

Progressing by Grassroot Networks – An Interview with Catherine Samary

Before we turn to the discussion of the war in Ukraine and prospects for left internationalism, let's talk about the recent developments in your home country. How do you analyse the current political situation in France and the role that left-wing politics might play in it?

– Michel Barnier's new government combines two core elements: racism and attacks on social rights. The latter is evident in the ongoing parliamentary debates over the 2025 budget and social security funding. Marine Le Pen's National Rally (Rassemblement National) has played a key role in these discussions, not least due to the fact that no single party has managed to achieve a stable majority in the French parliament. Even though the result of the New Popular Front (Nouveau Front Populaire) in the recent legislative election, which followed the dissolution of the Assembly last June, was unexpectedly high – and most welcome – it is still only a minor and relative victory.

This situation is unlikely to change unless the various forces within the New Popular Front come together, consolidate their victory, and start a large-scale mobilization. This could be achieved through the creation of local political alliances across the entire country that would be focused on concrete struggles. We should not forget that mass mobilizations against attacks on the social system are still possible – and so is the collapse of the government itself.

Against all evidence, the government wants people to believe that it has not introduced an "austerity budget" plan, but rather "a budget [plan] to avoid austerity" – at least, this

is what the Minister of Finance Antoine Armand [declared](#) on the 21st of October. National Assembly deputies have proposed over 3,500 amendments to this plan! And yet, disagreements between different political alliances in the parliament are obvious. At the moment, no single one of them has a stable majority – these political struggles are indicative of what awaits us during the 2027 presidential election. In the current situation, there is a strong chance that the government will once again resort to Article 49.3 of the Constitution to pass the budget without a parliamentary vote. Previously, this procedure enabled the French government under Élisabeth Borne to push through the pension reform bill. However, the decision to use it now would pose a risk of early collapse for the government both due to internal divisions among the ruling classes and the general unpopularity of these measures.

And what better way is there to “divide and rule” than by designating a scapegoat – immigrants? Valérie Pécresse, who has held numerous high-level positions for different right-wing political organizations, has become an emblem of the vile demagoguery that drives much of today’s right-wing factions. On the 14th of October, she had the audacity to declare: “How do you plan to explain to the French that you are going to ask for more sacrifices from them, to pay more taxes, to benefit from fewer and fewer public services, while allowing immigration-related expenses to keep rising?” She added: “When we are too generous, we end up attracting people we do not want to welcome.” Minister of the Interior Bruno Retailleau [shares](#) the same philosophy – his immigration bill is directly inspired by the National Rally’s ideas. It is the duty of the left today to take a strong stance on this front as well and to stand firmly against all forms of racism.

– During the elections this year some of the international issues – in particular, those related to the wars in Ukraine and Palestine – were included in the programmes of all political parties. Would you say that international issues are

politically divisive in France? Are they an important electoral factor in national political life?

– I would answer “yes” to the first question, but for the second question I am inclined to say “no.” Political divisions on international issues have never played a central role in the electoral campaign or had any impact on its outcome. As I mentioned earlier, domestic issues have overwhelmingly dominated the political scene, especially in the wake of the crisis triggered by Emmanuel Macron’s decision to call early elections. His choice to appoint Michel Barnier as Prime Minister in September – instead of [Lucie Castets](#), the candidate proposed by the New Popular Front, which came first in the legislative elections – highlighted the focus on domestic issues even more prominently. Macron’s choice had little to do with international matters: it was strictly about pushing forward his social agenda.

It is also worth noting that parliamentary decisions about the sums allocated to Ukraine were made back in March and did not generate much controversy during the elections. That being said, a lot of things regarding France’s foreign policy are up for debate. The country’s contributions to European and global aid packages to Ukraine are minimal. The current military budget is more allocated towards nuclear programs, furthering neocolonial interests in Africa (the “Françafrique” policy), and military support for Israel, rather than towards Ukraine. [1] The lack of real debate on these issues does not imply that they are of secondary importance; rather, it reflects the poor state of parliamentary “democracy” and the limited transparency around France’s foreign policy.

– And internally, within political organizations?

– I am not the best person to give a detailed answer here, as I don’t closely follow the inner workings of every party across the spectrum. However, what I can say at the very least is that their “political life” lacks democratic transparency.

Most of the time, the only thing we see are public “positions” taken by party leaders – and these sometimes shift in noticeable, even awkward ways.

This happened with the right-wing approach to the war in Ukraine. After the invasion, which was widely recognized as an act of aggression, Marine Le Pen, as a representative of the National Rally, had to readjust her public position to distance herself from Vladimir Putin. Macron had to do the same, although this shift did not result from internal debates among his supporters or within his party Renaissance (RE). The same goes for his recent, cautious criticism of Israel’s politics in Gaza and his call to recognize the rights of the Palestinians. Yet, overall, there is a consensus among the right on demonizing so-called “Islamism” as a tactic to discredit any form of support for Palestine.

As for the left-wing parties – from the communists and socialists to La France Insoumise (FI) – there are, of course, political disagreements on various international issues, including ongoing military conflicts, both between the parties and within them. Some people on the radical left, in France and abroad, frame the Russo-Ukrainian war as a clash between NATO (the United States, essentially) and Russia – thus overlooking Ukraine itself. They see it through the “main enemy” lens and reduce the equation to a single “imperialist enemy” – in particular, the United States and NATO. As Gilbert Achcar puts it, this view might eventually come down to the following conclusion: “The enemy of my (main) enemy is my friend.” This explains Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s (leader of La France Insoumise) once somewhat sympathetic stance toward Putin compared, for instance, to Raphaël Glucksmann’s active campaign against Kremlin’s politics in his role as a socialist deputy in the European Parliament.

