



Revolutionary Marxism 2020

A JOURNAL OF THEORY AND POLITICS



Sungur Savran

Levent Dölek

Özgür Öztürk

Merriam Ansara

Sungur Savran

Burak Gürel

Sungur Savran

Leon Trotsky

Mustafa Kemal Coşkun

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Savas Michael-Matsas

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Iosif G. Abramson

E. Ahmet Tonak

A unique crisis of civilisation

Covid-19: Two wars, one victory

Welfare state nostalgia

Letter from Havana

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Fascism in India

Lenin and Trotsky

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AKP and the working class

The metal struggle in Turkey

Hungary 1919

China and the 21st Century Crisis

A note on Iosif G. Abramson

Marx and science

The iPhone and exploitation



Revolutionary Marxism 2020

When one remembers under what conditions the working-people live, when one thinks how crowded their dwellings are, how every nook and corner swarms with human beings, how sick and well sleep in the same room, in the same bed, the only wonder is that a contagious disease like this fever does not spread yet farther. And when one reflects how little medical assistance the sick have at command, how many are without any medical advice whatsoever, and ignorant of the most ordinary precautionary measures, the mortality seems actually small.

Friedrich Engels

Condition of the Working Class in England (1845)

Comrades, it is impossible to imagine the dreadful situation in the typhus regions, where the population is broken, weakened, without material resources, where all life, all public life ceases. To this we say, "Comrades, we must concentrate everything on this problem. Either the lice will defeat socialism, or socialism will defeat the lice!" [...] If we are able to supply grain, if we succeed in increasing the fuel supply, if we devote all our efforts to wiping out typhus in Russia—the typhus which comes from a lack of culture, from poverty, backwardness and ignorance—if we devote to this bloodless war all the strength and experience gained in a bloody war we can be certain that we shall achieve ever greater successes in this work, which is, after all, much easier and much more humane than a war.

V.I. Lenin

Report of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee and the Council of Peoples' Commissars

5 December 1919

All this has a lot to do with the theme of our talk today, the integration of the physician or any other medical worker, into the revolutionary movement. The task of educating and feeding youngsters, the task of educating the army, the task of distributing the lands of the former absentee landlords to those who laboured every day upon that same land without receiving its benefits, are accomplishments of social medicine which have been performed in Cuba.

Ernesto Che Guevara

On Revolutionary Medicine

19 August 1960

*Without revolutionary theory
there can be no revolutionary movement.*
V. I. Lenin, *What is to be done?*

Revolutionary Marxism 2020

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Cover Photo

A demonstration in the Amritsar city of the Punjab state, as part of the nationwide general strike in India on 8 January 2020.

Revolutionary Marxism 2020

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In this issue

Our fourth annual English edition, *Revolutionary Marxism 2020*, is coming out at a time of unprecedented, almost unique, crisis in modern history. For the first time in world history, a dire public health crisis has brought together close to 190 countries, that is to say almost the entire planet, in a desperate struggle against a pandemic of enormous proportions. This disaster is testimony to the fact that it is not only a world economy, a world politics, or a world literature that has been created by capitalism, as predicted through the analysis of the nature of capital by Marx (and Engels). Disasters have also been internationalized. How capitalism will overcome this challenge with the health care systems that have been systematically decimated all around the world for the last four decades is a mystery to all.

However, the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic is not confined to the domain of public health alone. At least two more dimensions stand out for their immediate and decisive effect on people's lives around the globe. The first is the free fall of the world capitalist economy set off by the lockdown that has been imposed in the struggle against the pandemic. The collapse of the stock exchange internationally from early March on is now accompanied by a headlong plunge of world growth. This will, in all likelihood, become the most profound economic crisis modern world history has witnessed, surpassing even the mammoth crisis of the 1930s. This is but a new avatar in the history of what many of our authors have called the Third Great Depression. After the "Great Recession" of the post-2008 scene, the IMF has once again found a term that will absolve capitalism of all blame regarding this profound crisis: the "Great Lockdown". The ideological battle is continuing in and through the pandemic.

The other aspect has to do with the self-exposition of capitalism in its most naked and brute image as a class society based on exploitation. The sheer hypocrisy of the "stay home" recommendation of the establishment to the upper and middle strata of society is clear for all to see when capital is driving millions and tens of millions of workers in each country out of their homes via crowded transportation into huddled work conditions in factories, warehouses, and retail stores of all sizes to make them prey to the virus. Capital no longer contents itself with sucking the surplus labour

of workers but poses their death as a precondition to its accumulation of surplus value. Hidden at other times beneath a veil of freedom and equality, capitalism is now proving to be no different from precapitalistic societies, slaveholding, feudal or otherwise.

There is not a shred of doubt that a new stage has opened up in the unfolding of the Third Great Depression and its accompanying consequences such as the rise of proto-fascism, of an approaching world war, and the outbreak of revolutionary struggles on different continents. History is calling out to socialism as the solution and to Marxist forces as the standard-bearer of that new society, much more adequate to the productive forces that have outgrown their capitalist straitjacket, much more adapted to the age-long aspirations of the masses culminating in a classless society, much more humane.

Our first dossier in this issue deals precisely with the pandemic. Sungur Savran characterizes the coronavirus pandemic crisis as “historic” in nature. He takes up the different facets of the question (health care, economic, and class) in order to reach a synthesis that brings out the historic significance of the situation we are going through. This he calls a crisis of civilization, which points to the fact that by sending the working class to possible death for the extraction of surplus-value, the capitalist system is at the same time cutting the ground from under its own feet and, obversely, seen from the point of view of the worker, capital now appears as an alien force that not only exploits labour, but sends the owner of the labour power to her death. This is the outward expression of the exhaustion of the possibilities capitalism can sustain and develop.

Levent Dölek argues that we are currently witnessing the COVID-19 pandemic not only as a fatal health problem but also as a deepening of the capitalist crisis with the pandemic. The class struggle is sharpening. On the world scale and in the context of the Turkish experience, the choice between planning and the market, profit and need, private property and public property is on the agenda of humanity in a bare and irreconcilable contrast. Society is fighting a double war against both the pandemic and capitalism.

In the context of the ongoing Third Great Depression that is getting deeper as a result of the Coronavirus outbreak, there are proposals for a new “welfare state”. The main reference of such proposals is the so-called “golden age of capitalism” that lasted from the end of World War II to the mid-1970s. In his paper titled “The welfare state nostalgia”, Özgür Öztürk analyses the background of the welfare state institutions of that period, within the general framework of the formation dynamics of social policy, and in terms of class struggles, the process of capital accumulation and the activities of the capitalist state. His basic thesis is that the achievements of laborers can become permanent, not by means of any “welfare state”, but only through the political rule of laborers.

The COVID-19 crisis has brought to the fore the special place Cuba occupies as a workers’ state with respect to its healthcare system. Cuban doctors and nurses were flown into Milan in late March to help one of the richest regions of Europe, Lombardia, cope with the virus, which was later complemented by the expedition of other groups of Cuban medics to other countries suffering from COVID-19. This

obviously raises a question: how does Cuba approach the Coronavirus pandemic at home? An American living in Cuba, Merriam Ansara, published a lovely piece on this aspect of the question on the web site of the American left-wing magazine *Counterpunch*. We as *Revolutionary Marxism* discovered this piece only as we were going to press and without even finding the opportunity to consult either the author or *Counterpunch*, for lack of time, we decided to publish it for the benefit of our readers.

The rise of fascism at this beginning of the 21st century has been a constant theme in the previous issues of *Revolutionary Marxism*. The 2017 issue devoted its top dossier to the rise of reactionary and repressive political movements, with articles on the election of Trump and the regimes in Hungary and Poland. The 2019 issue, in its main dossier, directly turned to the fascist phenomenon in its classical form. In between the 2018 issue also included an article on the discussion of “populism”. Now, our current issue revisits the question of fascism with two articles.

The first article in this dossier is the sequel to Sungur Savran’s article published in our last issue on classical fascism. In that article with the overall title “The return of barbarism”, Savran had tried to bring out the distinctive characteristics of fascism that set it apart from other reactionary repressive regimes on the basis of a close scrutiny of Nazism and Italian fascism as the paradigmatic instances of the overall movement. In the sequel to that article, the author studies a constellation of movements and personalities that range from the so-called “populist” right in Europe to Trump in the United States, Bolsonaro in Brazil and Modi in India, in order to come to grips with the nature of the new threat on the horizon. Sensitive to the specificities of each of these different instances, Savran nonetheless attacks the concept “populism” and develops the category of proto-fascism as an overarching characterization, thus sounding a warning to the entire international left.

In the second article of the dossier, Burak Gürel shows that India has a special place in the global rise of the far-right today because the fascist movement there significantly resembles the “classical fascism” of the interwar period in terms of its social basis, ideology, and methods. The core of the Indian fascist movement has been the upper-caste small and medium bourgeoisie. The movement probably has the oldest and best-organized fascist paramilitary organization of the world. It also has an irredentist program based on the dream of “Greater India.” On the other hand, Gürel also stresses that although the fascist BJP has stayed in power since 2014, the fascistization of the current political regime is still incomplete due to (first and foremost) the absence of a revolutionary or radical reformist threat coming from the left. Moreover, India’s highly complex social structure and the existence of many political parties organized on the basis of different castes, ethnicities, and regional interests pose a severe obstacle to the Hindutva movement in its long-term endeavor to turn India into a fascist dictatorship. The opposition of the mainstream parties and the radical left have not weakened enough to allow such a radical transformation. Therefore, there is still a steep road in front of the fascist movement in India to reach its ultimate goal. However, since the ongoing great depression aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic may intensify class struggles as well as inter-capitalist and inter-state competition, there is no insurmountable

barrier between proto-fascism and fascism in India or elsewhere.

2020 is a special year for Marxists. After the bicentenary of Marx that was celebrated in 2018, this year is the bicentenary of that other giant of the 19th century, Friedrich Engels. The mother of *Revolutionary Marxism*, the Turkish journal *Devrimci Marksizm* organized in May 2018 a Conference in Istanbul in honor of the bicentenary of Marx where different aspects of his revolutionary theory and practice (dialectics, critique of capitalism, women's oppression and liberation, class struggle, the national question and his entire oeuvre read as a revolutionary project) were discussed. This year *Devrimci Marksizm* is planning a dossier for its Fall issue on different facets of Engels' contribution to Marxism. Unfortunately, our annual English issue is coming out too early to include any of that material.

However, this year is also special in terms of the anniversaries of the second generation of great Marxists, especially the two towering figures of that generation, Lenin and Trotsky. 2020 happens to be the 150th anniversary of Lenin's birth in April and the 80th anniversary of the assassination of Trotsky in August. This explains our third dossier of this issue on the twin figures of Lenin and Trotsky.

The first article in the dossier looks into the relationship between these two historic figures under the title "Lenin and Trotsky: The anatomy of a relationship". Sungur Savran considers the relationship from different angles: the differences between the two Russian revolutionaries before 1917, the way those differences were resolved in the heat of the October revolution, how Trotsky's conversion to Bolshevism changed his entire orientation and made him, in an ironic turn of history, the defender of the traditions of Bolshevism in the face of the bureaucratic Thermidor the revolution experienced from the second half of the 1920s on, with a discussion of the many-sided causality of why Trotsky was defeated in his fight against the Stalinist onslaught of total revision of the Marxist programme. Savran's conclusion on the relationship is summed up by a quotation from Trotsky himself of late 1918: "I realized only too well what Lenin meant to the revolution, to history, and to me. He was my master." In a sequel to this article to be published in the next issue of *Revolutionary Marxism*, Savran will attempt to show how the international Trotskyist movement in most of its variants veered away from this conception so clearly expressed by Trotsky and how all this is related to the political problems that have beset this movement throughout the decades.

The second piece of the dossier is by Trotsky on Lenin. In a much-neglected short piece of a gem, Trotsky wrote, on the occasion of Lenin's 50th birthday, on the relationship of the leader of the revolution to Russian history and to the exploited and oppressed classes of Russia, the proletariat and the peasantry. This is a most startling piece coming from one of the most intransigent internationalists in the history of Marxism because it casts a look at the profound local roots and characteristics of Lenin as a revolutionary. That is why *Revolutionary Marxism* attributes great importance to this short article: it shows through the pen of Trotsky the importance of local tradition and of revolutionary parties and leaders being a part and parcel of the peculiar universe of the nation they are to lead even when proletarian internationalism precludes all fetishism of the nation as such. To be able to cope with this dialectically contradictory predicament is the hallmark

of successful revolutionary leadership. This man, Lenin, who lived the life of a cosmopolitan in exile for around half of his adult life and spoke fluently and read copiously in three foreign languages, was also a living embodiment, according to that sharp observer of people that was Trotsky, of the Russian worker and peasant.

Our fourth dossier surveys the current state of class conflict in Turkey. Mustafa Kemal Coşkun provides a detailed empirical assessment of the situation of the working class in Turkey during the AKP era since November 2002. Coşkun's article shows that violation of the workers' right to unionize, privatization of state-owned enterprises, informalization of labor, and proletarianization have been the main trends of this era. Coşkun then addresses the question of why the majority of the working class voted for the AKP in subsequent elections, although the government has acted against their interests. He explains the important role of in-cash and in-kind social assistance to the poor in the AKP's project of hegemony. Coşkun also stresses that the mainstream opposition parties represent the interests of other fractions of the Turkish bourgeoisie and, therefore, a strictly labor-oriented socialist strategy can help the working class to reorganize, reclaim its previously lost rights, and move towards an anti-capitalist direction.

Levent Dölek addresses the rousing strike by metal workers, shedding light on its different dimensions such as the importance of the metal industry within the Turkish economy; the traditional leading role of metal workers in class struggles; how the military regime of 1980-83 attacked the militant trade-unionism in the industry to undermine the metal workers' power; how the metal workers' struggles spanning from 1998 to 2015 challenged the post-coup yellow trade-unionism; and the place of the current struggle within those historical developments. We believe that the strike, which is full of lessons for workers, and marks a turning point in the class struggles in recent years, deserves close attention.

The fifth dossier dwells upon diverse problems of socialism in the 20th century. The first article of the dossier focuses on the Hungarian experience. 2019 was the 100th anniversary of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, one of the most valuable victories and experiences of the international proletariat, although it was swiftly crushed by the counterrevolution after 133 days. We published Tamás Krausz's article on this event of world-historical importance in our 2019 edition. We are publishing Savas Michael-Matsas's article on the same subject in the current issue. Michael-Matsas provides a brief but fairly comprehensive account of the world-historical context that the Hungarian Revolution of 1919 was born into. The article presents the victory of the October Revolution of 1917 as the main strength and enabling factor behind the Hungarian Socialist Republic. It also stresses the vacillation of the leadership of the republic between reformism and revolution as one of the primary weaknesses of the revolution. Michael-Matsas also emphasizes the necessity of seeing the Hungarian Revolution as a "strategic experience" that provides vital lessons for the communists of today fighting for the world socialist revolution, rather than a case of lost cause.

In his essay titled "Mao redux?", Burak Gürel reviews Minqi Li's 2016 book titled *China and the Twenty-First Century Crisis*, which examines China's transition to capitalism since the late 1970s, and class-struggles during and after

that transition. Gürel's review shows that by linking this transition with the crisis of the capitalist world economy in the second half of the 1970s, Li provides a solid analysis of China's transformation as the main provider of a "spatial fix" to global capitalism since the early 1980s. The analysis of the forthcoming end of the China-centered spatial fix and the resulting intensification of the crisis tendencies of global capitalism is an important contribution of the book. Gürel also points to several shortcomings of the book, among which the absence of deeper reflection on the problems of the theory of "socialism in one country", an uncritical reading of the Maoist legacy, and failure to distinguish socialism from the rejection of neoliberalism appear the most important ones.

Our last dossier explores the links between capitalism, science, technology, and exploitation. It opens with Savas Michael-Matsas's introductory note on the life of Iosif G. Abramson as a revolutionary intellectual. Matsas brings out the best in this nonagenarian Russian communist from the city of the October revolution, still Leningrad to us communists, who lived through almost the entire Soviet period and although was disillusioned by and himself suffered the consequences of the bureaucracy's repression, has, nonetheless remained a communist up until today, even militantly working for his current party, the Russian Party of Communists.

Iosif G. Abramson, an invaluable comrade to us all, had already contributed to our journal's Turkish edition. *Devrimci Marksizm* published his correspondence with the world-renowned Turkish communist poet Nâzım Hikmet, who was living in exile in the Soviet Union in the 1950s. In his short piece in this issue of *Revolutionary Marxism*, Abramson contends that Marx's forecast has come true and that science now *has become* the leading productive force under the capitalist mode of production. However, Abramson indicates that since science requires a very different type of labor power, this new development in the productive forces of society will necessarily lead to a break with capitalism.

The rise of digital technologies has led to the idea that the labor theory of value is no longer valid because of the complications, among others, created by so-called "immaterial labor" peculiar to our period. In a study prepared collectively, the Tricontinental Institute for Social Research leans on the production of the iPhone, a signature product of the digital era, through the lens of the labor theory of value. We publish here the calculation the study makes of the rate of surplus-value in the production of the iPhone by one of the foremost experts in this area, our comrade E. Ahmet Tonak. For considerations of space, we have shortened the study by Tricontinental, to which we present our gratitude for graciously accepting the republication of a shortened version thereof.

We hope our readers will enjoy reading our current issue and will contribute to the journal by submitting manuscripts and actively promoting *Revolutionary Marxism* among broader audiences.

The Coronavirus pandemic: a unique crisis of civilisation

Sungur Savran

The crisis humanity has found itself in since the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic is unique in modern history. It is, as we have said from the beginning, a crisis of historic dimensions and significance. We have to come to terms with the intellectual challenge that it poses. To do this, we have to grasp it in its multifaceted forms of appearance in order to understand how these different facets are really the constitutive components of one single historic crisis. In other words, we first have to look at the phenomenon in its complexity and then move towards a synthesis that brings out the full significance of the crisis we are going through.

Pestilence is not alien to human history. But modern capitalism has prided itself, to a certain extent rightfully, to have mastered these nightmarish occurrences in history through the advance of modern science in general and of medicine in particular. The Spanish flu of early 20th century seems to be an exception that was not part of the overall historical development. There is something to be learnt from it with respect to the socio-economic and political factors at play in that dramatic incident that is estimated to have taken 50 million lives, if not more, in the space of two and a half years. Accordingly, that episode now needs to be studied afresh so as to see what kind of light it may shed upon today's unravelling tragedy. We will come back to it briefly later, to compare at least one aspect of that incident to our present-day catastrophe. That seemingly exceptional episode apart, the Coronavirus crisis is unique in the historical development of the capitalist mode of production,

at least in its highest, imperialist stage, in that the pandemic is not the result of underdevelopment but finds its best expression under the conditions of advanced capitalism.

What are the different facets of this crisis that can provide us with the necessary elements in order to unearth its significance? Let us first express a caveat: it is yet too early to grasp the phenomenon in its full import. The epidemic, having started as a local health crisis in one single state of the vast continent that China is, goes back at most five months. However, that was not the defining moment. The decisive character of the crisis flows from the fact that the Wuhan *epidemic* has become a *pandemic*, a world phenomenon. That is the first aspect that is unique to this crisis, namely that it is a worldwide, universal crisis. (We will come back to this point shortly and explain why this is the decisive moment, in dialectical terms.) This aspect then is only a three-month-old baby. As the crisis unfolds, there will come into being other phenomena which may prove to be central to the dialectical unfolding of the crisis, that may, in other words, mark its further development and dénouement. We can of course predict some new aspects that will emerge as the crisis develops and we will try to do that below. But predictions cannot replace observation and dissection, leading to new syntheses. So the analysis here is performed *tentative*.

Once that caveat has been expressed, we can now proceed to look at what for the moment form the three constitutive moments of this crisis: the health crisis, the economic crisis, and what we will call the civilizational crisis.

A tragedy that is the making of capitalism

The Coronavirus seems, at first sight, akin to what is usually classified as a natural disaster. For some it is even a God-sent malediction. This translates, in the wooden language of vulgar economists, into what is called an “external or (exogenous, in more elaborate language) shock”. That, though, is the most deceptive aspect.

The scientific answer to the question of whether the Coronavirus has its roots exclusively in natural processes or, alternatively, whether it is also connected to the socio-economic conditions that have historically been prepared by capitalism will probably require a long period of research and reflection. Until then, we will have to assume, since we do not have contrary evidence, that the virus emerged independently of socio-economic conditions or, in other words, that it is a purely natural phenomenon. Many are those who derive from this that the catastrophe brought about by the virus was *inescapable*. There are those who go further to assert, in perfectly Malthusian spirit, that it is an instrument used by Allah or God to regulate the functioning of human society.

This inescapability argument is a pure case of *non sequitur*. We have claimed from day one that the catastrophe that has descended on humanity is the making of capitalism. The *virus* may not be, but the *catastrophe* is. It is the result of the contradiction of the potentialities created by capitalism itself and the limits posed again by capitalism to the full enjoyment of these potentialities by humankind. Let us explain what we mean briefly.

As Marx and later classical Marxism, in particular Lenin in his theory of

imperialism and Trotsky in his elaboration on the concept of world revolution, made clear, capital as a social relationship possesses the potential of creating a world economy and a world civilisation. This aspect of Marx's analysis has been fully vindicated in the historical march forward of the capitalist mode of production. Capital has created a world economy, albeit not in the simplistic form envisaged by the reductionist conception of globalisation theory, but in the most contradictory fashion imaginable, where nation states remain the driving force of history, each as the embodiment of a distinct national fraction of capital, but bring together within their own constitution the deep contradiction that exists between the drive to international integration and national division. Not only has capital created a world economy, it has also created in its own image a world political integration, a world literature and art, a world scientific community, all, let us repeat, marked by the divisions created by the interests of the competing and conflicting nations.

Hence, the growing over of the epidemic in Wuhan into a pandemic is a consequence of the historical development of capitalism. Let us be as clear and down-to-earth as possible on this: it is the level of integration of the world economy, of capital, trade, and labour mobility on an international scale, of the consequent increase in international travel, tourism, education, cultural exchange etc. that is at the root of the internationalisation of the epidemic. To our knowledge, never in history has an epidemic become so internationalised, today having spread to, at very different levels of urgency it is true, close to 190 countries. And this difference in the levels of urgency is really a warning signal: once the pandemic takes into its full grip countries such as India or the poorer countries of Latin America and, worse still, the entire continent of Africa, it will become a nightmare of appalling dimensions. Even the Spanish flu of 1918-1920 did not, to our knowledge, attain this kind of reach, remaining, it seems, more of a phenomenon of the relatively advanced geographies of the Northern hemisphere.

Having developed this worldwide integration on the basis of its own growth, capitalism, on the other hand, deprives humanity of the possibility of coping with a health hazard of these gigantic proportions. The major reasons for this are twofold, one a consequence of the fact that the capitalist mode of production is constitutionally based on commodity production and the law of value, the other driven by the fact of class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. On the one hand, commodity production in its advanced capitalist form makes the capitalist system beholden to the logic of the market, which itself is marked, under capitalism, by the search for surplus value or profit. The allocation of resources through the intricate workings of the law of value, a system that completely alienates the allocation of resources from the conscious and rational decisions of society to deliver it to the hands, in the final analysis, of the stock exchange, prevents timely and to the point decisions that will act as a solution to the type of crisis that is born of the Coronavirus. On the other hand, although capitalism has created the scientific basis for coping with this kind of health care crisis in potential form, capital acts as a barrier in the way of erecting the health care systems and providing instruments that can offer the population *on a mass basis* the fruits of such advances in medicine. This is all the truer as one descends the rungs of the world imperialist hierarchy.

And in those exceptional times when the bourgeoisie allows or even works actively towards the creation of such mass-scale systems of health care (such as the so-called “welfare state” of the post-war order, a result, first and foremost, of the fear of socialism),¹ it only sustains them as long as they are necessary for purposes of class struggle and thereafter wages a ruthless assault on those very institutions it has created.

All in all, the bourgeoisie has historically created the conditions of what is a deadly pandemic, but deprived humanity of the instruments with which such a lethal threat can be brought under control.

The Coronavirus pandemic: What a difference socialism would make

This proposition can be tested by looking into the question of how an alternative mode of production, communist or socialist society still in the making, a social formation transitional to a classless society, would fare under these conditions. The question is simple: would socialism be able to cope better with the threat caused by the Coronavirus?

If socialism were the dominant social formation on the planet, the damage that the virus would cause would have been much more limited. It might even have been brought under control before it spread outwards from China, its first home. And even if it had spread afield, the number of casualties would have been much lower. This is no wanton propaganda claim. It is a proposition that flows directly from the undeniable differences between the fundamental characteristic properties of the two modes of production in discussion.

Let us first take up the question of the growing over of the epidemic into a pandemic by spreading outside of China to travel the entire planet. Now, if we were living under socialism, this would certainly not have meant that there would be a less dense web of relations between China and the rest of the world in the spheres of the economy, education, travel and the like; if anything, there would have been an even deeper integration. How is it then that we can talk of the possibility of the epidemic being brought “under control before it spread outwards from China”? That is because under socialism the world will be living in a fraternal commonwealth of nations. Behind the endless competition and conflict between nation states in today’s world lies the fact that each of them is used as an instrument of a national fraction of the international bourgeoisie. This leads to a situation where, despite the semblance of unity projected by the United Nations system and all the international cooperation in different spheres, each nation state looks after, in the last instance, the interests of its own ruling class.

Had the epidemic broken out in China under socialism, all the nations of the world and the supra-national instances and agencies that united them in different spheres of activity would immediately have shared a part of their scientific skills, their trained human resources, and their material resources with China so as to help bring the Coronavirus under control. This they would have done not

¹ On this see the article “The Welfare State Nostalgia” by Özgür Öztürk in this issue.

as the manifestation of an imaginary altruism of the type “let us rush to help our Chinese sisters and brothers”, but on the basis of an awareness that in a perfectly integrated world, their own interests are dependent on the interests of the others. (As socialism develops, even altruistic behaviour would become stronger until it can be considered no longer imaginary.) In other words, they would have done it so that the virus would not wreak havoc on other human communities outside China, including their own community. Under capitalism, on the other hand, international integration marches forward hand in hand, and in contradiction, with competition or even (in this case) hostility because of the diverging and conflicting interests of the national fractions of the bourgeoisie. The consequences are clear for all to see: America has already exceeded the number of infections earlier observed in China, a country that harbours almost five times its population and Italy has achieved the remarkable feat of surpassing the number of casualties of that same country which happens to have a population 25 times its own! These countries did not lift a finger when China was being ravaged by the virus and it was they who are now suffering for it. What else does this show that in a perfectly integrated world, capitalism is an irrational and obsolete system? Should anyone harbour doubts regarding our claim, we would like to remind them that doctors from Cuba, a poor country, have rushed to the help of Lombardia, Italy. Lombardia is not *il Mezzogiorno*, it is one of the richest regions of Europe!

Let us assume that the virus could not be stopped in China under socialism either. When it reached other countries, socialism would have waged a much more effective battle against it than now simply because it is a planned system. There is a span of time of around a month and a half between the epidemic reaching threatening levels in Wuhan and its spread to Europe, and somewhat later, America. Countries living under socialism would have made themselves much stronger and more resilient in the fight against the virus than capitalist countries thanks to their planned economy. Some would object that capitalist governments could also have prepared plans regarding an epidemic. Of course they could. But this is not what we are talking about. When we say “planning” we are not talking about some files in certain computers prepared in certain talking shops in certain capitalist countries. Planning is a relation of production, not documents bearing sumptuous titles of the type “Master Plan for the Integral Fight against the Pandemic of the Century”!

Just look at this example: even in the most powerful country, wielding the largest economy in the world, the United States, the scarcity of test kits prevented the meticulous tracking of the disease and the drawing up of a realistic picture of its distribution geographically, with respect to economic groups or different population groups etc. so as to make the struggle against the virus much more effective. The whole world knows that from the rich United States to the middle-income Turkey passing through G-7 member Italy, many capitalist countries simply did not test enough for days, or even weeks in some cases, whereas the president of the World Health Organisation said very clearly that as “you cannot fight a fire blindfolded”, you cannot fight the pandemic without knowing who is infected, drawing the conclusion: “Test, test, test!”

America is now facing, at the time of writing, a shortage of Personal Protective

Equipment, Intensive Care Unit beds, respirators, even high-grade masks etc. And yet we know that car factories can immediately be restructured so as to produce respirators, that hospitals can be built and furnished in a matter of days (cf. China), that many textiles factories can be overhauled so as to produce quality masks etc. So where is the planning that capitalist countries can make? It may be retorted that no one could have known before the fact that such would be the scale of the calamity. But even now, when the Surgeon General admits the problem, not only America but all capitalist countries are still having trouble in mobilising the resources necessary to supply rapidly in response to such an urgent need the equipment necessary. They fight it out over whatever there exists according to the sacrosanct rules of the market, not only among nations, but also among the 50 states of the Disunited States of America. And when need be, they even resort to piracy, like the case of a hefty delivery of equipment to be sent to the Land of Berlin being diverted to the United States as it was being flown out from Thailand to Germany! And why all this scarcity despite not only overall planning but also concrete decisions of governments? Because under capitalism the entire production system is geared to the production of surplus-value and you cannot expect capitalists to forgo their profit and produce for the general interests of society. You need nationalisations to swiftly overcome barriers set by the capitalist relations of production.

A more complete discussion of the difference socialism would have made would take as far afield. Let us wind up by mentioning one last vital difference. Socialism is based on meeting the basic indispensable needs of the working population such as education, health care, housing and others. Nobody lives a miserable existence, remaining jobless or even homeless and uncertain of their future. Hence the overall public health picture is incomparably better under socialism than under the richest capitalist country. Even in the case of the experience of socialist construction in the 20th century, bearing the burden of so many distortions and deformations and defects, this was an indubitable achievement. Capitalism, on the contrary, is class struggle. Capital does take a step back or two when circumstances impose that (the so-called “welfare state”). But when its interests dictate another course, it will step up class struggle and cut down on all social services in cold-blooded ruthlessness. Thus the neoliberal assault on all gains of the working class! The bourgeoisie, in a frenetic course to take back what it had conceded over the three decades from the end of the second war all the way up to Thatcher and Reagan, has decimated the health care system around the world. That is why patients are lying on the floors of hospital wards in Italy and Spain! That is why the richest city of the world, New York, home to Wall Street, is the epicentre of the pandemic!

A crisis deeper than the Great Depression of the 1930s

It is now common knowledge that a financial crash has accompanied the Coronavirus crisis almost from the moment the epidemic became truly a pandemic. The spasmodic development of stock markets around the world that started with the collapse of 9th March has now become a headlong plunge despite all the packages and bailout programs promised by the governments and central banks of

all countries. In a previous piece written immediately after the crash started,² we tried to establish the correct relationship between the Coronavirus crisis and this financial crash. Our overall verdict at that moment was the following: as we have explained time and again, since 2008, the so-called “global financial crisis” set off not a “Great Recession”, as vulgar economics persistently claimed, but the Third Great Depression in the history of capitalism. In the 12 years that have gone by, the institutions of the international bourgeoisie were only able to postpone the crisis, without being able to find a solution that would resolve or supersede the crisis situation. This postponement fundamentally took the form of cheap money (so-called “quantitative easing” and negative policy interest rates), which then flowed into the stock market to create the longest (11 years from 2009 to 2020) bull run in history. This made financial markets vulnerable to the bursting of the bubble once again, with historically high price earnings ratios. The crash this time was really the bursting of a bubble that was waiting for a trigger factor. The Coronavirus was precisely that factor.

We added that with this second crash, the Third Great Depression was entering a new phase of its development. What set the Third Great Depression apart from the first two (1873-1896 and 1929-1948) was that, under the impact of, first, the much more activist policy of governments and central banks from day one and, secondly, of the spectacular growth of China on the basis of its own special momentum, the world economy did not suffer as deep and sustained a slump as the previous experiences. We predicted that because of the limitations to further possible intervention on the part of governments (already very heavily indebted) and central banks (many already in the negative interest rate zone) and also because of the expected fall in the growth rate of the Chinese economy, this new phase of the Third Great Depression would make it look much more like the 1930s in terms of growth, investment and unemployment.

We still believe that this is the fundamental diagnosis and prognosis in a nutshell, but have since revised our view in one respect. The Coronavirus crisis *will* have its very real specific effect on production, investment, unemployment, thus the depth of the slump, in short on the real economy. This can be denied only by turning one’s back on the real world. For the risks created by the virus and the “stay home” or “lockdown” policies that have been, after considerable delay, adopted by most governments in those countries that are seriously afflicted by the pandemic have an undeniable direct impact on the activity level of the economy and indirectly on fixed capital formation, i.e. investment in real terms.

That is why, given the dimensions of the catastrophe into which capitalism has turned the epidemic and the pandemic, it can very safely be predicted that the recession or slump that will ensue in the coming months or even years will take a heavy toll on growth and result in very high levels of unemployment.

The D-word was forbidden among the profession of vulgar economics save for the courageous few. The euphemism “Great Recession” was precisely devised to

2 “2020 Stock Market Crash: a New Phase within the Third Great Depression”, <http://redmed.org/article/2020-stock-market-crash-new-phase-within-third-great-depression>.

hide the severity of the crisis, the fact that it was really a crisis that partook of the nature of depressions. What made this possible was the fact that this depression unfolded in a more gradual and hesitant manner than those that went before, that is, without an abrupt, deep, and persistent collapse in the real economy for the reasons mentioned above. Now that this will no longer be true, it may easily be predicted that the D-word will finally become permissible to use within the orbit of vulgar economics as well.

The circle closed

In a paper published in 2011, but was first presented in October 2009 at a conference, that is only a year after the collapse of the Wall Street bank Lehman Brothers, itself the harbinger of the so-called “global financial crisis”, we advanced the idea that what had set in was the Third Great Depression and used this new situation to test Marx’s theory of the manner in which economic crises were the modality in which the capitalist mode of production manifested its nature of barrier in the way of the further development of the productive forces, this development itself being the historical product of the constant revolutionisation of productive forces by capital.³ In other words,

We set out to show, in the footsteps of Marx and Engels, that the ever growing contradiction between the socialisation of production and private appropriation does not imply an absolute stagnation at a certain stage in the development of technology and the productive forces in general, but manifests itself periodically in the form of crises, each time more threatening to the existence of the capitalist mode of production, and to point out that the current world economic crisis implies a renewed confirmation of this proposition.⁴

We formulated Marx’s theory of crises and the relationship of this theory to the exhaustion of the capacity of the capitalist mode of production to advance humanity in terms of four major propositions:

- (1) Crisis is an inevitable moment in the pattern of development of capitalism.
- (2) Economic crisis implies not only a slump but a destruction of previously created productive forces.
- (3) Given its nature, economic crisis threatens the very existence of capitalist society.
- (4) This threat increases over time.⁵

The first three propositions were very easy to test. All the historical empirical material that existed amply demonstrated that the first three propositions passed the test of time. However, the last proposition could not have been either proved or disproved at that moment. The testing of this last proposition is of momentous

3 “Capitalist Crisis or the Crisis of Capital?”, E. Ahmet Tonak (ed.), *Critical Perspectives on the World Bank and the IMF*, Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Press, 2011.

4 Ibid, p. 36.

5 Ibid, p. 26.

importance for the following reason: as the productive forces developed by capitalism progress on their road to socialisation as opposed to the relations of production that remain anchored on private decision-making for allocation because of capitalist private property in the means of production, capitalism should come more and more into contradiction with the productive forces that are progressively ever more socialised. If the major economic crises of capitalism, which have now assumed a special form called depressions, are, in the last instance, reflections of this fundamental contradiction, then the crises themselves must threaten capitalism ever more violently. To put forward the idea that the present economic crisis could exercise even greater ravage than the notorious Great Depression of the 1930s was a bold move, not to say audacious, since very few economists, even among the Marxists, so much as granted the idea that we were now going through a depression, let alone admit that it had the potential of becoming more severe than that of the 1930s. This is what we had to say on the question in 2009:

The only serious question is whether the threat will increase this time relative to past experience, whether, in other words, this crisis will wreak more havoc than the Great Depression. This is yet to be seen. However, the incomparably higher level of the socialisation of production and the equally incomparable advance of internationalisation today relative to the 1930s are *a priori* reasons that point towards a state of things that make it a distinct possibility for this crisis to be even more severe than the Great Depression of the 1930s.⁶

“This crisis” is now definitely going to become “even more severe than the Great Depression of the 1930s”. The circle has been closed: the fourth and last proposition has also been tested and shown to hold. Thus Marx’s prognosis was correct: capitalism goes through crises (depressions) of increasing severity as a result of the contradiction between the socialisation of the productive forces and the private nature of appropriation and accumulation. These result in an increasingly violent and spasmodic movement in the body politic within these great depressions. It is the outcome of these that will decide which way world capitalism will go: a reconsolidation of capitalist rule or revolution and socialism?

It may be retorted that what has made the present-day crisis more severe than even the Great Depression is the Coronavirus crisis. It is impossible to measure which factor, the self-propelled dynamics of the Third Great Depression or the Coronavirus pandemic, will contribute more to the severity and profundity of the crisis. Future researchers can perhaps calculate the relative weight of the two factors, but it is impossible to gauge these while we are living the present as history.

However, even if the Coronavirus pandemic were the major factor behind the deepening of the present-day crisis, this would not vitiate the vindication of the fourth proposition under discussion. For we have shown above that capitalism is complicit in the Coronavirus pandemic. It may not have *created* the virus. But capitalism accelerates its spread freely to take the form of an absolute doom to

⁶ Ibid, p. 36.

claim tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands or maybe even millions of lives through a thousand cracks it has inflicted on the health care system, from shortages of medical kits to those of personal protective equipment, Intensive Care Units, ventilators, medicine or vaccine.

Hence, the Coronavirus catastrophe may well be outside of the classical crisis formation mechanism of capitalism, but it is itself the making of capitalism. It is good to return to the Spanish flu as a point of comparison. If this epidemic was so ravaging in its overall effect, it was because it came at the end of the Great War. It took an uncountable number of young lives on the trenches. But that was not all. The world was absolutely ripe for a public health disaster because of the travails of a war that killed between 10 and 20 million people, left still others injured and maimed and created desertland across the geography of the hostilities. Could anyone in their right mind say, under these circumstances, that the Spanish flu in its full import was purely a natural disaster? Could any sane person refuse the central part that capitalism in its imperialist stage of development played in the First World War? If such is the judgment we reach on the Spanish flu, then the part played by capitalist social relations in today's catastrophe is hardly any different.

A crisis of civilisation

Once the Coronavirus pandemic reached proportions of a catastrophe, capitalist society shed its appearance of civilisation and displayed itself for what it was: a class society as callous and hierarchical as slave-holding or feudal society. The bourgeoisie, while putting on a mask to protect itself from the Coronavirus and taking refuge in self-isolation and quarantine, at the same time unmasked its ugly face by throwing millions of proletarians onto the streets, drove them into crowded means of transportation, and sent them flocking into factories and workplaces, leaving "freedom, equality and Bentham" behind, entering the abode of the despotism of capital, where they were expected to produce surplus value for their masters, all the while reproducing the virus among themselves, thus making the factory also a collective deathbed. Never has capital exposed itself so clearly for what it is: a Pharaoh bidding labourers to build pyramids of surplus value for its ever expanding socio-economic power.

This picture is common to all capitalist countries, rich or poor, imperialist or subordinated and oppressed, despotic or democratic. All evidence shows that the "lockdown" or "stay-home" policy is advocated for the bourgeoisie itself, its agents within the corporate hierarchy, the modern, well-to-do petty bourgeoisie, the liberal professions that are part of this petty-bourgeoisie, and the intellectuals of this class. Not even the personnel of the coercive arm of the state is spared. But proletarians of all types and across industries are simply forced to go to work and face the high risk of infection under pain of layoffs or straightforward starvation. It must be emphasized that not only workers employed in those industries such as pharmaceuticals and medical equipment, hospitals, food and agriculture, transportation and cargo services etc. that are now universally dubbed "essential", but car factories or luxury textiles or others working for the world market also have to go to work or face layoffs. This is because capital is value in motion and ceases

to exist as such as soon as it comes to a standstill. So rather than the bourgeoisie starving for surplus value, let the proletarians die if necessary so that capital lives on! How hypocritical are the admonitions of the state authorities to stay at home when millions of workers are forced out on the streets and into their workplaces every single day of the week!

This we characterise as a crisis of civilisation. After having caused what may turn out to be a terminal crisis in nature itself, i.e. climate change, the other element that contributes to the production of wealth alongside human labour, it is now labour power itself that is being increasingly menaced by decimation, if not extinction, under capitalism. Viewed from the point of view of capital, this is the destruction of the very labour power which provides the source of surplus value and hence is self-defeating from the point of view of even capital itself. Of course, with the abundance of a reserve army of labour worldwide, this does not seem to pose a mortal danger for the moment. Nonetheless the very logic of the entire process seems to remove the ground underneath capital.

The situation is even graver when viewed from the vantage point of the proletarian. Capitalist society no longer exploits or even at times threatens the very basis of the existence of the proletarian. It now sends the proletarian to his or her death. This is a civilisation that lightly sends millions to their death. The proletarian is forced to revolt against capitalism for sheer survival!

Such is the crisis of capitalist civilisation. Surely one would understand more readily why millions of men and women would opt for revolution under these circumstances.

Whither class struggle?

The very analysis of the constitutive components of the present unique crisis we are going through permits us to reconstruct it easily as a synthetic whole and thus grasp its significance. The crisis we are going through is in effect the most acute existential crisis of capitalist society in its history. All three constitutive moments show that this society is no longer an adequate form to the content it has conjured up. Its social relations have entered into contradiction with the productive forces that it has created, which themselves are raising a hopeless scream in search of central planning. Its system of nation states, saddled with the interests of the national fraction of the bourgeoisie in each state, is riddled with the contradiction of integration with the rivalry and competition that beset this integration. And its class nature both works to destroy the basis of existence (the health care system) of a society that depends on the mass of proletarians but at the same time sends these very proletarians to death when the system that it itself has nibbled away endlessly for the last four decades fails.

If that is the case, that is if we are going through the process of a capitalist society in its death agony, then we must be prepared for all kinds of “solutions” it would give a try to, solutions that would break all hell loose. Such is the “alternative” that is now hoping to grow exponentially at this moment of the breakdown of globalism and neoliberalism, which comes into its element in this atmosphere of withdrawal to the “defence of the nation”, that so-called “populist” movement which is nothing

but an incomplete version of fascism, one that we analyse in another article in this issue of *Revolutionary Marxism* under the label of “proto-fascism”. Another escape route may seem to be, at least to certain sections of the bourgeoisie, a world war, which would certainly lead to a menace not only to humanity at large but also to all living species, given the menace posed by the weapons of mass destruction wielded on all sides.

These are the kinds of developments that we need to look out for so as to be able to analyse them more clearly as they become concrete menaces, in order to save humanity and all living species from the destructive power that capital has become at this threshold of a new period in history. The antidote is already there for anyone with the right method to see. The third wave of world revolution started with the Arab revolutions of 2011, went into an eclipse after the defeat of the Egyptian revolution in 2013, but was revived with uprisings, revolts and revolutions around the globe from 2018 on and, particularly, in 2019. The Coronavirus crisis has caused a generalised malaise in the working class across the globe. It is now more and more the proletariat that will become the chief protagonist of the fight against capitalism. This promises a new dawn for social struggles. The proletariat will once again prove to be the principal protagonist in shaping the future of society by bringing down the bourgeoisie.

21 April 2020

Two wars, one victory

Levent Dölek

Social life in Turkey has undergone a fundamental transformation within days after March 11 when the first official Coronavirus (Covid-19) case was announced. As the epidemic has dictated its rules, the number of cases has amounted to 50.000 in one month. It has been preached since almost from the beginning that Coronavirus is a class-blind disease, exemplifying the celebrities, artists, sportspersons, and politicians diagnosed positive with Coronavirus, and featuring the wealthy classes who are under self-quarantine in their mansions. That is, however, a delusion being debunked every day by the reality itself that the epidemic further sharpens the class antagonism.

Class characteristics of the epidemic are two-folded. The first is that the epidemic inflicts more severe and devastating effects on the laboring and poor classes. The second is related to how to deal with the epidemic. The struggle led by the bourgeoisie against Coronavirus is crippled by the fact that the interests of the capitalist class prevail over the dire need of scientific measures required for the society to survive the epidemic.

The most common symptom: Unemployment

For an affluent minority, calls such as “Stay at home” and “Life fits home” may just sound as warnings. For those who have to work to afford their life, on the contrary, they are the harbinger of unemployment. Thousands of service workers have lost their jobs as a result of the contraction of the industry. Shopkeepers having closed down their businesses were left with no means to pay their debts back. Workers sent home for self-quarantine have been granted short-time working

payment, which is just 60 percent of their actual wages. Those allowed paid leave are unsure if they would receive their wages next month. Professionals whose jobs are suited for working from home may have not faced income losses, but the near future remains bleak for them, too. At the first glance, working from home may seem a privilege, however, we know very well that white-collar personnel is the first to be jettisoned to retrench costs as had it happened in the crisis of 2001 and of 2008-2009.

Turkey succumbed to the Coronavirus epidemic as it has been going through an economic crisis. A report released by the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey [TOBB in Turkish acronym] on April 6 stated that the seasonally-adjusted rate of unemployment has reached 15% by January 2020. That figure does not cover mass lay-offs induced by the epidemic. When considered that approximately 145.000 workplaces are shut down temporarily or permanently, it is not hard to foresee that millions of unemployed workers would join the ranks of the reserve army of labor. Under the current circumstances, commuting for work is as much a threat as staying jobless at home because, no matter how robust the precautions are, it risks contracting the virus, and thus infecting your family. That is why laborers still at work have raised the demand of being allowed paid leave alongside, when Coronavirus cases are detected at the workplaces, going on de facto strikes for more measures to be taken.

The cause betrayed!

A struggle, which is led by the bourgeoisie, and fought by the working class at the fronts, is going on against the epidemic. The cause is just, but the leadership is traitor! Judging from historical experience, it is not something surprising. That is not to say that the bourgeoisie has done nothing to cope with the epidemic. However, the measures it has taken never extend beyond prioritizing its own interests over humanity's survival. Boris Johnson's "herd immunity" proposal revealed that the bourgeoisie would never hesitate to be allied even with a virus against humanity. They had the nerve to try to deceive people into believing that that barbaric proposal, which was aimed in essence at reducing the costs of social benefits by letting the old die, was the best option, notwithstanding that they later about-faced when they realized that political burden would be too big to shoulder if their plan resulted in a slaughter. As we were penning this article, Boris Johnson, the self-proclaimed "Shepherd" of the UK, was still under intensive care due to Coronavirus symptoms. That is like an omen portending that a calamity is imminent if we let the bourgeoisie fool us!

An anti-Coronavirus vaccine or drug is yet to be discovered. It is told that it may take one and a half year. During that period, it is possible to minimize death toll and social destruction by implementing the rule of social distancing to decelerate the pace of the infection; procuring the treatment-required drugs and medical materials; providing health workers with the equipment they need; planning how to produce and distribute the basic and vital goods and services. There is, nonetheless, an obstacle we have to overcome to apply those measures: capitalism itself!

The coronavirus epidemic as a test for Turkish capitalism

Markets vs. planning, profit vs. needs, and private vs. public ownership, all those deep-rooted contradictions have surfaced in every country tackling the virus. In Turkey, the government's first move was to launch a stimulus and support package worth of 100 billion Turkish Liras to compensate for the losses of the capitalist class. Even the "short-time working payment" itself, which is the only tangible step taken in favor of the working class, prioritizes the interests of the bosses. That measure enables the businesses, which either terminate their operations or decrease their production levels, to retain their workers by paying them less than usual. The 60 percent of workers' gross wages are recompensed from the "unemployment insurance fund" in return for deductions to be made in their unemployment benefits when they are eligible to claim. The relevant law entitles the President to revoke the deductions, but, unsurprisingly, Erdogan has never attempted to enforce that power.

The government further leveraged the epidemic to help the capitalist class tighten its grip on workers by introducing "obligatory unpaid leave", which has so far been prohibited by law. The amendment touted under the guise of forbidding lay-offs confers on the bourgeoisie the advantages, respectively, of forcing workers to take leaves with no payment, and only with a benefit recompensed at the lowest level from the unemployment insurance fund, and of dodging from paying seniority indemnity and in lieu of notice in the case of dismissal.

The working class, which has had to commute for work via shuttles and public transportation vehicles, and who has had to work risking their lives because their workplaces, except some, has not been rearranged in accordance with the rule of social distancing, remains a "colossal exception" to the call "stay at home". Although a curfew was imposed for citizens aged 18-20 alongside the old over 65, the workers in the first category were exempted for the sake of profit from it the day after. That the former lives mostly with their grandparents, the most riskiest group, has aggravated the viral hazard and thus paving the way for Coronavirus to rampage through Turkey, which has for a while been ranked first among other countries by the pace of the infection.

Capitalism puts up barricades before health workers, patients, and clients who need hospitals equipped well enough to fight the virus. Our health workers suffer the lack of personal protective tools, which has caused the number of Coronavirus-diagnosed nurses and doctors to swiftly increase (it is difficult to estimate the actual figure because health workers have been tested sporadically and non-comprehensively). The government boasting about being one of the leading countries in the textile industry resorted desperately to the vocational high schools to produce protective masks. Production of ventilators and intensive-care equipment is left completely at the mercy of the private sector. The Minister of Health Fahrettin Koca, who owns a chain of private hospitals, and whose appointment was a manifestation of Erdogan's desire to form a cabinet consisting of the private sector representatives who would govern the country like a corporation, let alone not mobilizing his facilities to deal with the pandemic although it is a statutory obligation, leveraged the disease to attract those patients who have not received proper treatment at the public hospitals because they have been focused thoroughly

on Coronavirus. Erdogan preferred converting two airports into hospitals instead of forcing the private hospitals, which have half of the total intensive-care beds, to deploy their unutilized capacity.

The first month of the epidemic in Turkey clearly showed that markets and profits being prevalent over planning and needs has undermined our capabilities to struggle against the epidemic.

Class politics against coronavirus

Then it is fair to say that the anti-epidemic fight has gained a political dimension, meaning that it has been intertwined with the one against capitalism. The working class, who has perseveringly straddled both fronts, that is, the provision of and the production and distribution of goods and services, should take the lead of that struggle. That undeniable truth poses the question of taking power. To become triumphant over the epidemic without allowing it to wreak societal havoc, the proletariat needs to seize the state power to smash the shackles of private property and markets so that productive forces can be employed in full capacity in favor of the society.

The most striking manifestation of that need is unemployment. Although it is now perceived as a natural fact stemming from the epidemic, the moments of crisis indeed require that all labor power socially available be mobilized. In a society where labor power is no longer a commodity sold and bought in the market, mass lockdowns caused by epidemics do not lead to unemployment, but an excessive demand for labor power. This is because the rule of social distancing entails production to be carried on by scheduling more shifts, in which lesser workers will be employed for lesser hours. New investments to be made to retain the level of production, the need to produce some goods and services more than usual due to the epidemic, the inevitable changes in the consumption habits, and the requirement of a wider distribution network will also increase the demand for labor. It is only the socialist alternative that can fulfill those tasks properly.

Preaching that the socialist alternative is the only solution is in itself not enough, though. To make masses recognize that alternative necessitates taking concrete actions beyond reading the piles of books and articles or following training courses. We should formulate such demands corresponding to workers' daily needs that they spark a mass workers' mobilization aimed at transcending the capitalist system. The extraordinary circumstances engendered by the epidemic dictate us to advance the class struggle to the end because it is the only way to defeat Coronavirus, keeping masses safe from a physical and economic catastrophe. Whoever seeks reconciliation with the bourgeoisie and calls on it for bestowing compassion upon workers, laborers, and the poor trails a regressive utopia.

The divergence between the petty-bourgeois left and proletarian socialism

The epidemic brought with it a cleavage between the petty-bourgeois left and proletarian socialism, the former of which has been inclined to treat the epidemic-induced social problems as ones rooted primarily in the unequal distribution of

wealth that they proposed would be solved by a solidarity network. However, once the naked truth of being incompetent quantitatively to organize such a large network emerged, they hastened to align behind the CHP and began to demand that the Party-run municipalities undertake more responsibilities. That political line has also restricted its opposition only with criticizing the AKP's attempts to monopolize the social benefit instruments. While it was the quickest to adjust itself to the call for "stay at home", and transferred all its publications and political activities, even the protests and press releases having been organized just for the sake of appearances, into digital sphere accordingly, it has become more and more distanced from the struggles waged by the working class in the hospitals, factories, and warehouses.

For the proletarian socialism, confining its political activities into four walls is no option because even if a comprehensive lockdown is to be imposed, an overwhelming majority of the proletariat still has to leave their homes to work.

So the proletarian socialists should stand shoulder by shoulder with the working class in their vehement struggle against the epidemic and for earning a livelihood, as how naïve and futile it is to strive to persuade the bosses to treat workers benevolently is understood better each day. They have turned a deaf ear to the workers' demands both for being allowed paid leave with full wage and for more measures to be taken, except handing some sops intended to appease their indignation. The task of the proletarian socialists is to convince the proletariat of using the only instrument it is left with, that is, *de facto* strikes. If workers do not resort to that means, they will keep working until their turn to be infected by the virus.

If production has decreased at a certain workplace, due to the conditions created by the epidemic, workers' power that comes from production certainly decreases. At this point, the workers' demand for living comes to the fore. The state helps the bosses with the application of "short-time working allowance". It pays 60 percent of the workers' wages from the unemployment insurance fund, which is also formed by deductions from workers' wages. The bosses both get rid of the wage burden and have the opportunity to manage the process in a manner that will more easily adapt to the normal production structure after the epidemic. The workers' response to this situation is to fight again to make the remaining 40 percent of the wage to be paid by the boss.

From *de facto* strikes to workers' control

However, since bosses do and will retaliate to *de facto* strikes by refusing to pay wages, and *de facto* strikes will lose their viability after a while, workers have to advance their struggles into taking the workplaces under their control to be able both to keep themselves safe from the epidemic and to afford their life. Workers' control will assume a specific form under viral circumstances. Production will be rearranged to meet urgent needs such as health materials, ventilators, protective equipment, etc. The process of workplaces being taken under control by workers will result in nationalization. The former will entail a well-planned division of labor among factories and workplaces that will be applied through the coordination of the chambers of engineers, and of medicine, trade unions of health workers, and hospital-based committees. The workers' control will also bring in question the

issue of what class should and can lead the anti-viral struggle.

From committees to workers' power

That is what is placed at the center of the political orientation adopted by the Revolutionary Workers' Party since the beginning of the epidemic. Hospitals are at the forefront of the class struggle. Hospital committees will show that workers' control is the only way to save the healthcare system, which is collapsing into chaos. When those committees seize the steering wheel of the anti-epidemic fight, the private hospitals will be confiscated immediately to be put at the service of public health. Factories are where the permanent solution lies because production is at the heart of the crisis. Revolutionary workers should organize the walk-outs, mobilize other workers, and put pressure on the bosses to produce healthcare materials. If the madness of stocking we have witnessed at the beginning of the epidemic recurs in a more chaotic form due to the deepening of the crisis, the workers' control will be the only solution to the problem of distribution of goods and services. Neither municipalities nor political parties and solidarity networks can intervene in as effectively as the workers themselves. Especially the workers' committees to be formed at the warehouses run by the giant monopoly retailers will play a crucial role in overcoming the crisis.

The most revolutionary militants of the youth have refused to stay at home and to confine the struggle into social media. Instead of joining the distant-learning sessions, they have preferred preparing projects intended to redesign the production process in line with the crucial need for health-related tools and materials, with the help of the chambers of mechanical, electrical, industrial, and textile engineers. 5 thousand biologists declare that they volunteer to join the teams applying the tests. Those initiatives may not in themselves be meaningful. However, if they are organized in a manner that would correlate individual spheres based on the requirements of the class struggle, they could serve as an example of what a social mobilization under the leadership of the proletariat will look like.

The working class, which has combated tirelessly to vanquish the epidemic at the expense of their life, needs to unite the nation under its leadership to defeat the malicious and failed bourgeoisie. When we achieve that goal, we will have one win for two wars!

18 April 2020

The welfare state nostalgia¹

Özgür Öztürk

Note to the reader: This paper was written before the coronavirus outbreak. As everyone knows, the pandemic has progressed quickly and covered the entire world in just a few months. As of April 2020, it is not yet clear how and when the outbreak will end, but some of its results have already become evident.

First, it seems more or less clear that the global economic crisis that started in 2008 will enter a new, deeper phase. With stock market crashes every week and soaring unemployment in almost every country, there is no “recovery” on the horizon, and a large-scale depreciation of capital is around the corner. Moreover, the coronavirus outbreak has accelerated the retreat from the so-called “globalization” process. Cross-border movements of capital, commodities, and people have decreased considerably. Declining world trade, increasing nationalism, the rise of fascist and proto-fascist politics, economic depression, unemployment... the situation resembles the 1930s.

Second, the outbreak has revealed the miserable condition of the healthcare systems of even the most powerful capitalist states. In many countries, very basic protective health items such as sanitizers or medical masks are in short supply, and people are dying because of the lack of ventilators, or intensive care services. What we see is the collapse of the healthcare system and the bankruptcy of capitalism. Undoubtedly, this collapse is a result of the decades-long neoliberal assault on the working class, and the dismantling of the so-called “welfare state”.

According to social-democratic reformism, the pandemic has proved, once again, that neoliberalism doesn’t work, and we need a “social” approach, which includes a return to Keynesian policies. This kind of “social” reasoning accepts

¹ The original Turkish version of this paper will be published in *Toplum ve Hekim* [Community and the Physician], the theoretical journal of the central council of the Turkish Medical Association. This is a revised version of the paper.

private property in the means of production and circulation of goods, and abstains from radical measures such as the nationalization of private hospitals or the pharmaceutical companies. It seems that just a piece of governmental wisdom will be enough to establish an acceptable form of capitalism.

However, there is no reason to think that once we have overcome the coronavirus pandemic, governments will behave more wisely and implement “welfare state” type programs. The future will be shaped by the world-wide balance of class power. Amid a great depression, in the absence of strong working-class organizations, of powerful revolutionary movements and parties, and of workers’ states to make pressure on the capitalist world, the bourgeoisie will resist every demand to expand the rights of the masses. We urgently need revolutionary, not reformist, politics.

Introduction

The neoliberal policies that have prevailed all over the world for the last forty years have faced increasing objections in the context of the new “Great Depression” that began in 2008. The crisis has also led to an acceleration of the search for in-system alternatives. Indeed, especially in social-democratic (or social-liberal) circles, there are proposals for a new economic policy, which are often articulated within a post-Keynesian framework.² According to such approaches, a “rational” economic mechanism that is more humane and better working than free-market neoliberalism can be established without breaking away from capitalist relations of production. In this regard, the so-called “golden age of capitalism” is mentioned as evidence; the period from the end of the Second World War to the mid-1970s. During this short period, now far behind, many countries implemented policies referred to as the “welfare state” (or the “Keynesian social welfare state”). For nearly thirty years, economic growth had been accompanied by low unemployment, relatively high wages, and rising social spending, and there was significant progress in education, health, and social security. The aim is to design a similar, or rather updated, version of this now.

The details of the proposals for a new welfare state will not be discussed in this paper. Instead, the original welfare state, the “Welfare State 1.0” version will be examined. Understanding the historical conditions under which the first “model” emerged, what limitations it faced and why it went into crisis can make it easier to see whether a similar project has a chance of success today.

In academic debates on the welfare state, the historical context is often accounted for quite superficially. But the fact that some institutions called the “welfare state” took place in some leading capitalist countries in the third quarter of the twentieth century cannot be discussed without taking into account the class struggle on a world scale, and the socialist construction attempts in the Soviet Union, China, Eastern European countries and other places. However, in perhaps the most important

2 See, e.g. Paul Davidson, *The Keynes Solution: The Path to Global Economic Prosperity*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009; Joseph E. Stiglitz, “The Welfare State in the Twenty-First Century”, in José Antonio Ocampo and Joseph E. Stiglitz (eds.), *The Welfare State Revisited*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.

work of the welfare state literature, Gøsta Esping-Andersen's *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (first published in 1990), the Soviet Union is not mentioned **even once**.³ Rather than simple neglect, this appears to be the result of social-democratic approaches' comprehension of the "welfare state" as an ahistorical "model". By contrast, in this paper, it will be argued that the structure called the "welfare state" was a product of specific conditions, and the possibility for it to come on the agenda again is low, even in its updated form.

The new Great Depression will probably get deeper.⁴ In such a case, the number of people who sympathize with the proposals for a new welfare state will likely increase. But the deepening of the crisis will also restrict the maneuvering space (and budgetary resources) of governments. Moreover, compared with previous periods, the organization and struggle levels of the workers (who are supposed to push the state in this direction) are very low. Finally, a factor like the Soviet Union, which in the past had exerted pressure on the capitalist world, no longer exists. In such a context, if the crisis deepens, rather than implementing welfare state-type programs, the ruling classes will insist on neoliberalism to "overcome the crisis"; and if the crisis can somehow be overcome, this time capital will continue neoliberal policies anyway, since neoliberalism is the program of the attack on labor. Though it was carried out in parallel with the so-called "globalization" process in the 1990s, these two are not the same. Under the conditions of today's crisis, a step back from globalization is not only possible but almost inevitable; however, this does not make the termination of neoliberal policies necessary. For these reasons, welfare state projects are unlikely to be implemented in the coming period, perhaps for several decades. Workers in this or that country can achieve some gains, and even improve their living conditions a bit by counter-attacking. Still, insofar as the capitalist organization of production continues **worldwide**, there is no guarantee that any gain will be permanent. In my opinion, this is the most important lesson to be drawn from the welfare state experience(s): the gains of the workers can only become permanent with workers' rule.

Below, first, the formation of the social policy field in capitalist society will be discussed with reference to Marx's writings in the 19th century. In the second section, the development of the social policy field in the post-Marx period is evaluated through the examples of Bismarck and Beveridge models. In the next three sections, the rise, historical significance and the crisis of the welfare state are discussed, respectively. The sixth and the last part tries to provide an answer to the question of whether a new welfare state experience is possible.

3 Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996.

4 As for the "Third Great Depression" and its possible trajectory, see Sungur Savran, *Üçüncü Büyük Depresyon: Kapitalizmin Alacakaranlığı* [*The Third Great Depression: The Twilight of Capitalism*], İstanbul: Yordam, 2013.

1. Social policy in capitalist society: Marx and factory laws

a. An ideological notion

That the “welfare state” is a problematic term should be noted at the beginning. Though it is not known who first coined it, the term became commonplace in the 1950s and 60s, during the Cold War period. The portrayal of the Western countries of the period as “welfare states” (and not, e.g., as capitalist or imperialist) has resulted from ideological concerns. The notion itself reflects the belief that capitalism can be a system that works well, creates wealth and spreads it to the entire population.

On the other hand, the emphasis on the state is in accord with the Keynesian spirit of the post-war years. As is known, after the Great Depression of the 1930s, policies involving state intervention have begun to replace the liberal market approach that had collapsed in the first half of the 20th century. The “mixed economy” programs that intended –mainly via public spending– to reduce unemployment and increase effective demand, and at the same time make pressure on the financial sector, span a broad spectrum that ranges from Roosevelt’s *New Deal* program in the US to the fascist and corporatist regimes in Europe, and even to the statism of the 1930s in Turkey. The Keynesian economic doctrine, an expression of the interests of industrial capital, was a product of this period.⁵ The Second World War further strengthened this trend, and liberal theories (such as the Austrian School) that exclude state intervention in the economy were thoroughly discredited. However, it is controversial whether the policies envisaged by Keynes were implemented during the thirty years after the war; since the “official” economic doctrine in the capitalist world in this period was the so-called “neoclassical synthesis” that combined Keynesian theory with neoclassical economics. Moreover, causality worked in the opposite direction: the post-war “golden age” was not the result of the implementation of Keynesian policies, but rather, the Keynesian doctrine (in its various versions) was the intellectual reflection of this period. The free-market approach has been put on the shelf due to concrete political and economic developments.

We should also be very clear about the “systematic state interventions on the market” that form the core of the Keynesian approach(es): the intervention aims to make capitalism work by curbing the market. Contrary to what conservative commentators like Hayek argue, the welfare state and Keynesian economics have no intention of “socialism”. In the eyes of its supporters, the welfare state primarily functions as “a fundamental aspect of modern government... that operates as an indispensable means of making capitalist economies socially and economically sustainable”.⁶ In other words, the aim is never socialism, or even spreading welfare to the whole population, or meeting social needs, but to control and thereby maintain a system that is not “sustainable” by itself, a system that produces devastating consequences when left alone.

5 Geoffrey Pilling, *The Crisis of Keynesian Economics: A Marxist View*, Croom Helm, 1987, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/pilling/works/keynes/index.htm>.

6 David Garland, *The Welfare State: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 3.

b. Capital and the state

The idea that capitalism is a destructive system is as old as capitalist production itself. Marx writes that capital is dead labour that “vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks”.⁷ In the 19th-century horror literature, the “monster capital” image has been embodied in figures such as Frankenstein and Dracula.⁸ In the more realistic literature, the miserable living conditions of the workers were covered in the novels of many authors from Dickens to Zola. Young Frederick Engels’ study *The Condition of the Working-Class in England* (1844) documented the negative consequences of industrialization on workers.⁹ Half a century later, the Boer Wars showed the physically awful situation of the British soldiers to the whole world.¹⁰ The capitalist mode of production was ruining humanity, not metaphorically, but literally.

But the destructive activity of capital has also resulted in workers’ resistance. The struggle between workers and bosses has forced capitalists to grant certain rights to workers and has led to the formation of what is now called “social policy”. In this field, the results of the struggle between the two classes often take shape via the mediation of the state (in laws, various institutions, etc.). However, as the power apparatus of the capitalist class, the capitalist state is at the same time obliged to provide the general conditions for the accumulation of capital. For this reason, the results of the class struggle are shaped by passing through the prism of the capitalist state that takes care of capital accumulation.

The basic idea inherent in the notion of the welfare state, and the idea social policy is built around, is the restriction of capital. The state is the actor expected to do this. Since the essence of capital is to grow, this is not an easy task. In the words of Marx, capital “has a boundless and measureless urge to exceed its own limits. Every boundary is and must be a barrier for it.”¹¹ In other words, capital will see each limit (from capital’s point of view these are quantitative limits, factors that limit the rate of profit) as obstacles to be overcome, will try to overcome them, and will succeed sooner or later. Otherwise, its existence will end. Just like cancerous cells, growing and spreading is in the nature of capital.

Even today, at a time when capital has reached gigantic dimensions on a global scale, the hope of keeping it within certain limits and controlling capitalism remains live. For example, Thomas Piketty, in his recent book on wealth and income inequalities (winking at Marx, he has titled it *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*),

7 Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol I, in Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol 35, Lawrence & Wishart, 2010, p. 241.

8 Franco Moretti, “Dialectic of Fear”, in *Signs taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms*, translated by Susan Fischer, David Forgacs, David Miller, London: Verso, 1997, p. 83.

9 Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England*, in Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol 4, Lawrence & Wishart, 2010, p. 295.

10 Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, p. 63; Chris Renwick, *Bread for All: The Origins of the Welfare State*, London: Penguin, 2017, chapter 4.

11 Karl Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1857-1858*, in Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol 28, Lawrence & Wishart, 2010, p. 259.

argues that the right solution is “a progressive annual tax on capital”. Piketty is aware that such a solution exceeds the power of the nation-states. Yet he believes that “if we are to regain control of capitalism, we must bet everything on democracy— and in Europe, democracy on a European scale”.¹² Regaining the control of capitalism, returning to the good old days: this is probably the most concise expression of the utopia of our time.

Undoubtedly, the modern capitalist state is, to some extent, autonomous, both from the field of economy and society. In this sense, it can set limits on capital, and it has set, but this has limits too. Because (i) the capitalist state pursues the interests of capital *as a whole*, it tries to provide the conditions for accumulation to continue profitably, so it must avoid attempts that will reduce the overall rate of profit. (ii) On the other hand, capital is not a homogeneous whole; it exists as separate capitals and fractions of capital with different interests. Just like labor-capital conflicts, intra-capital conflicts also pass through the mediation of the state. Accordingly, the state’s decisions on issues such as taxes, incentives, public spending, exchange rate, etc. limit the movement of some capitals, while paving the way for others. (iii) Moreover, the state should not be considered the ultimate decision-maker. Both capital accumulation and class struggle are processes that exceed state borders. The state is sovereign in a particular territory but acts within a broader regional and international context. It is the general world conjuncture that often determines the policies pursued by individual states.

Many contradictions and conflicts arise from all these complex and multi-layered relationships. In such an environment, the state tries to simultaneously perform many tasks that may contradict each other. Within a specific world conjuncture, and the framework of dynamic power relations between and within classes, it can create a *modus vivendi* that will last for a while. But can’t do more than this. When the general economic situation worsens, tax revenues decrease and debts increase (as in the 1970s), no matter which party is in power, it is obliged to abide by capitalist rationality.¹³

c. The logic of social policy

Thus, it can be said that the social policy field is shaped via the mediation of the state within the framework of the dynamic interaction of class struggles and capital accumulation. In other words, when analyzing this field, it is necessary to take into account three factors that affect each other. Class struggle is the key moment, and as well as being limited by the bumpy course of capital accumulation, it may erect barriers to capital accumulation in the opposite direction. The state acts, in a sense, as a “collective capitalist”, and in its effort to provide the subjective and objective conditions of capital accumulation within the territory it controls, it tries to solve the problems that go beyond the horizon of individual capitals. For example, education, health, reproduction, etc. of the total labor force in the country inevitably becomes

12 Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, translated by Arthur Goldhammer, Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2014, p. 572-3.

13 Ian Gough, *The Political Economy of the Welfare State*, London: The MacMillan Press, 1979, p. 42.

the subject of state interest. Moreover, the needs of international competition also force the state to intervene in these fields.¹⁴ The state's regulations in areas such as education, health, housing, employment, and social security can also serve to legitimize capitalist relations of production by creating a state image that cares for and protects its citizens. However, it should be noted that the autonomy of the capitalist state is not absolute but relative; it is conditioned by class power relations and the process of capital accumulation.

In short, the formation of the "logic" of social policy is partly the result of the functional needs of capitalist production. These are not given, indisputable things, but requirements that are political by their nature, and that also pass through the mediation of class struggle. At any given time, the question about what capital accumulation in a territory requires is never answered, and in fact cannot be answered, "technically". Since capital itself is a contradictory social form, the logic of capital accumulation takes shape within a complex struggle process.

Let us take the determination of the length of the working day as an example. According to Marx, in the case of England, the determination of the length of the working day that is considered "normal" is not the result of the functional needs of industry or a compromise between labor and capital, but "the result of centuries of struggle between capitalist and laborer".¹⁵ Marx notes that two opposing currents were seen in the history of this struggle. During the "germination" phases of capitalist production, during the period from the 14th century to the mid-18th century, by the "labor statutes" issued before the Industrial Revolution, the working day was forcibly extended, while with modern factory laws the working day was essentially shortened. This contrast did not stem from the humanitarianism of the factory owners or the requirements of industrial production.

The working day is a magnitude that *can vary* within certain (upper and lower) limits. These lower and upper limits have both a physical character (for example, workers cannot be expected to work 23 hours a day) and a social character determined by the "general level of civilization".¹⁶ There is ample playground between these two limits, and the limitation of the working day by law is also a contentious process. For example, Marx states that "Parliament passed 5 Labour Laws between 1802 and 1833, but was shrewd enough not to vote a penny for their carrying out, for the requisite officials, &c."¹⁷ In any case, as of 1832, the working day had been reduced to 12 hours (to 10 hours in 1848) in many industries.

But the issue was not closed, since the indirect consequence of the shortening of the working day was an increase in the use of machinery in industry, and this increased mechanization led to both an increase in the intensity of labor, and the employment of female and child labor in the factories on a mass scale (and also gave

14 Gültekin Akarca, "Sağlık Tanımı ve Hekimin ve İşyeri Hekimi'nin Sınıfsal Konumu Üzerine" ["On the Definition of Health, and the Class Position of Physicians and Workplace Physicians"], *Mesleki Sağlık ve Güvenlik Dergisi [Turkish Journal of Occupational Health and Safety]*, vol 19, no 71, 2019, p. 25.

15 Marx, *Capital*, vol I, p. 276.

16 Ibid., p. 240.

17 Ibid., p. 283.

advantage to big business against small capitals). The machine turned into a crucial weapon in breaking the resistance of the industrial worker. Moreover, the workers' rebellion against the machines also led to the development of new machines: "It would be possible to write quite a history of the inventions, made since 1830, for the sole purpose of supplying capital with weapons against the revolts of the working class."¹⁸ However, the resistance of the working class against this attack, which it was now exposed to as a whole together with women, children, and men, brought the birth of factory legislation. Marx writes that factory legislation is "just as much the necessary product of modern industry as cotton yarn, self-actors, and the electric telegraph".¹⁹ This is not a technical requirement, but a necessity mediated by class struggle. Besides, once factory legislation has emerged, its content has become a constant subject of conflict.

Some Marxist researchers such as Ian Gough believe that working-class struggles –indirectly– serve the "long-term accumulation of capital".²⁰ But it is difficult to draw such a conclusion from Marx's analysis. Marx's thesis is that what is today termed as "social policy" is shaped by the never-ending class struggles rather than the functional requirements of capitalist production (in the end, the answer to the question of what is "functional requirement" is also given on the same ground). These struggles pass through the mediation of the state as a general rule and become embodied in specific laws. The new institutional form that emerges as a result of a process of struggle, and stamped and approved by the state, achieves a certain permanence (path dependency). However, due to the development of the content, after a while, this current form will also become unsuitable for that content and will trigger new struggles (for example, shortening of the working day will speed up mechanization, and new contradictions will emerge from this). Also, though struggles take place between the two basic classes, other social strata and classes (land-owning nobility, petty bourgeoisie, etc.) are often involved. Moreover, all these complex struggles are not limited to the economic or trade union sphere but also extend to political, social and ideological fields. The expansion and complexification of the area of social struggles (hence the social policy field) over the past two hundred years is no accident.

This emphasis on struggles does not mean the affirmation of a pure "voluntaristic" logic. "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past."²¹ In this context, at the most general level, there are the restrictions or incentives created by the dominant trends worldwide. Factors such as the legacy of struggle inherited from the past, cultural habits, and the existing institutional forms themselves will also be effective. However, the most influential among all these factors is the fluctuations of the economic conjuncture. According to Marx, workers can only compensate

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 439.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 483.

²⁰ Gough, *The Political Economy of the Welfare State*, p. 55.

²¹ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol 11, Lawrence & Wishart, 2010, p. 103.

for the losses they inevitably suffer during the downturn of the economic cycle by struggling in relatively good periods.²² Therefore, the trade unions “work well as centres of resistance against the encroachments of capital”.²³ But one should not expect more than that.²⁴

As a general rule, workers can achieve some gains, especially in periods of relative abundance; but in recessionary periods, they are more likely to suffer losses. Here the most direct mechanism is the fluctuation of the magnitude of the unemployed mass (the industrial reserve army) with the economic conjuncture. During stages of economic boom, when unemployment is low, the strength of workers’ organizations generally increases, while periods of stagnation increase unemployment and intensify competition among workers, leading to the weakening of the class. In short, the level of organization and struggle of the workers also varies depending on the economic cycle. But in the concrete world of the class struggles, many examples can be seen that violate this general rule. An unorganized and demoralized working class can witness the loss of some of its previous gains, even during an economic boom. Though the economic growth rate was high in Turkey in the years before the 2008 crisis, workers lost many rights. Conversely, it is also possible for workers to achieve gains as the result of a fierce struggle even during a great crisis. For example, the paid holiday *tradition* in the USA started in the 1930s (a tradition that has never been legally secured to date). General trends are just general trends; in each concrete case, one can observe features differing from this generality.

2. The shaping of social policy: The prehistory of the welfare state

a. The example of Bismarck

One of the paradoxes frequently mentioned in the field of social policy is that in many instances, the first steps towards the “welfare state” have been taken by the (conservative or liberal) ruling classes.²⁵ Indeed the first move that changes a given situation (regardless of direction) usually comes from the ruling class, since the struggle between the rulers and the ruled is asymmetrical: the upper strata of the ruling class (big business, high bureaucracy, top ranks of the army, etc.) are more integrated and organized in themselves. In the end, those who take critical decisions that affect everyone’s life in a capitalist economy are just a group of individuals,

22 Karl Marx, *Value, Price and Profit*, in Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol 20, Lawrence & Wishart, 2010, p. 143.

23 Ibid., p. 149.

24 It must be noted that trade unions were underdeveloped at Marx’s time, hence the “wage and price stickiness” that would later gain great importance in Keynes’ theory was more or less absent, and during crisis periods even the nominal wages could be lowered; but this does not change the essence of the argument.

25 For instance, Esping-Andersen views this as a paradox (Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, p. 108).

a group too small to fill a large university lecture hall.²⁶ It is not very difficult for such a small group to quickly organize, make decisions, and take action. Another reason for the asymmetry is that the “time horizon” of the governing section of the ruling class is broader. As Guillermo O’Donnell has shown in the example of Argentina, the plans of especially big monopolistic industrial companies are long-term, and their production and investment decisions span years.²⁷ Thanks to their political-economic power and resources at hand, their capacity to predict the future and shape this future is higher compared to other social segments.

In the German case, the new imperialist state, which established its political unity under Bismarck in the late 19th century, used various methods to meet the threat from the working class. The most striking of these is the anti-socialist law that was in force between 1878 and 1890, aimed at the Social Democratic Party (SPD). But in the face of the ongoing rise of the workers’ movement and socialism, a different path would be followed with a series of new laws. In this context, the sickness insurance law was enacted in 1883, the accident insurance law was enacted in 1884, and the compulsory pension system was introduced in 1889, with the premiums paid by workers and employers.²⁸ The fact that Bismarck laid the foundation of modern social policy is probably one of the ironies of history.²⁹

It is known that Bismarck was seeing socialism as an internal security threat, “a matter of civil war and sovereignty”, and did not have the slightest sympathy for workers.³⁰ Why did the “Iron Chancellor”, the leading conservative, prepare all these modern laws? It would be a correct but incomplete answer to say that Bismarck, who had the power to abolish the Reichstag when necessary, had to compromise workers. Rather, this involved the (willy-nilly) recognition of the *economic* and *social* power status of the working class, which it had acquired with industrialization, but also the effort to prevent its transformation (by merging with the socialist movement) into a *political* subject. Hence this was a preventive move. As Asa Briggs emphasizes, Bismarck tried to create an alternative to socialism (and liberalism).³¹ Most social policymakers nowadays are in a similar quest.

26 Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Democracy and Capitalism: Property, Community, and the Contradictions of Modern Social Thought*, New York: Basic Books, 1986, p. 86.

