisis that shows no sign of resolution even now.

The second decade of the century saw the emergence of the characteristic problems of rapid capitalist growth; over-accumulation of capital, falling rates of profit, stock exchange booms and busts and indebtedness on a scale that could bankrupt some of the biggest corporations, the most publicised of which was Evergrande. This was also the decade that saw the rise of Xi Jinping and the initiation of the Belt and Road Initiative as China began to project its strength internationally to secure its markets, its raw materials and its access to energy sources. All of this is presented clearly and supported by copious footnoting for those who want to see the original sources.

China's growth into a major global player necessarily brought with it any number of new problems both domestic and foreign, not least the differing and, very often, diverging, interests and priorities of different sectors of the economy.

These include the tension between the state owned industries and the newer, often privately owned, industries of the south and coastal provinces; between those provinces and the much less developed interior and between export-oriented and domestic market oriented corporations, not to mention the international context, exemplified by Barack Obama's 'Pivot to the Pacific'.

Chapter 3 deals with the responses to these developing differences in the context of what it calls, 'Xi's political project'. That is more precisely defined as 'the party-state's project to preserve the power of the state-capitalist ruling class' (p69). So, following Cliff's model, we now have a party which is also a capitalist state, or, perhaps, a capitalist state that is also a party, fighting to preserve its power against another class of capitalists. The conflation of party and state, two quite separate categories in Marxist analysis, serves only to confuse the picture. It would be more accurate to recognise that the party, which controls the state apparatus, has begun to lose its social basis, that process is still far from complete but it explains why Xi Jinping has had to impose an ever more repressive regime on his own party.

### **Resistance**

Budd does point to the increasing numbers of tensions and conflicts and rightly sees them as the real reason for Xi Jinping's increasingly authoritarian rule, not his own personality as many commentators would have it. In this chapter, authoritarian repression is dealt with at the level of the regime itself, including the removal of any limit on Xi's term of office, changes in the internal organisation of the party, re-assertion of its right to control all social activities and repeated crackdowns on corruption within its own ranks.

Subsequent chapters deal with the 'party-state' responses to pressure and discontent from outside of the regime; from the working class; the socially oppressed and from imperialist rivals. Readers will find those dealing with the domestic issues a very useful source of information, culled from websites, academic papers and

specialised journals, not easily available to most people.

For example, the scale of strikes and workers' protests in the period up to 2015 will surprise many whose image of the Chinese working class is of vast ranks of docile assembly line workers. Budd cites one Beijing academic survey that reported an average of 483 strikes, per day, in 2010, to support his conclusion that increasing numbers of strikes and protests in the previous ten years or so had 'served to embolden the workers'.

In addition, there is some consideration not only of how the strike wave showed signs of developing organisational ability but also the difficulties and complexities of relating to the official trades unions. In keeping with the character of the book as essentially a narrative, not an analysis, however, there is no attempt to draw any conclusions or to draw on the experience of other workers under severe repression.

Perhaps the author is wary of appearing in any way condescending, a healthy instinct certainly but actually misplaced; comrades in China are interested in foreign insights and experience and can access 'Western' literature.

Budd's book will be read in China, as will this review, and internationalists have an obligation to think internationally and not assume they have to restrict their ideas and arguments to their own borders.

### **Imperialism**

The chapter on China's place in the world gets straight to the point; 'China's state-capitalism is embedded in a global system of inter-imperialist rivalry'. Budd, quite rightly, rejects arguments, such as those of Michael Roberts, that because its ways of exploiting other countries are not the same as those of the longer established imperialisms, it somehow does not qualify as imperialist.

That clarity is perhaps rather blurred by the adoption of Au Loong-yu's formula of 'an emergent imperialist power, a very strong regional power with a global reach ... but has not yet consolidated its position in the world'. Do the 'emergent' and the 'not yet' in some way qualify the definition? It is not clear, but the possibility of a

direct clash with an established imperialist power is very real and it should be made clear that revolutionaries would be defeated on both sides were that to happen.