Given this range of political sentiments and positions within the parties composing the New Popular Front, it was reassuring to see straightforward, positive statements on foreign policy

in their last program. They have taken a firm stance on “promoting peace in Ukraine,” specifically by “unwaveringly defending Ukraine’s sovereignty” through arms deliveries and asset seizures from Russian oligarchs. As far as Gaza is concerned, the New Popular Front has called for “an immediate ceasefire” and a “just and lasting peace,” condemning the “complicit support” of the French government for Benjamin Netanyahu’s policies. The program demands effective sanctions against Israel, along with official recognition of the state of Palestine in line with the United Nations resolutions. However, while these positions are important and encouraging, we have not seen much of a real political “battle” in the parliament or during the elections to make these statements more concrete.

– What do you think about the political situation in France in the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February of 2022? What discussions took place within your organization, the New Anticapitalist Party?

– The invasion was certainly a major political shock that raised serious questions across all political organizations. As the war continued, these questions have only deepened, and no clear consensus has emerged. Many pre-war conceptions continue to be actively debated – though, unfortunately, many of these views have not been updated. Even the basic condemnation of the Russian aggression has not led to the development of a unified position and approach across the political spectrum, especially regarding NATO or the European Union’s planned expansions to Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and the Western Balkans.

Before the invasion, Macron (much like Putin!) had considered NATO a “brain-dead” organization. His conclusion was based on NATO’s withdrawal from Afghanistan as well as internal disagreements among member countries regarding Russia and its energy resources. Ironically, the war has led to NATO’s expansion, harsher sanctions against Russia, and the

legitimization of increased military budgets. At the same time, support for Ukraine has been hypocritically instrumentalized. As I said, a large share of the military budget in France (and in the United States, for that matter) is not actually directed toward Ukraine. There is also significant uncertainty around the United States' concrete international commitments, which Macron sees as an opportunity to promote France's arms industry in Europe and beyond. However, all this is not up for debate among the right.

On the left, including the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA), there has been limited debate around what Achcar calls the "New Cold War," even though it is a necessary discussion. The prevailing logic within the NPA has been the following: even without a clear understanding of the rapidly changing world around us, without understanding the connections between various crises, and lacking viable socialist, anti-capitalist alternatives at national, European, and global levels, we can still fight for grassroots internationalism grounded in the defense of universal equal rights. Echoing our comrades from Sotsialnyi Rukh (Social Movement) in Ukraine, we declared: "From Ukraine to Palestine, occupation is a crime!" We viewed and condemned the war in Ukraine as an aggression by Putin's Russia against Ukraine's very right to exist. We stand with our comrades from political organizations and labor unions in Russia and Ukraine, while maintaining independence from "our national governments" and disapproving of their neoliberal practices. We oppose Russian imperialism, shaped – among other things – by czarist and Stalinist legacies, while affirming our stance against "all imperialisms." We have also called for Ukraine's debt to be canceled and, alongside our Ukrainian comrades, we have condemned any attempt by Western powers or the Zelensky government to exploit Ukrainian resistance against the Russian aggression as a pretext for imposing anti-social policies.

Practically, the NPA has supported Ukraine's resistance, both

armed and unarmed. We have recognized its legitimate right to request weapons (from those who manufacture them) for self-defense. Since March 2022, we have been involved in the European Network in Solidarity with Ukraine and Against the War (ENSU), where we remain active both at the European level and through its French branch, working alongside progressive Ukrainian groups.

This does not mean there has been no debate or disagreement. While all of us agree on Ukraine's right to request weapons for self-defense, several questions and dissensions emerged immediately: Is it politically justifiable for an anti-capitalist organization like ours to request arms from "our own bourgeoisie" and for a bourgeois government? Is it practically possible to call for military aid while also opposing militarism and military alliances like NATO?

Personally, I answered "yes" to both questions, as did the majority of the NPA members. Alongside other comrades, I represent the NPA within ENSU and work directly with leftist, feminist, and student groups in Ukraine engaged in multiple struggles. But this activism requires us to differentiate our position from both "militarist" attitudes and "abstract pacifism." This is achievable by "politicizing" the arms debate, which entails nationalizing the arms industry so that military budgets and the use of weapons become an object of political debate.

To summarize: "yes" to arms delivery to Ukraine in solidarity; "no" to sales to dictatorships and oppressive regimes like Israel! ENSU recently discussed and adopted a statement on this issue, which will soon be available on its website.

– And what about Emmanuel Macron's statements regarding the potential deployment of French troops in Ukraine?

– Macron himself admitted there was "no consensus" – and that is an understatement – on this idea. His suggestion was met

with criticism, with many seeing it as dangerously escalatory, if not reckless. Still, Macron maintained that “in the face of a regime that excludes nothing, we must exclude nothing ourselves.” However, critics pointed out the discrepancy between Macron’s “commitment” to helping Ukraine and the limited aid that France has actually provided so far. They also highlighted the difference between “deploying troops,” which implies co-belligerency, and sending military personnel and technicians for support tasks, like managing foreign-supplied military equipment. Macron’s other semantic improvisations were heavily criticized as well, for example his statement that France and the European Union were entering a “war economy.” This notion doesn’t match reality, as current production systems haven’t undergone any such transformation.

As I mentioned earlier, another crucial issue is the need to politicize and increase transparency around military budgets. This requires analyzing what the military industry is really producing and sending to Ukraine, alongside the financial and material aid needed to support Ukraine’s actual “war economy.” If Ukraine’s economy remains state-run and dependent on Western aid tied to neoliberal conditions, it is bound to fail. This is why I support the “internal” strategy of the Ukrainian leftist organization Sotsialnyi Rukh, which criticizes the current trajectory of Zelensky’s government and instead prioritizes the popular and democratic resources of independent Ukraine itself.