27 Guillermo O’Donnell, *Bureaucratic Authoritarianism: Argentina, 1966-1973*, in *Comparative Perspective*, translated by James McGuire, Rae Flory, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, p. 18-20.

28 Gough, *The Political Economy of the Welfare State*, p. 64; İlker Belek, *Sosyal Devletin Krizi ve Sağlık Ekonomisi Politikası* [*The Crisis of the Social State and the Political Economy of Health*], İstanbul: Sorun, 1994, p. 47.

29 Jürgen Tampke claims that Bismarck’s reforms of the 1880s were overrated; similar laws were already in effect in Prussia in the coal mining sector, and the concrete effects of these laws were limited (“Bismarck’s Social Legislation: A Genuine Breakthrough?”, in W.J. Mommsen and Wolfgang Mock (eds.) *The Emergence of the Welfare State in Britain and Germany, 1850-1950*, London: Croom Helm, 1981, p. 71-4). Yet Bismarck’s initiative is still important because of its national scale.

30 Otto von Bismarck, *Düşünceler ve Hatıralar III* [*Thoughts and Reminiscences, vol. III*], translated by Nijad Akipek, Maarif Vekaleti [Ministry of Education], 1955, p. 67.

31 Asa Briggs, “The Welfare State in Historical Perspective”, in Christopher Pierson and Francis G.

The merging of the workers' movement and the socialist current is dangerous because the working class has the potential to become a political force to transform society by leading all oppressed social segments. But the position of the workers (and their organization, the trade union) within the relations of production prevents the development of this potential: the trade union struggle is limited only to the specific problems of the workers or their particular segments. On the other hand, the socialist movement is the expression of the consciousness of this social revolutionary power of the working class. Indeed, the explicit goal of the SPD from the outset was to merge socialism with the workers' movement (its later turn towards reformism does not change this). With the Paris Commune example still in memory, it was not hard to realize the explosive potential of this fusion.

Bismarck reforms highlight a critical aspect of the logic of the struggle (and social policy): the ruling class and the state sometimes have to respond to the direct pressure of the working class, as seen in the example of factory laws; but sometimes, when there is no apparent pressure from the bottom, they make preventive moves by predicting the future, thereby trying to shape this future in the direction they desire. A well-designed "reform" can neutralize the revolutionary potential of the workers (which they are not yet aware of) before it emerges.³² Indeed, the SPD leadership of the time (e.g. August Bebel) had clearly understood that the purpose of Bismarck's initiatives was to weaken the workers' movement. Yet at the end of the 19th century, a reformist-revisionist current gained strength within the SPD. "Social reform or revolution?" were the terms Rosa Luxemburg used to frame the issue at the time. As is well known, she later suggested the slogan, "socialism or barbarism", which implies that whenever social reform is not part of the struggle for socialism, it is a means for prolonging capitalist barbarism. More than a century later, these are still the terms of the debate.

Nevertheless, it should be remembered that at the turn of the 20th century social spending was very low compared to today and that a "welfare state" certainly was not on the agenda. Even if Bismarck or others made some concessions to the working class, these were insignificant. (For example, Engels did not feel the need to analyze these reforms.) In Western countries, in this period, social spending was only 3 percent of the national income. This increased to 5 percent at the beginning of the Second World War, 10-20 percent in the 1950s, and 25-35 percent in the mid-1970s.³³ In other words, the main leap took place after the war.

b. Beveridge and the birth of the welfare state

After the Second World War, the most striking aspect of the new world order was the international organization of capitalism under US hegemony, even before the beginning of the Cold War. From the moment it was clear how the war would end (perhaps even earlier), representatives of the capitalist world worked on the

Castles (eds.) *The Welfare State Reader*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006, p. 21.

32 Gough, *The Political Economy of the Welfare State*, p. 58-9.

33 Oğuz Topak, *Refah Devleti ve Kapitalizm: 2000'li Yıllarda Türkiye'de Refah Devleti [The Welfare State and Capitalism: The Welfare State in Turkey during the 2000s]*, İstanbul: İletişim, 2012, p. 50.

new design in a coordinated manner under the leadership of the United States. The most important initiative in discussing and deciding on the institutional structure of the new period was the Bretton Woods conference, held in 1944 with the participation of 44 countries. But institutionalization was on the national scale also. The Beveridge Report, the primary document of the social policy outlook of the new period, came before the Bretton Woods conference. In the UK, the report prepared by the liberal-oriented parliamentary William Beveridge in 1942 had a huge impact on the public and was discussed and accepted in the parliament a year later (when the victory appeared on the horizon).³⁴ The Labor Party also took part in the coalition government during the war, but the prime minister was Winston Churchill, the famous conservative politician.

The Beveridge model covered all citizens. All “social risks” such as illness, old age, occupational accidents were covered under a national insurance system. The comprehensive social security system was designed as “part of a larger plan that includes economic policies that guarantee full employment and the national health system”.³⁵ In other words, the model complemented Keynesian policies aiming at full employment. Indeed Beveridge especially emphasized that for the model to work, the government should keep the employment level as high as possible.³⁶

The implementation of the model fell to the Labour Party majority government (1945-51) after the war. The Clement Attlee cabinet introduced the National Insurance Act in 1946, the Urban and Rural Planning Act in 1947 (hundreds of thousands of social dwellings were built with this law), and the National Health Act between 1946-48 (covering Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland).³⁷ The most famous social reform of the period was the National Health Service (NHS) established by this latter law. For the first time in the history of capitalism, a universal, comprehensive and free (at the point of service) healthcare system emerged. The NHS, which was founded by overcoming the opposition of the British Medical Association, soon diverted from its ideal form (for example, when the government changed in 1951, prescription charges were introduced). Yet it continued to be one of the most important symbols of the “welfare state”.

Just like the Bismarck model, it can be said that the Beveridge model and the “welfare state” in a broad sense were also preventive moves, because the prestige of socialism was very high worldwide, both during and after the Great Depression of the 1930s. Thanks to its planned economy, the Soviet Union had not been affected by the Great Depression and even had zeroed unemployment by embarking on a rapid industrialization move.³⁸ While the rich and haughty UK had not even started to discuss institutions like the NHS yet, the USSR had promised “equal, free, qualified

34 Renwick, *Bread for All*.

35 Belek, *Sosyal Devletin Krizi ve Sağlıkın Ekonomi Politikası*, p. 125.

36 Gough, *The Political Economy of the Welfare State*, p. 147; Renwick, *Bread for All*, chapter 10.

37 Asbjørn Wahl, *The Rise and Fall of the Welfare State*, translated by John Irons, London: Pluto Press, 2011, p. 28.

38 Özgür Öztürk, “Economic background of the collapse of the Soviet Union”, *Revolutionary Marxism* 2017, p. 142.

health care for everyone”.³⁹ In short, socialism had become a desirable option for laborers. Indeed, in the years following the war, a new wave of revolutions from Eastern Europe to China had shaken the whole world, and in Britain, the Labour Party had a landslide victory in the 1945 elections. Under such conditions, the so-called welfare state was not a favor bestowed on workers, but a necessary direction for the bourgeoisie. Moreover, as another conservative politician, Arthur Balfour, had already claimed a long time ago, social legislation was the “most effective antidote to socialism”.⁴⁰

The Attlee government has not only implemented the Beveridge model but has also introduced an extensive nationalization program that covered about a fifth of the economy. In this context, important industries such as coal, gas, electricity, railways, iron, and steel have been nationalized, together with the Bank of England.⁴¹ However, the government has not gone beyond this point and has adopted a system called the “mixed economy”. In other words, the aim was not to move to socialism and planned economy by changing the relations of production, but rather to limit the “negative” consequences of the free market with a Keynesian approach. The Fabian dream of passing to socialism step by step with constant reforms has remained an intellectual fantasy.

According to Gøsta Esping-Andersen, the post-war welfare states have been clustered around three models.⁴² In countries such as the USA, Canada, and Australia there was the liberal welfare state based on a minimalist understanding of welfare; in countries such as Germany, France, Italy, Austria, the corporatist model that gives the state a more central role but also maintains traditional status differences; in the Scandinavian countries, the social-democratic welfare state based on a universalist approach. Later studies have suggested that a Mediterranean model can be added to these three groups, or different groupings can be created with different criteria.⁴³ The exact count of welfare state forms is debatable. But the more important question in the context of this paper is why and how the welfare state came to life, and this question cannot be answered without taking into account the post-war conjuncture and the USSR factor.

Before examining the causes of the rise of the welfare state, it will be useful to highlight two interconnected developments:

(i) First, in the post-war period, the social policy field has expanded enormously and covered the entire population (and many issues other than industrial relations). From a sectoral perspective, social policies started from specific sectors of industry (like mining and metal) in the 19th century, expanded to the entire industry, then to agriculture, then to the self-employed, and in the middle of the 20th century to the whole population. In terms of scope, workmen’s compensation insurance came first;

39 Özlem Özkan, “Sovyet Sosyalist Cumhuriyetler Birliği’nde Sağlık Hizmetleri” [“Healthcare Services in the USSR”], *Toplum ve Hekim*, vol 18, no 1, 2003, p. 33.

40 Wahl, *The Rise and Fall of the Welfare State*, p. 24, 33.

41 Renwick, *Bread for All*, chapter 11; Wahl, *The Rise and Fall of the Welfare State*, p. 36.

42 Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, p. 26-8.

43 Wil Arts and John Gelissen, “Three worlds of welfare capitalism or more? A state-of-the-art report”, *Journal of European Social Policy*, vol 12, no 2, 2002, p. 137-158.

this was followed by sickness, disability, and old age insurances, unemployment insurance, and family allowances.⁴⁴ In the field of education, compulsory primary education was followed by the proliferation of secondary schools and higher education after the war. The growth of industrial cities brought new regulations in areas such as housing and health. In the same period, there was also significant progress about universal voting rights, freedom of expression and association.⁴⁵ Such developments have undoubtedly not been spontaneous and the growth of the working class has led to the expansion of conflicts beyond the gates of the factory.

(ii) On the other hand, developments in social policy have also expanded the boundaries of state intervention. The post-war welfare states have regulated not only the economy but also the world of social relations, especially the family, which forms a critical moment of the reproduction of the labor force.⁴⁶ The war itself has played an essential role in such developments, but the more fundamental reason was the growth of the working class. For example, the transformation of women into wage laborers has led to the partial commodification of the duties (such as cleaning, cooking, caring for children, the sick, and the elderly) they have previously undertaken domestically within the framework of the patriarchal division of labor, and the workers' wage has now also covered these. The question about how these new needs created by the capitalist relations of production would be met (by the social workers of the state or through the market) has added new dimensions to class struggles.

3. The rise of the welfare state

The rise of the welfare state is the result of the mutual interaction of many factors. Class struggles and capital accumulation processes, which form the context of social policy, take place both on a national and international scale. In order to understand the institutionalization of the "welfare state" in a country, it is necessary to identify the global dominant trends first. The main factors within such a general framework can be listed as follows:

a. Class struggle

At the root of the post-war "golden age" lies the remarkable loss of power of the working class.⁴⁷ The working-class power has generally declined due to the increase in pressure on labor under the conditions of the Great Depression of the 1930s, the complete crushing of the working-class organizations in countries experiencing fascism, and the fact that workers were subjected to both ideological and physical destruction during the war. The secret of the growth miracles of countries like Germany and Japan in the 1950s lies here. In the USA, the workers' movement

44 Topak, *Refah Devleti ve Kapitalizm*, p. 53-4.

45 Gough, *The Political Economy of the Welfare State*, p. 35-37, 60.

46 Gough, *The Political Economy of the Welfare State*, p. 46-9; Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*.

47 Ernest Mandel, *Kapitalist Gelişmenin Uzun Dalgaları [Long Waves of Capitalist Development]*, translated by Doğan Işık, İstanbul: Yazın, 1991, p. 25.

from below, which displayed an astonishing vitality between 1934 and 1937, was choked by the winds of war, and the war itself became a tool to discipline labor. In the post-war period, the Cold War and McCarthyistic anti-communism targeted workers' organizations. It is beyond doubt that behind the labor productivity increases in the golden age of capitalism lied the pressure on laborers. As Beaud notes, in this period labor productivity was increased with new techniques that resulted in lengthened working time, or increased labor intensity, and practices that led to further deterioration of working conditions (such as the shift system).⁴⁸

On the other side of the coin, the workers' movement has gained enormous potential with the expansion of the geography lands of socialist construction after the war. The inclusion of Eastern European countries into the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union, and then the Chinese revolution, tilted the global balance of power in favor of socialism. In many European countries, communist parties came out of the war with high prestige. The welfare state gave workers some rights in this context. At a time when the working class had considerable achievements in the Soviet Union, the planned economy was scoring great success and crushed Hitler's fascism, many countries had been included in the socialist camp, and the pursuit of independence in the third world countries had accelerated, some gains on the part of the workers in the core capitalist countries was no surprise. But what made this possible was the increase in labor productivity, and more generally, economic boom. And the basis for the post-war economic growth in the core capitalist countries was primarily provided by the defeat of the workers' movement.

b. The long expansionary wave

The cyclical character of capitalist development is a long-known phenomenon. Capital accumulation has the form of nested cycles, some of these composed of several years, some others 8-10 years, and still others 25-30 years ("long waves"). Although the causes and start and end dates of the cycles are controversial, it is clear that the process does not involve any automatism. A significant contribution in this regard has come from Ernest Mandel.⁴⁹ According to him, periods of great depression due to the decrease in profit rate are more or less inevitable, but there is no guarantee of getting out of depression. For capital to recover from a great crisis (such as today) and increase its profitability, an essential condition is the weakening of the working-class power. But, another condition at least as important as this is the elimination of the inefficient, low-profit capital segments, the depreciation (devaluation) of capital.⁵⁰ This sometimes occurs in forms such as bankruptcies, closure of factories, and sometimes in ways such as physical destruction and war. Unless such a liquidation takes place, the overall profitability potential of capital remains limited.

In the long expansionary wave between 1945-1975, both conditions were met. The decline of the working-class power in most of the core capitalist countries at the

48 Michel Beaud, *Kapitalizmin Tarihi [History of Capitalism]*, translated by Fikret Başkaya, Ankara: Dost, 2003, p. 244.

49 Mandel, *Kapitalist Gelişmenin Uzun Dalgaları*.

50 Savran, *Üçüncü Büyük Depresyon*, p. 38.

beginning of the period, combined with the physical destruction of capital during the war, formed the ground for the post-war boom. Between 1948 and 1971, global industrial production increased by an average of 5.6 percent per year.⁵¹ Periodically, this was the highest rate seen in the history of capitalism. Industrial investments, labor productivity, and economic growth rates remained high throughout the period. In the cases of Germany and Japan, growth rates were higher as a result of both the crushing of working-class organizations and the depreciation of capital in the harshest way possible. For example, between 1950-1970, labor productivity in the manufacturing sector increased by an annual average of 3 percent in the USA, 4.8 percent in Germany and 10.2 percent in Japan. The annual net profit rate in the manufacturing sector was 24 percent in the USA, 23 percent in Germany, and 40 percent in Japan (between 1955-1970).⁵² In the following period, these figures decreased significantly in all three countries.

In short, the welfare state is the product of the long expansionary wave after the war. The economic recovery has brought a relative strengthening of the working class by shrinking the industrial reserve army, and real wages have increased due to the high unionization rate.⁵³ Between 1950 and 1970, real wages in the USA increased by an average of 2.6 percent annually, compared to 5.7 percent in Germany and 6.1 percent in Japan. In the same period, the unemployment rate was 4.2 percent in the USA, 2.3 percent in Germany and 1.6 percent in Japan.⁵⁴ As İlker Belek stresses, full employment is “the major component of the welfare state”.⁵⁵ In addition to high wages and low unemployment, the so-called “social wage” component also tended to increase. While only half of the workers in Western European countries were covered by social insurance (unemployment, disability, occupational accidents, and old age) in the 1930s, this ratio reached 80 percent in the 1970s.⁵⁶ During the period, the number of public sector employees also increased rapidly, and this sector, which has a high level of unionization, played an important role in fueling the working-class militancy in the late 1960s.⁵⁷

c. The US hegemony

The post-war expansionary wave that formed the basis of the welfare state has become possible by the weakening of the working class and the depreciation of capital. In addition to these two conditions, there was one further boosting factor: the capitalist world managed to overcome its hegemony crisis and became integrated under the leadership of the USA. During the (previous) inter-war period, the internal integration of world capitalism was weak, and there were imperial

51 Beaud, *Kapitalizmin Tarihi*, p. 241.

52 Robert Brenner, *Ekonomide Hızlı Büyüme ve Balon: Dünya Ekonomisinde ABD'nin Yeri [The Boom and the Bubble: The Place of the U.S. in the World Economy]*, translated by Bilge Akalın, İstanbul: İletişim, 2007, p. 23.

53 Gough, *The Political Economy of the Welfare State*, p. 72.

54 Brenner, *Ekonomide Hızlı Büyüme ve Balon*, p. 23.

55 Belek, *Sosyal Devletin Krizi ve Sağlığın Ekonomi Politikası*, p. 123.

56 Topak, *Refah Devleti ve Kapitalizm*, p. 57.

57 Gough, *The Political Economy of the Welfare State*, p. 142.

blocs (e.g. the Sterling Bloc, the Frank Bloc) established by the leading imperialist countries. These blocs helped reduce the effects of the Great Depression for the imperialist countries, but also caused the loss of potential markets. During the inter-war period, the attempt to form a League of Nations had failed; by contrast, after the war, many international institutions such as the United Nations, the IMF, the World Bank, GATT, NATO and the World Health Organization were rapidly established – a fact showing that capitalism has managed to integrate in itself.

The Bretton Woods conference in 1944 set the framework for this integration. In the conference, both the international monetary system of the post-war period and the institutional legs of the new economic order (the IMF and the World Bank) were created. According to the new monetary system known as the “gold exchange standard”, the US dollar would be used as the world currency in international transactions, and the dollar would be convertible to gold at a certain rate. The dollar (and hence gold) exchange rates of other national currencies were kept constant. Exchange rates vary depending on the economic power of countries; thus it is not possible to keep them constant for a long time. At a time when the USA had almost three-quarters of the world gold reserves and was performing half of the world industrial production, this system worked. But the rapid recovery of other countries (in particular Germany and Japan), and especially France’s inclination to increase its gold reserves, formed cracks in the Bretton Woods monetary system.⁵⁸ With the rise of the military spending and external deficits of the USA during the Vietnam War, the international monetary system fell into crisis. In 1971, the convertibility of the dollar was cancelled, and in 1973, exchange rates throughout the capitalist world were left to free float. In other words, the US hegemony was weaker now.

However, together with the GATT agreement, the three-legged design (monetary system, IMF and World Bank) of this period played an important role in liberalizing world trade. The world trade volume increased at an average rate of 7.3 percent per year between 1948 and 1971. This rate was 3.7 percent between 1900-1913, 0.7 percent between 1913-1929, (-)1.15 between 1929-1938 and 0 between 1938-1948.⁵⁹ According to these data, the total increase in international trade volume was 67 percent in the first half of the century and 500 percent in the third quarter of the century.

D. The internationalization dynamics of capital

While significant steps were taken towards the liberalization of trade in this period, international capital movements were subjected to control. Yet this did not prevent the increase of cross-border direct capital investments. As a matter of fact, during the post-war expansionary wave, especially the US-based multinational companies usually focused on foreign direct investments, which were generally financed by profits from previous investments.⁶⁰

58 Duncan Innes, “Kapitalizm ve Altın” [“Capitalism and Gold”], in Nail Satlıgan and Sungur Savran (eds.) *Dünya Kapitalizminin Bunalımı* [*The Crisis of World Capitalism*], İstanbul: Alan, 1988.

59 Beaud, *Kapitalizmin Tarihi*, p. 241.

60 Berch Berberoglu, *The Internationalization of Capital: Imperialism and Capitalist Development*

One of the most significant characteristics of the post-war era is the prominence of the productive form of capital (industrial capital) in the internationalization of capital. In the previous periods capital was usually exported in the form of money-capital (finance) flows, but now capital started to expand as a relation of production, and the geographical scope of capitalist relations of production was extended. Moreover, the expansion of the productive form of capital also accelerated the movements of commodity-capital (trade) and money-capital (finance). In other words, productive capital movements enlarged the circuits of capital as a whole. The fact that countries like Turkey managed to make the transition to the capitalist mode of production in this period is a result of the internationalization of capital.⁶¹

However, the internationalization of capital is an inter-national phenomenon. In other words, global capital movements take place within a space divided by nation-states. While it has been widely debated whether the post-war economic policies can be attributed to the Keynesian doctrine, it is clear that these policies were in accord with the spirit of Keynesian economics that gives privilege to industrial capital and the national economy.⁶²

Stiglitz, one of the foremost advocates of a new welfare state program, remarks that there are parallels between the welfare state and the “developmental state”.⁶³ Although Stiglitz does not explain the reasons for this, his observation is correct. At the root of the parallelism lies the Keynesian approach. Keynesianism, defending the systematic intervention of the state in the economy, played a role in the post-war period not only in the economic policies of developed countries but also in the industrialization efforts of underdeveloped countries.

e. Decolonization

One of the most critical developments in the post-war world is the new wave of political independence (decolonization). India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma, Indonesia in Asia; Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon in the Middle East; many countries such as Egypt, Sudan, Ghana, Tunisia, Morocco, Guinea, Madagascar, Algeria, Ethiopia, Libya, Somalia, Zaire, Burundi, Rwanda, Angola in Africa became independent in this period. The member count of the United Nations, established in 1945 with 51 members, increased to 99 in 1960, 126 in 1970, and 150 in 1980. The fire of independence, lit in North America in the last quarter of the 18th century, then in Latin America in the first quarter of the 19th century, now covered the whole of the colonial world in the third quarter of the 20th century.

The main reasons for the rapid elimination of classical colonialism can be summarized as follows: (i) From the viewpoint of the new hegemonic power of the imperialist world (USA), the old colonial groupings had to be disbanded. (ii) The independence demand of the Third World countries has been more effective due to the favorable conjuncture (the success of the Chinese revolution, the confidence

on a World Scale, Westport: Praeger, 1987, p. 30-1.

61 Özgür Öztürk, “Para, Finans ve Sermayenin Uluslararasılaşması” [“Money, Finance and the Internationalization of Capital”], *İktisat*, no 485-486, 2007.

62 Pilling, *The Crisis of Keynesian Economics*.

63 Stiglitz, “The Welfare State in the Twenty-First Century”, p. 6.

provided by the existence of the socialist bloc, the communist parties leading the struggle against imperialism in many countries, the domestic bourgeois classes now having more interest in independence). (iii) The political, economic, and social costs of colonialism increased (so that in some countries the colonial system was put to an end by the colonialist state).⁶⁴

With decolonization, the old-style colonial empires eventually became history, and the capitalist world economy became organized based on nation-states. The concept of territorial conquest, which defines classical colonialism, gave way to more indirect (economic, political, military, and cultural) forms of domination specific to modern imperialism. With the spreading of industrial capital to new locations, capitalist production permeated into underdeveloped countries. In this process, some of the underdeveloped countries that were previously selling primary goods (unprocessed agricultural products and raw materials) to industrialized countries and buying manufactured goods in return also started to industrialize. The integration style of the former colonial countries with the world economy began to change, and as an intellectual reflection of this, the ideology of “development” emerged. In countries such as Turkey that have accelerated their quest for development during this period, the industrialization process usually started with giving priority to the domestic market (import substitution).⁶⁵

The needs of industrial capital are different from commercial capital. Raw materials (of a certain quantity and quality) must continuously flow to the newly established factories, workers must be subjected to a certain discipline, and it must be possible to sell the commodities now produced on a large scale, thus the infrastructures of the internal market (roads, energy, etc.) have to be constructed. Consequently, unlike commercial capital, which plays a mere intermediary role between producers and consumers, industrial capital has a much more holistic form. In an underdeveloped country, industrialization under free-market conditions is almost impossible; on the contrary, a capitalist planning phase in which the state is involved is necessary. It is this necessity that brings the parallelism between the ideology of development and Keynesian policies. As a result, in the post-war world, Keynesian policies (representing the interests of industrial capital) were introduced in both the Western countries and the late industrialized countries. The welfare state and the “developmental state” are indeed relatives.

The development of capitalist production has brought the institutionalization of a social policy field in the late industrialized countries too. To be sure, there were regulations about labor relations in those countries even before the 20th century. However, the transition to capitalist production, together with the positive effects of the post-war world conjuncture, accelerated the evolution on this front. Here, the earlier experiences of capitalist societies also played a role. In Marx’s terms, the industrially more developed countries showed, to the less developed, the image of their future. In this sense, the “developmental state” of the post-war period included

64 Özgür Öztürk, *Emperyalizm ve Kalkınma [Imperialism and Development]*, MSc thesis, İstanbul: Marmara University, 2005.

65 Cyrus Bina and Behzad Yaghmaian, “Post-war Global Accumulation and the Transnationalisation of Capital”, *Capital & Class*, no 43, 1991, pp. 107-130.

a “welfare” component. Needless to say, this was very modest compared with the “welfare states” of the period (in Turkey, for example, unemployment insurance has come into effect only in the 21st century). The latecomers “suffer not only from the development of capitalist production, but also from the incompleteness of that development”.⁶⁶

4. The meaning of the welfare state

It is seen that the welfare state has been brought to life by the complex interaction of many factors mutually feeding each other. The first point to be emphasized in this regard is that there is no ahistorical “social welfare state model” that can be applied in every conjuncture. The whole set of practices called the welfare state is peculiar to a specific historical phase of capitalist development. Undoubtedly, there is always a social policy field in capitalism, but this does not have to organize in the form of a “welfare state”. For example, social assistance, which is becoming more and more prominent in social spending today, and aiming at managing, not eradicating, poverty, just like the Poor Laws of the past, cannot be thought in any way with the notion of “welfare”.

The second point to be emphasized is that it is even controversial whether the welfare state is actually “pro-labor”. For example, in the USA, in the so-called welfare state period, some “social wage” payments to workers were financed entirely by taxes paid by the working class.⁶⁷ In another study of six OECD countries for the overall post-war period, it is found that the portion of social welfare expenditures exceeding the taxes paid by the workers was close to zero.⁶⁸ In a sense, what’s going on here is simply that a part of the workers’ income is being subjected to forced saving; thus the welfare state can be seen as an actor redistributing the income of the working class “horizontally”.⁶⁹ However, the control of the funds created by the savings of the workers remained in the hands of the state and private companies, not the workers’ organizations.⁷⁰ Before social policy, in the traditions such as the “provident funds”, the fund was controlled by the workers, while in the welfare state, the savings of the working class (seized in the form of taxes) have been put to the service of capital accumulation.

The third point is that the whole process is complex and full of contradictions. Therefore it is necessary to avoid short-cut reasoning and simple qualifications such as “good” or “bad”. The significant achievement of a period can lead to unexpected

66 Marx, *Capital*, vol I, p. 9.

67 Anwar Shaikh and E. Ahmet Tonak, “Refah Devleti ve Sosyal Ücret Efsanesi: ABD, 1952-1985” [“The Myth of the Welfare State and the Social Wage: USA, 1952-1985”], in Nail Satlıgan, Sungur Savran, and E. Ahmet Tonak, *Kapital’in İzinde [In the Tracks of Capital]*, İstanbul: Yordam Kitap, 2012.

68 Anwar Shaikh, “Who Pays for the ‘Welfare’ in the Welfare State? A Multicountry Study”, *Social Research*, vol 70, no 2, 2003.

69 Gough, *The Political Economy of the Welfare State*, p. 53, 111.

70 E. Ahmet Tonak, “Kapitalist Devlet Karşısında İşçi Sınıfı: ABD Örneği” [“The Working Class Against the Capitalist State: The Case of the USA”], in Nail Satlıgan, Sungur Savran and E. Ahmet Tonak, *Kapital’in İzinde*, İstanbul: Yordam Kitap, 2012.

results in the next. Marx's writings on factory laws bring many examples to this. Similar contradictory dynamics can also be observed in the welfare state practices. For example, retirement is an achievement, but it also deepens the dependence of the worker on capitalist relations of production. Unemployment insurance also functions similarly; an unemployed person is expected to meet certain conditions to receive this allowance and to accept the "alternative" job offered.⁷¹ In general, the growth of the working class expands its ranks, but also adds many new layers, and it becomes more difficult to carry out a common struggle. Women's participation in the workforce creates a huge emancipation potential, but at the same time absorbs this potential under the form of wage slavery, and increases the workload of women because of the patriarchal structures. In general, the internationalization of production and new methods such as flexible production and lean production, which have accelerated after the 1970s, have increased the divisions within the working classes of the world. Thus the gain of one sometimes means the loss of the other. Hence it is necessary to avoid shortcut judgments and to always move from the concrete analysis of a concrete situation.

Finally, the fourth point is that the welfare state can by no means be seen as a step on the road to socialism.⁷² On the contrary, concrete practice shows that the welfare state was precisely designed and implemented to preclude the socialist option. In the field of social policy, especially in the boom phases of the economic conjuncture, it is possible to achieve some gains by organized struggle, and this is very important, but it cannot be said that these gains will "accumulate" and at some point become a means of transforming capitalism. Neoliberal policies, which have marked the last forty years, must have shown that no social "right" is indisputable from the perspective of capital. Even some gains (such as the right to a paid holiday) that are not directly targeted in today's capitalist production relations can be rendered meaningless in various ways (subcontracting, informal, migrant labor, etc.).

5. The crisis of the welfare state

The welfare state and Keynesian policies, which seemed like a brilliant success for some time, came to a deadlock in the mid-1970s. In this period, world capitalism fell into a deep crisis, and the welfare state was liquidated step by step, both under the pressure of its internal contradictions and under the conditions of the great crisis, which it constituted a part of.⁷³ It is certain that the welfare state has deeper roots and is more resilient in some locations such as the Scandinavian countries. But it is also certain that it has lost its character of being a general "model" in the capitalist world. As a matter of fact, as of the beginning of the 21st century, it is gradually eroded in the Scandinavian countries too.⁷⁴

71 Gough, *The Political Economy of the Welfare State*, p. 33.

72 Belek, *Sosyal Devletin Krizi ve Sağlığın Ekonomi Politikası*; Denizcan Kutlu, *Türkiye'de Sosyal Yardım Rejiminin Oluşumu: Birikim, Denetim, Disiplin* [*The Making of the Social Relief Regime in Turkey: Accumulation, Control, Discipline*], Ankara: NotaBene, 2015, p. 136.

73 Gough, *The Political Economy of the Welfare State*, p. 128.

74 Wahl, *The Rise and Fall of the Welfare State*, pp. 107-115.

The crisis of the 1970s resulted from the decrease in industrial profit rates. When the 1960s and the mid-1970s are compared in this respect, it is seen that the profit rates in all major capitalist countries decreased between one-third and two-thirds of the old level.⁷⁵ Although there are many reasons for this decline, two factors should be mentioned in particular: the first is that the new investments that increased labor productivity in the industry during the post-war “golden age” at the same time increased the organic composition of capital and put pressure on the rate of profit. The second is that the increase in the rate of exploitation could not overcome this pressure due to the increasing combativeness of the working class throughout the period. Labor and student movements in the core countries peaked towards the end of the 1960s; for example, the number of workdays in strike snowballed.⁷⁶ All these developments are signs that the working class, whose power and self-confidence increased during the welfare state era, moved towards a more militant line. Moreover, this orientation was not only visible in the core countries but also in the late industrialized countries like Turkey. One aspect of the general crisis of capitalism was the crisis of domestic market-based accumulation in the late industrialized countries.

Another cause of the general crisis is the decline of US hegemony. While competition has intensified in the capitalist world, investments within the USA have decreased relatively. The remarkable economic growth of new competitors such as Germany and Japan led to a decrease in the share of the USA in the world economy.⁷⁷ When the increase in military spending due to the Vietnam War and the loss of political prestige after the defeat were added, the undisputed leadership of the USA ended in the 1970s. The collapse of the Bretton Woods monetary system between 1971 and 1973 is another visible expression of the weakening of hegemonic stability.

The collapse of the world monetary system and the decline in profit rates in the industry brought the expansion of the credit system and capital’s turn towards finance. The credit boom experienced throughout the world in this process led to a rapid escalation of loans to late industrialized countries, and eventually to an international debt crisis in the early 1980s.⁷⁸ It is known that this crisis served as an essential pretext for imposing neoliberal policies on the late industrialized countries.

As a result of the decrease in profit rates in the core countries, capital turned towards financial markets on the one hand, and on the other hand, it started to shift production to Asian countries such as South Korea, Malaysia, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong (and then to China, Vietnam, and India). Capital migration led to a further decline in industrial investments, and an increase in unemployment (consequently to the weakening of the working class) in core countries, and in the end, social spending became “unsustainable”. With decreasing tax revenues and increasing debts, the states fell into “financial crisis”, and the welfare state turned

⁷⁵ Andre Gunder Frank, *Crisis: In the World Economy*, New York: Holmes & Meier, 1980, p. 34.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 103.

⁷⁷ Brenner, *Ekonomide Hızlı Büyüme ve Balon*.

⁷⁸ Neşecan Balkan, *Kapitalizm ve Borç Krizi [Capitalism and the Debt Crisis]*, İstanbul: Bağlam, 1994.

into an obstacle to capital accumulation.⁷⁹

The neoliberal attack that liquidated the welfare state is the product of such a context. Neoliberal policies will not be examined in this paper, but it should be emphasized that the liquidation of the welfare state does not mean reduced public spending. For example, in the 1980s, the US arms spending increased remarkably under the Reagan administration (which is called “military Keynesianism”). Throughout the world, social spending has not decreased in some areas such as healthcare. But the main reason for this is not a development in the quality and coverage of health services, but rather, as seen in the city hospitals model in Turkey, the use of public resources to secure the profitability of capital. Besides public spending, private health expenditures also tend to increase. In many countries, the health sector is an important part of national income.⁸⁰

It may seem like a paradox at first, but neoliberal policies have not succeeded in reducing public spending. Increasing unemployment has resulted in the expansion of the budgetary resources reserved for unemployment compensations. The proliferation of part-time, low-pay, and precarious forms of employment has resulted in more poverty, which has brought an enormous increase in social aids. Moreover, the last thirty years have witnessed a new wave of proletarianization worldwide, especially in the late industrialized countries. Hence the number of formally employed workers has also increased, as well as the number of people who have access to pension schemes, public education, public health, housing, etc. The neoliberal period is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is worth mentioning that the size of public spending alone is not an indicator of “welfare”.

The interesting point is that the crisis of the welfare state coincides in time with the crisis of the socialist construction processes. In the 1970s, not only world capitalism but also the countries that were undertaking socialist construction, especially the Soviet Union, fell into crisis. Undoubtedly, the crisis faced by countries in this second group stemmed from different reasons.⁸¹ However, towards the 1980s, the attractiveness of the socialist option has decreased among the working masses. For example, the USSR started to charge healthcare services in the 1970s, and problems in this field became unconcealable. The Primary Health Care Conference, convened in Alma-Ata in 1978 with the proposal of the USSR, is the product of such a context. Even if the goals set at this conference are considered meaningful for the capitalist world (which is controversial), for the Soviet people “it would not be wrong to say that it was the loss of gains and the confirmation of loss”.⁸² The weakening of the socialist alternative should be considered as one of the main factors that facilitate the liquidation of the welfare state.

79 Gough, *The Political Economy of the Welfare State*, p. 94-108.

80 Belek, *Sosyal Devletin Krizi ve Sağlıkın Ekonomi Politikası*.

81 Öztürk, “Economic background of the collapse of the Soviet Union”.

82 Onur Hamzaoglu, “Reel Sosyalizmin Çözülüşünün İpucu: Alma Ata Bildirgesi” [“The Clue of the Dissolution of Really Existing Socialism: The Alma-Ata Declaration”], *Toplum ve Hekim*, vol 17, no 2, 2002, p. 110.

6. Is a new welfare state possible?

From the discussion up to this point, it must be clear that there are serious obstacles to a “welfare state” type institutionalization today. There are several reasons for this:

(i) Welfare state institutions were the products of the post-war expansionary wave. This wave ended in the mid-1970s. It is clear that the working class was defeated on a global scale in the subsequent neoliberal period, but this alone is not enough to get out of the crisis. Besides, capital has still some way to go in this direction (in some locations, especially in Europe, workers have managed to at least partially protect their positions, and in the Latin American continent, they have even mounted an attack against capital since the 1990s). The other basic condition for getting out of the depression phase, that is, the depreciation of capital, has been postponed until the 2000s for various reasons.⁸³ In the new Great Depression era that started with the 2008 crisis, it will probably be more difficult for workers to achieve anything in any field. The unorganized and miserable situation (compared with the past) of the working class around the world should make us think that the attacks of capital will gradually intensify.

(ii) Today, the absence of a socialist bloc to make pressure on capitalist countries is another factor that will probably frustrate the expectations of a new welfare state. For example, in the field of healthcare, there was no significant improvement in the forty years between the 1978 Alma-Ata Conference and the 2018 Astana Conference, since there was no solid reference point that would provide an example for laborers. The World Health Organization itself confesses that the “healthcare for everyone in 2000” goal of the Alma-Ata Declaration was not reached.⁸⁴ Cuba is the only country that has reached that goal, five years before the deadline.⁸⁵ Today, in the context of the 2020 presidential elections, the world’s richest country is discussing how to finance the “Medicare-for-All” proposals, while poor Cuba is miles ahead of the USA in this respect. The case of Cuba shows that if the workers take over political power (even under adverse conditions), they can achieve real gains. But it is clear that compared with the former Soviet Union, Cuba’s influence on the international proletariat is minuscule.

(iii) The welfare state came to the fore at a time when industrial capital was relatively strong. This period was marked with Keynesian economic policies, financial excesses were restrained, and increases in industrial labor productivity have enabled relatively high wages and accompanying forms of “social wages”. The inevitable rise of financial capital after the crisis of the 1970s has restricted industrial investments and labor productivity increases in the capitalist world. It seems difficult to get out of depression and implement a new welfare state program without serious transformations on this front.

83 Savran, *Üçüncü Büyük Depresyon*, p. 38.

84 Bülent Kadri Gültekin and Kayıhan Pala, “‘Herkes İçin Sağlık’ Alma-Ata’dan 21. Yüzyıla” [“Healthcare for Everyone: from Alma-Ata to 21st Century”], *Toplum ve Hekim*, vol 15, no 4, 2000, p. 298.

85 Akif Akalın, “Alma Ata Bildirgesi Nasıl Değerlendirilmeli?” [“How Should The Alma Ata Declaration Be Evaluated?”], *Madde, Diyalektik ve Toplum*, vol 2, no 1, 2019, p. 105.

(iv) On the other hand, the national economy, which forms the backbone of Keynesian policy, has also weakened as a checkpoint. The internationalization process of capital, which has accelerated under the leadership of industrial capital in the post-war period, has reached an enormous scale since 1970, but this time under the leadership of financial capital. The power of multinational companies that plan production on a global scale and financial institutions that dominate huge funds has increased. In such an environment, when certain additional rights are granted to the working class in any country, sudden capital outflows may drag that country's economy into a crisis.⁸⁶ In other words, the disciplinary power of the market has become more visible. The formation of an "international social policy" field is perhaps possible. But in a world divided by nation-states, it is not easy for the labor movement to organize on a world scale like capital. Capital is much more organized on a world scale, as well as domestically.

(v) In the context of today's Great Depression, there may be some who think that the "welfare state" program can be brought up *by capital itself* to get out of the crisis. Indeed, proposals for a new welfare state actually do not address the working class, but the states and the capitalists. In other words, such suggestions implicitly include the idea that the capitalist class also needs the welfare state or similar programs today. Detailed criticism of such arguments is beyond the scope of this paper.⁸⁷ However, it is necessary to draw attention to the following points: It is known that in times of crisis capitalist states turn to various "Keynesian" measures such as increasing public spending, which was also the case in the 2008 crisis. Yet such measures that at first alleviate the severity of the crisis to a certain extent, elevate the problems of individual capitals and sectors to national and international levels, and by expanding the scale and scope of the crisis, prepare the ground for a tougher new crisis. On the other hand, a crisis of this sort can only be overcome with processes that increase the rate of profit; this requires new technologies to boost labor productivity, new investments, the elimination of inefficient capitals (through bankruptcies, destruction of productive forces, etc.), as well as further pressure on workers' rights. The primary concern of capital and the state is not to increase consumer demand, which is just a part of the aggregate demand, but rather to boost investments and the rate of profit by suppressing that part. In the case of the US of the 1930s, it was the world war that provided the way out of the crisis. The so-called "welfare state" is not a program for capital to overcome the crisis, but a very specific experience that has been possible only within a boom conjuncture, and under the pressure of the working class and socialism on a world scale. In today's conditions, expecting capital to turn to such programs, designing a "working" capitalism that is free from contradictions, is in a sense dreaming, but in another sense, is an expression of a desire to eliminate the socialist option from the start, with the intuition that the situation is getting worse for capital. However, from

86 Prabhat Patnaik, "Yeni Emperyalizm" ["The New Imperialism"], in Emine Tahsin and Murat Öztürk (eds.) *Yeni Emperyalizmin Ekonomisi [The Economics of the New Imperialism]*, İstanbul: Yeni Hayat, 2005.

87 For a detailed critique of Keynesian approaches and under-consumptionist theories, see Savran, *Üçüncü Büyük Depresyon*, pp. 167-239.

the perspective of capital, there is currently no reason to compromise on neoliberal policies.

In short, the “welfare state” was a parenthesis in the history of capitalism, and that parenthesis has already closed. If the organized workers’ movement gains strength, if socialism becomes a serious alternative again, and if world capitalism manages to recover from depression, in the long term it is, of course, possible or even inevitable for a new welfare state to come on the agenda. But it is known by experience that no welfare state can be permanent. Besides, today’s world has gone far beyond the level to keep the destructive tendencies of capital under control. At the end of a long historical process, we’ve reached a point where the only way to stop Frankenstein is to destroy him, the only way to prevent Dracula is to stick a stake in his heart.

Conclusion

Today, workers make up the majority in almost every country. The ratio of wage or salaried workers in total employment has exceeded 50 percent worldwide in the last decade.⁸⁸ As the level of development increases, the proportion of wage earners also increases. This rate is close to 70 percent in Turkey, and in advanced capitalist countries ranges between 85-95 percent (85 percent in Britain, 88 percent in France, 90 percent in Germany and Japan, 94 percent in the US). In short, workers constitute an overwhelming portion of the working population. When we say “humanity” or “people”, in practice, we talk about a vast mass of workers and laborers.

The working class is growing, but on the other hand, it is relatively impoverished. According to the latest data of the World Labor Organization ILO, covering 2004-2017, the share of labor incomes in national income is decreasing; in the specified period, this rate has dropped from 53.7 percent to 51.4 worldwide and from 55.6 percent to 52.9 percent in the G20 countries.⁸⁹ In other words, in the 21st century, workers are unable to achieve the level of “well-being” they deserve, even though they constitute the majority of the population and grow day by day.

The vast mass of workers is made up of layers and sections that differ in many respects (by sector, gender, wage level, ethnicity, etc.). However, it can be said without any hesitation that some issues concern all workers. For example, low unemployment, easy job finding, short working day, and satisfactory wages; humane working conditions; more resources devoted to health, education and social security; trade union rights and a democratic political environment to express these demands – these are the common expectations of all. These are simple, reasonable and humanistic expectations, and they can be met easily at the current level of global production.

However, these basic demands of the largest part of the society do not seem to be

88 The Worldbank, “Wage and salaried workers, total (% of total employment) (modeled ILO estimate)”, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.EMP.WORK.ZS?view=chart>, accessed: September 2019.

89 ILO, “Labour income share as a percent of GDP (%)”, https://www.ilo.org/shinyapps/bulkexplorer6/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=SDG_1041_NOC_RT_A, accessed: 14 November 2019.

met under the conditions of contemporary capitalism. While automation, computer, and communication technologies are developing, unemployment is increasing at the same time; though the machines undertake a significant part of the production, the working hours are getting longer; also, working conditions are deteriorating gradually, and flexibility, precariousness, and subcontracting are becoming the rule. In healthcare, education, and social security, the conditions are deteriorating every day. Income and wealth inequalities are deepening. Moreover, the new Great Depression that started in 2008 is aggravating social problems. Today, the general economic crisis is accompanied by authoritarianism and even fascist trends in the political sphere, the ecological crisis which has become a global issue, and increasing irrational tendencies at all levels.

The way out of this nightmare lies at the international organization of the working masses. Undoubtedly, as (or if) the organization and struggle capacity of the workers increase in this process, in some countries some regulations such as the “welfare state” may come (or inevitably will come) on the agenda. However, as discussed in this paper, such tendencies are always limited by the process of capital accumulation. Thus the rights/gains that workers can achieve in a capitalist society (compared to a socialist alternative) will be both limited and “reversible” due to the fluctuations of the economic conjuncture. The gains of workers can only become permanent if political power is captured by the workers. In other words, it is necessary to struggle for various rights/gains included in the “welfare state” type institutions, but an understanding of struggle just limited to this is not enough. It seems imperative that workers and their organizations go beyond the narrow horizons of the economic struggle and directly target political power. And this does not happen “spontaneously” but only if they merge with the socialist political movement that defends the power of labor. Humanity needs a new political-economic form that has to be organized on an international scale.

RedMed

www.RedMed.org

RedMed and Christian Rakovsky Centre on the move!

RedMed (short for Red Mediterranean) was, until recently, a web site that published news, opinion, commentary and political declarations from around the Mediterranean Sea, the Balkans, the Middle East, the Black Sea region, Transcaucasia, and the broader Eurasian region. It has now been transformed, as of the beginning of 2020, into a centre for propagating socialist thinking, carrying commentary and political statements and publishing various journals from the Mediterranean region all the way to Russia and the former Soviet Union.

RedMed used to work hand in hand with the Balkan Socialist Centre Christian Rakovsky to establish links between socialists and revolutionaries from these regions. However, parallel to the expansion of RedMed, the Christian Rakovsky Centre also broadened its remit. Over time three Russian organisations became members of the Christian Rakovsky Centre: the OKP (United Communist Party), the RPK (Russian Party of Communists), and the Association "Soviet Union", in addition to the original members, two political parties of two Mediterranean countries, EEK (Workers Revolutionary Party) of Greece and DIP (Revolutionary Workers Party) of Turkey. Thereupon the centre changed its name to the International Socialist Centre Christian Rakovsky.

RedMed is now publishing on a bimonthly basis both the Communist of Leningrad, journal brought out for quite some time in Russian by the RPK, and Soviet Renaissance, a new online journal in Russian prepared by the Association "Soviet Union". This is in addition to its already established commentary and political statements on world affairs in many different languages, first and foremost in English, but also French, Italian, Greek, Turkish, Russian, Farsi and Arabic.

RedMed welcomes letters, comments, news about struggles, debates and material in different languages. We would appreciate very much if people would volunteer translating the different articles and declarations that we publish in the web site into their native tongue.

Let us join hands to bring down the yoke of imperialism and capitalism in Europe, in Asia, in the Middle East and North Africa, and across the world.



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John Lennon in quarantine: A letter from Havana¹

Merriam Ansara

John Lennon is in quarantine. He, or at least his bronze sculpture, sits on a bench in the leafy park at 17th & 6th Street in Vedado, as though inviting visitors to sit next to him and have a chat. At the foot of the bench is the inscription in Spanish: You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one.

The park is in the Carmelo district of Vedado. Until March, the park received a steady stream of foreign visitors arriving both in Havana's famed classic cars and on foot. The guard on duty, from a group of local retirees called back into to service, held on to Lennon's famous glasses, bringing them over to the visitors so they could sit on the bench and have their picture taken with John Lennon (the retirees were hired after quite a few of John Lennon's glasses were stolen). Nearby in the early mornings a regular group of elders would practice Tai Chi with one of the hundreds of Sports Institute and Wushu Institute trained instructors, usually also retirees. On the weekends a famed Cuban baseball pitcher who lived in the neighborhood would come out for coaching sessions with the neighborhood youngsters.

El Carmelo is also home to another Cuban institution well known to visitors and Cubans alike: El Fabrica del Arte, a former oil factory that for at least a decade has housed a complex of discos, art galleries, restaurants and other event venues.

¹ This article was originally published on the *Counterpunch* website on 9 April 2020 (<https://www.counterpunch.org/2020/04/09/john-lennon-in-quarantine-a-letter-from-havana/>).

And it also is home to the best Guarapo stand in Havana, at 17th and 24th. Here the sugar cane stalks are ground directly into a bucket of ice and served up sweet and cold, 1 peso for a small glass, 2 pesos for a large.

Though Old Havana is known as the city's tourism center, Vedado has also long been known for its rotating population of foreign visitors, both living in its many rental units and B&Bs and frequenting its many restaurants and other venues. For this reason also it was not surprising to find that a number of cases of Covid-19 were found in that neighborhood. All Covid-19 cases to date have been from either visitors from abroad or Cubans returning from abroad or direct contacts with these two groups. Only recently have there been cases that have jumped to a third person, known as "local spread".

All regular activity came to a halt on Friday evening, April 3, 2020, at 8:00 pm. On March 23rd, 12 days after the first case of Covid-19 in Cuba, the government had activated the Councils of Defense, Cuba's Civil Defense famed worldwide for its ability to respond rapidly and efficiently to any kind of natural disaster. The Havana Defense Council had determined that there was a grave danger of Covid-19 spread in the neighborhood. The Municipal Delegate, the People's Council, and the entire infrastructure of family doctors and polyclinics agreed.

As of 8 pm, the entire neighborhood that stretches from 6th Street to 28th, Malecon to 21st, roughly the area between Paseo and the Almendares River below 23rd Street, is closed to entry and exit. Anyone with a need to enter or leave must prove that they have been tested and are free of Covid-19. The Civil Defense will ensure that all necessary supplies are brought into the neighborhood stores. The medical personnel will be checking regularly on the most vulnerable in the population. Social workers will be enlisted to help and will also help with classes. Buses traveling through the area will be restricted.

This approach to epidemic is not new in Cuba in my memory. I remember in the 1980s a section of Vedado being shut off following discovery of a single tetanus case. I also remember in the 1970s troops of patrolling nurses in white seeking out anyone not vaccinated against measles in the neighborhood in which I and my little daughter then lived. They were an impressive and determined sight. Just a few years ago when a friend contracted dengue, neighborhood patrols went searching for the source of standing water that could breed the dengue (*Aedes aegypti*, also a carrier of chikungunya, Zika, Mayaro and yellow fever) and so most likely responsible for the friend's dengue. The source was found and the resident responsible was fined.

How many cases of Covid-19 occasioned this lock down? 8 as of Friday. That may not seem like many, but Cuba takes its approach to public health very very seriously. 8 cases in such a limited area means that there is local spread, as discovered previously in another neighborhood locked down in Pinar del Rio's Consolación del Sur. Local spread, unlike community spread, means that you can trace the virus as it hops from person to person. Community spread means that you can't trace the virus and it's rapidly moving out of control. This the Cuban authorities are trying to prevent, so far, 21 days into the virus, successfully. And hence the lockdown of El Carmelo.

As a matter of fact living in Havana these days as I am feels liking being

enfolded in a warm blanket of care and concern. Every day there is a televised press conference at 11 am with detailed information on the number of new cases and how each of the patients is doing. Each day there is a meeting of the President and Cabinet, the details of which are relayed by television to the population. Each day there are special concerts by the country's leading musicians broadcast over the airwaves. Each day there is the Mesa Redonda on television starting at 6 pm or 7 pm where the country's leaders explain exactly what is happening and what needs to be done. Each day at 8 pm on the news there is more information. Each day there are programs about what you need to do, what you can do, how Cuba's laws and regulations work, what the best ways are to protect yourself and others. Each day there are teams of medical students knocking on your door to ask how you are. At the family doctor's office where I am volunteering mornings, there is a steady stream of people in and out, consulting the doctor, bringing babies for regular vaccinations, or even telling the doctor what's available that day at the neighborhood store. In the afternoons, Dr. Marta spends visiting her elderly or otherwise vulnerable patients, taking shifts at the neighborhood polyclinic, or following up on the findings of her medical student volunteers. As well, she supervises a group of Kenyan medical students doing their residency in Cuba.

At today's press conference, the National Director of Epidemiology, Dr. Francisco Duran, after running through each and every case and how they are doing (we are up to 312 cases), said he wanted to take some time to explain the difference to us between the various tests that are being used. Yesterday he explained the evolution period of the disease. Today he said that the rapid test kits that Cuba has just been able to get are to measure the antibodies in people who are suspected of harboring the virus (these are the kits that Cuba had trouble getting into the Island, I believe, because the owner of Alibaba balked at challenging the US embargo); they don't actually rule out the virus; they are a quick and reliable way to see who needs further following up on. The PCR test is a real time proof positive test. He explained how each is used and how we can understand. That is a hallmark of everything we are being told: The health authorities believe that if we have the most information possible, we will be able to make the best judgments. (Information has been a hallmark of the Cuban Revolution since the very beginning; it was the basis of the Literacy Campaign: An educated population will make the best decisions about building their own and our collective future.)

Everyone is wearing cloth masks in the streets. The Public Health authorities have been unequivocal about this since the beginning: Too many people are asymptomatic or don't show symptoms until it is too late. Social distancing is an established protocol (*Quédate en la casa!*) but one not always easy to enforce in Cuba, especially in Havana. Too many people, in fact everyone, must go to the store regularly and form lines when scarce and needed goods like chicken or detergent come in. Cuba has dealt with epidemics before: Hemorrhaging dengue at home; Cholera in Haiti; Ebola in Africa. You cannot control people coughing sneezing spitting. In a society without cars and dependent on daily shopping it is not feasible for everyone to stay indoors all of the time. A physical barrier between each person's nose & mouth and everyone else's is a reasonable precaution. There

are endless programs and signs on how to care for your masks, how to make them so you have more than one, how to clean yourself before you reenter your house, what precautions to take when you go out. All stores and the few remaining restaurants (mostly take out) have bottles of Hypochlorite, this country's low cost solution to personal and household disinfectant, at the door. Police are on hand to try to ensure that people in the long lines in front of stores are maintaining 2 meters distance. Some stores are trying novel approaches, such as handing out tickets for your turn.

Face masks are now taken for granted in this society of ours here. We're used to hearing the President's voice a bit muffled behind his mask. We're used to seeing his cabinet sitting every other chair, sporting a variety of homemade masks of different colors and patterns. We've gotten used to people crossing the street when they see us coming and don't take it personally. We've gotten used to the smell of chlorine in hypochlorite and to the rituals of entering our homes: take off shoes, sprinkle hypochlorite on hands and rub vigorously, clean off the dog's paws with hypochlorite and then water, open the door and then clean off key and doorknob with hypochlorite, shed clothing and mask as soon as step in the door, wash hands, take shower, don inside clothes, carry on.

This is still Cuba, though, irrepressible as ever. The other evening I asked my nephew to take me to a friend's house in Atarés. It was her birthday and I had some chicken for her. As we rode down Calzada de Cerro we marveled at how empty it was; how there was almost no foot traffic and the buses were half empty. Erik had just commented on how proud he was of his fellow Cubans even keeping the children inside. Then we turned into Atarés and pre-Covid Havana came into view: Every doorway had one or two people sitting in it, people strolled the street, children played marbles in a bunch. The only difference was that everyone was wearing a face mask.

Some of my Cuban friends will complain that I don't understand Cuba; I'm not Cuban. It's just because Cubans feel that they are so well taken care of by the government that they don't need to comply 100%. In this, though, I think that Cubans are very much like everyone everywhere: there is a degree to which the danger is simply not real; and in Cuba's case, the nature of the Cuban people is not to go shopping or do other such practices that we might consider risky but to hang out with their neighbors.

And I might add, while there is Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp, there is no Zoom. When you try to go to the Zoom site it says: 403 Forbidden. What's with that? The rest of the world is using Zoom and we in Cuba can't?

So back to John Lennon. The thing about John Lennon is that in many ways he sums up many of the ideals of the Cuban Revolution, or at least Cubans see it that way. His dream was of world peace; Cuba's dream is even broader: not just world peace, but world community and collaboration. Everyone here — everyone — is supportive of every step Cuba is taking to send help wherever they are asked. Oh, I'm sure you can find a few disaffected whiners and complainers, but the goals of the Cuban Revolution are deeply, deeply ingrained in even the most alienated youth or hardened elders. Fidel planted the seeds of solidarity: Revolution is the sense of the historic moment; it is changing everything that must be changed; it is full

equality and liberty; it is being treated and treating all others as human beings;... it is defending the values in which we believe at any cost; it is modesty, lack of self-interest, altruism, solidarity and heroism...

These seeds, though, fed the essential nature of the people of Cuban and I think mostly likely would feed all humans allowed to flourish within the cosmos of such caring. We see in the United States so many people rising to be their best selves in the face of this adversity, despite the cringing narcissism, bullying, misrepresentation and lack of values at the top. Cuba is exceptional, but it is exceptional because it has been asked and made the decision to be so: Cuba knows that it is fighting for its own survival and that its own survival depends on the survival of all of us.

Every night at 9 pm. We all go out on our balconies or lean out our windows and we clap and clap. We clap for our medical personnel, at home and abroad. We clap out of enthusiasm and out of kindness. We clap for the essential workers keeping our society going. We clap our expectations and hopes for the future.

The Marxist interpretation of the Erdoğan phenomenon now in Farsi, after English and Turkish!

The Neoliberal Landscape and the Rise of Islamist Capital in Turkey was edited by Neşecan Balkan, Erol Balkan and Ahmet Öncü and first published by Bergahn Books, USA, in hardback

format in 2015 and paperback format in 2017. It was immediately translated into Turkish and published by Yordam Kitap in 2016. Some of the articles were written by members of the Editorial Board of our journal, namely Burak Gürel, Sungur Savran, Kurtar Tanyılmaz, and Özgür Öztürk. The book has now been translated into Farsi by Aidin Akhavan and published by Agah Publishers in Tehran, with a new Preface prepared specially for the Farsi edition, bringing the developments up to date.

From the “Preface to the Farsi Edition”

“The history of the AKP and its leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in power is a story of deception and misjudgement on a colossal scale for mainstream bourgeois thinking internationally and a certain brand of left-wing thinking in Turkey itself... It was not only the Western world that succumbed to the temptation of taking the ruse of the AKP seriously... For all political moderates of the Middle East living under authoritarian regimes, Erdoğan seemed to embody just the right dose between alliance with the West and loyalty to Islamic tradition... This was among the ruling classes and the intelligentsia... Fed up with the servile attitude of Arab leaders towards US policy in the Middle East and their total capitulation before Israel, the masses yearned for a leader like Erdoğan... As the title of the original English edition, *The Neoliberal Environment and the Rise of Islamist Capital in Turkey*, makes clear, the dominant view that permeates the articles brought together in this book presents the AKP as the political instrument for the rise of a new, Islamist fraction of the ruling classes in Turkey within the overall neoliberal environment of the early 21st century. Its historic mission had nothing to do with establishing democracy in Turkey.”



The return of barbarism: Fascism in the 21st century (2) The rise of proto-fascism

Sungur Savran

Fascism has raised its head once again at this beginning of the 21st century.¹ However much the intellectuals of the bourgeoisie and its media try to hide the fact, when fascism shows its ugly face everyone recognises it. When, 75 years after Nazism was defeated in Germany, a racist kills nine people for reasons of hate and the circumstances of this massacre are questioned by millions or when fascists attempt to start a pogrom against immigrants in the cities of Chemnitz and Köthen or when neo-Nazis chant out loud “National Socialism! Now! Now! Now!”, no one in their right mind doubts as to the real identity of these people. When, hordes of white supremacists, having raided Charlottesville, Virginia in the United States

¹ This article was originally written for the Turkish edition of our journal, *Devrimci Marksizm* and published in its issue No. 38 of Spring 2019. It has been translated (by the author himself) without any changes to the main body of the text and therefore is a bit dated at times, as it necessarily does not cover the changes that have come about in the course of the last twelve months. We have tried to make up for this in two ways. On the one hand, we inserted some new footnotes in order to bring the reader up to date on certain issues or countries. On the other, we have added as an Appendix our overall assessment of the elections to the European Parliament held in May 2019, published on the web site RedMed (www.redmed.org) in the wake of the elections.

in order to defend pro-slavery Confederate generals, display their affiliation under labels such as the American Neo-Nazi Party or the Klu Klux Klan, no one questions who they are. Everyone knows. Behind euphemisms such as “Alt-right”, everyone sees through the true nature of these fascists.

But when the fascists or the Nazis do not disclose themselves so blatantly, it becomes necessary to recognise who they are, to discover their nature, to situate them precisely, and to understand what kind of threat they represent for the future of humanity. Alongside the vacuous term of “populism”, other appellations are put into use in the bourgeois media, such as “extreme right”, “racist”, “nativist”, “nationalist”, or even “neo-fascist”. Everyone immediately understands which currents are being discussed. Everyone knows who the “nationalists” are in Italy that are a constant threat to migrant labourers or who the “populists” are if it is a question of the European elections. But these terms are not used for a scientific characterisation of the parties in question. In fact, these terms are simply insufficient to do that. For, leaving aside the appellation “neo-fascist”, none of these characterisations are sufficiently concrete, sufficiently descriptive, sufficiently distinctive as to the nature of the phenomenon at hand.

Our objective in this article is to conduct a scientific analysis of this current that has its centre in Europe, but has nonetheless spread to the rest of the world, to identify its main characteristics, to examine future prospects and to advance ideas about how to fight it. In doing this, the analysis displayed in the first instalment of this article published in the previous (2019) issue of this journal will be of guidance to us.² The knowledge provided to us concerning classical fascism there will be used to understand these movements developing in the early part of the 21st century.

If we leave aside the obsession of bourgeois intellectuals and the left-wing intellectuals who slavishly follow in the footsteps of the former with so-called “populism”, there remains a different kind of conceptual laxity that is common to broad sections of the left. This is a common characterisation of all repressive regimes or strongman politics or racist movements under the same general heading. When people start to talk about Marine Le Pen in France or Bolsonaro in Brazil, they immediately skip all the way to Putin in Russia or Orbán in Hungary or Erdoğan in Turkey or even Duterte in the Philippines. There is no doubt that these governments (or “regimes” when that term applies) have much in common with those we are discussing and with fascism. The common elements are obvious at least regarding rights and freedoms and, more generally, law. But to ignore their differences and collect them in the same basket may imply a lack of understanding of the real nature of these other movements and an underestimation of the threats posed by the proto-fascist movements. We are simply leaving outside of the purview of this article the series of countries named from Russia all the way to the Philippines above. We are simply abstracting from them. It is necessary to decide on each case on the basis of its own merits and come to a conclusion as to whether that specific case belongs to the same family as those movements that we consider to be a manifestation of

2 Sungur Savran, “The Return of Barbarism: Fascism in the 21st Century. (1) Classical Fascism”, *Revolutionary Marxism* 2019, <http://www.devrimcimarksizm.net/en/revolutionary-marxism>.

the rise of fascism. Rather than do that in this article, we will focus on the genuine instances of the current that we wish to examine.

In the same vein, it is quite common to see the *takfiri* movements³ (such as Al Qaeda or Islamic State) in the Islamic world in the same light as these currents we are talking about and label them “Islamic fascist”. Taking into consideration the fact that in our day and age, political formations in the Islamic world are the product of a specifically determined itinerary deeply marked by the relations of this world to that of Christendom or more generally the West, we will refrain from such reductionism that is not sufficiently concrete in its treatment of the object at hand and, furthermore, represents total abstraction from the class basis of fascism.

We have thus delineated the borders of our object. The political family we will dwell upon is, in our opinion, a series of movements that are historically linked to the fascist movement. This is not any old repressive or nationalistic movement. The phenomenon that we wish to discover is the resurgence of fascism on the stage of history. We can investigate the question of whether the regimes or movements that we propose to leave aside are related to fascism or, even if they are not historically linked to it, will become connected to it in the future only when we have reached clarity on this question.

We can then start to examine the family that we are interested in.

Panorama: Europe

In the wake of the defeat of Nazism and fascism at the end of World War II, movements that remained loyal to this current dragged on their existence as organisations that were largely isolated and marginalised from the rest of society. There existed movements in diverse countries that dedicated themselves to the principles of Nazism or fascism and at times they conducted their political business in the open, but were, at other times, banned from politics. Some of these were able to make themselves heard more successfully than others. For instance, the *Movimento sociale italiano* (Msi-Italian Social Movement) made its presence felt for half a century. In Germany, where Nazism was remembered no less than as a trauma, the *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NPD-National Democratic Party of Germany) tried to create a kind of revival on the basis of a unification of a series of grouplets. In Britain, the British National Party (BNP) made itself heard after the 1980s. However, these were really ***forms of survival of the doctrine in organisational disguise***. Their capacity to carry on politics on the national scale was limited.

The first instances of success in the effort to overcome marginalisation came in France and Austria. In France, the *Front National* (FN-National Front), established by a veteran of the Algerian war by the name of Jean-Marie Le Pen in the early 1970s, started to have some impact on national politics from the early 1980s on.

³ The word “*takfir*” implies declaring others infidels. The *takfiri* movement is that movement which takes upon itself to decide whether a person or a community is Muslim or infidel, irrespective of how that individual or community perceives and defines itself. This means that *takfirism* sees Muslims who do not live in conformity with *its own* conception of Islam as infidels.

That the initiatives taken by François Mitterrand, who was elected twice president of the republic and ruled France for 14 years between 1981 and 1995 with the support of the French Communist Party, in order to divide the right had a part to play in this resurgence is a widely accepted opinion. Le Pen was a politician who not only was a French racist through and through, but proved his affinity to Nazism by his full-fledged historical negationism, almost denying the Holocaust (“*un point de détail de l’histoire*”).

In Austria, on the other hand, the *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ – Austrian Freedom Party), whose roots go back all the way to the 1950s, made a leap forward towards the end of the century after having remained marginalised for long. Its leader Jörg Haider was someone who was loyal to the “cause” to the degree of making positive references to Hitler from time to time. The FPÖ raised its share of the vote swiftly from the late 1980s on and Haider was elected governor in his own *Land* and would also be sent to the federal parliament.

Both parties made a breakthrough at the turn of the century. In 1999, FPÖ came second in Austrian elections and set up a government with the traditional right-wing party of the country. This created a serious malaise both within Austria and abroad and especially within the European Union (EU). Haider was forced to renounce the leadership of the party. Later when Haider formed another party because of discord within the FPÖ itself, the latter stopped for a time to pose a threat.

As for the FN in France, the party made a big leap forward in the presidential elections of 2002. Jean-Marie Le Pen managed to receive the highest number of votes after traditional rightist Jacques Chirac in the first round and thus was able to stand in the second round for the first time. However, being able to raise his share of the popular vote from 17 per cent to only 18 (in quantitative terms from 4.8 million to 5.5 million) he lost the elections by a distant margin. One has to conclude from the evidence that the support given to Le Pen at this stage was exclusively from a hard core racist minority of the country and that he was isolated from the rest of society, as he was not able to attract much additional support from other sections of the population.

In other countries of Europe, parties within the sphere of attraction of fascism did not make their presence felt in this period. More generally, the following should be said: the pre-2008 period is the *prehistory* of the movement in Europe. The real history started with the crash of the Wall Street bank Lehman Brothers in September 2008 and the onset of the Third Great Depression.

The first advances came in Hungary and Greece. As we know, Hungary is a country that entered the path of capitalist restoration in 1989 after decades of existence as a bureaucratically degenerated workers’ state and at a certain stage was admitted to the EU along with other central and eastern European countries. The economic disruption and poverty created as a consequence of capitalist restoration had already created an explosive situation in this country. The challenging circumstances that sprang up with the onset of the Third Great Depression pushed the youth and a growing part of the population at large rapidly to the side of fascism. As an explicitly fascist party that wields a paramilitary militia called the Hungarian Guard and propagates a historical narrative of the origin of the Hungarian people

on the basis of an ideology of the original fatherland called “Turan”, Jobbik made a big leap forward from 2010 on. Since then it has been receiving approximately 20 per cent of the popular vote. (Significant change has come about in Jobbik in recent years, which we will be touching upon below.)

Although Greece certainly was not confronted with the kind of disruption that was experienced by former workers’ states, it is nonetheless the country that has suffered most in Europe the consequences of the Third Great Depression and been crushed under the weight of its foreign debt and the diktat of austerity by the EU. Of the two “nationalist” parties of the country, LAOS (the People’s Orthodox Revival) was established in 2000 and soon managed to send representatives to parliament. However, another “nationalist” party, the Golden Dawn, accusing LAOS of betrayal, adopting ideologically a much more radical stance, and, with its paramilitary bands, posing a vital threat to migrants, refugees and leftist militants, was strengthened rapidly as a result of the economic crisis that scorched Greece from 2010 on. In 2012, LAOS lost its seats in parliament and Golden Dawn entered parliament triumphantly as the third biggest party of the country.⁴

One has to be very clear here. Jobbik and Golden Dawn do not only display the characteristics of fascist parties in the ideological and political spheres, but also create a sense of permanent, albeit slow motion, civil war using their paramilitary militia. They unabashedly claim Nazi symbols. In other words, with the onset of the Third Great Depression, the movement has, in Hungary and Greece, turned towards openly owning the fascist heritage, with at least a difference of degree from France and Austria. It would not be incorrect to say that this sheds light on related parties in other countries that cannot go so far as to claim that heritage openly, but do refer to it occasionally. On the other hand, it would be a mistake to ignore the difference between the two wings of the family.

We can sum up what has been said so far in the following manner: movements that have their origin to differing degrees in fascism or Nazism made remarkable inroads in political life, first in two countries at the turn of the 21st century and then in two other countries after 2008. However, these were still isolated cases. A leap forward across the entire continent, an explosive development in other words, came about for the first time during the 2014 elections to the European Parliament. In tandem with this development, there occurred a rise in a European country that was not a member of the EU, Ukraine, during the Maidan events of summer 2014.

In the European elections, three such parties came first in their country: the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) in Britain, the Front National in France, now under the leadership of Marine Le Pen, the daughter of the founding father, and a far right party in Denmark called the Danish People’s Party. There was also very rapid growth of racist and far right nationalist parties in many other countries.

As for Ukraine, within the mass movement in the Maidan events that ousted the

4 Since the writing of the original article, Golden Dawn has suffered at the hands of the electorate and lost its seats in parliament in 2019. Moreover, its leadership is being prosecuted for different crimes.

pro-Russian administration of the country, the paramilitary striking force consisted of several fascist parties. These were openly fascist parties that claimed the Nazi symbols of the Bandera movement that became prominent under German occupation during World War II. When the Maidan movement succeeded in bringing down the previous administration and a transitional government replaced it, some of these parties became coalition partners in that government. This was the first experience in power of openly fascist parties on the European continent since the fall of Hitler! (That some leftists dared call the Maidan events a “revolution” gains a grotesque allure in the light of these facts.)

The second leap forward of the overall movement after 2014 came in 2016, when, in the wake of the hegemonic role played by the UKIP at the Brexit referendum in Britain, Donald Trump was elected that November president of the United States. The later developments in the two countries diverged widely: the charismatic leader of UKIP, Nigel Farage, disappeared from the scene and his UKIP became irrelevant for British politics for a while.⁵ (Tommy Robinson, leader of a much more radical fascist movement, somewhat increased his clout benefitting from this temporary absence.⁶) In contrast, the victory in the US presidential elections gave both Trump, whose political stance we have been calling “loose cannon fascism”, referring through that not only to his temper, but also the fact that he has no disciplined party behind him to accomplish the tasks he sets himself, and the Alt-Right movement, the new racist, white supremacist, pro-imperialistic right-wing movement of recent years a lot of leeway to further their agenda. (We are not leaving the US behind. We will come back to it in the second section of the article.)

Since 2016 the movement has been growing and spreading towards the rest of Europe in uninterrupted fashion. (There are times when, as in the presidential election in France in 2017, because very high precocious expectations develop within the movement, there comes about a serious sense of defeat if those expectations are not met. However, what really counts is not the variable psychology both in friend and foe, but the growth in the objective strength of the movement in time.)

The veteran and best-established representative of the current, the FN in France, put up its leader Marine Le Pen as candidate in the the presidential elections of spring 2017, who received the support of a full one third of the French electorate in the second round against Emmanuel Macron. Public opinion concurred that she put up an extremely bad performance in the television debate on the eve of the second round. And because expectations were so high, this was experienced as a defeat in

5 Since the writing of the original article, Nigel Farage has come back. Britain was unable to leave the EU, going through a chaotic process for three long years. That is why it had to participate in the European elections of May 2019. Farage, already an MEP (Member of the European Parliament), used this opportunity to set up a makeshift list called Brexit for these elections. He came in first once again, receiving 31 per cent of the vote. But his rise proved once again to be short-lived, as Boris Johnson, the Conservative leader who is also passionately pro-Brexit stole the show by winning the snap parliamentary elections at the end of the year.

6 Probably trying to repeat Farage’s success and steal the show, Robinson participated in the European elections. But since Farage also entered the fray and showed a very strong standing, Robinson’s support seems to have evaporated.

some quarters within the party and outside. We consider it as extremely significant that *one French voter in three* voted for this ultra-nationalist and racist candidate.

General elections were held in the Netherlands at around the same time as the French presidential election and the FVV (Freedom Party) of Geert Wilders came in second. Again, there was disillusion in party ranks because the party had climbed to first place in public opinion polls after the blatant racism it had propagated during the large migratory wave of 2015. Probably under the impact of this disillusionment, at the elections for the Senate in March 2019, another racist party called the Democracy Forum (FvD) under the leadership of Thierry Baudet took the first place and the vote for the FVV declined.

The FPÖ in Austria, after having been eclipsed momentarily in the wake of Jörg Haider's split, has now recovered. In the presidential elections of December 2016 (in Austria a largely ceremonial post), the candidate of the FPÖ, Norbert Hofer, lost to the candidate of the Greens by a hair's breadth. This obviously means that the candidate of a party related, to say the least, to fascism in one way or another, managed to receive the vote of *one Austrian in two*! The FPÖ came in third in the general elections held at the end of 2017. The traditional right-wing party the ÖVP, which had earlier been reprimanded when it formed a coalition government with Jörg Haider, now delivered, in a coalition government under the premiership of its 31-year old leader Sebastian Kurz, very important seats, such as the interior, foreign affairs, and justice, to the FPÖ, this time with a very weak protest accompanying the formation of such a government.⁷

Developments in Germany followed a different path. Germany was the country with the weakest results for the movement in the European elections of 2014. This was because there was yet no party in sight. This may probably be explained by the long-standing trauma that Nazism has wrought on the German people. However, precisely in that same year of 2014 a racist movement emerged in Germany: called Pegida (Patriots of Europe against the Islamisation of the West), the movement saw the light of day in Dresden and staged powerful demonstrations against immigrants, particularly in the regions of the former East Germany. The movement suffered a great debacle before engendering a political product. The incident is telling: Lutz Bachmann, the leader of the movement, shared a personal photo with a Hitler moustache on social media in January 2015, which raised extreme rage in the country. As Pegida's prestige collapsed, the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD - Alternative for Germany), a party that had been formed recently, even refused to sit down and talk with Pegida leaders.⁸

⁷ The situation has changed radically since the writing of the article. The FPÖ leader was caught red-handed in a scheme of political corruption and the party lost quite a lot of voters in elections and had to exit government.

⁸ For a detailed overview of Germany, see Kurtar Tanyılmaz, "Almanya'da Faşizmin Ayak Sesleri" (in Turkish), *Devrimci Marksizm*, No. 38, Spring 2019. For an analysis of the situation after the European elections of May 2019, see, by the same author, "Implications of the European Elections: the Crisis of the German Bourgeois Democracy", <http://redmed.org/article/implications-european-parliament-elections-crisis-german-bourgeois-democracy>.

Founded by college professors, receiving serious support from several quarters within business and media, the AfD came in third in the general elections of 2017 and became a decisive force in German political life. The professors were kicked out of the party, more plebeian elements taking the party's administration over.

An event of vital importance occurred in Germany in September 2018 in the formerly East German cities of Chemnitz and Köthen, when thousands of fascist militants, wielding openly Nazi symbols, carried out a rehearsal of a pogrom against immigrants and leftists. These hordes, who did not even bother to hide their affinity to Nazism, were protected by the “gentle”, “civilised”, and “pliable” militants of the AfD!

The Italian situation is quite complex. In the past the representative of fascism in Italy was the Msi we have already mentioned, a party that had been established after the war by partisans of Mussolini and survived until the 1990s. Today the picture is radically different. The main actor now is the *Lega* of Matteo Salvini. This is a transmutation of the *Lega Nord*, a regionalist party that defended at least autonomy if not full independence for the rich north of Italy. It has now banished the qualifying “Nord” from its name and adopted a nationalist, racist, anti-EU line. The new Lega obtained a very successful result in the elections of March 2018. Its leader Salvini became deputy prime minister and (significantly) minister of the interior in a coalition government with the M5S, a hodge-podge newcomer without any serious programme binding its militants or grassroots supporters. Having gone into the coalition on the basis of the 17 per cent vote the Lega received in the elections, Salvini pursued racist and anti-immigrant policies, which, in today's conditions raised his standing in opinion polls to at least twice that.⁹

There are other parties in Italy from the same family. One of these is the *Fratelli d'Italia* (Brothers of Italy, ironically led by a woman leader), established in 2012. This party participated in the 2018 elections in the same bloc as the Lega, but received a much smaller share of the vote. Then there are parties that do not refrain from running in the elections but accord priority to street politics. *Forza Nuova* (New Force) and *Casa Pound* (the Pound House, after the famous American poet Ezra Pound of fascist inclination) are indubitably cut of fascist cloth.

In Nordic countries as well, organisations that belong to the same family have been growing recently. Perhaps in similar fashion to Italy, these should be taken up at two different levels. At one level stand parties that are actively present in the domain of parliamentary politics and have gained success in recent years. We have already spoken of the Danish People's Party. The Swedish Democrats received 18 per cent of the popular vote in the general elections of September 2018 and became a third force on the political spectrum alongside the social democratic-socialist bloc, on the one hand, and the bloc of “bourgeois” parties, to use the terminology

⁹ Since the writing of the article, Salvini has left government. There is now an M5S-Democratic Party government in power. Salvini is in opposition waiting for his turn. The Lega came in first in the European elections of May 2019. See Burak Sayim, “The (Still) Resistible Rise of Salvini”, <http://redmed.org/article/still-resistible-rise-salvini>. We will of course have to wait and see how the Coronavirus pandemic will reshape the Italian political scene.

peculiar to that country. In Finland, the True Finns party, having become several years ago one of the four biggest parties of the country for the first time, later split into two parties, one relatively moderate and one extremist. The moderate wing has almost evaporated with the extremist party coming in a very close second to the social democrats, having received 17.5 per cent of the popular vote at the general elections of April 2019.