Much of the rest of the chapter is concerned with charting China's changing relationships, particularly with the USA, as the country grew and strengthened. There is a quite detailed account of the Belt and Road Initiative which combines the evidence for the imperialistic character of the initiative with rejection of 'Western' attempts to exaggerate its scale by comparing the value of its various projects with those of the established imperialisms.

The likelihood of a 'hot war' with the USA, for example over Taiwan, is downplayed, and a literal equation of current rivalry with the Cold War with the USSR rejected. Equally, a consideration of the threat of 'decoupling' of the economic links built up over the last 30 years concludes that this is most unlikely. As against those who interpret China's rivalry with the USA as some kind of positive alternative, opposition is made clear: 'The two sides are far from equal, but the world's second most powerful imperialism does not provide a progressive alternative'.

## Results and prospects

The final chapter, entitled 'Prospects for Change' summarises the changes that have taken place and stresses, correctly, that capitalist development inevitably brings its own problems, not least slowing growth rates at home and economic retaliation from abroad. Popular discontent and unrest is also a product of the changes and mobilisations like the mass 'break out' from Foxconn's giant complex in 2022 and the anti-lockdown protests in many cities, including Shanghai and Beijing, exemplify this.

To combat this, it is predicted that the rulers will try to divide opponents by nationality, religion, sexuality and any other potential differences and certainly will not shrink from the harshest repression. However, '... the scale of the coming crisis is likely to force millions into a new wave of protest and struggle with the potential to break down the differences and unite the masses around their

common interests' (p198).

Such a wave is, indeed, likely, even probable but, as Budd goes on to point out, such potential can disappear as quickly as it appears if it is not embodied in organisation—his answer? The need for a revolutionary socialist party, even though building one will be a 'daunting task'. That is all very well but he has nothing to say about how that task, the essential task, is to be fulfilled.

The most fundamental principle for building such a party is surely the need for the complete political independence of the working class, and Budd would surely agree with that. Given his prediction of a 'wave of mass protest', surely he should also learn from the experience of other such waves, most recently the Arab Spring or the Sudanese revolution, that basic democratic demands can also be taken up by bourgeois or petty bourgeois forces who then lead the movement to ultimate defeat. Earlier, he has already dismissed the long touted idea that, 'the corporate elite will ultimately challenge CCP rule' on the grounds that the 'economic and political elites overlap' and that is very probably true. But what about those lower down the pecking order, the heads of firms whose growth is stunted by party policies, the professionals whose careers are blighted by party dogma and censorship and the academics whose studies make clear to them that the party is a barrier to progress?



All such people, of whom there are millions, know perfectly well that it is party policy that has caused the current economic malaise centred on real estate speculation and the construction industry and that Xi's answer of concentrating on high tech industries is not going to resolve it. These are the social forces that could provide the initial basis for bourgeois or petty bourgeois parties, or even splits from the party, to emerge and gain leadership of the 'democratic movement'.

To combat that danger, revolutionaries have to know in advance that their priority will be to use the context of the crisis to build working class organisations, democratically controlled, in the workplaces and the communities. They need to have prepared an action programme of demands, centred on workers' control, to campaign for in addition to democratic demands and, when necessary, against the liberals and the petty bourgeois. Central to their strategy has to be an understanding that breaking the power of the party is only the start of what is needed, the goal is the quite separate task of mobilising the workers' organisations to overthrow the state and establish their own rule.

Here and now, developing that programme and winning the most committed comrades to it, is the task of activists, many of whom have already felt the repression when they tried to support workers' protests and are now discussing the lessons and the way forward. Budd does point to the experience of the Russian Revolution to prove his point that a party is needed, quite right, but the reference point at the moment is what the Russian revolutionaries did long before 1917. In China, we are closer to the small-scale and clandestine propaganda and training groups, which codified the programme upon which the Bolshevik party was based, than to the mass-based revolutionary party of 1917. ■



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