– How have people reacted to Vladimir Putin’s repeated nuclear threats?

– Reactions have been mixed and have changed over time. Putin clearly knows that he is spreading fear this is exactly what he wants – and we cannot exclude the risk of a catastrophe. However, it is hard to imagine what “effective” use of nuclear weapons could look like from Putin’s perspective. So far, each of his “red lines” has shifted back in response to the Ukrainian military operations, including those on Russian

territories, without triggering the nuclear retaliation he promised. Another reassuring factor has been China's explicit veto against any use of nuclear weapons by its Russian ally.

Still, some "pacifists" continue to instrumentalize the fear of nuclear escalation as an argument against sending more weapons to Ukraine to avoid further "provoking" Putin!

– Are there ongoing discussions and debates in activist circles about France's nuclear deterrent and its possible strategic uses?

– No, these debates are not – yet – taking place among activists, who are not necessarily in a position to have such discussions. There is justified political distrust toward our government, especially given France's post- and neo-colonial history. Both this distrust and our necessary independence from the government make it hard to imagine how a radical, anti-capitalist organization like ours would ask Macron to use "his bomb" in the name of vaguely defined common interests. Journalists have questioned Macron about the French nuclear deterrent in a context of growing uncertainties surrounding the United States' commitments: while he has not "ruled out" a form of European "mutualization" of France's nuclear arsenal, he has insisted that command would remain under French control.

However, current discussions about "security" should extend far beyond nuclear deterrence. For instance: How should the military and police forces evolve? How can we exercise civilian, democratic control over their actions? The growing influence of far-right ideas within the French police force is particularly alarming. Likewise, the European left urgently needs to consider what a progressive, "alter-globalist" approach to "European defense" might look like. The ongoing crisis in global and European social forums has caused significant delay in this area, but there are efforts underway to revive a "European alternative public sphere." This

movement is essential, and we must support it to address these multidimensional “security” issues. I am a participant of a newly formed working group in France comprising left-wing “alter-globalist” activists working on these questions and committed to defending equal social and political rights – both individual, collective, and across national borders.

– Security issues do not solely concern international relations: the ultra-right, for instance, resort to threats, “attacks on the Arabs,” and even murders. What options does the left have to counter the rise of the far-right, which is one of this decade’s most serious challenges?

– Here too, it is crucial to examine how such factors as state structures of “legal violence,” the justice system, and the rise of fascist private militias interact in each country. Much depends on who is in power and the nature of current social struggles. Historically – and likely in the future – the key factor has been the ability of mass organizations, involving both men and women, to self-organize and unite in self-defense while conducting information and denunciation campaigns in the media. This topic is a central point of discussion within the “European alternative political space” that is currently being (re)built.

– What does it mean for the contemporary left to engage in international politics?

– Environmental threats are just as serious as attacks on social rights, with the poor being the most affected. The “contemporary left” is diverse and currently grappling with issues that weaken its capacity to respond to urgent problems. These issues stem from a series of crises: the crisis of countries that once pursued a socialist project – if not a reality – and those who identified with it, be that in Europe, China, or Cuba; the crisis of social-democratic movements, which have largely given up on transforming capitalist societies; and the crisis within the radical left, which often

struggles, for diverse reasons, to offer viable alternatives to the system it criticizes and sometimes indulges in dogmatic, sectarian “vanguard” positions.

These widespread crises have also impacted the global and continental social forums working to invent new transnational modes of operation and action in a rapidly changing world-system. All these difficulties have led to significant political concessions and, at times, acceptance of a “lesser evil” logic. However, valuable assets persist across all the leftist currents I mentioned and beyond. From the radical left to the new social, feminist, eco-socialist, and antiracist movements, there is a wealth of accumulated experience and past struggles. While criticizing “vanguardism” is important when it attempts to substitute itself for social movements, it is equally important to reinforce pluralistic, democratic, international cooperation among anti-capitalist groups. These connections are currently limited, but they are vital for achieving a broad, pluralistic understanding of past challenges and mistakes we made.

It is crucial to progress forward by building strong grassroots international networks that focus on concrete issues. The European Network in Solidarity with Ukraine and the [BDS \(Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions\)](#) campaign in support of the Palestinian cause demonstrate that this is possible. Likewise, we need campaigns that address feminist, anti-racist, social justice, and environmental issues, which are essential to reestablishing a multi-issue, alternative space for rethinking globalization. This vision is taking shape in Europe, and while there is no magic solution, it is clear that failing to move in this direction will only leave us vulnerable to the rising threat of the far-right.

20 November 2024

Source: [Posle Media](#).

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Trump's Second Term – Now is the Time for a Global Fightback – Statement from Anti Capitalist Resistance

The following statement on the US Presidential Elections has been issued by the comrades of Anti*Capitalist Resistance and has been reproduced as a contribution to how we should respond to the Trump victory here in Scotland. For further information about Anti*Capitalist Resistance visit their website at <https://anticapitalistresistance.org/>

Donald Trump won a second US presidency on 6 November 2024. The Republican Party is now in almost total control of US establishment politics as they also made gains in the Senate, giving them control of the entire legislature, the presidency and the Supreme Court. It is a victory for the US Plutocrats and Oligarchs, Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, the crypto-fanatics and west-coast Tech Bros. Trumpism is part of the global counter-revolutionary wave we see with far-right populists, authoritarians, semi-fascists and libertarians taking power in countries around the world. What we are seeing is a process of a general shift to the far-right caused by neoliberalism and

the collapse in the post-war liberal consensus that it has brought about. Trumpism is the same trend that produced Modi in India, Duterte in the Philippines, Meloni in Italy and so on.