A totally different kind of organisation is emerging at the other level. Nordic Resistance is a movement that is organizing only as a street gang. It does not engage in parliamentary politics itself, although it will use like-minded parties more amenable to parliamentary politics as a front, a shell, so to speak, at least in some countries. For instance, before the latest elections, there were two members of the Nordic Resistance in the Swedish parliament that had been elected on a Swedish Democrats ticket. There are also widespread rumours that the Swedish Democrats extend financial support to Nordic Resistance.¹⁰

For a long time, Spain remained the exception among the large countries of Europe with respect to the emergence of this type of party. This was rather startling for those who are familiar with the plethora of extreme right movements that haunted this country in the 20th century and the despotism of an extremely reactionary Franco administration that lasted from the late 1930s all the way up to the mid-1970s. However, a local election in the autonomous region of Andalusia in December 2018 gave a new party, Vox, 11 per cent of the popular vote and 12 seats in the regional parliament. Vox displays all the typical characteristics of the family of parties we have been talking about, but also an extreme Spanish nationalism in reaction and hostility to the Catalan independence movement. It is no coincidence that the new party won its first electoral victory in Andalusia. This is a region mired in poverty and the Third Great Depression has left deep scars there. The rate of unemployment still hovers around 21 per cent.

The political party system in Spain is already undergoing a crisis: it has not been possible for almost three years now to form a reasonably stable government in the country. The country went to the polls at the end of April 2019 for general elections for the third time in four years. Vox made a great stride forward and raised its share of the popular vote to above 10 per cent and obtained 24 seats in a parliament of 350 seats.

This type of party is on the rise in many countries that are not in a decisive position for the overall politics of the EU or of Europe at large: Belgium, Slovakia, Bulgaria and many other Balkan countries have entered the fray and have seen similar movements reach a certain threshold.

The European elections to be held at the end of May 2019 will, in all probability, represent a new apogee in the march to victory of this current.¹¹

¹⁰ For much more on both Nordic Resistance and the Party of True Finns, see Muzaffer Ege Alper, "EU Elections in the North: The Victory of Anti-Immigration over Anti-Austerity", <http://redmed.org/article/eu-elections-north-victory-anti-immigration-over-anti-austerity>.

¹¹ See Appendix 1 for an overall assessment of these elections.

Panorama: the US, Latin America, Asia

It is predominantly in Europe that this family of far right movements has shown its ugly face in the era of the Third Great Depression. There are many different reasons for this: if one of these is the fact that this continent is the original fatherland of classical fascism and Nazism and therefore has carried on some of its traditions in subterranean fashion, another is the fact that Europe has emerged as the weak link of the world capitalist system in the context of the depression.

However, the phenomenon did not remain confined to this continent, but was observable on others as well, albeit with a lag. The movement obtained its biggest victory in the United States of America, the country with the most powerful economy and military in the world. In our opinion, Donald Trump is a representative of this movement, naturally displaying certain characteristics peculiar to America. Because we explained this fully in an article published in the first issue of *Revolutionary Marxism* immediately after Trump was elected, we will not go into any details as to why we think Trump bears a relation of kinship to this family of movements. The present article is, in a certain sense, a sequel to that one and the interested reader, we venture to say, might find that earlier one useful as well.¹²

We will only summarise the gist of our analysis on Trump so as to make the case intelligible in the context of this article. From day one, even before the elections, we labelled Trump the “loose cannon fascist”, an expression more readily comprehensible in Turkish than in English. The essence of this characterisation lies in the fact that although Trump ran and got elected on the Republican ticket, he is in fact a magnate-turned-politician *without a party*. Fascism is an organised movement, the business of a party that is well-organised and disciplined. That is why his rise to power without fully relying on the strength of that kind of party, something due to the peculiarities of American political traditions (of which the so far undented absolute domination of the two-party system is the most significant), should be considered as an anomaly. A more psychological sense of the term “loose cannon fascism” is an allusion to the character of the man since he has proved to be quite unpredictable from day one. This is certainly related to the personality traits of the man himself, but requires, as a precondition, the more objective sense of the term. To put it in a nutshell, the unpredictability is connected with the loose relationship between the man and the party.

In the political orientation of Trump, one sees the influence of other political currents rather than mainstream Republican views. One of these is the Tea Party movement that was born within the very same Republican Party as a product of the Third Great Depression. Although this far right current was not ultimately successful as a political project, it nonetheless left its mark on the general political atmosphere of the party and the country. The second ideological-political source is the new trend called “alt-right” (the “alternative right”), a trend that is through and through imperialistic and white supremacist in its outlook. One name deserves

12 Sungur Savran, “The Great Challenge: Winning the Working Class Back from Ideological Irredentism”, *Revolutionary Marxism* 2017, <http://www.devrimcimarksizm.net/sayi/revolutionary-marxism-2017>.

special mention here. Steve Bannon, one-time editor of an “alt-right” news web site called Breitbart News, was chief advisor to Trump both during his election campaign and in the first few months after he took office and had great influence on his policies. His departure from the White House without any signal of tension with the president has remained shrouded in mystery to this day. But thanks to this departure, we have obtained one of the strongest pieces of evidence as to how Trump had a relation of kinship to the family of movements in Europe that we have been dwelling upon in this article. After having abandoned his post in the White House, Bannon concentrated his whole political clout towards recasting these European parties and trying to turn them into a weighty political actor on the continent.

It must be added that Trump’s conduct in office has confirmed our characterisation as well. He has taken steps to fulfil his electoral promises regarding Muslim peoples (a travel ban imposed upon passengers travelling from certain Muslim countries) and to build his cherished Mexican wall, even going so far as to declare a temporary state of emergency in order to force the US Congress into ceding to his demand of funds for the wall. If he manages to erect a wall on the Mexican border or any other system to the same end, this will be a memorial to his undeniable racism. His positive attitude towards the camp of far right movements gathered in Charlottesville, Virginia in the summer of 2017, among the ranks of which, it must be emphasized, stood the Ku Klux Klan and the American Nazis, clearly attested to his ideological inclinations. But the most important indicator of his kinship to fascism is his economic policies. We content ourselves with a simple assertion here as we will come back to this point in more detail below.

In order to avoid misunderstandings, let us note two caveats here. Although the concept “loose cannon fascist” is in the end a metaphor, in effect we do not regard Trump as a full-fledged case of fascism, any more than the other movements we are examining in this article. When we reach a complete overall characterisation of these movements below, it will become clear how we situate Trump himself. The second caveat has to do with the “loose cannon” aspect. The metaphor here refers primarily to the fact that Trump is not the leader of a well-disciplined fascist party. We by no means imply through this concept that he determines his policies according to his personal whims, independently of the needs and demands of the US bourgeoisie. As we will explain below, Trump’s policies are, no less than those of the other parties we are examining, to be seen as very concrete tendencies born within the bosom of the bourgeoisie of the respective countries.

If we have dwelled to such length on Trump, this is owing to the fact that the country he is ruling over is the one that has the greatest impact on the world’s economy, politics and military affairs. The other two countries that we now turn to are countries with immense weight in their own regions, but lack the clout of the US worldwide. That is why we will touch upon them more briefly.

It should not come as a surprise to anyone if one were to claim that India is amongst the most decisive countries in the politics of Asia. It will soon catch up with and surpass China populationwise, becoming thereby the largest country of the world, is a nuclear power in its own right, and has even proved recently that it ranks fourth in space technology, after the US, Russia and China. It is in this

country, which harbours close to 200 million Muslims in an ocean of Hindus, has gone through the trials and tribulations of the Partition, and has been rocked by strife between the two communities (summed up by the term “communalism” in Indian political literature) since the early 1990s, where the standard-bearer of Hindutva nationalism, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has now been in power for six years. The leader of the party, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is a politician with a political record upon which the long shadow of collaboration with one of the greatest pogroms committed against Muslims is cast.

One particularity of the BJP stands out: the existence of paramilitary forces claiming allegiance to the party has played a powerful effect in the historical development of the party. We are not claiming that India lives now under a fascist regime. Nonetheless, it should not be ignored that the danger is very real and that the most reactionary characteristics of the BJP may take over the Indian political scene.¹³

The family of movements that we are examining has most recently made an inroad in Latin America. Jair Bolsonaro, almost universally acclaimed as a “fascist”, has been elected president of Brazil in the wake of the conviction to eight years and subsequent imprisonment of Lula, the historic leader of the PT (Workers’ Party), for an unproven case of corruption, upon the explicit instruction of the military.¹⁴ A racist and an enemy of women’s and gay people’s rights and an extreme advocate of neoliberal economic policy, Bolsonaro also openly supports the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil from 1964 to the mid-1980s with brutal methods. His vice-president, a retired army general, has had no qualms saying that if need be, Congress should be shut down and the military should take over the country. Bolsonaro’s love affair with the army is by no means platonic: his government is packed with generals. The military dictatorship established in 1964 is now being celebrated every year starting from its 45th anniversary in 2019.

Bolsonaro displays affinity to fascism in his hostility towards the PT and the unions and his zeal in mobilising the Brazilian petty-bourgeoisie, filled with hatred against the PT, which remained in power for 14 years, but tends towards the methods of a traditional military dictatorship in his infatuation with the armed forces.

The US, India and Brazil are three key countries that can be very influential in helping this family of movements to extend to other countries. While the US is the hegemon of the world (albeit more and more questioned in its supremacy), India is a giant in the context of Asia and Brazil in that of Latin America. The fact that Trump turned to a much more aggressive policy with respect to Venezuela as soon as Bolsonaro took office is evidence as to how important Brazil is in the overall context of Latin America. In other words, the future is filled with threats for both Asia and Latin America.

13 For the Indian situation in its entirety the reader can consult with great benefit Burak Gürel’s article on the question in this issue of *Revolutionary Marxism*.

14 Since the writing of this article, Lula has been released from prison. But the damage was done, making it possible for Bolsonaro to win the elections.

Political characteristics and class nature

Are there common traits shared by the movements we are examining? Are these traits specific enough to these movements so as to distinguish them from others? How can the class character of these movements be described? Let us now proceed in our task of understanding the nature of these movements by answering these questions.

The first common trait that hits the eye is a sickly racism, hatred for immigrants and refugees, anti-Semitism and hostility to Muslims. These traits are certainly closely connected to the powerful presence of an unshakeable faith in one's own nation or race (usually the white race), so commonly spread within imperialist countries. As the non-white races or nations continue to swamp (the term is due to Margaret Thatcher) the prosperous and peaceful territories of the white Western civilisation, they debase civilisation. The reaction that takes thus a cultural form in the mind of the bourgeois and the petty-bourgeois turns, among the ranks of the proletariat and of the poor, into grievances of the form "they come and take away our welfare programs and become our rivals, steal our jobs, raise house rents, and make crime a widespread occurrence".

The movements we are discussing exploit the prejudices and concerns that already exist in the imperialist countries to the full and win mass support on the basis of these sentiments that are almost inscribed as an embedded ideology in the ranks of the population. It is very easy to understand what has been said up to this point. However, this is just the background, so to speak. The gist of the matter lies elsewhere. Against this background acting as a facilitator, racism/nationalism, anti-Semitism and hatred for Muslims all serve a very specific purpose for the movements we are discussing. ***This is not any old racism. It is a specific kind of racism that is trying to substitute class contradictions by contradictions between nations and races.***

There is a second aspect that seems identical, but is distinct from and broader than racism in its function, although it also comprehends racism itself. This may be labelled as the "über alles syndrome". As the reader may be familiar, "Deutschland über alles", or, in other words, "Germany above all", is the refrain of the German national anthem, one that was made into a symbol of German racism under the Nazis. Although this was adopted as the national anthem before the Nazis came to power and remained the national anthem after the Nazis' ouster, this verse asserting the absolute primacy of Germany has always been identified with Nazi racism. It is this idea that is adapted by each of these movements to its own country that marks these movements. Trump's idea of "America first" turns into the "*prima gli italiani*" ("the Italians first") in the electoral propaganda of Italian fascists. As we shall see presently, this really lays bare the essence of a solution sections of the bourgeoisie opt for in the environment of the deep economic crisis the world is going through, but even before that it strikes by its sheer egotism. This, then, is what we call the "über alles syndrome" that accompanies racism in these movements. It raises the idea of the advance of nations at each other's cost in opposition to the liberal myth of "win win" and makes the entire world an arena of the conflict of nations version of social Darwinism.

This political orientation, which counterposes the interests of nations and states worldwide, takes the form of an opposition to the European Union (EU) at the level of the European continent. This is a common trait for all these movements. (Interestingly, even Trump, whose country is of course no member of Europe, strives to divide the EU.) There are very concrete reasons why the movements in member states of the EU are anti-EU.

The major reason, as we will have the opportunity to explain in more grounded fashion below, is the fact that the EU is established on the premise of liberalisation within the Union. That is why “Brussels”, i.e. institutions promoting the interests of the EU as an entity, in particular the Commission, refuses to let the bourgeoisies of the single nations resort to measures that seem to each country to be in line with its own interests. In particular, the constraints on fiscal policy, best known as the “Maastricht criteria”, create great pressure on single countries, most of which have, moreover, foregone their control over monetary policy by joining the Eurozone. Hence each national movement within the far right family we are discussing is promising its bourgeoisie (and petty-bourgeoisie) to take control of their country’s economic policy.

A second factor regarding the EU is geared towards rallying mass support. As the EU continues imposing neoliberal policies at the continental level, it becomes easier to throw the blame on “Brussels” for the ravage wrought by these policies. Thus these movements profit from this by creating a “foreign enemy” and drawing closer on imaginary bases the bourgeoisie and the working class of their own country. This may be compared to the part played by the IMF in poorer countries: in the same way as the governments and the ruling classes of those countries that implement a stand-by programme under the tutelage of the IMF play the role of the victim and thereby hide from view the fact that the policies imposed by the IMF are really in their own interest, for the governments and the ruling classes of the member states of the EU, “Brussels” is an excuse that mystifies their own part in the application of neoliberal austerity. For the EU is, as we have not tired from saying for years and as has been repeatedly proven, most recently in the case of the Troika austerity in Greece, another name for the IMF on the European continent.

Still another aspect of the anti-EU stance of the movements in question derives from the fact that the EU is a source of immigration. As is widely known, the “single market” stipulates the free movement not only of capital and goods but also of people. This implies a powerful wave of migration from the poorer regions of the EU (principally from eastern Europe and the Balkans) into the richer regions (principally to western and northern Europe). While there is an adverse reaction to this migration from the latter, the idea of a “more equitable” sharing of the migrants and asylum-seekers coming from the Middle East and northern Africa has created a backlash in the former countries.

Finally, in a series of countries hostility to the EU is based on the blatant political intervention of the central powers of Europe (in particular Germany and France) in the life of the poorer countries or those who happen to be passing through dire straits for a certain time. The arrogance of the German government in taking up the debt crisis in Greece when it broke out in 2010, the fact that Angela Merkel imposed on

Italy a government of technicians headed by central banker Mario Monti in 2011, the humiliating reprimand addressed to the Italian people by Jean-Claude Juncker, the former president of the Commission, saying “they should work more”, at a time when Italy was going through difficult times—all these provoke an instinct of self-defense against the EU and find a serious echo in the masses of people. The movements in question thus benefit from the discontent thereby created.

The most important thing that marks the economic policy of these movements is the defence of national economies. As a reaction to the shaping of each individual national economy by globalism and neoliberalism in the interests of the EU, these movements have posed themselves the task of defending and developing the “national economy” as a priority. Although this approach has not yet reached the stage of defending “autarchy” or self-sufficiency, this is a tendency in progress.

Another distinguishing characteristic of these movements is the fact that each of these movements practices a policy of revanchism/ideological irredentism in its own way. What we mean by this is the following: The rights obtained by such oppressed groups as women, oppressed nations or races, gays etc. against their victimisation have created a backlash among the supporters of these movements and the movements thus engage in a fight in the ideological sphere in order to return to what seems to many a certain “golden age”. The aspiration to go back to the good old days when white supremacism was a normal thing, the desire to go back to those times when the civilisation of the white race had not yet been “sullied” by immigration, the yearning on the part of Vox of reviving that fatherland of the ancestors when privileges had not yet been granted to the autonomous regions and “Catalan separatism” had been subdued characterises these movements constitutionally.

We now come to a most delicate aspect of the matter. The class basis and the class character of these movements will of course play a very important part in determining their nature and potential. The first thing to be said here is that there is almost no doubt that these movements are very popular among the owners of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and the petty-bourgeoisie of city and country alike. Naturally, it is necessary to research more carefully in order to verify to what degree this proposition is valid for each movement. But a lot of evidence exists to show that Trump has received a lot of support from the American farmer and small business person and that Marine Le Pen speaks with the voice of SMEs and others align their policies to the needs of these strata. Hence, it would not be wrong to say that the core of the class basis of these movements is the petty-bourgeoisie and the SMEs, two categories sometimes amalgamated in unwarranted manner.

However, one should not hasten to conclude from this that these movements have not established close ties to certain sections of the big bourgeoisie and that they do not represent the long-term interests of those groups. Trump himself is, also at a personal level, a prominent representative of the American bourgeois class. Powerful sections of the American bourgeoisie, starting with oil companies, arms producers, iron and steel, those industries that produce for the domestic market, and even automotive, support the overall political and economic orientation of Trump. Moreover, almost the entire gamut of large capitalists supports some of the policies

that no president dared to implement until Trump came along.

The tough policies Trump has pursued concerning intellectual property rights, industrial espionage, and the stringent conditionality to which foreign investors are subjected in the domestic market of China receive the backing of all multinationals. Trump has delivered the administration of all supervisory and regulatory agencies in almost all spheres to the representatives of large corporations. To cite two examples, EPA, the Environmental Protection Agency, has been turned over to the hands of companies that pollute the environment and the FAA, the Federal Aviation Agency, regulator of civil aviation, to representatives of companies in that sector. No one had shown the temerity of making the corporate world happy with such cocksure policies. It need not even be emphasized too heavily that the gigantic tax break that Trump has treated capitalists and other magnates was a boon for these plutocrats.

Just like Trump, Nigel Farage is also a successful businessman. He has gathered around him a coterie of big bourgeois that has been financing his ventures all along. At first sight, it may not be clear in this so-called “age of globalisation” why members of the big bourgeoisie might wish to wrest Britain away from the EU. We will come back to the question of why certain sections of the big bourgeoisie support these kinds of protectionist measures. But we did see, when looking above at the support for Trump, that there may be differences between the different industries on such matters.

However, alongside that aspect of the matter, there are other scenarios that come on the agenda within the bosom of the British bourgeoisie as alternatives to EU membership. For one thing, the “special relationship” with the US has always been a strategic orientation for the British ruling class after the first quarter of the 20th century. Brexit creates the possibility of extending this diplomatic-military rapport towards the economic sphere. Readers may remember that at the time when Theresa May was prime minister Trump made clear that he was against what was called “soft Brexit”, a concept that implied that Britain would remain within the so-called single market, and that he was a vociferous defender of “hard Brexit”, making clear that he preferred Boris Johnson over Theresa May for this reason. As a result, he threatened Britain that it might miss the chance of signing a comprehensive free trade agreement with the US. So there need not be an implication that those sections of the British bourgeoisie that pursue the goal of Brexit have necessarily given up on foreign markets, quite the contrary. In other words, elements of the big bourgeoisie that are committed to other types of strategic orientation may become partisans of Brexit.

As may be expected, the degree and the form of the support of the big bourgeoisie or some wings thereof varies from country to country. As one overriding factor, let us mention the degree to which the bourgeoisie of the country in question needs the alternative offered by these movements as a consequence of the intensity of its own peculiar crisis. The support provided for Trump and Farage may not be observed in the short run in Germany, where big capital thrives as a result of exports, which also implies that German capital is more dependent on global, or at least European, markets. An elementary fact is the degree to which class struggles within the country in question challenge the unswayed rule of the bourgeoisie.

The movements in question also stretch out their hands, at the other end of the class spectrum, to the working class of their respective countries. Globalist neoliberal policies have impoverished the working class and the labouring strata around it considerably since the early 1980s. Having become popular through opposition to globalist policies, these movements appear to offer a solution to the problems experienced by the working class.

Examples are legion. Trump won the elections directly because the blue-collar working class families of the so-called “rustbelt” of the US, a series of states ravaged by the decline of US industry, switched their vote from the Democrats to Trump. In France, Marine Le Pen has made her party the strongest force in the North, what was once considered to be a fortress of the French Communist Party. The highest “yes” vote for Brexit in the 2016 referendum came from those regions of Britain in which, in quite a similar way as the US “rustbelt”, the British working class experienced, over several decades, a condition of steady industrial decay. In Germany, the AfD achieved an electoral success way over its natural average both in the impoverished urban areas of the former East Germany and in those regions where powerful metal and motor industry plants are located. We will come back later to the lessons of the clout that these movements have acquired over the working class.

Finally, a common trait of these movements is the special relation that they have been fostering with Russia, a trait that is perhaps not so essential but rather tactical in nature. It is quite evident that Trump has a special relationship with Putin. But even the report by the special attorney Mueller admits that this does not extend to collaboration with the alleged intervention of Russia in the presidential elections of 2016. In France the special relationship of Marine Le Pen to Russia has been the talk of the town for a long time. It is a fact that some of the other members of this family of movements also entertain good relations with Russia. It would probably be more correct to view this as a result of Russia’s desire to divide its foes rather than as a result of some ideological affinity.

Proto-fascism: a transitional stage

The political characteristics and class nature discussed so far imply that these movements may be regarded as fascist movements in their orientation. The distinguishing characteristics that we discovered in the first part of this article by studying Nazism in Germany and fascism in Italy exist unambiguously in these movements as well.

For one thing, we clearly observe one characteristic that is usually neglected in the study of fascism that we brought under the limelight in the previous instalment of this article. Within an international environment that has been characterised by a progressive internationalization of capital (ideologically dubbed “globalization” by liberalism of the right and of the left), these movements have abruptly turned to attributing priority to the national economy and have made considerable moves against the international dimensions of liberalism. They share at least a dose of Euroscepticism because of the liberalism of the EU. In short, by refusing to accept the liberal precept that the economic interests of each country is served best by

marching in tandem with the rest of the world, they view the future in opposition to the EU and see the salvation of their country outside of the it.

Outside the EU, Trump has gone so far as to attack the liberal international order through heavy doses of protectionism. The policies pursued by Trump are only apparently tougher and more virulent than those of the others. Take the British example: if the option defended by the partisans of hard Brexit materializes and Britain abandons the Single Market, that country too will have turned to heavily protectionist policies. In other words, the economic policies of Farage do not differ from those of Trump. So it is no coincidence that there is a love affair between Trump and Farage.

This orientation, which we have so far formulated in terms of economic policy, manifests itself clearly in the “über alles syndrome” as well. As already mentioned there is no difference between Trump’s “America first” and Salvini’s “prima gli italiani” and the “Deutschland über alles” so rampantly popular under the Nazis.

We have already seen, in the first instalment of this article, that in an age in which capitalism has integrated the world economy to an advanced level and in which the productive forces have long outgrown the frontiers of the nation state, this turn towards the nation state, this choice of economic policy was, in the age of classical fascism, a manifestation of the inner contradictions of the capitalist mode of production in decline. This historical tendency towards capitalist decline, we may remember, manifests itself in deep crises periodically, more concretely in what are called “great depressions”, the most ravaging of such crises. At the stage capitalism has reached, the productive forces that have become totally dependent upon each other require a recourse to central planning, but because the fragmented decision-making processes of the market are defended tooth and nail in the name of the interests of private property, capitalism simply cannot find a solution to the contradictions manifested in great depressions. Some national fractions of the international bourgeoisie, sensing the impossibility of an overall solution, turn to the salvation of their own national economy. The tendency to defend the interests of a single country “über alles” is a product of this kind of contradictory dynamics. But precisely because the world economy is deeply integrated, this economic policy will generate contradictory, even irrational consequences. This is the reason why fascism opens the door to world war and barbarism. The situation today is, from this point of view, a repetition precisely of the 1930s. In other words, Trump and the movements in Europe have revived the historic spirit of fascism once again.

The racism and the hostility towards immigrants, Muslim peoples, which have become minority peoples in Europe, or that traditional scapegoat of Europe, the Jew, displayed by this family of movements is a trait that derives from the desire to lead the masses in the service of the same “über alles” policy. We have already underlined the fact that this is a special kind of racism that strives to substitute class contradictions by contradictions between races and nations. But this is precisely the kind of racism that Nazism was! Here, then, we are face to face with a second distinguishing characteristic of fascism.

This invites a policy of revanchism. A considerable backlash has been simmering within the oppressor nation or race, as the case may be, of the more distant past,

confronted with some progress in the rights of the races or nations that had been oppressed for decades, if not centuries, a progress that is the result of long and painful struggles. The power of the civil rights movement that started in the United States in the 1950s and reached its climax in the 1960s had subdued the white supremacist movement into silence. These same groups are usually equally disturbed by the advance in the rights and positions gained by women and gay people. Now that race instead of class is brought to the forefront by the forces in power or at least a very powerful opposition, when the “über alles syndrome” spreads afield, all barriers are eliminated in the way of the revanchist motives within the oppressor nation, race, faith or gender and the return to the “golden age” becomes a more palpable hope for these masses. The same kind of legend concerning the return to a glorious past and the reestablishment of a “golden age” played an important part in the mythology of German Nazism and Italian fascism as well.

During its advance towards these goals, in particular in striving towards the replacement of class conflict as the dominant contradiction by racial ones, fascism will inevitably confront all kinds of independent organisations of the working class, whether these be of the economic kind or political ones. The method of fascism in fulfilling this task is to organise the petty-bourgeoisie and then have it attack the workers’ organisations. We have already seen that the family of movements we are dwelling upon has established close connection to both the urban and rural components of this class. In this sense, too, these movements partake of this distinguishing trait of fascism.

All these show that fascism is mounting on the stage of history once again in this beginning of the 21st century. But these movements lack a very important aspect, key among the fundamental characteristics of fascism. This is street power. It is the absence of paramilitary bands or militia. Only a few of the movements evoked above have already organised such forces. The clearest examples in Europe are the fascist movements in Ukraine, Golden Dawn in Greece, Jobbik in Hungary, and Nordic Resistance. There is also the exceptionally strong RSS of the BJP in India. The others have not turned or could not turn, as yet, to the task of organising street power.

The only meaning of paramilitary organising is not that it will add to the strength of the fascist movement in question or, in other words, add military clout to political influence. As we tried to explain in the first instalment of this article, fascism is no ordinary reactionary movement that emerges in normal times. Fascism is, in a certain sense, a counter-revolution against historical development. The paramilitary force is the practical expression of this ideology of rupture, of radical break. In the same way as revolutionary organisations cannot make do with parliamentary methods, fascism needs the same kind of additional instruments for its counter-revolution.

But that is not all. Fascism’s hostility to working class organisations or, to use Trotsky’s characterization, to workers’ democracy embedded within bourgeois democracy pushes it to have recourse to the forces of the petty-bourgeoisie in order to smash working class organisations. But the petty-bourgeoisie is nothing in its disorganized state of existence. For it is a class that is congenitally atomized,

with no collective traditions. Fascist militia is also the form under which the petty-bourgeoisie is transformed into the battering ram of finance capital, of the big bourgeoisie, against the working class and in particular its organisations.

Finally, the fascist movement *qua* counter-revolution, despite being a movement of bourgeois character itself, needs to wield a force, an instrument outside and beyond the regular bourgeois state apparatus. For its revolt against history may, indeed will, lead it to practice barbarism to a scale that would be difficult at times to stomach even for the regular bourgeois state apparatus. It may have to confront resistance. Under such circumstances, a paramilitary force that is organised outside the remit of the armed forces of the state in question, one that is organised under the authority of the fascist movement itself and accountable only to the leader of the movement, is necessary for fascism, not only during its rise to power, but equally when in power.

That is why today's fascist movements, in their majority, are incomplete in their becoming. They have not matured sufficiently for the counter-revolution. They are prefigurations of fascism. We propose that they be labelled proto-fascist movements.

It is our belief that proto-fascist movements have the capacity and the propensity to add street power to their overall baggage when class struggle and the political conjuncture reach a certain stage, when the need makes itself felt, and/or when the opportunity makes itself felt. When this becomes a reality, we will then have reached the stage of full-fledged fascist movements. This is something that can be accomplished in the wink of an eye. So it is necessary not to content oneself with saying this is not yet fascism in the full sense of the word. On the contrary, it must be emphasized that the overriding character of these movements is of a fascist nature, but that they have not ripened to the level of obtaining victory immediately (using the word in its *dialectical* sense).

To put it differently, these are not movements of a hybrid nature. They are not "populist" movements that bear a certain number of the traits of fascism. We are face to face with fascism. But it is a *coy fascism* that cannot yet forcefully assert its nature. This is a fascism that cannot say its name, a fascism that does not feel itself powerful enough to arm. It is coy and yet it is fascism.

The sources

We have so far examined the general picture that is presented by a family of movements that emerged fully after the 2008 financial crash and also taken up the class nature and the political characteristics of these movements, reaching, in the light of all this, the conclusion that these are proto-fascist movements. Let us now proceed to examine the historical precondition of the rise of this phenomenon, the environment that made its emergence possible and necessary.

The principal factor behind the emergence of proto-fascism is of course the Third Great Depression that set in with the financial crash of 2008. Although this particular depression did not deepen as rapidly as the Second Great Depression of the 1930s, unemployment rates of the 1930s far exceeding those of the present, just to cite a single indicator, the fact that it was preceded by a 30-year crisis meant that the overall impact was graver than the depression alone could have produced.

The reader may remember that the premise for the depression of the present was the long crisis of the world economy that started in the 1970s. The response of the international bourgeoisie to this long crisis was the neoliberal assault on the working class and the labourers that was set off in 1979 (the Thatcher moment). This assault was complemented by globalism after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

So here is the picture: the bourgeoisie was in search of a solution to the long crisis of the world economy for three long decades, but the solution that it had internationally agreed upon ended up leading to a financial crash and a great depression!

Face to this situation, a second tendency arose within the ranks of the diverse national fractions of the international bourgeoisie. This is what has prepared the emergence of fascism, the new “solution” being the tendency to force the ways of overcoming the crisis of national bourgeoisies at the single country level. Fascism is thus, in direct fashion, a product of the deep crisis of capitalism on the world scale and of the decline of the capitalist mode of production that lies behind this crisis.

The neoliberal and globalist policies pursued over the 30-year crisis and the decade-long great depression have generated another result: a painful process of impoverishment with an unprecedented increase in inequality, especially in the imperialist world, i.e. in “rich countries”, accompanying this. The evidence for this is so clear that it is admitted by even some who defend “globalisation” blindly. It was, throughout all that period, very commonplace, both worldwide and in Turkey, to attribute neoliberalism and globalism to the urge of advanced economies to export the crisis to the underdeveloped countries. We, on the contrary, kept stressing that the real target was the relatively organised workers of the imperialist countries who enjoyed rights and gains acquired through struggles over the years. Today, the whole world understands that it was those fractions of the international proletariat that had the most advanced rights and conditions that stood most to lose from so-called “globalisation”. Thus fascism addresses itself to the rage engendered by globalism in those sections of the working class and promises them racist and nationalist methods against immigrant populations, hence *transforming a question that has its roots in the class contradictions of capitalism into a war of races and nations*, progressively creating a political space for itself within the masses. This analysis also demonstrates that the policy of revanchism or ideological irredentism is really not, at bottom, an exclusively cultural and ideological question, but the ideological form taken by the wrath of the working class face to material impoverishment and immiseration, a word almost evicted from the dictionary for decades now.

Here we see that, different from the dynamics of classical fascism, the current proto-fascist movement is able to reach into the ranks of the working class as well and capture sections of it ideologically and politically before smashing it under the assault of the petty-bourgeois hordes. While examining the political characteristics and the class nature of proto-fascism, we had pointed out that certain movements within the family (Trump, Brexiters, Le Pen, AfD) succeeded in gaining strong support from certain sections of the working class. Classical fascism, on the other hand, was only able to draw large masses of the working class to its side only after

it had ascended to power and crushed the independent organisations of the workers. Where does the difference come from?

The difference arises from the contrast between the left-wing movements of the two periods. Both wings of the left in the 1920s and the 1930s (whether social democracy or the communist movement evolving from its departure point in the 1920s of revolutionism towards bureaucratisation and national communism in the 1930s) were fundamentally workers' organisations. Whatever may be their political and organisational defects, their myopia, the wild fluctuations in their political line etc., the interests and needs of the working class lay at the centre of their activities. Partly for this reason and partly because unions had not been integrated into state structures to the extent that they are now, these parties had a lot of influence on trade unions. The working class did not need to search for other forces that would champion its needs in the face of the ravage of the Great Depression. In the wake of first 1968 and later 1989, i.e. after the restoration of capitalism commenced in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, in the Soviet Union, and in China and Vietnam, the international left turned its back on the working class. It first turned towards class collaborationism with the glorification of what has since been dubbed "civil society" and then towards identity politics with postmodernism. Being a worker was seen, in the best of cases, as one more identity among others. Things would go further, with the claim that the working class was undergoing a process of evaporation, all attention being then turned towards identities, democracy, and ecology. On the other hand, the widespread impact of left-wing liberalism on the left led to expectations of democracy and progress from European imperialism and implied a positive view of the EU, which is nothing more than the most powerful centre of imperialist liberal barbarism.

In consequence of all this, the left abandoned the working class to *political solitude*. It declared that class struggle was over just when the class offensive of the bourgeoisie took its most virulent forms. The left became an unalloyed petty-bourgeois movement, a movement of the modern and well-to-do petty-bourgeois. Under these circumstances the masses of workers and, in particular, those layers that were the worst hit by the economic crisis, turned to the only movement that held out its hand to them, the proto-fascist movement. Left-wing liberalism, identity politics, and post-Leninism, the latter being the movement that has been working for the liquidation of working class parties of a vanguard nature, together form *one of the political conditions of the ascendancy of proto-fascism*.

Conversely, wherever there emerged a left-wing leadership that owned the interests of the workers and conducted politics on that basis, the working class distanced itself from the proto-fascist forces and turned to that leadership. Sanders in the US and Corbyn in the UK are striking instances of this proposition.¹⁵ While in Brazil fascism rose as a result of the policies of the PT under Lula and Dilma

¹⁵ Since the writing of this article, Corbyn lost the parliamentary elections of 2019 miserably and had to resign the leadership of Labour. For our analysis of his rise and fall, see Sungur Savran, "The inglorious end of Jeremy Corbyn the prevaricator", <http://redmed.org/article/inglorious-end-jeremy-corbyn-prevaricator>.

Roussef, in neighbouring Argentina the formation of the FIT (the Front of the Left and of Labourers), to which the Partido Obrero (PO) is affiliated, and its success in becoming the third political force in the country is due to the same contrast. ***We must not, then, explain the rise of proto-fascism on the basis of the Third Great Depression only, but also by the abdication of the left in the course of the last half a century.***

Another factor that made the rapid ascendance of proto-fascism possible is that in the epoch of the Third Great Depression, political party systems that had been in place for decades were dealt a great blow and became fragmented. The typical European political system that functioned like a pendulum between the centre right and the centre left, the latter being labelled misleadingly socialist or social democratic as the case may be, is going bankrupt. In many countries (France, Greece, even Germany) it seems to be the end of the road for so-called social democracy. In some countries (e.g. France) the centre right finds itself in a state of coma. In such a state of collapse, proto-fascism finds itself a much more propitious environment to grow.

There are other phenomena that show that the political party systems in Europe are in deep crisis. In some countries new parties can grow by fits and bounds in a short span of time. It is more readily understandable to see *Podemos* (or *Unidos Podemos* and later *Unidas Podemos* under its newer appellation) grow rapidly, for it is a direct product of the mass protest movement of 2011 in Spain. However, the other new party in Spain, the centre right *Ciudadanos*, which rapidly gained in strength to become one of the four major parties in that country, does not even have a social movement behind it. Beyond that, at times, a single celebrity, for instance a comic as in Italy (Beppe Grillo of the Five-Star Movement) or in Ukraine later (Volodymyr Zelensky), can gain political clout and in the end win elections. For a moment, in certain countries the common fantasy of what was called the “Pirate Party” (established as a pan-European party) won some success in several countries of Central and Nordic Europe. Of course such developments are always possible in single countries now and then, but the fact that all this is happening on the scale of a whole continent clearly shows that the entire political system is already in crisis. It is obvious that for brand new starters such moments of upheaval are more fertile ground than usual.

Now we come to an extremely important factor. We can summarise this factor by saying that ***European reaction and Middle Eastern reaction find themselves in a metabolic relationship of symbiosis, nourishing upon the politics of each other.*** As long as Europe, as well as the US, subjects the Middle East to pillage and aggression, as long as the European proto-fascist movements make scapegoats of the Muslim immigrant populations of Germany, France, the Netherlands, and the others in the full sense of the term, this instills great strength in the *takfiri* organisations (first and foremost Al Qaeda and ISIS). The very fact that among the components of the militant force of this kind of organization, Muslim youth who have lived miserable lives in the dilapidated neighbourhoods of metropolitan cities, have remained jobless almost all their lives, have been involved in petty crime and were drug addicts until they chose that other opium of the people occupy an

important part is the most salient symptom of what is being said here. Conversely, as these *takfiri* organisations stage bombings, assassinations, attacks on crowds in vehicles or with knives in hand and sow fear and terror in the ordinary people of these countries, this feeds into racism by provoking a feeling of hatred in them and renders these ordinary people into easy prey for the proto-fascist movements, which advocate aggressive policies against Muslims and immigrant populations at large.

We are face to face with a veritable vicious circle here. Hence, every struggle against the fascism of the 21st century needs to be simultaneously anti-imperialist in nature. On the opposite side, struggle against *takfirism* in the Middle Eastern and North African countries with a majority Muslim population holds great importance for the brotherhood of peoples. Only an internationalist struggle that acts as a barrier to both reactionary movements can stop the blood-letting.

We have already mentioned the special relationship that Russia entertains with these movements, possibly in an effort to sow divisions among and play against each other the powers of NATO. It may be said that this is an additional source of strength for the proto-fascist movement, but it is really not easy to gauge the level of this support extended in surreptitious manner. On the other hand, to present these movements solely as the product of Russian intervention in the politics of the Western countries would not only be an extreme exaggeration, but would amount to falling in the trap of the disinformation disseminated by the globalist wing of the European (and American) bourgeoisies and result in ignoring the profound dynamics of these societies themselves, with every cell secreting fascism on a daily basis.

Finally, as in the age of classical fascism, each of the proto-fascist movements receives extra strength from the protection of certain reactionary circles within the state apparatus and financial and propaganda (media etc.) support from certain wings of the bourgeoisie of the country it works in. In this sense, the Chemnitz and Köthen events are extremely significant: here, an atmosphere of aggression and fear was created through cooperation between fascist and proto-fascist forces and the racist horde saw the state apparatus pave the way for its hysteric mob actions. The so-called security forces almost embraced the mob even as they freely used Nazi symbols and resorted to open violence against immigrants and leftists in a manner impossible to witness if a left-wing rally turned aggressive in the same way. In the wake of these events, it was documented that a very senior level security official was in close contact with these currents and that Horst Seehofer, leader of the Bavarian wing of Christian Democracy and federal interior minister, protected this official. It is a well-documented fact that at least in the cases of Nigel Farage and the AfD, certain wings of the bourgeoisie simply protect and support these parties.

Prospects

From the analysis conducted so far it has transpired that the *substance* of these movements is fascism, but that this fascism has developed and is still developing under a *form* that remains incomplete and inadequate when compared with classical fascism. This tense and contradictory relationship between substance and form,

intertwined with the dynamics of the deep economic and political crisis the world is going through, will probably result in developments that will bear local colours peculiar to each country. Concrete developments so far do offer us clues as to what prospects are in the offing. To go through these briefly might create the possibility of reaching certain prognoses as to what forms proto-fascism may develop in the near future.

Before all else, it must be stressed that the movement has a certain “internationalism” to it in its own manner. It is obvious that, as opposed to the international proletariat, which has shared long-term interests over and above national frontiers, these chauvinist movements that might at any moment break loose upon each other cannot be consistently internationalist. Each fascist movement, by its very nature, sets its eyes on establishing hegemony or even tyranny over others. However, before reaching this “final” stage, there is a long way in the struggle fascism wages both against the working class and the cosmopolitan, globalist wing of the international bourgeoisie. In the age of classical fascism as well, fascist movements set up alliances and common fronts, although these alliances also bore severe contradictions and tensions. We took up the pact between Hitler and Mussolini, the support given by both to Franco, and the partnership they established with Japanese imperialism, no less aggressive than its Western counterparts, in the first instalment of this article.

Today also, proto-fascist movements are coming together to assess the possibilities of cooperation at the European level and looking into prospects of concrete cooperation. Without going into detail, let us point out that this search for cooperation has been accelerated in the recent period for three different reasons. First, the fact that certain proto-fascist parties became government parties in coalition governments in some European countries has given a momentum to these efforts. For instance, as Marine Le Pen committed certain mistakes during the 2017 presidential elections in France and suffered a degree of setback and even an important scission from her party, in order to overcome the adverse effects of this, she set up a special relationship with two proto-fascist parties in power: one was the Lega of Matteo Salvini, then deputy premier and interior minister in the Italian government, and the other was the FPÖ of Austria. Coming together with these “statesmen”, so to speak, held a message for the French people: she was thereby proving to the French citizen that she was not the “marginal” that some tried to show her as, but a perfectly respectable interlocutor of other European government parties.

Secondly, an institutional change in the make-up of the EU made a rapprochement between the proto-fascist movements of the different countries attractive for them. In the past, the president of the European Commission, the main executive body of the EU, used to be elected on the basis of negotiations between the member states. From now on the European Parliament will have a say on who the president will be. Hence not only will the elections in May 2019 determine the balance of forces within that parliament, up to now of an entirely ceremonious nature, but it will also have an impact on who will be elected president of the Commission, a post that wields extensive powers. As other political families within the EU, the proto-fascist

one now also has an interest in bringing together its forces in the election for the president of the Commission. Salvini's name is often dropped in this context.

The third factor also evokes the relationship between the American movement (Trump) and European proto-fascism. Steve Bannon, who, as we have already seen, was an advisor to Trump during his election campaign and his first few months in office, but later resigned his job at the White House, is doing a lot of work to unite the European proto-fascist movement. Thanks to the objective factors at play we have just touched on, his efforts seem to be bearing fruit.

The cooperation and solidarity between proto-fascist parties in the imperialist countries seem to us to have the potential to help the transition from proto-fascism to fascism until such time when these nationalist movements enter into contradictions between themselves.

One characteristic of proto-fascism is the meteoric rise in some of these movements, with the help of objective circumstances it should be added. On the other hand, some of these movements can fall as fast as they have risen. The most striking example is the rise and fall of the Pegida movement in Germany due to the blunder of its foremost leader, which we have recounted above. The roller coaster nature of some others (the most notable instance being the Dutch movement) are also noteworthy. The PVV under the leadership of Geert Wilders was given first place in the upcoming elections in public opinion polls in early 2017, but after having come in second that spring, lost its place to a newcomer in 2018. The same thing happened in Greece to LAOS in the elections of 2011 when it was replaced by Golden Dawn and to the latter in 2019, when it, in its turn, remained below the electoral threshold of three per cent and lost all of its parliamentary seats.

In our opinion, what lies behind these ups and downs is the fact that these movements have not yet acquired the most adequate form under which fascism, the substance of these parties, can flourish best. These parties are not like the determined, audacious, even intrepid parties of classical fascism. The characterisation of proto-fascism in effect tells us that these parties stand half-way between fascism and the established order. That is why they may very well decline rapidly after initial successes and even be absorbed by the parties of the established order.

In this context, we should return to the theme of the coyness of present-day fascism, one we have already raised. The crux of the matter lies in the historical lived experience of European society. Europe came out of World War II with a painful trauma regarding the Nazi and fascist experience. Hence propagating fascist ideas openly and, in particular, owning the symbols and ideas of the age of classical fascism explicitly, still bears the risk of the self-isolation of these parties. Although there has been some erosion in this aversion to Nazism and fascism, it is nonetheless still valid. It is because of this that many of these parties are trying to project a softer image of themselves than that which corresponds to truth. Some even go further and try to erase the virulent and extreme image created by former practices.

The clearest example of this can be observed in France. After having taken over the party from her father Jean-Marie Le Pen, the founding leader, Marine Le Pen engaged in an intense effort to soften the image of the party in the eyes of the people, probably reckoning that under the circumstances of the earlier period, the

ideological discourse set by her father had gone too far. This even ended up in a brawl between father and daughter, which finally led Marine Le Pen to expel her father from membership, although he was supposed to be the “honorary chairman”. This whole process of making the proto-fascist party in France more likeable to the public at large is called in French “*dédiabolisation*”. Marine Le Pen also changed the name of the party from the original Front National (National Front) to *Rassemblement National* (National Rally).

Yet this whole process raises a question: to what extent is this just a change of image and to what extent is it a real change of the nature of the party that the present leader inherited from her father? This last question need not be confined to questions of ideological order, but does arise even in areas of practical politics, creating real dilemmas for the party. Take the following example: in the presidential elections of 2017, as she was going into the second round, Marine Le Pen brought the question of leaving the Eurozone on the agenda (a timid Frexit). This caused pretty much an earthquake. Even sections of the more loyal electorate of the party made clear that they would not vote for this. The EU still has a kind of untouchable quality to it, an indispensability in the eyes of the majority of the population in countries like France (Germany, Austria, and the Benelux countries can comfortably be classified into this category). The great majority may be critical of, or even against, the “Brussels bureaucracy”, but, for the moment, their aspiration is to “reform” the EU, not abandon it wholesale. At least these are, as yet, the “No Exit” countries, so to speak.

This in fact forms the major distinction between the far right (proto-fascist) parties and the conservative/Christian Democrat/centre right parties in European countries. We can see this in action in Austria. Sebastian Kurz, the present leader of the ÖVP, the traditional centre right party in this country, has a position on immigration that is little different from his coalition partner, the proto-fascist FPÖ. The coalition agreement between these two parties was signed in Kahlenberg near Vienna. This is the hill on which the Ottoman army was defeated during the second siege of Vienna in 1683. The symbolism is transparent: hostility to the Turk or rather to the Muslim and highlighting the Christian identity of Europe. Kurz is no different on such matters from his partner. But his red line is the EU.

However, as we have just said, this is true for only certain countries. The overall political and social atmosphere in Britain has become so hostile to the EU that an important wing of the Conservative Party is competing in its zeal for Brexit with Nigel Farage. This may have inspired in Nigel Farage an “entryist” tactic, but we do not have information whether this is true.

Only time will show to what point the image refreshing operation of Marine Le Pen will carry her party. The same goes for the FPÖ of Austria and the Jobbik of Hungary, which have both set off a process of renewing their image.

What demonstrates most clearly that proto-fascism is cut of the same cloth as fascism in substance, though not in form, i.e. in terms of organization, is the fact that these movements, strubbornly dubbed “populist” by bourgeois commentators and representatives of the post-Leninist left, act as a shield and an advocate of unalloyed fascist actions or mobs when the time comes. What the AfD did during the

Chemnitz and Köthen events was precisely this. In Italy, Matteo Salvini defended fascist elements much more virulent in style than he is while he was minister of the interior. In each country, there are other movements that are more “orthodox”, stricter regarding doctrine, purer in terms of ideology. Italy is surely one of them.

Finally, it is clearly visible that institutions of the established order offer channels that would contribute to the strengthening of the proto-fascist movement. It is not true, at least in those countries that are more prepared ideologically and politically for fascism, that a proto-fascist party that comes to power will necessarily go through a process similar to the early years of social democracy, when, once in power, these parties adapted themselves to the routine of everyday politics. On the contrary, in such countries racist and anti-EU policies bring a lot of support. The increase in the power of Salvini when he was in office, thanks to his vociferous anti-immigration policy, was the best instance of such a situation. Such coalition governments can, under the right circumstances, act as governments transitional to fascism.

Let us finish this discussion on prospects by underlining the most important possibility and stressing the dimensions of the threat this poses. If the world economy undergoes the bursting of a bubble and a consequent financial crash of the dimensions of 2008, proto-fascists of the type of Marine Le Pen or Matteo Salvini, having already prepared the ground, may rise to power on their own in the wink of an eye. The Second Great Depression had confronted the world immediately with a very profound economic crisis, a fall in production, skyrocketing unemployment etc. The Third Great Depression, for reasons we have taken up elsewhere, is developing in a much more protracted way.¹⁶ Classical fascism came to power in an incredibly short span of time (in Italy only two years, in Germany three). When the Third Great Depression also wreaks havoc in the world economy similar in dimensions close to the Second, proto-fascism will see the road paved for its ascent to power. Proto-fascism will then easily find the opportunity to show to the population at large that a worldwide solution is no longer possible and will sound much more convincing in its quest for “national” salvation. And when the movement is finally unleashed, we have no doubt that it will easily and swiftly arm itself, thus becoming a fascist movement not only in substance but in form as well.

Fight against barbarism

The whole argument above has shown that fascism has once again taken a step to mount on the stage of history and is biding time in the antechambre for the day of reckoning. To everyone who wishes to prevent that the future of humanity becomes one of repression, barbarism and world war befalls the task of asking themselves what to do in order to stop the ascendancy of fascism. We had earlier planned to write a third instalment of this article, delving into the debates of the past over how to fight fascism and reach conclusions for the present on the basis of that.

¹⁶ The collapse of the stock exchange in this most recent period, in which the Coronavirus pandemic has acted as a detonator, has changed this completely. See our “2020 Stock Market Crash: a New Phase within the Third Great Depression”, <http://redmed.org/article/2020-stock-market-crash-new-phase-within-third-great-depression>.

However, the danger is so imminent, the tendency toward barbarism so palpable, that it would be unwise to finish this second part of the article without providing some indications on the burning questions of our time. We will be very brief and clear at the expense of a more elaborate exposition.

The first point has to do with the precondition for everything that we will take up later: ***an end must be put to the domination of the liberal and identity politics left within the socialist and left-wing movement.*** The period in which petty-bourgeois leftists did not tire of bringing to the fore their own personal problems and simply ignored the burning questions facing the overwhelming majority made up of workers and labourers must come to an end. Everyone who adopts a hostile attitude towards the working class is an enemy of the future of humanity. This, as we have shown, is why proto-fascism has gained so much ground. Even in the miserable conditions in which the international left finds itself today, after the ravage of Stalinism and later the collapse of the experience of socialist construction of the 20th century, it proves possible to attract the working class towards socialism at the expense of the proto-fascist movement if left-wing policies that are centred on the problems and needs of the working class: the popularity of Bernie Sanders within the blue-collar workers of America is a case in point. The same goes for the FIT in Argentina on a different plane and a totally different scale.

To centre one's politics on the working class implies the revival of Marxism on the left. If that is the case, then while, on the one hand, a robust class policy is pursued in the practical sphere, the whole left must also join, on the other, the fight against left-wing liberalism and post-modernism as this journal has been doing in its Turkish and English versions for close to fifteen years and five years now, respectively. Class war also requires a battle of ideas!

Leftists from a petty-bourgeois background as well as student revolutionaries should give priority to winning positions within the working class, the labouring population and the poor. Cultural activity as well should be centred on class struggle. Works of art that ruminate on the problems experienced by petty-bourgeois intellectuals have imprisoned the imagination and horizon of young artists and literary people far too long. Let young minds open up to the multitudes of the working class!

It is very important to unite the class as a class and create a force with which the working class can once again defend its interests through united front tactics. Only if the working class can be mobilized for its own material and political interests can it also pose its candidacy for becoming a hegemonic force and go beyond the horizon of the petty-bourgeoisie, constricted by a mere struggle for democracy and rights, by showing the way to all oppressed under capitalism.

The revanchist policy of proto-fascism threatens the newly acquired rights and freedoms of many an oppressed group won through hardy struggles. These rights must be defended. But to pursue the "identity politics" of yesterday would be suicidal. Such an attitude implies accepting the terms of the struggle imposed on us and lead us to a self-defeating fight, making things even worse. What must be done is to educate the working class on these questions all the while as we win it over by addressing its deep-seated needs and demands. Inasmuch as women,

oppressed peoples and faiths, immigrants, gays etc. stand by the working class in its struggle for its demands, what the practical struggle teaches in action *and* the ideological education provided for the working class will come together to change the workers' consciousness. It must not be forgotten that, historically, it was during workers' revolutions, and in particular the October revolution of 1917, that the rights and freedoms of the oppressed were most rapidly and completely recognized. The working class is not condemned to remain forever immured in cultural underdevelopment.

This means that we need to organise anti-fascist actions that grow out of the bosom of the working class and not "antifa" actions that are confined to the well-off liberal petty-bourgeoisie, the upper educated crust of the proletariat, students, ecologists etc.

Naturally, in order to materialise all of this, a revolutionary Marxist party that is equipped with the lessons of history, that organizes its ranks in discipline in order to become a leadership for the working class of its own country, starting with the vanguard of the working class, that will reconstitute the nation through a revolution under the hegemony of the proletariat is necessary. In order to fight fascism, embodying a poisonous nationalism, this party and similar ones in other countries must necessarily adopt internationalism as a major plank of their politics. Proletarian internationalism makes a world party indispensable.

A socialist left that can do all this will not only overcome the fascist threat, it will be knocking on the door of world revolution.

Appendix:

The proto-fascist menace in Europe¹⁷

Sungur Savran

A month has gone by since the European elections. In this while, RedMed brought light and insight for its readers on the national results of 11 countries in 8 articles. Of the six largest countries, five were covered: Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and Poland. Two more central and eastern European countries were taken up in addition to Poland, Hungary and Romania. The three Nordic countries members of the European Union (EU), i.e. Sweden, Denmark, and Finland were taken up together. And finally, Greece, the *enfant terrible* of the EU, was given special attention, through a party document of our sister organiser of RedMed, the EEK.

Above and beyond the national constellation of forces, the European elections laid bare certain trends with respect to the evolution of the major political forces of the continent. Of these, the most controversial was the result obtained by what we call the proto-fascist movement. The tenor of the debate on that question was again a tendency towards the underestimation of the rising menace of fascism over the

¹⁷ First published on 29th June 2019 on RedMed: <http://redmed.org/article/proto-fascist-menace-europe>.

old continent. There were three main arguments put forward to belittle the outcome obtained by proto-fascism. The first was that the pundits and the cassetras (of which we admit to be one) had predicted a much stronger leap forward for the movement across Europe while the actual results, when considered Europe-wide, were wanting with respect to that kind of expectation. The second was that in many countries (the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Denmark, Greece etc.) a kind of regression was observed, let alone a triumphant rise. Thirdly, those who tend to underplay the fascist menace pointed out that there was no immediate threat from the movement at this stage of the development of the forces in play.

Beware subjectivism

The first argument is deplorably identical to the reaction displayed by the ecological, postmodern, post-Leninist left as the year 2017 advanced. The first continent-wide display of the rise of proto-fascism was on the occasion of the 2014 European elections. Of course fascist and proto-fascist parties existed and were significant in a number of countries before that. But they were isolated cases. France and Austria, and somewhat later Greece and Hungary were the scene of the early rise of this new trend. But the trend became a universally European phenomenon only in 2014. It will also be remembered that 2016 brought in two alarming results in the advanced capitalist world: Nigel Farage's UKIP emerged as the big winner of the Brexit referendum held in June of that year and in November Donald Trump won the most powerful political office in the world, quite contrary to the expectations of the detractors of the idea that a far right menace was on the horizon of the entire imperialist world. These twin scourges led everyone to cast a wary eye on the national elections to be held in the Netherlands, France and Germany in the course of 2017. In the former country, the results of Geert Wilders' Freedom Party turned out to be much less spectacular than that suggested by opinion polls, which had persistently forecast that the party would come in first, whereas the outcome of the elections placed the party in second place.

France was of course a much bigger test. Incredibly, the general judgment was that Marine Le Pen lost big in those elections. It was not at all important for these people that in the second round Le Pen's extremely retrograde discourse had attracted one in three French people! Nor did they notice that as opposed to her father, the founder of the party, who also passed to the second round in 2002, but did not succeed to raise his share of the vote significantly, the daughter captured an additional 10 per centage points of the popular vote in the second round. Everybody concurred that Marine Le Pen's performance during the television debate between the two rounds with the winner Macron had been awful. But to deduce complacency from this relative failure was a real feat!

What was striking was that the complacency was due not to bad results (after all both in the Netherlands and in France the proto-fascists had come in second, not exactly a disaster for them!), but was predicated upon a relatively smaller success than had been predicted by the "pundits" or the polls. This kind of reasoning is particularly dangerous in politics, for it substitutes subjective evaluations and predictions into a kind of yardstick on the basis of which one decides whether

a political development is significant or not. But as our leftists have been psychologically comforted, the new fascist menace has covered new ground, which goes unnoticed to our post-Leninist, who now lives day to day according to the precepts of postmodernism. So, by mid-2017 the fashion was to think that the new “populist” movement had already peaked.

The German elections in the fall shattered this illusion. For the first time since the Nazi experience, Germany saw a mass exodus towards a racist party: the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland-Alternative for Germany) came in third to win around 14 per cent of the popular vote and 82 seats in parliament. This was a wake-up call for anyone, so the atmosphere of complacency was over by the end of the year.

It is remarkable how the same subjectivist urge has come to dominate the scene once more in the wake of the recent European elections. What is the reason for the new complacency? The fact that things did not turn out as bad as was predicted! But did they turn out bad? They sure did. So what does the complacency serve except the “wellness” and a better “quality of life” for the intellectuals and the leaders of the post-Leninist and Green left?

What do the statistics say?

The second reason why the results of the post-fascists are belittled has more to do with objective developments. This argument relies on certain facts, in particular pointing out that the results for post-fascism are mixed, some defeats as well some real victories. Let us then look at the statistics, but not in unsystematic and haphazard fashion but more dialectically.

First to be mentioned is the fact that the numbers clearly show the leap made by post-fascism. Out of the dozen or so political families at the European level, only three groups raised the strength of their representation in the European Parliament. The big losers were, of course, the centre right (Christian democracy and conservatives etc.) and the centre left (so-called social democratic and socialist parties), as well as the soft, post-Leninist left. The winners were the Greens on the left, the liberal democrats at the centre and the ensemble of two proto-fascist families and a group close to them on the right. It is not enough to say that these were the winners. One should also look at the rate at which each of these families advanced. Here the misnamed Europe of Nations and Freedom (the most hard core proto-fascists led by Marine Le Pen of France and the rising star Luigi Salvini of Italy), now renamed Identity and Democracy (a well-deserved ironic slap in the face to identity politics on the left!), is way ahead of all the other winners. Let us compare the percentage increase in the number of MEPs between the three most publicised winners: the Greens 44 per cent (from 52 MEPs in 2014 to 75 in 2019), the Liberal Democrats (earlier named ALDE, now “Renew Europe”) 56 per cent (from 69 to 108), and the post-fascists of Identity and Democracy by a full 103 per cent (from 36 to 73, more than doubling their number of MEPs)! The mixed family bringing together Italy’s Five-Star Movement with Britain’s Brexit along with some other minor groups only raised its number of MEPs by 2 (roughly 4 per cent), this despite the undeniable victory received by Brexit, and the European Conservatives and Reformists group, sometimes considered to be a potential ally of

the proto-fascists, somewhat higher, by 33 per cent (from 47 to 62). So the success of the Greens is really highly inflated. Compared to the likes of Salvini and Le Pen, theirs is only a modest gain, while the latter have doubled their presence in the parliament.

There is then the possibility of a future alliance of the three groups, the full-blooded proto-fascists of Identity and Democracy, the hybrid group that brings together the proto-fascist Farage and the charlatans of the Five-Star Movement, and finally the far right European Conservatives and Reformists. The three together add up to 179 MEPs, second only to the biggest group in the European Parliament, the centre-right European People's Party (the EPP, which currently has 180 MEPs). Before the 2019 elections, that ratio was 216 for the EPP and 120 for the prospective proto-fascist-far right alliance! One should also remember the delicate situation that was born in the EPP group immediately before the Euro elections, when Viktor Orbán of Hungary was temporarily suspended from the group for his strongman practices vis-a-vis the opposition in his country.¹⁸ Not only Orbán, but the party in power in Poland, the PiS, may very well become allies of the proto-fascists before the end of the five-year term of the European Parliament.¹⁹

So it is not enough to say this or that political family lost or won in this or that country in a non-systematic manner, but necessary to look at the overall picture.

For a more dialectical approach to the data

But, secondly, even more important than the crude data is the dialectical analysis of the combined but equally uneven development of the proto-fascist movement. When we are talking of the leap forward of a political current, *a fortiori* of a current such as post-fascism, which challenges the status quo and is seen as abhorrent by many political tendencies, a linear and well-balanced development is the last thing to be expected. This would be true even within the frontiers of a single state, let alone a multifarious and heterogeneous totality such as the EU. Each nation state has its own temporality and direction of change and while early risers such as the Netherlands and Denmark may fall behind, latecomers such as Italy may very well leap light years ahead. This is precisely what happened in the 2019 elections. Moreover, the Italian surge forward is incomparably much more dangerous than an even distribution of gains across many nations.

The excellent article by our comrade Burak Sayım on Italy in the RedMed series²⁰ shows clearly that Italy has become the new political centre of Europe. The results in Italy are daunting: La Lega of Salvini (Lega Nord in 2014) received 34 per cent of the popular vote as opposed to 6 per cent in 2014 and won 28 MEPs, 22 more than the 6 it had since 2014! It has become the first party of the country, receiving fully one half more votes than the Democratic Party in second place. And as if

18 On Hungary, see the article by Matyas Benyik: <http://redmed.org/article/european-election-results-hungary-show-restructuring-opposition>.

19 For a very informative article on Poland, see Ewa Groszewska's article: <http://redmed.org/article/european-elections-poland>.

20 <http://redmed.org/article/still-resistible-rise-salvini>.

this were not enough, another proto-fascist party that goes by the name of Fratelli d'Italia (FdI-the Brothers of Italy) raised its share of the vote from 3.5 per cent in 2014 to 6.5 per cent in 2019 and its number of seats in parliament from nil to 5. Only time separates, in all probability, proto-fascism from single-handed power in Italy, one of the most decisive countries in Europe.

What being in power in one of the largest countries of Europe will mean for the further development of proto-fascism may be gauged by looking at the use Salvini has made of his position as minor coalition partner of the Five-Star Movement so far. Domestically, Salvini has exploited his position by addressing the basest tendencies of a part of the Italian petty-bourgeoisie and the less organised and disadvantaged sections of the Italian proletariat through his ignominiously racist policies. Internationally, he has become the driving force (with the full collusion, let it be pointed out, of Marine Le Pen) of European proto-fascism. Now, if he successfully crowns his newly-found strength with victorious early national elections and forms a government of his own, getting hold of the state apparatus of one of the richest countries in the world will give him immense room for manoeuvre for building up the proto-fascist movement across Europe. That this has escaped so many analysts on the left is truly a source of astonishment for us.

In second place, the development in Britain is a true source of fresh resources for the proto-fascist movement. Having formed his new party Brexit only two months to go to the elections, Nigel Farage left behind all the other parties of the political spectrum to win the elections with 31 per cent of the popular vote, in the process raising his share of the vote from the (already immensely successful) vote of 27 per cent of his UKIP in 2014 and his number of MEPs from 24 to 29. Farage was a complete outsider in 2014. Today he is the protégé of a powerful actor on the world stage, none other than Donald Trump. The latter has already suggested to his favourite and look-alike candidate for the prime ministerial race within the Tory party, Boris Johnson, to give a role to Farage in the negotiations for Brexit with the EU! Some within the soft left tend to protect Farage from any comparison to Salvini, Le Pen or Gauland of Germany, but given the sympathy between Trump and Farage, that is rather like saying Trump is no racist like Salvini or the others.

We will come back to the British scene a propos the pitiful sight displayed by the conservatives and the formidable rise of the Liberal Democrats, but let it be said in passing that the victory obtained by Farage and the complementary defeat of Labour after its resounding success in the recent parliamentary elections are a product of Jeremy Corbyn's own making. Having almost erased UKIP from the depressed working class regions of Britain in the parliamentary elections, he refrained from taking a decisive stand on Brexit, giving in to the Europeanist, neoliberal wing of his party. Thus he made it impossible to propose a progressive Brexit to British society, which would carry a part of the pro-remain population along with the traditional working class Brexiters. In the end, stuck between two mosques, as the saying goes in Turkish, he could not win sufficient hearts on either side and had to concede victory (and a part of the working class) to Farage.

Thirdly, the result in France deserves careful, albeit brief, commentary.²¹ The Rassemblement National (RN-National Gathering) that replaced the Front National (FN) saw its share of the vote fall from 2014 to 2019 (from 25 per cent to 23 per cent) and the number of its MEPs as well (from 23 to 22). But this should be interpreted in its concrete context. First of all, as we have already said, the 2017 elections were perceived as a defeat for Marine Le Pen by French society at large. This was coupled with the fact that Le Pen's foremost lieutenant abandoned her to form a rival party (Les Patriotes). Hence Le Pen went through very difficult times. Secondly, despite the drop in her share of the vote, Le Pen saw her new party come in first, before the République en Marche (LREM) of her arch rival President Macron. This was sufficient to restore her confidence and that of her followers. One can safely conclude that the crisis opened by the 2017 elections has been successfully managed and overcome. Next to this, the 2 percentage point drop in the share of the Le Pen vote remains insignificant.

When we look at these three countries together, an obvious fact jumps to the eye. In three out of the four original giants of the EU, proto-fascism has come in first. This is no mean feat. All in all, the statistics show that these elections were an unambiguous victory for the proto-fascist movement.

Uneven development across the board

Some may say that the jump in the number of seats captured by the hard core proto-fascists, the Identity and Democracy family, is really due to the remarkable leap in the number of additional seats won by the two Italian parties, the Lega and FdI. This is true. Of the 37 additional seats taken by the whole family, 28 are won thanks to the Italians. We explained above how this might and probably will prove to be an advantage rather than a drawback. But let us also point out that this is true for almost all groups. Uneven development was a rule for most of the political families in the elections of 2019.

The group only second to the full-blooded proto-fascists in the increase of seats gained is, it will be remembered, the Liberals (Renew Europe). Of their 39 additional MEPs, 15 came from the British Liberal Democrats (who had a single MEP in 2014, but have raised that number to 16 now!) and another 14 were won by the LREM of Macron in France (LREM was inexistent in 2014, so the comparison is with the centrist MODEM and another small formation). This brings the contribution of two countries alone up to 29 out of a total of 39, perfectly comparable as a ratio to that which applies to the proto-fascists. The same goes for the Greens. The great "victory" attributed to the Greens owes to the jump in the vote of the German Grüne (from 10.5 to 21 per cent, providing an extra 10 seats) and the French EELV (which doubled the number of its MEPs from 6 to 12). The two add up to the 16 of the 23 new seats the family of Green parties have in the parliament.

So much for the winning families. There is another kind of uneven development in the losing political families. It is not to be doubted for a moment that the centre

²¹ For a careful analysis on France, involving precious sociological insights as well, see the article by our comrade Guy Hesser: <http://redmed.org/fr/article/europeennes-2019-en-france>.

right and the centre left took a great blow in these elections. Even in Germany, where despite everything Merkel's CDU-CSU came in first, the total of the votes of the centre right and centre left fell from 62 per cent in 2014 to 44 per cent in 2019.²² But there are some other striking examples to be cited. Of these the twin cases of the French right wing Les Républicains (LR) and the British Conservatives is crystal clear. The LR came in fourth with a meagre 8.5 per cent and 8 seats (compared to 21 per cent and 20 seats in the previous elections) while the British Tories came in fifth (this is the government party, mind you!) with only 9 per cent of the vote (as opposed to 23 per cent in 2014) and 4 MEPs (as opposed to 19 seats in the previous elections). As for the centre left, the Parti Socialiste (PS) suffered another humiliating defeat in France, winning only 6 per cent of the popular vote; the German SPD, for its part, fell from 27 per cent in 2019 to 16 per cent this time around.

But uneven development created exceptions here as well. At the centre left, the shining star in the bigger countries was the PSOE of Spain, which came in first, receiving 33 per cent of the popular vote as opposed to 23 per cent in the 2014 elections.²³ And on the centre right the spectacular event was the comeback of New Democracy, topping Syriza with its 33 per cent as opposed to the miserable 24 per cent of that government party.²⁴

Overall, then, statistics should be read with ample space for uneven development and for national particularities.²⁵ It is only out of that kind of sensitive reading that the true message of the 2019 European elections can be correctly deduced.

In the wink of an eye

One last grace period. The elections to the European Parliament have provided one last chance to the organised working class movement of Europe and the left before the storm. The proto-fascist movement, which the whole world persistently and blindly names "populist", attained great success in these elections, but nonetheless this was not the kind of victory that will create havoc immediately tomorrow. Moreover, the movement ran on two different slates for the European Parliament. It is, in other words, divided. Hence, in the short term, in the aftermath of the election,

22 For a fuller analysis of Germany see the article by our comrade Kurtar Tanyılmaz: <http://redmed.org/article/implications-european-parliament-elections-crisis-german-bourgeois-democracy>.

23 For a much more extensive analysis of Spain, with the background of national elections as well, see the article by our comrades of the Grupo de Independencia Obrera: <http://redmed.org/es/article/espana-un-balance-del-largo-proceso-electoral>.

24 The perceptive analysis of our comrades of the EEK on not only Greece but Europe as well is required reading: <http://redmed.org/article/what-syriza-seeded-sprouted-field-right-wing-harvest-however-must-and-can-be-only-red>.

25 For the national peculiarities of other countries we recommend the reader (for Romania) the article by Ana Bazac: <http://redmed.org/article/what-syriza-seeded-sprouted-field-right-wing-harvest-however-must-and-can-be-only-red>. As for the Nordic countries an analysis with a broad sweep is presented on the three countries of Sweden, Denmark, and Finland by an associate of ours in the region, Muzaffer Ege Alper: <http://redmed.org/article/eu-elections-north-victory-anti-immigration-over-anti-austerity>.

it would be incorrect to say that proto-fascism will create an immediate danger for the people on the scale of Europe as a whole. In certain countries taken singly the question may arise. Striking developments may unfold in some of the bigger countries (starting with Italy, France, and Britain, in each of which the proto-fascist parties came first), with the proto-fascist movement becoming an important element in the day to day life of the country (in Italy this had already commenced since the Lega of Salvini joined a power-sharing scheme and became a ruling party). So in the short term the danger is distant for Europe as a whole, but in the medium term this movement is a real danger. This delay in the emergence of the immediate threat is what has given the working class movement and the left a very precious reprieve for preparation before the impending showdown. Should the left once again fall into the kind of complacency that was observed after the relative setbacks suffered by the proto-fascist movement in France and the Netherlands in 2017, for instance, woe to the working class and the poor of Europe and beyond!

These are the introductory lines to our first article on the European elections, written immediately after the event.²⁶ Trying to calibre the true scale of the fascist menace for Europe, we try there to both point to the fact that the danger is not immediate, but also to sound the alarm of warning for the near future. It is this fact that fascism is still not an impending threat. This justifies, through however unconscious modalities, in the ranks of the soft left the belittling of the fascist menace.

But this is entirely deceptive. We also pointed to the following aspect of the matter in the same article:

Disciplined, fed with the lowliest ideological garbage, entranced by the feeling of superiority that derives from the erstwhile colonial feats of European civilisation and of their own country, full of rage against the immigrant and the refugee, who, they believe, has robbed them of their job, housing, educational and healthcare services, a crowd full of missionary zeal. The only missing thing is their militia, their paramilitary forces, their bands of thugs. But this is precisely why we do not label them as fascists, but *proto*-fascists. That they can overcome this lacuna in the wink of an eye has been demonstrated in Charlottesville, Virginia in the events of summer 2017 or in the German cities of Chemnitz and Köthen last autumn or in the chain of events in which black immigrant farm workers were attacked (and occasionally killed) in Italy after Salvini came to power in a coalition government last year.

So we again warn as to the possibility of the rapidity of the transformation of these movements and parties into real storm troopers. But not only that. There is a very concrete situation which, if and when it occurs, will give the final impetus to the march to power of the proto-fascists, through the eventual transformation of the

²⁶ See our “European Elections: Iron and Cotton”, <http://redmed.org/article/european-elections-iron-and-cotton>.

movement into a fully fledged fascist one.

If and when the world faces a new Lehman Brothers scenario, fascism will almost of necessity be the solution many (but not all) of the national fractions of the imperialist bourgeoisie will turn to. A new 2008 will, in all probability, usher in a new 1933. It will be too late then to start building the movement that really has the ideological and political clarity and the guts to fight fascism effectively. No Wall of China separates us from that moment. So let us start to prepare now.



Historical roots, current manifestations, and future prospects of fascism in India

Burak Gürel

The global waves of the far-right historically coincide with the great depressions of the world economy (1873-1896, 1929-45, and the post-2008 era) and usually appear as a reaction to two main developments triggered by such crises. As witnessed during the previous two great depressions, the far-right movements and regimes served the big bourgeoisie to overcome its crisis by decisively crushing the labor movements associated with revolutionary or radical reformist politics. Second, the far-right reactionary movements and regimes emerge in response to the intensification of inter-capitalist, inter-imperialist, and inter-state competitions during great depressions. In such periods, national economies protect themselves with customs walls, and imperialist states fight with each other to increase their

respective shares within a stagnant or shrinking world economy. Nation-states use all means possible at such times, including military conflicts, as evidenced by two world wars in the 20th century. In such conflicts, by making extreme nationalist and xenophobic politics mainstream and silencing its critics, the far-right movements and regimes serve the interests of their own national bourgeoisie.

The peculiarities of the current great depression can be identified in this comparative perspective. Unlike the post-1929 period when labor unions and communist parties were strong, the organizational level and political disposition of the working class today is not threatening enough to force the big bourgeoisie to depend on the far-right. The rapid aggravation of the current depression in part due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which has slashed tens of millions of jobs within only a few weeks, may change this situation. Still, so far, there has not been a revolutionary upsurge. The main similarity between the depressions of 1929 and 2008 is the growing inter-capitalist and inter-state competition. Fierce economic competition has already set in, not only among the imperialist states of North America, Western Europe, and Japan but also among their rising contenders such as China and, to a lesser but still significant extent, Russia and India. A Third World War has already become a real danger.

In the same manner as before, today's far-right is remarkably diverse. Some movements aim to transform the state machinery in a more authoritarian and chauvinist direction without destroying the multi-party regime based on competitive elections. Other organizations seek to destroy the multi-party regime and basic civil liberties. There are also substantial variations in this pro-dictatorial group. Some movements are fundamentally similar to classical fascism of the interwar era, combining parliamentary and paramilitary methods to carry out regime change. Others, which can be named "proto-fascist," mainly lean on electoral/parliamentary means and are characterized by the lack of a paramilitary wing (or have it in a rudimentary form). The transition from proto-fascism to fascism or vice versa is possible, depending on the trajectory of class conflict at the national and global levels. We need to distinguish these different tendencies carefully and analyze their shifting positions over time to wage an effective struggle against the global rise of the far-right.¹

This article examines Hindu fascism's long march to power. Understanding this movement will help us grasp general characteristics of the period we are going through. Hindu fascism is a religious fundamentalist and fascist movement. While

¹ Leon Trotsky's writings in the 1930s provide the best classical Marxist analysis of fascism (*The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1971). For other useful studies of fascism see Arthur Rosenberg, "Fascism as a Mass-Movement," *Historical Materialism*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2012 [1934], pp. 144–189; Daniel Guérin, *Fascism and Big Business*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 2016 [1939]. For detailed comparisons of fascism and proto-fascism with reference to the political circumstances of the second and third great depressions of the world economy, see Sungur Savran, "The Return of Barbarism: Fascism in the 21st Century (1) Historical Roots: Classical Fascism," *Revolutionary Marxism 2019*, pp. 15–48; "The Return of Barbarism: Fascism in the 21st Century (2) The Rise of Proto-fascism," *Revolutionary Marxism 2020*.

its roots trace back to the 19th century, the movement acquired a firm organizational framework in the mid-1920s. The middle classes and upper and middle castes of the Hindu majority have been the core constituency of fascism in India. The movement has used both parliamentary and paramilitary methods. Fascist paramilitaries have mobilized the lower-middle classes and the lumpenproletariat against the communists, secularists, and religious minorities, especially Muslims. Indian People's Party (Bharatiya Janata Party, BJP), the party of Hindutva fascism, has rapidly risen since the late 1980s and has been in power without the need for a coalition partner since 2014. The demise of the mainstream bourgeois parties—first and foremost, the Indian National Congress (INC, also known as the “Congress Party,” or the “Congress”)—and the socialist movement in the neoliberal era, has enabled Hindu fascism's rise to power. Unlike centrist parties, Indian fascists have consolidated their power by bringing social services and aid to the proletariat through their grassroots organizations and have maintained the same line while in power. Therefore, it is not enough to defend secularism and democratic rights against Hindu fascism (and other far-right movements). Except for a persistent and systematic revolutionary proletarian policy and organization, no strategy can decisively defeat such movements.

This article consists of eight chapters. The second section analyzes the political economy of religious communalism in India. Basic features and history of Hindutva fascism are explained in the third and fourth sections, respectively. The fifth section examines Hindutva fascism's rise to power. The sixth section surveys the BJP's administrative practice and strategic orientations since 2014. The seventh section addresses the degree and prospects of the fascistization of the Indian political regime and outlines the most feasible path of the left-led resistance against fascism. The concluding section summarizes the main arguments of the article.

The political economy of religious communalism in India

A brief survey of the Mughal, British, and postcolonial periods will put India's religious communalism in historical perspective. The earliest roots of the Hindu-Muslim conflict can be traced to the Mughal Empire, ruled by the Muslim emperors, which conquered and governed the central and northern parts of the Indian sub-continent from the 16th century to the early 19th century. Islam quickly spread throughout the subcontinent during this period. The British colonization of India—which started with the East India Company's occupation of Bengal in 1757, deepened with the transition to direct British rule in 1857 and ended in 1947—added new dimensions to the problem of religious communalism. Although the history of Christianity in India traces back to the pre-colonial era, the presence of the British expanded the popular reach of Christianity in the subcontinent. Hindu chauvinists have targeted Christians ever since then, although not in the same degree as they have attacked Muslims, who comprise a larger portion of the population and are perceived as a bigger threat. The British Raj also implemented “divide and rule” policies to prevent a unified resistance against the colonial rule, which heightened the Hindu-Muslim animosity, and—to a much lesser extent—Hindu-Christian tension. Third, the division of the sub-continent into two separate states (India and

Pakistan), based on a brutal war and ethnic cleansing that began immediately after the end of British colonialism sow the seeds of today's communal fault lines and Hindu majoritarian politics.