But this victory, in particular, is a disaster for billions around the planet. The power of US imperialism to act or not act is still a decisive factor in global politics.

A second Trump presidency will be as chaotic and vile as the first. Only now his key intellectual backers will be much clearer on what they want to get out of it. Project 2025 is a blueprint for an authoritarian USA; it includes the proposals to sack thousands of government employees and place the rest of the US government bureaucracy under central presidential control. Elimination of the Department of Education to allow state-level control of curricula. It involves Rolling back transgender healthcare and social rights, making trans existence almost untenable in some states. It means the elimination of federal protections for gender equality, sexual orientation and reproductive rights. It will almost certainly prevent abortion pills from being sent through the post, which is the number one way people get abortions in the USA. We will see the mainstreaming of "conversations" about disenfranchising women. It also involves slashing funding for renewable energy research and development, increasing energy production and scrapping targets for carbon reduction.

Whether Trump's promise to be a dictator on day one and use the military against political opponents was hot air for electioneering or not is unknown. But that he ran such a reactionary campaign and got such a decisive vote reveals something about the growth of far-right populist ideas. We know that both he and his Vice President JD Vance recently endorsed a book called *Unhumans*, [a manifesto for the mass murder of left-wing activists](#) along the lines of Pinochet in Chile. This reveals the fascist kernel of neoliberal politics, which has come full circle.

This defeat largely rests on the wretched politics and failed strategy of the Democrats. It is clear that the Democrats are not even a dented shield against the growth of the far right; they actively feed the problem. They were business as usual in a period of anxiety and division.

They ran a campaign against a populist who was appealing to 'the common people' by instead focusing on the virtue of the establishment – constantly repeating that Trump was a felon as if there are not millions of felons in the USA in a corrupt and unfair judicial system who might see in him a persecuted martyr. The Democrats' fixation on the law courts to undermine him before the election failed utterly and added to his populist credentials. They preferred a campaign from the centre, focusing on celebrity endorsement, winning over middle ground Republicans, and parading with Liz Cheney. They appealed to the belief that the US is a country of equal opportunity and post-racism when it palpably isn't.

Trump and his supporters see through this. They know it is a lie. They prefer bullish, macho posturing, might makes right, freedom from consequence. The Democrats focussed in the last few weeks on labelling Trump a fascist – the response from his supporters was either a shrug or to embrace the fact that he wound up the liberals so much. Trump is a cypher for all the most selfish and reactionary views in US society, but the Democrats were no alternative. His movement crystallised a view of the USA that rejects equality and embraces domination. His movement is not foreign to the US body politics; it is rooted in it.

The global counter-revolutionary wave is largely a reaction to the gains of the post-war era – the advances made by women, Black people, the LGBTQIA+ community and others. Trump appealed especially to white people and young men, to Christian nationalist far right and tech bro supporters of Elon Musk. He also picked up votes from the Arab American community that turned on the Democrats for their funding of

Israel's genocide in Gaza (although Trump will pursue the same policy). But he also drew support from a [significant number of Black people](#) (meaning people of colour) and women, those who reject the liberal establishment and want to resolve the contradictions of American society by embracing its supremacist values. Some of the US Black population also backs mass deportations of recently arrived immigrants if it drives down prices and improves wages (as Trump claims). That is the point of populism; it combines contradictions and appeals to different people in different ways while claiming to provide simple answers to complex questions and denying meaningful change.

There will be considerable contradictions in his populist programme. Trump promised a carbon fossil fuel bonanza to drive down energy bill costs and tackle inflation, but he also wants tariffs on imports to strengthen US industry, which will drive up prices. He seems unlikely to deliver better living standards and more jobs for US citizens, especially with massive public sector cuts. But we also have to be wary of assuming that people primarily vote on economic grounds – the modern political landscape is far more complicated and riven by ideological divisions rather than simple financial calculations.

His indication that he will withdraw support from Ukraine and 'end the war there' almost certainly means that Russia's imperial annexation will be allowed to proceed. What this means for the broader region as Putin continues his expansionist project remains to be seen. Certainly, the emergence of a more multipolar world will propel us closer to a third world war at some stage. For the Palestinians, it also means more slaughter and defeat, Trump has been clear with Netanyahu that the far right leadership of Israel can "do whatever they need to do" to win.

The need for continued resistance goes without question. There will be many people feeling hopeless or full of despair right

now, and that is exactly what the far right and fascists want. They take sadistic pleasure in the defeats they inflict on the 'woke' and on the left. But politics is determined by struggles for power and counter-power, building mass coalitions of resistance, identifying the weak points in the enemy's side and mobilising forces to shatter their strength.

ACR is in total solidarity with those in the USA who reject this authoritarian turn and want to fight for a better world. We know the next few years will be difficult, but our movement has faced difficult times before. We know things will get worse before they get better. But we also know that we can argue for a world beyond capitalism, imperialism, and militarism, based on a society that provides for everyone and is sustainable with the environment. Runaway global warming is already with us, as is the worldwide strengthening of the far right; the two are linked. And politics does not end at the ballot box – that is another lie the Democrats relied on. Power comes from our organisation and resilience. We fight for a revolutionary change. Our role is to be part of the international fightback to change the world, to reclaim the future and build a better society for everyone!

Building Internationalism from Below in a Multi-Polar World – afternoon school 27 April 2024 Glasgow

A day conference organised by the [Republican Socialist Platform](#) on 2pm-5pm , Saturday 27th April 2024, [Renfield](#)

[Centre, 260 Bath Street, Glasgow G2 4JP](#)

Building Internationalism from Below in a Multi-Polar World.