Defying the Hindutva and Islamist theses, which claim that there was no cultural integration between Hindus and Muslims during the Mughal era, historical accounts document a certain level of synthesis. For example, the Mughal rulers were often the patrons of Hindu temples and festivals, whereas the Hindu rulers of the Maratha and the Rajput dynasties, who fought against the Mughals, did the same for Muslim mosques and religious festivals. There were also periods when Hindu and Muslim soldiers fought under the command of the same army. Therefore, it is wrong to claim that Hindu-Muslim relations were hostile at all times. Moreover, there were times when the Shia-Sunni sectarian conflicts in India were as severe as Hindu-Muslim conflicts. Nevertheless, it is an indisputable fact that the roots of religious communalism in the Indian subcontinent lie in the Mughal period and led to innumerable conflicts and pogroms since then.²

Although the trajectory of relations among different religious communities cannot be explained solely on economic factors, the changes in economic structure significantly affected the degree of religious tolerance and intolerance in India. Long before the Mughal conquest and the expansion of Islam, the relationship between Hindus and Buddhists in India had significantly varied across the spectrum of harmony and animosity, which was shaped by changing economic circumstances:

The thing to mark is that the Indian character was not always so tolerant. There are periods when people came to blows over doctrine, ritual, and worship. Emperor Harsa Siladitya (circa 600-640 AD) of Kanauj found no difficulty in worshipping Gauri, Mahesvara-Siva, and the Sun, while at the same time he gave the fullest devotion to Buddhism. His enemy Narendragupta-Sasanka, raided Magadha from Bengal, cut down the Bodhi tree at Gaya, and wrecked Buddhist foundations wherever he could. What was the difference? Why was a synthesis of the two religions [...] not successful? [...] ***the underlying difficulties were economic [...] a dovetailing of the superstructure will be possible only when the underlying differences are not too great.***³

In other words, when “there was no longer enough for all; one or the other group had to be driven to the wall.”⁴ Religious co-existence—and even synthesis—was easier to attain during the times of economic expansion, whereas economic contractions aggravated religious fault lines and led to increasing religious discrimination. Hence, while the expansionary phase of the Mughal economy created the basis of

2 For a careful analysis of the historical background of religious conflict in the Indian subcontinent, see C. A. Bayly, “The Pre-History of ‘Communalism’? Religious Conflict in India, 1700-1860”, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 1985, pp. 177-203.

3 Damodar Dharmanand Kosambi, *Myth and Reality: Studies in the Formation of Indian Culture*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1962, p. 29 (emphasis added).

4 Ibid., pp. 29-30.

Hindu-Muslim harmony, its subsequent depression diminished it: “With Mughal prosperity at its height, Akbar could dream of a synthetic Din-e-ilahi; Aurangzeb could only try to augment his falling revenue by increased religious persecution and the Jizya tax on unbelievers.”⁵ These discriminatory measures created a sense of humiliation among the Hindu majority, which motivated the politics of revanchism, bigotry, and violence against Muslims, especially after the Mughal rule.

Class struggles during the era of British colonialism significantly shaped the Hindu-Muslim conflicts. The struggles within the upper classes and the struggles between the upper and lower classes coincided with religious divisions in many regions. For example, the majority of the poor peasants in the east of Bengal were Muslim, whereas most of the landlords were Hindu. The class conflicts in the region took the form of religious disputes.⁶ The diverging paths of class alliances and conflicts in the heavily populated United Provinces (UP) of the British India, which includes the present-day states of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, are another interesting case. In the eastern UP, Muslim and Rajput (an upper-caste Hindu group) big landowners sustained a long-term alliance during both the Mughal and British periods. The language of education and communication of this dominant class alliance was Urdu, i.e., Hindi language with significant Arabic and Persian accretions. The Urdu-speaking elite dominated the UP politics until the second half of the 19th century. In the western regions of the UP, where landed interests were weaker and commercial and financial interests—almost exclusively represented by upper-caste Hindus, primarily from the Bania caste—were comparatively stronger. With the development of commercial economy due to a greater railroad connectivity, the economic power and political assertiveness of the latter group increased. The colonial administration’s promotion of local representation through elected bodies in return for raising taxes intensified the competition between these two dominant class fractions. To challenge the dominance of the Urdu-speaking elite, Banias, Brahmins and other upper and middle castes demanded that the colonial administration make Hindi language written with the Nagri script—which had religious significance for Hindus—the official language of education and administration in the UP. Hindu revivalism and Muslim separatism resulted from this initial inter-elite conflict.⁷

In many regions, the contradictions between Muslim weavers and Hindu usurer-merchants in the areas of trade and finance triggered religious conflicts in many instances. The conflicts among the lower classes have also taken religious forms.

5 Ibid., p. 30. “The attempted integration between communities was evident at the *Khanqahs* of Sufis,” which “provided a means of incorporating Hindu religious customs and beliefs into an eclectic system” (Zoya Khaliq Hasan, “Communalism and Communal Violence in India,” *Social Scientist*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1982, pp. 25-26).

6 Amiya Kumar Bagchi, “Predatory Commercialization and Communalism in India”, In *Anatomy of A Confrontation: Ayodhya and the Rise of Communal Politics in India*, edited by Sarvepalli Gopal, London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1993, pp. 196-199.

7 Francis Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces Muslims 1860-1923*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 10-83.

During the Mughal era, the population was relatively small, and taxes were collected only from the cultivated land. Hence, vast common pasture areas were opened for animal husbandry. The reforms of the British colonial administration, which legally secured private property over land, changed this situation. These reforms made the tilling of land (either as private property or state property) mandatory. The private lands (regardless of their actual usage) were taxed. This rule led to the conversion of common pastures into private farmland. The land conflicts between farmers and those engaged in animal husbandry become widespread. These conflicts took on religious forms in regions where Muslims were mainly cultivators and Hindus mainly preoccupied with animal husbandry. Hindu and Muslim dominant classes which wanted to avoid conflict with the colonial administration framed this issue in religious terms. Upper caste landlords in North India started the “cow protection movement” in the last few decades of the 19th century. The Ulema and Muslim landowners took a similar path by declaring jihad against the Hindus.⁸

Another deep-rooted conflict was the dispute over the locations of Hindu temples and mosques. During the Mughal era, some Hindu temples were destroyed and replaced by mosques. During British colonialism, the Hindus took action to rebuild temples in these places. There were severe tensions and conflicts during religious holidays, especially those with conflicting dates.

The “divide and rule” policy of British colonialism poured gasoline into the fire of religious conflict. The fact that both Hindus and Muslims participated in the (Sepoy) Mutiny of 1857, the first major armed insurrection against colonial rule in India, alarmed the British colonialists. For instance, George William Forrest, a historian in the service of colonialism, warned the colonial administration that:

Among the many lessons the Indian mutiny conveys to the historian, none is of greater importance than the warning that it is possible to have *a Revolution in which* Brahmins and Sudras, *Hindus and Mohamedans, could be united against us*, and that it is not safe to suppose that the peace and stability of our dominions, in any great measure, depends on the continent being inhabited by different religious systems for they mutually understand and respect and take part in each other’s modes and ways and doings.⁹

The colonial administration’s divide and rule policy aimed to fend off this looming danger. Although the Indian National Congress, founded by the predominantly upper-class and upper-caste Hindus in 1885, did not initially voice the demand for national independence, in response to the growing desire for independence, British colonialists started manipulating the Hindu-Muslim tension. Quotas were set for greater representation of Muslims in local governments and at the national level. Muslim elites were encouraged not to join the INC but to establish organizations of

8 Bagchi, pp. 196-199. Also see Robinson, pp. 77-78.

9 D.R. Goyal, “Some Observations on the Origins of Communalism in India,” in *Communal Riots in Post-Independence India*, edited by Asghar Ali Engineer, Hyderabad: Sangam Books, 1991, p. 43 (emphasis added).

their own. Muslim elites founded the National Mahommedan Association in 1877 and the Muhammadan Educational Conference in 1886. The latter organization changed its name to All-India Muslim League on 30 December 1906. The strengthening of the Muslim League deepened the Hindu-Muslim divide further.¹⁰ Despite its claim of representing all Indians, the INC became an almost exclusively Hindu organization, with Muslims constituting only 3% of its membership by the mid-1930s.¹¹

Severe conflicts between Hindus and Muslims intensified from the late 19th century onward. Gaurakhshini Sabha (the Society for the Protection of Kine) was founded in 1882. The following year, violent clashes occurred in Lahore, Punjab, Haryana, and Delhi due to the cow slaughter issue. Similar events occurred in Punjab and Delhi in 1886 and Haryana in 1889. In the 1890s, communal violence shook North India. In August 1893, a small-scale civil war took place in Mumbai, where hundreds of people were killed and wounded.¹² In 1905, British colonial rule divided the state of Bengal into Muslim-majority East Bengal (today's Bangladesh) and Hindu-dominated West Bengal. Although Bengal was reunited in 1911 in response to protests mainly by Hindus, the first partition seriously affected the political struggles in parallel with the decline of British rule in India. The idea that Hindus and Muslims could not live under the same state roof has become increasingly accepted. As Indian independence rose over the horizon, conflicts between Hindus and Muslims spread in the entire subcontinent, sometimes taking the forms of local civil wars and pogroms. Finally, massacres and clashes during the India-Pakistan partition, which co-occurred with the end of the colonial rule in 1947, resulted in the death of between half a million and one million people, and displacement of about 12 million people.¹³ During the Partition, a significant portion of Hindus in Pakistan migrated to India, while a significant portion of Indian Muslims migrated to Pakistan. Nevertheless, a sizeable Muslim minority remained in India. According to the 2011 census, the religious composition of Indian population is as follows: Hindu (79.8%), Muslim (14.23%), Christian (2.3%), Sikh (1.72%), Buddhist (0.7%), Jain (0.37%), "other religions" (0.66%), "not-stated" (0.24%).¹⁴ In terms of the absolute figures, India is the second country with the highest Muslim population after Indonesia.¹⁵

10 For detailed information on the encouraging attitude of the colonial government on the separate representation of Muslims, see P. Hardy, *The Muslims of British India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972, pp. 116-196.

11 Perry Anderson, *The Indian Ideology*, London and New York: Verso, 2013, p. 52.

12 Hardy, pp. 140—141.

13 Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017, p. 6, 9. The region that was known as "East Bengal" before 1947 and then "East Pakistan" for some time seceded from "West Pakistan" and turned into the independent state of Bangladesh in 1971. The foundation of Bangladesh is one of many examples showing that religious glue is not enough to sustain national unity.

14 "Religion Census 2011," <https://www.census2011.co.in/religion.php>

15 Jeff Diamant, "The Countries with the 10 Largest Christian Populations and the 10 Largest Muslim Populations," *Pew Research Center*, 1 April 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/tscs6ng>

One of the most significant consequences of the partition is the emergence of the Kashmir question. India annexed a sizeable part of Kashmir, where Muslims comprise the vast majority of the population. Kashmiri Muslims have been fighting for independence ever since. There is no consensus on the status of Kashmir, whether it should be a separate state or join Pakistan, even if it manages to win independence. Although not all Kashmiris want to join Pakistan, Pakistan has been deeply involved in the problem. India and Pakistan fought three wars (in 1947, 1965, and 1999) over Kashmir. Islamist movements have long been influential in the independence movement in Kashmir. Similar to other states, India is trying to legitimize its presence in Kashmir, using the argument of “terrorism” at the national and international levels. The unsolved Kashmir problem has fed Hindu chauvinism.¹⁶

Although communal violence had never disappeared, the first decade of the post-independence India was relatively peaceful in terms of communal relations for three main reasons. First, the immense amount of communal hatred accumulated over many decades had just been settled by the massive bloodshed during the partition. Second, the Congress enjoyed its highest degree of prestige in its entire history and Indian masses, regardless of their religious affiliations, had high hopes from the new India. Finally, the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by a Hindutva fascist militant in 1948 also, temporarily, isolated the fascist movement from Hindu masses. However, this honeymoon ended in the early 1960s, when the tide of communal violence started to rise again. The first major communal riot of the post-independence era happened in the city of Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh state in 1961.¹⁷ Despite brief interludes, communal violence pitting the Hindu majority against religious minorities—mostly against Muslims, but also against Christians and Sikhs in certain periods—had become part of daily life since the early 1960s.

Similar to the pre-independence era, the conflicts between and within different social classes have remained a major structural determinant of communal violence in the post-independence era. The contradictions within the petty and middle bourgeoisie in urban areas, especially in medium-sized cities of North India, shaped communal politics throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The most prosperous sections of the Muslim capitalists and landlords migrated to Pakistan during the partition. Along with the lowest castes of Hindus, Muslims have constituted the poorest section of the Indian society since then.¹⁸ However, medium-sized cities of North India retain a fairly large number of Muslim-owned industrial and commercial firms. Although

¹⁶ On the historical background of the Kashmir question, see Anderson, *The Indian Ideology*, pp. 68—74, 142—143.

¹⁷ Asghar Ali Engineer, “The Causes of Communal Riots in the Post-Partition Period in India,” in *Communal Riots in Post-Independence India*, edited by Asghar Ali Engineer, Hyderabad: Sangam Books, 1991, p. 35.

¹⁸ For an analysis of the incidence of poverty by caste and religious groups see K.P. Kannan, “Macro-Economic Aspects of Inequality and Poverty in India,” in Alpa Shah, Jens Lerche, Richard Axelby, Dalel Benbabaali, Brendan Donegan, Jayaseelan Raj, Vikramaditya Thakur, *Ground Down by Growth: Tribe, Caste, Class and Inequality in Twenty-First Century India*, London: Pluto Press, 2018, pp. 43-44.

independent India has never gone through an economic renaissance similar to East Asia, the expansion of the national market and increasing international trade generated opportunities for this group. Hence, “Muslim artisans and craftsmen were able to work themselves into small entrepreneurs and began competing with Hindu traders and craftsmen” and some of them became “businessmen of substance,” running small factories and export commodities.¹⁹ The economic boom of oil-producing Arab countries in the same period provided a significant advantage to Muslim capitalists who could establish links with these countries due to shared religion and cultural affinity. The competition among Muslim and Hindu capitalists was not confined to local and foreign markets. They also competed within the labor market. Muslim capitalists found “it easier to get Muslim workers to work for them unless their Hindu counterparts agreed to pay better wages and offered better conditions of work,” making “the situation of Hindu entrepreneurs to tighten and their competition with Muslim entrepreneurs tougher.”²⁰

Economic advancement increased the visibility and posture of Muslims in urban areas, manifested through investments in real estate, Islamic education, mosque construction, and religious festivals. Finally, Muslim businessmen competed for leadership positions within the local branches of the Congress and sought office by mobilizing Muslim votebanks. The socio-economic advancement of Muslims resulted in an increasing sense of threat and resentment among the Hindu businessowners and lower classes. Hindu communalists portrayed the flow of money from oil-rich Arab countries to Muslim businesses as an Islamic fundamentalist conspiracy and a terror threat against India.²¹ Hindu elites and the fascist organizations mobilized the low-caste Hindus against Muslims in communal riots by disseminating this sense of Muslim threat, which was accompanied by implicit and explicit promises of upward mobility for low-caste Hindus by conquering Muslim properties, markets, and jobs.

Larger cities and metropolitan areas have also been incorporated into the political economy of Hindu communalism over time. During the fascist mass mobilizations in the recent four decades that are examined below, Muslim properties and businesses were attacked by low-caste mobs and paramilitary forces mobilized by the Hindu fascist leaders of middle and upper castes and classes.

Hindutva as a fascist ideology

The *Hindutva* ideology and movement (commonly referred to as “Hindu nationalism” and “Hindu fundamentalism”) aims to make India a Hindu *rashtra* (nation) through establishing Hindu majority’s absolute dominance over religious minorities, especially over Muslims. As I will explain in the next section, the Hindutva movement, besides its political party, has been established primarily through a paramilitary organization that was initially formed in the inter-war period

19 Imtiaz Ahmed, “Political Economy of Communalism in Contemporary India,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 19, No. 22-23, 1984, p. 904.

20 Ibid., p. 905.

21 Ibid, p. 905; Engineer, pp. 36-40.

and directly inspired by Italian fascism and Nazism. Hence, “Hindu fascism” or “Hindutva fascism” is a more accurate description of the movement. Similar to Islamists’ view of the first Islamic state (established in the 7th century) as a golden age that needs to be resurrected, the Hindu fascists consider the pre-Mughal era as a golden age and aim to revive it. The Hindutva version of the national history narrates the Mughal conquest as the rape of the Hindu homeland and the biggest disaster. It perceives the Hindu states and principalities that survived in the Mughal period, especially the Maratha state which played a significant role in the decline of the Mughals, as positive historical references.

Hindu fascism views history through the prism of essentialist, sexist, and chauvinist definitions of male and female identities. A conventional narrative is that the eyes of the Muslim men are always on Hindu women, while Hindu men are weak, cowardly, and incapable of protecting their women. Apart from claiming that Muslim men are polygamous, Hindutva asserts that they do not use birth control, so the Muslim population is growing much faster and the demographic structure of the country is rapidly changing against Hindus.²² Furthermore, although Hindu fascists do not approve of British colonialism, they see it as a less catastrophic event than the Mughal rule. The fact that Britain defeated Muslims before colonizing India is the main reason for this more relatively favorable viewpoint.

Another characteristic of the Hindutva movement, similar to many far-right movements, can be seen in its expansionist ambitions. Hindu fascists have coined a term “United India” (*Akhand Bharat*), referring to a vast region which extends from Burma in the east to Afghanistan in the west and includes Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. They see this region as the territory they lost and must recover at the earliest opportunity. In 1948, a Hindutva militant assassinated Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of Indian independence movement, because he had supposedly failed to prevent the foundation of Pakistan. One of the most trenchant and enduring criticisms that Hindu fascists make against the Congress Party is that they disregard the goal of establishing the “United India.” Today, the map of *Akhand Bharat* frequently appears in the propaganda materials of Hindu fascists.²³

Hindu fascism aims to remove the principle of secularism from the constitution and make Hinduism the official religion of the state. In other words, it intends to make non-Hindus second-class citizens at best. Hindutva ideology legitimizes the physical elimination of those who do not accept this status. Hindu fascists aim to achieve this goal through reconversion of religious minorities to Hinduism,

22 The ratio of Hindus to the total population decreased from 84.1% in 1951 to 79.8% in 2011, while the proportion of Muslims increased from 9.8% to 14.2% in the same period (Abantika Ghosh and Vijaita Singh, “Census: Hindu share dips below 80%, Muslim share grows but slower,” *The Indian Express*, 24 January 2015, <https://tinyurl.com/y9hoxddh>; “Religion Census 2011”). In short, the population balance has not changed much in sixty years, and the Hindutva demographic argument is non-sensical and chauvinist.

23 Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 110; Sankaran Krishna, “Cartographic Anxiety: Mapping the Body Politic in India”, *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 1994, p. 511, 520.

deportation of Muslims to Bangladesh and Pakistan, and mass murder of those refusing the first two options. Similar to Turkish Islamists, Hindu fascists seek to erode secularism at the societal level gradually at first and then to change the political regime through radical legal amendments. In line with this perspective of a long-term struggle, they intend to eliminate certain legal rights given to the Muslims in a positive discrimination framework such as the abrogation of the application of the sharia law among the Muslim communities in specific issues such as family affairs. Hindu fascists often make baseless claims that the rights of the Hindu majority have been violated and call the central government and state governments to protect their rights. Similar to Turkish Islamists' discursive distinction of *laikler* (secularists) and *laikçiler* (those who are—allegedly—obsessed with “secularism” to the extent of violating the rights of the Muslim majority in Turkey), Hindu nationalists frequently use the term “pseudo-secularism” to attack the secularists resisting the Hindutva agenda.²⁴ On the one hand, they put themselves under legal protection by making lip service to the constitutional principle of secularism; on the other, they try to hollow out all secular ideas and principles. The Congress Party has made many concessions to Hindu chauvinism over decades and has become, in a manner of speaking, a party of “soft Hindutva,”²⁵ as evidenced by the murder of thousands of Sikhs in New Delhi after the 1984 assassination of Indira Gandhi, the then Congress leader and prime minister, and its passive and appeasing attitude towards Hindu majoritarian politics over the years. However, until recent years, most Muslim citizens of India viewed—and, to a lesser extent, still view—the INC as an imperfect but the best available bulwark against Hindu fascism and casted block votes for the Congress.²⁶ This political behavior is similar to the heterodox Alevi community's continuous support to the CHP (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, Republican People's Party) as the most secular establishment party (despite the CHP's serious concessions to Islamists over the years) as a relatively secular bulwark. As a result, like Turkish Islamists who label the CHP as the party of Alevis to isolate it from the Sunni majority, Hindu fascists often blame the Congress as the party of Muslims and try to separate it from the Hindu majority.²⁷

Indian radical left has been the most consistent and principled enemy of Hindu fascism. The communist movement, which started to rise immediately after the October Revolution, frightened the Indian bourgeoisie and landlords. In the 1930s

24 Hansen, p. 150, 157, 165, 187; Yogendra K. Malik and V.B. Singh, “Bharatiya Janata Party: An Alternative to the Congress (I)?,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 32, No. 4, 1992, pp. 324–325.

25 Christophe Jaffrelot, “The Fate of Secularism in India,” In *The BJP in Power: Indian Democracy and Religious Nationalism*, edited by Milan Vaishnav, Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2019, p. 56.

26 Paul R. Brass, “Congress, the Lok Dal, and the Middle-Peasant Castes: An Analysis of the 1977 and 1980 Parliamentary Elections in Uttar Pradesh,” *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 54, No. 1, 1981, p. 16; Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and Lloyd I. Rudolph, “The Centrist Future of Indian Politics,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 20, No. 6, 1980, p. 581.

27 Hansen, pp. 160, 173–174; Vinod K. Jose, “The Emperor Uncrowned: The Rise of Narendra Modi,” *The Caravan*, 1 March 2012, <http://www.caravanmagazine.in/reportage/emperoruncrowned-narendra-modi-profile>

and 1940s, communists led mass struggles that sometimes acquired insurrectionary characteristics. Although Indian communism followed the path of parliamentary reformism under the guidance of the Soviet Union, which wanted to get along with the Indian government, it continued, until recently, to be a considerable force capable of organizing among the workers and poor peasants. Following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union, the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) moved even closer to social democracy. Indian Maoism has been a notable exception to this broader trend of social democratization. The Maoists emerged as a formidable force after the peasant uprising in the Naxalbari village of West Bengal in the second half of the 1960s (the Maoists are often called “Naxalites,” a reference to the Naxalbari uprising). Although the Maoists faced a series of army crackdowns and factional splits, after the unification of two major Maoist factions under the umbrella of the Communist Party of India (Maoist), CPI (Maoist) in 2004, Maoism gained significant power. The Maoist guerillas are still active in a vast area of East-Central India known as the “Red Corridor,” spanning from Andhra Pradesh up to the Northeast. The Maoists retain a large following among the Scheduled Castes (Dalits) and Scheduled Tribes (Adivasis) that comprise the poorest and most oppressed section of the Indian society. Hindu fascists see these leftwing organizations as enemies of the Hindu unity. Like other fascist parties, Hindu paramilitaries have fought against leftists since the very beginning.²⁸ These paramilitaries collaborated with both the British colonial government and the Congress Party against the communists. They continued this line of action after the independence. Despite their serious contradictions, both Hindu fascists and the Congress cooperated against communism in specific instances.²⁹

The history of the Hindutva movement

The Hindutva project, which had sprouted during the communal conflicts from the 1890s on, turned into a nationally organized political movement for the first time in 1913 after the establishment of the Hindu Mahasabha (All-Indian Hindu Grand Assembly). The fact that an openly anti-Muslim organization like Hindu Mahasabha remained within the Indian National Congress until 1938 reveals the Congress’s problematic relationship with secularism and its disposition to compromise Hindu chauvinism from the very beginning. Hindu Mahasabha, remained strong until the 1950s and later on became insignificant due to factional splits of the Hindutva movement.³⁰

The foundation of the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS, National Volunteer Organization) in 1925, while fascism was rising in Europe, was the real turning point of Hindu fascism. The RSS incorporated the mass base of Hindu Mahasabha

28 Hansen, p. 106, 166; Kiran Saxena, “The Hindu Trade Union Movement in India: The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 33, No. 7, 1993, p. 691.

29 Aijaz Ahmad, “India: Liberal Democracy and the Extreme Right”, *Socialist Register 2016*, edited by Leo Panitch and Greg Albo, London: The Merlin Press, 2015, p. 183.

30 Ibid., pp. 178—179.

by the 1950s and became the supreme fascist organization in India. The RSS was deeply influenced by classical fascism in ideological and organizational terms. For example, the RSS leader Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar explicitly expressed his approval of Nazis' treatment of Jews as an acceptable model for India:

To keep up the purity of the Race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging of the country of the Semitic Races — the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for Races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindusthan to learn and profit by [...] The foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no ideas but those of glorification of the Hindu race and culture [...] or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment — not even citizen's rights.³¹

Similar to the fascists in Italy and Nazis in Germany, the RSS is organized, first and foremost, as a paramilitary organization with local branches called *shakhas*. Professional fascist organizers called *pracharaks* train these paramilitaries with strict discipline. RSS paramilitaries hold rallies typically with their uniforms and carrying sticks. In short, the RSS is undoubtedly a fascist organization.³²

The Indian central government banned the RSS three times. After an RSS-linked fascist killed Mahatma Gandhi in 1948 due to his alleged failure to prevent the foundation of Pakistan and concessions to non-Hindus in independent India, the government banned the RSS and arrested 20,000 of the RSS militants. The Congress government led by Indira Gandhi banned the RSS during the emergency period (1975-1977). Finally, after the Hindu fascists destroyed the Babri Masjid on 6 December 1992, which led to nationwide communal conflict, the RSS was banned again. However, due to its historically strong influence among both the masses and the elites, each successive ban was shorter in duration and softer in implementation. Overall, those bans have not severely constrained the organization.³³

The Hindutva movement has a large number of organizations that appeal to India's highly complex social structure, shaped by variations in class, caste, ethnicity, language, and region. In Hindutva terminology, the whole movement is called *Sangh Parivar*, i.e., Family of Organizations, and the RSS is the family's

31 Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, *We, or Our Nationhood Defined*, Nagpur: Bharat Publications, 1939, p. 35, 62; cited in Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics, 1925 to the 1990s*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1996, pp. 55-56. In 2006, sixty-seven years after the publication of Golwalkar's book, the RSS made an utterly unconvincing and ridiculous attempt at distancing itself from the book (Akshaya Mukul, "RSS Officially Disowns Golwalkar's Book," *The Times of India*, 9 March 2006, <https://tinyurl.com/uhltatm>).

32 For detailed information on the RSS see Hansen, pp. 90-133; Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics*, pp. 33-79.

33 Hansen, pp. 90, 130-131, 184-185.

“mother.” Sangh Parivar currently includes over 800 organizations.³⁴ Some of these organizations are specialized in non-violent activities, but the movement as a whole is firmly based on a paramilitary structure.

Several organizations of Sangh Parivar are worth mentioning. The World Hindu Council (*Vishva Hindu Parishad*, VHP), founded in 1964, is the ecclesiastical authority of the movement. It aims to provide an orthodox, uniform, and simple interpretation of Hinduism to build a Hindu nation. The VHP has organized campaigns to build Hindu temples in disputed areas between Hindus and Muslims. *Bajrang Dal* (i.e., “Monkey Brigade,” named after monkey-God Hanuman, a messenger of Lord Ram, according to Hinduism), is the paramilitary youth wing of the VHP which was founded in 1984 at the heyday of the Ayodhya campaign (that is explained in the next section). Its members mainly consist of unemployed and underemployed men from the lower castes. Bajrang Dal has committed numerous atrocities since then.³⁵

Founded in 1936, the National Women Volunteers Committee (*Rashtriya Sevika Samiti*) rests on an essentialist, chauvinist, and distorted Muslim male–Hindu male duality outlined above. According to this distorted view, because of the cowardice of Hindu men, Hindu women are vulnerable to Muslim men, and they have to learn to protect themselves. Hence, under the guise of women’s self-defense, anti-Muslim chauvinism is advocated.³⁶ The All Indian Student Council (*Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad*, ABVP), bringing together pro-Hindutva university students, was established in 1948. The main goals of the ABVP have been to fight against the radical left and religious minorities. To date, the ABVP has carried out numerous attacks on campuses against leftists and students belonging to minorities. The ABVP has actively engaged with day-to-day problems of college students (such as the quality of educational facilities, dormitories, scholarships, etc.) to prevent the radical left from dominating the student movement. In line with the general rise of the Hindutva movement, the ABVP has become India’s largest student organization today, claiming to have more than 3 million members.³⁷

The Indian Workers’ Union (*Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh*, BMS), founded in 1955, is the labor union arm of Sangh Parivar. The BMS is strongly corporatist and anti-communist. Less than 10% of the Indian working class is employed in the formal sector.³⁸ Unions are much more robust in the formal sector than in the informal sector. Therefore, union data alone are not sufficient to understand the power of a political movement within the Indian proletariat. Nevertheless, since

34 Thomas Crowley, “Modi Might Have Finally Gone Too Far: An Interview with Achin Vanaik,” *Jacobin*, 22 December 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/vltfd89>

35 Sumantra Bose, *Transforming India: Challenges to the World’s Largest Democracy*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013, p. 68; Hansen, pp. 155-156; Jaffrelot, “The Fate of Secularism in India,” p. 55.

36 Ahmad, pp. 183-184; Hansen, pp. 97-98.

37 Ahmad, p. 184; Jaffrelot, pp. 127, 258-265; Jose, “The Emperor Uncrowned.”

38 Elizabeth Hill, “The Indian Industrial Relations System: Struggling to Address the Dynamics of a Globalizing Economy,” *Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 51, No. 3, 2009, p. 404.

unions are active in critical sectors of the economy and different organizations are competing in the trade union field, the data on union organization is undeniably important. The BMS became the second-largest union by the early 1980s. With 12 million members, it is currently the biggest labor union of India.³⁹

Rural political organization is extremely important in India, where two-thirds of the total population live in the countryside, and two-fifths of the workforce are employed in agriculture.⁴⁰ Hindu fascism is quite active in the countryside. The fascist movement is strong among small and medium Hindu farmers, especially in the northern regions of the country. The populist and conservative coalition of the landowning farmers (bringing large, medium, and small farmers together) successfully defeated Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's attempts at establishing cooperative farms and transferring the agricultural surplus to industry in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Hindu fascists played a vital role in this conservative camp through an intense campaign labeling Nehru as a communist. Later on, the farmers' movement led by the rich and middle farmers marked the politics of the country in the 1970s and 1980s. This movement extracted significant concessions from the government (and, indirectly, from industrial capital) such as higher procurement prices for agricultural products, more generous subsidies for farm inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides, and significant reductions of taxes on farm products and prices of water and electricity. The Indian Farmers' Union (*Bharatiya Kisan Sangh*, BKS, also referred to as *Bharatiya Kisan Union*, BKU) has been the most influential farmer organization of the country. Founded in 1978, the BKS/BKU represented both Hindu and Muslim landowners in its early years. However, since the 1990s, Hindu fascists have dominated the BKS/BKU, and Muslim farmers abandoned the organization, especially in northern states where Hindu-Muslim tension is high.⁴¹

Apart from these affiliates, Hindu fascism also has a political party wing. Since legal parties are generally more inclusive and accessible due to electoral dynamics, the movement's parties have maintained greater autonomy than any of the RSS's other subsidiaries. The RSS leadership has authority over the legal party, but there are occasional disagreements between the two. Three subsequent parties have represented the movement. The Indian People's Association (*Bharatiya Jana*

39 Ahmad, p. 184; Rina Agarwala, "The Politics of India's Reformed Labor Model," in *Business and Politics in India*, edited by Christophe Jaffrelot, Atul Kohli, and Kanta Murali, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019, p. 101.

40 World Bank Open Data, n.d., <https://data.worldbank.org/>

41 On the successful conservative coalition of the landowning peasantry against Nehru see Terence J. Byres, "Charan Singh, 1902-87: An Assessment," *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2, pp. 139-189. On the involvement of fascists in this coalition see Christophe Jaffrelot, *Religion, Caste, and Politics in India*, New Delhi: Primus Books, 2010, pp. 259-260. On the increasing influence of Hindutva communalism within the farmers' movement and the BKU/BKS itself see Jairus Banaji, "The Farmers' Movements: A Critique of Conservative Rural Coalitions," *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 3-4, pp. 228-245; Tom Brass, "The Politics of Gender, Nature and Nation in the Discourse of the New Farmers' Movements," *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 3-4, pp. 27-71; R. Ramakumar, "Jats, Khaps and Riots: Communal Politics and the Bharatiya Kisan Union in Northern India," *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 2017, pp. 22-42.

Sangh, BJS), was active between 1951 and 1977. The growing public dissatisfaction regarding the INC government's failures on many fronts, especially in economy, enabled the rightwing and leftwing opposition to strengthen their support in the 1970s. Unable to crush the street protests, the INC leader Indira Gandhi, Nehru's daughter, declared a state of emergency in 1975. The violation of human rights and political freedoms were the characteristics of the emergency period. Nevertheless, Indira Gandhi was unable to crush the opposition and put her political agenda to practice entirely. She lifted the state of emergency in 1977.

A coalition whose only common denominator was hostility to Indira Gandhi founded the Janata (People's) Party. At this stage, the BJS showed serious tactical flexibility by dissolving itself and joining the Janata Party, which won the 1977 elections and ruled the country until 1980, when it split and lost power. This tactical move significantly helped the fascist movement present itself as a democratic and legitimate force and thereby break the walls separating it from large masses.⁴² In this sense, the Janata coalition was the starting point of the gradual fascistization of Indian mainstream politics in the next four decades. Following the dissolution of the Janata government in 1980, the Indian People's Party (*Bharatiya Janata Party*, BJP) was founded in the same year. We can measure the mass support for the Hindu fascism by looking at the votes of BJS and BJP in general elections. BJS received 3.06% votes in 1951, 5.93% in 1957, 6.44% in 1962, 9.41% in 1967, and 7.35% in 1971. BJP received 7.74% of votes in 1984 and 11.36% of votes in 1989.⁴³ In short, Hindu fascism was strengthened but did not become hegemonic before the 1990s.

Hindu fascism's march to power

Hindutva's mass appeal has increased rapidly since the 1990s. BJP's vote share increased from 11.36% in 1989 to 20.1% in 1991 and 25.59% in 1998. Although its vote share fell to 18.8% in 2009 elections due to the internal discord and *relatively* poor record of the BJP-led coalition government between 1998 and 2004, this was only a temporary retreat. BJP received 31.34% of votes in the 2014 general election and came to power alone for the first time, and consolidated its power by receiving 37.36% in 2019 election.⁴⁴ As I show below, this success resulted mostly from the failures of its main rivals, the Congress and the socialist left. Sangh Parivar's organizational innovations and advances also helped. As a result, while the fascist movement has historically maintained strong support among the upper-middle castes and classes of Northern India, it has managed to increase its influence and support among the lower and lower-middle castes and classes across the country.

The decline of the Congress

The Congress Party is one of few parties that stayed in power for such a long

42 Walden Bello, *Counterrevolution: The Global Rise of the Far Right*, Warwickshire: Practical Action Publishing, 2019, p. 71.

43 Election Commission of India, "Election Results- Full Statistical Reports," n.d., <https://eci.gov.in/statistical-report/statistical-reports/>

44 Ibid.

time in a multi-party parliamentary system. In this respect, it is similar to the Peronist movement in Argentina, the Swedish Social Democratic Party and the Liberal Democratic Party in Japan. The INC ruled India either alone or as the major partner of coalition governments between 1947-1977, 1980-1998, and 2004-2014. That the INC stayed in power for so long can be attributed to its deep ties with the regional elites and ordinary people due to its leading role in the independence movement. In this respect, the Congress is completely different from the CHP, which ruled Turkey between 1923 and 1950 under a single-party regime but failed to win general elections in the multi-party era, except the elections in 1961, 1973, and 1977. The Congress promised Indians rapid economic development and decent living standards. It is clear that, if some periodic improvements are left aside, it failed to fulfill these promises. This failure gradually eroded the INC's hegemony. Moreover, the dynastic character of the Congress' leadership (manifested by an unbroken chain from Jawaharlal Nehru to his daughter, Indira Gandhi, Indira's son Rajiv Gandhi, and today, Rajiv's son, Rahul Gandhi) and the party's rampant corruption over decades have resulted in mass alienation from the party. The INC under Indira Gandhi's leadership, which could not cope with the rising opposition, declared a state of emergency in 1975, the first clear signal of its crisis of hegemony. The Congress could not sustain the emergency rule for long and lifted it in 1977. The general election of 1977 brought to power the Janata coalition, which consisted of several center-left and center-right parties as well as fascists. Hence, the three-decade long uninterrupted rule of the Congress ended.

After the dissolution of the Janata government in 1980, the people gave the Congress, which demanded their votes with the slogan of "Remove Poverty" (*Garibi Hatao*), another chance in the 1980s. Yet the Congress failed again. Rajiv Gandhi (the Prime Minister of India from the assassination of his mother, Indira Gandhi, by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984, to his own assassination by Tamil militants in 1989) initiated an economic liberalization program by cutting taxes for the upper and middle classes and easing import restrictions. Following the economic crisis in 1991, the INC government shifted to full-fledged neoliberalism by privatizing state-owned industries and cutting agricultural subsidies and social expenditure, which alienated large sections of the proletariat and small peasantry.⁴⁵ Although the INC managed to be the first or second party in elections after 1990, it lost its mass appeal. The INC's vote share declined from 39.5% in 1989 to 28.3% in 1999, 28.5% in 2009, 19.5% in 2014, and 19.49% in 2019.⁴⁶

The crisis of the socialist left

The second important reason behind the rise of Hindutva is the decline of the socialist left. The Stalinist bureaucracy ruling the Soviet Union prioritized good relations with the INC governments over the revolutionary struggle in India. As a result, the CPI supported the Congress under the pretext of alliance with the

45 Amiya Kumar Bagchi, "The Republic at Crossroads," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 77, 2016, p. 971.

46 Election Commission of India, "Election Results- Full Statistical Reports."

“national” and “progressive” bourgeoisie against imperialism and even claimed that India was following the path of “non-capitalist development.” However, the Congress did not tolerate any advances of the CPI. For example, responding to the CPI’s victory in the state election in Kerala in 1957 and launching a land reform program afterwards, the central government under Prime Minister Nehru declared a state of emergency in Kerala and dismissed the CPI government in 1959. This counterrevolutionary move did not change the CPI’s collaborationist line, evidenced by its support to the Indian government against the People’s Republic of China (which was a workers’ state, albeit bureaucratic) during the China-India War of 1962. Another shameful action of the CPI was its support for Indira Gandhi’s emergency rule during which basic civil liberties were suspended and thousands of socialists were arrested.⁴⁷

The Communist Party of India-Marxist, founded in 1964 by those who had resigned from the CPI, protesting against its class-collaborationist line (especially during the China-India war), initially created hope, but after a while, the CPI-M also shifted to a similarly class-collaborationist direction. In Kerala, the state government has changed hands in subsequent elections between the INC-led and CPI-M-led coalitions since the late 1960s.⁴⁸ Education and healthcare services and indicators have improved significantly, but economic underdevelopment and chronic unemployment continued. The CPI-M-led “Left Front” governments uninterruptedly ruled the state of West Bengal for thirty-four years (1977-2011). Since West Bengal is a much larger and populous state than Kerala and the CPI-M governed there for such a long time, the developments in West Bengal have mattered more than those in Kerala for the long-term trajectory of Indian communism. Unfortunately, the CPI-M’s record was dismal there. In 1985, a perceptive observer provided the following analysis of the CPI-M’s performance in West Bengal:

The fact is that in the past three or four years the Left Front has failed to put forward and carry out even a credible parliamentary programme of change. Its early policies of panchayat government, land rights to *bargadars* and food for work soon reached the point of exhaustion. It has never formulated a viable programme of agricultural development, except to shamefacedly collude in the percolation of a degenerate form of capitalist agriculture. On the industrial front, it has been able to do nothing about the prolonged and seemingly irreversible stagnation, increasing unemployment and the proliferation of a deeply impoverished sector of unorganized labor. On power, transport, health and education, not only has there

47 Bagchi, “The Republic at Crossroads,” pp. 968-969; Ouseph Varkey, “The CPI-Congress Alliance in India,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 19, No. 9, 1979, pp. 881-895. Forty years after the declaration of emergency, the CPI leadership acknowledged that supporting the emergency rule was a grave mistake! (Shiv Sahay Singh, “Supporting Emergency Was a Mistake: CPI Leaders,” *The Hindu*, 27 June 2015, <https://tinyurl.com/t5b2geh>).

48 Joseph Tharamangalam, “The Perils of Social Development without Economic Growth: The Development Debacle of Kerala, India,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 30, No. 1, 1998, pp. 23-34.

not been any effective programme of change, even the existing systems have been allowed to rot and crumble. Its constant plea of stepmotherly treatment by the center has increasingly sounded like a hollow excuse rather than the rallying cry of a popular struggle for changing the present constitutional framework. On top of this, charges of sectarianism, corruption and manipulation of government machinery and patronage systems for serving narrow partisan interests have become more and more vociferous.⁴⁹

Later developments only confirmed these early observations. Although effective campaigning by a disciplined party apparatus and opportunistic coalitions with various local interest groups helped the CPI-M win subsequent elections, its political orientation and dismal administrative record continued.⁵⁰ Making things even worse, both the Left Front government in West Bengal and the CPI-M leadership collaborated with the Indian government to crush the Maoist insurgency in the countryside.⁵¹

The collapse of the Stalinist regimes in 1989-91 worsened the situation even further. Both the CPI and CPI-M fell into a deep ideological-political crisis and shifted towards a center-left line. In this new context, the West Bengal government even flirted with neoliberalism by encouraging mining and industrial corporations to invest in the state and suppressing the mass opposition against these corporations in the 2000s. The disillusionment created by the CPI-M's class collaborationist line and poor administrative record was a critical factor behind the decline of the Indian left. The CPI-M's loss of West Bengal in the 2011 state election was a turning point in this regard. The combined vote share of the CPI and CPI-M was 9.85% in 1971, 8.73% in 1980, and 9.12% in 1989, which then declined to 6.88% in 1999, 6.76% in 2009, 4.02% in 2014, and 2.33% in 2019.⁵²

Meanwhile, although Indian Maoism has avoided these reformist pitfalls, the reliance on guerilla methods in the forests of central and eastern India and lack of a nationwide revolutionary strategy have separated large sections of the urban and rural proletariat from the Maoists. The impasses of Stalinism, Maoism, and reformism have discredited the communist alternative in India as a whole.⁵³

Growing influence of Hindutva among the Indian bourgeoisie

The Hindutva movement has made a significant electoral and organizational breakthrough, primarily through its legal party BJP. As noted, the movement started

49 Partha Chatterjee, "1 January 1985: Left in a Bind," *Frontier*, 5 January 1985, reprinted in Chatterjee, *The Present History of West Bengal: Essays in Political Criticism*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 116.

50 Kheya Bag, "Red Bengal's Rise and Fall," *New Left Review*, No. 70, 2011, pp. 69-98; Bagchi, "The Republic at Crossroads," pp. 976-977.

51 Thomas Crowley, "The Many Faces of the Indian Left," *Jacobin*, 12 May 2014, <https://tinyurl.com/ufwyt9>

52 Election Commission of India, "Election Results- Full Statistical Reports."

53 Crowley, "The Many Faces of the Indian Left."

mainly as the representative of the upper caste small and middle bourgeoisie. However, it lacked the support of the big bourgeoisie, which is necessary for any organization to become a contender for power in bourgeois politics. This situation has changed notably since the 1990s. The BJP harmonized its economic policy with neoliberalism despite criticism from other organizations of the Hindu movement, especially the BMS and the BKS/BKU. Besides, the policies pursued by Narendra Modi during his fourteen years (2001-2014) in the office, as the Chief Minister of the Gujarat state, improved the party's relations with the big bourgeoisie. The fact that Gujarat is one of the few economically most developed states of India and that it has strong ties with the Indian diaspora capitalists in Britain, USA, and Canada makes the relations cultivated in that region determining at national and international scales. Modi seized that opportunity well. He gained the trust of the big bourgeoisie and attracted investment to Gujarat through low taxes and the provision of low-cost land. Through many well-publicized summits held in Gujarat, he cultivated personal relations with top Indian and foreign capitalists. These policies increased the BJP's appeal to the big bourgeoisie. Finally, long before capturing the central government, the BJP-controlled state governments like Gujarat utilized administrative power to nurture pro-Hindutva capitalists through various favoritisms.⁵⁴

Growing influence of Hindutva among the Indian proletariat

Getting the support of the big bourgeoisie is necessary but insufficient to come to power. Since India is still a poor country (in terms of per capita GDP and the percentage of population below or slightly above the poverty line), winning lower classes is necessary for achieving decisive electoral victories. The simultaneous decline of the Congress and the Marxist left in the neoliberal era allowed fascists to gain influence over large sections of the classes of labor. Although successive Congress governments implemented the policies of import substitution industrialization during the first three decades of the postcolonial era, and thus increased formal industrial employment, the great majority of India's labor force continued to be informal workers. The liberalization of the 1980s and neoliberalization after 1991 destroyed millions of formal sector jobs and further swelled the ranks of the informalized and unorganized proletariat. The socialist left was incapable of resisting this process and organizing millions of recently unemployed and informalized workers.

Similar to the rise of fascism in the interwar era, increasing lumpenization of the proletariat provided fertile ground for the rise of Hindu fascism from the 1980s onwards. This process was especially dramatic in Gujarat. Ahmedabad, Gujarat's capital city, had been the center of textile industry and known as "Manchester of India" and "Manchester of the East" for about a century. About half of Ahmedabad's workforce was employed in textile mills. The degree of formal employment and unionization in Ahmedabad was much higher than national average. The Textile Labor Union (*Majoor Mahajan Sangh*) founded in 1917 by the leader of national independence movement, Mahatma Gandhi, was the strongest union. Although it

⁵⁴ Jose, "The Emperor Uncrowned."

followed a class-collaborationist line, Majoor Mahajan Sangh secured considerable gains in terms of wages and working conditions for over decades. This situation changed completely in the 1980s and 1990s. Most of the textile mills were closed and 125,000 workers were laid off. Surat city became the new industrial heartland of Gujarat. Surat's industries relied on migrants from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh. This new labor force entirely consisted of informal workers without any union protection, who worked long hours under dismal conditions for low wages. The sea change in Gujarat's labor force shifted the political terrain in favor of Hindu fascism:

Whenever communal tensions have flared up and erupted in street riots in the past, these clashes could be defused by appealing to working class solidarity, which transcended the boundaries of primordial loyalties. The social consciousness produced by factorised employment did not arise spontaneously but had been built up during the social struggle in which the Majoor Mahajan Sangh played a pivotal role [...] No doubt, there were communal riots also then. When riots broke out in 1969 [...] factories had stopped production but on the third day of riots the call came for members of the MSS to report back to duty. Workers of the same shift but with different caste and religious identities were told to go to the mills and back home in mixed batches in order to safeguard each other's wellbeing. Nowadays there is hardly any space left for that sort of intercommunal sharing and mutual protection. The union which at that time with more than 150,000 members was one of the largest and best organised in the country is a spent force, reduced to less than one-tenth of its former strength and depleted of all economic and political power.⁵⁵

This resulting lumpenization of the labor force played into the hands of the fascist movement:

Since there was no security to be obtained from the state and the community, people thought their only resort would be to religion and became victims of godmen and the RSS. Just as the contractionary policies of Heinrich Brüning and Franz von Papen had created a huge army of unemployed labour, in the same way, the failure of earlier governments to provide enough employment and the repeated budget squeezes of the NDA and UPA governments generated an enormous mass of labour, some of whom became lumpenised through repeated failures to find employment.⁵⁶

This lumpenized proletariat actively participated in two major anti-Muslim pogroms (in 1992 and 2001), which will be briefly explained below. During the massacre in Surat in 1992, "most of the hunters came from the hordes of labour

55 Jan Breman, "Communal Upheaval as Resurgence of Social Darwinism," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 16, 2002, pp. 1485-1486.

56 Bagchi, "The Republic at Crossroads," p. 972.

migrants. The survivors identified them: Kathiawadi diamond cutters, Uttar Pradesh *bhaiyas*, Oriya *malis*, who operate the power looms.”⁵⁷ During the pogrom in Ahmedabad in 2002, “the orgy of violence that has taken place [...] have reached a climax in ex-mill localities.”⁵⁸

The caste dimension of this sea change is also noteworthy. According to the 2011 census data, Dalits and Adivasis make up a quarter of the total population.⁵⁹ Since the Hindutva movement was based on upper-middle castes and classes, it faced serious difficulties in winning the hearts and minds of Dalits and Adivasis for a long time. However, the movement has made considerable progress in this regard since the 1980s. The local mass organizations of the Hindutva movement have made significant effort to win these groups. Public services such as healthcare and education are dismally inadequate in urban slums and villages. Hindutva grassroots organizations have mobilized to fill this gap and thereby win the political support of lower castes and classes. They opened a large number of schools, dormitories, and healthcare centers that provide free services to the poor. Wealthy fascists and local governments under the BJP’s control finance these grassroots organizations. Fascist militants work as teachers and doctors in these schools for modest wages. These people, who grew up with organizational discipline, are much more devoted workers than civil servants. The people find the education and health services provided by Hindutva grassroots organizations at a much higher quality than the services offered by the state. These institutions work for the BJP during election campaigns. This organizational innovation has significantly contributed to the rise of Hindu fascism.⁶⁰ Today, as the class position increases, the votes to the BJP increase, but the 2014 election results show that the party has significantly increased its support within the lower castes and classes.⁶¹ In a paper published right after the Gujarat massacre of 2001, Jan Breman underscored this phenomenon:

The mobilisation of low and intermediary castes to participate in the activities of

57 Jan Breman, “A Footloose Scholar,” *New Left Review*, No. 94, 2015, p. 58.

58 Breman, “Communal Upheaval,” p. 1485.

59 <https://www.census2011.co.in/scheduled-castes.php>; <https://www.census2011.co.in/scheduled-tribes.php>

60 Hansen, p. 103; Tariq Thachil, “Elite Parties, Poor Voters: Theory and Evidence from India,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 108, No. 2, 2014, pp. 454-477. Radhika Desai provides a careful analysis of the alliance of the middle class and the big bourgeoisie that brought BJP to power. However, an exclusive focus on the neoliberal face of the BJP leads her to almost entirely ignore the factors behind the party’s growing support among the lower classes (Radhika Desai, *Slouching Towards Ayodhya: From Congress to Hindutva in Indian Politics*, New Delhi: Three Essays Collective, 2004; Desai, “A Latter-Day Fascism?,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 49, No. 35, 2014, pp. 48-58).

61 Christophe Jaffrelot, “The Class Element in the 2014 Indian Election and the BJP’s Success with Special Reference to the Hindi Belt,” *Studies in Indian Politics*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 2015, pp. 19-38. Regarding BJP’s increased support among lower castes and in former strongholds of the socialist left, see Achin Vanaik, “India’s Landmark Election,” *Socialist Register 2015*, edited by Leo Panitch and Greg Albo, London: The Merlin Press, 2014, pp. 55-56.

the Sangh Parivar organisations in the last two decades has broadened the base of Hindu fundamentalism as a social-political force. The price these previously denigrated segments have to pay for their acceptance within the Hindutva fold is their willingness to express antagonism to Muslims as members of the religious minority and, in brutal acts of confrontation, to do the dirty work of cleansing on behalf of their high-caste brothers and sisters.⁶²

The Ram Janmabhoomi movement

As noted above, the Hindutva movement has based itself on a paramilitary organization since its early days. The Hindu-Muslim conflict over the status of Babri Masjid in the Faizabad district of Ayodhya city of the northern state of Uttar Pradesh has become a core issue of fascist mass mobilization since the mid-1980s. The Babri Masjid was built in 1528-29 upon the orders of Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire. According to Hindutva mythology, the masjid was constructed right at the place where the Hindu god Ram was born. According to the whole Hindutva movement, especially the World Hindu Council (VHP), the birthplace of Ram is an indispensable part of Hindu religious doctrine. Therefore, it cannot be subject to any scientific scrutiny and debate. Hindutva ideology interprets the very existence of the Babri Masjid as a symbol of the oppression and humiliation of Hindus by Muslims. Destroying the Babri Masjid and building a Temple of Ram in its place has been one of the most popular demands of the Hindu chauvinists since the mid-19th century and has been the motivation of numerous mass mobilizations. Many violent clashes took place between Hindus and Muslims in Ayodhya in 1853-55, 1883-86, and 1934. Aiming to demolish the masjid after the independence, the Hindu mass mobilization continued. The nine-day religious ritual organized by Hindu Mahasabha around the masjid in December 1949 was the turning point. On 23 December 1949, the last day of the ritual, about 50 people entered the mosque and placed Hindu icons around. Soon afterwards, fascist agitators announced (via megaphones to thousands of people gathered around the masjid) the fake news of a divine miracle that Hindu idols had just suddenly appeared inside the masjid. At that moment, the masjid was *de facto* converted into a Hindu temple that attracted visits of tens of thousands of Hindus each year. Uttar Pradesh state government, afraid that the volatile situation might trigger a fierce religious conflict, declared the masjid as a “controversial area” on 16 January 1950 and locked its door. Hindutva and Islamic activists filed separate requests (in 1959 and 1961) demanding the area, but they did not get any results.

Hindu fascists have reignited the Babri Masjid conflict since the mid-1980s. In 1984, the VHP started the *Ram Janmabhoomi* (“Ram’s Birthplace”) campaign and established “The Committee for Sacrifice for the Liberation of Lord Ram’s Birthplace.” In the same year, the VHP also established Bajrang Gal, its paramilitary youth. The number of Bajrang Dal members reached 100,000 by the late 1980s. The VHP founded *Durga Vahini* (Durga’s Battalion) in 1991, which is a similar organization for recruiting young women. In 1985, the campaigners organized a

⁶² Breman, “Communal Upheaval,” p. 1485.

march that started from twenty-five different locations in North India and finished with a mass demonstration in front of the Babri Masjid. The campaign gave its first result in the following year. In February 1986, the Faizabad District Court allowed Hindus to hold a religious ceremony around the masjid. This decision was, of course, not enough for the fascists who wanted to demolish the masjid and build a Hindu temple instead. However, by helping the movement gain a legal ground, it helped mobilize more people in the following period.⁶³

In 1989, the VHP announced to the public the plan to move the bricks which it deemed “blessed” from all over the country to the region by mass marches. To win the votes of Hindus under the influence of the temple campaign in the general election scheduled for December, the Congress government headed by prime minister Rajiv Gandhi declared a parcel adjacent to the Babri Masjid as an “undisputed land” in September 1989. The INC government also allowed the VHP and other campaigners to carry on their effort to move the bricks to the area. Panicked by the intense protests of the Muslims who supported the Congress Party, the Gandhi government stepped back and banned the construction of the temple. However, the arrow had already come out of the bow. The campaigners rejected the ban and continued the protest. Standing behind the scenes for a while, the BJP finally took the stage and supported the campaign vehemently. According to pro-Hindutva sources, more than 100 million people participated in the temple campaign in every corner of the country in 1989. Hundreds of millions of bricks were collected from villages, towns, and cities and moved to the conflict zone.⁶⁴ Religious polarization played an essential supportive role in the BJP’s election campaign. As a result, its vote share increased from 7.74% in 1984 to 11.36% in December 1989. More importantly, the BJP won state elections in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Himachal Pradesh.⁶⁵

In September 1990, L.K. Advani, the then BJP leader, started a 10,000-kilometer-long march from Somnath Temple toward Ayodhya. The RSS called this march a “holy war.” On their way to Ayodhya, Hindu fascists carried out many attacks against Muslims. After the Bihar government arrested Advani at the end of October, things broke new ground. On October 30, fascist militants erected the saffron flag symbolizing Hinduism on top of the Babri Masjid. During the clashes that followed, the police killed more than 50 militants and detained hundreds of them. This event sparked the movement even more. The fascists started a great agitation organized around their so-called “martyrs” who sacrificed themselves for the sake of their religion. The campaigners branded the Congress-led Bihar and Uttar Pradesh governments as “pro-Muslim pseudo secularists.” Persistent mass mobilization had a positive impact on the BJP’s performance in the 1991 election. The party’s national vote share made a huge leap, from 11.36% in December 1989 to 20.11% in June 1990. The BJP not only retained the three state governments it had won in the previous election but also won Uttar Pradesh, the most populous province of India

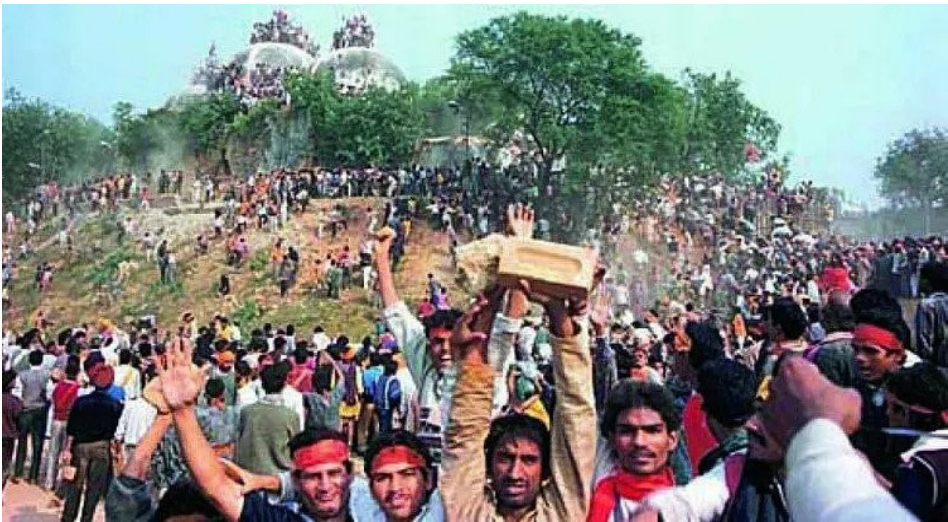
63 Hansen, pp. 154-156.

64 Ibid., pp. 156-161.

65 Saxena, p. 693.

and the center of the Ram Janmabhoomi campaign.⁶⁶

After the BJP's landmark victory in Uttar Pradesh, the final stage of the masjid crisis started. The Chief Minister of the UP, Kalyan Singh, claimed that the BJP's victory meant a referendum on this issue. Singh tried to please the fascist campaign that had brought him to power, keeping his actions within the limits of legality and preventing the demolition of the masjid. He confiscated a large area around the masjid and allocated it for Hindu rituals. On the other hand, he assured the Constitutional Court that the masjid demolition was out of question. However, the RSS and the VHP did not care about Singh's legalistic gestures and pressed the button for masjid demolition. On 6 December 1992, more than 200,000 Hindutva militants and sympathizers from all over the country quickly broke the poorly staffed security cordon, first hit the masjid structure with sledgehammers and then set it on fire. Five century old Babri Masjid was destroyed. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Singh resigned immediately after the incident. In reality, the BJP-led state government did nothing serious to protect the masjid. It gave tacit support to its "mother organization" RSS and religious authority VHP in their efforts to destroy the Babri Masjid.⁶⁷



An image showing the demolition of the Babri Masjid on 6 December 1992.

The demolition of the Babri Masjid was a turning point in India's post-independence history. It poisoned Hindu-Muslim relations further. Immediately after the incident, a small-scale civil war broke out between Hindus and Muslims across the country, which, according to official figures, took 1200 lives.⁶⁸ The campaign and its aftermath were a real test for the Hindu fascist movement. Immediately after the demolition of the masjid, the BJP-led Uttar Pradesh government resigned. The central government in New Delhi removed other BJP-led state governments (of Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, and Rajasthan) due to their failure of providing law and order. Many fascist leaders, including the BJP leader Advani, were detained. Finally, the RSS, VHP, and Bajrang Dal were banned.

The Hindu fascist movement successfully passed that test. The demolition of the Babri Masjid and post-demolition conflicts (where the majority of victims were Muslim) created a sense of triumph among the lower and middle-class Hindus. Expressions like "teaching the minorities a lesson" and "do not take on the Hindu wrath" became popular. For this reason, the Congress government could not seriously enforce its ban on Sangh Parivar organizations.⁶⁹ Neither the demolition of the masjid nor the events that broke out afterward were subject to a serious police investigation. Those arrested for communal violence comprised a tiny portion of the perpetrators. The Hindu paramilitary organizations endured the process virtually unscratched. The central government lifted the ban soon, and the RSS and the VHP activities continued without any hindrance. The BJP's vote share increased from 20.29% in 1996 to 25.59% in 1998⁷⁰ and the party ruled the country as the senior partner of a coalition government between 1998 and 2004.

The Gujarat pogrom

Fascist violence reached its second peak during the Gujarat massacre in February–March 2002. On February 27, 2002, when a train carrying Hindu pilgrims returning from Ayodhya (the location of the demolished Babri Masjid which had become a Hindu pilgrimage site) to Gujarat stopped at the town of Godhra (where 40% of the population was Muslim and many religious conflicts had taken place in the past), a fight broke out between Hindu pilgrims and Muslims. Fifty-nine pilgrims died in the fire that broke out on the train. The cause of the fire is still a controversial topic. However, Sangh Parivar organizations and media immediately referred to it as a massacre of Hindus perpetrated by Muslims. On 7 October 2001, less than four months before the incident, Narendra Modi, an RSS veteran, had taken the office of the Chief Minister of Gujarat, not through popular vote but replacing the former CM who was in poor health and declining popularity due to corruption allegations. Modi ordered the transfer of 59 burned corpses to state capital Ahmedabad for public display for several days. This public display fueled the anger of the Hindu majority. On February 28, a large crowd led by fascist paramilitaries attacked Muslims all over Gujarat, especially in Ahmedabad. Approximately 1000 people were killed,

68 Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics*, p. 463.

69 Hansen, pp. 181-185.

70 Election Commission of India, "Election Results- Full Statistical Reports."

mostly Muslims. Many people, including babies, were burned and skewered, while women were first raped and then killed. Approximately 20 thousand houses and businesses were destroyed, together with 360 places of worship, most of them belonging to Muslims. One hundred and fifty thousand Muslims left the region after the pogrom and moved to ghettos.

One of the most dramatic episodes of the pogrom happened at a Muslim-majority apartment complex called the Gulbarg Society in Ahmedabad. People who were afraid of being murdered took refuge in the house of the former INC deputy, Ehsan Jafri. Jafri called many state administrators, including Modi, and several officials in New Delhi, saying that they were about to be killed by the mob and requested the police to be sent to the area urgently. These demands were ignored. As a result, Jafri and many others accompanying him were murdered. In short, the 2002 Gujarat Pogrom is a mass murder and ethnic cleansing carried out by Hindu fascist mobs, the state government under Modi, and the BJP-led coalition government in Delhi.

The rise of Modi

Although his responsibility in the Gujarat pogrom is clear, Modi has never been investigated and put to trial. He repeatedly said that he had no responsibility in the incidents and did nothing to apologize. The BJP-led federal government did not dismiss Modi but instead called for a snap election in the state. Being a candidate again in the state election on 15 December 2002, Modi organized his election campaign in an utterly anti-Muslim communal framework. One of his main messages was the unity of Hindus. While repeatedly reminding the 59 Hindu pilgrims burned on the train, he never mentioned 1000 Muslims killed by his supporters. As the BJP won 127 seats out of a total of 182 of the Gujarat parliament, Modi was elected as the CM of Gujarat. In short, fascists triumphed both on the street and in the ballot box.

After this victory, Narendra Modi rapidly climbed up to the leadership of the BJP. His charismatic leadership positively contributed to the party's image. The fact that Modi had come from a low-caste and poor family was beneficial for the BJP, which tried to change its image as the party of the middle-upper castes and classes. Modi joined the RSS when he was eight years old, and he did not engage in anything other than RSS organization until his forties. Little is known about this period of his life. This mystery halo contributed to his charisma. In addition to his oratory skills, Modi is known to be brutal and risk-taker. He endured the challenges of the post-pogrom era. The US and British authorities denied Modi's visa applications due to his alleged role in the Gujarat pogrom. In 2003, shortly after this massacre, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), an organization of the big bourgeoisie, organized a "Meeting with the President of Gujarat Prime Minister Narendra Modi". What happened at the event is a striking example of Modi's determination and risk-taking behavior. At the beginning of the meeting, the president of the Bajaj Group, Rahul Bajaj, said to Modi:

Why don't we get investment in Kashmir, the Northeast, or Uttar Pradesh and Bihar? It is not just the lack of infrastructure, but also the sense of insecurity. I hope this won't happen in Gujarat—all this comes to mind because of the unfortunate

events last year [...] We would like to know what you believe in, what you stand for, because leadership is important [...] You are today the undisputed leader of your party and government in Gujarat and we want to know you better [...] We are prepared to work with governments of all hues, but we also have our own views on what is good for our society and what works for it.⁷¹

Not willing to be tamed in this way, Modi gave the following response while shouting: “You and your pseudo-secular friends [...] can come to Gujarat if you want an answer. Talk to my people. Gujarat is the most peaceful state in the country [...] Others have vested interest in maligning Gujarat. What is your interest?”⁷² Immediately after this scandalous meeting, Modi founded an alternative organization called the *Resurgent Group of Gujarat* (RGG) by the pro-BJP businessmen. In its first statement, the RGG accused the CII of insulting the Gujaratis and invited the Gujarat branch of the confederation to resign. Frightened by the threat of resignation from one hundred large companies from Gujarat, the CII bowed to pressure and apologized to Modi. Modi’s victory in the first arm wrestling with the big bourgeoisie benefited him in the long run. As noted above, Modi facilitated investments in Gujarat, curry favored with the big bourgeoisie but continued to hold the strings all the time. Modi also managed to impress the Hindu Gujaratis of all classes and castes with his alarmist and uncompromising rhetoric about national security, exaggerations of economic growth, and administrative efficiency. In an interview during the 2014 election campaign, an ordinary supporter described Modi in the following words:

Today the most helpless people are Hindus in India. In Kashmir people burn Indian flags. Only in India can such things be considered normal. After the 2002 riots, when the media and other political parties started blaming Modiji, thousands of people like us—now it must be crores of us—started becoming staunch supporters of Modiji. The more you blamed him, the more of our support he gained [...] If Modi becomes PM we know for the next 10, 15 to 20 years we will have a leader who will work day and night to make India stronger. He has set an example by governing Gujarat well [...] What did the Congress do in the last 10 years? How hopeful we were in 2004! Where are we now? Modiji will take 5, 10 years, but, at least, after those five years we will be back in the race to compete with China.⁷³

The BJP in power

The BJP came to power for the second time in 2014. This time, unlike the coalition government experience between 1998 and 2004, the party had an absolute majority in the parliament. Despite the absolute majority, to avoid offending its coalition partners within the National Democratic Alliance, the BJP also gave

⁷¹ Jose, “The Emperor Uncrowned.”

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Jaffrelot, “The Class Element in the 2014 Indian Election,” p. 24.

ministries to those parties in the government. However, it has acted as a single-party government.

The BJP government's main objective in the field of economy is to attract foreign capital to the country by keeping wages, taxes, and land prices low, thus keeping the economic growth at a high rate. Modi aims to make India a popular destination for international capital, which is seeking an alternative to China due to the substantial increase in wages and land costs there. Modi tried to make amendments in the Land Acquisition Law to expand the state's eminent domain to provide cheap land to industrial investors. Besides rural landowners (including small and large farmers) and opposition parties, numerous organizations within the Sangh Parivar such as the BMS labor union and BKS/BKU farmer union also opposed Modi's land acquisition bill.⁷⁴ The growing opposition and related loss of elections in Bihar in 2015 forced the BJP to step back and shelve the planned changes.⁷⁵ Modi's failure to provide a large amount of cheap land to industrial investors has so far obstructed his goal of attracting industrial investment from China to India.⁷⁶

I have mentioned above the critical role of Sangh Parivar's social service and assistance activities in the slums and villages in the BJP's success. The BJP continues these activities while still in power. It has also maintained a series of social programs launched by the INC governments. Modi harshly criticized the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which was legislated in 2005 with the support of the INC government and the Left Front parties, especially the CPI-M. The MGNREGA scheme provides minimum wage employment in rural infrastructure projects for up to 100 days every year. Many leftists took Modi's statements at face value and claimed that the BJP government was going to abolish the MGNREGA program. However, since the BJP has been increasingly concerned with expanding his support among rural lower castes and classes, it has so far allocated more funds to this program than the Congress government.⁷⁷

As the party of a movement organized primarily by provoking hatred against

74 "Land Bill: RSS Affiliates Lodge Strong Objections before Joint Parliamentary Committee," *The Indian Express*, 23 June 2015, <https://tinyurl.com/yxy4ehvq>

75 Amy Kazmin, "India's Narendra Modi Stumbles on Land Reform", *Financial Times*, 9 August 2015.

76 Aman Thakker and Vikram Albrecht, "Modi Reform Scorecard: Improving Land Acquisition in India," 10 July 2019, <https://www.cogitasia.com/modi-reform-scorecard-improving-land-acquisition-in-india/>

77 Sanjeeb Mukherjee, "10 Years of MGNREGA: How the Modi Government Was Forced to Adopt the Scheme", *Business Standard*, 3 February 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/vzsj25n>; Liz Mathew, "Why the BJP Embraced MGNREGA, the 'Living Monument' of the UPA's Failures," *The Indian Express*, 3 February 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/tuundan>; Manas Roshan, "In a Hole: Political Realities Blunt Narendra Modi's Attack on the NREGA", *The Caravan*, 1 March 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/wzxmk2w>; Ujjwal Krishna, "NREGA: How Political Will Impacted Implementation," *Financial Express*, 5 June 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/wtohyvo> For an accurate prediction that the Modi government will capitalize on the existing social programs rather than eliminating them, see Vanaik, "India's Landmark Election," p. 63.

non-Hindus, the BJP's practice in communal politics is critical for both itself and the future of India. The pressure on Muslims increased after the BJP had come to power. Expanding the restrictions on cattle slaughter is one of its most critical aspects. There has been a ban on cow slaughter for a long time in states other than Kerala, West Bengal, and the ones in the Northeast. However, there was no prohibition on the slaughter of other bovine animals that are unable to reproduce or be used in transportation. Hindutva movement has campaigned for the ban on slaughtering all kinds of bovine animals for a long time. Modi enforced such a ban in Gujarat in 2005. After BJP's victory in 2014, Haryana and Maharashtra state governments did the same. Despite the slaughter ban, eating beef has not been banned yet. The Hindutva movement is pushing it to be banned. After 2014, there has been an increase in attacks against those trading cattle and eating beef. In May 2015, the Modi government put a nationwide ban on cattle sales for non-agricultural purposes. The Indian Supreme Court annulled this decision in July 2017.⁷⁸

The VHP and the RSS are running an aggressive campaign to reconvert low caste (especially Dalit) Christians and Muslims to Hinduism. Many Dalits converted to Christianity and Islam as a form of resistance against the caste system that has historically been associated with Hinduism. The VHP and the RSS promise financial aid and the right to choose whatever caste they want in return for reconversion to Hinduism. If these incentives do not work, they try to force the target population through violence. Reconversion to Hinduism usually takes place through grand ceremonies. The Hindutva movement uses these ceremonies as a tool of mobilization and display of strength. These reconversion efforts further worsen the relations between Hindus and other religious groups.⁷⁹ In addition to frequent targeting of Muslims, the pressure on Christians is also increasing. Fascists are attacking churches and threatening those celebrating Christmas.⁸⁰ Christian and Islamic organizations and secular mass organizations have repeatedly called Prime Minister Modi to condemn and prevent these practices. Modi did not respond to these calls satisfactorily. Modi's tacit approval encourages fascists to intensify their attacks. A BJP deputy of the Uttar Pradesh parliament declared that by 2024, India would become an entirely Hindu nation.⁸¹

One of the earliest attacks of the BJP after 2014 was against the students and

78 "India's Supreme Court Suspends Ban on Sale of Cows for Slaughter", *The New York Times*, 11 July 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/ydxfp4zk>

79 "Indian Agra Muslim Fear Conversions to Hinduism," 11 December 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-30429118>; Sarath Babu George, "30 Christians Converted in Kerala: VHP," *The Hindu*, 22 December 2014, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/30-christians-converted-in-kerala-vhp/article6713944.ece>

80 "Fear Grips India's Christians Amid Church Attacks", 2 February 2015, <http://www.dw.com/en/fear-grips-indias-christians-amid-church-attacks/a-18235914>; "Right-wing Hindu Groups Target Christmas in India", 22 December 2017, <http://www.dw.com/en/rightwing-hindu-groups-target-christmas-in-india/a-41906732>

81 "50 per cent of Muslims Converted from Hinduism, Will Return: BJP MLA from UP," *The Indian Express*, 15 January 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/sw4tcun>

scholars at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and Hyderabad University (HU), prestigious public universities, and secularist and leftist strongholds. The government has put significant pressure on academics and students opposing state repression in Kashmir by charging them with “sedition.” The events that took place at JNU in February and March 2016 are exemplary in this regard. The first link in the chain of events is a campus protest in February about the execution of the separatist Kashmiri militant Afzal Guru. Guru was executed in 2013 for his alleged involvement in the armed attack on the Indian parliament in 2001. Human rights advocates claimed that Guru’s trial and punishment had been marked by many violations of law and human rights. The Guru incident has become one of the symbols of the Kashmir tragedy. At a demonstration at the JNU campus, some students shouted slogans in favor of Kashmir’s independence. The Hindutva movement then started a massive campaign against the leftists at the JNU. The ABVP, a university student arm of the fascist movement, organized mass demonstrations during which JNU students were declared as “separatists,” “traitors,” and “collaborators of Pakistan.”

Immediately afterward, the JNU administration opened a disciplinary investigation about the student protestors. The BJP government’s Interior Minister Rajnath Singh, on the other hand, ordered the Delhi police not to tolerate any action against the national union and to take action immediately. After this order, six students were arrested, including Kanhaiya Kumar, the president of the JNU Student Association and one of the leading members of the CPI. Prosecutors demanded life imprisonment on charges of “sedition,” a crime inherited from the colonial era. Following this event, demonstrations were held for weeks in many campuses and squares across the country to defend the arrested students. In this process, most of the mainstream media put the JNU students on the target board. As a result of the resistance, Kumar was released. However, fascist provocations and threats continued. For example, one of the leaders of the BJP’s youth branch announced that he would reward 500 thousand Rupees to the person who cut off Kumar’s tongue. Upon the reactions, the BJP announced the termination of that person’s party membership. In many districts of Delhi, posters that put prizes on Kumar’s head were hung.⁸²

Modi’s administration has also worked feverishly to break the influence of secularists and leftists in social sciences in India, especially in the field of Indian history. Administrations of major central government institutions such as the Nehru Museum and Library and the Indian Council of Historical Research were changed.⁸³ There has been a persistent effort at the federal and state levels to rewrite the primary and secondary school textbooks in conformity with the unscientific dogmas of

82 “Kanhaiya Kumar: ‘Sedition’ Student Returns to JNU with Fiery Speech”, *BBC News*, 4 March 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/vldo7p5>; Saif Khalid, “Kanhaiya Kumar on Sedition and ‘Freedom’ in India,” *Al Jazeera*, 7 March 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/rcw8rpr>; Piyasree Dasgupta, “BJP Leader Allegedly Announces Rs 5 Lakh Reward For Anyone Who Cuts Off Kanhaiya’s Tongue”, 5 March 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/rjovubg>

83 Manash Firaq Bhattacharjee, “Making India Great Again,” *The New York Times*, 10 March 2017, shorturl.at/gATZ4

Hindu fascism.⁸⁴ While the artistic and scientific contributions of Muslims to Indian civilization are denied, ridiculous claims such as the use of computers and planes and practice of plastic surgery in ancient India have been made without shame.⁸⁵

The Modi government also revoked the permission of many international organizations, including the Greenpeace and Human Rights Watch, accusing them of working to stir unrest and divide the country. The BJP advertised these acts to prove its nationalist credentials and expand its mass appeal.⁸⁶

Since the BJP's capture of the central government, the effort to create a personality cult around Modi has intensified. This effort aims to project Modi's image as an energetic, selfless, and perseverant leader. The propaganda machinery of the Hindutva movement presents Modi's leadership as a historic chance to save India from backwardness, ensure that it overtakes China, defeat the country's internal and external enemies, and finally turn the 21st century into a golden age of Hindus. Millions of Modi supporters convey this message through social media effectively. Social media trolls, some of which are paid by Sangh Parivar organizations, effectively intimidate those who oppose the Hindutva agenda with profanity and threats.⁸⁷

The 2019 elections

The BJP increased its vote share from 31.34% in 2014 to 37.36% in 2019. It also increased its share of the seats in the Lok Sabha (the lower-house of India's bicameral parliament) from 51.9% to 55.8%. The INC's vote share did not change at all: 19.52% in 2014 and 19.49% in 2019. The socialist left declined to its all-time low. The CPI-M's vote share dropped from 3.2% to 1.75% and CPI's vote share decreased from 0.78% to 0.58%.⁸⁸ In short, fascists won a historic victory and both the mainstream opposition and the socialist left suffered disastrous defeats.

The most striking symbolic manifestation of the increasing confidence of the fascist movement after the 2019 election is the attack against the Gandhian legacy. As noted before, Gandhi was assassinated by an RSS-linked fascist in 1948. However, the RSS has continuously denied its involvement with the assassination, and the Sangh Parivar organizations have often presented themselves as the best Gandhians. Boasted by its recent election victory, the fascist movement has recently started to remove its pseudo-Gandhian cover. Vandalism against the statues of Gandhi is increasing, and the popularity of Nathuram Vinayak Godse, the assassin

84 Christophe Jaffrelot, "Why the BJP Rewrites History," *The Indian Express*, 7 June 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/yx8ylup8>

85 Subhoranjan Dasgupta, "Intolerance is Sweeping, No Room for Questions, Says Amiya Bagchi," *The Telegraph*, 15 April 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/t3sb977>

86 Samant Subramanian, "India's War on Greenpeace", *The Guardian*, 11 August 2015, <https://tinyurl.com/tnw4q57>; Nita Bhalla, "India: Foreign Funding Law Used to Harass 25 Groups," 9 November 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/st7zq7b>

87 Swati Chaturvedi, *I am a Troll: Inside the Secret World of the BJP's Digital Army*, New Delhi: Juggernaut Books, 2016.

88 Election Commission of India, "Election Results- Full Statistical Reports."

who killed Gandhi, is growing.⁸⁹ The BJP-led Uttar Pradesh government has even toyed with the idea of changing the name of the Meerut district to Pandit Nathuram Godse Nagar.⁹⁰



A photo showing the members of Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha, a fascist organization that is not affiliated with the RSS, holding a ceremony in front of the bust of Gandhi's killer, Godse, in Meerut in 2020.

The abrogation of Kashmir's autonomy

As noted before, the Indian occupation of Muslim-majority Kashmir region and the Indian-Pakistani controversy over Kashmir are critical factors in aggravating Hindu-Muslim relations and benefitting Hindutva fascists. A critical political event in 2019 was the suicide attack by a Pakistan-based Islamist group *Jaish-e-Mohammedin*, which killed 40 Indian soldiers and wounded 35 in the Pulwama district of Jammu and Kashmir on 14 February 2019. This was the deadliest attack against the Indian army since 1989.⁹¹ Hindu fascists capitalized on the attack to realize their historical goal of ending Kashmir's autonomy. One of the BJP's key promises during the 2019 campaign was to revoke the Article 370 of the Indian constitution (originally accepted in 1949) which gave autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir and barred non-Kashmiris from obtaining permanent residency and property in Kashmir. Following its electoral victory, the BJP government revoked Article 370 entirely on 5 August 2019. At the same time the government cut internet access and practically abrogated basic civil liberties in the region.⁹² The termination

⁸⁹ Sameer Yasir, "Gandhi's Killer Evokes Admiration as Never Before," *The New York Times*, 4 February 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/wondtxl>

of Kashmir's autonomy has significant potential to further poison Hindu-Muslim relations in India as well as India-Pakistan relations.

The Citizenship (Amendment) Act

One of the ultimate goals of the Hindutva movement is making non-Hindus—especially Muslims—*second-class citizens* and ultimately *non-citizens* to be eliminated through reconversion, deportation or outright killing. The recent amendment of India's Citizenship Act is an important step toward this goal. Indian Citizenship Act of 1955 defines two paths towards acquiring citizenship. First, migrants from the “undivided India”—those living in Bangladesh and Pakistan—can apply for Indian citizenship after 7 years of residency in India. Second, migrants from other countries residing in India for 12 years can apply for Indian citizenship.⁹³ The BJP government proposed to amend the law in July 2016. It failed to legislate that law at that time due to widespread opposition. The BJP's decisive victory in 2019 elections cleared the path and the Citizenship Amendment Act was passed by the Indian parliament on 11 December 2019. The new citizenship act allows the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan who suffered “religious persecution or fear of religious persecution” in their country and entered India before 2014 to apply for citizenship. The new act also requires everybody to provide a set of documents to prove their citizenship and to be included in the National Register of Citizens. Finally, the amendment also introduces conditionality to the status of the Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) by stating that OIC cardholders may lose their status if they violate local laws.⁹⁴ Hence, Muslim migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan are explicitly excluded from the right to apply to Indian citizenship. There are Muslim communities who suffer from religious persecution in these three countries. For example, Shia Muslims and the Ahmadiyya community suffer from religious persecution in Pakistan. The Rohingya Muslims, who had suffered persecution in Myanmar, took refuge in Bangladesh and many of them then migrated to India. The new citizenship act closes the path of citizenship for these communities and threatens them with deportation.⁹⁵ The Modi government ordered the construction of several detention camps for illegal immigrants. Moreover, the government can exploit the new conditionalities introduced to the OIP status to revoke the residency permits of non-Hindus and political dissidents. Overall, the Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019 is an openly anti-Muslim law and a grave blow to secularism in India.

Massive protests against the act were staged across the country. These protests had two main types. Protests in eight northeastern states, especially those in Assam,

93 The Citizenship Act, 1955, <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/410520784.pdf>

94 “The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019,” *The Gazette of India*, 12 December 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/wp5w5d6>; Press Information Bureau of the Government of India Ministry of Home Affairs, “Parliament Passes the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2019,” 11 December 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/su84lzh>

95 “Citizenship Amendment Bill: India's New ‘Anti-Muslim’ Law Explained,” 11 December 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-50670393>

were *not* against the anti-secular character of the act. People protested because they thought the act would give citizenship to a large number of people who migrated from Bangladesh over decades and thereby destabilize the demographic balance. Demonstrations in other regions explicitly protested against the anti-secular and chauvinist character of the new act. Protests were banned in many regions. The number of protestors killed by the police reached 27 by the end of December 2019.⁹⁶

The Delhi pogrom

The second—and so far, the deadliest— episode of the incidents after the Citizenship Amendment Act took place in northeastern New Delhi in the last week of February 2020. Hindu fascists carried out a pogrom in Muslim neighborhoods by shooting, slashing, and setting people on fire. The police either turned a blind eye or overtly supported the fascists for the entire week. According to official records, 53 people were killed during the incidents and nearly 40 of them were Muslim. Hundreds of people were wounded. Many Muslims are still missing, probably killed by the fascist mobs.⁹⁷

In short, the BJP's victory in 2019 elections, a more decisive victory compared to the 2014 elections, has encouraged the fascists to take bolder steps to eradicate secularism by making non-Hindus—first and foremost Muslims—second-class citizens. The electoral victory has also strengthened the fascists' hand to intensify the suppression of political dissent. The mainstream and radical leftist opposition in India has also fallen further to a state of demoralization and disarray. However, the mass protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act show that the struggle is far from over and there is still hope to counter the rise of fascism in India.

Fascism and the struggle against it in contemporary India

This section addresses two urgent political questions based on the preceding survey of Indian fascism's century-long march to power. First, whether and to what extent the Indian political regime has acquired fascist characteristics? To put more bluntly, has India already become a fascist dictatorship? Second, how—with what kinds of methods, tactics, and strategies—should the Indian left confront fascism?

Statements by four Indian Marxist intellectuals provide a useful template to address these questions. In an interview conducted during the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act, Achin Vanaik underscores the significant advance but the still incomplete character of the fascistization of the Indian state:

The theoretical question is: how do you understand fascism? Do you understand fascism as an organism, or do you understand it as a process? I've always taken the view, based on left traditions of understanding, that it's a process, it's something in motion. *There's always a fascist potential. And the culmination of the fascist*

96 "Internet Banned in India's Uttar Pradesh Amid Anger Over Killings," *Al Jazeera*, 27 December 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/s53orhe>

97 "Delhi Riots Death Toll at 53, Here Are the Names of 51 of the Victims," *The Wire*, 6 March 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/vrk7jpt>

potential would be the fascist state. And the fascist state is one of the most class-autonomous forms. You have an extremely centralized and autonomous state. It's a one-party dictatorship with nothing to do with democracy, an imperial character and so on. Many people were worried about a fascist state when the BJP first came to power in the 1990s. But I remember saying very clearly that even if it comes to power, the democratic state will not be lost. *Now, most people recognize that there's not going to be a complete elimination of democracy. Instead, there's going to be a dramatic hollowing out of democracy, which means that you will continue to have elections because they provide legitimacy for many far-right forces and so on.* So I think one needn't make too much of the fascist debate. It's enough to recognize that this is a very, very, very dangerous force, with fascistic characteristics, and the important thing is to not get too hung up on theoretical differences. Much more important are programmatic differences that may follow from theoretical disagreements.⁹⁸

Aijaz Ahmad explains the incompleteness of the fascist counterrevolution based on the absence of a revolutionary threat coming from the left:

When I wrote that every country gets the fascism it deserves, I had in mind the great difference between Germany and Italy, between Italy or Germany and Spain, and so on, which then implies that if and when fascism comes to India it will be a product of our own history and society, quite different from any other. *You ask me if fascism is coming to India now. The answer is "No". Neither the Indian bourgeoisie nor the RSS needs fascism. In interwar Europe, varieties of fascism came in countries where the working-class movement was very powerful and a communist revolution was very possible. No such situation obtains in India.* Communal violence, no matter how ugly or punctual, is not fascism. Do the RSS and several of its non-parliamentary fronts have some fascist attributes? Yes, they do. But so do dozens of movements and parties of the Far Right all over the globe.⁹⁹

In a similar vein, Bernard D'Mello, a Maoist intellectual, argues:

The consequence of this can be *semi-fascism*—fascism hyphenated with a semi—not full-blown fascism, mainly, but not wholly, because there is no need to dispense with electoral democracy, given bipartisanship (concurrence of the Congress and the BJP) as far as both neoliberal economic policy and strategy and nascent sub-imperialism are concerned. Indian big business has no reason to endorse an overthrow of electoral democracy and support the institution of a one-party dictatorship. Despite the Maoist movement, *the ruling establishment is not threatened by revolution from below, and hence, there is no imperative for instituting a*

⁹⁸ Crowley, "Modi Might Have Finally Gone Too Far" (emphasis added).

⁹⁹ Jipson John and Jitheesh P. M., "A Conversation with Aijaz Ahmad: 'The State is Taken Over From Within'," *Monthly Review*, 22 July 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/t3pyygr> (emphasis added).

*full-blown fascist regime.*¹⁰⁰

Similar to the three authors cited above, Irfan Habib also thinks that fascism has not decisively won in India yet. Yet, Habib does not rule out the possibility of total fascistization in the foreseeable future:

It is obvious that with the constitution still in place and most state governments out of BJP's control, civil liberties and democratic rights are not abrogated though they are under attack through organised hooliganism. The RSS which controls BJP has a manifestly fascist ideology as can be seen from [M.S.] Golwalkar's writings and RSS's quasi-military practices. How long the present phase will last is anyone's guess. *If no united opposition is put against the present regime, the present state of balance may not last long.*¹⁰¹

All four comments acknowledge the existence of a serious fascist threat but also stress that the Indian political regime has not become totally fascist. The concept of "proto-fascism," explained detailly in Sungur Savran's recent works,¹⁰² is particularly useful to explain this phenomenon. Similar to Vanaik, Savran underlines the character of fascism as a process whose outcome depends on the trajectory of class struggles at the national and international levels. As Savran notes, the world economic crisis that started in 2008 shares with the 1929 crisis the characteristics of a "great depression." Therefore, the political consequences of the ongoing crisis would be as radical as those of the 1929 crisis. Like those in the past, many far-right movements and governments of the present-day have fascist tendencies that should be taken very seriously. However, unlike Italian and German fascisms, which came to power on the back of strong paramilitary organizations, most of the contemporary far-right organizations either do not have such organizations or have them in quite rudimentary forms. Savran brands these formations as proto-fascist.

While Savran's comparison helps us understand the global rise of the contemporary far-right, the case of India presented in this paper requires taking a slightly different approach and expanding the concept of proto-fascism. The character of Sangh Parivar is fascist rather than proto-fascist. However, the same cannot be said about the political regime, because despite the BJP government's severe assault against the secular and democratic characteristics of the state outlined in this paper, a variety of legal political parties (including legal communist parties) are still allowed to exist and participate in the still highly competitive periodic (general and state) elections, and civil rights and liberties are not totally eliminated. Proto-fascism is a suitable concept for defining the character of the current regime.

100 Bernard D'Mello, *India After Naxalbari: Unfinished History*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2018, p. 306 (emphasis added).

101 Ajoy Ashirwad Mahaprashasta, "Interview: Irfan Habib Debunks RSS's Nationalism and Their Attempts to Rewrite History," *The Wire*, 9 October 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/wfqf23y> (emphasis added).

102 See the first footnote.

In short, what defines proto-fascism, or, “semi-fascism” in D’Mello’s parlance, in contemporary India is not the absence of a full-blown fascist party with a paramilitary wing but the incomplete fascistization of the political regime.

The critical question is whether the Indian political regime would transition from proto-fascism to fascism in the foreseeable future. I agree with Ahmad and D’Mello that the absence of a credible revolutionary threat makes total fascistization unnecessary from the point of view of the Indian bourgeoisie for the time being. As noted above, the two legal communist parties rapidly declined in the last two decades and the rural insurgency led by the CPI (Maoist) failed to create a revolutionary momentum despite its initial achievements in the countryside in the 2000s. On the other hand, we cannot rule out the possibility of complete fascistization based solely on the weakness of the revolutionary left. Historically speaking, the rise of the proletarian movement often leads to the rise of revolutionary or radical reformist political organizations. However, we should also be undogmatic and open enough to identify exceptional circumstances under which a strong labor movement that constrains capitalist accumulation is present without a corresponding rise in communism or radical reformism. Hence, we need to take a close look at the trajectory of the Indian labor movement to determine whether this is the case. That three general strikes occurred in the recent years (in 2013, 2016, and 2020) shows the significant combativeness of the Indian working class. However, Table 1 shows there is not a clear upward trend in workers’ movement in recent years.

Table 1. Strikes, lockouts, and gheraos in India (1991-2014)¹⁰³

Years	Strikes			Lockouts			Gheraos		
	Number	Workers Involve (In ' 000)	Mandays Lost (In ' 000)	Number	Workers Involve (In ' 000)	Mandays Lost (In ' 000)	Number	Workers Involve (In ' 000)	Mandays Lost (In ' 000)
1991	1278	872	12428	532	469	13999	-	-	-
1992	1011	767	15132	703	484	16126	-	-	-
1993	914	672	5614	479	281	14686	-	-	-
1994	808	626	6651	393	220	14332	1	@	@
1995	732	683	5720	334	307	10570	1	@	@
1996	763	609	7818	403	331	12467	2	5	5
1997	793	637	6295	512	344	10738	-	-	-
1998	665	801	9349	432	488	12713	1	@	-
1999	540	1099	10625	387	211	16161	-	-	-
2000	426	1044	11959	345	374	16804	-	-	-
2001	372	489	5563	302	199	18204	1	@	@
2002	295	900	9665	284	199	16921	-	-	-
2003	255	1011	3206	297	805	27050	-	-	-
2004	236	1903	4829	241	169	19037	-	-	-
2005	227	2723	10801	229	191	18864	-	-	-
2006	243	1712	5318	187	98	15006	-	-	-
2007	210	606	15056	179	118	12111	-	-	-
2008	240	1514	6955	181	66	10479	6955	10479	17434
2009	167	1793	8075	178	74	9547	8075	9547	17622
2010	199	990	13150	172	85	9980	13150	9980	23130
2011	179	645	4697	191	90	9761	4697	9761	14458
2012	133	1221	2843	185	86	10094	-	-	-
2013	103	1774	4045	155	64	8600	-	-	-
2014	137	1051	2883	25	8	911	-	-	-

Note:

¹⁰³ <https://www.indiastat.com/>

@: Less than 500

Furthermore, as Table 2 demonstrates, although India's large-scale industry has not fared well in terms of profitability, workers' bargaining power is *not* the underlying reason. In fact, Indian industry managed to keep real wage growth below real productivity growth between 1982 and 2012. Rapid expansion of informal employment has been an important determinant of this outcome. Although the organized manufacturing sector was the traditional bastion of formal employment and trade union power in India until the early 1980s, this has changed significantly in the last four decades. The share of contract labor in registered factories increased from 12% in 1985 to 23% in 2002 and 51% in 2011. Even the public sector has not been immune to the informalization trend. The share of regular-informal workers in public sector employment increased from 13% in 1999 to 18% in 2011.¹⁰⁴ In short, besides their long-term failure to organize informal workers in small and medium-sized (and unregistered) enterprises, currently comprising about 90% of all workers in India, trade unions have failed to protect formal employment even in the large enterprises of the (supposedly) formal sector.¹⁰⁵ Hence, up to the present, there has been no labor conflict-related imperative pushing the Indian bourgeoisie towards a fascist solution.

104 Agarwala, p. 111.

105 The fact that the BMS (the labor union arm of the Sangh Parivar) is the largest labor union puts a significant obstacle to the rejuvenation of the working-class movement in contemporary India. The BMS is a particularly dangerous formation because, similar to fascist labor unions in interwar Italy and Germany, it has been smart and flexible enough to establish hegemony over the proletariat. For instance, it follows a strictly class-collaborationist line in its strongholds like Gujarat. In contrast, it tries to project a relatively combative image to organize the workers in left-dominated states like Kerala. An RSS-trained BMS leader in Kerala vividly illustrates this approach: "We are different from the BMS in other parts. We are more stringent trade unionists. That is because we can't survive any other way. The situation requires it because it is like that at the grassroots level. The communist seed in this land was cultivated in such a huge way that it has [spread] to every 'hook and crook' of the state. The BMS' ideology was also joining with [the ideology of the early Communist movement in Kerala], because, as we say in our songs and in our work, we are also working for the poorest of the poor. That is what we have in common [...] Even if we are reluctant to call for a *hartal* [strike] or *bandh* [blockade/closure], because that's exactly the practice [the Left unions] follow, we cannot say otherwise" (Smriti Upadhyay, "Workers and the Right Wing: The Situation in India," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 93, 2018, p. 87).

Table 2. Compound annual growth rates (%) of the rate of profit, real labor productivity, and real wage in India's organized manufacturing sector (1982-2012)¹⁰⁶

Period	Rate of profit	Real labor productivity	Real wage
1982–1991	–4.24	5.36	2.44
1991–1996	5.6	9.01	1.47
1996–2001	–8.07	–0.74	–0.8
2001–2007	11.38	9.24	–0.45
2007–2012	–1.66	1.96	1.11
1982–2012	0.14	5.74	1.02

Beyond the issue of a labor repression imperative, we need to view fascistization from the angle of the expansionary-irredentist tendencies of the Indian bourgeoisie and state. A possible hypothesis would be that the BJP government reflects and represents the imperial desires of the Indian bourgeoisie. This is not an entirely unsustainable proposition because after decades of state-directed and import-substituting industrialization and the subsequent neoliberal offensive, the Indian big bourgeoisie matured and reached the stage of finance-capital, i.e., the formation of private sector conglomerates incorporating the means of production, circulation, and finance under a single roof.¹⁰⁷ This development has increased the confidence of Indian capital and pushed it towards a more assertive and potentially expansionary foreign policy. In fact, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Indian bourgeoisie and state have opted to become a junior partner of the US imperialism in Asia. India has become a key partner of the US-led coalition aiming to stop the rise of China. The Indian navy's assertiveness in the Indian Ocean has also increased. On the economic side, the Indian private sector's involvement in the defense industry, including the partnerships with American and European military-industrial corporations investing in India, has significantly grown in recent decades. Hence,

106 Deepankar Basu and Debarshi Das, "Profitability in India's Organized Manufacturing Sector: The Role of Technology, Distribution and Demand," *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 2018, p. 146. The general trend in the period 1982-2012 illustrated in Table 2 is not fundamentally different from the trends of the 1970s. For an analysis of the period of 1969-1985, see Ranjit Sau, "Falling Rate of Profit in India's Industry?," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 24, No. 30, 1989, pp. 95-99.

107 Of course, India's economic growth and finance-capital formation performances have been much more modest compared to many countries of the Global South, especially in comparison to China. The number of Indian corporations in the Fortune Global 500 list increased from only one in 1995 to seven in 2019. In the same period, the number of Chinese corporations in this list rose from two to 119 (<https://fortune.com/global500/>).

Sangh Parivar's irredentist *Akhand Bharat* vision appears suitable for the zeitgeist of contemporary Indian political economy and geopolitics.¹⁰⁸ However, almost all of these developments trace back to the INC period, during which the Indian army fought three wars against Pakistan, one war against China, and implemented an essentially colonial policy with an almost permanent state of emergency in Kashmir and the Northeast since 1947.¹⁰⁹ Finally, there has not been any necessity to push the Indian bourgeoisie towards a fascist takeover for the sake of irredentism.

There is, of course, nothing to celebrate about a proto-fascist state run by a fascist party. On the other hand, as Vanaik and Habib both stress, the political process is dynamic and open to different possibilities. In the context of the ongoing great depression, which is recently aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic, the future prospects of the Indian economy do not seem bright. Hence, we cannot entirely rule out the prospect of a revolutionary renaissance of the workers' movement and the Marxist left in India. Such a renaissance would either rapidly transition to a full-fledged fascist regime with the support of large sections of the Indian bourgeoisie or it would crumble fascist hegemony over the lower and lower-middle classes and castes of India, which may force the bourgeoisie to cease its support to the Hindutva project. Similarly, the ongoing great depression aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic may also intensify class struggles as well as inter-capitalist and inter-state competition. The Trump administration's increasingly aggressive stance towards China, recently accompanied by allegations that Covid-19 originated in Chinese laboratories, indicate the seriousness of this possibility. Such a scenario may push the militaristic and irredentist tendencies of the Indian establishment to a new height, which may complete the fascistization process. In brief, although the proto-fascist fix has suited the needs of the bourgeois regime until recently, in the age of the third great depression and the Covid-19 pandemic, there is no insurmountable barrier between proto-fascism and fascism in India or elsewhere.

It is also impossible to rule out the radicalization of religious minorities coexisting with or without a communist rejuvenation. Islamist radicalism is already quite influential among Indian Muslims. Since the army crackdown on the Sikh movement for the separation of the state of Punjab from the Indian union in the 1980s, Sikh radicalism has continued its existence like a silent volcano. As in other states of India, the BJP has implemented flexible and successful tactics in Punjab, involving coalitions with Sikh parties. However, the increasingly patronizing attitude of Hindu fundamentalists towards Sikhs expressed through claims like "Sikhism is not a separate religion but a branch of Hinduism" has been annoying many Sikhs.¹¹⁰ Christian militancy has been a much weaker tendency but exists in certain pockets such as Tripura state. Although the BJP government signed a peace agreement with Christian rebels, the Hindutva agenda would probably clash with Tripura Christians

108 D'Mello, pp. 311-319.

109 Itty Abraham, *How India Became Territorial: Foreign Policy, Diaspora, Geopolitics*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, pp. 115-140.

110 Hartosh Singh Bal, "The Akal Takht's Call to Ban RSS Reiterates Sikhism's Long Resistance to a Hindu Rashtra," *The Caravan*, 15 October 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/y4f5dnho>

in the future. Hence, the intensification of the “Saffronization” trend would trigger these fault lines and lead to armed insurgencies of various religious minorities. A proto-fascist state led by the BJP/RSS would probably suppress these insurgencies more violently than the Congress governments did in the past. However, taking into account the Indian state’s failure in wiping out Maoist insurgency in central and eastern regions after decades of counter-insurgency efforts, it would not be entirely far-fetched to think that if these religious insurgencies take place more or less simultaneously, then the situation may look more like Lebanon of the 1980s or Syria of the 2010s than Italy and Germany of the 1930s.

To sum up, Sangh Parivar’s fascism has gained significant ground but it is not destined for an inevitable victory. Hence, the Marxist left should shed its current disarray and disorganization, and start waging a serious struggle for hegemony. Only a class-based offensive of the working class and poor peasantry can truly unite the people from diverse religious, ethnic, caste, and linguistic backgrounds. This is the only path that could save India from a religious bloodbath (and a possible genocide of religious minorities) or a complete fascist takeover.

A left-led anti-fascist movement should not waste time and energy to cooperate with the Congress for two main reasons. First, the Congress gradually became a party of “soft Hindutva” and is therefore unreliable for an effective fight against the Hindutva agenda. Second, and more importantly, both the CPI and CPI-M lost power and prestige due to their local and national-level alliances with Congress. As the INC has proven to be a dismally corrupt organization, close association with it would not help the left win the laboring masses. Although equating the INC and BJP would be a grave mistake, winning the lower-class Congress supporters is important, and organizing anti-fascist demonstrations with the INC-affiliated organizations should not be principally ruled out, since the INC has proven to be a dismally corrupt organization, close association with it would not help the left win the laboring masses. A genuine united front of the leftist parties and left-affiliated organizations (especially labor and farmer unions) is the priority of the current struggle against fascism. This united front should use electoral methods and tactics as much as possible but should not repeat the opportunistic parliamentarism of previous “Left Front” experiences.

In a polemic against Prakash Karat, one of the leaders of the CPI-M, renowned Marxist historian Jairus Banaji argued that rejecting an alliance with the Congress against the BJP is akin to the Comintern’s suicidal “Third Period” policy (1928-1933) that characterized German social democracy as “social fascism.” Notwithstanding his significant contributions to Marxist theory in other areas, and despite the fact that his polemic has strong points such as the critique of the CPI-M’s previous policy of alliance with the Congress, Banaji’s intervention in this debate is extremely problematic. He seems to oppose Karat’s narrow focus on finance capital at the expense of the mass character of the fascist movement on the basis not of class struggle, as Trotsky does, bringing in a rich array of classes and strata starting with the petty-bourgeoisie in deadly fear of the proletariat, but on a Reichian concept of authoritarian personality formation on the terrain of “culture

and ideology.”¹¹¹ More to the point for our debate here, the “Third Period” analogy is inappropriate. Trotsky argued that a united front of communists and social democracy against Nazism was necessary because social democracy consisted of a large part of the labor movement. The Congress has been the party of the Indian bourgeoisie since its inception. Although it is *not* certainly a “social fascist” party, the Congress perpetrated one of the most violent communalist massacres of Indian history, killing thousands of Sikhs in Delhi in 1984 in the aftermath of the Indira Gandhi assassination. Moreover, it is now on the same wavelength with the BJP in relation to the neoliberal attacks of the latter on the working class and the poor, although for reasons of short-term politicking, it tries to distinguish itself from some of the harsher policies that come on the agenda. Any durable alliance with the Congress Party would end up being neoliberal in its program. Hence, prioritizing an alliance with the Congress over the urgent task of reorganizing the revolutionary communists is a strategy that is doomed to fail. What is needed is a double-pronged strategy that relies, on the one hand, on the broadest unity of all the organizations representing working and toiling masses in action against the BJP and the capitalist class and, on the other, a reorganizing drive within and outside the traditional communist movement with the perspective of awakening Indian communism from its decades-long reformist slumber and building a truly revolutionary Marxist vanguard organization.

A revolutionary rejuvenation should overcome two important obstacles. First, as noted before, the CPI and CPI-M, the two prominent parties of the Stalinist left, have gradually become mainstream social democratic parties and supported the Congress in various occasions. On the other hand, although Indian Maoism currently led by the CPM (Maoist) has avoided these reformist pitfalls, the reliance on guerilla methods in forests of central and eastern India and lack of a nationwide revolutionary strategy have separated it from large sections of the urban and rural proletariat. In short, impasses of Stalinism, Maoism, and reformism have discredited the communist alternative in India as a whole. Hence, although the revolutionary Marxists of India and elsewhere should cooperate with these currents against Hindu fascists—and even insist on an immediate end of disastrous bickering among these three parties—they cannot rely on them to reorganize the labor movement. As Vanaik aptly notes,

Long reduced to primarily an electoral force with a diminishing cadre base that clings to old Stalinist verities when it does think about Marxism, their cadres with a few exceptions in a few places, have lost the capacity and interest in pursuing the politics of popular mobilization around genuine and justified grievances [...]. Finally, the last and to my mind the only realistic option is the creation of a new much more radical left force through a process which for a long time will be one of molecular accumulation but beyond a critical point its growth can become much more sudden and dramatic. *Central to this process will be the development of*

111 Jairus Banaji, “Stalin’s Ghost Won’t Save Us from the Spectre of Fascism: A Response to

ideologically trained and disciplined cadres involved in concrete struggles on multiple fronts and guided by a larger transformative vision of building a capitalism-transcending socialism whose democratic character will be much deeper than anything capitalist liberal democracy can hope to provide [...] There is the presence of various groups and independent activists involved in various progressive struggles who still see themselves as radical and revolutionary leftists even as they have through their own experiences become disillusioned with the hitherto two dominant traditions of the Indian Left — Stalinism and Maoism. There is therefore fertile ground to be ploughing and we need to get on with it.¹¹²

Vanaik's emphasis on the reorganization of "ideologically trained and disciplined cadres" of communists is laudable but needs to be qualified that such a reorganization initiative should embrace the Leninist theory of organization and carefully put it into practice. Liberal and lax organizational methods would not work to achieve this gigantic task.

Conclusion

Hindutva ideology and politics emerged based on Hindu-Muslim hostility in the Indian sub-continent. The bloody religious conflicts that started in the second half of the 19th century and reached a peak with the partition that followed the end of colonial rule in 1947 created the political basis of the Sangh Parivar. The core of its mass base has been the upper-caste small and medium bourgeoisie. The RSS, probably the oldest and best-organized fascist paramilitary organization of the world, is the organizational core of Sangh Parivar, the family of fascist organizations of India. Hindu fascists have waged a militant struggle against both the (relatively) secular mainstream parties, especially the Congress, and the socialist left. Sangh Parivar also has an irredentist program based on the dream of "United India." In short, Hindutva is a fascist political movement. The electoral power of Hindu fascism hovered around 10% of the popular vote before the 1990s. The mass discontent with the Congress's socio-economic failures and corruption, as well as its turn to neoliberalism after 1991, paved the BJP's way to power. The gradual mainstreaming and loss of prestige of large sections of the Indian communist movement, especially after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc in 1989-91, also made the rise of fascism easier. While adopting neoliberal policies to strengthen its ties with the big bourgeoisie, the BJP has also enhanced its appeal among the lower classes and castes by providing social services and assistance in slums and villages through Hindutva grassroots organizations. The Hindutva movement, which participated in coalition governments between 1977-80 and 1998-2004, came to power alone with 31.34% of the votes in the 2014 general election and consolidated its hold on power by increasing its vote share to 37.36% in the 2019 general election.

While the fascist credentials of Sangh Parivar are undisputable, the fascistization of the current political regime is still incomplete due to (first and foremost) the absence of a revolutionary or radical reformist threat coming from the left. Moreover,

¹¹² Achin Vanaik, "The Indian Catastrophe," *Jacobin*, 30 May 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/wr5zep5>

India's highly complex social structure and the existence of many political parties organized based on different castes, ethnicities, and regional interests pose a severe obstacle to the Hindutva movement in its long-term endeavor to turn India into a fascist dictatorship. The opposition of the mainstream parties and the radical left have not weakened enough to allow such a radical transformation. Therefore, there is still a steep road in front of the Hindu fascist movement to reach its ultimate goal. However, since the ongoing great depression aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic may intensify class struggles as well as inter-capitalist and inter-state competition, there is no insurmountable barrier between proto-fascism and fascism in India or elsewhere.

It is not enough to defend secularism and democratic rights against the rising Hindutva fascism (and other similar religious right-wing movements) that has risen by establishing hegemony on the lower classes and castes through grassroots organizations and social assistance networks. Except for a militant, persistent, and systematic proletarian policy and organization, no political movement can decisively defeat fascism.

Lenin and Trotsky: the anatomy of a relationship

Sungur Savran

*This article was originally written in Turkish to be published on the 75th anniversary of Trotsky's assassination in Mexico in 2015 by an agent of Stalin. This year is the 80th anniversary of the death of the great revolutionary, so we thought it would be meaningful to publish the same article in English on this occasion. However, this year also marks the 150th anniversary of the birth of Lenin. While thinking about what could be prepared for Lenin, we realised that this article is in fact perfectly appropriate for thinking about both Lenin and Trotsky and most importantly their relationship. This is in fact what the article is about. So we are publishing this article in **Revolutionary Marxism 2020** in remembrance and celebration of the great lives of both Lenin and Trotsky. The translation into English is the author's own work. We have omitted an occasional detail here and there that we thought would be of no interest to the international reader, especially in footnotes citing Turkish translations of Trotsky's works. Otherwise the article here is identical with the Turkish version published five years ago. (Author's note of 2020)*

Before going into a detailed discussion on Lenin and Trotsky, we would like to draw the reader's attention to a significant fact: we are here face to face with two geniuses with whom it would be difficult to compare any other revolutionary figure of the 20th century. Strangely enough at first sight, these two geniuses were the products of the same country in the same period. In a certain sense, these two are the Marx and Engels of the 20th century, only transposed from Western Europe

towards that extraordinary country that one is hard put to situate exactly on the Eurasian land mass.

This is no coincidence. If these two geniuses appeared in turn-of-the-century Russia, it was because the 1917 Russian revolution, to this day the greatest of all proletarian revolutions, solicited their services. What do we mean by “solicit”? The very few people in a certain space and time who are so talented as to be called “geniuses” are attracted towards certain life activities depending on the characteristics of the historical epoch they find themselves living in. The Russian proletariat roared and soared with such ferocity from the end of the 19th century all the way up to 1917 that it was able to draw these two geniuses into its orbit.

Trotsky himself narrates the intensity of the revolutionary fervour of the Russian proletariat around this time in his autobiography, *My Life*. “In 1896,” he says, “the famous weavers’ strikes broke out in St. Petersburg. This put new life into the intelligentsia.” Then he explains what impact this had on the courses of political education that he and some other youthful revolutionaries organised (he is only 18 years old). “The workers streamed toward us as if they had been waiting for this. They all brought friends; some came with their wives, and a few older men joined the groups with their sons. We never sought them out; they looked for us. Young and inexperienced leaders that we were, we were soon overwhelmed by the movement we had started. Every word of ours met with a response.”¹ Anyone who has been involved in revolutionary activity will comprehend immediately what a dizzying picture this is. If such a picture presents an almost uninterrupted continuity for more than two decades (with interludes such as the period of reaction between 1907 and 1912) and if three revolutions occur in the space of these two decades, then even the greatest genius will remain anchored to this movement! Once again, the subjective factor turns out to be subordinate to the objective. The determining element is class struggle as a material factor.

Had the Russian proletarian and revolutionary movement not been able to display such strength, Lenin and Trotskiy would each have proved to be towering figures, we have no doubt, in other spheres of human activity. It might be an intriguing exercise to speculate what sphere each would separately develop their talents in. It is our conviction that Lenin would have turned out to be an expert in the more rigorous and austere spheres of mental activity, from philosophy to law to mathematics. That a Russian professor said of Lenin, after a series of lectures the latter had given at a university in Paris, that he was “a perfect professor”² is no superfluous occurrence. The systematic nature of his thinking, which meticulously wove its arguments so as to leave no loopholes, is enough to show, we think, that Lenin might easily have been one of the foremost names in any branch of science, social or natural. Who knows, he might even have turned into a Russian competitor of the great Einstein, more or less his contemporary (although the latter was really born in the same year as not Lenin but Trotsky).

Trotsky, on the other hand, displays the disposition of an artist, or more

¹ Leon Trotsky, *My Life*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970, pp. 104 and 106.

² *My Life*, op. cit., p. 149.

specifically of the literary artist, rather than a man of science, a “professor”. Had the revolution not taken up the better part of his life activity, perhaps the Russian novel, dear to literary fans the whole world over, might perhaps have produced a twentieth-century Tolstoy. This is not to say that Trotsky was any less systematic in his work than Lenin. But the imagination plays a much greater part in his *oeuvre* than the former. With large brushstrokes, he recapitulates decades, roams continents, and pictures the past and the future at once. He possesses an almost supernatural prescience, but as he himself admits from time to time this is the product as much of intuition as of the intellect: it is as if the artist has mobilised his imagination towards the future. His pen is at times excruciatingly emotional and so fiercely incisive at others as to rip the enemies of the proletarian cause to pieces.

Leaving the world of speculation behind and setting our feet on the ground of lived history once again, we would further like to draw the reader’s attention to a second detail. We said above that Lenin and Trotsky were the Marx and Engels of the 20th century, so to speak. But it is impossible not to realise at once the striking contrast between the two pairs of revolutionary geniuses. Having met in 1844 and spent a ten-day period together exchanging ideas in the fall of that year, Marx and Engels thereupon developed a lifelong companionship both personally and intellectually. Lenin and Trotsky, on the other hand, despite remaining members of the same party in the broad sense of the word all their lives,³ nonetheless were engaged in constant political and intellectual conflict for years, excepting the first year of their acquaintance, after the young Trotsky, still 23, having escaped from his first Siberian exile, broke into Lenin’s bedroom in London at dawn one day in the fall of 1902. They remained political rivals until the great rage and fury of the working class brought them together on the barricades of the revolution in 1917. To the extent that the subjective factor, or, in other words, the human factor, the will, consciousness, the organisation influences the course of history, and there is no doubt that history is not a blind process that is determined in advance, it must be admitted that the development of 20th century socialism and revolution was deeply marked by the relationship between these two bigger-than-life figures not only in Russia but internationally as well. This relationship is what constitutes the final object of this paper and also the sole reason why Lenin and Trotsky are dealt with together in the same article, otherwise quite a daunting task.

It would be well to indicate that this approach to Trotsky is the product of an outlook that is rather specific, that this sets us apart from many Trotskyist movements and thinkers. This is even an understatement: it removes us light years away from Trotskyism as it is generally conceived. For the majority of Trotskyists, the great revolutionary is a historic figure that is to be taken up separately from Lenin, on

3 Although the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) had split into two in 1912 after a nine-year faction fight, even in 1917 Lenin was trying to win over not only those like Trotsky who remained independent of both wings, but also internationalist Mensheviks such as Martov. However, formally speaking, there were two parties after 1912. That is why we say “in the broad sense of the word” in the text above. Of course, from 1917 on, Trotsky, as well as Lenin, were members of the same, Bolshevik Party.

the basis of the merits of his theory and practice. Some would go even further and counterpose Trotsky to Lenin. We aim to show in this article that such an approach to Trotsky is without foundation and contradicts historical fact and, moreover, harmful for the construction of the communist movement of the future, a movement to which both of our protagonists felt they belong to without any reserve. Let us say it clearly and loudly from the outset: for us, *there is no Trotsky independently of Lenin* nor can there be.

We are *not* asserting thereby that Trotsky was simply an ordinary loyal disciple of Lenin. Trotsky was of such a calibre, so independent and creative in his thinking and as a revolutionary that he could not have behaved as a “disciple” of anyone, even of Marx, let alone of any other revolutionary. He may perhaps be characterised as having gone too far in his quest for independence, as we shall presently see, but a disciple, never! As we shall have occasion to point out below, Trotsky has made contributions of his own to Marxism in the spheres of theory, programme and practice, contributions that have changed Marxism and proletarian revolutionary practice forever. Yet these represent only one aspect of Trotsky’s significance in history (and we shall see that there is close kinship between some of these contributions and those of Lenin). But Trotsky’s work as a thinker and revolutionary *in its entirety* cannot be taken up and assessed in isolation from his relationship to Lenin. The method of this article is adapted to this view and the conclusions reached strive to demonstrate this point, one of the fundamental constitutive elements of revolutionary Marxism in our age in our opinion.

1. Trotsky’s contribution to Marxism and proletarian revolution

It would be folly to try to squeeze into the framework of a single article the entire contribution of figures such as Lenin or Trotsky. We should point out that the themes raised in this section are confined to those aspects of Trotsky’s contributions that we see as the most significant and indispensable.

Permanent revolution

The most important original contribution that Trotsky made to Marxism is, in our opinion, his approach summed up in the concept of “permanent revolution”. Until Trotsky, Marxism took up the development of modern society under two clearly distinct stages, both theoretically and programmatically. In the beginning, the seeds of capitalism growing in the bosom of feudal or otherwise pre-capitalist societies prepared, albeit at different paces, the dynamics of the transition to capitalism culminating in the explosive processes of bourgeois revolutions. The English revolution of the 17th century and the American and, most significantly, French revolutions of the 18th had created enormous upheavals, bringing in all classes and strata of society in a decisive battle and ending up by paving the way to the unfettered development of capitalism. The simultaneous eruption of revolution across Europe in 1848 made the tremors of bourgeois revolution felt all the way to the eastern fringes of the continent. Then came the age of proletarian revolutions, starting with the more modest June 1848 revolution in France and the epoch-making

experience of the Paris Commune in 1871.

In an *oeuvre* that extended from the *Paris Manuscripts* through the *Communist Manifesto* all the way to *Capital*, Marx (in collaboration with Engels) had studied the process through which the dynamics of capitalism created the bases of a socialist, classless society. Now, therefore, it was time for Marxism to develop the theorisation and strategy of this new type of revolution. By the turn of the century, these two types of revolution, i.e. bourgeois and proletarian, had been clearly conceptualised as two different historical formations.

However, history does not proceed in pure fashion. Phenomena that are necessarily separated and studied in isolation from each other interpenetrate, change locations, substitute for each other. At the turn of the century, many a society (from Russia and China to Turkey) that had not yet undergone bourgeois revolution had seen a certain level of capitalist development, ushering in the formation of a proletariat, albeit to a divergent degree, and leaving deep traces and scars on the traditional life conditions of the peasantry. It certainly could not be assumed that this new situation would not have any impact on the modality of the formation of the bourgeoisie in these countries and its political attitude, particularly in times of political upheaval.

Trotsky, at the age of 26, taking the 1905 revolution in Russia as his laboratory, came to the conclusion that, under the new conditions of world capitalism, the two revolutions conceptualised by Marxism would henceforth develop in interpenetrating fashion. On the basis of a tendency observed most clearly in Russia, the democratic revolution would be victorious only if it grew over to a socialist revolution. This was because the bourgeoisie had gradually lost its earlier revolutionary character and abdicated from the leadership of the revolution to abandon it to the proletariat. It was only possible to complete the tasks of the democratic revolution by effecting the rise to power of the proletariat supported by the peasantry. Once in power, the proletariat would necessarily have to make inroads into the rule of capital and thus set off the process of transition to socialism.⁴ Hence, the communist programme had to be shifted from the perspective of two distinct revolutions in two different stages towards that of permanent revolution, i.e. the growing over of the bourgeois revolution into the proletarian revolution. The history of the 20th century has verified this outlook not only in Russia, but also in subsequent revolutions, from the Chinese to the Yugoslav and from the Vietnamese to the Cuban.⁵

We need to touch upon briefly two other aspects of the question of permanent revolution. The theoretical-methodological aspect involves a contribution of Trotsky to the concept of uneven development. Many people today refer to a certain “law of uneven and combined development” without even mentioning its original author. This law (in the more correct form of “combined and uneven development”) is the brainchild of and a contribution to Marxist dialectics by Trotsky. The dynamics that lead to the rise of permanent revolution as a historical category is due to

⁴ This original vision was laid out most succinctly in the book *Results and Prospects*, which drew the conclusions of the 1905 Russian revolution, written in prison in 1906.

⁵ For a useful source on this see Michael Löwy, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development. The Theory of Permanent Revolution*, London: Verso, 1981.

the fact that precisely because societies that are living in different ages (uneven development) are now, under the rule of capital, more and more linked to each other on the world scale (combined development), which leads in contradictory fashion to a situation where each society develops within its bosom the coexistence of different ages (combined and uneven development). This law also sheds light on the so-called phenomenon of “underdevelopment” within the framework of the interdependence within world capitalism of economies that display different degrees of the development of capitalism and of productive forces, a phenomenon that both mainstream bourgeois, Stalinist and petty-bourgeois “dependency” theory have failed to explain in its dynamic development in satisfactory fashion.

The second aspect has to do with the further development and enrichment of the concept of permanent revolution after its initial formulation in 1906. In a book written during his internal exile in Alma Ata (today’s Almaty in Kazakhstan) in 1928, titled precisely *Permanent Revolution*, Trotsky both generalised the theory to other countries that shared Russia’s predicament and further refined the concept to include three different processes at once: the growing over of the democratic revolution into socialist revolution; the constant revolutionising of social relations in post-revolutionary transitional societies between capitalism and socialism; and the fundamental idea, present in Marxist theory and programme from the very first moment, that revolution can only be completed and irreversibly victorious if, having started at the scale of a nation or a full region, it develops and extends around the globe to become world revolution.

The originality of the revolution of the 20th century

It is of course impossible to elaborate on the rich implications of the concept of permanent revolution in this brief treatment. However, one implication seems to us of special importance when taken up in conjunction with Lenin’s contributions to Marxist theory and strategy. These two great leaders of the international revolutionary movement presented, pursuing each the path dictated by his own intellectual and practical achievements, a radiography of the revolution of the 20th century in ways that surprisingly share many commonalities. Régis Debray, a pro-Castro French intellectual in his prime, wrote a book after the Cuban revolution that defended the so-called “*foco*” strategy with the appealing title “Revolution in the Revolution”.⁶ There is no need to go into the vacuity of the claim save to remind the reader that the “*foco*” strategy can be implemented successfully only under very special conditions⁷ and to point out that the author of this “revolutionary” idea himself went over later to the bourgeois republican camp and acted as an advisor to the president of the French imperialist republic. The real “revolution in the revolution”, in our opinion, was effected at the dawn of the 20th century by the shared contributions of Lenin and Trotsky.

6 Régis Debray, *Révolution dans la révolution*, Paris: François Maspero, 1967.

7 We have taken this up in an article (in Turkish) in which we assessed Che’s Marxism: “Che Guevara’nın Marksizm İçindeki Yeri” [“The Place of Che Guevara in Marxism”], *Devrimci Marksizm*, No. 5, Winter 2007-2008, pp. 102-143.

Thanks to his theory of imperialism and, in particular, his emphatic idea that imperialism was a new stage of capitalism that was its highest, on the one hand, and his great programmatic stride forward very early on in the area of the national question with the promotion of the concept of the self-determination of nations into the status of a principle, Lenin reached the seminal conclusion that revolution in the 20th century would be the combined product of the struggle of the international proletariat *and* the rise of the oppressed nations fighting against imperialist enslavement. Within the framework of this combined development⁸ of world revolution, the solution to the national question now becomes the most important task of the democratic revolution in the colonial and semi-colonial countries. The most urgent priority of the revolution in such countries is to throw off the yoke of imperialism and wrest the peoples of those countries from the abasement and humiliation they suffer under colonial rule. It is precisely in the same context that Lenin makes a priority of the struggle against bourgeois or petty-bourgeois socialism (social democracy) in the imperialist countries, a political current whose social roots lie in the labour aristocracy that emerged as a result of the sharing out of the extra profits made possible by imperialism. All of this means that the new circumstances of the 20th century have burdened revolutionary parties with a new set of programmatic tasks.

Proceeding along his own trajectory, Trotsky has reached, by the end of the 1920s, the conclusion that in all countries where the democratic revolution is on the agenda, including those enslaved by imperialism, the tasks of this revolution, starting from that of national liberation, now falls to the young proletariat and its communist vanguard party. Everywhere the revolution will either transmute into permanent revolution or stop halfway: for instance, even if the colonial countries achieve their independence in formal terms thanks to a national revolution, they will subsequently fall back to the status of semi-colonies, unless the proletariat and its revolutionary party march at the head of the revolution to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat and put an end to colonial servitude once and forever.⁹

In our opinion, these two visions of 20th century revolution are complementary in nature. While Lenin points to the indispensability of the alliance between the international proletariat and the colonial and semi-colonial peoples in revolt against servitude and thus makes clear that social emancipation and national liberation must march *arm in arm*, Trotsky shows that when transposed into individual countries these tasks *interpenetrate* to become a single revolutionary process with a multitude

⁸ We deliberately and purposely use Trotsky's concept while talking about Lenin.

⁹ That the revolution was moving towards the East as a result of the imperialist servitude was perceived by Trotsky independently of Lenin. One can see this starting with the "Manifesto of the Communist International" that Trotsky drafted in 1919. See "Manifeste de l'Internationale Communiste aux prolétaires du monde entier!", *Manifestes, Thèses et Résolutions des quatre premiers congrès mondiaux de l'Internationale Communiste*, 1919-1923, Paris: La Brèche-Sélio, 1984, pp. 30-34 or "Manifesto of the Communist International to the Workers of the World", *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestoes of the First Four Congresses of the Third International*, 2nd Printing London: Pluto Press, 1983, pp. 27-36.

of duties to be achieved. A brief comparison can show us how significant are the original contributions of both Lenin and Trotsky. Gramsci, no doubt a great Marxist theoretician, another follower of Lenin as opposed to the preposterous liberal image that many have depicted him in, in his youth greeted the October revolution with an article ironically titled “The Revolution Against *Capital*”. This is what he had to say:

It’s a revolution against Karl Marx’s *Capital*. In Russia, Marx’s *Capital* was the book of the bourgeoisie, more than of the proletariat. It was the crucial proof needed to show that, in Russia, there had to be a bourgeoisie, there had to be a capitalist era, there had to be a Western-style of progression, before the proletariat could even think about making a comeback, about their class demands, about revolution... The Bolsheviks renounce Karl Marx and they assert, through their clear statement of action, through what they have achieved, that the laws of historical materialism are not as set in stone, as one may think, or one may have thought previously.¹⁰

Thus, in contrast to the grasp that the young Trotsky developed in his theory and programme of permanent revolution, telescoping different historical periods into the same contemporaneous space, the young Gramsci¹¹ concludes that a whole historical period to be lived under capitalism in Russia is necessary and hence that the Russian revolution is a challenge to the laws of historical materialism. If Gramsci, with his superior intellectual capabilities thinks this way, then it becomes easier to understand how lesser socialists got lost in the labyrinthine complexities of 20th century history.

Had Lenin and Trotsky not been able to develop their impressive visions of the nature of 20th century revolution, the revolution would not have arrived even so far as it had done. If, on the other hand, humanity was not able to go all the way described in those visions, this was because the processes of permanent revolution that so many countries experienced in the course of the 20th century were frustrated by the historic destruction and ravage brought upon these countries by the distinct national bureaucracies that came to control these post-revolutionary societies. We will have opportunity to come back to this question in due course.

The architect of the first victorious proletarian revolution

The greatest success that Trotsky achieved in his life not as a Marxist theoretician but as a practical revolutionary was, without any doubt, the extraordinary part he played in the establishing and maintenance of proletarian power in Russia. It should be underlined without fear of exaggeration that although the number one leader of the October revolution was (as Trotsky was adamant in pointing out) Lenin, the revolution in effect had two major leaders, the other being Trotsky. All historians

¹⁰ <https://www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/1917/12/revolution-against-capital.htm>.

¹¹ Let no one try to take refuge in the excuse that Gramsci was 26 when the October revolution occurred. Trotsky was exactly the same age when he formulated the theory of permanent revolution!

who refuse to bow to the distortions and falsifications of the Stalinist bureaucracy, as well as contemporaries of the revolution and the Russian working class, are aware of and reflect this truth.

As young as 26, Trotsky started to contribute immensely to the revolutionary traditions of the Russian proletariat when he served as the chairman of the workers' soviet of Petrograd, the capital of the country and the heart of the Russian working class of the time. When the Tzar dissolved the soviet, had its leadership arrested and prosecuted it for armed insurrection, Trotsky mounted an impressive political defense in court. He did not whine and complain of the repression and did not retreat to a defense of democratic rights, but simply relied on the historical legitimacy of the revolutionary orientation of the soviet. For him, the workers' soviet is "an autonomous governmental organisation of the revolutionary masses". It is confronted by that other organ of power, the army, which is the most horrible expression of the despotic and criminal nature of the Tzarist state. To arm the workers against the violence of the army is an indispensable method for the defense of law and the rights of the people. In any case, revolutions are not provoked but are the fruit of the violent eruption of social contradictions. To quote a brief passage from Trotsky's defense would be useful in order to learn from an exemplary act of political defense:

Mark this well, Honourable Judges. We never *prepared the insurrection*, as the prosecutor says, *we prepared for the insurrection*. ... to enlighten the people's consciousness, to explain to the people that conflict was inevitable, that everything that was given to us would soon be taken back, that only force could protect law...¹²

After having tested Trotsky in 1905, the revolution once again made him the chairman of the Petrograd Soviet in 1917. This time, no longer was Trotsky the independent revolutionary that he was in 1905. He had joined the Bolshevik Party in June 1917, to be coopted to the Central Committee immediately. Here he played the part of a valuable ally to Lenin in the face of those members, such as Zinoviev and Kamenev, who refused to support insurrection and those, such as Stalin, who prevaricated. He contributed to the revolution by revolutionising workers in countless factories thanks to his legendary talents as an orator and by instilling consciousness and courage in thousands and thousands of ordinary people and youth in the speeches he made night after night to a packed hall at the Winter Circus. The position he gained in the Soviet thanks to his reputation of 1905 proved to be an immense gain for the Bolsheviks. As the chairman of the Soviet, Trotsky was also appointed as the head of the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Soviet, which was established for the defense of the revolution. While Lenin was hiding underground in Finland because of the repression of the Kerensky government, it was Trotsky who planned down to its most minute details the insurrection that opened the way to the victory of the October revolution. As well as managing the military aspects, he contributed greatly to the political dimension of the art of

¹² Pierre Broué, *Trotsky*, Paris: Fayard, 1988, pp 114-116. The quotation is from page 116. Our translation from the French original.

insurrection by aligning its date to the convening of the All Russia Congress of Soviets, thus augmenting its legitimacy.

In the wake of the victory of the revolution he first served as the Commissar of Foreign Affairs on the Council of People's Commissars (*Sovnarkom*) and during the Brest-Litovsk peace negotiations both displayed a fine example of the advanced intellectual capacity of Bolshevism and before the diplomatic sessions started distributed, in his capacity of revolutionary, leaflets to German soldiers calling for fraternisation between the rank and file of the two armies at war. He also exposed the machinations of imperialist powers by disclosing a host of secret diplomatic documents and thus humiliated them in the eyes of the peoples of colonial and semi-colonial countries. Then when the civil war waged by the Whites and supported by the imperialist countries started, he was appointed to the post of War Commisar, founded the Red Army from scratch, lived in an armoured train for almost three years, crisscrossing the vast country to both supervise and spur on the troops and thus played a unique part in the winning of the war and the survival of the Soviet state.

It seems quite evident to us that when discussing the contributions of Trotsky to Marxism, one needs to open an altogether separate chapter for the themes of war and military art. Within classical Marxism, Engels was an adept of military matters and was a specialist in that area, so much so that he gained the moniker of "Marx's general". From him to Che and other experts of the guerrilla war, military strategy and war have had a respectable place in Marxist practice and literature. Within this succession of experts, Trotsky surely deserves pride of place. If we are not engaging in a discussion of his achievements and views in this area, this is because we do not think we are sufficiently equipped in the area to do so. The military writings of Trotsky have been translated into English and are awaiting critical study by revolutionary Marxists. We will nonetheless not abandon the topic before mentioning one of his main contributions to war and military strategy: Trotsky always insisted politics plays a major role in winning wars and, in particular, civil wars. He analysed different situations in this light from the Russian civil war to the Spanish revolution of the 1930s and he also acted accordingly in his practice as military strategist.

Let us then cite some instances of this briefly. First, in building the Red Army from scratch, Trotsky prepared a strategy rooted solidly in class-political bases. He started out by recruiting vanguard workers first, later to drafting workers at large, all in order to lay the groundwork in a robust proletarian core and only then opened up to the peasantry, still distinguishing between the poor peasants, who were drafted first with the middle peasants being brought in later.¹³ The class attitude that is embodied in the formation of the army also manifests itself in the approach to the army they are fighting against. The Bolsheviks never approached the armies they are confronting as enemies pure and simple and never forgot that the rank and file of that army is also composed of workers and peasants (professional armies are a

¹³ Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed. Trotsky: 1879-1921*, London: Oxford University Press, 1970, pp. 408-9.

phenomenon of the recent period). It is thanks to this conception that Bolshevik agitation among the sailors of the French navy occupying the Ukrainian port of Odesa on the Black Sea incited them to a mutiny, as a result of which the French had to withdraw their forces from the area somewhat later.¹⁴ This priority accorded to the proletariat as the human element of the war also found its expression in the political and ideological formation of the army. The Red Army Oath is a document that deserves to go down in history:

I, a son of the toiling people and a citizen of the Soviet Republic, assume the title of a soldier of the Workers' and Peasants' Army. Before the working classes of Russia and of the whole world I undertake to bear this title with honour, to learn conscientiously to wield arms... I undertake to observe revolutionary discipline strictly and unflaggingly... I undertake to abstain and restrain other comrades from deeds which might harm and lower the dignity of a citizen of the Soviet Republic, and to direct all my actions and thoughts towards the great goal of the emancipation of all working people. I undertake to come forward in the first call of the Workers' and Peasants' Government to defend the Soviet Republic... In the struggle for the Russian Soviet Republic and for the cause of socialism and of the brotherhood of the peoples I shall spare neither my own strength nor my own life. If by evil design I should depart from this my solemn promise, let general contempt be my lot and let the severe hand of the revolutionary law punish me.¹⁵

Even after Lenin's death and his own forced exile from the country by the bureaucracy, Trotsky defended the Soviet workers' state unconditionally and without compromise by every means he disposed of. We will return to this matter below.

A leader of the international proletariat

From a rather young age, Trotsky earned himself a significant place in the Second International, the international umbrella organisation of all the socialist parties before the Great War and made important contributions to imbuing the Russian working class with an internationalist consciousness. Among Russian Marxists, Trotsky was probably the one who was most at home culturally within international circles. He knew two languages (German and French) well and two (English and Italian) at a more modest level (and later learned to read in Spanish during his exile in Mexico). He had visited many European countries during his first exile of 1902-1905. When he escaped from Siberia a second time, he would be forced to live in Europe (and in the US where he was deported) overall for ten long years. The fact that he was one of the heroes of the 1905 revolution brought him a high level of prestige (undeservedly at the expense of Lenin) among international socialist circles in spite of his youth (he was only 28 when he settled down in Vienna in 1907). That he was working to unite the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks made him

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 429.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 409n.

a convenient interlocutor in the eyes of the leaders of the Second International, who were themselves trying to unite the Russian movement.

However, this interest neither spoilt Trotsky nor brought him a conformist mindset. It did not draw him into the cohort of the reformists of the Second International, nor could it have. When World War I broke out, Trotsky took his stand with the miniscule internationalist camp and engaged in a fight against the social patriotic currents. He not only participated in, but was the author of the manifesto of the Zimmerwald Conference of the internationalist current convened in 1915, which in a certain sense paved the way to the Third International.¹⁶

In the aftermath of the October revolution, when Russia was going through a bloody civil war and extreme economic hardship, the two leaders of the revolution, Lenin and Trotsky at the head of the Bolshevik Party undertook the foundation and construction of the Third (or Communist) International. That Trotsky was one of the two founding leaders of the Comintern can be gauged from the following simple facts: it was he who penned the “Manifesto of the Comintern”;¹⁷ it was he who, while he was touring the vast country in his armoured train visiting and electrifying all fronts, nonetheless was given the task of drafting several of the main documents at each congress of the Comintern and was the rapporteur who presented several points on the agenda; most importantly, although Zinoviev was given formally the job of acting as the president of the Comintern (until he was later dismissed by Stalin), the Comintern elected *two honorary presidents*, who were none other than Lenin and Trotsky!

After the Soviet Union succumbed to bureaucratic degeneration and the Comintern was made into an instrument of the foreign policy of the bureaucracy rather than the party of world revolution, this indefatigable defender of proletarian internationalism dedicated the last effort of his lifetime to the founding of a new International, the Fourth International. We will return to this at the very end of this article.

Defender of the Marxist programme against bureaucratic degeneration

To put it very bluntly, despite his many other achievements in the theoretical and practical-revolutionary spheres, Trotsky’s main contribution to the historical cause of the proletariat is his uncompromising struggle against the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet state born of the October revolution. The bureaucracy is a privileged social stratum that was born within the pores of the first victorious proletarian revolution (roughly the first part of the 1920s), rose to power after a fierce struggle within the party and the state (roughly the second part of the 1920s) and thereupon consolidated its power by recourse to ferocious methods (the 1930s).

¹⁶ The positions of Lenin and Trotsky diverged in Zimmerwald. We will touch upon this briefly later.

¹⁷ The Comintern did not have a proper programme until its 6th Congress held in 1928 (when it was already coming under the control of the bureaucracy). The closest it gets to a general programmatic text is this Manifesto drafted by Trotsky for the First Congress.

In place of the programme of world revolution of the Bolshevik Party in power, it substituted the programme of “national communism” (a contradiction in terms), which made possible peaceful coexistence with imperialism for the long haul, thus guaranteeing the stability of the system of domination of the bureaucracy. Additionally, it went back to Great Russian chauvinism in place of the Leninist programme of full and real equality of nations within the Soviet Union and substituted a brutal bureaucratic dictatorship in place of the orientation towards proletarian democracy based on the soviets.

In the wake of Lenin falling prey to a stroke first (March 1923) and then succumbing to death (21 January 1924), there arose an opposition with Trotsky at its centre, first the 1923 Opposition, then the Left Opposition, later the United Opposition (Trotsky-Zinoviev-Kamenev), and then the return to the Left Opposition and later, in 1929, the International Left Opposition. As the foremost opponent of the bureaucracy, Trotsky was expelled from the party in 1927, sent into forced internal exile in 1928, and then deported to Istanbul at the beginning of 1929. All of the political leaders that raised the banner of opposition to the bureaucratic stratum represented by Stalin in the second part of the 1920s and the entire decade of the 1930s capitulated to Stalin at a certain stage and recanted. (Some, like Zinoviev and Kamenev, turned against Stalin three times and then composed with him again.) Despite this capitulation, almost all of them were tried and executed during the infamous Moscow Trials. Alone among the opposition figures, Trotsky never composed with the Stalinist bureaucracy and defended the world revolution, proletarian democracy, the self-determination of nations in the face of the onslaught of the bureaucracy and its programmatic formula of “socialism in a single country”. This is why he was assassinated in 1940 in his Mexican exile by an agent that was given the duty under the personal orders of Stalin.¹⁸ This last struggle of Trotsky is a unique and irreplaceable fight for the future of Marxism and of international proletarian revolution. Not a single historical figure has since waged such a struggle that even comes close to this. It also occupies a special place in Trotsky’s own life.

Three aspects of this struggle of Trotsky’s deserve special mention. First, he laid out a fully materialist analysis of the Soviet state and society on the basis of the Marxist method. The most mature and comprehensive product of this effort, *Revolution Betrayed* of 1936, is, in our opinion, the **most important book of the 20th century**. This is because **world history**, and not only the history of the Soviet Union, cannot be understood unless one understands the impact of the Russian revolution and its eventual demise on the rest of the world. Trotsky’s work presents an incomparably higher level of perceptiveness with respect to the dynamics of Soviet society than that of any of his contemporaries and has remained unequalled to this day. Although it certainly cannot match the scientific precision of Marx’s *chef d’oeuvre*, it would nonetheless not be wrong to characterise *Revolution*

¹⁸ See Pavel Sudoplatov, Özel Görevler, *Sovyet İstihbarat Şefinin Anıları*, İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2015, pp 88-91. This is the Turkish translation of Sudoplatov’s memoirs, published in English under the title *Special Tasks: The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness, a Soviet Spymaster* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1994).

Betrayed as the *Das Kapital* of the 20th century. Marx's masterpiece laid bare the secrets of capitalism for all to see. Trotsky's work, on the other hand, unravelled the complexities of the contradictory nature of Soviet society and state, thus making the 20th century and the failure of the first wave of the socialist construction process intelligible. Those socialists who have not had the good luck of bathing in the light of *Revolution Betrayed* are now lost souls wandering in the desert of agnosticism, constantly groping for an answer to their questions about what went wrong with 20th century socialism, questions unanswerable since they shun the only serious Marxist analysis of the glory and misery of the first and most advanced workers' state.

To summarise very briefly, *Revolution Betrayed* tackles the thorny theoretical question of the relationship of the state and socialism and finds that every revolution will necessarily develop bureaucratic tendencies, but concludes that because of the poverty and isolation of Soviet society, these tendencies reach unmanageable proportions. As Trotsky puts it in a memorable metaphor, where scarcity and queues are the rule, the policeman has an indispensable part to play. In Soviet society, these dynamics have led to the formation of a bureaucracy in the pores of the state, the economy, and within the party itself, a social stratum whose material life conditions diverge from those of the working class and the peasantry. Because this social stratum receives its privileged position in society from the centrally planned economy that is predicated on the abolition of capitalist private property, it attributes great importance to the preservation of the new relations of production whose bases have been established by the revolution. This, in a nutshell, explains *that seemingly inexplicable contradiction between the immensely progressive organisation of society and the rapid economic growth that the Soviet Union provides for the people and the extremely retrograde forms of despotism and bureaucratic primitivism that go alongside it*. This contradiction remained inexplicable to other socialists. *Revolution Betrayed* provides the key to the understanding of this living contradiction.

But no society remains frozen in its relationships. The very contradiction embodied in the existence of the bureaucracy as a privileged guardian of the socialist forms of the economy pushed in time that very stratum to seek ways of creating guarantees for its privileges and a certain continuity, necessarily putting the return to private property and succession rights in the means of production on the agenda. This proves to be the major dynamic that leads to the restoration of capitalism when circumstances are propitious for this. The programme of "socialism in a single country" is but the road to stability for the bureaucracy, which sheds it when the opportunity for capitalist restoration under its own control finally presents itself. In terms of Trotsky's analysis, a political revolution led by the working class, political only and not social because the socio-economic structure of the country is ruled by the forms brought about by the October revolution, is the only historical method of conserving the gains of the revolution.

It might be superfluous to remind the reader that history has in fact followed almost in precise form the prognosis of *Revolution Betrayed*. When political revolution failed after many different attempts (East Germany (1953), Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), Poland (1956, 1970, 1979-81), and China (1989))

capitalism was restored from 1989 on under the leadership of the communist parties, having in the meanwhile been transformed into the political instruments of bureaucratic rule. This was the gist of the demise of socialism towards the end of the 20th century in Central and Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, the former Yugoslavia, Albania, China, Vietnam etc.

The second aspect of Trotsky's struggle against the bureaucracy is his tireless effort to establish a new International and revolutionary parties in each country affiliated thereto in the face of the bureaucracy's wilful gradual destruction of the Comintern and the transformation of the national communist parties into its own foreign policy instruments. As a result of an uphill struggle, Trotsky finally succeeded in establishing the Fourth International only two years before his death. It was also he who wrote the so-called Transitional Programme of 1938, an immensely important political document in its own right in the history of revolutionary Marxism.

The third and last point is the fact that Trotsky waged a titanic battle against the ideologues of the bureaucracy, those he called the "epigones", in trying to salvage Lenin's true thinking from distortion, falsification and outright suppression, from under the rubble that was heaped on it. We will elaborate on this further on.

The theoretician of fascism and a guide for fighting it

If some asked for less controversial evidence for the capacity for analysis, gift for prediction and tactical finesse of Trotsky as a revolutionary leader despite everything that has been presented up to now, it would be convincing for anyone if we were to explain to them the unmatched insights of Trotsky into fascism and the ways to combat this scourge. With the exception of Gramsci, the Italian revolutionary who languished in the prisons of Mussolini until months before his death, and the Lenin of the early 1920s, who drew attention to the dire importance of the rise of fascism, none of the leading Marxists of the time really grasped in its full import the threat posed by fascism and the greater menace of Nazism¹⁹ and even less provided the correct method of fighting this plague. From his isolated abode on the Island of Prinkipo in Istanbul, Trotsky insisted, for four years between 1929 and 1933, on the enormity of the danger posed by fascism, stressed the fact that it brought humanity to the doorstep of barbarism, pointed to the importance of the suffering of the petty-bourgeoisie in the context of the economic crisis and how this made it a prey for fascism, advocated the tactic of the United Workers' Front, a tactic that he had developed hand in hand with Lenin during the Third and Fourth Congresses of the Comintern (1921-1922), and warned that the whole of Europe and even the survival of the Soviet Union would be gravely menaced were fascism able to rise to power, all this in the face of the ludicrous theory of the "Third Period", which attributed social democracy the role of the "twin of fascism", dictated a course to the Communist Party of Germany that relied on a competition with the Nazis in the sphere of nationalism, and failed to even comprehend the tremendous danger posed

¹⁹ In all fairness, we need to draw attention to the contributions of Clara Zetkin ve Karl Radek as well.

by fascism, going so far as to say “after Hitler, us”, thus betraying an unforgivable underestimation of the fascist phenomenon.²⁰

His critique levelled both at the “ultra left” policies of the Third Period and of the policy of Popular Front that replaced it in the wake of the German debacle, which acted as a barrier not to fascism but to proletarian revolution definitely in Spain and possibly in France after 1936, is of the highest Marxist calibre. If the younger generations of Marxist theoreticians are today, in this age of rising proto-fascism, still ignoring Trotsky’s theory of fascism, it is not Trotsky’s heritage nor his followers that suffer from this but Marxist theory in general and the workers’ movement!

2. Why was Trotsky defeated in his struggle against the bureaucracy?

The 1920s and 1930s witnessed a ruthless struggle in the land of October and within the Comintern. In this struggle, revolutionary Marxism fighting for the long-term general emancipation of the proletariat, not only of Russia but also of the world, lost the battle face to the “national communist” wing representing the interests of the bureaucracy. Both the revolutions that triumphed or were defeated in the remaining part of the 20th century and the experience of socialist construction undertaken in those countries that underwent socialist revolution bear the mark of this defeat. In a certain sense, then, the fate of 20th century socialism was sealed in the 1920s and the 1930s. The collapse or elemental transformation into capitalism of practically all the bureaucratic workers’ states save a few at the end of the century, the loss of credibility that socialism suffered as a consequence of this, and the sustained attack of the bourgeoisie on the working population during the last three decades of what has proved to be the longest lasting capitalist assault in modern history, all of this remains unintelligible unless one understands correctly what really transpired during the first quarter of a century following the October revolution.

So the question of why Trotsky at the head of the revolutionary Marxist movement lost to the bureaucratic forces is of much broader import than being of personal interest for him or a party interest for his followers. In trying to answer this question, one surely needs to address two different orders of factors, those of an objective nature and those of a subjective one. We should hasten to add that the distinction itself is volatile: what is objective and what subjective depends totally on the context one is working in and upon. Most importantly, even parties or their leaderships may need to be taken as objective factors depending on what one is discussing.

When one is discussing Russia in the 1920s and the 1930s and posing the question of why revolutionary Marxism was defeated, one should take only the subjective will power, consciousness and decisions of the revolutionary Marxist movement, in this case its leader, as the subjective factor and everything else as objective factors.

²⁰ The writings of Trotsky from this period, some prophetic in their insight, have been brought together in a book: Leon Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1971.

German social democracy and the choices made by its leadership, for instance, are subjective factors in other situations, but need to be taken as objective factors in the current context.

The objective conditions of the defeat

Since the subject matter of this article is not a general analysis of the formation and rise to power of the bureaucracy, but is the place of Lenin and Trotsky in history, we will only quickly touch upon the objective factors and move on to a more detailed discussion of those that are of a subjective nature, which are directly relevant for our purposes.

Among the objective factors, four need to be brought out in summary form. The first has to do with the socio-economic backwardness of Russia. It is for this reason that Lenin and Trotsky constantly reiterated from the February revolution on their shared idea that unless the European revolution came to its help, the Russian proletariat was doomed to lose power. Let us content ourselves with a comprehensive quotation from Lenin. This is how Lenin characterises in 1922 the outlook of the Bolsheviks on the October revolution in 1917:

Our thought was: Either the international revolution will come to our aid, and in that case our victories are wholly assured, or we will do our modest revolutionary work in the consciousness that in case of defeat we have nevertheless served the cause of the revolution and experiment will be of help to other revolutions. ... In spite of this consciousness we did everything to preserve the soviet system in all circumstances and at whatever cost, since we knew that we were working not only for ourselves, but for the international revolution.²¹

Their prediction proved erroneous from a timing point of view, but each of the problems that lay underneath this prediction is very genuine. Unless the revolution spread to Europe, socialist tasks would come into conflict with the weight of the small peasantry. And conflict they did. It was precisely in the context of crises that were a product of such conflicts that the bureaucracy managed to take the upper hand.

The second objective factor follows directly from the first: the absence of a victorious revolution in the West. It was not that Lenin's and Trotsky's expectation that the triumph of the Russian revolution would fire the revolutionary fervour of the European proletariat proved erroneous as such. Quite the contrary. A revolution broke out in Germany quite similar to the Russian revolution only a year after the latter, in November 1918. Short-lived Soviet republics were even established in Hungary and in Bavaria in Germany. From Finland to Italy and Scotland a working class radicalisation swept Europe. If all this came to nought, the main burden falls on the shoulders of social democracy. This, then, is an objective factor on the scales of history from the point of view of Russian revolutionaries.

21 Cited by Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, London: Pluto Press, 1979, p. 1250.

When revolution failed to conquer Europe, the latter engaged in an attempt to quash the revolution in Russia in alliance with the Whites (i.e. the counter-revolutionaries). The three-year civil war left Russia bleeding. Beyond the generalised misery into which the dire economic conditions dragged the entire society, the impact of this situation on different classes was decisive. The working class was in a state of decomposition. The main force of the revolution, vanguard workers, lost their lives on the battle field in their thousands or even tens of thousands. More generally, the difficulty of providing food to the cities and the decline in industrial production down to one eighth of the pre-war period sent many workers running to the countryside, where for obvious reasons food supplies were more abundant. While the working class and its vanguard thus entered a process of dispersion and loss, the peasantry, while aware that their newly won land was obtained thanks to the protection the Bolshevik government afforded them from landowners, nonetheless started to moan and groan as conditions became more and more unbearable. More generally there was increasing exhaustion within the populace. After a state of war that lasted from 1914 to 1921, with an interruption of barely six months, it became a yearning for people to be fed properly and to live in peace and stability. Under these circumstances, the programme of the bureaucracy, “socialism in a single country”, found much more support among the people than that of Marxism, world revolution, which sounded rather distant and unnecessarily messianic to the ears of the poor.

After the retreat of the European revolution in the 1920s, the situation only deteriorated in the 1930s: with the rise of Nazism to power, reaction took hold of almost all countries gradually. This was followed by the defeat of the revolution in Spain, another victory for international fascism. In all of this, the criminal action of the Soviet bureaucracy is now to blame. But there is no doubt that a more objective set of circumstances played their part as well. Let us put it in the following way: if, in spite of the suicidal policy pursued in Germany by the Stalinist movement, Hitler were not able to climb to power or if, despite the treachery of Stalinism, the revolution won in Spain (as a result, for instance, of the supremacy of the more revolutionary wing of the anarchists, that wing led by Durruti, and/or the adoption of a more revolutionary policy on the part of the POUM), then revolutionary Marxism would have increased its strength internationally and the course of the revolution could perhaps be shifted again.

It is then clear that objective factors did play an almost decisive part in the defeat of Trotsky in his struggle against the bureaucracy. When assessing his role in this struggle, Trotsky, as a materialist, rightly refers to the importance of objective factors, but this he does at times in order to cover up his own misjudgments and prevarications. Today, at the beginning of the 21st century, as revolutionary Marxism is again preparing to take over the leadership of the proletariat, we need to keep our distance to taking the same kind of attitude and admit frankly the mistakes of our historic leaders. Let us then delve into the subjective factors.

The subjective factors

Among the subjective factors, the one which is by far the most important is the fact that because Trotsky came to the Bolshevik party very late in the day, a rift developed very early on between him and the “old Bolshevik guard”. This resulted in a situation in which Stalin, to become in time the political leader of the rising bureaucracy, had a head start against Trotsky. No organisation easily and willingly yields its leadership to a newcomer. Many leaders and cadres, such as Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin etc., all close colleagues of Lenin, fought at different times against Trotsky on the side of Stalin, only to be annihilated themselves at the time of the Great Purge of 1936-1938, which saw the absolutist consolidation of the rule of the bureaucracy. The question thus becomes one of why Trotsky came so late to Bolshevism. This is such an important and many-faceted question that we will have to take it up separately in the next subsection. Let us first look at the other subjective factors that played a role in Trotsky’s defeat.

One personal factor, no making of Trotsky himself, is related to his family background. Trotsky is a Jew. In Russian society, notorious for the rabid anti-Semitism of a sizeable portion of its population and the pogroms intermittently directed against Jews, this is a clear disadvantage for the popularity of a leader in the eyes of the masses, in particular the peasants, if not among the vanguard of the working class, imbued though it is with an internationalist culture. When the government was being formed in the immediate wake of the revolution, Lenin proposed the position of the chairman of Sovnarkom, the counterpart of prime minister, to Trotsky, himself meaning to concentrate on party affairs. Trotsky, however, refused, advancing the reason of his Jewish ancestors. “Prime Minister Trotsky” would surely be a great position from which to fight Trotsky’s otherwise uphill battle.

More to the point are the mistakes that Trotsky committed in this period. Given the length of this article, we will not go into details here but only cite some typical examples of major categories of mistakes.

For one thing, at the same time as Stalin was made secretary of the party in April 1922, Lenin proposed to Trotsky the position of deputy prime minister. Although the proposal was repeated several times throughout the year, Trotsky kept refusing the post. Whatever the reason for refusal, this was a serious mistake. If Rykov was made the president of Sovnarkom, i.e. prime minister, after Lenin’s death, the most important reason for his choice was that it was so to speak “natural”, since he had been Lenin’s deputy in this post.²²

Then comes the question of the alliance between Lenin and Trotsky against the bureaucracy at the beginning of 1923. (We will not go into every aspect of this alliance at this stage, as we will return to it subsequently.) The settling of accounts was planned, as it was only natural, for the 12th Congress of the party to be convened in April of that year. But in the month of March, Lenin had a new stroke and never recovered. Although Lenin had warned him about a “rotten compromise” with

²² Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed: Trotsky: 1921-1929*, London: Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 134.

Stalin,²³ Trotsky nevertheless refrained from advancing their shared views during the 12th Congress and contented himself with a limited operation under the pressure of which Stalin temporarily retreated partially. This was despite the fact that the latter had put himself in a real bind at this stage. Lenin had dictated a very important and explosive text to his secretary in the last days of 1922 and at the very beginning of 1923. This text, titled “The Question of Nationalities and ‘Autonomisation’”, ripped to pieces the policy of Stalin as the Commissar of Nationalities marked by Great Russian chauvinism, most clearly observable in the case of Georgia, but visible elsewhere as well. Trotsky simply refrained from disclosing this text to the delegates to the Congress. As if to prove that this was a bomb ready to explode, the text would later be kept secret from the party and the people for 33 years, only to be made public in 1956, after the 20th Congress!²⁴

Trotsky’s errors continued in the wake of Lenin’s death. The day Lenin passed away, Trotsky was in the Caucasus because of a serious health condition. The telegram from Stalin said that the funeral ceremony was to be held on Saturday. The date was in all probability decided so as to prevent Trotsky from joining the ceremonies. Trotsky did not lift a finger and lingered on in his Caucasian surroundings. However, the ceremonies were held in effect not on Saturday but on Sunday. Trotsky could have made it for Sunday. During the funeral ceremonies, even Trotsky’s wife Natalia Ivanovna did not understand how he had not tried to make it to the burial. “Our friends”, she wrote in her diary, “were expecting L.D. to come to Moscow, and thought that he would cut short his trip in order to return... I remember my son’s letter, received at Sukhum. He was terribly shocked by Lenin’s death, and though suffering from a cold, with a temperature of 104, he went in his not very warm coat to the Hall of Columns to pay his last last respects, and waited, waited, and waited with impatience for our arrival. One could feel in his letter his bitter bewilderment and diffident reproach.” This is Trotsky’s own son. One can imagine how the rank and file of the party and the masses at large would feel about Trotsky’s absence.²⁵

Trotsky repeated the same mistake he had committed during the 12th Congress when Lenin’s testament came on the agenda after his death. Feeling he was nearing death, Lenin had at a certain moment dictated a testament to his secretaries, in which, after having assessed all the prominent leaders with great acumen, he advised that Stalin be removed from the post of secretary general. When Zinoviev and Kamenev, already part of a bloc of three with Stalin (the “Triumvirate”) against Trotsky, defended at a Central Committee meeting the non-disclosure of the testament, Trotsky did not even mutter. On the basis of this decision, against which only Lenin’s widow Krupskaya would raise her voice in protest, Lenin’s testament would be kept a secret! The testament had in fact been addressed to the congress of the party. In other words, Lenin’s wish was being infringed. Trotsky thus became unwillingly complicit in the crime of the Central Committee in trampling upon

²³ Ibid, p. 91.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 93.