Book here:
<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/building-internationalism-from-below-in-a-multipolar-world-tickets-858894254837>

Please note this event was rescheduled from 23 March due to speaker illness

Hear from Prof Gilbert Achcar, author of 'The New Cold War', and speakers from the Palestinian, Kurdish and Ukrainian solidarity movements.

The [Republican Socialist Platform](#) invites friends to discuss 'Building Internationalism from Below in a Multipolar World' in Glasgow on **Saturday 27th April 2024, 2pm-5pm.**

Our main speaker is **Professor Gilbert Achcar**, professor of development studies and international relations at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London.

His many books, published in a total of 15 languages, include:

- *The Clash of Barbarisms: The Making of the New World Disorder* (2002, 2006);
- *Perilous Power: The Middle East and U.S. Foreign Policy*, co-authored with Noam Chomsky (2007, 2008);
- *The Arabs and the Holocaust: The Arab-Israeli War of Narratives* (2010);
- *Marxism, Orientalism, Cosmopolitanism* (2013);
- *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising* (2013); and
- *Morbid Symptoms: Relapse in the Arab Uprising* (2016).

Most recently, Professor Achcar is the author of [The New Cold](#)

[War: The US, Russia and China – From Kosovo to Ukraine](#), which was published in 2023.

On the day, we will also be joined by speakers from the Palestinian, Kurdish and Ukrainian solidarity movements to provide an update on the current state of these struggles and what we can do to support them.

This event is free to attend, but we welcome donations to help us cover the costs of arranging speakers and the venue.

This public event will be governed by the RSP's [comradely conduct and care](#) policy.

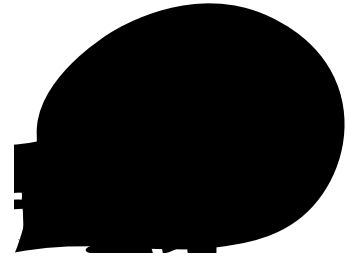
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Anti-Fascists Demand Freedom for Zaragoza Six

Jennifer Debs writes for [Heckle.Scot](#) about the campaign to free anti-fascist activists in the Spanish state.

If the Scottish independence movement has a sense of internationalism, then events in that blob of disgruntled nations called ‘Spain’ tend to loom largest in our minds. [Heckle](#) readers are aware, I’m sure, of how the cause of Catalunya is eagerly identified with the cause of Scotland – one need only attend any independence march to see that evidenced in the Catalan colours among the mass of flags. In a way, this is a kind of Scottish modification of the traditional “philo-hispanism” of the left, our movement’s continuing identification with the history of the Spanish Republic, the international brigades, workers’ power in Barcelona, and the long clandestine struggle against Franco and his regime.

Even so, for all our sympathy with the brave crowds who confronted the Guardia Civil during the 2017 Catalan referendum, our support for persecuted pro-independence politicians, and our disgust at the zombie Francoism of the Spanish government, there are some urgent causes from the

peninsula that could do with greater awareness among Scottish workers. Take the case of the Zaragoza Six, a group of anti-fascist activists arrested and imprisoned on trumped-up charges after a protest against the far-right Vox party in 2019.

Just for taking to the streets to oppose the rising threat of fascism in the Spanish state, the Zaragoza Six are facing prison sentences. Theirs has been a years-long battle for freedom since the initial arrests, a story of trials, verdicts, appeals, and yet more trials, with three of the group now having entered prison as of April 16th, and one more set to enter prison on April 24th. These four comrades will each be serving a sentence of four years and nine months, and that on top of heavy fines.

As anti-fascists facing punishment, the cause of the Z6 demands the enthusiastic support of the Scottish left. Not only have we witnessed fascist political organisations making a comeback in the anti-refugee protests at Erskine, but far-right public order and culture war politics lead the way in the Conservative Party, with the government taking aim at refugees, climate protesters, striking workers, Palestine activists and transgender people. The danger is in the streets, but also in the halls of government. The Spanish context, with the role played by both Vox and by state repression, therefore warrants our close attention – our national situations are two facets of a wider phenomenon.



In order to find out more, I reached out to the Z6 campaign to see if I could interview anyone and bring their story to an audience over here. They were happy to speak to [Heckle](#), and so Javitxu Aijon, one of the Six, got in touch with me to speak over a video call. My discussion with Javitxu took place when he was still free, but I am sad to say that as you are reading this now, he is behind bars.

I began by asking Javitxu who the Zaragoza Six are, and about their case. Essentially, Javitxu said, they are just six people who were arrested following a demonstration against a meeting of the far-right Vox party at Zaragoza's auditorium on 17th January 2019. Just one month prior to the demo, Vox had entered the Andalusian parliament, "so there was a popular impression of the rise of the far right, and the danger of that- machismo, racism, xenophobia," Javitxu explained. "In that protest there were a lot of people who weren't in formal political movements," he continued, including himself among their number. Javitxu said he had previously been in the Podemos party in 2018, and had left-wing views, but that he wasn't really organised at that point. In all, 200 young anti-fascists protested against Vox on the 17th, facing violent attacks from the police in the process.

After the demonstration was over, six young people, four adults and two minors, all of them under 24 years of age, were arrested at random in the surrounding area. The police made their choices based on the look of their targets' clothing – indeed, one of the six did not even attend the anti-Vox protest. Four of the six, Javitxu alongside them, were detained when police entered a bar close to the site of the demonstration. In Javitxu's case, he simply saw a minor being arrested in the bar, and when he tried to point this out to the police officer and tell him to be careful, he was grabbed and detained too. He asked the officers why he was being arrested, but didn't get much of a response: "Their only answer was that I was in the protest, so maybe I had done something." This was an arrest on pure suspicion, on assumed guilt.