²⁵ Quoted by Trotsky, *My Life*, op. cit., p. 511.

Lenin's explicitly expressed will!

Error begets error. When, one year later, in 1925, the American communist Max Eastman, close to Trotsky, paraphrased Lenin's testament in a book he wrote on the Soviet Union, a brawl broke out at the Central Committee. When Stalin pointed a finger at Trotsky, the latter was compelled to write a statement in the *Bolshevik*, that the rumours about Lenin's testament were "malicious inventions".²⁶ In effect, this is quite consistent with what Trotsky has already said in 1923, drawing upon the English adage on one's country: "My party, right or wrong".²⁷ This is doubly wrong: For one thing, it is difficult not to conclude that Trotsky has backslided into the same mindset of making a fetish of unity on the basis not of a clear vision but of lax compromises. In a certain sense the old disease has relapsed, this time within the Bolshevik Party. For another, Trotsky is simply disregarding the changes in the party, to which he clings "right or wrong". The Bolshevik Party was now the single party in the country, not as a result of Bolshevik schemes, but as the end product of a long drawn out process of conflicts with other socialist parties. It had thus become the target of all kinds of opportunists and careerists that wished to be close to the levers of power, a tendency amplified by the corrupting atmosphere of the market-oriented New Economic Policy adopted in 1921. The campaign to recruit massively that the opponents of Trotsky started in the wake of Lenin's death added insult to injury. Hence, behind the mistakes that Trotsky committed also lay his attitude of ignoring the changing nature of the Bolshevik Party, although he had, parallel to Lenin, already come to the conclusion that the tendency towards bureaucratisation was advancing rapidly. This is the major error of timing he made, over and above all the other timing mistakes he committed, only some of which are being taken up in this necessarily summary catalogue of mistakes.

Trotsky also made serious mistakes with respect to the constellation of groups within the party. He first unnecessarily dissolved the 1923 Opposition established by cadres that were close to him. Then he would act with considerable delay when the Triumvirate Stalin-Zinoviev-Kamenev fell out and only tie up with the latter two against Stalin in the United Opposition after they were defeated by Stalin.²⁸

Beyond these tactical errors, the fact that Trotsky and the Left Opposition defended certain ideas that may very well have been rational and logical, but which were nonetheless couched in a terminology without due regard for the sensibility of the masses led to the formation of powerful alliances of concrete interests against them. Take the case of the "militarisation of labour" and the policy on trade unions that Trotsky advocated in the period 1920-1921 (something we will have to come back to later). It is an established fact that Bukharin's close colleague and president of the Congress of Trade Unions Tomsky became alienated from Trotsky because this policy seemed to be a hostile attitude to the unions.²⁹ There goes a whole section

²⁶ Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed*, op. cit., p. 202.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 139.

²⁸ Compare this with the astute tactics that Lenin adopted during the Second Congress of the RSDLP. See Broué, *Trotsky*, op. cit, p. 73.

²⁹ Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed*, op. cit., p. 82.

of the labour movement! Evgeny Preobrazhensky, for his part, adopted a callous attitude towards the peasantry. This bright economist of the 1923 Opposition and later the Left Opposition, talked of “socialist primitive accumulation” and even at times of the “exploitation” of the peasantry for the purposes of industrialization. This naturally played directly into the hands of the Stalin-Bukharin alliance, providing them with material they could use for constantly harping on Trotsky’s supposed “underestimation of the peasantry” and the Left Opposition’s tendency to destroy the *smychka*, the worker-peasant alliance. The terminology naturally alienated the representatives of the peasantry. There goes another whole section of the population! True, Trotsky himself never adopted this conceptual framework put forth by Preobrazhensky. It is most probable that behind this lay such political concerns. But the very fact that he did not come up against this terminology (*not* the substance of the theory) although he should have known full well that this would create a heavy burden for the Left Opposition in its relations to the peasantry is itself a mistake on its own.

At the root of these questions of relations with classes lies in effect a problem with Trotsky’s politics that Lenin addresses in his testament. Lenin claims that Trotsky shows “excessive preoccupation with the purely administrative side of the work”. We must personally admit that when we first read Lenin’s testament as a young man in his 20s, we were unable to grasp this criticism, felt at a loss to understand why Lenin would fuss over such a minute detail, and were somewhat disappointed. It is much later, with experience in revolutionary politics, that we came to understand the full import of Lenin’s wisdom. He is in fact saying here that Trotsky designs plans very aptly and implements these plans with impeccable rationality and discipline, but all this in somewhat mechanical fashion, without taking into consideration the consequences of what is being done on relations with other actors, in particular relations within the party and relations with entire classes. In other words, *even if* Lenin had shared Trotsky’s assessment on the functions to be attributed to trade unions, which he did not, he would not have advocated his plans for the militarisation of labour. To put it slightly differently, under the assumption of the continuation of the policy of “War Communism”, Trotsky has concluded that to assign any other tasks to trade unions apart from regulating production is a logical contradiction. This leads him to disregard all other political aspects and to alienate, if necessary, the union cadres because he has an obsession with the “purely administrative side of the work”. Lenin would not have acted so recklessly.

The discussion in this subsection does not imply the assertion of the proposition that if Trotsky had not committed these errors he would have won the battle against the bureaucracy. No, objective conditions were skewed too heavily against him for us to assert this. Victory was too difficult to attain for revolutionary Marxism and might not have been won under any circumstances. But it would be too simplistic to say that there was a retreat in the consciousness and the will power of the masses and that therefore the battle was *already* a lost cause. The masses may have retreated to a certain extent. But so powerful a revolution was the October revolution that it continued to throw some robust forces on the stage of history over and over again, albeit with certain lags. Having been defeated at the end of the decade of the 20s,

the movement revived once more at the beginning of the 30s. There is the “Bloc of Oppositions” and the Ryutin Platform in 1932.³⁰ After the failure of this initiative, the bankruptcy of the strategy of the Communist Party of Germany in the face of Hitler’s rise to power leads to widespread talk of Stalin’s imminent demise.³¹ Even after the Moscow Trials have started, the ranks of the Trotskyist Opposition grow once again. Thousands, even tens of thousands of Trotskyists resist heroically in the labour camp of Vorkuta, only to be executed by firing squads.³² So the fire of resistance did not dwindle easily. A correct line may have paid off.

Having raised these mistakes, we ought to, nonetheless, give Trotsky his due. We said above that Trotsky at times displays the tendency to hide his mistakes and shortcomings behind the compelling nature of objective factors. But the opposite is also true. Trotsky is aware that he has made great mistakes, although he does not anywhere, to the best of our knowledge, go through these in systematic fashion. But this is what he has to say on the matter in his autobiography:

I must add here that the errors which I have committed, however important they may have been—and *some of them were of extreme importance*—always referred to questions that were not fundamental or strategic, but dealt rather with such derivative matters as organization and policy.³³

“Derivative questions of organisation”: whether derivative or essential, we now come to the question of organisation.

3. The young Trotsky or the Bolshevik Trotsky?

We said above that among the set of subjective factors that decided the fate of the battle between Trotsky and the political representatives of the bureaucracy, the most important was that Trotsky came to the Bolshevik Party very late in the day. It is now time to deal with this decisive matter.

Trotsky’s Marxism displays a creativity, breadth of horizon and profundity at times far beyond those of his contemporaries. But on one question, that of organisation, it is, up to a certain stage, vitiated by a tremendous weakness. As a result, from his break with Lenin in 1903 up to 1917, Trotsky committed serious mistakes within the Russian Marxist movement as well as, less vitally for our present purposes, within the international movement.

³⁰ Broué, op. cit., p. 700 ff.

³¹ Ibid, pp. 734-35 and 742.

³² Ibid, pp. 880-82.

³³ *My Life*, op. cit., p. 185, emphasis ours. Let us play the devil’s advocate to draw attention to the fact that even in 1930 (when he wrote his autobiography) Trotsky still considers matters of organisation as “derivative”. In our opinion no such sentence would have flowed from Lenin’s pen, nor to the best of our knowledge it ever did.

The maverick

Because Stalinism has willfully distorted, even falsified the factual aspect of the question, let us say clearly from the outset: Trotsky was no Menshevik. In fact, his strategic view of the Russian revolution (permanent revolution) sets him even farther away from the Mensheviks than the distance between the latter and Bolsheviks. Save for the first year after the split in the RSDLP (the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party), Trotsky remained outside of both Bolshevik and Menshevik structures and waged a constant uphill battle for the unity of the party. As is well-known, Russian Marxism first organized as a party in 1898. However, this party did not yet exercise authority over the circles of workers around the country. That is why Lenin, after having settled abroad, took the initiative to publish the newspaper *Iskra*, which aimed at a centralization of the party on the basis of a new programme and statutes. In order to ground this orientation, Lenin published his rightly famous *What Is To Be Done?* in 1902. Having fled his exile in the autumn of that same year, Trotsky quickly rose to prominence and was to become an important element in the publication of *Iskra*. The aim of the Second Congress convened in 1903 was to consummate this process of centralization that *Iskra* had been working towards.

Lenin insisted that only those militants that agreed to work under the strict discipline of party organs should be admitted as members while the Mensheviks wished to make do with a much looser tie between the party and the members. Thus were born the two wings of Russian social democracy, the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. It was this division that provoked Trotsky's split from Lenin. Officially, Trotsky had participated in the congress as a delegate of Siberia. He would attack Lenin violently in two documents consecutively: in his *Report of the Siberian Delegation* immediately after the congress and in a pamphlet penned in 1904, *Our Political Tasks*. ***What we are about to discuss is of extreme importance for the later Trotskyist movement*** for many are those in that movement who agree with what Trotsky had to say in these two documents whereas we cannot disagree more with the young Trotsky on this matter.

Trotsky opined that Lenin acted as a “disorganiser” in the congress.³⁴ He contended that the criterion Lenin put forth as an instrument against “opportunism and intellectual individualism” amounted to a hopeless attempt to find a “statutory remedy” that smacked of a “bureaucratic dream”.³⁵ What was achieved, in his opinion, was “not centralism but ego-centralism”.³⁶ He accused Lenin of harbouring dictatorial tendencies in the manner of Robespierre, the leader of the Jacobins in the French revolution.³⁷ He finished off with a prediction: Leninist “centralism” would rapidly and inevitably collapse.³⁸ For someone whose prescience is, most of

34 Leon Trotsky, *Report of the Siberian Delegation* (1903), London: New Park Publications, n.d., p. 18.

35 Ibid, p. 21.

36 Ibid, p. 35.

37 Ibid, p. 37-38.

38 Ibid, p. 38.

the time, impressive, to say the least, this must be the one that turned out the most inaccurate!

These views, in our opinion, are the product of a *tragic error*. First of all, Trotsky was totally mistaken on the question of the internal regime of the party. He had perceived the debate on the constitution of the party as well as on other matters we have no space to take up even in the most schematic manner. He had not been able to grasp the fact that Lenin was fighting to make the party a real party and not a talking shop, a plaything of chatter-happy intellectuals. The preposterous idea that the question could in any way be linked to Lenin's ego and that Lenin was in pursuit of a personal dictatorship in the party bore a degree of superficiality that was unbecoming of Trotsky even at this early age (he was 24 during the congress).

However, behind this mistake concerning the party regime lay, in fact, an even more serious methodological error. Trotsky's grasp of the relationship between the party and the class itself was vitiated. When standing up against this type of party regime, Trotsky, just like Rosa Luxemburg, pontificated that the struggle against opportunism could not be waged through provisions of the constitution.³⁹ He did not deny that opportunism or reformism were menaces that threatened the working class movement. It is just that he thought Lenin's solution to the problem was too mechanical and too despotic. What did he (and, independently of him, Rosa Luxemburg) propose instead? A big nothing. Thus they both relegated the problem to spontaneous processes. The revolutionary instincts of the working class would inevitably overcome opportunism at the end of the day. Lenin's answer to this contains an argument worth quoting at length:

To this category of arguments... belongs in particular Comrade Trotsky's statement... that "opportunism is produced by more complex [or: is determined by deeper] causes than one or another clause in the Rules; it is brought about by the relative development of bourgeois democracy and the proletariat..." The point is not that clauses in the Rules may produce opportunism, but that with their help a more or less trenchant weapon against opportunism can be forged. The deeper its causes, the more trenchant should this weapon be. Therefore, to *justify* a formulation which opens the door to opportunism on the grounds that opportunism has "deep causes" is tail-ism of the first order.⁴⁰

History has confirmed Lenin's viewpoint and falsified that of Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg by repeated examples of workers' parties to whose building millions contributed over a period of decades, but which in the end were offered to the services of the bourgeoisie by opportunist or reformist leaders. The solution to this problem is to build a revolutionary party that will *lead* the working class politically to taking power in its own hands. This necessarily requires a revolutionary

³⁹ We have taken up this debate in detail in our short book on Lenin in Turkish: Sungur Savran, *Lenin'i Yakmalı mı?* [Should Lenin Be Burnt?], Istanbul: Kardelen Yayınları, 1998.

⁴⁰ V. I. Lenin, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back", Moscow: *Collected Works*, volume 7, pp. 271-72n.

programme and a constitution that establishes a disciplined internal regime that sees to it that the party closely abides by this revolutionary programme and does not veer from it at the caprice of its leadership. So, Lenin's disciplined party is in fact more of a dictatorship over the leadership than a dictatorship of the leaders over the membership. Naturally, even this provides no unassailable guarantees against opportunism or reformism. Nonetheless that a method does not fully guarantee victory is no reason why it should not be employed as long as it brings a certain level of protection. It is surely better to arm the party against the reformist scourge and fight one's way to victory or defeat than to surrender without a fight. The clearest manifestation of the young Trotsky's misapprehension of the class-party relationship is the statement in the editorial of issue number one of the *Pravda* (not to be confused with Lenin's *Pravda*) that Trotsky started to publish in 1908 to the effect that this publication does not set out to "lead the working class but serve it".⁴¹ The mature Trotsky pins down the problem with the young Trotsky with enviable precision in the autobiography of the Bolshevik Trotsky: "social-revolutionary fatalism"⁴²

This is why Trotsky wandered in the desert for 14 years between 1903 and 1917, why he pursued an ever-receding dream of unifying the RSDLP rather than laying stone upon stone in building a truly revolutionary proletarian party. Once again, it is a lie to say that Trotsky was a Menshevik. He acted together with the Mensheviks because he mistakenly believed that Lenin "disorganized" the Second Congress, but already in 1904 he officially parted his way with them because he understood clearly that their political views and his were simply impossible to coexist under the same roof. Politically speaking, Trotsky stood apart from both major factions due to his programme of permanent revolution. However, because the hard ground on which the idea of permanent revolution rose was based was the idea that the bourgeoisie had spent its revolutionary energies, Trotsky was a full-scale enemy of the liberalism of the Cadet party. The Mensheviks, on the other hand, were still living in the world of the 19th century: they believed that it was bourgeois liberalism that was going to lead the struggle for the democratic revolution. From this vantage point, Trotsky had a much greater kinship to Lenin and the Bolsheviks for although Lenin insisted that in the short run and before the victory of revolution in Europe, the Russian revolution could not move beyond the democratic stage, he conceived of this democratic revolution not as one that would be led by the liberal bourgeoisie, but would move forward thanks to an alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry. Here, there was an almost insuperable difference of political programme: while Menshevism led the working class to tail-end the bourgeoisie, Bolshevism and Trotsky, in their different manners, defined the immediate revolutionary tasks of the proletariat as one of struggle against the bourgeoisie. How could Trotsky's relationship to Menshevism have survived the 1905 revolution let alone continue for a full dozen years?

41 In order to distinguish it from the *Pravda* Bolsheviks started to publish in 1912, this newspaper is usually referred to as the "Viennese *Pravda*".

42 *My Life*, op. cit., p. 224.

An ill-tempered and pugnacious fight

Given this, it is even more incomprehensible why Trotsky would insist on the unity of the party. It is true, as he rightly argued, that events leading to revolutionary ascendancy or moments of crisis drew important sections of the Mensheviks towards revolutionary positions. This is what the revolution of 1905 did, opening the way in the aftermath of the revolution to the unification at the Stockholm Congress. But when political reaction took hold (1907-1912), tendencies to simply liquidate the party flourished among the Mensheviks. Again, there would be those among the Mensheviks who took an internationalist stand during World War I, but the greater part of the Menshevik faction adopted a social-patriotic position. There is no need to multiply the examples. Lenin himself tried to win over to his party elements that could be won from among the Mensheviks and other currents. But Trotsky's attitude was different. Rather than strive to build the revolutionary party of the proletariat that is bound by a centralized discipline, he wanted a party that would bring under its roof all socialists no matter what their views were. Just like Rosa Luxemburg, Trotsky had also fallen into the trap of a large and united party no matter what. It is true that at certain moments leaving a large party may imply separating from the class itself. But in Russia there was not even a trace of that problem. Before the outbreak of the war, the Bolsheviks had effected a much more successful organizing drive within the working class than other components of the working class movement.⁴³ To leave a large party or to remain, that is essentially a tactical question. The young Trotsky falsely turned this into a principled question.

The effort to reconcile two irreconcilable currents made Trotsky prey to bizarre contradictions. This young man who yearned for unity for all was not able to unify anyone and thus himself remained all alone! And in 1912 the effort to effect the unification of the party through a struggle against factionalism directly led to an unprincipled factionalism on the part of Trotsky himself. One needs to dwell longer on this question of the 1912 event. This has to do with the notorious "August Bloc".

In 1910, under the pressure of the International, the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks tried to close ranks for one last time. A meeting was held in Paris. The decision was reached to share in the financial resources of the two factions and turn whatever was available to a delegation representing the International, to stop the publications of the factions, to have both sides break from the extreme irreconcilable elements on their side. The Bolsheviks, ever the scapegoat to be accused of factionalism, did everything they were bound to: they turned over the financial resources they wielded, expelled the Otszovists, who were against all legal work, and they arrested their publications. But the Mensheviks did not break from their extremists, the current that pushed for the entire party structure to come out into the open and was therefore called "liquidationists" simply because they insisted on a move that might end up liquidating the party under the despotic conditions of Tsarist Russia. Everything is crystal clear: The Mensheviks simply infringe on the

⁴³ Lenin demonstrates this, statistics in hand, to the most minute detail in a report he has submitted to the International: "Report of the C.C. to the Brussels Conference and Instructions to the C.C. Delegation", Moscow: *Collected Works*, volume 20, pp. 495-527.

Paris agreement and choose to stick to an extremely right wing tendency within their own ranks rather than join hands with the Bolsheviks. Upon this, Lenin and his Bolsheviks held a congress in Prague and declared themselves a separate party. Face to this move, Trotsky adopted an incomprehensible stance. He brought together all the factions, including the liquidationists, fighting Lenin together under a patchwork movement called the “August Bloc”. The strongman within this bloc was Trotsky himself. Thus Lenin and Trotsky had become the leaders of two opposing factions facing each other!

This is how Lenin described in 1914 the August Bloc of 1912:

In March 1912, the following united in the columns of *Vorwärts* to abuse us: the liquidators, the Bund, the Letts, the Poles, the Trotskyists, and the Vperyodists. What a lot of “trends” and “groups”, one might think! How easy it should have been for them to set the workers of Russia a good example by their unity!

But when steps were taken to convene the “August” Conference of the liquidators, it was found that our opponents *could not* march in step. Both the Poles and Plekhanov refused to attend the “August” Conference of the liquidators. Why? Because they *could not* agree on the meaning of the term: membership in the Party!⁴⁴

How ironic! Trotsky, who had moved away from Lenin because of the latter’s supposed “ego-centrism” based on the whole debate on party membership, now found himself as the leader of groups that could not even agree on that question. It is no wonder then that as soon as the newspaper *Kievskaya Mysl* proposed to him the position of war correspondent concerning the Balkan wars, Trotsky jumped on that proposal and abandoned the August liquidators to their fate!⁴⁵

Even after he had gone through this experience Trotsky was not able to take the correct road. The war naturally found the two uncompromising internationalists on the same side. The two leaders of the future October revolution were both present in Zimmerwald. But Trotsky was still running after compromises, just as he did in 1912. Although internationalist Mensheviks refused to break from social patriotic Mensheviks, Trotsky himself still continued to refuse to break from internationalist Mensheviks. 1912 was repeating itself. It is perhaps only the war atmosphere and the forced exile of Trotsky by the European bourgeoisie that prevented the formation of a new August Bloc!

One only needs to add to all these big mistakes the fact that Trotsky hardly ever attacked the Mensheviks, but polemicized against Lenin and tried to counter his influence. Let us call to the witness stand an honourable witness, Rosa Luxemburg, who, we know, was never pro-Lenin:

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 514.

⁴⁵ Trotsky’s mistake is so flagrant that Rosa Luxemburg, habituated as she is to point a finger towards Lenin for every problem that befalls the Russian movement, does not accuse him this time, but blames Trotsky for “supporting opportunist elements [i.e. the liquidators] who contribute to the dispersal of the movement in the guise of pretending to defend tolerance”. Our translation from the French original. Cited by Broué, *Trotsky*, ibid, p. 140.

[Trotsky] insults the Bolsheviks and the Polish directly as the “instigators of division in the Party”, but does not have so much as to say a word to condemn the pamphlet written by Martov against Lenin, a pamphlet which surpasses ignominiously what has gone on before and tends to provoke visibly a split.⁴⁶

The part psychology played

Why all this? We are of the opinion that this phenomenon cannot be explained solely on a political basis. Psychology seems to have played a considerable part in the relationship between the two geniuses. The young Trotsky was someone who was passionately and jealously trying to safeguard his independence, made it a point of honour, so to speak, to think with his own head and reach his own conclusions, hardly amenable to the guidance of another. We see this in Trotsky's remarks again and again and he had, one might add, a very insightful penetration into the intricacies of his own personality. To take one example, this is how Trotsky explains his resistance to the widespread criticism of his ornamental style of writing:

Only time would purify my style. And as the struggle for form was neither an accidental nor an external thing, but a reflection of my intellectual processes, it is no wonder that, with all my respect for editors, I instinctively protected my still shaping individuality as a writer against the inroads of men who were already mature but differently constituted.⁴⁷

He talks of a similar process on the question of the party:

My break with Lenin occurred on what might be considered “moral” or even personal grounds. But this was merely on the surface. At bottom, the separation was of a political nature and merely expressed itself in the realm of organization methods. I thought of myself as a centralist. But there is no doubt that at that time I did not fully realize what an intense and imperious centralism the revolutionary party would need to lead millions of people in a war against the old order... *Independently* I still could not see Lenin's centralism as the logical conclusion of a clear revolutionary concept. And the desire to see a problem *independently*, and to draw all the necessary conclusions from it, has always been my most imperious intellectual necessity.⁴⁸

And finally directly on Lenin himself:

At first, I “denied” Paris, and even tried to ignore it. Rightly considered, it was the case of a barbarian struggling for self-preservation... I resisted the Louvre, the Luxembourg, and the exhibitions... In point of fact, I was resisting art as I had resisted revolution earlier in life, and later, Marxism; as I had resisted, for several

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 139.

⁴⁷ *My Life*, op. cit., p. 156.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 162. Our emphasis.

years, Lenin and his methods.⁴⁹

We here find ourselves facing a brilliant instance of self-analysis. Trotsky's aim is to explain the dynamics of his relationship to Lenin. Very subtly he starts out discussing art. He has earlier explained how he has resisted Marxism, so he alludes to that. Then comes the crux of the matter. His pride has prevented him from surrendering to Lenin easily!

Then he turns to the second time his path crosses with Lenin's and this time he recounts everything in complete frankness:

I came to Lenin for the second time later than many others, but I came *in my own way*, after I had gone through and had weighed the experience of the revolution, the counter-revolution and the Imperialist war. I came, as a result, more surely and seriously than those "disciples" who, during the master's life, repeated his words and gestures—not always at the right moment—but, after his death, proved to be nothing but helpless epigones and unconscious tools in the hands of hostile forces.⁵⁰

Is this really the fact of the matter? Let us see.

4. Lenin and Trotsky: the anatomy of a political relationship

It is a well-known fact that before the 1903 Congress separated them, Lenin and Trotsky got along quite well. Lenin supported and tried to win this young man (as young as 23) of extraordinary talents to the cause, as he did with all who displayed an aptitude of contributing to the revolution. After a brief period of acquaintance, he proposed Trotsky as the seventh member of the *Iskra* board. In the letter he sent to the board, he described the young man as "of rare abilities, ...conviction and energy".⁵¹ The elderly Plekhanov refused because he saw this as a manoeuvre against himself and also because of his personal repulsion for Trotsky. Trotsky was referred to as "Lenin's bludgeon".

We have seen above how very fiercely Trotsky attacked Lenin in the aftermath of the 1903 Congress. Despite this, when in 1905 Trotsky was elected to become president of the Petrograd Soviet and started to play a very important part as a leader of the working class, Lenin did not spare his praise. Our witness is Anatoly Lunacharsky, Commissar of Education in the first few years of the revolution:

I remember somebody saying in Lenin's presence: "The star of Khrustalyov is setting. To-day the strongman in the Soviet is Trotsky." For a moment Lenin's expression seemed to darken; then he said, "Well, Trotsky has won this by tireless and striking work."⁵²

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 148.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 164. Our emphasis.

⁵¹ For the entire letter see *ibid*, p. 152-54.

⁵² Ibid, p. 182.

Typical of Lenin, with his strong sense of fairness! Of course it was not just Trotsky who attacked Lenin with harsh accusations in the period 1903-1917. At times Lenin also used severe invectives against his rival. But on the one hand these were lighter than Trotsky's deliberately injurious style. On the other hand, one positive remark by Trotsky throughout this period concerning Lenin is still awaiting discovery, while Lenin is on record to have admitted Trotsky's virtues.

Political differences between the two men throughout this period are not to be underestimated. Just to skim over them, topics such as the weight of the peasantry in the revolution, the importance of the national question, the policy to be pursued during the world war (in other words, Lenin's revolutionary defeatism), the slogan of the "United States of Europe" were all areas in which the two revolutionaries defended different positions.⁵³ However, the two main contentious issues were permanent revolution and the party. We have already seen what the differences on these two questions are.

Lenin and Trotsky face to the October revolution

1917 would eliminate these differences. This is how Trotsky explains in his autobiography the light under which the question of permanent revolution appears:

In New York, at the beginning of March, 1917, I wrote a series of articles dealing with the class forces and perspectives of the Russian revolution. At that very time, Lenin in Geneva, was sending to Petrograd his "Letters from Afar." And both of us, though we were writing in different parts of the world and were separated by an ocean, gave the same analysis and the same forecast. On every one of the principal questions, such as the attitude toward the peasantry, toward the bourgeoisie, the Provisional government, the war, and the world revolution, our views were completely identical. Here a test of the relations between "Trotskyism" and Leninism was made on the touchstone of history. And it was carried out under the conditions of a chemically pure experiment. At that time I knew nothing of Lenin's stand; I argued on the basis of my own premises and my own revolutionary experience, and I drew the same perspective and suggested the same line of strategy as Lenin.⁵⁴

There is not a shred of doubt that by abandoning his insistence on the democratic stage of the revolution and advocating the taking of power by the proletariat first in his "Letters from Afar" and later, when he arrived in Petrograd, the "April Theses", Lenin had come very close to the programme of permanent revolution defended by Trotsky ever since the 1905 revolution. Trotsky had, for his part, reached the same conclusions on the immediate tasks of the revolution *independently* of Lenin.

⁵³ We do not go into the details of the disagreements between Lenin and Trotsky on these questions since our aim here is not to draw up a full balance-sheet of the differences between them. Let us just point out that most of these have been *manipulated and distorted* later by the Stalinist establishment.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 329.

There was, then, no reason to continue resisting. This new situation led to Trotsky and his group joining the Bolshevik party upon the invitation of the latter, with Trotsky being co-opted to the Central Committee. From that moment on, the two revolutionaries would collaborate in the closest manner possible until the death of Lenin. What Stalinists have tirelessly propagated about this relationship for the period 1903-1917 is distorted and exaggerated, but at least has historical basis. But after 1917, especially after the revolution had become victorious, the belligerent relationship between Lenin and Trotsky was replaced by an extremely productive exchange and cooperation.

With his characteristic sense of fairness, Lenin expressed this in different ways. At a central committee meeting of the party one week after the revolution, he said that once he became convinced of the impossibility of union with the Mensheviks, “there has been no better Bolshevik than Trotsky”.⁵⁵ The great novelist Maxim Gorky has narrated how Lenin described to him how he assessed the work Trotsky did for the Red Army:

Striking the table with his hand, he [Lenin] said: “Could any one point out to me another man who could organize an almost model army in a year and even win the respect of military experts? We have such a man! We have everything. And there will be miracles.”⁵⁶

On the day after the conquest of power, Lenin proposed the post of premiership to Trotsky in front of the central committee of the party! Even more significant is the confidence he has in Trotsky, which he displayed on various occasions. In 1919, after he drafted a statement for the Council of Defense, the supreme body in the area of the conduct of the Civil War, he wrote the following as he was sending the draft to Trotsky: “I did it hastily, and it did not turn out well. You had better put my name under your own text.”⁵⁷ For someone like Lenin who usually split hairs on each phrase in political texts, to write something of this nature to anyone is phenomenal.

Even more strikingly, when complaints were raised about the disciplinary punishments handed down by Trotsky as commander of the Red Army, Lenin vouched for these without reserve by writing a letter with an open date to be used when Trotsky deemed necessary: “Knowing the strict character of Comrade Trotsky’s orders, I am so convinced, so absolutely convinced, of the correctness, expediency and necessity of the cause of the order given by Comrade Trotsky, that I unreservedly indorse this order. V. Ulyanov/Lenin.” A blank cheque, so to speak.⁵⁸

Apart from all of this, it is also a fact that in the six years of their collaboration in this second period, Lenin never once referred to their differences of the past against Trotsky. It is not that there arose no differences between the two men in this period. Secondary matters aside, there were serious disagreements on at least two matters.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 333. Also p. 339.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 360.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 425.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 469.

The first arose immediately after the revolution on the question of whether to sign a peace agreement with Germany. In this debate that has gone down in history as the Brest-Litovsk controversy after the name of the town where the peace negotiations were held, the “left communists” under the leadership of Bukharin raised the line of “revolutionary war”. Lenin, taking the measure of the military situation, advocated peace in order to defend the revolution, while Trotsky defended the slogan of “neither war, nor peace”. The epigones would later try to use Lenin’s position in this controversy in defense of the idea of “socialism in a single country” and accuse Trotsky of advancing the phantasy of “exporting revolution”. Leaving aside the adventuristic position on Brest-Litovsk advocated by Bukharin, who was an ally of Stalin until the late 1920s, it must be pointed out this debate has nothing to do with the idea of “socialism in one country”. The easiest way to show this is to compare the Brest-Litovsk incident with the debate on Poland two years later. After the Red Army repelled the Polish armies in the civil war, Lenin made a miscalculation and defended the march of the Red Army into Polish territory and towards Warsaw, hoping that under the impact of the war, the Polish working class would rise to bring down the government, while Trotsky saw the dangers this posed and voted against this course. He proved to be right: having suffered oppression at the hands of Russia for so long, the Polish workers joined the defense of the country against the armies of Russia, which resulted in a defeat for and consequently the retreat of the Red Army from Polish territory. Does this mean that, this time around, it was Trotsky who was defending “socialism in a single country” and Lenin who was a partisan for the “export of revolution”?

The second disagreement created greater friction. We touched upon this debate as an instance of how (in Lenin’s opinion) Trotsky was prone to attribute excessive importance to the “purely administrative side” of things and thereby to commit errors in human communication and relations. We pointed out that Trotsky defended the elimination of the independence of trade unions as a logical implication of War Communism and that Lenin came up against this completely. As we will return to this below, we refrain from going into detail for the moment.

Alliance

However, these differences on specific issues should not hide from view the fact that Lenin and Trotsky were on the same ground in the building of the revolutionary state and the new International. To take the Comintern first, Lenin and Trotsky indicated the same line to be adopted vis-à-vis the tendency called “left-wing communism”, which appeared in quite a few European countries in this period. This line leaned on a struggle with the reformist (social democratic) parties that have a large following within the working class on the basis of a united workers’ front unless a revolutionary situation occurs that promises the revolutionary party hegemony over the masses. The aim here is to make possible, on the one hand, the gaining of new strength of the working class through its daily struggles and expose, on the other, the reformist leaders in the eyes of the masses not through propaganda alone but within the living struggle itself. This is the policy abandoned by the Stalinist leadership in the 1920s and early 1930s in favour of its narrower

self-interest. That is why power was almost offered to Hitler on a golden plate.

That is the situation on the international scene. As for the Soviet Union itself, an alliance was established between Lenin and Trotsky, as was mentioned above, against the rise of the bureaucracy. This alliance aimed for a more forceful assertion of the importance of planning, the consolidation of the state monopoly of foreign trade subject to a string of erosions, a struggle against the bureaucratic practices within the party and the state, and the prevention of the revival of great Russian chauvinism.⁵⁹ We have seen above how this effort proved abortive when Lenin had a new and lasting stroke in the spring of 1923.

Self-criticism

Before we leave the topic of the political relationship between Lenin and Trotsky, it would be wise to see what kind of evolution the thinking of the two revolutionaries underwent on the two major disagreements between them in the period 1903-1917.

Let us first look into Trotsky's changing position on the question of the party. Trotsky subjected the attitude he took towards Bolshevism and Lenin's conception of the party in the past to an unambiguous self-criticism in his writings of 1939-1940 later compiled in the book titled *In Defense of Marxism*. It is necessary to quote Trotsky at length:

Upon joining the Bolshevik party, Trotsky recognised completely and wholeheartedly the correctness of the Leninist methods of building the party. At the same time the irreconcilable class tendency of Bolshevism had corrected an incorrect prognosis. If I did not again raise the question of "permanent revolution" in 1917 it was because it had already been decided for both sides by the march of events. The basis for joint work was not decided by subjective or episodic combinations but by the proletarian revolution.

As one can see, Trotsky contends that it is he who has conceded the correctness of Lenin's position on the question of the party and Lenin who did the same on that of permanent revolution. There is a certain realism to this assessment. (Why we use the qualifying adjective "certain" will be clear in a moment.) A bit further on, Trotsky talks about the August Bloc:

I participated actively in this bloc. In a certain sense I created it. Politically I differed with the Mensheviks on all fundamental questions. I also differed with the ultra-left Bolsheviks, the Vperyodists. In the general tendency of politics, I stood far more closely to the Bolsheviks. But I was against the Leninist "regime" because I had not yet learned to understand that in order to realise the revolutionary goal a firmly welded centralised party is indispensable. And so I formed this episodic

⁵⁹ See Moshe Lewin, *Lenin'in Son Mücadelesi*, [The Last Struggle of Lenin] translation A. Muhtitin, İstanbul: Yücel Yayınları, 1976 and V.I.Lenin/L.D.Trotsky, *Lenin's Fight Against Stalinism*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1975.

bloc consisting of heterogeneous elements which was directed against the proletarian wing of the party.

In the August bloc the liquidators had their own faction, the Vperyodists also had something resembling a faction. I stood isolated, having co-thinkers but no faction. Most of the documents were written by me and through avoiding principled differences had as their aim the creation of a semblance of unanimity upon “concrete political questions”. Not a word about the past! Lenin subjected the August bloc to merciless criticism and the harshest blows fell to my lot. Lenin proved that inasmuch as I did not agree politically with either the Mensheviks or the Vperyodists my policy was adventurism. This was severe but it was true.

Then he generalises the question:

As “mitigating circumstances” let me mention the fact that I had set as my task not to support the right or ultra-left factions against the Bolsheviks but to unite the party as a whole. ... The second mitigating circumstance is this, that the very phenomenon of Bolshevism as the genuine revolutionary party was then developing for the first time — in the practice of the Second International there were no precedents. But I do not thereby seek in the least to absolve myself from guilt. Notwithstanding the conception of permanent revolution which undoubtedly disclosed the correct perspective, I had not freed myself at that period especially in the organizational sphere from the traits of a petty-bourgeois revolutionist. I was sick with the disease of conciliationism toward Menshevism and with a distrustful attitude toward Leninist centralism.⁶⁰

This text is an exemplary specimen of courage and honesty to a degree rarely seen in the history of Marxism. Outside of instances of fabricated self-criticism that Stalinist parties used to have their members that have fallen into disfavour exposed before the party, it is very difficult to come across such an instance of frank self-criticism that a revolutionary has made of his own free will. Let us repeat the crux of all this lest the reader skip the message: Trotsky in his Bolshevik age characterises the young Trotsky as someone who has not been able to cast off “the traits of a petty-bourgeois revolutionist especially in the organizational sphere”. What to say of those “Trotskyists” who, after this bold self-criticism in the starkest terms possible of the master they supposedly own, still ruminate about the alleged lack of democracy in Lenin’s party etc.?

We have criticised Trotsky ruthlessly. Let us now say out loud what he deserves: bravo, great revolutionary!

It is now time to look at the other side of the medallion. Has Lenin also admitted that Trotsky was right on the question of permanent revolution? We pointed out above that that is how Trotsky saw the picture and that there is “a certain realism” to this. We said “a certain realism” because Lenin never admitted so much in public.

60 Leon Trotsky, *In Defense of Marxism*, London: New Park Publications, 1982, pp. 175 and 177-78.

Or rather he did so, but did not name it permanent revolution. Among those texts of Lenin that we are aware of, that in which he comes closest to characterising the October revolution through the lens of permanent revolution is the transcript of a talk he made on the occasion of the fourth anniversary of the revolution on 14th October 1921, published on 18th October 1921 in *Pravda*. Let us now delve into this text to read some passages of immense significance:

We have *consummated* the bourgeois-democratic revolution as nobody had done before. We are *advancing* towards the socialist revolution consciously, firmly and unswervingly, knowing that it is not separated from the bourgeois-democratic revolution by a Chinese Wall, and knowing too that (in the last analysis) *struggle alone* will determine how far we shall advance, what part of this immense and lofty task we shall accomplish, and to what extent we shall succeed in consolidating our victories.⁶¹

Up until this point Lenin has somewhat diverged from the old Bolshevik formula by stressing that there is no break between the two stages of the revolution. Of course, the two revolutions are linked to each other or have even penetrated into one another, but this is still not permanent revolution. For the characteristic trait of permanent revolution, its *differentia specifica* as it were, is that the democratic regime can be completed only by growing over into socialist revolution, in other words, only socialism in power will make it possible to carry out the democratic tasks. Let us proceed a bit further in Lenin's text:

We solved the problems of the bourgeois democratic revolution in passing, as a "by-product" of our main and genuinely *proletarian*-revolutionary, socialist activities.⁶²

Now this is permanent revolution. In his polemics with the "old Bolsheviks" carried out in 1917, including in his "April theses", Lenin said that the democratic revolution had been *completed* in Russia thanks to the February revolution so that it was the turn for socialist revolution. This of course came close to Trotsky in practice in that it admitted that the power of the proletariat was on the agenda of history, but that is all it conceded. Here, on the other hand, "proletarian-revolutionary" or "socialist" power is advanced as the *condition of the completion* of the democratic revolution. Let us take still another step:

Incidentally, the Kautskys, Hilferdings, Martovs, Chernovs, Hillquits, Longuets, MacDonalds, Turatis and other heroes of "Two-and-a-half" Marxism were incapable of understanding *this* relation between the bourgeois-democratic and the

61 V.I. Lenin, "Fourth Anniversary of the October Revolution", *Pravda*, No. 234, 18 October 1921, *Collected Works*, volume 33, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976, pp. 51-52. All emphases belong to Lenin.

62 Ibid, p. 54. Emphasis in the original.

proletarian-socialist revolutions. The first develops into the second. The second, in passing, solves the problems of the first. The second consolidates the work of the first.⁶³

Had Trotsky been asked to define permanent revolution, he would probable have had recourse to the same words and phrases! What is being described here is the quintessence of permanent revolution. *Lenin thus admits here that the October revolution has developed and been completed according to the dynamics of permanent revolution!*

Under these circumstances, there is no reason whatsoever to doubt the veracity of what Adolf Joffe, a member of Trotsky's Left Opposition, wrote in the letter he left behind for Trotsky when he committed suicide in 1927:

I have never doubted the rightness of the road you pointed out, and as you know I have gone with you for more than twenty years, since the days of 'permanent revolution.' But I have always believed that you lacked Lenin's *unbending will*, his *unwillingness to yield*, his readiness even to remain alone on the path that he thought right in the anticipation of a future majority, of a future recognition by every one of the rightness of his path. *Politically, you were always right*, beginning with, and I told you repeatedly that with my own ears I had heard Lenin admit that even in 1905, *you, and not he*, were right. One does not lie before his death, and now I repeat this again to you ... But you have often *abandoned your rightness* for the sake of an overvalued agreement, or compromise. This is a mistake. I repeat: politically you have always been right, and now *more right than ever*. Some day the party will realize it, and history will not fail to accord recognition. ... Many a time I have wanted to tell you this, but only now have I brought myself to do so, as a last farewell.⁶⁴

True, no one would lie when facing death. However, one cannot but wish that not only Joffe but the whole party had heard with their "own ears" that Lenin had said he believed that even in 1905 Trotsky was right concerning their political disagreements!

We have submitted Trotsky to the harshest of criticisms in this article. Is there any good reason to spare Lenin from criticism? *One of Lenin's biggest mistakes in his lifetime* was not to have explicitly made self-criticism on this question after the victory of the October revolution, admitting that on the programmatic debate Trotsky had been in the right, that the Russian revolution had become victorious on the basis of the dynamics of permanent revolution in precisely the terms that he (Trotsky) had foreseen. It was because he had not done this that, hardly Lenin's body interred, the Stalin-Zinoviev-Kamenev Triumvirate started a frontal and wholesale attack on the concept of permanent revolution advocated by "Trotskyism". Had Lenin's mark of protection been sealed over the concept of permanent revolution, the Triumvirate

⁶³ Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Trotsky, *My Life*, op. cit., p. 537.

would have to pay a prohibitively higher price in order to launch that attack. At least, everything would have been clearer for all to see. Every Bolshevik would have known that the conception on which war was being waged by the Triumvirate was one to which Lenin had seen fit to subscribe to at a certain stage of his life. In other words, as Trotsky was saying at the time, it would have been much clearer that the struggle that was being waged was “against proletarian revolution”!

One can only speculate as to why Lenin did not make such self-criticism. The problem cannot be lack of confidence on Lenin’s part toward Trotsky. We saw above what extensive powers he bestowed on Trotsky from 1919 on. Moreover, Lenin entrusted the command of the army, the Red Army to him. Had he not had such great confidence in him, he certainly would not have put in Trotsky’s hand a lever that was susceptible to abuse for inconceivably evil purposes. A more reasonable political explanation might have been Lenin’s fear that Trotsky might use Lenin’s self-criticism to his own ends in the context of party infighting. He might have thought that such self-criticism coming from the unquestionable leader of the party and the revolution would augment Trotsky’s prestige to a level that might pose a problem in the context of possible future intra-party friction. One can see clearly that his testament is marked through and through with the fear of a future division of the party. Hence, he might have shrunk from giving an even more formidable weapon to Trotsky, whom he already assesses as a leader of superior talent.

Until a certain stage of development, this might indeed be seen as a wise tactical consideration. But Lenin should at least have done this self-criticism after he started a war in common with Trotsky against the bureaucracy in the fall of 1922. He now believed that Stalin should be removed from office, which implies that he has already understood that Stalin was the chief menace. There is no reason why he should still fear strengthening Trotsky’s hand excessively.

A psychological explanation might be that it proved difficult for Lenin to present a self-criticism after 14 years of polemic against his erstwhile rival. Lenin has gone down in history as an exemplary leader who, once he found out that he was wrong, was able to change instantly his point of view and move over to the correct position. But this case is different. In all the other cases, Lenin reached the correct position by settling accounts with reality *himself*. Here, there is something akin to *capitulating* before your rival after 14 long years of disagreement. This is pure speculation, we repeat, because we do not wield any evidence to substantiate it, of the type that we did when explaining the psychology of Trotsky’s resistance to Lenin.

Whatever might be the reason, Lenin’s hesitations or his judgment that there is no place for self-criticism under the circumstances proved to be very costly for the future of the revolution he led and cherished so much.

5. The liberal Trotsky or Trotsky as an alternative to Lenin

The restoration of capitalism successively in most workers' states resulted in Lenin footing the bill of the crimes of Stalin. And because Stalinist calumny had for decades presented Trotsky as an anti-Leninist, many leftists disillusioned in Lenin (and in Stalin who, they imagine, is the legitimate successor to Lenin) started to ask themselves the question of whether Trotsky may be a promising alternative to Lenin. Naturally, Soviet democracy, as well as inner party democracy, played an important part in Trotsky's critique of the bureaucracy. On the other hand, because Stalinist parties had presented their bureaucratic centralist inner regimes as an example of the "Leninist party", it was possible to reason as follows: since Trotsky criticised the Stalinist inner regime, which is said to be "Leninist", he may be defending a model of the party that is not centralist but lax and liberal. For all of these reasons, many people who were looking for a road outside what was being called "really existing socialism" (or "real socialism" for short, both of them nonsensical and apologetic terms) started to look at Trotskyism as a liberal or anarchistic model.

As this was happening in the formerly Stalinist camp involving large masses of people in many countries, another tendency was seeing the light of day, one that complemented and further reinforced this tendency. In its effort to emphasize the differences between itself and Stalinism for decades, Trotskyism had striven to bring to the fore its democratic credentials. This had not brought Trotskyism much support for a very long time. But now former Stalinists were turning their face towards "democracy" and indeed sliding with the speed of light towards liberalism *en masse*. The emphasis on democracy could perhaps finally pay off. Many Trotskyist groups started to represent "socialist democracy" as a paradise where all political currents would be able to work unfettered, where even the bourgeoisie would not be subjected to any kind of repression or exclusion; in effect, many would, in time, start to see the very concept of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" as ballast in the way of increasing their popularity and decided to throw it away. As for the inner regime of the party, tendencies and factions came to be seen not as a permissible right, but something almost desirable, something, indeed, to be encouraged, something that is a mark of maturity. The end result was to ignore the rule of unity of action, which was a *sine qua non* of democratic centralism, the rule to the effect that once a decision was taken in due fashion, the whole party was bound by that decision and would contribute to its practical implementation. On the other hand, in European countries, where Eurocommunism had by now become the dominant trend, militants who worked in Trotskyist parties also came to decide which actions of the party they would attend or, for that matter, in which sphere of activity they would be exerting their militant effort. Former Stalinists having become new left-wing liberals should surely be forgiven for thinking, inspired by these examples, that Trotskyism was really an alternative to Leninism!

The idea of the "liberal Trotsky" is a fiction, one that has been fabricated by currents that have long abandoned revolutionary Marxism, but still continue to apply the label of "Trotskyism" to their movement. It is not possible to find a speck of such tendencies in Trotsky himself, nor in the currents that have remained loyal to his true heritage. We saw above that some elements of such tendencies were present

in the thinking of the young Trotsky. Even then, the sole problem was basically the existence of a spontaneist logic preventing Trotsky from grasping the importance of a centralist revolutionary party. There is not the slightest sign that Trotsky had any illusions in “pure democracy” regarding the character of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Quite the contrary. But when Trotsky became a Bolshevik, even the loose conception of the party was completely eliminated. What should one call people who insist on committing the youthful mistakes of a master who later saw his errors and presented as thorough a self-criticism as Trotsky dared to make on that very question?

In this fifth section, we will introduce some new elements into precisely this topic, elements that will fill the partisans of a liberal Trotsky with dismay. There are some works of Trotsky that instill in those who adopt a liberal interpretation of Trotsky’s thinking a mixture of embarrassment and regret. One of these is the compilation of articles and documents from which we have quoted at length above, titled *In Defense of Marxism*, which brings together material from the years 1939-1940. In a review of that book years ago, we advanced the idea that the book in question may even be read as the testament of Trotsky.⁶⁵ A second book composed of writings penned only slightly before these articles, in 1938-39, was later published under the title *Their Morals and Ours*.⁶⁶ Then there is another book or pamphlet written by Trotsky, hardly ever mentioned in our day and age, called *Terrorism and Communism*. He wrote this one in 1919-1920, when he was crisscrossing Russia in his armoured train. It is his answer to Kautsky’s critique of the Russian revolution.

Because we have assessed the import of *In Defense of Marxism* before,⁶⁷ we will not go here into that book. As for *Their Morals and Ours*, we will refer to it only briefly as the complexity of its philosophical topics require a more detailed exposition and discussion. But we would like to dwell somewhat on *Terrorism and Communism*. Additionally, we will also take up the questions of the “militarisation of labour” and the elimination of the independence of the trade unions, two mutually related concepts that Trotsky raised in 1920. This book (*Terrorism and Communism*) and this practical proposal are almost hidden by self-styled Trotskyists from the public eye. Others, on the other hand, constantly exhume them supposedly to throw shame on Trotsky. We criticize Trotsky, in the same way as we will criticize other Marxists we regard as our leaders, when he or others make mistakes. But if no mistake exists, we continue to defend their thinking and practice. And if mistake there is, it is important to know what its real import is and whether the enemies of Marxism are abusing those mistakes so as to turn the younger generations away from Marxism.

65 Sungur Savran, “Trotsky’ın Vasiyetnamesi” [Trotsky’s Testament], *Sınıf Bilinci*, No. 11, October 1992.

66 Leon Trotsky/John Dewey/George Novack, *Their Morals and Ours*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1986.

67 What is meant here is that the author has gone over the major aspects of *In Defense of Marxism* in a book review earlier (see footnote 65 above). Unfortunately, as the article is in Turkish, the foreign reader does not have the opportunity to inspect that article.

Terrorism and Communism

As is widely known, Kautsky was one of the leaders and the major theoretician of German social democracy before the imperialist war, but moved gradually towards reformism, pursued a centrist policy during the war and moved definitively to the ranks of the counter-revolution after the October revolution. He wrote two pamphlets attacking the October revolution. Lenin answered the first one and Trotsky the second. Both of these ripostes referred to the views of Marxism on wars and revolutions and engaged in serious theoretical debates and were, in their essence, written along similar lines. This simply shows that the views of Lenin and Trotsky overlap, dealing another blow to the search for “Trotsky as an alternative to Lenin”. Here we will dwell exclusively on Trotsky’s book.

In his book, Trotsky insists that in times of revolution and civil war, the proletariat must defend the power that it has acquired by all kinds of extraordinary measures and, as one component of these extraordinary measures, respond to counter-revolutionary terror by resorting to revolutionary terror. In order to explain this to those of the ilk of Kautsky who have renounced revolution and turned their attention to parliamentarism, he cites instances of this attitude from past revolutions. The “Glorious Revolution” of 17th century in England, the Jacobins in power during the French revolution of late 18th century, and the Civil War of the mid-19th century that completed the American revolution, as well as the Paris Commune of 1871, which Kautsky pretended to defend, all had recourse to terror. Because, adds Trotsky, “the problem faced by revolution, as that faced by war, is to break the will of the enemy, to force him to capitulate by accepting the conditions of the victor.”⁶⁸

Trotsky advances evidence in countering Kautsky’s attempt to demonstrate how different the Paris Commune was from the October revolution. Most importantly, he shows, in counterposition to Kautsky’s allegations, that Marx criticised the Commune for exaggerating the importance it attributed to democracy and for not having destroyed the counter-revolutionary Versailles army while the latter was still weak. In Marx’s opinion, the National Guard turned power over to the elected Commune bodies too early. The author of *Civil War in France* complains of an “artificial atmosphere of parliamentarism”. Why all this criticism? The reason is simple: because the Commune refrained from defeating the Versailles army conclusively, the Versailles had the time and the opportunity to recompose and subjected the communards to a fusillade that cost tens of thousands of them their lives! The Kautskian mind, unable to grasp this decisive importance of war in revolutions, disregards this unassailable fact!

The last chapters of *Terrorism and Communism* were devoted to a discussion of the question of the “militarisation of labour”. We will convey this policy proposal and practice of Trotsky to the reader in its historical context, without confining ourselves to this book.

⁶⁸ *Terrorisme*, *ibid*, p. 64. Our translation from the French edition.

The militarisation of labour and the question of trade unions

As mentioned before, the economic policy of the Civil War period in Russia was named “War Communism”. Without going into detail, the gist of this policy was the requisition by the state of the economic surplus produced by the peasant. The peasantry, which was initially prone to a lot of self-sacrifice in order to protect the land that it had acquired thanks to the Bolshevik regime, grew increasingly restless. Because Trotsky, in contrast to Lenin and others who were administering the new state from their offices in Moscow, contacted peasants face to face constantly on his trips in the armoured train, he noted this restive mood earlier than all. In his opinion, a policy was necessary that would address the interests of the peasant, a policy that would provide more incentive to work more. His proposal was a prefiguration of the NEP (New Economic Policy) orientation that was to be adopted later at the Tenth Congress of the Party in early 1921. Trotsky brought his proposal to the Central Committee in early 1920, but Lenin came up against this and the motion was rejected with 4 votes in favour and 11 against. Trotsky did not consider it appropriate to take his proposal to the ninth party congress that was to be convened soon.

It thus became clear that the policy of War Communism, the requisition of the peasant’s economic surplus, i.e. its appropriation through extra-economic measures, was going to be carried on for some time longer at least. This policy was one that did not create a relation between work and personal remuneration, but subjected the entire economy to the requirements of military needs and targets. Even the needs of certain vital institutions were not met. Transport and, in particular, railroad transportation was one of these industries. When in early 1920 engineers reported that railroads would, technically speaking, come to a halt a short time later, the government gave Trotsky, commander of the Red Army in the ongoing Civil War, the additional task of reviving the transport sector, with the railway network in the foreground. Trotsky was well aware that, marked by a spirit of devotion and political consciousness as it was, the Red Army was the Soviet institution that functioned in the most effective fashion. Benefitting from the fact that in certain regions of the country the Civil War was practically over, he started to devote the services of military troops to civilian economic activities. It was thanks to these measures that the railroad system came to be revived in a brief time.

During this successful effort, Trotsky came into conflict many times with the railroad labour union. The militarisation of labour was prone to create arduous work conditions that were met with a lot of discontent by the unions. Trotsky defended these conditions on the ground that the salvation of the revolution demanded self-sacrifice on the part of the working class and criticised the union’s resistance for creating an obstacle in the way of the survival of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In the process, Trotsky started to defend a new position on trade unions: because the state was henceforth a workers’ state, the working class had no need of defending itself face to the state. The unions should join the effort, on the side of the state, of increasing production. This controversy would go all the way up to the Congress of Trade Unions and the Bolshevik president of the Congress, Tomskey, would come up against the policy advocated by Trotsky.

From then on the question became one of a controversy within the Bolshevik Party itself. The 10th Congress, which met in early 1921, put this question on its agenda and duly deliberated on it. Lenin, who had up until then supported the policy of militarisation, was to defend the unions against Trotsky. Lenin's position was quite straightforward: he insisted that the Soviet state was not a workers' state in the pure sense of the term, but a workers' state marred by bureaucratic deformations. Thus workers did need their organisations to defend their rights. His approach to the question was to be adopted by the delegates at the congress and Trotsky's theses defeated.

But the 10th Congress was also the one that abandoned the policy of War Communism and adopted the New Economic Policy (NEP). The restlessness that Trotsky had first observed in the ranks of the peasantry had now taken forms visible to all. The country was rife with a series of peasant revolts. There were also stirrings within the working class itself. Lenin and the Bolsheviks concluded from all this that a retreat was necessary. NEP was an economic policy orientation that allowed for a certain part of the economic surplus produced by the peasant, over and above that paid as a tax to the state, to be sold on the market, for market incentives to be used in other spheres of economic activity, even for the seeking of opportunities of cooperation with foreign capital. The importance of all this with respect to the controversy on unions and the militarisation of labour lay in the following: Trotsky had advanced this proposal within the context of War Communism after the NEP-like orientation he had earlier recommended had not been adopted. In his opinion, the logic of War Communism imposed this course. But now that War Communism had been left behind, the actuality of this course disappeared.

Defending the dictatorship of the proletariat

This, in a nutshell, is the nature of the controversy on the militarisation of labour and trade unions. Trotsky was wrong on this and Lenin was completely right. In our opinion, even Lenin did not go far enough, for he predicated his rejection of Trotsky's trade union policy on the twin facts of the disproportional influence of the peasantry on the state and the idea that the Soviet state was, indeed, a workers' state but a "bureaucratically deformed workers' state". We believe that trade unions will long have a part to play even in the healthy and robust workers' state of the future because although the state is a workers' state, to the extent that individual workplaces are not run by the workers themselves but managers that do not share the power of decision-making with workers, workers will need organs of defense of their interests. We say this tentatively, open to further debate on the question. Trotsky's position, on the other hand, is indefensible given *the general grounds he presents* for his theses. The fact of the existence of a workers' state should not, *per se*, be advanced to turn the unions into docile organs of the state apparatus, irrespective of all circumstances.

The careful reader will have noticed the reference to the "general grounds". Under certain conditions, when the revolution is faced with liquidation and the dictatorship of the proletariat with the threat of extinction, there may be exceptional practices that are defensible. If terror is permissible for the survival of the workers'

state, surely union rights might as well be suspended. To object to this implies the counterposition of *abstract and partial rights* to the interests of the *working class as a whole*.

Why did we bring up the question of the militarisation of labour and trade unions? In fact, this question does not stand alone. Many other questions could also have been evoked for the same purpose. The critics of the Bolsheviks do in fact adduce other kinds of evidence that range from the banning of other socialist parties to the suppression of the Kronstadt uprising. We need not go into all of this for two reasons. First, the defense of terror for the preservation of the revolution goes further than all of that. We see hence that *both Lenin and Trotsky* consider the protection of the revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat above all else. And, secondly, the idea of the elimination of the independence of the trade unions deals a mortal blow to the image of the “liberal Trotsky”, since *Trotsky has defended a method that is rejected even by Lenin*. If Lenin is a despot, Trotsky is surely more of a despot!

Trotsky, Stalin minus the power?

No further evidence is necessary to rebut the image of the “liberal Trotsky”. But now we have to turn the other way and deal with another serious question. All that we have recounted here (terror, the banning of socialist parties, trade unions, Kronstadt etc.) provide evidence for anarchists and left-wing liberals, as well as straightforward bourgeois thinkers for the following proposition: Had he been able to win the struggle for power Trotsky would not have been any different from Stalin. This cohort thereby confess that they have not understood a thing about Stalinism.

For the question is not one of *which methods* Stalin has resorted to. The question is *why, to what ends* the Stalinist terror has been applied. The despotic dictatorship established by Stalin was shaped by the needs of the constitution and preservation of the power of the bureaucracy over the working class and the toiling masses. The methods that Trotsky defended during the Civil War were, on the contrary, to protect and defend the power of the proletariat. Some may object that Stalin also claimed he was defending the proletarian state. How then can we establish the difference? To show the difference, we will present evidence of two different orders.

Trotsky applied terror to the White Armies that were trying to oust proletarian power. Stalin applied it to communists. If he substituted the secret police and other apparatuses of repression in place of the party as the main instrument of power, if he had all the members of the Central Committee of the party that had led the October revolution to victory (like the Zinovievs, the Kamenevs, the Bukharins, the Pyatakovs, the generals of the Red Army that won the Civil War etc.), that is those who had not earlier died of natural causes (like Lenin or Sverdlov for instance) judged and killed during the Moscow Trials for collaboration with fascism and its ally Trotsky, sabotage, assassination or other utterly outlandish crimes, if he had a revolutionary of the stature of Trotsky assassinated upon his personal orders, or even more strikingly, if he had 139 full members and 98 alternate members of the Central Committee elected at the 17th Congress of the party convened in 1934, a congress ironically labelled “the congress of the victors”, purged, if at the opening

of the 18th Congress that met in 1939 only 24 per cent of those that had been elected at the previous congress were still alive,⁶⁹ this can mean only one thing.

Trotsky defended suppressing Kronstadt because it was an *armed* insurrection against the proletarian state.⁷⁰ It is obvious what Stalin has done to his most peace-loving opponents. If Trotsky defended the banning of socialist parties, that is because the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries (or the SRs as they are more commonly known) sided with the Whites against the revolution during the Civil War. The Bolsheviks tried, from time to time, to win over these parties to the side of the revolution but it was they who each time refused to abide by Soviet legality.⁷¹ Stalin raised the nonsense that the working class could possess only one party to the level of theory and constitutional provision, an idea the Bolsheviks had never subscribed to during the revolutionary period of the party.

In short, we are applying the criterion that Trotsky threw at the face of Kautsky in *Terrorism and Communism* to the case of the latter-day Kautskyists:

“Well, then how does your tactics differ from those of the Tzarist state?” ask us the pontiffs of liberalism and Kautskyism.

Do you not understand, you false bigots? Then we will explain to you. The terror of the Tzar was directed to the proletariat. The Tzarist gendarmerie was strangulating workers fighting to bring socialism. Our Special Commissions are executing landlords, capitalists, generals, who are all striving to restore the capitalist order. Do you grasp this... nuance? Yes? For us communists, this is more than sufficient.⁷² It might be in order to point out how closely this argument is linked to the philosophy of “the ends justify the means”⁷³ propounded in *Their Morals and Ours*. This shows that the ideas Trotsky set forth in *Terrorism and Communism* in 1920 are not tainted by the bloody environment of the Civil War and that he has remained true to them until 1938-39, to the end, in fact, of his days.

The real criterion

We can now pass over to the second criterion. Although the facts are there for all to see, some may still complain that it is not comprehensible who applied terror to communists and the partisans of the working class and who against the defenders of capitalist exploitation. Hence the first criterion may not seem to them sufficiently “fine”. We will now put forth an indisputable criterion. Marxist communism differs from all currents in the ranks of the working class by defending the *long-term*

69 See Sungur Savran, “Stalin’in Yazısına Uzun Bir Dipnot: ‘Devletlü Komünizm’” [A Long Footnote to Stalin’s Piece: ‘Communism with the State’], *Sınıf Bilinci*, No. 3, December 1988, pp. 172-73.

70 See Nail Satlıgan, “Kronstadt 1986” [Kronstadt 1986], *11. Tez*, No. 2, February 1986.

71 Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, op. cit., pp. 330-32 ve 447.

72 *Terrorisme*, op. cit., p. 69. Our translation from the French edition.

73 In our opinion, the better formula is “it is the ends that justify the means”, which shows not all means are justifiable when you look at the ends. This formula is a better rendering of the idea. However, in the text above, we have used the formula that is familiar to all.

interests of the *entire* working class. Because capitalism has given a worldwide character to productive forces and combined the entire historical process into a single one, proletarian internationalism and the programme of world revolution taken together are an indispensable criterion of Marxism. Whoever writes on their banner the aim of reaching classless society within the bounds of a single country is not a Marxist; they are not defending the interests of the entire working class or, in other words, of the world working class, but those of the bureaucracy of that single country, albeit presented in the guise of the interests of the working class of that same country. The real criterion is, hence, whether the struggle is waged in the name of proletarian internationalism or “national communism”. The real criterion is whether the struggle is for world revolution or “socialism in a single country”.

When Lenin returned from his exile in Switzerland to the Petrograd of the February revolution, he addressed a crowd of workers in front of the Finland Station at which he had just arrived. He finished off with the slogan “Long live the world socialist revolution!” Trotsky arrived in Petrograd a month later, after an adventurous trip. The day after his arrival, when he was given the floor at the Petrograd Soviet, of which he had served as chairman in 1905, he finished his speech with the following slogan: “Long live the Russian revolution, prelude to the world revolution!” Both revolutionary leaders, *without the means of knowing what one or the other has on their minds*, saw the process triggered in Russia as part of the revolution that would unfold at the international arena.

Let us then wrap up in the following manner. The fundamental criterion that sets apart Trotskyism and Stalinism is not that Stalinism is for despotism and Trotskyism is for democracy. That *is* certainly the case. But democracy can only be handled within the framework of an algebraic formula. Its content can only be filled depending on concrete conditions, relations between the classes, between war and peace, between revolution and counter-revolution. Trotsky, having defended a single party under the concrete circumstances of the Civil War and the upheaval caused by the revolution, criticises, in the 1938 Transitional Programme, the fetishism of the single-party system raised to the level of doctrine under Stalinism and demands freedom for all Soviet parties.

Proletarian democracy is of *crucial* importance for Trotskyism or revolutionary Marxism. But because of this question of algebraic formula, it cannot be the real distinguishing criterion. That is why the real distinction between Stalinism and Trotskyism is proletarian internationalism or world revolution.

In *In Defense of Marxism*, Trotsky depicts the order of priorities for revolutionary Marxism in the following way:

We must not lose sight for a single moment of the fact that the question of overthrowing the Soviet bureaucracy is for us subordinate to the question of preserving state property in the means of production in the USSR; that the question of preserving state property in the means of production in the USSR is subordinate for us to the question of the world proletarian revolution.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ *In Defence of Marxism*, op. cit. p. 26.

The ranking is clear: the first priority is world proletarian revolution, that is to say internationalism; the second criterion is the defense of the workers' state; the elimination of the bureaucratic degeneration of the workers' state and establishing, as part and parcel of that process, proletarian democracy comes only in third place. Liberal Trotskyism will become history before long. In effect, those who adopt and practice Trotskyism in that manner are more and more undergoing a process of fusion with left-wing liberalism, becoming indistinguishable from it day by day.

6. El hombre que rescaté a la humanidad de la “medianoche en el siglo”⁷⁵

We can now pull the strings of the different arguments advanced in this article together. In this paper, we first looked at the place of Trotsky in the rise and fall of the proletarian revolution in the first half of the 20th century. To begin with, we saw the great contributions that he made to the struggle of the proletariat and to Marxism in the spheres of both theory and practice. Later we subjected his weaknesses to a scrutiny. This showed us that as he matured, Trotsky cast off the spontaneism of the young Trotsky and became a Bolshevik or, in other words, corrected the fundamental flaw in his Marxism. But we also established the fact that this was a long drawn out and painful process that cost Trotsky and the revolution a very high price after Lenin's early death. Despite all this, Trotsky succeeded to hold the banner of Marxism and proletarian internationalism high under very adverse circumstances all his life.

We pointed out at the beginning of the article that, just like Lenin, Trotsky was a man of extraordinary gifts. Having been thrown by history into the maelstrom of an explosive working class movement, this genius contributed immensely to the repertory of ideas accumulated by humankind. Trotsky was as good a writer as any of the literary figures of his age; he was one of the three outstanding orators of the socialist movement in the 20th century, together with Jean Jaurès in the early century and Fidel Castro in the second half; he was a thinker of extremely high calibre in the sphere of literature and the arts; he was a giant of an intellectual that could, on behalf of the proletariat, cross swords with the most influential thinkers and statesmen of the 20th century, from Bernard Shaw to Winston Churchill and from André Malraux to Bertrand Russell and John Dewey. These and his contributions to Marxist theory and to revolutionary politics deserve to be recounted in much greater detail. But we think that Trotsky has a *unique place in history* for a reason that towers over all of the rest. This is what we are going to dwell upon in this concluding section.

Victor Serge was an intellectual who was a rare cross-breed between anarchism and Trotskyism (a mixture that was closely reproduced in Daniel Guérin, a generation younger than him). He depicted an age darkened by the twin enemies Stalinism and fascism in his *Midnight in the Century* successfully. It was Trotsky who, in this dark moment of the 20th century when fascism was massacring the proletariat and humanity at large and Stalinism was slaughtering Marxism within the working class movement, rose like the Northern star in the horizon of the working class movement

⁷⁵ Spanish for: The man who saved humanity from “midnight in the century”.

and *created the preconditions for the survival of revolutionary Marxism and proletarian internationalism up until the 21st century*. The different variants of the bureaucracy that descended upon 20th century socialism as a calamity and of Stalinism its ideology (the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Communist Party of China, the series of communist parties of different appellations in Eastern Europe and the Balkans etc.) became the architects, precisely as Trotsky had predicted in *The Revolution Betrayed*, of a process of capitalist restoration that delivered the property of the means of production into the hands of the bureaucracy. All the other currents in the international working class movement extolled one or another of these bureaucracies as the vanguard force of world communism. Most of these pure-bred Stalinist or Maoist parties have now become social democratic or plain democratic parties, defending liberal capitalist ideology. But those parties that were formed in the light shed by Trotsky continue to some or other degree to be the defenders of Marxism.

We wish to underline three dimensions of this process. First, the significance of Trotsky lies in that his presence in the debate shatters the equal sign that the bourgeoisie and the liberal left place between Marxism and Leninism, on the one hand, and Stalinism, on the other. Within a process that started at the end of last century and has continued to this day, post-modernism, post-Marxism, left wing liberalism and countless similar currents have tried to lay the blame for the horrendous practices of Stalinism and its variants at the door of Leninism. See what Marcel Gauchet, historian and philosopher who plays an important part in the public debate among left-wing intellectuals in France, has recently said while discussing the 1968 experience:

...for me the word totalitarianism has been of central importance. The decisive question for me has been the nature of the regimes born of the Leninist communist movement. It was around this that my intellectual itinerary turned. In that period, I considered the Communist Party [the PCF] not as going through destalinisation but through deconstruction. The problem that gripped me and became the engine of my personal journey is the failure of Marxism to explain those regimes with a Marxist inspiration. I developed very early on the idea that the fundamental question was to elaborate one's thinking on history that would avoid the dead ends of Marxism, in particular with respect to its assessment of so-called "bourgeois" democracy. It is this question that separated me from 68 thinking, which was not amenable to be used to that end.⁷⁶

What succinct summary! There are so many left-wing intellectuals around the world today who would appose their signatures to this passage, whatever other differences they may harbour with each other. The basic allegation made by Gauchet is the "failure of Marxism to explain the regimes that claim to have been inspired by

⁷⁶ "La pensée 68 est-elle épuisée?", *Le Monde*, 28 July 2015, pp. 14-15. Our translation from the French original. (https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2015/09/02/la-pensee-de-68-est-elle-epuisee_4702049_3232.html).

itself". Yet Trotsky has, in his *The Revolution Betrayed* and other writings, advanced the fundamentals of such an explanation with resounding success. The analysis that he presents there on the basis of a dialectical and materialist method has, moreover, provided us with ***the only diagnosis that has born the correct prognosis*** concerning the final outcome of the process of becoming of these societies. This, then, is the first point: Trotsky is the barrier in the way of the contemporary prejudice that identifies Marxism and Leninism with Stalinism.

Secondly, the influence of Stalinism did not remain confined to the Soviet Union, but spread to the rest of the world movement through the mediation of the Comintern. Thus, only a quarter of a century after 1914, the international socialist movement of the working class suffered another blow. Social democracy had sided with its own bourgeoisie in each country, thus decapitating the working class internationally for the first time. Now it was the turn of Stalinism to do the same thing by first transforming the Comintern from a world party to a foreign policy instrument of the Soviet bureaucracy and later, in 1943, liquidating the organisation that Lenin had founded under such difficult circumstances. Trotsky, by now an accomplished Bolshevik, knew how important was the continuity of a revolutionary organisation both at the national and international scales. Despite aging, he would roll up his sleeves. This is what he wrote in his diary in 1935:

...I think that the work in which I am engaged now, despite its extremely insufficient and fragmentary nature, is the most important work of my life—more important than 1917, more important than the period of the civil war or any other. For the sake of clarity I would put it this way. Had I not been present in 1917 in Petersburg, the October Revolution would still have taken place—***on the condition that Lenin was present and in command***. If neither Lenin nor I had been present in Petersburg, there would have been no October Revolution: the leadership of the Bolshevik Party would have prevented it from occurring—of this I have not the slightest doubt! If Lenin had not been in Petersburg, I doubt whether I could have managed to overcome the resistance of the Bolshevik leaders. The struggle with "Trotskyism" (i.e. with the proletarian revolution) would have commenced in May, 1917, and the outcome of the revolution would have been in question. But I repeat, granted the presence of Lenin the October Revolution would have been victorious anyway. The same could by and large be said of the Civil War, although in the first period, especially at the time of the fall of Simbirsk and Kazan, Lenin wavered and was beset by doubts. But this was undoubtedly a passing mood which he probably never even admitted to anyone but me.

Thus I cannot speak of the "indispensability" of my work, even about the period from 1917 to 1921. But now my work is "indispensable" in the full sense of the word. There is no arrogance in this claim at all. The collapse of the two Internationals has posed a problem which none of the leaders of these Internationals is at all equipped to solve. The vicissitudes of my personal fate have confronted me with this problem and armed me with important experience in dealing with it. There is now no one except me to carry out the mission of arming a new generation with the revolutionary method over the heads of the Second and Third International.

And I am in a complete agreement with Lenin (or rather Turgenev) that the worst vice is to be more than 55 years old! I need at least about five more years of uninterrupted work to ensure the succession.⁷⁷

The year is 1935 and he needs another five years! Trotsky's calculation proved to be right. Five years proved to be enough. Despite the "insufficient and fragmentary nature" of the process of foundation of the Fourth International, today the programme and revolutionary ideas inherited by the world movement from that experience forms the ground for the construction of the international vanguard of the proletariat. So, this is the second point: Twice was the world vanguard of the proletariat destroyed, the first time by social democracy and the second time by Stalinism. Trotsky mended the broken link of this effort of reconstructing the vanguard.

Finally, Trotsky did not permit the great tradition of revolutionary Marxism embodied in the practice and principles of Lenin to be destroyed by the bureaucracy. Some of Trotsky's own contributions are so great as to be compete with those of Lenin. But *his success in establishing the continuity of Bolshevism for the victory of world revolution is the greatest contribution Trotsky has made to Marxism.* Trotsky came to Lenin, to use his own words, late, but with great seriousness. Let us leave the floor once again to Trotsky:

Long before anyone else, I made a public appreciation of Lenin's part in the Brest-Litovsk days. On October 3, 1918, at the extraordinary joint meeting of the higher organs of the Soviet government, I said: "I deem it my duty to say, in this authoritative assembly, that at the hour when many of us, including myself, were doubtful as to whether it was admissible for us to sign the Brest-Litovsk peace, only Comrade Lenin maintained stubbornly, with amazing foresight and against our opposition, that we had to go through with it to tide us over until the revolution of the world proletariat. And now, we must admit that we were wrong."

I did not wait for the delayed revelations from the epigones to recognize the political courage of Lenin's genius, which had saved the dictatorship of the proletariat in the Brest-Litovsk days. In the words I have just quoted, I took upon myself a larger share of responsibility for the errors of others than was really my due. I did it as an example to the others. At this point, the stenographic report notes "prolonged ovation." The party wanted to show in this way that it understood and appreciated my attitude toward Lenin, an attitude devoid of jealousy or pettiness. I realized only too well what Lenin meant to the revolution, to history, and to me. He was my master.⁷⁸

This is precisely why, for us, Trotsky is of paramount importance, but only together with Lenin. We are all Leninists, Trotsky included. This is why Lenin is a master to us all and Trotsky is his true heir.

⁷⁷ Quoted by Joseph Hansen, "Introduction: With Trotsky in Coyoacan", *My Life*, op. cit. pp. vi-vii.

⁷⁸ Ibid, pp. 393-94.

V.I. Lenin on his fiftieth birthday¹

Leon Trotsky

Lenin's internationalism needs no recommendation. It is best characterized by Lenin's irreconcilable break, in the first days of the world war, with that counterfeit internationalism which reigned in the Second International. The official leaders of "Socialism" used the parliamentary tribune to reconcile the interests of the fatherland with the interests of mankind by way of abstract arguments in the Spirit of the old Cosmopolites. In practice this led, as we know, to the support of the predatory fatherland by the proletarian forces.

Lenin's internationalism is in no sense a formula for verbally reconciling nationalism with internationalism. It is a formula for international revolutionary action. The world's territory in the clutches of the so-called civilized section of mankind is regarded as a unified arena where a gigantic struggle occurs, whose component elements are constituted by the individual peoples and their respective classes. No single major issue can be kept restricted within a national framework. Visible and invisible threads connect such an issue with dozens of events in all

¹ This article was originally published in *Pravda*, the official newspaper of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, on 23 April 1920. It was translated to English by John G. Wright and published in *Fourth International* (Vol. 12, No. 1, January-February 1951, pp. 28-29). It is available on the Marxists Internet Archive <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1920/04/lenin.html>

corners of the world. In the evaluation of international factors and forces Lenin is freer than anyone else from national prejudices.

Marx concluded that the philosophers had sufficiently interpreted the world and that the real task was to change it. But he, the pioneering genius, did not live to see it done. The transformation of the old world is now in full swing and Lenin is the foremost worker on this job. His internationalism is a practical appraisal plus a practical intervention into the march of historical events on a world scale and with worldwide aims. Russia and her fate is only a single element in this titanic historical struggle upon whose outcome hinges the fate of mankind.

Lenin's internationalism needs no recommendation. But at the same time Lenin himself is profoundly national. His roots are deep in modern Russian history, he draws it up into himself, gives it its highest expression, and precisely in this way attains the highest levels of international action and world influence.

At first glance the characterization of Lenin as a "national" figure may seem surprising, but, in essence, this follows as a matter of course. To be able to lead such a revolution, without parallel in the history of peoples, as Russia is now living through, it is obviously necessary to have an indissoluble, organic bond with the main forces of the people's life, a bond which springs from the deepest roots.

Lenin personifies the Russian proletariat, a young class, which politically is scarcely older than Lenin himself, but a class which is profoundly national, for recapitulated in it is the entire past development of Russia, in it lies Russia's entire future, with it the Russian nation rises or falls. Freedom from routine and banality, freedom from imposture and convention, resoluteness of thought, audacity in action – an audacity which never turns into foolhardiness – this is what characterizes the Russian working class, and with it also Lenin.

The nature of the Russian proletariat, which has made it today the most important force of the world revolution, had been prepared beforehand by the entire course of Russian national history: the barbaric cruelty of the Czarist autocracy, the insignificance of the privileged classes, the feverish growth of capitalism fed by the lees of the world stock-market, the escheated character of the Russian bourgeoisie, their decadent ideology, their shoddy politics. Our "Third Estate" knew neither a Reformation nor a great revolution of their own and could never have known them. Therefore the revolutionary tasks of the Russian proletariat assumed a more all-embracing character. Our past history knows no Luther, no Thomas Münzer, no Mirabeau, no Danton, no Robespierre. Exactly for that reason the Russian proletariat has its Lenin. What was lost in way of tradition has been won in the sweep of the revolution.

Lenin mirrors the working class, not only in its proletarian present but also in its peasant past, still so recent. This most indisputable leader of the proletariat, not only outwardly resembles a peasant, but there is something inwardly in him strongly smacking of a peasant. Facing the Smolny stands the statue of the other great figure of the world proletariat: Karl Marx, on a stone pedestal in a black frock coat. Assuredly, this is a trifle, but it is impossible even to imagine Lenin putting on a black frock coat. Some portraits of Marx show him wearing a dress shirt against whose broad expanse something resembling a monocle dangles.

That Marx was not inclined to foppery is quite clear to all who have an inkling of the spirit of Marx. But Marx was born and grew up on a different national-cultural soil, lived in a different atmosphere, as did also the leading personalities of the German working class, whose roots reach back not to a peasant village, but to the corporation guilds and the complex city culture of the middle ages.

Marx's very style, rich and beautiful, in which strength and flexibility, wrath and irony, severity and refinement are combined, also contains the literary and esthetic accumulations of the entire German socio-political literature since the days of the Reformation and even before. Lenin's literary and oratorical style is awesomely simple, utilitarian, ascetic, as is his whole make-up. But in this mighty asceticism there is not a trace of a moralistic attitude. There is no principle here, no elaborated system and, of course, no posturing; it is simply the outward expression of inward conservation of strength for action. It is a peasant's practical proficiency but on a colossal scale.

The entire Marx is contained in the Communist Manifesto in the foreword to his Critique, in Capital. Even if he had not been the founder of the First International he would always remain what he is today. Lenin, on the other hand, is contained entirely in revolutionary action. His scientific works are only a preparation for action. If he never published a single book in the past, he would forever enter into history just as he enters it now: the leader of the proletarian revolution, the founder of the Third International.

A clear, scientific system – the materialistic dialectic – is necessary for action on such a historical scale as devolved upon Lenin – it is necessary but not sufficient. Needed here in addition is that irrevealable creative power we call intuition: The ability to judge events correctly on the wing, to separate the essential and important from the husks and incidentals, to fill in mentally the missing parts of the picture, to draw to conclusion the thoughts of others and above all those of the enemy, to connect all this into a unified whole and to deal a blow the moment that the “formula” for this blow comes to mind. This is the intuition for action. In one of its aspects it merges with what we call shrewdness.

When Lenin, screwing up his left eye, listens over the radio to a parliamentary speech of one of the imperialist makers of destiny or goes over the text of the latest diplomatic note, a mixture of bloodthirsty duplicity and polished hypocrisy, he resembles a very wise mouz-hik whom words cannot cajole nor sugary phrases ensnare. This is the peasant shrewdness elevated to genius, armed with the last word of scientific thought.

The young Russian proletariat was able to accomplish what it has only by pulling behind itself, by its roots, the heavy mass of the peasantry. This was prepared for by our whole national past.

But precisely because the proletariat has come to power through the course of events, our revolution has been able suddenly and drastically to overcome the national narrowness and provincial benightedness of Russia's past history. Soviet Russia has become not only the haven for the Communist International, but also the living embodiment of its program and methods.

By paths, unknown and as yet unexplored by science, by which the human

personality is molded, Lenin has assimilated from the national milieu everything he needed for the greatest revolutionary action in the history of humanity. Exactly because the socialist revolution, which has long had its international theoretical expression, found for the first time in Lenin its national embodiment, Lenin became, in the full and true sense of the word, the revolutionary leader of the world proletariat. And that is how his fiftieth birthday found him.

From the AKP to the Working Class: “No offense dude but...”

Mustafa Kemal Coşkun

A classic bourgeois party is identified by the degree to which its various representations of capital and political inclinations compete and contend, and what kinds of responses it produces to meet the needs of capitalist fractions within the ruling block. Along these lines, the foundations of a political and economic system (whether it is a presidential or a parliamentary system) are not free from capital accumulation, capitalist classes, and class struggle. In other words, all sorts of authoritarian or democratic rule are favored not according to the personal pleasure of the rulers but as per the structural qualifications of the capital accumulation regime while bourgeois parties are nothing more than the implementation tool of such priority.

Yet this analysis, based on the mode of production, suffices for us to conclude that all bourgeois parties, at the most abstract level, serve/will serve the perpetuity of the capitalist system and the overall interests of the bourgeoisie in one way or another. This fact, however, should not prevent us from distinguishing the differences among bourgeois parties. Indeed, one begins to see the distinctions among bourgeois parties when the level of analysis is taken from the level of the abstract mode of production to the more material level of social formation and class relations. Now what is decisive here is to ascertain which fraction of the bourgeoisie a bourgeois party represents, and which fraction's ideology it attempts to render dominant in the society. When handled within this framework, comprehending the distinctive characteristics of the rule of each bourgeois party becomes easier and it not only does redeem us from assuming that each bourgeois party is identical to

one another but also enables us to see the conflicts among these parties. This is the first point.

The second point to underscore is the fact that the working class movement in Turkey has been in retreat since the *coup d'état* of 1980. Such withdrawal and position loss, engendered by the frailty of the class movement and the left, also brought along further usurpation of vested rights, and a gradual erosion in organized movements each day. It should be noted that this withdrawal has gone through certain stages in itself as well, but the fact that the 18-year long AKP rule has coincided with a quite particular period within the context of capitalist attacks against the working class should also be underlined. With neoliberalism, under such circumstances, the grand asymmetry in the power relations between labor and capital has become even deeper with the AKP rule. The following is an exposition of what this means for workers and laborers.

Before going on with the exposition, however, it would be useful to note one point as a warning related to the above-mentioned part. As has been underlined above, there are, of course, distinctive features of bourgeois parties that render them original, but this should not mean that the path to “getting rid of” one bourgeois party entails supporting another bourgeois party. Or, in other words, one can argue: You can get rid of the ruling bourgeois party this way but you cannot get rid of the bourgeois rule; you would put the representative of another fraction of the bourgeois class into power at best. This, nevertheless, calls for another individual study.

The originality of the AKP

The originality of AKP, in contrast to the previous bourgeois governments, lies in two points, among many other things, for the purposes of this study. The first point, yet secondary within the scope of this study, is the change that has facilitated the Islamist bourgeoisie to take its share from the social surplus value during the AKP rule. For instance, one observes that a series of companies that are members of MÜSİAD [Independent Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association] and TUSKON [Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists] have seized an extraordinary growth rate among those that have increased their revenues the most between 2003 and 2007.¹ Therefore, although the expectation of the Islamist bourgeoisie to receive the support extended to big capital had flourished with the coup d'état of 12 September 1980 and the Özal² era, it met with genuine political support during the AKP period. Although the state's role in capital accumulation did not change, its supportive role now extended to other circles, other capitalists

1 Kurtar Tanyılmaz, “The Deep Fracture in the Big Bourgeoisie of Turkey”, in *The Neoliberal Landscape and the Rise of Islamist Capital in Turkey*, edited by Neşecan Balkan, Erol Balkan, and Ahmet Öncü, New York: Berghahn Books, 2015, p. 105.

2 Indeed, the members of the Nur Movement supported the Motherland Party and free market economy during this period. Islamist sections, even at this first stage of neoliberalism, endeavored to fill in the spaces left behind by the state while withdrawing from the economy. Yet, they would find essential support and political power during the AKP period. they would find the essential support and political power during the AKP period.

and financiers. Thus, another section of this class has settled alongside the class responsible for the government of the state. This new class comes from within political Islam, not from class sections with a Kemalist, secular, and modernist ideology any more. The education system, political system, legal system etc. have all been reshaped in order to maintain the continuity of this change. The second one, bearing a more direct significance pertaining to the focal point of this study, lies in the fact that in contrast to the previous bourgeois governments, AKP both increased proletarianization and further impoverished the working class while it, on the other hand, has succeeded in committing the working class and at least a significant portion of workers’ organizations to the interests of the bourgeoisie, and even in establishing workers’ organizations directly depending on itself. What Türk-İş Chairperson Ergün Atalay said after accepting the government’s offers during the latest collective bargaining agreement negotiations stands testimony to what this study in fact talks about. He said “If this lingers on, we will complicate things. At least I closed the deal this way.”³

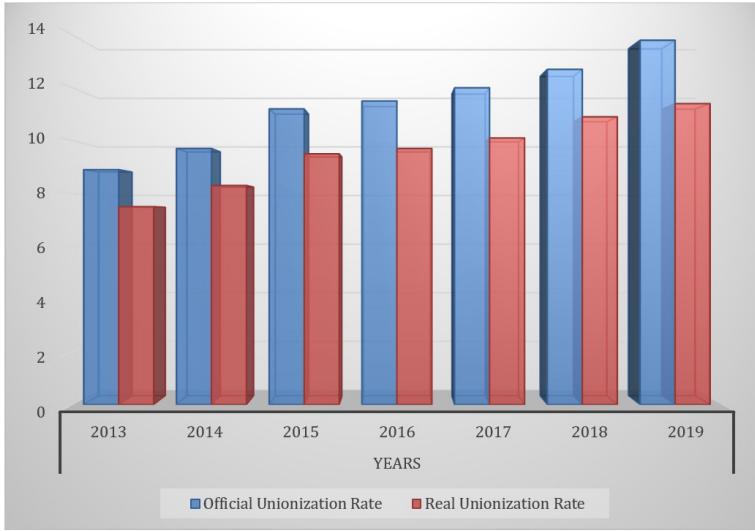
The second point underlined above will be the focus of this study to analyze the policies of AKP, which claimed power in 2002, towards the working class and labor organizations.

Unionization and pro-government trade unions

Unionization in Turkey has increased both in number and proportion specifically since 2010. One can talk about a couple of reasons for such hike. The most significant reason, however, is the legal regulation that was introduced in 2014 providing for unionization for subcontracted workers particularly in public institutions. This regulation facilitated a quantitative increase in unionization. The following graph demonstrates that increase.

³ I am not arguing that Türk-İş and its trade unions are directly affiliated with the AKP government. It would be rather more accurate to say at this point that confederations like Türk-İş rely a lot on their political ties with the government. Therefore, one should not disregard the fact that such trade unions as TÜMTİS, Tekgıda-İş, and Petrol-İş affiliated with Türk-İş have been engaged in a significant struggle for workers during this process.

Graph 1. Unionization Rates between 2013-2019



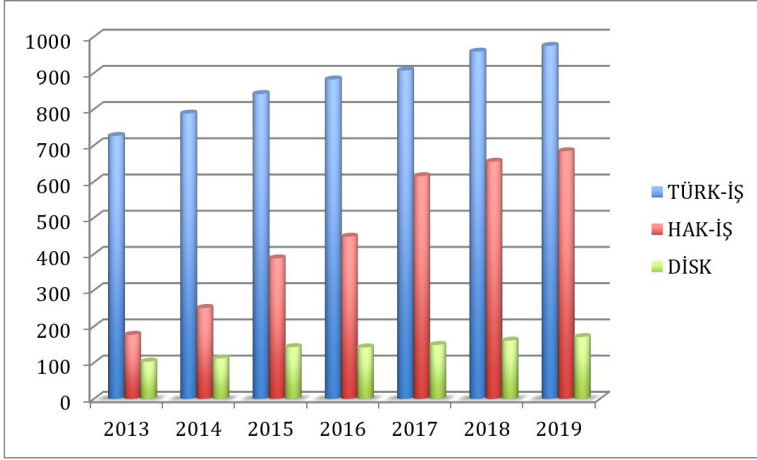
Source: DİSK-AR, Research on Unionization, 2019.

The official unionization rate appears higher as the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services has not included the number of informal workers. Real unionization rate, on the other hand, is lower as it also covers informal workers and those who do not have collective labor agreements. Yet the mere comparison of these two rates reveals that the unionization rate has gradually increased. Indeed, the number of unionized workers has gone up to 1 million 859 thousand from 1 million 2 thousand with an almost 86% increase between 2013 and 2019. When one takes into account the fact that the number of insured workers increased by 23.2% while the total number of workers increased by 25% during the same period, the 86% increase in the number of unionized workers is quite significant. In other words, it is possible to say that about 860 thousand workers have become trade union members within six years.⁴

But a more important indicator for our purposes here is the change in the number of members of three large confederations (Türk-İş, Hak-İş, DİSK).

4 Aziz Çelik, “Sembiyotik ilişkiler ve otoriter korporatizm kışkıracısında 2010’lu yıllarda Türkiye’de sendikalaşma, toplu pazarlık ve grev eğilimleri”, *Uluslararası Yönetim, İktisat ve İşletme Dergisi CEEİK*, Special Issue, 2018, p. 46.

Graph 2. Number of Confederation Members, 2013-2019 (Thousand persons)



Source: Compiled from the statements of sector trade union members issued by the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services.

The rapid increase in the number of members of trade unions affiliated with Hak-İş confederation stands out in the graph. In this period, trade unions affiliated with Hak-İş neither involved in a distinguished struggle nor undertook a compelling campaign for association. Thus, the rapid increase in the number of Hak-İş members, in comparison to the increases in other confederations, cannot be assumed something ordinary. When one further takes into account the fact that Hak-İş is protected by public officials and the government itself, this increase should be read not only in relation to undertaking a union mission in conformity with the government but also to corporatist labor relations in terms of the cooperation among the state, capital, party and labor.⁵ One of the original features of the AKP rule as per its bourgeois predecessors within this context proves to be its success in establishing a union organization committed to the state, the party and capital (when we consider the unions that have a different legal status and organize civil servants, although it is not a part of the study, specifically Memur-Sen and the rapid increase in this confederation's number of members).

Other data supporting the above-mentioned corporatist inclination should also be consulted. There is substantial quantitative increase in the number of union members but this does not point to actual unionization, exercise of union rights (like collective labor agreements, strikes) and utilizing union protection. All assessments disregarding the background underlying this apparent increase would be faulty and misleading. Let us investigate this background now.

The weakening of union rights

The quantitative increase in the number of union members does not point out to the exercise of union rights because the AKP rule's most pressing policy to prevent the exercise of union rights is to delay and ban strikes. One can see such hostility towards the working class in Erdoğan's addresses defending strike delays. He stated the following in his address at a meeting held by the International Investors Association on 12 July 2017:

We have been maintaining the state of emergency to let our business world work better. I ask you; do you have any problems, any disruptions in your business world? When we took office there was the state of emergency. But all factories were threatened by strikes. Remember those days. Do you have anything like it today? Quite the contrary. Now we readily intervene into a place threatened by strike, utilizing the state of emergency. We thus say no, we do not permit you to go on a strike because you cannot unsettle our business world.⁶

Erdoğan had openly stated on 7 June 2017, about a month before such statements, at the 24th General Assembly of MÜSİAD that he had had no tolerance for strikes and strikes had been delayed to the benefit of the capital by saying "He would now and then get up and want strike at once, whatever... No offense dude but..."

Erdoğan has actually kept his promise to the capitalist class by using sometimes the state of emergency. A total of 16 strikes have been delayed, with 7 of them during the state of emergency, since the day AKP came into power. The state of emergency, which was claimed to have been declared against the putschists, has become a practice that has terminated the right to work and strike within this framework. The number of workers affected by such de facto ban on strikes is about 193 thousand. The scope of strike delays was, at the same time, extended in 2016 with an opportunity to ban strikes that were regarded to be disruptive of "economic and financial stability" and "inner-city public transportation services" in addition to the grounds of "national security and public health."⁷

Table 1. Strikes Banned during the AKP Rule

Year	Workplace	Grounds	Trade Union
2003	Petlas	National Security	Petrol-İş
2003	Şişecam	National Security	Kristal-İş
2004	Şişecam	Public Health and National Security	Kristal-İş
2004	Pirelli	National Security	Lastik-İş
2005	Erdemir	National Security	T. Maden-İş
2014	Şişecam	National Security	Kristal-İş
2014	Çayırhan Kömür	Public Health and National Security	T. Maden-İş

2015	MESS Grup	National Security	Birleşik Metal
2017 (SoE)	Asil Çelik	National Security	Birleşik Metal
2017 (SoE)	EMİS Grup	National Security	Birleşik Metal
2017 (SoE)	Akbank	Economic and Financial Stability	Banksis
2017 (SoE)	Şişecam	National Security	Kristal-İş
2017 (SoE)	Mefarİlaç	Public Health	Petrol-İş
2018 (SoE)	MESS Grup	National Security	Türk Metal, Birleşik Metal, Çelik-İş
2018 (SoE)	Soda Kromsan	National Security	Petrol-İş
2019	İzban	Disruptive of Public Transportation Services	Demiryol-İş

Source: DISK-AR, Research on Unionization, 2019.

It would not be wrong to argue that strike bans also affected the tendency to strike. The tendency to strike is calculated by strike incidence which refers to the number of work days at strike per thousand workers.⁸ Strike incidence and the related tendency to strike have sustained a significant decrease during the AKP rule. Strike incidence which was 75 in 1985 went up to 1059 in 1991. Although the figure went as high as 1097 in 1995 through the increase in public strikes, the numbers significantly dropped in the 2000s. Strike incidence, which was 334 during the 1985-2002 period, went down to 25 during the AKP rule (2003-2017), while the mean figure for 2010-2017 went as low as 11 per annum.⁹

Another obstacle before the exercise of union rights is the restrictions imposed on the right to collective bargaining. In other words, although the number of union members increase quantitatively, union member workers' right to collective bargaining has gradually been restricted. Indeed, in spite of the fact that 1 million 859 thousand workers are union members according to the data provided by the ministry in January 2019, 727 thousands of these workers are not eligible for collective labor agreements. This means 39% of unionized workers cannot enjoy the right to collective labor agreements.¹⁰

Moreover, unionization got even more challenging within the private sector with a major development in employers' skills to prevent unionization. One of the leading reasons for the emaciation seen in unionization is the fact that employers got rather specialized in de-unionization techniques through the support of the political power. Some of these techniques have been listed as follows in a related report drafted by Türk-İş:¹¹

- Resorting to ideological discourse slandering trade unions and unionization to keep workers away from unions.
- Psychological coercion on workers by arguing that unionization means

being disloyal to the employer by using traditional relationships like kinship and being denizens of the same city.

- Suppressing workers' "employment security" threatening them with layoffs or closing down the workplace in case of unionization.

- Playing both ends against the middle and preventing collective action by the workers through setting them against one another by provoking differences in political views, faiths, ethnic backgrounds and the like among workers.

- Offering non-wage financial aid and payment to workers in order to make them back down on unionization.

- Laying off workers leading unionization efforts.

- Whole or partial laying off of unionized workers.

- Revoking the authority of the union by recruiting new workers following the lay off of unionized workers.

- Relocating unionized workers, assigning harder tasks to them, forcing them to undertake works outside their professional capacity and competence to intimidate them.

- Dissolving union organizations by subcontracting.

- Preventing workers' freedom to choose their own unions by making workers members of unions established by the employers themselves.

- Preventing workers' freedom to choose their own unions by transferring workers to controlled unions that act in concordance with employers from the unions they were members of.

- Breaking workers' resistance during the unionization process by means of the police and gendarmerie or by hiring people.

- Attempting to keep women workers away from unions through such discourse as "women have nothing to do with unions" by using current gender inequality.

- Employers' acting together particularly in organized industrial zones, industrial estates and free zones and their developing "blacklists" covering unionized workers or those inclined to get unionized preventing such "blacklisted" workers to find jobs at different businesses in the same vicinity.

- Extending work hours, delay in wage payments, reduction in break times, removal of tea services at breaks, repealing free bus rides to work, not offering lunch at work places going through a unionization process. Making imams [priests] to preach and indoctrinate workers to prevent unionization at mosques frequented by workers.

Privatizations and subcontracted labor

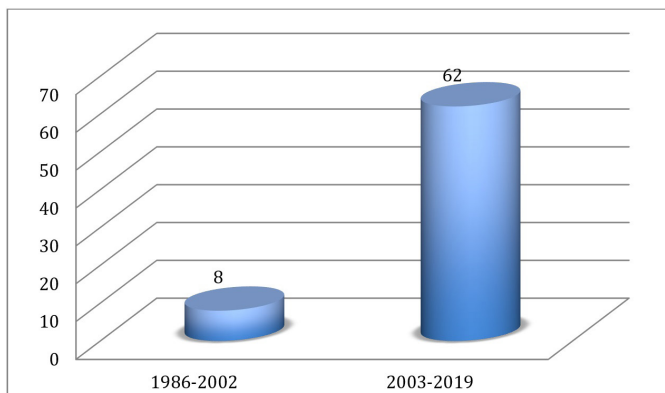
The rush for the privatization of public enterprises and the withdrawal of the state from the economy began in the Özal era and was maintained by subsequent governments in accelerating or decelerating speeds. The liquidation of the public could not be undertaken at the desired speed in the 1990s due to interventions by both the Constitutional Court and other judicial authorities along with objections raised by trade unions. In other words, even the 12 September coup d'état constitution had erected some obstacles before privatization. Nevertheless, one significant difference needs to be underlined. Governments before the AKP legitimized privatization

endeavors by stressing the so-called need to dispose of unprofitable enterprises burdening the state’s resources. AKP governments, on the other hand, based this on disposing of public enterprises as an economic philosophy without having regard to which enterprise was productive or profitable.¹² AKP governments were, thus, the champions of privatization and the liquidation of the public. Both the constitution itself and some legal regulations removed a significant portion of the obstacles before privatization. Privatizations undertaken during the AKP era have accounted for the 88% of all privatizations.¹³ While privatization before the AKP was 8 billion dollars, this figure amounted to 62 billion dollars during the AKP rule.

Graph 3. Privatization in Turkey, 1986-2019 (Billion Dollars)

Source: DİSK-AR, Labor during the AKP era, 2018.

Another point that calls for attention about privatization is the fact that the privatization of public services has also gained impetus during the AKP era. In other words, not only has public production but also these fields, prominently health and education, have been rendered capital appreciation. For instance, the number of private schools which was 1780 during the 2001-2002 education year has skyrocketed to 12,809 in 2018-2019.¹⁴ Thus, on the one hand, the number of private education and private medical institutions have been rapidly increasing, on



the other hand, public institutions have become commercialized, and services that should have been offered essentially by public personnel began to be undertaken through service procurement and the subcontractor system.

Subcontracting has begun to occupy a larger space in Turkey’s agenda notably since the 2000s. This practice had already been common in the construction sector. Further the predominant mode of work in the construction sector was employing subcontractors. Indeed, when one looks into the number of subcontractor workers

12 Dilek Filizfidanoğlu, “2008 Özelleştirme yılı”, *Cumhuriyet Strateji*, 1 January 2008.

13 DİSK-AR, AKP Döneminde Emek [Labor during the AKP era], 2018.

14 <http://sgb.meb.gov.tr/www/resmi-istatistikler/icerik/64>.

in the private sector, it is possible to see the primacy is the construction sector.

Subcontracting has systematically increased in the public sector, primarily in healthcare, education, mining and energy sectors, especially since 2002. While the number of registered subcontracted workers was 387 thousand in 2002, this figure went up to 1 million 611 thousand in 2011. Subcontracting began to be preferred more in both the private and public sectors as it is a mode of work resorted to by employers to avoid legal obligations. Moreover, while each capitalist raised the rate of surplus value by making labor work for low wages through employing subcontractor workers, the public sector has been avoiding levying new taxes and increasing its share from distribution by disposing of public personnel spending by employing subcontractor workers instead of secured employment.¹⁵ It would not be inaccurate to argue that this state of affairs was a reflection of political inclinations aiming to develop a flexible and precarious work life in the field of employment.¹⁶

Flexibility and precarity

The AKP rule represents an era during which the ideology and legal structure of precarious and flexible work have been rendered institutionalized. The Labor Act of 2003 which was enacted during AKP's early years had already put forth provisions based on flexibility. This was followed in 2016 by significant regulatory measures to enable flexibility in the labor market as well. Law No. 6717, which went into force in 2016, facilitated remote working forms including teleworking and homeworking that were among the modes of flexible working. The same regulation granted the power to establish employment relationships to private employment agencies as well. Thus, what was targeted was nothing else but more precarity for the employee, less financial burden on the employer, streamlining layoffs and handing a large unemployment pool to private employment agencies for their brokerage endeavors.

The National Employment Strategy (NES) issued during the AKP era proves to be an open source in terms of its revealing the foundations of flexible and precarious labor. The 8th paragraph of the 2017-19 Action Plan issued in concordance with the NES has set forth ensuring security and flexibility in the labor market as one of the main policy axes (p. 2).

The same action plan has provided the necessity for flexible working as follows:

Globalization and rapidly developing technological change cause fundamental changes along with far-reaching reconstruction in world economy. This change affects working relations and labor markets deeply and transforms them. Economic crises and competitive environment happening especially in the last 20 years have caused the abandoning of strict regulations in working life; countries, companies

15 Onur Ender Aslan, *Kamu personel rejimi*, Ankara: TODAİE Publications, 2005, p. 412.

16 Serkan Öngel, "Türkiye'de taşeronlaşmanın boyutları", *DİSK-AR Bulletin*, Winter 2014.

and labor force had to give up classical production and working styles in order to adapt to change and crises. All these developments have provided a basis for the adoption of flexible production and flexible working in terms of both businesses and employees (para. 66, p. 29).

This, hereby, is the ideology of precarious and flexible working: the stress on the adoption of flexible working not only by employers but also by the work force. Thus both AKP’s and employers’ justification for flexibility proves to be the same. The so-called need for flexible work has been explained by such grounds as “change in information technologies,” “increasing global competition,” “adaptation to changing economic circumstances,” and “increasing the competitive power of enterprises.” Flexibilization of labor markets, in this sense, has become a priority policy during the AKP rule precisely for the survival of capital.

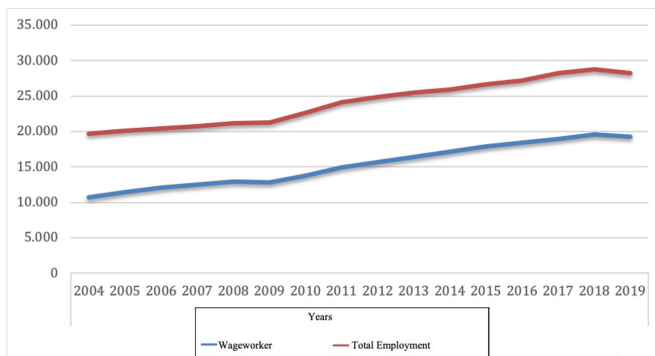
Proletarianization and unemployment

It has been stated that proletarianization has been on the rise both in Turkey and the world with the majority of the population made up of those making a living by selling their labor. The following graph explicitly demonstrates this state of affairs.

Graph 4. Total Employment and Wageworker Rates in Turkey (2014-2019)

Total employment was around 20 million in 2004 in which the rate of wage and casual workers was about half this figure. Total employment has drawn near to 30 million in 2019 with the rate of wage and casual workers increasing to about 20 million. Therefore, while half the society made a living by selling their labor power at the beginning of the 2000s, wage earners now account for two thirds of the total employment in 2020. This is quite a radical change which stands for a grand wave of proletarianization possibly bringing about both social and political consequences.

The post-2002 era has proven to be one during which proletarianization increased while unemployment invariably multiplied with regards to the whole economy. The following graph presents annual unemployment rates.

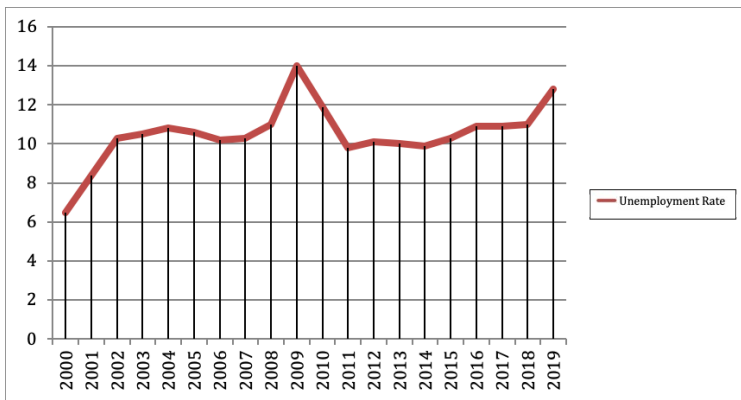


Source: Compiled from the Labor Force Statistics by TSI.

Graph 5. Unemployment Rate in Turkey (2000-2019)

Source: Compiled from the Labor Force Statistics by TSI.

In brief, unemployment rates after 2012 significantly increased. Even though one puts the economic crisis related rapidly increasing unemployment rate of 2009 aside, it is observed that the course of unemployment maintained a level at and over 10% until 2019. This situation unavoidably expanded the reserve army of labor and brought about a competitive pressure on wages. Thus labor income dropped off in the real sense. Should the year 1999 is taken to be 100, real wages per capita remained at the same level in 2011 as well.¹⁷ Therefore, while proletarianization increased, so did unemployment and real wages of the labor force drop accordingly. Significant hikes have been observed in unemployment rates in Turkey during the



period when the problems of the accumulation model led by loans started to become more prominent. The highest unemployment rates in Turkey since the end of 1990s, according to official figures, were recorded in the first quarters of 2009 and 2019 respectively. Although one can barely compare these figures due to changes

Table 2. Labor Force Statistics and Widely Defined Unemployment Rates (2018-19) (Thousand persons)

Years	Labor force	Unemployed	Unemployment rate (%)	Those with no hope of employment	Other (not a jobseeker but ready to work)	Seasonal workers	Time dependent underemployment	The number of widely-defined unemployed	Widely-defined unemployment rate (%)	The widest definition: the unemployed including the underemployed
2018-10	32658	3788	11.60	485	1579	116	383	6351	18.23	7101
2018-11	32295	3981	12.33	522	1614	123	406	6646	19.23	7442
2018-12	31957	4302	13.46	598	1710	142	401	7153	20.79	7920
2019-1	31825	4668	14.67	618	1693	163	410	7552	22.02	8344
2019-2	32084	4730	14.74	621	1754	142	422	7669	22.16	8475
2019-3	32339	4544	14.05	563	1706	117	426	7356	21.18	8181
2019-4	32401	4202	12.97	553	1732	102	374	6963	20.02	7755
2019-5	32426	4157	12.82	558	1736	105	334	6890	19.78	7622
2019-6	32766	4253	12.98	583	1726	103	323	6988	19.86	7724
2019-7	33113	4596	13.88	614	1740	94	320	7364	20.71	8112
2019-8	33180	4650	14.02	613	1635	74	333	7305	20.58	8084
2019-9	33006	4566	13.83	630	1616	65	322	7199	20.38	7983
2019-10	32740	4396	13.43	668	1507	80	350	7001	20.01	7750

Source: Labor Force Statistics by the TSI and author's own calculations.

¹⁷ Serkan Öngel and Kurtar Tanyılmaz, "Türkiye ekonomisinde küresel kriz karşısında sermayenin tepkisi: İşçilerin artan sömürüsü", *DİSK-AR*, Fall 2013, p. 39.

introduced to the calculation of labor force statistics, it can at the same time be argued that these rates correspond to the highest unemployment rates in the history of the Republic of Turkey. The impeditive consequence of such rates has been the fact that impoverishment remained constant, if not higher.

An assessment of the condition of labor in Turkey within the last two decades confirms a similar trend in those of other countries where neoliberal policies are implemented. Briefly expressed, this trend shows a setback in the material position of labor. Increases in labor productivity are not in any way reflected on wages, and labor's share in income either makes no headway or falls back. Indeed, no increases were seen in labor's share from gross domestic product in spite of fluctuations within the period during the last two decades that can be described as a rapid process of change in Turkish economy. The increase in employment during the 2010s has been quite lower than the mean annual increase of labor force. It is also observed that services have rapidly increased in the sectorial distribution of employment. Further, rapid employment increases have been seen in the construction sector until the 2018-19 crisis. An overall assessment shows that while proletarianization increased, unemployment also got into an upward trend after 2010 according to labor force statistics and employment data in Turkey. Wages of laborers in the labor force have made no headway in real terms and have rapidly been dropping under crisis circumstances. The consequence is the intensification of cases of injustice in income distribution and the deepening of poverty.

As has been presented in the table 2, the number of the unemployed within its widest definition including the underemployed is about 8 million.

The overcrowding in the army of the unemployed, also known as the reserve army of labor, extends great opportunities to employers for the deterioration of working conditions. Additionally, the conditions of millions of workers suffering from precarious practices indirectly affect working conditions as has also been the case in Turkey. Should one look at the picture taking into account those who are not considered to be unemployed under official definitions, whose relationship with the labor market is more fragile than current workers, a surplus population getting more crowded than the labor force can be identified. When the conditions of accumulation are met excluding those who are not assumed to readily return to the labor market and taking into account those who are predicted to start working again (the unemployed excluding those who are unemployed for more than 2 years, those ready to work, seasonal workers and the time-dependent underemployed), one can argue that the number of persons within fluid surplus population would be more than 6 million. The increase in fluid surplus population, the proportion of which to the total labor force in Turkey amounts to 19%, conduces to the further irregularization of working conditions, to the easier imposition on the working class of poorer working and living conditions. It thus serves various functions for the reproduction of capital under crisis conditions.¹⁸

¹⁸ “Its production is included in that of the relative surplus population, its necessity in theirs; along with the surplus population, pauperism forms a condition of capitalist production, and of the capitalist development of wealth.” Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of*

At this point one would ask why workers and laborers still vote for AKP. The following is a brief discussion of why.

Why do workers vote for AKP?

One point needs to be underlined first. It would be wrong to assume that workers and laborers were completely silent against the unfair and unlawful practices they faced in their workplaces. Indeed, workers staged 1,116 protests in 2015 with a sharp decline to 608¹⁹ in 2016, 607 in 2017 and 642 in 2018.²⁰ Most of these protests were staged at workplaces against problems like layoffs, trade union membership, and non-payment of wages.

However, as has been demonstrated in the previous sections, while it is clear that the state's interventions into the labor market during the AKP era are characterized by neo-liberal and anti-labor policies to a great extent, the reasons why workers and the poor, who have been adversely affected by such policies, continue to support and vote for the same government should firstly be explained. Involvement in a protest at the workplace against the employer does not mean that the worker will directly develop political consciousness. Nevertheless, it is not possible to explain the reasons why workers and laborers still vote for the government in spite of all its negative policies against themselves merely by the absence of political consciousness.

It was previously mentioned that AKP had two original features and the focus was particularly set on the second point (increase in proletarianization and establishment of pro-AKP workers organizations). Now the third point that supports the second one and distinguishes AKP from previous bourgeois parties can be addressed. This third originality lies in AKP's success in receiving the political support of both the poor and low-wage workers and laborers through its "social policy" practices.²¹

States' social policies and the related factors cannot be regarded as something

Political Economy, Vol. 1, İstanbul: Yordam Kitap, (2011 [1867]), p. 622.

19 The most important reason for this decline is probably the fact that the country was driven into a climate of conflict and authoritarianism following the elections held in the summer of 2015. The resolution process was shelved after the election and armed conflict broke out in the South East. ISIS attacks against mass protests resulting in Suruç and Ankara massacres were also committed during this period. When one at the same time takes into account the state of emergency regime initiated after the failed coup attempt of July 2016, the reasons of the subsequent declines can be understood more clearly.

20 Data compiled from the reports drafted by Labor Studies Group (*Emek Çalışmaları Topluluğu*). See <https://emekcalisma.org/category/raporlar/>

21 There are many other social, economic, political and cultural reasons (cultural identity policies, conservatism, nationalism, consciousness level of the working class, etc.) as to why AKP was able to obtain the support of the proletariat. Yet the focus of this study is on the original features of AKP that render it different from other bourgeois parties. One of its original features is the issue of social policy and social assistance that make workers and laborers vote for AKP.

completely different from the capitalist accumulation regime. The neo-liberal accumulation regime introduced step by step beginning in the 1980s has also designated the conception of social policy. To take the issue from an earlier time, AKP’s originality regarding this matter lies in its successful transformation of social policy practices, which in fact is a civil right, into a process of poverty management instead of reducing or fighting poverty with its conception of volunteering and philanthropy that it inherited from the Ottomans. Poverty is, thus, transformed into a political relationship by means of social assistance that is also cloaked in a religious content and commodified in concordance with neo-liberal economic policies. This is killing two birds with one stone: both social assistance has become a valorisation area for certain capital circles through its commodification demonstrating compatibility with the neo-liberal accumulation regime and AKP succeeded in garnering the support of the disorganized and informal parts of the working class and the rural poor. The following further explicates this argument.

AKP’s social policy boils down to the implementation of social assistance by means of local governments, NGOs and notably via foundations directly established by the state.²² Social assistance can be classified within this framework as public central social assistance,²³ public local social assistance,²⁴ private sector social assistance²⁵ and civilian social assistance.²⁶

The first two above-mentioned categories covering public social assistance account for the largest share in social assistance. The aim of Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations has been set forth in the related law as “...to enable fair income distribution, to encourage social cooperation and solidarity by taking measures reinforcing social justice.”²⁷

Social assistance can either be direct monetary aid or aid in kind. Such in-kind aid includes programs like food, fuel, housing, educational material, and medical support. It would not, however, be accurate to argue that neither public central nor public local social assistance were able to meet their stated goals to enable a fair income distribution and to reduce poverty. Indeed, the following table presents data

22 Onur Metin, “Sosyal politika açısından AKP dönemi: sosyal yardım alanında yaşananlar”, *Çalışma ve Toplum*, No. 1, 2011, pp. 194-195.

23 These are Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations established in cities and districts by the General Directorate of Social Assistance operating under the Ministry of Family and Social Policy. Today there is a total of 1003 foundations established by the state (see, shorturl.at/oNU23). Public central social assistance occupies the largest space among social assistance categories in Turkey. The financial resources of such aid are available by public funding.

24 Social assistance offered by local governments (municipalities and special provincial administrations) again through using public resources.

25 Assistance especially by corporations to their own employees within the framework of collective labor agreements or volunteering.

26 Assistance by NGOs, religious communities and religious foundations.

27 Office of the Prime Minister Circular Letter No. 1986/11.

that confirms this shortcoming.

Table 3. Relative Poverty Rates and Income Distribution Inequality by Years

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Relative Poverty Rates (%)*	23.8	21.2	22.7	22.4	21.8	21.9	21.2	20.1	21.2
Income Distribution (Gini coefficient)	0.402	0.404	0.402	0.400	0.391	0.397	0.404	0.405	0.408

* 60% of the median value of equivalent household disposable income is taken as the poverty line.

Source: Compiled from TSI studies on Income and Living Conditions.

As is revealed by the table, more than one fifth of the population has been living on the poverty line. Thus, it is seen that such aids' poverty reducing impact has been quite limited, even little if any. Additionally, inequality kept on increasing peaking in 2018 although some decrease was seen in 2014 and 2015 in income distribution inequality. Therefore, one can argue that social assistance neither contributed to the fight against poverty nor to justice in income distribution.

The direct correlation of social assistance to capital accumulation can be understood within the framework of the above-listed commodification of aid programs. Thereby social assistance could be articulated with neo-liberal economic policies. Looking particularly at aids in the education and healthcare fields would suffice for examples of the case in question. For instance, merely 27.6% of the textbooks distributed to students during the 2019-2020 education year were published by the Ministry of National Education while 72.4% by private companies within the scope of free book aids offered by the state in the field of education.²⁸ Another significant datum on education is related to the promotion of private schools. The state started to pay a certain amount of tuition to private schools in 2015 by initiating financial aid to families who wanted to send their children to private schools. This state of affairs has led to an increase both in the number of private schools and in the number of students attending such schools. Indeed, while the share of private schools within the total number of schools was 12.6% in 2014-2015, this figure went up to 19.2% in 2018-2019. While the increase in the number of students in state schools was 0.9% between 2014 and 2019, the one in private schools between the same years was 74.9%.²⁹ Within this framework

²⁸ <http://www.eba.gov.tr/>

²⁹ Statistics by the Ministry of National Education, 2018-2019 (See shorturl.at/ckyEO).

social assistance functions as a tool, *inter alia*, to increase capital accumulation, to open up new spheres of valorization for capital, appraisal fields for capital and to enable the commodification of the service offered by means of transferring public resources to private capital. The two visible points in social assistance policy within the scope laid out above refer, on the one hand, to the transformation of aid into a form available for appraisal by the capital through the commodification of aid and, on the other hand, to cloak poverty with a manageable form. This means that social assistance has thoroughly been established as a capitalist category within the labor-capital relationship.³⁰ To these it should be added that social assistance, as a form of non-wage income and means of livelihood, positively contributes to the conditions under which households give into poverty and low-wages, while the sense of loss brought about by the customer relations formed between the provider and receiver of aid is transformed into political support and the freedom granted to workers to keep them distant from strikes and other forms of struggle.³¹ Thus, while charity is organized at the level of the state on the one hand, charity-based relations are subjected to overt political ends on the other.³²

The gap created by social policy’s loss of “its old meaning” as a public-centered organizational instrument was prescribed to be filled in by the private sector, particularly by NGOs (associations, foundations, trade unions, “faith-based charity organizations” etc.). While the interventionist role of the public has been diminished during this process, it is seen that foundations, associations, volunteer organizations and philanthropists have become prominent in such fields of social policy as education, health and social assistance.³³ In other words, the new non-state actors of social policy were these types of bodies.

Although the regulatory principle in social assistance policies is not religion itself, it should be noted that religion too has an impact in terms of the ideology which shapes implementation. Thus, social assistance has been presented with an Islamic motive within the framework of “to serve” conception, while this in turn has matched up with the expanding new-right and new conservative practices as a global trend. The address by the then vice prime minister, Bülent Arınç, receiving the annual “father of the poor” award presented by YOYAV, which is a “faith-based” civil society organization, provides a very good example regarding this matter:

Turkey stands on the feet of these. This is why the society does not have social explosions. This is why conflict and disorder cannot find themselves a necessary base in the society. Because if you do not help the poor, people become others’ wolves. Then homo homini lupus becomes real, this is what we were taught in the

30 For a comprehensive analysis of this mode of capitalist category see Denizcan Kutlu, *Türkiye’de sosyal yardım rejiminin oluşumu*, Ankara, Nota Bene, 2015.

31 Kutlu, *ibid.*, pp. 73-74.

32 Zafer Yılmaz, “AKP ve Devlet Hayırseverliği: Minnet Ekonomisi, Borç Toplumu ve Siyasal Sermaye Birikimi”, *Toplum ve Bilim*, No. 128, 2014, p.56.

33 Kutlu, *ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

past. (...) This joining of hands, this unity strengthens Turkey. Turkey does not have social explosions, not anybody takes a gun in their hands and hold it against somebody's head. Not anybody probably gives somebody else's property the evil eye. Not anybody regards one another's life with hostility and hate. The reason for this are the sentiments of charity and benevolence. (...) Why do I use religious references more? These are what our religion, our faith dictates us. If people of faith comply with these, they believe that they will win Allah's consent but if the price of these in social life, in secular life, in worldly life is not a religious gain people would feel free to do these or not. It goes without saying that everyone would agree to help the poor out of humanitarian, moral sentiments but they would do this more from the heart if unworldly satisfaction and interest are in question.³⁴

Faith-based aid associations and foundations have thusly been founded during this process with an ever-growing number. While these aid associations surely attempted to popularize and improve the conception of Islamic charity, they also reproduced the neo-liberal perception of poverty. So much so that an astounding ideological bombardment was carried out simultaneously by means of the mainstream media on issues like EU membership, democratization, reduction of state intervention etc. and this situation, unfortunately, amounted to the working class and laborers extending support to the AKP rule and in some cases even made workers' organizations supportive of privatization.

In lieu of conclusion

This study analyzed the situation of labor and the working class in a couple of its dimensions during the AKP era. Material data were used to deliver an analysis of what happened during the AKP rule with regards to many issues of interest to workers spanning from the minimum wage to distribution of income, from unionization to collective bargaining and the right to strike, from employment and unemployment to subcontracted working and the losses sustained by labor were exposed.

The study also provided an answer as to why workers and laborers supported the AKP in spite of all these anti-labor policies. In this concluding part a few points on the policies of the left and socialists need to be noted.

While virtually all the left has been talking about the crisis of trade unions and their impasse, no one mentions their own predicament. In other words, what has been happening is the crisis of socialists rather than a union and a great majority of the socialists are still oblivious to this fact.

Namely, socialists have extremely been affected by the expanding left-wing liberalism and identity politics cross-sectioning classes since the 1980s. Some argued that now identity and cultural issues were more prominent than that of the class (like Alain Touraine) and some, going even further, propounded that class too was an identity (like those in the group calling themselves autonomous Marxists).

34 <http://www.haber7.com/siyaset/haber/558069-arinc-yilin-yoksul-babasi-oduluncelayik-goruldu>.

Therefore, the policies of many socialist organizations were formed around left-wing liberalism and identity problems rather than on the basis of class struggles. Thus fetishism of civil society even the socialists from class conception by eliminating the classes bringing about a non-class consciousness and a world of ideology in them.³⁵

The most significant point to be made on this issue, therefore, is nothing but the return of socialists to class politics. Should such a return occur, the consent handed to the AKP by the workers and laborers might be reversed and it might indeed mobilize them.

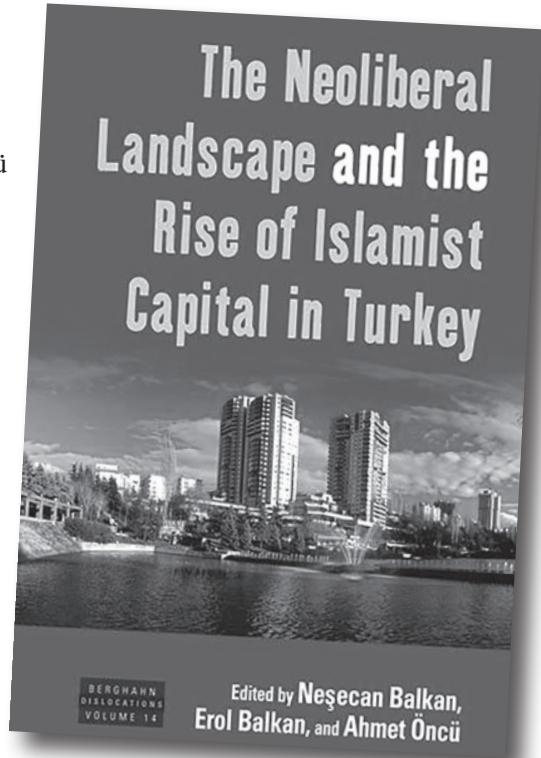
35 Sungur Savran, “Arap Devriminin Dirilişi: Türkiye İçin Dersler”, *Devrimci Marksizm*, No.39-40, 2019, pp. 13-62.

The Neoliberal Landscape and the Rise of Islamist Capital in Turkey

Berghahn Books,
New York, 2015

Edited by Neşecan Balkan,
Erol Balkan and Ahmet Öncü

Chapters by Burak Gürel,
Sungur Savran,
Kurtar Tanyılmaz,
Özgür Öztürk,
Evren Hoşgör and others



Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey and the party he leads, the AKP, have been analyzed in many different ways. What was lacking was a materialist analysis using the methodology of Marxism. This is what this book does: it provides the reader the complex class dynamics that lie behind the rise and resilience of this leader and his party.

The hardback edition was published in February 2015 and the paperback edition is coming out now, in January 2017. The hardback edition was published in February 2015 and the paperback edition is coming out now, in January 2017. The book was published in Turkish translation back in 2016. It has now been published in Farsi translation by Agah Publishers of Tehran.

The struggle of the metalworkers of Turkey for bread and freedom: Obstacles, promises, and prospects

Levent Dölek

The Turkish metal industry has just gone through four months (early October 2019 to early February 2020) of fierce negotiations between the bosses and the trade unions over the collective agreement for the period 2019-2021. This was no ordinary collective bargaining process, but one that contained explosive potential, for reasons explained below. We think that sharing this instructive Turkish experience with proletarian socialists in the region and around the world is worthwhile. Levent Dölek is the Deputy Chairman of DIP (Revolutionary Workers' Party), which was deeply immersed in the strike.

The industry-wide collective negotiations between MESS (the Association of Employers of Metal Industrialists) and trade unions has always been a major battlefield of class struggle in Turkey between the most powerful representatives of the capitalist class and the most organised and vanguard battalions of the working class. The metallurgical industry lies at the heart of the Turkish economy. 178 of the largest 500 corporations countrywide, according to the classification of the Istanbul Chamber of Industry, are active in this industry. Of the largest 20 corporations of the country, a full 17 are from this branch of industry. The number of workers employed by the metal industry reaches up to 1.5 million. While companies that are members of MESS employ around 10 per cent of the total number of workers in the industry,

they control more than half of the net sales of the sector.

The 186 factories affiliated to MESS employing 130 thousand workers are not only the heavy guns of this sector (with an additional 7 thousand workers employed in 16 factories members of EMIS, the other important employers' association in the industry), they realise one fourth of the turnover and 39 per cent of the exports of manufacturing industry at large. Trade union density is close to 18 per cent in the industry. This is of course quite low. However, the average for workers in the country overall standing at 9 per cent, metal achieves twice that rate. And trade union density is not decisive on its own: we see metalworkers always at the forefront of class struggle from Kavel, where workers struck before the right to strike had been legislated in 1963, to the insurrection of 15-16 June 1970, when close to 150 thousand workers took over the city of Istanbul to protect their unions, and from resounding strikes and political action in the late 1970s all the way to the recent rebellions against the yellow union dominant in the industry in the 21st century, most recently in 2015, of which more below.

When the decisive forces of the two classes thus confront each other, even an ordinary collective bargaining process ignites a more serious conflict than usual. Moreover, we should remember the concrete context in which these collective negotiations unfolded: world capitalism has been going through a depression since 2008 and this crisis has manifested itself in all its gravity in Turkey within the last two years. So the significance of this process was not confined to the industry, but rather concerned the two classes at a more general level, the question of who will pay the price of the economic crisis being decided above all in these collective negotiations. On the other hand, we must remember that these negotiations were being conducted under the despotic regime of Erdoğan, who, in all frankness, declared publicly several times that he was making use of the state of emergency instituted in the wake of the failed coup of July 2016 “to facilitate the affairs of the employers”. This meant banning all strikes above a certain size for years now (a more detailed picture will be provided below). This aspect of Erdoğan's despotism has constantly been overlooked internationally simply because the international media represents interests in the imperialist countries that approach this special aspect of Erdoğan's repressive regime with approbation, if not active instigation.

The flexibilisation assault of capital

In the collective negotiation process, MESS tried to impose a series of measures that aimed at the flexibilisation of work. The drive to compensation of hours over the week, month and year and the extension of the probation period for new workers from 2 to 4 months, as well as the attempt at indexing fringe benefits to performance (thus pretending intensity of work is the same thing as productivity), this way pitting workers against each other, were all part of the proposals of MESS. These are all measures that do away with certain acquired rights and they form part and parcel of the strategic assault of capital on the working class as a whole in order

to lay the burden of the crisis on labour. In effect, TOBB, the umbrella organisation bringing together all representatives of the capitalist class had already demanded in 2019 the same measures to be implemented with a view to “ameliorate the business environment”.

Another priority of MESS was to extend the period of the collective contract from two to three years. The insistence on this owes to a calculation that longer periods between collective negotiations provides the opportunity to the capitalists to reduce the wage raises to be given to workers, especially in times of inflation, which is now precisely the situation Turkey finds itself in. Moreover, times of collective negotiation are periods when the attention of workers to matters of struggle over the division of the value produced increases and they become much more militant in their demands than ordinary times. For the capitalists this is a moment when “social peace” is disrupted. Hence the capitalists want this to occur as infrequently as possible.

The workers’ struggle for bread

A struggle is unfolding day by day to decide who will pay the bill that the crisis has presented society at large with. Real wages are falling in all industries under the pressure of an army of unemployed of 7 million (officially 13 per cent, though the real rate is much higher). The threat of unemployment is being put to use for the flexibilisation of work. And in an environment where the official minimum wage is, so to speak, indexed to the hunger level, the working class also shoulders the taxation burden almost single-handedly.

In its ideological struggle against the labouring classes, the bourgeoisie performs all kinds of intellectual tricks to hide from view the gravity of the economic crisis. But when comes the time of collective bargaining and workers’ rights are on the table, then the first excuse the spokespersons of the capitalists take refuge in is always the economic crisis. MESS insisted on how difficult life was for its member enterprises under conditions of crisis during the bargaining process. However, Ulrich Bastert, manager of Mercedes, which produces buses and trucks in Turkey, confessed during an industrial fair in Hanover, probably thinking he was off the radar of Turkish trade unions, that because of the depreciation of the Turkish lira over the last two years, they were doing very well in their Turkish business!¹

Mercedes is no exception. The members of MESS usually consist of companies that pay their workers’ wages in a depreciating Turkish lira, but export a major part of their products and hence are paid in dollars or euros. The same picture emerges from the balance sheet of the companies affiliated to MESS.

¹<https://www.dunya.com/sectorler/otomotiv/bastert-kriz-gecici-turkiyenin-gelecegine-guveniyoruz-haberi-428072>.

The metalworkers' struggle for freedom

Naturally, capitalists are bitterly aware of the strategic importance of the metal industry not only in the economy but also in class struggle. The part metalworkers have played in the enjoyment of trade union rights by workers, in the winning of the right to strike, in the signing of collective agreements that are advantageous to workers in the past is clear for all to see. The military dictatorship that was born of the 12 September 1980 coup d'Etat took the initiative of restructuring the trade union sphere in the interests of the capitalist class, after serious gains by the working class as a result of big fights in the two decades of the 1960s and the 1970s.

As the new labour and trade union laws were being prepared in the shadow of the military dictatorship in the early 1980s, the chairman of the Confederation of the Employers' Association of Turkey (TISK), the umbrella organisation to which MESS is also affiliated to, said in blatant relaxation, "up until today, it was the workers who laughed, now it's our turn to have a laugh". The military junta imposed outright prohibitions of strikes in certain industries and gave the government powers to "postpone" strikes under the pretext of a threat to "national security" and "general hygiene". However, this so-called "postponement" is, in effect, a ban, since 60 days after the decision is made by the council of ministers the bargaining process is sent to so-called "High Arbitration". Thus the strike is over once the decision of postponement is made.

The military dictatorship also shut down the class struggle confederation of trade unions DISK (the Progressive Confederation of Trade Unions). In tandem with DISK, the vanguard union in the metallurgical industry, Maden-Is, an affiliate of the former, was also banned. The leader of the latter union, who was the founding president of DISK in 1967 as well, had been assassinated by the fascists abetted by the "deep state" only two months prior to the coup of 12 September. Under these circumstances, MESS aided Turk Metal, a very weak organisation before the 1980 coup, to become the dominant union in the metal industry. With DISK and Maden Is shut down, the extremely popular leader of the latter assassinated, and the other leaders in prison for 11 years, Turk Metal was deliberately and in planned fashion made the domineering power among the unions in the metallurgical sector, working hand in glove together with MESS. This is a yellow union in the real sense of the word. It uses mafioso practices to quash opposition within and has commercial activities in alliance with, of all business partners, MESS itself!

After the release of the DISK unionists in the early 1990s, Maden-Is naturally resumed its activity. A part of its erstwhile membership had taken refuge in the 1980s in a small union called Otomobil-Is to protect themselves from becoming captive to the yellow union that Turk Metal was. Unification was achieved between the once legendary Maden-Is and the modest Otomobil-Is under the roof of DISK. The new united union was called Birlesik Metal-Is ("Birlesik" means "united"). However, even the "united" union was small when compared to the giant of a union that Turk Metal is in proportion to the rest of the Turkish union movement. Just

to give the reader an idea of the relative size of the two unions, let us remind the reader that in the bargaining process this time, Turk Metal represented more than 100 thousand workers, while Birlesik Metal only 10 thousand. There is also a third union, quite insignificant in size, though it sat at the bargaining table during the negotiations this time. It is under the complete hegemony of Erdogan's party, the AKP, and works quite like the labour department of that party rather than a union.

So Turk Metal is a creation of the 1980 military regime as a breakwater in the most militant sector of the Turkish working class. And this was the result of a plan that MESS, and at its head the Koc Holding Company, the largest capitalist group of Turkey, with the open support of the junta, executed hand in hand with the unionists of Turk Metal. Although a great majority of unionised metalworkers were recruited to Turk Metal in the 1980s, partly because they did not wish to fall prey to a process of deunionisation, from 1998 on, Turk Metal, given its class collaboration and its heavy-handed maffioso tactics towards independent minded workers, was attacked by the vanguard forces within its membership. There was an outright revolt against the leadership of Turk Metal, but due to the timid attitude of the then leadership of Birlesik Metal, the revolt was soon absorbed by the bureaucratic structures of Turk Metal.

Then came another wave in 2012. The workers of the German brand Bosch and the affiliated Rexroth factory resigned from Turk Metal and passed over to Birlesik Metal. A similar movement was started at the French joint venture car maker Renault with factory occupation, but this one was unsuccessful. The most powerful wave was experienced in 2015, when the part of ice-breaker played by Birlesik Metal, as a result of whose strike some factories got better raises than others, there was an almost generalised revolt among the workers of Turk Metal. There were wildcat strikes observed for several weeks at some factories, and factory occupations in some of these factories. Renault was at the vanguard of the movement. But the movement embraced many enterprises among which Tofaş (the joint-venture of the Italian Fiat in Turkey), Turk Tractor, Ford Otosan (the joint venture of Ford), Arçelik (the world-renowned Turkish white goods brand, also known as Beko), and many large factories within the components industry. In many factories the entire work force resigned from the union. But the fact that in order to enjoy the rights gained by a collective contract one needs to be a member of the union that has signed the contract and that the collective contract had already been signed for a period of two years, in addition to small concessions from MESS and some maffioso repression on the part of Turk Metal, pushed the workers back to the yellow union. However, nothing could have been, or has been, the same as before after the 2015 revolt.

Up until then, shop stewards (workers' representatives) had been appointed from above by the union bureaucracy. Now elections were held for workers to elect their representatives. Attention was paid that the representatives did not only work hand in hand with the ruling bodies of Turk Metal, but that they also received in

their action the consent of the rank and file. In some factories, it was even the leaders of the revolt against Turk Metal that were elected representatives. When the time for the next round of industry-wide collective bargaining came in 2017, under the pressure of the rank and file and fearful of a new rebellion, Turk Metal, as well as Birlesik Metal, declared a strike. However, both strikes were banned by the government, as the strike of Birlesik Metal had been in 2015. But this time the High Arbitration Board was not brought in and the sides settled for raises that were indisputably higher than earlier rounds of negotiations.

Looking at these waves of struggle, it is clear that more recently metalworkers have risen in revolt against the breakwater system that the military regime of 1980 established, in collusion with MESS, in the metal industry, albeit not with a well-thought out plan and in full consciousness of the cause. This system rises on three legs: the employers' association MESS, the government (possibility of the ban on strikes and the High Arbitration Board), and Turk Metal as a yellow, maffioso union. So the struggle of the metal workers since 2012 has been one of freedom against this despotic system. The recent 2019-2020 industry-wide bargaining process once again brought the metalworkers face to face with the shackles of this despotic system established in 1980 and amply put to use by the AKP government forty years later.

Modifications and fortifications in the established order of bargaining shaken by the metalworkers' struggles

By 2019, in the wake of the successive waves of 1998, 2012, and 2015, MESS no longer had the self-confidence of earlier days. The breakaway of EMIS as a splinter group from MESS during the 2015 strike is an example to teach a lesson. In the factories where the resistance of the work force is high, a rupture with MESS is always an alternative, since the management of robust enterprises with a high rate of profit may, under certain circumstances, opt to abandon MESS in order to reduce friction with the work force and prefer a more compromising process of collective bargaining in the future.

The Turk Metal leg has been seriously shaken up and has started to limp. Although the waves of revolt seem to have finally been contained and the ranks closed, the bureaucracy is now taking each and every step taking great care under the pressure of the worker rank and file.

It is only the strike bans and the High Arbitration Board that are intact as instruments of the capitalists, but there also there are some inroads and the political cost of using that trump card has risen. Birlesik Metal went to the Constitutional Court after the strike ban of 2015 and the Court has found that the arbitrary recourse to a strike ban was a clear violation and even went so far as to impose on the government damages (to the ludicrous sum of 50 thousand Turkish lira or around 7 thousand euros). Another union in the glass industry also won its case in the

Constitutional Court, so that an important jurisprudence has already been formed regarding the unlawful nature of such arbitrary strike bans. This obviously puts the government on its defense and provides workers a legal basis that creates a sense of legitimacy regarding approaching strikes. In a certain sense, then, even the government leg has not escaped unscathed from the worker rebellions of the recent period.

Down but not out. As the last round of collective bargaining of 2019-2020 was approaching, the system established to contain the vanguard of the Turkish working class under the military regime of the early 1980s was still in place despite all the inroads caused by the metal workers since 2012. The bosses' front tried to mend its cracks as it was preparing for the approaching battle. Before the collective bargaining process started, MESS took the initiative of reunification with EMIS and covered considerable ground towards a final agreement.

There was not much that MESS itself could do regarding the Turk Metal leg. So IndustriALL, the international umbrella organisation that brings together all manufacturing industry unions around the world, was brought in as a last resort. A protocol was signed between Turk Metal and Birlesik Metal that came to reduce the vulnerability of the former. This protocol, signed under the auspices of IndustriALL, stipulates that the two unions will not try to organise in each other's turf, i.e. neither union will make an attempt to organise workers in a factory if the other union is already organised there. Even children can understand what the real import of such a provision is, given the fact that during the waves of revolt of 1998, 2012, and 2015, there were recurring desperate attempts by the rank and file of a multitude factories under the control of Turk Metal to go over to Birlesik Metal. Very few of these succeeded in the end for reasons referred to above, whereas only a handful (such as Bosch-Rexroth and Bekaert) made the breakthrough. However, a recurring wave there was. No converse flow was ever seen, i.e. no factory ever tried to break away from Birlesik Metal and join Turk Metal. So it is plain as daylight that IndustriALL mediated between the two unions in order to tie the hands of Birlesik Metal so that a replay of 2015 would not be in store this time. It is not difficult to understand why the abominable bureaucracy of IndustriALL would be involved in such a dirty operation: as the reader will have noticed, Turkey is an export platform for many large car and white goods corporations of imperialist countries, so a serious rise in wages in the metallurgical industry would hurt the interests of these very corporations who harbour such cunning and accommodative relations with the top crust of bureaucrats of international trade union umbrella organisations such as ICTU and the sectoral federations, including IndustriALL.

Regarding the political leg, the AKP government, and subsidiarily MESS, benefited from the force of precedents created in other collective bargaining processes that took place immediately prior to the metal negotiations. The bargaining process with both workers of the public sector (including for-profit productive enterprises in industrial, agricultural and transportation sectors) and for public employees (i.e.

civil servants), the latter lacking anyway the right to strike, were all concluded with infinitesimally small raises. So was the petroleum workers' collective contract, who work for a refinery privatised some time ago and sold to the Koc family, the largest conglomerate of Turkey we also met in the motor industry above, but who do not by law have the right to strike because oil is a "delicate" sector from the "nationals security" point of view. This last instance is of special importance as a threat to the metalworkers, since at the end of the process, the High Arbitration Board gave the workers a lower raise than what the bosses had already offered! Thus the Board was made a perfect scarecrow! Finally, although a decision handed down by the Constitutional Court is, legally speaking, binding on the government, this is true only under a functioning system. Under Erdogan's despotic regime, disregarding jurisprudence and even explicit legal provisions has become common practice. This despotism was really what MESS based its confidence upon in the final analysis. So the fact that to ignore that side of Erdogan's despotism is a class attitude comes out all the more strongly in this specific case.

MESS bases its strategy on a strike ban

Against the background of the economic crisis and under the present conditions, the metalworkers' strike had the potential of growing over into a struggle joined not only by the rest of the working class, but the toiling population at large. The status quo established in the metal industry by the military regime had interpenetrated with the despotic regime whose leader kept boasting for banning strikes and publicly declared that the AKP government was using the State of Emergency for smoothing the way forward for capitalists. The fundamental strategy of MESS was to drag the negotiations on towards a strike, to have Erdoğan ban the strike and then look towards the High Arbitration Board to conclude the collective contract in their favour, including the measures of flexibilisation and extending the period of the contract to three years.

The strike ban was at the centre of this strategy and yet was also the most vulnerable link of the chain. If in response to a strike ban, metalworkers stuck to their decision to strike, the entire strategy of MESS would have been broken at its weakest link and both MESS and the government would find themselves facing the paradox that was their most scary nightmare: how does one ban a strike that has, by definition, been transformed into a wildcat strike or, in other words, an unlawful strike? In 2015 MESS and the government had already confronted this paradox and had become paralysed. At the beginning of that year, the strike that Birlesik Metal had declared on the basis of the closest compliance with the legal procedures for staging a strike according to the legislation in force in the country had been banned by the government on the very first day the strike was launched. Birleşik Metal complied with the government's decision. But only three months later, there broke out a wildcat strike with partial factory occupation at the Renault and Tofaş (Fiat) factories, which lasted two weeks. This was the movement of rebellion against

the yellow union, Turk Metal, that we referred to above; it was so powerful that a popular nickname for the strike was the “metal storm”, after the name of a best-selling Turkish novel of those years. Since this strike was not started within the confines of the law, obviously it could not have been banned.

The mass character of the strike and the workers’ unity, as well as the perfect legitimacy of the movement, raised its cost to the government very high. As a matter of fact, MESS gave in to many demands of the workers, although the collective contract of that round had already been signed. There were additional material gains compared to the contract signed earlier. But even more importantly, no sanctions were imposed on the workers for their perfectly unlawful action in the nature of a wildcat strike with occupation. Thus the workers gained the right to strike, so to speak, by waging a strike.

As the 2019-2020 bargaining process entered the last lap, so to speak, everyone was expecting a strike decision from both Turk Metal and Birlesik Metal. It was also understandable why Turk Metal would try to project a more combative image both during the action within factories (work to rule, marches on the factory premises etc.) and when demonstrating on the streets. MESS was not impressed by the loud rhetoric of Pevrul Kavlak, the president of Turk Metal, but felt extremely satisfied when he added that they would fight for their rights within the limits of the law, dropping a hint of the possibility of a strike ban in passing. Everything was going according to plan. As for Adnan Serdaroglu, the president of the class-struggle union Birlesik Metal, it was also in the nature of things, given that his rank and file is more militant, that he should often lash out at MESS and declare that his union would simply disregard the strike ban. MESS certainly expected Serdaroglu to act in line with the spirit the IndustriALL memorandum of understanding and refrain from instigating another “metal storm”.

The watchword of the metalworkers: Kavel!

All these plans were upset by the resolution of the metalworkers to stage a strike! In the very midst of the MESS bargaining process, the general assembly of the largest branch of Birlesik Metal in the working class city of Gebze, which also happened to harbour a great majority of the enterprises that were affiliated to MESS, convened and elected, on the initiative of a new and combative generation of workers that considered the Kavel experience (of which more below) as their guiding light, a new, class-struggle oriented leadership. This was not simply a change in the leading personnel. Immediately after the change of leadership, strike committees were set up for the MESS process. In the training provided for the strike, the legal procedure was given scant attention and the great bulk of the time was devoted to the processes leading to and during the Kavel strike and to its consequences. This was a metal strike back in 1963, when the ancestor of the present Birlesik Metal, which we have already alluded to above, bearing the name of Maden-Is, engaged in strike action although the right to strike had not yet been enshrined in the legislation. This had

been a very militant wildcat strike that finally won its demands.

The Kavel spirit turned the prospect of the strike ban into a highly risky venture for MESS. One week before the date declared (5th February) by Birlesik Metal for launching the strike (Turk Metal had decided on a strike but deliberately refrained from indicating a date), MESS moved forth to create the conditions for the mutual signing of the collective agreement. It went back on its demands regarding the acquired rights of the workers (on matters such as flexibility or the three-year contract) and gradually increased its offer for the wage rise from the 6 per cent it had insisted on throughout months of bargaining all the way to 15 per cent (as opposed to Turk Metal's demand of 24 per cent and Birlesik Metal's 34 per cent). Having had long deliberations lasting many hours with Turk Metal, they invited Birlesik Metal to offer both unions an additional 2 per cent, thus bringing up the total raise to 17 per cent. The leadership body (Steering Committee) of Birlesik Metal agreed. However, the class struggle traditions of Birlesik Metal forced, as ever, the board to consult the representatives of the rank and file. It had to convince those factories that had adopted the watchword of Kavel as their guide.

The factories of Gebze said no to the agreement and voted to continue the plans for the strike to be started on 5th February, with less than a week to go. That same night, the central body empowered to decide on the course to be followed, the so-called Central Bargaining Board, composed of the Steering Committee, the branch leaders and shop stewards (workers' representatives) formally took a vote and decided to strike on the date indicated. The workers chanted "Everywhere Kavel, everywhere picketing". When the rumour spread, many workers at Turk Metal factories who had taken to heart the 17 per cent agreement once again turned all their attention to the Birlesik Metal strike. There was now another way forward that was possible.

Cancellation in Ankara of the decision of the factories in Gebze

However, what transpired later demonstrated that the leadership of Birlesik Metal itself had become part and parcel of the status quo that needed to be got rid of. Rather than preparing the workers for the strike, the Steering Committee of Birlesik Metal decided to divide the forces of the strike at the threshold of the class war and thus destroy the power created by the resolution of the rank and file in the factories. The Gebze branch, the largest one as we have already noted, was split into two branches by the central administration. To add insult to injury, the leadership that had lost the recent general assembly was made the caretaker executive body of the new branch thus established. There was even talk, among the workers, of "administrators" being appointed to the leadership of the new branch, an allusion to Erdogan's blatantly despotic practice of appointing provincial governors, called "administrators", in place of the elected mayors of Kurdish cities. Then came the

news that the leadership of Birlesik Metal was invited to Ankara by the Minister of Labour. Birlesik Metal signed the collective agreement on terms almost identical to those accepted by Turk Metal.

After Turk Metal had signed the agreement and Birlesik Metal was still resisting, the leadership of the latter criticised the former for having signed an unsatisfactory agreement. Now, after the leadership of Birlesik Metal themselves signed the same agreement, they started to say that the conditions accepted were better than those given to public workers or civil servants or others!

The basic reason why the metalworkers involved in the MESS process wanted to strike was not, anyway, related to wage rises. It was the strike ban and the fact that the poor raise that was being offered was done so under the pressure exerted, behind closed doors, by the High Arbitration Board. Adnan Serdaroglu, the president of Birlesik Metal, had earlier challenged a possible strike ban and declared they would certainly disregard it. But at the Ankara meeting he signed a document which would have been attainable even if the strike was banned and the agreement went to High Arbitration. Moreover, the same union leader had lambasted the AKP government in every speech he gave. But after the agreement in Ankara he extended “special thanks” to the Minister of Labour, who represented at that table the threat to ban the strike!

The MESS strike and the bourgeois parties

Although it never materialised, the MESS strike nonetheless displayed a political character by the very nature of the process it went through. At the turning point of the process, that is to say, the meeting in Ankara, where the Birlesik Metal leadership capitulated, the government was present in the person of the Minister of Labour, in all probability to level threats against Birlesik Metal, not only that of banning the strike, but other threats as well. However, the political significance of the MESS strike should be understood in a much broader framework. The orientation of Erdoğan and the AKP cannot be assessed in simplistic terms as the manifestation of an authoritarian political practice.

The situation is much graver: under conditions of deep crisis in the economy, the capitalist class is putting to use Erdoğan’s despotism almost in unmediated, pure fashion as an apparatus of class struggle in order to bring down real wages and raise profit rates (this is presented as an increase in the productivity of labour in the arguments of the bourgeoisie). For an economy that suffers from a chronic structural problem of a large current account deficit, capital inflows into the country are a vital necessity. These inflows include not only so-called “hot money” but foreign direct investment (FDI) as well. The incentives and exemptions provided to foreign capital are only part of the story; the other aspect that makes Turkey attractive to foreign corporations is the cheap and flexible labour force. The despotic regime ensures that these conditions are sustained and even improved for imperialist capital.

The bourgeois political opposition (in particular the supposedly social democratic

Republican People's Party (CHP), the newly formed İyi Parti, a splinter group from the fascist movement that acts as an ally to the CHP, and the Bliss Party (SP), a more conventional strand of the same tradition as Erdoğan's AKP) pretends that it supports the economic grievances of the labouring masses since it is, after all, the major opposition to the government, but has now been exposed for what it really is during the MESS negotiations. The contradiction in their discourse is clear for all to see: this opposition constantly reiterates that foreign capital has lately been remaining aloof to Turkey because of the violations of universal legal norms by this government. Hence it recommends observance of the principles of the rule of law so as to improve the "business environment" and to inculcate confidence in the "investor". But the same opposition will not raise a finger when it is a question of the government trampling upon all legal logic when it arbitrarily invokes national security in order to ban strikes and thus blatantly violates the decisions of the Constitutional Court as well.

This silence of the opposition has created a multiplier effect that amplified many times the pressure of the despotic regime over the workers. Moreover, the opposition acts as the agency that markets the capitulation of the union bureaucracy as rational bargaining behaviour. The television channels and newspapers ideologically tied to the CHP simply condoned the capitulation of the bureaucracy as "a good deal".

The MESS strike and socialists

At the end point, when the Birlesik Metal leadership capitulated by signing practically the same agreement as the yellow union, a role similar to the bourgeois opposition was undertaken by the reformist wing of the socialist movement. The so-called Communist Party of Turkey (no relation to the historic party established at the time of the Comintern) and the Freedom and Solidarity Party (the ODP, now renamed the Left Party, probably after Die Linke in Germany) simply remained silent in their capacity as political parties and contented themselves in their media with publishing the press communiqué of the Birlesik Metal leadership. The reason is obvious: they wish to continue supporting the union bureaucracy for their own interests. In the process they also thereby remained silent on the threat of the ban strike by Erdogan! The party that is more active than the previous two within the working class took an even worse position by joining the leadership of the new Gebze branch established by the central leadership in order to weaken the new class struggle leadership of this largest branch (see above).

Given this overall picture, the accusation levelled by the central leadership of Birlesik Metal at "certain political parties and groups" of "stirring up trouble in the union" is all the more significant. The union unfortunately neither names those parties nor explains the precise meaning of the "trouble" they have caused. There is one exception to this though: the fact that the previous administration of the Gebze branch lost to a new, class struggle leadership is attributed to the "manipulation" of some political parties. Within the atmosphere of "conspiracy" thus created, the

fact that the rank and file simply revolted against the class collaborationist previous administration and did it perfectly with the correct methods of workers' democracy is hidden in a mist. The fact that this new generation of workers who, with their clearly and conscientiously cast votes, put an end to the class collaboration policy, later took to heart the Kavel battle cry and the defense of the right to strike by practically striking despite the ban is simply a result of the logic of class struggle. As the DIP (Revolutionary Workers' Party), if we did indeed play a part in bringing out this political will, we would be more than happy and proud to have contributed to this new orientation! We would only add that other socialist parties and groups should play the same kind of role.

But we refuse the accusation of "stirring up trouble in the union". If anything is to be condemned, it is the attitude of backing class collaborationist policies just to keep the position of a socialist party in the branch steering committees or as professional experts in the union. Let us look at the bare facts: the bureaucratic leadership of Birlesik Metal thanked the AKP government that threatened the metalworkers with a strike ban; it kept silent as the CHP sided with MESS. But it targets socialists who, in line with their allegiance to class struggle, tried to prepare the workers for the strike and defended the Kavel method. This only attests to the bureaucratic nature of the Birlesik Metal leadership.

The international campaign of support

The DIP is a party that claims the heritage of proletarian internationalism of Marxism. It fights for world revolution and believes in international solidarity between workers of different countries. One particularly strong side of the international workers' movement is this class solidarity that is only partially and conditionally seen in the ranks of the bourgeoisie.

It was for this reason that DIP organised an international campaign of solidarity with the metalworkers strike in the form of a common petition to be signed by those in the workers' movement worldwide who are of a like mind.

This proved to be quite a successful campaign. Upwards of 200 parties, unions, associations and individual militants or intellectuals from 24 different countries apposed their signature to the same text of support for the strike and condemned a strike ban if this should happen.

The Kavel front will overcome!

If a balance-sheet were to be drawn up at this stage, the order built by the military regime of the 1980s that had been subjected to erosion in the recent period as a result of the breaches caused by workers' struggles has escaped the prospect of destruction. From the point of view of the struggle for bread, it is eminently clear that metalworkers have not been able to cover up for their losses. From the point of view of the struggle for freedom, the opportunity to bring down the scarecrow

of the strike ban was missed. But it is not true that metalworkers did not achieve any gains. By adopting the battle cry of Kavel and thereby proving their resolution, metalworkers forced MESS to step back on the issues of flexibilisation and the three-year contract. We know from the information that reaches us from factories that Turk Metal underhandedly tried to habituate metalworkers to a three-year contract and a raise of around 15 per cent. Not only MESS's renouncement of the three-year contract but also the 2 extra percentage points in the raise should be attributed to those who defended the Kavel method and the impact this made on the capitalists.

We think that the straitjacket created by the military regime of the 1980s in the metal industry is finally in a state of disintegration. Its grave-diggers will be the younger generation of workers who took the battle cry of Kavel to heart. However, in order to march towards victory, this new generation will first have to overcome the bureaucracy in the unions. For this, this vision has to be supported by heavier positioning inside the working class, stronger organising and a qualitative and quantitative leap in the practical leadership of the working class.

Hungary 1919: A Commune at the heart of Europe¹

Savas Michael-Matsas

For conservatives, particularly apologists, old and new, of Horthy's counter-revolutionary dictatorship, the 133 days of the Hungarian Commune of 1919 was "*a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing*", to use Macbeth's words.² But also, for the skeptics on the left, both before and especially after the dramatic changes in 1989/91, the Hungarian Revolution of the workers' and soldiers' Councils could not even be called a revolution...

At the opposite pole, against both apologists and skeptics, Lenin, on March 23, 1919, in his closing address to the 8th Congress of the Russian Communist Party, without hiding his worries and warnings for the difficulties confronting the newborn Hungarian Soviet Republic, considered its emergence as a "**historical necessity**" and, even, saluted it as "**a moral victory**" over the bourgeoisie.³

Why was it "a historical necessity", and not an accident of history? And, why continue to consider it "a moral victory", although a crushing defeat followed after 133 days? To answer properly these questions can reveal their *actuality* even today.

1 Paper presented to the International Conference for the 100th Anniversary of the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919, organized by the *Eszmélet* journal in Budapest on March 22-23, 2019.

2 William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act 5, Scene 5.

3 V. I. Lenin. *Collected Works*, Vol 29, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965, p. 234.

Necessity

Historical necessity does not mean a predetermined course of events but a historically determined field of objective contradictions making inescapable a living struggle of living forces, not the outcome.

The historical roots of the 21st March Hungarian Commune have to be traced deeply in the past, to the results of the defeat of the 1848 Revolutions in Europe. The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy could survive and sustain its fragile equilibrium insofar capitalist development in Europe and internationally could sustain in its framework conflicting forces and contradictory tendencies all over the Continent. As a result of the 1848 defeats, unification and industrialization of Germany were achieved under Bismarck “from above”, by an “iron fist”. The growth of rising Prussian militarism, subsequently, found a vast reserve of soldiers in the subservient, decayed Empire of the Hapsburgs, ruled by an authoritarian police state established long ago by Metternich. The Hungarian nobility survived within a powerless ghost “monarchy”, by making a servile compromise with the Austrian aristocracy in 1867.