And the crimes for which this haphazard bunch of arrestees, one of whom wasn't even present at a protest, stood accused? Public disorder, and assaulting a police officer. These were the charges on which the Z6 faced trial in the Provincial Court of Zaragoza, with a sentence of six years in prison for the four adults, one year of probation for the two minors, and a fine of €11,000 being handed down in January 2021. This conviction was, however, based on the sole evidence of the testimony of the police officers, with witnesses and evidence that could prove the innocence of the Z6 being ignored. Crucially, security footage caught by University of Zaragoza CCTV cameras shows the violence at the protest, but the footage does not show any of the Z6 involved in fights with the police at any point. However, this footage was not admitted as evidence by the judge.

Following the initial judgment, the sentence was then increased by the High Court of Justice of Aragon to seven years for the four adults in October 2021. Javitxu explained that a sentence of this length for anti-fascist activism is unheard of; typically, arrested anti-fascists receive

sentences of two or three years. The Z6 appealed this decision to the supreme court, and the appeal process dragged on with no decision until this year, when the supreme court finally decided on the aforementioned sentence of four years and nine months, plus fines. Even if the jail-time has been reduced, the fact that innocent anti-fascists are being imprisoned at all is a tremendous blow to the left, and a victory for both the far right and the repressive apparatus of the state.

“Francoism never went away. There is no real democracy in Spain.”

Beyond the police narrative of events, I wanted to get Javitxu's perspective on the reasons for the arrests and the sentences, and to discuss the significance of the criminalisation of his and his co-defendants' political activity. In Javitxu's opinion, “they want us in jail because we have a problem with police hierarchy and far-right movements. They are linked.” Indeed, Javitxu contends that the police are very close to far-right movements in the Spanish state. Furthermore, he feels that the Z6 have been hit with such heavy jail-time specifically to send a message to other protest movements. Javitxu pointed out that the protest in 2019 was the first anti-fascist protest he had seen in Zaragoza with new people who weren't just part of the pre-existing movements of the left, fresh people who saw a danger in far-right ideas – and of course, fresh layers of society taking part in protests is dangerous to the status quo, dangerous to the capitalist state. Adding to this, Javitxu outlined a repressive wave in motion throughout the Spanish state in recent years, with the arrest of the Catalan rapper Pablo Hasel for criticism of the monarchy serving as a prime example.

Javitxu dates this repressive wave from late 2017 and the

state backlash against Catalan independence referendum. He argues that the Spanish government is afraid of the number of people who took to the streets to fight for Catalan independence, and that it wants to try and clamp down on future mass movements. In the context of this, abnormally harsh sentences for protesters opposing the far right appear as a weapon for dispersing and defusing a protest movement before it can cohere. Indeed, when I spoke of the courts as a capitalist class weapon, Javitxu agreed with me. “Francoism never went away. There is no real democracy in Spain.”



The situation now is bleak. This means that the question of how the movement fights back against the convictions is crucial, so I naturally wanted to know what Javitxu thought about the issue. His answer was keeping up pressure, continuing the fight: “If you want to stop the repressive machine in, for example, the housing movement, and the bank are going to throw you out of your house, then there must be a movement to avoid the eviction. So if you want to end the repression of this movement, you need to stop more evictions. If you want to stop the repression of the workers’ movement, you need to strike more, protest more.”

For Javitxu, there is no solid border between the struggle in the courts and in the streets – indeed, for him the question of liberty is a political one, which requires an organised

response. "I think if you want to fight back against repression, you need more of a political movement." He pointed to the example of the Z6 solidarity campaign so far, which has gathered the support of the political parties, trade unions and movements of the left, as well as musicians and actors, and which has continued to protest and agitate for a total amnesty.

Of course, with the dire turn events have taken, the need for a political support campaign has only deepened, as has the necessity of internationalising the campaign and getting support from workers' and popular movements across the world. If pressure can be brought to bear on the Spanish government on multiple fronts, it will be to the benefit of the Z6.

The question of the movement's response naturally entails another: What next for the anti-fascist movement in the Spanish state? Javitxu felt that the main problem of anti-fascism currently is that "there are not enough people involved. The anti-fascist movement needs to do more to influence popular opinion." He also pointed out a problem with how the anti-fascist movement has traditionally operated: "I think there are people that still think the far right are just skinhead Nazis who are in the streets with knives and so on. It's really different, the way the far right are organising themselves right now. There are Nazis with a skinhead aesthetic, but they are not the majority of the far-right movement right now. They are not the imminent danger. Vox for example, I think there is a difference in how they do politics."

Javitxu pointed out that while Vox might hate groups like LGBT people and immigrants, the party is much more careful in how it expresses its ideas about these groups. It does not call for violence openly in the way a neo-Nazi gang would, but rather Vox seeks to influence and sway public opinion, to bring in parts of the traditional conservative voter base. In Javitxu's view, the anti-fascist movement needs to find a way

to combat this more “official” form of fascism. This dilemma is reminiscent of our own situation here in Scotland and the wider UK, where our anti-fascists may be able to outnumber and kick the fascists out of towns and cities on a good day, but where far-right ideas spur government policy regardless and receive silence, or even approval, from the Labour Party.

I ended our call by asking what the Scottish workers’ movement can do to support the Z6. Javitxu felt that the best way for people in Scotland to support the Z6 is, first and foremost, to spread the word: “It’s really important at the moment for this to be known about.” The campaign for an amnesty for the prisoners will be continuing, so Scottish workers need to keep up to date and show solidarity where they can. If you can bring up the cause of the Z6 in your trade union and organisational branch meetings and encourage them to contact the campaign and get involved, then please do so. And of course, there is currently [a fundraiser](#) to cover both the fines and the legal costs of the Z6 case. Please donate if you can, and spread it in your groups and networks.

Javitxu also wanted to underline to my readers that “if they know someone who is in some kind of trial, not to let him or her fight this alone. The most important support they can give to any victim of repression is emotional support.” We have cases here in Scotland that are in need of this kind of comradeship, like the Starmer Two, a pair of Palestine protesters arrested for demonstrating against Keir Starmer in December last year. Comrades bearing the brunt of police repression could always use a friend and a helping hand.

When we raise the call of freedom for the Zaragoza Six, the old struggles live anew in our words. We remember the names of friends and martyrs, class war prisoners old and new: John Maclean, Nicola Sacco, Bartolomeo Vanzetti, George Jackson, Angela Davis, Abdullah Öcalan. We remember the love, hope, rage and solidarity that fired, and fires, hearts in streets all across the world in cause of their liberty. And we fondly

recall the words of the great American socialist Eugene Debs, another victim of capitalist persecution, who said: "While there is a lower class I am of it, while there is a criminal class I am of it, while there is a soul in prison I am not free."

As for Javitxu himself, he remains defiant. Throughout our conversation he was adamant that he will continue to participate in anti-repression movements, and that his experience with the courts has only made him firmer in his resolve. He wants to show others what the judicial system does to people, and to express himself to others who are facing repression from the state.

"I had passed from a lot of states of depression because of this. I think that these are thoughts that are normal. After the second trial, I really wanted to abandon social movements, to go away, to disappear. And it's this that they want. They want us to surrender, give up, and not to fight for a better world, a better situation for our comrades, friends, family. I think if someone is living this kind of thing, like trials for fighting for a better world, maybe, maybe, they are on the right side of history. I did nothing wrong, my conscience is peaceful. For now, I have no problems. If I go to jail, it will be years to study politics, to form myself, to be a better militant for the movement, to change this shit, this judicial system, this political system."

All that remains to be said is that Javitxu Aijon and the Zaragoza Six are comrades in need. They deserve our support and assistance.

For them, for all political prisoners – tenacity, courage and fury!

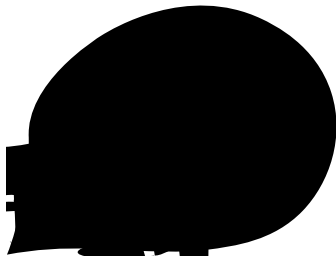
Free the Zaragoza Six!

You can keep in touch with the Z6 campaign at these links:

- [Fundraiser campaign for the Z6.](#)
- Campaign email address: contacto@libertad6dezaragoza.info
- [The campaign's website](#) has a manifesto with a section for signatures from supporters at the bottom of the page.

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Photos from [Heckle.Scot](#)

Portugal Election – Far Right Surges

First results

Party	% 2024	% 2022	% 2019
PS (Socialist Party)	28.6 77	41.68 120 seats	36.4
AD (Democratic Alliance: ,PSD/CDS/PPM Centre Right)	29.49 79	27.8 77 seats	27.8
Chega (Enough:neo-fascist)	18.06 48	7.15 12 seats	1.3
Iniciativa Liberal (pro business)	5.08 8	4.98 8 seats	1.3
Bloco Esquerda (radical left)	4.46 5	4.46 5 seats	9.5
CDU (PCP:Communist) +green front)	3.3 4	4.39 6 seats	6.3
CDS (right-wing)	n/a in AD	1.61	4.2
PAN (animal rights)	1.93 1	1.53 1 seat	3.3
Livre (Free, green pro-EC)	3.26 4	1.28 1 seat	1.1

Chega [*Enough!*], the far-right party led by ex-TV football pundit Andre Ventura, was the big winner of the night, increasing its votes by over ten points but quadrupling its seats to 48. It now competes as the third major party, way ahead of the rest of the field. The biggest loser is the PS

[Socialist Party] which led the last two governments; it lost 13% of its vote and 43 seats. On the other hand, due mostly to the rise of Chega, the mainstream right of centre alliance, the AD (Democratic Alliance), which had been the main parliamentary opposition, only edged up by barely two points, with just two more seats. Even this small advantage could be altered once the overseas votes are counted. The pro-business, neo-liberal IL (Liberal Initiative) held on to its 8 seats.

To the left of the PS Livre (Free) a pro-European Greenish party nearly tripled its vote and went from one to four seats. The radical left Bloco Esquerda held on to exactly its last score and keeps its 5 MPs. However the PCP (Communist) lost a percentage point and two seats.

Government

Soon after the first projections, when the AD advantage was bigger, the PS representative accepted that the AD should form the government and they would go into opposition. The margin is wafer-thin although the previous governing party has clearly lost the most support. It is likely that the President will ask the AD to try and form a government.

Luis Montenegro has ruled out a government coalition with Chega even though the numbers are there. He has said that “no means no”, and has dubbed Ventura’s views as “xenophobic, racist, populist and excessively demagogic.” Probably the neo-liberal IL would join an AD government but their seats do not take the AD past 116 required. A lot depends on the PS sticking to its early position, already signposted in the campaign, that it would allow a minority AD government to be established. In that eventuality PS abstentions would mean AD would not require Chega votes to form a government. Given the final figures the PS could demand some political concessions or red lines from an AD government and perhaps anticipate new elections at some point. Certainly if the PS were not to be

accommodating then the AD could change its position on an alliance with Chega.



Andre Ventura Photo:
Esquerda net

The Right

Chega, with a fifth of the seats, now has a substantial political and material basis for further growth. Ventura has consistently says he wants to form a government with the AD. Unlike in Italy there was no pre-election coalition between his party and the AD. Ventura repeatedly declares he is not neo-fascist or far right. He originally was an activist in the PSD, the main party of the AD. His main campaign slogan was to "*Clean up Portugal.*" He railed against the two party caste that has ruled Portugal for 50 years since the end of the dictatorship.