This entity, sarcastically called by Robert Musil, in his masterpiece *A Man without properties*, *KaKanie*, was described by Trotsky as “*simply a conglomerate resulting from dynastic needs, where all nationalities were centrifugal fragments*”.⁴ Ernst Bloch, in an article of his pacifist youth, in September 1918, on the eve of the Revolution in Germany, Austria and Hungary, rightly wrote that “*the Danubian monarchy was the sediment of the concept of the impossibility itself, the living equation of five unknowns in the sphere of politics*”.⁵ Both Trotsky, writing in *Borba* in 1914, at the beginning of the World War I, and Bloch nearly at its end in 1918, despite the political gap between them, agreed that “*the only road for progress not only for [Central and] the Southern Eastern Europe [...] but for Germany itself passes through the ruins, the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy*”.⁶

In his recent great film *Sunset*, the Hungarian director Laszlo Nemes has masterfully showed the contradictions and the unrest boiling behind the surface of a *Belle Epoque*, on the eve of the First World War: the contempt of imperial Vienna towards vassal Budapest, the servility of Hungarian capitalists towards the ruling aristocracy and their brutality towards Hungarian workers and the Roma minority, proletarian rebellions, the decay of a dying social order.

The conditions that permitted to this embodiment of “the concept of state impossibility” to survive were transformed into their opposite with the dramatic world-historical changes at the beginning of the 20th century. The post-1848 period of the apogee of capitalism was ended as well as the transition to the latest imperialist stage of world capitalism, into our epoch of capitalist decline. The equilibrium of conflicting forces in Europe and internationally, which until then sustained anachronisms such as the Danubian Monarchy, was broken. The explosion of the international contradictions led to the First World War, the defeat of the Central Powers and above all to “*the breaking of the international imperialist chain in its weakest link*”, in Russia in October 1917. Thus, the fate of the *KaKanie* was sealed and Revolution in 1918 gave a necessary end to this state impossibility.

But the contradictions were not defused, with the end of the Monarchy and the factitious “independence” of Hungary immediately challenged by the victorious

imperialist Great Powers of the Entente. From the opposite side, the dynamic of the international revolutionary process tended to acquire its *permanent* character, precisely what was tragically not achieved in 1848 but emerged victorious in 1917, in the October Socialist Revolution.

Lenin rightly had said that in 1917 it was not only the national weakest link that had broken but the *international* chain itself. The international dynamic of the revolution arises from this historic break in continuity. The drive towards its permanence comes from the *uncompleted* demands of the world historic process colliding with a declining global capitalism.

Hungary after November 1918 was at the crossroads of the unresolved international contradictions. From the one side, its newly formal independence was brutally threatened by the dismemberment imposed by the victorious imperialists of the Entente, particularly by the infamous Vix ultimatum threatening Budapest with military occupation. From the other side, the country, above all its workers' movement, was at the center of the post-1917 international revolutionary effervescence in the region, in Central-Eastern Europe and the Balkans.

The Hungarian bourgeoisie was paralyzed, totally unable to confront the threat of a new war in a country already devastated by the war. It abdicated literally from any responsibility and political power. The coalition between bourgeois democrats and social democrats disintegrated. Social democracy was split. Its majority left wing turned to the Communist Party, newly founded abroad, for aid, bringing finally Béla Kun and his imprisoned comrades from prison to power. The Hungarian Soviet Republic was born.

Béla Kun, in his speech at the public meeting of the Budapest Workers' and Soldiers' Soviet on April 19, 1919, rightly said:

Two world currents clash in battle over the Hungarian Soviet Republic: imperialist capitalism and Bolshevik socialism [...] This is a matter of the international class struggle [...] When we founded the dictatorship of the proletariat in Hungary, we did not base our calculations on our ability to tackle the Entente troops with our military strength in organized warfare. We did not believe that we could stop the offensive which is threatening us from all sides with those six divisions which the armistice agreements have permitted the Soviet Republic. We have emphasized and still emphasize that we based the fate of the Hungarian Soviet Republic on the international revolution of the proletariat.⁷

The *only possible opposition* to the Vix ultimatum and a total national catastrophe could be given by the forces of the international social revolution and by Soviet power. Thus, it was *a historical necessity*. A bold, possibly desperate but necessary leap beyond bourgeois democracy on the road towards world Socialism.

The abdication of the Hungarian bourgeoisie, at the moment of truth, in front of imperialism, demonstrated the impossibility of any independent role that it could ever play in history. It showed the fake "patriotism" and hypocrisy of all bourgeois

⁷ See Tibor Hajdu, *The Hungarian Soviet Republic*, Akadémia Kiadó, Budapest 1979, p. 24.

nationalists, especially in Central-Eastern Europe and the Balkans, who always fight against socialist revolution and Socialism in the name of the “fatherland” and “to avoid a national catastrophe”. As a matter of fact, they succeed only to bring both social and national disasters.

In this sense we can understand that the Hungarian Soviet Republic also represented *a moral victory* over the bourgeoisie. It took over the responsibility and power from the historical and moral failure of the abdicating capitalist class.

The abdication of the bourgeoisie in conditions of extreme crisis reflected, in general, the historical limits, the exhaustion and decline of the capitalist class and of its system internationally. The imperialists and their local dependent national elites understood that their survival depended on the defeat of a world revolutionary trend, what they used to call “*International Bolshevism*” or “*an international Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy*”. From the other side, the demise even of the radical democratic wing of the bourgeoisie represented the transition to a higher form of polity. As Lenin said: “*the Hungarian Revolution owing to its having been born in a totally different way from ours will reveal to the whole world that which was concealed in Russia- i. e., that Bolshevism is bound up with a new proletarian, workers’ democracy...*”⁸

From this standpoint, the Hungarian Soviet Republic was a necessary manifestation of the nature of our transitional epoch.

Centrality

The Hungarian Revolution of the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils should not be considered a secondary event in the periphery of Europe, following the Great War and the Russian Revolution. It is not an exaggeration to state that, at a certain moment of the postwar revolutionary turmoil in Europe, within the entire international context, the Hungarian Commune occupied a *central* position.

It was a Commune *at the heart of Europe*, not solely in a geographic sense but politically. For 133 dramatic days, it was situated at the heart of the continental conflict between revolution and counter-revolution, between international Bolshevism and imperialist capitalism.

The Hungarian Soviet Republic was an integral part of the Central-Eastern European Revolution organically connected with the land of the October Revolution, at that time still desperately struggling against the counter-revolutionary onslaught of fourteen imperialist armies and the White Terror gangs of Koltchak and Denikin. Soviet Hungary represented the highest and most crucial point of the regional revolutionary upheaval linking the Russian with the German Revolution.

In January 1919, the tragic month of the betrayal of the German socialist revolution by the SPD led by Ebert and Scheidemann, the time of the assassination of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht by the Freikorps proto-Nazis under the orders of the social democrat Noske, two months before the March 21st Hungarian Revolution, Béla Kun wrote in a secret message to Lenin: “*We are fully aware that our fate is decided*

⁸ V. I. Lenin, op.cit.

in Germany, but despite that, we will do everything possible.”⁹

The fate of the European Revolution had not yet been sealed in 1919. Its future was still open. Despite the defeat and the brutal repression of the communist Spartacists in Germany, the revolutionary potential of the workers' movement in that country, the most industrialized and advanced in Continental Europe, was not yet exhausted—until a series of crushing defeats in 1921-23. For a short but crucial period, for 133 days, the Hungarian Commune at the heart of Europe was the necessary bridge, the vital mediation between the revolutionary maelstrom coming from the east, Soviet Russia, to the metropolitan centers of Western Europe.

It is not an accident that even later, after the defeat, in 1926, the *Call of the Comintern*, the revolutionary song composed by Hanns Eisler with lyrics by Franz Jahnke, focused the attention of the international proletariat to four major cities with the greatest importance, at that time, for the European and world revolution: *London, Paris, Budapest and Berlin...*

The imperialists of the victorious imperialist Great Powers of the Entente were quite early conscious of the danger of a Commune at the heart of Europe. They rushed to blow up the Hungarian bridge between the Russian and German Octobers.

The Entente Supreme Command “*hurried to close off the Northeastern Carpathian fronts on both sides with secure military cordons, thus to prevent the ‘bacteria of Bolshevism’ from infiltrating Europe through Hungary*”.¹⁰ Lenin, at the leadership of the Bolsheviks, in the opposite camp, urged the Red Army in Ukraine to establish the connection with the Hungarian Soviet Republic and open the railway line linking Budapest with Kiev.

Imperialism was assisted by the rise of the non-Hungarian reactionary nationalism in the region. On its side was mobilized, “*the Hungarian Red Army’s most dangerous enemy: the army of the Romanian Boyars*”.¹¹ The nationalist ambitions of the weak local bourgeois classes rising to power were cultivated and manipulated by the Entente to be used as counter-revolutionary forces.

The new national bourgeois states that emerged from the disintegration of the old Empires in Central-Eastern Europe and the Balkans were rapidly becoming vassal and buffer states at the service of competing Great Powers. Real national independence from imperialism and its interventions in the region, from now on, was and is possible only through an anti-imperialist struggle, in a radical clash with local bourgeois interests—in other words, by taking a revolutionary socialist and internationalist road.

More concretely, because of the multi-ethnic composition of Central and South Eastern Europe, the conflict between national and social emancipation and local reactionary chauvinism at the service of imperialism, in conditions of crisis and collision between revolution and counterrevolution revives also the perennial demands for democratic and socialist Federations of the Danube and the Balkans, with full respect of the national rights of all nationalities.

In this spirit after the March 21st Revolution, the revolutionary political forces

⁹ Tibor Hajdu, op. cit. pp. 25-26.

¹⁰ op.cit., p. 28.

¹¹ Idem.

were re-organized on a federation basis. 15 national sections joined in an International Socialist Federation, whose members included German, Bulgarian, French, Italian, Magyars of Eastern Transylvania, Ukrainian, Carpathian and Jewish sections, and the Eastern Socialist Party, which comprised of Muslims (Albanians, Turks and Arabs). The Hungarian Soviet Republic developed policies of protection of the non-Hungarian nationalities, based on the principle of the right to self-determination.¹²

Proletarian internationalism based on the prospect of world socialist revolution remained its central strategic guiding principle.

But the Hungarian Commune had to face not only military isolation, aggression and invasion by foreign imperialist and pro-imperialist troops or the hostility of regional bourgeois nationalism. It had to confront major problems within the working class movement itself: the hostility or inactivity of traditional reformist and centrist leaderships of the workers' movement in neighboring Austria under the right-wing social democrat Renner, and of course in Germany; but also its own subjective weaknesses, immaturity, and errors of leadership.

It is well known and documented that Lenin and Trotsky sharply criticized Béla Kun's leadership, despite their recognition of his dedication to the revolutionary cause. They criticized his revolutionary phrase-mongering, his constant vacillation between impressionist over-enthusiasm and passive adaptation to the reformists, between opportunism and adventurism, what Tamás Krausz aptly described as expectation for a "*bureaucratic redemption*".¹³

These negative features were not just personal limitations of an individual leader but manifestations of a more general subjective weakness within the vanguard of the working class: a deficit of theoretical, political and organizational preparation for the huge, entirely new and unexpected challenges of history, in conditions of an extreme crisis rapidly evolving into its denouement. The turn to the proletarian revolution started in March 21st, 1919, with even the demarcation line between a radicalized social democracy and revolutionary communism blurred, as both parties of the Left, the "old" social democratic and the newly founded Hungarian Communist Party merged into one single Party.

The maturity of the consciousness of the proletariat is a very important but a relative factor. In such conditions the responsibility of leadership becomes immense. "*Victory is a strategic task*", as Trotsky said.¹⁴ And the deficit of strategy in the leadership of the Hungarian Revolution was manifested particularly in the treatment of the agrarian question. Nationalization of the land was not followed by its division among the poor peasants. This policy alienated the Hungarian peasantry from workers' power, while the bourgeoisie in neighboring countries started land reforms to secure political support among peasants to their nationalist orientation in accommodation with foreign imperialist interests. Counter-revolution found a political basis in the rural

12 Op. cit., p. 421.

13 Tamás Krausz, *Reconstructing Lenin: An Intellectual Biography*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2015, p. 308.

14 Leon Trotsky, "The Class, the Party, and the Leadership", in *The Spanish Revolution (1931-39)*, Pathfinder Press, 1973, p. 360.

areas within an isolated Hungarian Soviet Republic surrounded and invaded by enemy military forces. Finally, it was not mainly internal counterrevolution but primarily foreign military invasion that gave to the heroic Hungarian Commune the *coup-de-grace*, followed by the barbarism of white terror and the long brutal dictatorship under Admiral Miklós Horthy.

The centrality not solely of the eruption of the Hungarian Revolution but of its defeat as well cannot be underestimated. It was a huge blow not only against the Hungarian proletariat but against the European Revolution as a whole, a blow to the future of international Socialism. It contributed to the isolation of the Russian October Revolution, and finally to the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union under Stalinism.

Actuality: the future within the past

Victory or defeat neither depends on a mechanistic determinism nor can they be reduced to a list of subjective errors. In history, including in the case of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, developments are not linear. A complex living, dialectic interplay of objective and subjective factors, embedded in a determinate historical situation, leads to an outcome both necessary and open.

The Hungarian Revolution of 1919 has to be studied as *a strategic experience*, in the sense that Trotsky uses this term in *The Lessons of October*. It includes vital lessons of the interactions between the international and the national, between Central-Eastern and Western Europe, between politics and economy, between classes and political tendencies, parties and leaderships.

It outlines the dynamics of major deep trends of the epoch opened by the First World War and the October Revolution in the early 20th century, still working a hundred years later, in the 21st century, in new complex ways, in new situations, regionally, and on a European and world scale.

The Hungarian Commune at the heart of Europe was a crucial moment of an uncompleted international revolutionary process. The current global capitalist crisis, more than a decade long and still unresolved, demonstrates that this unfinished process, still today, drives to acquire its permanent character to provide a socialist exit out of a historical impasse that threatens humankind.

Even in its 133 days of life, the Hungarian Commune showed in practice essential elements of such a socialist exit: constant and consistent social policies for equality and justice; for wages, jobs, pensions, shelter; a free healthcare system for all, managed collectively by doctors and hospital workers' committees; a free, high-quality education for all, open to the most modern trends. Psychoanalysts like Sándor Férenczi, Mélanie Klein, or Géza Roheim, later to become famous internationally, and who previously, under the pre-revolutionary regime, were forbidden to teach or exercise, now were involved in and supported by the revolution. Theater, cinema, music flourished with great artists, like Béla Bartók, who became later, exiled abroad by the counter-revolution, the pride of all human civilization.

Culture and revolution, the Modern in Art and the Modern in History, met in a synthesis, even temporarily, even if for only 133 days, anticipating a future of universal

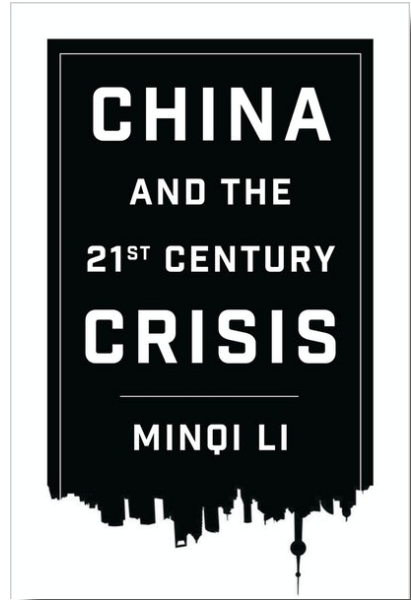
human emancipation, considered so far only as an inaccessible Utopia.

Just one month before the tragic end of the Hungarian Commune, on July 1, 1919, the futurist Kassák, addressing the Congress of Young Communist Workers, said defying the coming barbarism: “*We stand in the midst of life as in the sweep of swift waters, with a large red star on our foreheads...*”¹⁵

And today, *the Commune*, not Horthyism, *stands still in the midst of life* of all oppressed as anticipation of the future to come, existing as a germ within the unfulfilled past.

¹⁵ Tibor Hajdu, op. cit. p. 77.

Mao Redux?¹



Minqi Li

China and the 21st Century Crisis

London: Pluto Press, 2016

Burak Gürel

Minqi Li is one of the most prominent figures of the contemporary Chinese left. Coming from a relatively privileged family background, Li received a strict neoliberal, “Chicago School” type economics education at Beijing University between 1987 and 1990. Like many members of his generation, he participated in the “democracy movement” of workers and students that culminated in the Tiananmen Square protests that lasted between 15 April and 4 June 1989. In contrast to the great majority of the movement’s participants, who fell prey to a depoliticization process and a right turn following the suppression of the movement by the state, Li took the opposite path. Impressed by working-class militancy during the protests and disillusioned by the political inability of the liberal leadership of the student movement to unite with the workers effectively and seize the revolutionary momentum,² Li quickly abandoned liberalism and became a Marxist. Due to a

¹ This review was originally published on the website of the *Historical Materialism* journal in 2019 (<http://www.historicalmaterialism.org/book-review/mao-redux>).

² Li suggests that “the student movement had the support of the great majority of urban residents throughout the country. To pursue this option, however, the liberal intellectuals and students had to be willing and able to mobilize the full support of the urban working class. This was a route that Chinese liberal intellectuals simply would not consider” (Minqi Li, *The Rise of China and the Demise of the Capitalist World Economy*, London: Pluto Press, 2008, p. xiii). Wang Hui makes a

speech he gave at the campus soon after the suppression of Tiananmen, Li was expelled from Beijing University and imprisoned between 1990 and 1992. In Li's own words, during this process he "became a leftist, a socialist, a Marxist, and eventually, a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist."³

Li views himself as part of the "Chinese New Left," a loose term referring to a diverse group of intellectuals and activists with a critical stance towards China's capitalist transformation that refuses to label the 1949–78 period simply as one of economic disaster and unproductive political extremism, and tries to articulate a left-wing alternative built through critical engagement with that experience. As Li notes, "today, it is virtually impossible for someone in China to be a leftist without also being some sort of a Maoist (with the only exception of some young Trotskyites)."⁴ Although it is true that the majority of Chinese leftists defend certain aspects of Maoism, it seems more accurate to characterise their politics as social-democratic rather than Maoist. From their perspective, reclaiming and reinterpreting certain aspects of the Maoist legacy (such as national independence, land reform, egalitarianism, and "mass line" politics) is necessary in order to reshape the current Chinese political economy along social-democratic lines. However, defending more radical interpretations of Maoism (as a politics of socialist revolution squarely opposed to the contemporary political regime) is out of the question.⁵ Minqi Li diverges from this dominant tendency. Although Li seems inclined to give certain concessions to a social-democratic line, a position criticised below, he takes socialist revolution as a serious possibility for today's China and the broader world and tries to develop Marxist theory in a way that contributes to this endeavour.

Li left China in 1994 and finished his PhD in Economics at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in 2002. He is currently a faculty member at the Department of Economics at the University of Utah. Both institutions are among the (very) few economics departments in Western academia where neoclassical economics is not viewed as the unquestioned truth and Marxist political economy is part of the curriculum and informs research activities. During the last two decades, Li has researched a number of key questions through engaging with various strands of the historical-materialist tradition. He has investigated the tendency of the rate

similar diagnosis, albeit with a less-blaming tone: "The failure of the movement is directly attributable to its violent suppression by the state. Yet, indirectly, it is also attributable to the movement's inability to establish bridges between demands for democratic politics and demands for equality, as well as its ability to form a stable social force. This made it impossible to link the movement's direct goals with its material conditions" (Wang Hui, *The End of the Revolution: China and the Limits of Modernity*, London: Verso, 2009, p. 35).

3 Li, 2008, p. xiv.

4 Ibid., pp. xvi–xvii.

5 The works of Wang Hui, probably the most prominent figure of the "Chinese New Left," are the best examples of this social-democratic perspective and its particular reading of Maoism (Wang, 2009; Wang Hui, *China's Twentieth Century: Revolution, Retreat and the Road to Equality*, edited by Saul Thomas, London: Verso, 2016). On the socio-political context of contemporary Chinese social democracy, see Daniel F. Vukovich, *Illiberal China: The Ideological Challenge of the People's Republic of China*, Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 54–56.

of profit to fall in the contemporary world from a classical-Marxist perspective; analysed long waves and shifting centres of capital accumulation, centre-periphery relations, and the rise and fall of hegemonic states from a world-systems perspective; and engaged with the question of ecological crisis and sustainability in a dialogue with the related literature. He has analysed China's past and possible future paths with reference to these broader questions. For these reasons, Li's work deserves close attention and scrutiny.

Li's first book, titled *The Rise of China and the Demise of the Capitalist World Economy*, was published in 2008.⁶ In 2016 he published his second book, titled *China and the 21st Century Crisis*, which is the main focus of this review essay. This new book provides a comprehensive historical-materialist analysis of the national, global, historical and contemporary aspects of the rise of China in the world-capitalist system since the 1980s. It starts with a brief discussion of the factors behind late-imperial and republican China's century-long crisis and its resolution after the revolution of 1949. Li identifies the failure to mobilise the agrarian surplus for industrialisation and military modernisation as the fundamental reason for this decline and China's subordinate incorporation into the world-capitalist system after its defeat in the First Opium War (1839–42). He stresses the fact that rapid industrialisation (through the effective mobilisation of the agrarian surplus) and human development (through the nationwide expansion of healthcare and education services by the state and rural collectives) during the Mao era prepared the material conditions for the spectacular rise of the Chinese economy since the 1980s (pp. 16–17).⁷

In addition to these Mao-era achievements, Li identifies two other factors behind the post-1980 boom of the Chinese economy. These are, first, the end of the post-WWII economic boom in the mid-1970s and, second, China's transition to capitalism in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Declining profit rates forced the core and semi-peripheral countries to relocate a significant portion of their industries to peripheral countries where labour costs are low. In line with Giovanni Arrighi,⁸ Li notes that cheap labour is a necessary but not sufficient condition of such massive relocation. Peripheral countries should also have decent infrastructure and a sufficiently skilled labour force in order to be able to absorb massive industrial investment. Due to the Mao-era achievements, by the early 1980s China was the only sizeable region in the periphery that could simultaneously provide quality infrastructure and cheap and semi-skilled labour to foreign capital. Referring to David Harvey's concept of "spatial fix," Li argues that China appeared as the best candidate to provide this type of solution to a world-capitalism in trouble (pp. 72–7, 176–9).

World capitalism was unable to benefit from this sort of spatial fix as long as

⁶ Li, 2008.

⁷ A very similar analysis of the historical background of China's rise the 1980s can be found in Ho-fung Hung, *The China Boom: Why China Will Not Rule the World*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2016, pp. 34–51.

⁸ Giovanni Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the 21st Century*, London: Verso, 2007, p. 351.

China kept along its non-capitalist path. Hence, China's transition to capitalism was the second factor that allowed it to receive large quantities of foreign capital, to become the workshop of the world, and to sustain high economic growth rates for the next three decades. The impasse of building socialism in one backward country and the related bureaucratisation of the party-state prepared the conditions that facilitated the transition to capitalism under Deng Xiaoping's leadership after December 1978. Capitalist restoration started with the dismantling of the rural collectives, introduction of capitalist-style management practices in state-owned enterprises, and the opening up to foreign direct investment during the 1980s. The defeat of the protest movement of urban workers and students after the Tiananmen massacre on 4 June 1989 eliminated an important obstacle to the deepening of capitalist restoration. This made possible the privatisation of a substantial portion of state-owned enterprises and the elimination of the employment guarantee and other gains of the urban state-sector workers (known as the "iron rice bowl") in the 1990s. The party-state bureaucracy transformed itself into a capitalist class in this process. State and collective assets (created before the 1980s) worth about US\$5 trillion were transferred to this new bourgeoisie through privatisation. As a result, by 2006, about 2,900 of the 3,200 people with personal property worth over US\$15 million in China were children of senior party-state officials (pp. 19–23, 32–4).

Li's study empirically explains how China provided a "spatial fix," and therefore a temporary breathing space, for the core and the semi-peripheral capitalist countries by undertaking greater amounts of low-wage manufacturing activities from the 1980s on. For Li, China's transition from the periphery to the semi-periphery is not yet complete and it therefore continues to provide a "spatial fix" to world capitalism (pp. 73–5). On the other hand, Li predicts that China will join the semi-periphery within a decade, which implies the end of the China-centred spatial fix for world capitalism. South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa are unable to substitute for China as suppliers of an equally large economic surplus to the core and semi-periphery due to their problems of weak infrastructure, a comparatively-unskilled labour force, political instability, and ecological constraints (pp. 77, 179). According to Li, this implies that "'spatial fixes' as a historical strategy to revive the capitalist world system has reached its limit" (p. 75). Deprived of significant surplus extraction from the periphery outside of China, the core regions would experience comparatively greater socio-political instability (p. 77).

China's transition into the semi-peripheral zone constitutes only one aspect of the structural challenges confronting world capitalism. Li provides us with a detailed empirical analysis of the ongoing crisis tendencies of the world economy. He elaborates on several factors constraining the profit rate, such as the over-accumulation of capital (pp. 79–85), which is central in Marx's theory of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall; wage increases won through workers' struggles (pp. 6–7, 62, 68, 78, 183); and energy and environmental constraints (to which Li devotes Chapter 6 entirely). Based on the historical experience of British and American capitalisms, Li suggests that the leading capitalist economy has to sustain a profit rate that is significantly above 10% for the relatively stable operation of the world-capitalist system. He stresses as a fact the collapse of the profit rate in

the US during the 1970s and 2007–2009, which precipitated the advent of two major world-economic crises. Li then adds that China's profit rate was 12% in 2012 and has been declining since then. According to Li's projection, which he admits to being "too optimistic," China's profit rate will decline below 12% after 2022 and below 10% after 2028 (pp. 86–91). Given the fact that China accounted for almost one-third of global economic growth between 2003 and 2013 and has replaced the US as the greatest contributor to global economic growth since 2008 (p. 98), declining profitability of the Chinese economy signals the strengthening of crisis tendencies within the world economy as a whole. Although Li does not discuss it in explicit terms, this also suggests that it is very difficult, if not altogether impossible, for China to become the new hegemon of the world system. With a declining (US-centred) core and a (China-centred) semi-periphery unable to rise in limitless fashion, world capitalism would face formidable challenges to achieving long-term stability.

In these circumstances, the struggles of the subaltern classes tend to become more widespread and intense. Li starts his book by emphasising that since the start of the world-economic crisis in 2008, "mass protests and popular rebellions have transformed the political map throughout the world" (p. 1). Although China has not witnessed a regime-threatening mass movement since 1989, Li suggests that the country's transformation into the workshop of the world has eventually led to the rise of workers' struggles. After more than two decades of labouring under hazardous conditions and repressive management to earn meagre wages, Chinese workers have been waging increasingly militant struggles against capital in recent years. In line with the recent labour-movement scholarship on China,⁹ Li underlines the important role played by the new generation of migrant workers (who are registered as rural households but actually work in urban industries) in labour-struggles of today. This new generation is better educated, more determined to stay in the cities, and it therefore has higher consumption standards than the older generations and is more inclined to view class struggle as the main means of meeting its material needs. Demographic factors such as the depletion of rural surplus labour and the decline of the total labour force increase its bargaining power. The approaching end of the era of rapid economic growth under the pressure of the world crisis makes the capitalists of China increasingly incapable of meeting the demands of this new proletarian generation (pp. 28–9).

Li views the increase in the number of "mass incidents" (from 8,700 in 1993 to 60,000 in 2003 and 120,000 in 2008) and various violations of "social order" (from 3.2 million in 1995 to 11.7 million in 2009 and 13.9 million in 2012) as empirical proof of the increasing trend of proletarian and popular struggles in China (p. 182). He compares contemporary China with the experiences of several earlier

9 Beverly Silver and Lu Zhang, "China as an Emerging Epicenter of World Labour Unrest," in *China and the Transformation of Global Capitalism*, edited by Ho-fung Hung, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009, pp. 174–187; Pun Ngai and Lu Huilin, "Unfinished Proletarianization: Self, Anger and Class Action of the Second Generation of Peasant-Workers in Reform China," *Modern China*, Vol. 36, No. 5, 2010, pp. 493–519.

industrialisers of the semi-periphery (including Brazil, Poland and South Korea) since the end of WWII. The conclusion of this comparison is clearly optimistic. Unlike these countries, which experienced economic crisis in the 1980s and 1990s, “when global revolution was in retreat and neoliberalism was advancing in every geographic area in the world” (p. 40), Li asserts that “the coming economic and political crisis of Chinese capitalism will take place as the structural crisis of the global capitalist system is approaching” (p. 41).

At the end of the book, Li puts forward three possible scenarios for the future of China. The first scenario is the revival of the socialist model of development by the CCP leadership under growing popular pressure but without a regime change and the upheavals involved under such circumstances. The second scenario is the collapse of the present regime and transition to a formal liberal democracy. The final scenario is a long-term and general socio-political collapse and a civil war in the worst case (similar to the pre-1949 period). In light of the purge of the relatively “left-wing” faction of the CCP represented by Bo Xilai (the former Politburo member and party secretary of the Chongqing Municipality) in 2012, Li views the first scenario as highly unlikely. On the other hand, he draws a much more optimistic picture regarding the final outcome of the other two apparently chaotic and painful scenarios. Despite enormous challenges, Li expects a revolutionary re-organization and unity of the subaltern classes, which would lead to the victory of socialism in China (pp. 183–5).

Li’s work deserves much appreciation for its broad scope, distance from dominant mainstream (non/anti-Marxist) approaches in the literature on the Chinese political economy, and empirically-grounded arguments. Having said this, some parts of the book deserve criticism. My criticism will proceed from relatively minor to major problems with the book.

First, although the explanation of the crisis of the capitalist economy is one of the main preoccupations of his book, Li’s crisis theory suffers from eclecticism. Li mentions three main crisis-theories, underconsumption theory, profit-squeeze theory, and Karl Marx’s theory of the “law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall” (pp. 3, 43–4, 48–51), without saying which one provides the correct/best explanation. It is a well-established fact that these theories provide significantly different (and oftentimes opposite) explanations of the crisis. For instance, according to underconsumption theory, lack of effective demand for consumption goods is the main factor starting major crises. This is not the case for the theory based on the tendency of the profit-rate to fall, which argues that since the exploitation of labour is the only source of profit, increasing organic composition of capital through the substitution of capital for labour periodically leads to falls in the rate of profit and causes economic crisis. As the decline in the profit-rate would eventually lead to a decline in both capital investment and labour employment, the effective demand for capital and consumer goods would also decline and thereby aggravate the crisis. In short, whereas effective demand is the chief factor in initiating an economic crisis according to underconsumption theory, it is an intervening factor but not the chief cause of the crisis according to the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to

fall.¹⁰ These are not simply theoretical differences. They have important implications for socialist politics. In contrast to underconsumption theory which “stresses the commonality of interests between capital and labour,” Marxism underscores that “labour’s gains are capital’s losses and thus contribute to the objective weakening of capitalism rather than to its strengthening.”¹¹ Therefore, the lack of a clear comparison of crisis-theories is apparent as a shortcoming of Li’s book.

Second, the neglect of the place of the peasantry in the class alliance behind the restoration of capitalism in China is another problem with the book. Li is right in stressing the significance of the urban middle class’ enthusiastic support for capitalist restoration (pp. 22–3). He suggests that, especially after the repression of Tiananmen in 1989, the urban middle class’ pro-capital stance helped the state to isolate the state-sector workers politically, which eventually rendered them defenceless against successive waves of privatisation in the 1990s (pp. 23, 32). Although these arguments sound valid, what is missing in Li’s account is a clear analysis of the position of the peasantry. Regarding the Chinese peasantry of the 1980s, Li suggests that “agriculture was the weakest link of the traditional socialist system. Agricultural privatization in the early 1980s was met with little resistance from the peasants (though the official propaganda that the peasants enthusiastically supported privatization was mostly unfounded)” (p. 23). This point is also valid but insufficient. Official propaganda claiming that the decollectivization of agriculture was a bottom-up movement initiated and supported by the peasantry is wrong, because it hides the top-down character of the reform in which the party-state leadership used harsh administrative measures against the (not so few) villagers and rural cadres resisting decollectivization in many regions.¹²

However, recognising the problems of the official propaganda should not lead us to miss the central importance of rural support for the initial pro-capital reforms. The Chinese leadership was well aware that agricultural decollectivization was not enough to establish pro-capital hegemony over the peasantry. Therefore, as soon as the decollectivization reform started, the state increased the purchase price of all major agricultural products and decreased agricultural taxes significantly. In fact, agriculture’s terms of trade against industry (which were very unfavourable before 1978, for the purpose of effecting primitive socialist accumulation) improved

10 Anwar Shaikh, “An Introduction to the History of Crisis Theories,” in *US Capitalism in Crisis*, New York: The Union for Radical Political Economics, 1978.

11 Guglielmo Carchedi, “Behind and Beyond the Crisis,” *International Socialism*, No. 132, 2011, <http://isj.org.uk/behind-and-beyond-the-crisis> For a good comparison of Marx’s law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall with other crisis-theories, see Michael Roberts, *The Long Depression: How It Happened, Why It Happened, and What Happens Next*, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016, pp. 9–30. On the political difference between Marxist and underconsumptionist theories of crisis, see Sungur Savran, *Üçüncü Büyük Depresyon: Kapitalizmin Alacakaranlığı*, İstanbul: Yordam Kitap, 2013, p. 168.

12 Huaiyin Li, *Village China under Socialism and Reform: A Micro History, 1948–2008*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009, pp. 267–8; Zhun Xu, “The Political Economy of Decollectivization in China,” *Monthly Review*, Vol. 65, No. 1, 2013, pp. 17–36.

significantly until the completion of decollectivization in 1984.¹³ Hence, although decollectivization and price policy were virtually separate areas, the Chinese leadership presented them as components of a single reform package. Hence, huge increases in agricultural prices became a decisive factor behind winning the peasantry to the reform camp.¹⁴ Although the initial spike in agricultural prices was not sustained to the same extent after 1984, the improvement of the peasants' lot until then was significant enough to keep the peasantry away from any anti-regime mobilisation. This helped the Chinese state significantly when suppressing the workers and students in 1989.¹⁵ In his previous book, Li suggests that in the early 1980s,

Peasants' incomes also grew rapidly, in fact, more rapidly than the incomes of the urban households [...] As the availability of food and other agricultural goods improved, the urban working class also enjoyed a rapid improvement in living standards and began to have access to various modern consumer durables. With these temporary concessions made to the workers and peasants, Deng Xiaoping and the "reformers" were able to consolidate their political power.¹⁶

This is the only place where Li engages with the question of economic

13 Terry Sicular provides the best empirical account of this rural populist turn in China between 1978 and the mid-1980s ("Ten Years of Reform: Progress and Setbacks in Agricultural Planning and Pricing," in *Economic Trends in Chinese Agriculture: The Impact of Post-Mao Reforms*, edited by Robert F. Ash and Y.Y. Kueh, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

14 Contrary to the standard mainstream account claiming that decollectivization played a key role in increasing agricultural productivity in China between 1978 and 1984, the available empirical evidence shows no significant relationship between the two (Chris Bramall, "Origins of the Agricultural 'Miracle': Some Evidence from Sichuan," *The China Quarterly*, No. 143, pp. 731–55; Philip C.C. Huang, *The Peasant Family and Rural Development in the Yangzi Delta, 1350–1988*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990, pp. 222–51; Zhun Xu, "The Chinese Agriculture Miracle Revisited," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 47, No. 14, 2012, pp. 51–58). It is therefore hard to disagree with Chris Bramall's contention that "the primary motivation behind the imposition of decollectivization in 1982–3 was undoubtedly political. Deng's new regime was eager to build support in the countryside, and decollectivization served that purpose by creating a new class of cultivators who had a large stake in the new system" (Bramall, Chris 2004, "Chinese Land Reform in Long-Run Perspective and in the Wider East Asian Context," *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol. 4, No. 1–2, 2004, p. 125). It seems clear that the Chinese government's rapid increase of the procurement prices of farm products and significant cuts in agricultural taxes simultaneously with the decollectivization reform significantly helped to legitimize the latter in the eyes of the villagers.

15 On the absence of the peasantry from the protest movements of the 1980s, see Wang, 2009, p. 23, 28. On the emergence of the rural crisis and the rising tide of rural protest in the 1990s, see Alexander F. Day, "A Century of Rural Self-Governance Reforms: Reimagining Rural Chinese Society in the Post-Taxation Era," *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 6, 2013, p. 940; Kevin J. O'Brien and Lianjiang Li, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006; Kathy Le Mons Walker, "'Gangster Capitalism' and Peasant Protest in China: The Last Twenty Years," *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 1, 2006, pp. 1–33.

16 Li, 2008, p. 60.

concessions provided by the state and the political orientation of the lower classes in the 1980s. However, he does not explain why urban workers and peasants had significantly different political dispositions in the late 1980s. In neither of his two books does Li provide a systematic analysis of the material basis of the diverse political orientations of the urban proletariat and the peasantry, which seriously impacted the outcome at the critical juncture of 1989. Lack of attention to this question is an important shortcoming of Li's work.

Finally, Li's analysis of the so-called socialist regimes of the twentieth century in general and the Maoist experience in particular suffers from a number of problems. After recognizing their successes in "achieving both effective capital accumulation and improvement of people's living standards," he continues:

However, by the 1970s and the 1980s, socialist states were squeezed between rising labor and resources costs and their inability to compete with the core capitalist countries on the technology frontier. The Communist Party's ruling elites took advantage of the economic crisis to dismantle the socialist social contract and complete the capitalist transition (p. 185).

Here Li is basically referring to the failure of the practice of 'socialism in one country' from Eastern Europe to East Asia. Li makes his point more explicit elsewhere:

The only conceivable alternative would require the Chinese Party and state elites to give up a substantial portion of their material privileges. By sharing material hardships with the working class and continuing to provide workers and peasants with basic social security, the Communist Party leadership might be able to convince the great majority of the population to live within a relatively closed socialist system for a prolonged period of time. If China were to follow this alternative path, it might create a relatively favorable political environment for a new wave of global revolution when neoliberalism enters its own major crisis. The Cuban experience after 1990 has demonstrated that it is possible for a socialist state surrounded by neoliberal capitalism to maintain the basic socialist framework for several decades, provided that the Communist Party leadership was willing to sacrifice its own material interests. But in the absence of a major socialist revolution in a big country, even Cuba has been under growing pressure to undertake neoliberal-style "economic reform." In China, with the end of the Cultural Revolution, the majority of the Party and state bureaucrats had abandoned their original revolutionary ideals. Any development strategy that demanded the sacrifices of the ruling elites became politically unfeasible (pp. 35–6).

The similarity between Li's point and Leon Trotsky's pioneering analysis of the Soviet Union (the only "socialist state" of the time) in his *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936) is striking.¹⁷ Trotsky was the first Marxist thinker who provided a

17 Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed: What Is the Soviet Union and Where Is it Going?*, translated by Max Eastman, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1983 [1937].

systematic analysis of the structural limitations and inevitable collapse of the model of “socialism in one country.” He also pointed to the possibility of this model’s transition back to capitalism through a metamorphosis of the ruling bureaucracy into a bourgeoisie. According to Trotsky, socioeconomic privileges and the political power of the Stalinist bureaucracy were closely related to the relative isolation and economic backwardness of the Soviet Union. He predicted that as long as it remained isolated, the Soviet Union would come under increasing economic and military pressure from the advanced capitalist countries. After an initial investment-driven economic boom, the country would sooner or later suffer from economic stagnation and crises. Trotsky argued that should the working class fail to overthrow the bureaucracy through a “political revolution” and combine socialist construction in the country with a clearly internationalist policy to accomplish world revolution (for which the reconstruction of the Communist International was absolutely necessary), the ruling bureaucracy might view capitalist restoration as a way to overcome the impasse of “socialism in one country.”¹⁸ Although Li’s analysis has idealistic tones (especially when he talks about the bureaucrats’ “abandoning [of] their original revolutionary ideals”), he clearly attempts to underline this causal relationship between economic backwardness and isolation and capitalist restoration. Interestingly, there is not a single reference to Trotsky’s work in Li’s book.

This omission seems to be related to a deeper problem in Li’s analysis of the past and present of Chinese socialism. Li glosses over Mao Zedong’s responsibility in the degeneration of Chinese socialism and places the blame exclusively at the door of Deng Xiaoping and his fellow capitalist-roaders. This approach is clearly visible in his remarks regarding the Cultural Revolution. For Li, in the early years of the Cultural Revolution, large sections of the population enjoyed *de facto* freedom of speech and association. Mass organizations took over power in many cities. Many were inspired by the aspiration for a truly democratic and egalitarian socialist society (p. 30). He then goes on to explain its failure:

Unable to win the support from the majority of the Party and state bureaucrats, Mao Zedong made one last attempt to save the revolution by directly calling upon the workers and the young students to rebel against the bureaucracy. But the workers and the student rebels were politically inexperienced and divided. The Party and state bureaucrats survived the initial panic and organized counter-attacks. In many cities, the army intervened to support the established bureaucrats. Radical workers and student rebels were brutally repressed. By 1969, the radical phase of the Cultural Revolution came to an end (p. 18).

¹⁸ “The juridical and political standards set up by the revolution exercised a progressive action upon the backward economy, but upon the other hand they themselves felt the lowering influence of that backwardness. The longer the Soviet Union remains in a capitalist environment, the deeper runs the degeneration of the social fabric. A prolonged isolation would inevitably end not in national communism, but in a restoration of capitalism” (Trotsky, 1983, pp. 300-301).

Li then stresses the unsustainability of China's hostility to both the US and the USSR during the 1960s. He adds that China started to import technology from the West and Japan and normalized its diplomatic relations with the US during the 1970s, before Mao's death (pp. 18–19).

The problem with Li's narrative is his exoneration of Mao(ism) from any responsibility for these events. As Yiching Wu's careful research on rebel politics during the Cultural Revolution demonstrates, these organizations indeed represented a genuine attempt to counter the growing problem of bureaucratization and establish a truly democratic socialism. In a political context where explicitly non-Maoist discourse was not allowed and all political organizations (including those waging bloody fights against each other) had to formally present themselves as Maoist, rebel organizations also used a specific interpretation of Maoism to enlist the working masses for anti-bureaucratic mobilisation. As Wu shows, by using an increasingly critical tone against the party-state and insisting upon continuing mass mobilisation until the establishment of a genuine socialist democracy through direct representation of the workers and peasants (with frequent references to the example of the Paris Commune), rebel politics soon trespassed the boundaries set by Mao himself. That is why, instead of countering it, the Maoist leadership actually supported the army's bloody repression of these rebels.¹⁹ Wu carefully demonstrates the causal links between the suppression of the rebels in 1968–9, the ensuing de-radicalization/degeneration in the 1970s, and capitalist restoration after 1978.²⁰ In addition to suppressing the anti-bureaucratic socialist mobilisation, Mao and his allies also insisted on the unscientific description of the USSR as an imperialist and fascist country²¹ and gradually established an anti-Soviet axis with the US in the 1970s, which helped the eventual victory of capitalist restoration in China.²² Neglecting these factors is an important shortcoming of Li's book.

19 For similar accounts demonstrating Mao's personal responsibility in the repression of the rebel movement in 1967 and 1968, see Jack Gray, *Rebellions and Revolutions: China from the 1800s to the 1980s*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 353–365; Maurice Meisner, *Mao Zedong: A Political and Intellectual Portrait*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007, pp. 178–186.

20 Yiching Wu, *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins: Chinese Socialism in Crisis*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014. The major problem in Wu's (otherwise very insightful) account is the absence of systematic analysis of the relationship between the PRC's international isolation, economic backwardness (despite the strong growth performance during the Mao era), and the problem of bureaucratization.

21 Editorial Departments of *Renmin Ribao*, *Hongqi* and *Jiefangjun Bao*, "Leninism or Social-Imperialism? – In Commemoration of the Centenary of the Birth of the Great Lenin," *Peking Review*, No. 17, 1970, p. 7.

22 For a detailed analysis of the geopolitical dimensions and consequences of the Sino-American alliance against the Soviet Union, see S. Mahmud Ali, *US-China Cold War Collaboration, 1971–1989*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2005. With its patronizing and nationalistic attitude towards the PRC, Soviet bureaucracy (from Stalin to Brezhnev) played a significant role in the aggravation of Sino-Soviet relations. Ali's book shows that both sides of the Sino-Soviet conflict sought the cooperation of the USA against the other and the PRC won that competition (Ali, 2005, pp. 63–72). The Sino-Soviet conflict was one of the most shameful episodes of the history of the international left

The political significance of this shortcoming regarding the Maoist experience becomes clear in Li's discussion of left-politics in contemporary China. Li concludes his book by stating that, "as capitalism ceases to be a viable economic and social system, humanity will have to ask if there is any economic and social alternative to socialism, however socialism will come to be defined in the twenty-first century" (p. 192). Li's emphasis on the actuality of socialism is laudable. However, his expression "however socialism will come to be defined" requires some caution since he apparently has quite a broad definition of socialism. Li notes that the CCP faction led by Bo Xilai "advocated greater state control of the economy and some redistribution of wealth from the capitalist class to the working class" (p. 36). Other observers similarly defined Bo Xilai's so-called "Chongqing model" as one based on the mixed economy aiming to pursue complementary growth of the state sector and (national and foreign) private capital.²³ A mixed economy with some redistribution is hardly socialism! Hence, Li's praise of the "Chongqing model" throughout the book (pp. 1, 15, 36–8, 192) is hardly compatible with his view of socialism as the only viable alternative to capitalism. It gives the impression that he confuses the rejection of neoliberalism with socialism.

In the light of the failures of Stalinism, social democracy, and left-populism, which have led to the disillusionment of the masses with socialist politics in the past and today, distinguishing socialism from other left-projects by stressing its strictly anti-capitalist, egalitarian, democratic and internationalist character is immensely important. Doing otherwise would risk the workers in China and elsewhere undergoing similar tribulations yet again, which would sooner or later help capitalism to recover from its crises. Hence, reading Li's valuable work critically will help us to think deeply about socialist politics in contemporary China and elsewhere.

and played a significant role in the transition to capitalism from Eastern Europe to East Asia in the 1980s and 1990s. A Marxist analysis of it that goes beyond geopolitics is still lacking. We also lack a historical-materialist account of the relationship between the relatively backward, isolated and bureaucratic character of the PRC, the defeat of the anti-bureaucratic movements in the late 1960s, the Sino-American alliance of the 1970s and the PRC's gradual transition to capitalism from the late 1970s onward.

23 Philip C.C. Huang, "Chongqing: Equitable Development Driven by a 'Third Hand'?", *Modern China*, Vol. 37, No. 6, 2011, pp. 569–622; Yuezhi Zhao, "The Struggle for Socialism in China: The Bo Xilai Saga and Beyond," *Monthly Review*, 1 October 2012, <http://monthlyreview.org/2012/10/01/the-struggle-for-socialism-in-china/>

A Note on Iosif G. Abramson

Savas Michael-Matsas

Iosif Grigorievitch (or Yerzhevitch) Abramson is, with no exaggeration, a legendary figure, a personality highly respected in the Left and among scientific circles in Russia and internationally. A distinguished scientist in nuclear physics and chemistry, with a vast culture in music, poetry, and literature, he stood from his youth throughout his long life a militant communist, an exemplary fighter for universal human emancipation, world Socialism.

He wrote by his life a chapter of living history, which is impossible to summarize in a short introductory note. We could say that he embodies all the tumultuous history itself of the Soviet Land of October, its epic tragedy and the struggle for a catharsis of this tragedy by a renewal of the international struggle for Socialism.

Here a brief sketch of his long journey from the most dramatic moments of a long century. It is based on notes taken from Comrade Abramson's presentations in the international meetings and Marxist Summer Camps organized by the EEK in Greece and by the DIP in Turkey.

Iosif G. Abramson was born in Leningrad, in the Soviet Union, in 1927. It was the year that the struggle between the Left Opposition in the Bolshevik Party and the rising Stalinist bureaucracy had led to the expulsion and repression of the Opposition and of its leader Leon Trotsky. As a young boy Iosif had the chance to see Kirov, the Party leader in Leningrad, before his assassination in 1934- a crime, which became the pretext and starting point of mass repressions and purges by Stalinism in the 1930s. The old Bolshevik guard that led the revolution was in the first rank of the innocent victims.

He was born in a Soviet Jewish family of medical doctors, genuine supporters of the Land of the October Revolution.

His uncle, Iosif Eliashberg, the brother of his mother, member of the West Siberian section of the VKB(b)- the Communist Party- was executed in 1937, during the Great Terror of *Yezhovtchina*, together with Robert Eikhe, the first secretary of the Regional Committee of West Siberia of the VKP(b).

Later, by chance, Iosif Abramson discovered that even his patronym fell victim to bureaucratic anti-Semitism: the name of his father, initially Yerzhyi, was considered “too Jewish” and it was arbitrarily changed into the most Russian sounded “Gregori”...

Nevertheless, Iosif Yerzhevitch or Grigorievitch became from his youth a communist fully dedicated to the cause of Socialism. He participated as an adolescent fighter in the heroic protracted defense of Leningrad under siege against the Nazi troops of invasion. Following the antifascist Victory, he became a member of the Communist Party, dedicated in the rebuilding of the heroic city and Soviet fatherland. He completed his scientific studies in the most advanced fields of physics and chemistry, becoming quite early known among scientists and intellectuals.

In the period 1951-55 Abramson was in Vorkuta, at the Arctic Circle, working as a teacher in a Miners' College. Later, he worked at the Vorkuta filial of All Union Coal Research Institute.

In Vorkuta, he was married, in 1953, with Sonya Galperina, the daughter of Piotr Galperin, the great, non-conventional, well known Soviet psychologist and professor in the Moscow State “Lomonosov” University. Iosif and Sonya lived together for 59 and half years, until her death.

Iosif G. Abramson remained a militant communist, both during the Soviet era and after the inglorious demise of the Soviet Union.

Even now, in an advanced age, he is very active as a member of the Executive Committee of the Russian Party of Communists -*RPK*, as the chief editor of its official organ. the newspaper *Kommunist Leningrada* (The Communist of Leningrad), as a member of the Association of Marxist Social Scientists- *AMSS*, and as a member of the *Levyi Front* (Left Front).

I.G. Abramson is well known for his efforts to overcome the sectarian divisions among communists both in Russia and internationally. As a genuine internationalist, participating often in many political events of the international Left, traveling from Turkey and Greece to Nepal and Argentina, he supports the necessity of the struggle for a new revolutionary International. In this spirit, Comrade Iosif Grigorievitch Abramson was from its beginnings and continues to be a leading member of the International (previously Balkan) Socialist Center “Christian Rakovsky”.

Marx's forecast has come true, science *has become* the leading productive force: the global revolutionary leap *becomes* the categorical imperative of time

Iosif G. Abramson

Abstract

The forecast of Marx that in time science will become an immediate productive force has come to pass. Literally, “from the wheel”, the results of scientific research become technological solutions, and the mass of wage workers are released from production. They are replaced by robots and automated systems of newer and newer generations. And together with this, the main contradiction of capitalism is aggravated. It would seem that it is possible to open new production facilities, new medical and educational centers. This is what modern material production requires (we will specify: materially-virtual). Having become an immediate productive force, science demanded changes in the nature of labor and in the carrier of labor. This is no longer a hired worker, creating a monotonous product by routine

technology. It should be a worker-creator, creating new, increasingly perfect and nature-friendly technologies, a worker - homo creator. Mandatory working hours should be reduced in favor of free time for creative work. And this requires the removal of the contradiction between the social nature of production and the private way of appropriating the results of labor. The socialization of production becomes a categorical imperative.

In the preparatory manuscripts for Capital there is the following paragraph:

Nature does not build machines, locomotives, nor railways, nor electric telegraph ... etc. All these are products of human labor, natural material transformed into organs of human will, dominating nature, or human activity in nature. All these are *organs of the human brain created by the human hand*, the materialized power of knowledge. The development of fixed capital is an indicator of the extent to which *universal public knowledge* [Wissen] has become a *direct productive force*, and hence is an indicator of the extent to which the conditions of the social life process itself are subject to the control of universal intelligence and are transformed in accordance with it; to what extent social productive forces are created not only in the form of knowledge, but also as direct organs of social practice, of the real life process.¹

Before Marx's prediction came true, in the first quarter of the twentieth century there were two grand physical revolutions (not only the great Russian social one), relativistic and quantum-mechanical. In the middle of the century, fundamental biology discovered a gene that carries inherited traits. In those years, at the turn of the 1940s and 50s, cybernetics was formed, the science of the general laws governing the processes of control and transmission of information in machines, living organisms and society. And from that time, having absorbed the grandiose results of the mentioned revolutionary upheavals in the knowledge of nature, high science began to form a close alliance with technologies, having launched a scientific and technical revolution from the first decades of the second half of the 20th century. The world sees with what speed and with what increasing acceleration, especially since the beginning of the zero years of this century, the technologies of the achievements of the natural sciences are invading, first of all, in the field of information theory. Literally "off the wheels", the results of research and development are becoming technological solutions, and the mass of hired workers are released from production. They are replaced by robots and automated systems of newer and newer generations.

And at the same time the main contradiction of capitalism becomes sharper. Technologies based on the latest scientific discoveries and inventions accompanying them harshly increase labor productivity. The level of production of material goods is relatively quickly becoming adequate to the volume of material needs of employees and the entire population. But the things are becoming more difficult to sell. In addition, their production every year requires a smaller number of people.

¹ Marx K. & Engels F. Collected Works, v.46. p.2, page 215

And the problem of making a profit becomes more and more difficult for capitalists to solve. This is on the one hand.

On the other hand, the proletariat, especially of the scientific and technological sphere, in the unity and at the same time in the struggle with capital, is opposing the need for creative work, the need for obtaining new knowledge. It takes time free from routine work. There is a new level of aggravation of the contradiction between the social nature of labor and the private-proprietary nature of the appropriation of its results. It is becoming increasingly difficult for capital to keep the exploited majority in a state of consumer society. It is being torn to replace by the society of creators. The human being of routine labor is replaced by the creative human of labor — the creator-worker who creates new, increasingly perfected and environment-friendly technologies, homo creator, as for the first time Alexander Buzgalin in his famous brochure of 1996 (!) “The Future of Communism”² perfectly proved.

In September 1917, Lenin concluded: “state-monopoly capitalism is the most complete *material* preparation of socialism, there is a *threshold* of it, there is that step of the historical staircase between which (step) and the step called socialism, there are *no intermediate* steps.”³ After 100 years, world capitalism is faced with a completely unusual situation for the self-preservation in power. Productive forces require widely educated creators. And they need free time for creativity. Creative work, free time becomes the main need. And how to sell free time? This is not a simulacrum, not a new gadget, not new, super-expensive sneakers, and not a new super-expensive car-crossover. The step about which Lenin wrote is becoming more narrow. But to overcome it an awareness of the categorical need to overcome it must be required. Despite the crises, the waves of which hit the world economy with increasing frequency, global capitalism itself will not leave the historical path. As Vladimir Mayakovsky superbly cried: “Not to overtake it, not to get around, only blow it up is for us the way out!”

And just as the industrial proletariat was, as the most advanced layer of the proletariat, the support of the Bolsheviks in the Great Workers and Peasants Revolution of 1917, so organized, employed in high-tech sectors of the economy, the proletariat of modernity will be the vanguard of the coming revolution, designed to remove the alienation of man from the results of his labor. But in order to become such a vanguard, even this highly educated stratum of the modern proletariat must be imbued with the awareness of the need for liberation from the domination of capital. And the first steps towards this are the wide and convincing propaganda of this truth. The specificity of Russia requires in this connection the liberation from the established Bonapartist regime and the real provision the freedom of speech on state radio and TV channels.

Sometimes people ask: what contradictions will become the sources of the development of a classless society? There will be many, non-antagonistic contradictions. The main of them will be between new technologies, quickly

2 Бузгалин А.В. Будущее коммунизма. М., 1996, 112 с., ISBN 5-87322-368-0

3 Ленин В.И. ПСС, т 34, с.193

replaced by each other, and the requirements for the preservation and improvement of the human environment and the earth's flora and fauna. But there will be many other contradictions. For example: between the threats of planetary elements, disasters and the possibilities of preventing them and minimizing the harm they cause, between the level of knowledge achieved and the unknown phenomena and regularities that need to be revealed, between the creative tasks that people set themselves, and the limited human life, between family and social bringing children up, between different trends in literature and art and so on.

The rate of exploitation (the case of the iPhone)¹

E. Ahmet Tonak

Part 1: Welcome to the iPhone.

What if the iPhone X were made in the United States?

If the iPhone X were made in the United States, it would be unaffordable for the vast mass of the world's population. One estimate suggests that if the iPhone were made in the United States, it would cost at least \$30,000 per phone. [All dollar amounts in this Notebook refer to the US dollar].

The current (2019) price for an iPhone X varies from about \$900 in the United States to about \$1900 in Brazil and Turkey.

At \$30,000, the iPhone is simply unaffordable. A minimum wage worker in India would have to work for sixteen and a half years, each day, to afford one phone. A minimum wage worker in South Africa would need to work for fourteen and a half years for one phone.

¹ This paper is a shortened version of a collective study by the Tricontinental Institute for Social Research, *The Rate of Exploitation (The Case of the iPhone)*, published in English, Spanish, Portuguese and Turkish. The longer version (which can be accessed at: https://www.thetricontinental.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/190928_Notebook-2_EN_Final_Web.pdf) includes some sections on the basic concepts (such as the commodity, value, surplus value, the rate of exploitation, constant capital, variable capital, etc.) of the Marxist theory of value. This shortened version focuses directly on the sections that deal with the production process of iPhone as a capitalist commodity.

Almost all of the 70 million iPhones currently in circulation – as well as the 30 million iPads and 59 million other Apple products – are made outside the United States.

The iPhone is made outside the United States for several interrelated reasons. The first (and most obvious reason) is the cost of labour. The cost of labour within the United States is higher than that in certain parts of the world – notably in the People’s Republic of China, where many of these products are manufactured. The second reason is the adverse working conditions (no trade unions, long hours) in many parts of the world, particularly in export-processing zones that explicitly ban unions and have almost no State regulations. The retreat of the State from regulating workplaces and resource extraction has led to an increase in the negative externalities of production – namely, to the dumping of toxic waste without treatment, the use by mining companies of harsh chemicals that pollute water sources, and – as a consequence – the destruction of agriculture. This pushes more and more of the billions of small farmers and peasants off the land and towards wage labour in the industrial production process. At the centre of these changes is disarticulated production along the Global Commodity Chain. This Notebook will focus attention on disarticulated production and on the Global Commodity Chain.

The global commodity chain?

Factories were once located in a single place. Land was either rented or bought, and upon this land was built a building – the factory. The owner of the factory – the capitalist – would then rent or buy machinery that was housed inside the four walls of the factory. Electricity would be wired into the factory to run the machines and to provide electricity; this allowed for longer workdays, with a third shift working late into the night. Raw materials would be purchased, out of which would be produced the commodity to be sold. Then, the capitalist would hire workers to bring their skills and energy to the factory and work for a set number of hours to make commodities. Better machinery and advances in cooperation, as well as the division of labour amongst workers, made the factories more and more productive. But what defined these older factories was that they were – by and large – in one location. Even when the factory was in one place, raw materials were sourced from a variety of locations. Factories, therefore, were always linked globally to places that their raw materials came from and to places where their products were sold.

Gradually, by the 1960s, three technological changes and three major political and economic changes enabled factories to alter their basic structure.

The three interlinked technological changes were:

1. Telecommunication networks.

By the mid-1960s, a large number of satellites were launched for commercial purposes. These satellites allowed for easier communication between different parts of the world.

2. Computerisation.

The use of computer databases allowed firms to maintain their inventory – their raw materials and their stock of finished products – on a computer rather than in a large ledger.

If two computers – one based in Hong Kong and the other based in California – could be linked across the satellite network, then the business headquarters in California could be informed immediately about drops in inventory and could reorder raw materials and products as soon as possible.

3. Efficient logistics and standardisation.

It used to take dockworkers days to unload a ship, whose cargo could easily be misplaced in the warehouses that abutted the quays. But dockworkers, through their radical unions, would often go on strike not only to increase their wages and working conditions but also for political issues. Their political unity needed to be broken. In the mid-1950s, container ships began to carry goods in large, standard-sized metal containers which could be removed – within hours – from a ship by cranes and placed immediately on the back of a truck or on a railway flatcar. What this meant was that it became less time-consuming to move goods around the world, and it meant that the dockworkers' union was substantially weakened. This process reduced both the overall transportation cost and the risk of strikes. But containerisation is just one part of a revolution in logistics. Highly sophisticated logistical systems have allowed firms to track raw materials and finished products, making sure that they do not get lost and that they arrive at their destinations on time. None of this would be possible without standardisation (driven by the International Organisation of Standardisation), which means that any input to production can be sourced from anywhere in the world. A grade of electrical cable or a type of glass is no longer arbitrarily measured. It is now produced to a certain precise standard. Thus, it allows firms that source goods to play off one producer against another and drive down prices. If workers in one locality successfully win better working conditions, standardisation and efficient logistics allow capital to route their production process away from this “trouble” and towards a more pliant workforce.

These three technological changes allowed firms to imagine breaking up the factory into several components, each located either near raw materials or near inexpensive but skilled labour. Even as the production process was fragmented across continents, firms controlled the entire process through the integrated management of data about production, transportation, and inventories. Efficient logistical systems and better transportation techniques made sure that components and products could move rapidly across the world. A capacitor could be made in one place, the screen for the phone in another, and the various components could then be brought to a third place to be assembled into an iPhone. This disarticulation of production intensified the old pattern for the movement of raw materials from one country to another for final production. It created a new system that undermined labour rights and national development projects and enabled global capital to

increase exploitation as a consequence.

We call this new system the Global Commodity Chain (it is also known as the Global Value Chain). What defines this Global Commodity Chain is that production (as well as marketing and distribution) of the commodities is broken up among multiple firms in different territories. The Global Commodity Chain allowed firms to manage inventory through a process known as ‘just-in-time’ production, where firms did not hold a large inventory but ordered commodities to meet market demand. What is also key here is that the multinational firms – such as Apple – rarely produce anything beyond the brand for the phone and yet they control the process and earn the lion’s share from it.

The iPhone in the global commodity chain

The Apple iPhone would not be possible without the Global Commodity Chain. The raw materials and the components in the iPhone come from over thirty countries. There are two types of inputs in the iPhone:

1. Raw materials.
2. Manufactured components.

An additional factor here is the intellectual property that goes into making the iPhone. Intellectual property is not an input such as raw materials or manufacturing components; it is merely a legal entitlement given by the State, which can become the basis for rent. Firms that claim intellectual property on pharmaceutical products or on electronic technology charge rent for the use of the rights given to them by the State and they block the use of these by others based on this monopoly right. One assumption is that Apple did the work of creating the technologies, and therefore deserves to claim intellectual property rent from the sale of these phones. But, nearly all technologies that make up the iPhone – the Internet, the GPS systems, the touch screen, the voice-activated assistant (Siri) – were developed almost entirely with public money given to universities and to research laboratories. In other words, Apple used government-developed technologies to produce the iPhone. The State allowed private firms – such as Apple – to claim intellectual property rights for these technologies. The profits from these publicly-financed innovations went – and continue to go – into private hands. Firms such as Foxconn that both manufacture parts of the iPhone and assemble them cannot cut out Apple and sell these phones because of the protections of intellectual property and because Apple has built a powerful brand. And, since it is the case that Apple did not create these technologies, we are left with the question: who deserves to profit from publicly funded technology?

Amongst the raw materials in an iPhone, you will find:

- Aluminium.
- Arsenic.
- Carbon.
- Cobalt.

- Coltan (Niobium and Tantalum).
- Copper.
- Gallium.
- Gold.
- Iron.
- Platinum.
- Silicon.
- Tin.

These raw materials come from a variety of sources, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Bolivia. Reports from reputed agencies – such as UNICEF (the United Nations’ Children’s Agency) and Amnesty International – have revealed over the years that the suppliers of the iPhone use child labour to extract these minerals from the mines and that they pay the miners starvation wages. Amnesty International’s report showed, for instance, that 40,000 children work in very dangerous conditions in mines in the Democratic Republic of the Congo that extract raw materials. Death, dismemberment, and long-term health problems are routine. The children, who work twelve hours a day, carry heavy loads out of the deep mines for \$1 to \$2 per day. Besides, child labour is forced labour, with mining companies well aware that the cost of bringing rare earth minerals and crucial raw materials is so low because militia groups force workers down the mines by the barrel of the gun. This is now a familiar sight in central Africa. These forms of labour discipline bring essential elements and minerals for the iPhone out of the earth and yet are treated as the most disposable part of the Global Commodity Chain.

Apple’s Supplier Code of Conduct (updated regularly, most recently in 2019) says unequivocally that:

Apple believes all workers in our supply chain deserve a fair and ethical workplace. Workers must be treated with the utmost dignity and respect, and Apple suppliers shall uphold the highest standards of human rights.

These words seem to mean little to Apple and to the subcontractors who source their raw materials from places that are distant from the imaginations of those who buy these phones.

The raw materials then enter manufacturing units in at least thirty countries, from Europe to China. Many iPhone components are manufactured by factories in China. To get an idea of the diversity of suppliers of manufactured components, take a look at the origin of these parts of the iPhone 5s and iPhone 6:

- Accelerometer: Bosch in Germany. Invensense in the United States.
- Audio Chipsets and Codec. Cirrus Logic in the United States (outsourced for manufacturing).
- Baseband processor. Qualcomm in the United States (outsourced for manufacturing).

- Batteries: Samsung in South Korea. Huizhou Desay Battery in China.
- Cameras: Sony in Japan. OmniVision in the United States produces the front-facing FaceTime camera chip but subcontracts TSMC (in Taiwan) for manufacturing.
- Chipsets and Processors: Samsung in South Korea and TSMC in Taiwan. Alongside their partner GlobalFoundries in the United States.
- Controller Chips. PMC Sierra and Broadcom Corp in the United States (outsourced for manufacturing).
- Display. Japan Display and Sharp in Japan. LG Display in South Korea.
- DRAM. TSMC in Taiwan. SK Hynix in South Korea.
- eCompass. Alps Electric in Japan.
- Fingerprint sensor authentication. Authentec makes it in China but outsources it to Taiwan for manufacturing.
- Flash memory. Toshiba in Japan and Samsung in South Korea.
- Gyroscope. STMicroelectronics in France and Italy.
- Inductor coils (audio). TDK in Japan.
- Main Chassis Assembly. Foxconn and Pegatron in China.
- Mixed-signal chips (such as NFC). NXP in Netherlands.
- Plastic Constructions (for the iPhone 5c). Hi-P and Green Point-Jabil in Singapore.
- Radio Frequency Modules. Win Semiconductors (module manufacturers Avago and RF Micro Devices) in Taiwan. Avago technologies and TriQuint Semiconductor in the United States. Qualcomm in the United States for LTE connectivity.
- Screen and Glass (for the display). Corning (Gorilla Glass) in the United States. GT Advanced Technologies produces the sapphire crystals in the screens.
- Semiconductors. Texas Instruments, Fairchild and Maxim Integrated in the United States.
- Touch ID sensor. TSMC and Xintec in Taiwan.
- Touchscreen Controller. Broadcom in the United States (outsourced for manufacturing).
- Transmitter and Amplification Modules. Skyworks and Qorvo in the United States (outsourced for manufacturing).

Among these firms, the most significant is Foxconn (Hon Hai Precision Industry), a manufacturing company from Taiwan. It generated an annual revenue of \$160 billion in 2017. About 1.3 million workers are on its payroll in China, where it is the largest private-sector employer in the country. Worldwide, only Walmart and McDonald's employ more workers than Foxconn.

Scandals are routine at these manufacturing plants. There is now a phenomenon known as 'Foxconn Suicides' because of a spate of deaths by workers in protest of the low wages and bad working conditions at Foxconn City in Shenzhen, China. The Chinese media called this the 'suicide express'. Two Chinese academics (Pun Ngai and Jenny Chan, 2012) studied the phenomenon at Foxconn. In their searing report, they quote several workers from a mobile phone assembly plant:

We get yelled at all the time. It's very tough around here. We're trapped in a concentration camp of labour discipline – Foxconn manages us through the principles of 'obedience, obedience and absolute obedience!' Must we sacrifice our dignity as people for production efficiency?

To get a sense of the speed of the work, listen to this worker's description of ten seconds of her workday:

I take a motherboard from the line, scan the logo, put it in an antistatic-electricity bag, stick on a label, and place it on the line. Each of these tasks takes two seconds. Every ten seconds, I finish five tasks.

One worker told Brian Merchant (2017) that 1,700 iPhones pass through her hands every day. She was in charge of wiping a special polish on the phone's display. She polishes three screens a minute for twelve hours a day. Other work – such as fastening chip boards and assembling back covers – take a few minutes apiece. The pressure on the workers is extraordinary.

From 2010 to 2012, Steve Jobs made consistent claims of Apple's awareness of the high suicide rates at Foxconn ('Foxconn suicides') and that the problem was under control – 'we are all over this', he announced regularly. The problem, however, lingers. It cannot be measured by the suicides alone. Low wages and bad work conditions – including daily humiliation – define the lives of the workers. On several occasions, up to 150 workers went to the roof of a building and threatened to jump. They used the 'Foxconn suicide' as a bargaining tactic. That is the level of the production process for the iPhone.

Part 2. A Marxist Analysis of the iPhone.

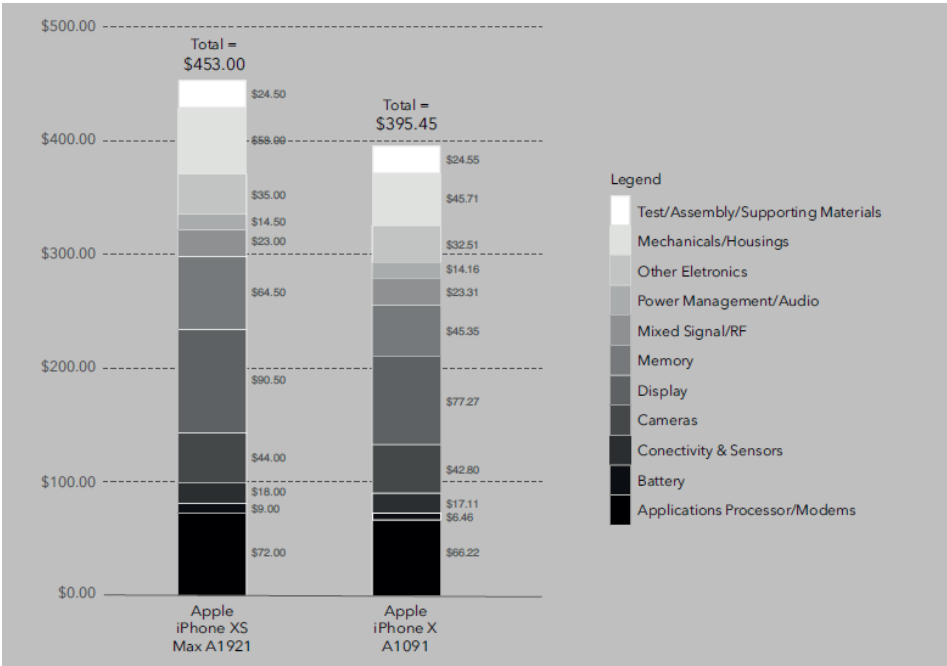
If you are outraged by what you have read so far, then you can rest assured that you are a human being. No human being should be cavalier about the working conditions that produce the iPhone – whether in the mines of South America and Africa or in the factories of East Asia.

But this Notebook goes further than outrage. We are interested in looking at the production of the iPhone – a commodity – through the framework of a Marxist analysis. We are interested not in being angry at Apple and Foxconn alone, but in being able to measure how much workers are exploited to produce this commodity. In other words, we are interested in measuring the rate of exploitation.

The rate of exploitation is one of the most important concepts in Marx's theory. This measurement allows us to show how much the worker contributes to the increase of value in the production process. It shows that even if the worker is paid more, by the special magic of mechanisation and of efficient management

of the production process, the rate of exploitation increases. The rate expresses quantitatively the contradictory interests of the capitalists and of the workers. There is a radical politics implicit in the analysis of the rate of exploitation. It enables workers to see how much of the share of the value produced is appropriated from them by the capitalists, and to therefore make the case for a different way to organise production and to end exploitation.

The procedure used in this Notebook to calculate the rate of surplus value in the Apple iPhone X is similar to the way Karl Marx calculated the rate of surplus value in yarn production. In *Capital I*, Marx wrote, “[T]he constant portion of the value of the week’s product is £378. Wages amount to £52 a week. The price of yarn ... is the sum of £510. The surplus value is therefore in this case £510 - £430 = £80 ... The rate of surplus value is therefore $80/52 = 153\frac{11}{13}\%$.”



We begin with the sale price of the iPhone X in the United States – \$999. This amount, we believe, roughly represents the total value embodied in the commodity. In any commodity produced in a capitalist production process, the mass of embodied values contains three value parts: constant capital, variable capital, and surplus value. Therefore, we must estimate the value of those segments of the total value of the iPhone X.

Constant Capital. Data from TechInsights gives us a detailed and specific look at the prices of components of both the iPhone XS Max and the iPhone X.

The total component prices of these two models are respectively \$453 and

\$395.44. The first bar in the columns, however, includes the cost of ‘test/assembly/supporting materials’. This confuses the data for the analytical distinctions made by Marx. ‘Test/Assembly’ belongs to the variable capital, since, in both, labour power must be purchased to do those jobs. However, ‘supporting material’ is merely another part of the raw materials and belongs to the constant capital. To make matters simple, we exclude this portion of the top item from our estimation of the constant capital. Hence, the amounts that roughly represent the constant capital would be \$428.50 (\$453 - \$24.50) and \$370.89 (\$395.44 - \$24.55).

Drawing upon the iPhone X, we will consider the amount for constant capital to be \$370.89.

Variable Capital. The estimation of the variable portion of the total value of the iPhone is more problematic. We are faced with the secretiveness of Apple, which does not release wage data. Two additional problems of the data need to be acknowledged. First, we do not have complete information on the expenditure by Apple for the initial research and design of the iPhone. We believe that the initial research and design labour costs can be ignored since these costs have been spread out over different models of the iPhone and the contribution of the research and development cost is increasingly negligible for the newer iPhones. Second, we do not have clear data on the wage differentials between workers who produce different components of the iPhone in different countries. This wage differential can be ignored because most of the companies that produce components for the iPhone are located in wage zones where this differentiation is not substantial. In fact, since we are estimating the wage bill based on the manufacturing side and leaving out the extraction of raw materials, we are inflating rather than deflating the wage bill.

We find these assumptions to be acceptable on the grounds that our figure of variable capital (\$24.55) is based on ‘test/assembly/supporting materials’, which probably overestimates the extent of productive labour used in the process of making the iPhone X.

Total value of iPhone = \$999.

Constant capital = \$370.89.

Variable capital = \$24.55.

What is the surplus value?

Surplus value = (total value) – (constant capital + variable capital).

\$999 – (\$370.89 + \$24.55)

= \$603.56.

Each time an iPhone X is sold for \$999, Apple receives \$603.56 of *surplus value* in money form.

What is the rate of exploitation?

$$s/v = 603.56/24.55 = 2458\%.$$

The rate of exploitation is 2458%. This is 25 times the rate of exploitation that is gleaned from Marx's examples in *Capital*, published in 1867. Workers who make iPhones in the 21st century, in other words, are twenty-five times more exploited than textile workers in England in the 19th century.

What does this number – 2458% – tell us? It tells us that an infinitesimal part of the working day is devoted to the value needed by the workers as wages. The bulk of the day is spent by the worker producing goods that enhance the wealth of the capitalist. The higher the rate of exploitation, the greater the enhancement of the capital's wealth by the worker's labour.

Appendix.

Kenneth L. Kraemer, Greg Linden and Jason Dedrick (2011) analyse the geographical distribution of the gross profits received by first-tier suppliers of the iPhone 4. In their study, they break down the cost of inputs into materials and labour. From a non-Marxist perspective, they attempt to identify approximate portions of surplus value (gross profits), constant capital (materials), and variable capital (labour) in the total value of the iPhone 4.

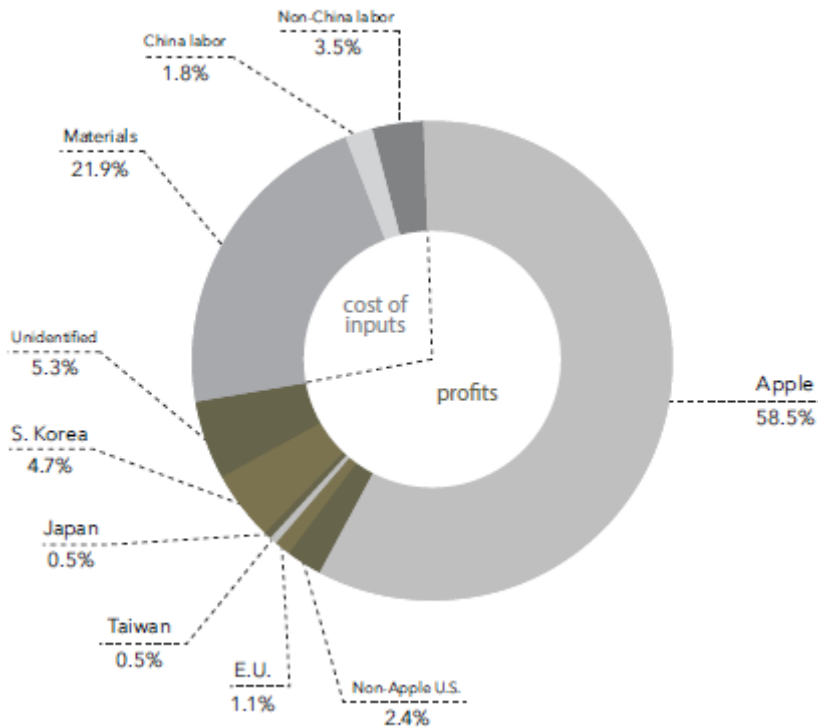
Based on the data in this chart, we can do a back of the envelope calculation to determine the rate of exploitation of the iPhone 4.

The approximate portion of surplus value in the total value of the iPhone 4 is 73% (Apple profits + non-Apple US profits + EU profits + Taiwan profits + Japan profits + S. Korea profits + Unidentified profits).

The share of the total cost of materials is 21.9%.

The share of the total labour cost is 5.3%, in which non-China based labour is 3.5%. Assuming that a large portion of the non-China labour cost represents the salaries of managerial and supervisory employees (unproductive workers, whose salaries are paid out of the share of surplus value), then we can legitimately consider only 1.5% of that cost to be variable capital. The total variable capital is the share of the China-based labour (1.8%) and the non-China based productive labour (1.5%). The share of total variable capital in the total value of the iPhone 4 is therefore 3.3%.

Given these figures, the rate of exploitation of the iPhone 4 is $75/3.3 = 2273\%$.



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