The Costa government fell because of corruption in his leadership group. It has been prevalent for many years. I remember going on a tennis holiday in the Algarve and discovered that the huge hotel and golf complex development there had involved bribes and kickbacks for politicians. So a campaign centred on kicking out the corrupt caste has proved effective.

Ventura outlined a whole raft of new laws and actions to weed

out corruption – seizing assets, defining a new crime of illicit enrichment. AD failed to capitalise on the PS government failure to deal with low wages, declining health services and soaring housing costs because it was seen as a co-manager of a corrupt system. The previous right-led government had carried out hard austerity policies. Chega appears to have taken votes from both the AD and the PS.

The other part of Ventura's clean-up is his racist offensive against immigrants and the Roma community. He proposes restricting immigration and creating a new crime of illegal residence. Over recent decades Portugal has gone from a country of net emigration to net immigration. Around 13% of the population come from migrant backgrounds. 70% of the population identify as White.

Chega also defends what it calls the traditional family and attacks women and LGBTQ+ rights.

If you combine this reality with the problems of inequality and austerity and the inadequate response of any governments to deal with these issues then you can see how Chega is able to blame migrants for the cost of living crisis or lack of housing. Chega's big advance has taken place under the second PS government which has not continued some of the progressive policies it enacted during his first government when the radical left parties, the Bloco and the PCP had enabled its formation on condition it carried out such a programme.

Today being excluded from government could provide the conditions for Chega to further grow. An AD government permitted to govern by the PS would provide further confirmation of its claim that the two party system is a stitch up against the people. If there were to be a more formal programmatic agreement that could create an even greater opening. The AD might still want Chega votes to pass legislation if the PS opposes specific laws. Ventura has said he has contacts with PSD people and one tactic will be to step

up pressure on their MPs to be more open to an agreement with Chega. We are seeing this scenario of far right parties pulling mainstream right parties to more extreme positions or working to create internal splits elsewhere in Europe.

Chega has important financial supporters. During the campaign the Civic Front exposed how it relied more on unnamed private backers than the official state funds for political parties. The Chega surge is part of the general rise of the far right or neo fascists in Europe and globally. This “creeping fascism” is pulling the mainstream right-of-centre parties to more extreme policies too. Already, leaders of Vox, the Spanish state neo-fascists and other far right leaders in Europe are sending in their congratulations to Ventura.

Bloco

The [Bloco](#) campaign focussed on putting forward radical measures on wages, health and housing as well as defending migrants, women and LGBTQ+ rights and calling on solidarity with Palestine. Unlike the PCP it has managed to maintain its electoral support and five seats. It also campaigned to stop the rise of Chega and a right wing government by proposing a new left wing agreement similar to the first Costa government, where it would give limited external support without taking ministerial posts. Clearly the failure to increase its support and the PS defeat meant this option is off the table. In this respect, the left as a whole has been pushed back in these elections.

In her first reaction to the results, Bloco leader Joana Mortágua, who was re-elected in Setúbal, said that they “confirm a shift to the right”, as a result of a “negative assessment, which we share, of how a PS government with an absolute majority delivered.” As for the Bloco’s result, by keeping the parliamentary group and increasing the vote compared to 2022, “it’s a sign that there’s confidence in the

Bloco for whatever the political situation: whether it's to form a majority or to be a determined and fierce opposition to the right."

Livre (Free) a pro-European party with green credentials was the winner among the left-of-centre parties, tripling its vote and going from one to four MPs. Perhaps it is one reason why the Bloco did not succeed in significantly increasing its vote. It wins votes in the big urban areas and among similar demographics as the Bloco.

Austerity

Portugal remains one of the poorest and unequal countries in Europe, it is 24th in the Social Justice index in the EU. It has the world's fourth highest number of citizens over 65 years, 21.8% of the population. Recent governments have not protected the living standards of senior citizens. Rental costs have soared for ordinary people. One factor is the uncontrolled promotion of tourism means an explosion of Airbnb lets in cities like Lisbon and Porto which increases rental values. The gains of a national health service set up after the revolution 50 years ago have been very much eroded.

Now that even the social liberal left are out of power, defending social gains and the living standards of working people will need increased mobilisations in the workplaces and communities. increased polarisation and instability could increase rather than decrease with these election results.

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Bloco promises to be “the most combative opposition to the right”

In her election night statement, Mariana Mortágua emphasized that despite the turn to the right in the electoral results, the Bloco managed to resist, maintaining its mandates and with more votes than in 2022.

The Left Bloc coordinator’s reaction to the results of the legislative elections came at a time when “the parliamentary situation is still not entirely clear”, given the close result between the PS and PSD that could be altered by the emigration votes.

Mariana Mortágua said that the shift to the right resulting from this Sunday’s elections “is a reflection of the failure of two years of disastrous politics by the PS’s absolute majority”.

LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS RESULT IN A SHIFT TO THE RIGHT

But despite this shift, she emphasized that “the Bloc resisted and increased its votes by around 30,000. It stood firm in these elections, we kept all our seats”. And it is with this strength that “we will be part of any solution that removes the right from government,” she continued.

In this election, the Bloc re-elected two MPs in Lisbon (Mariana Mortágua and Fabian Figueiredo) and Porto (Marisa Matias and José Soeiro) and re-elected Joana Mortágua in Setúbal.

“I want the people of the left to know that they will have in the Bloc the most combative opposition to the right,” said the

Bloc coordinator, promising to contribute to “building an alternative to the left to defend our people”.

11 March 2024

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<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article8445>

Translated by *International Viewpoint* from *Esquerda Net*-><https://www.esquerda.net/artigo/bloco-promete-fazer-oposicao-mais-combativa-direita/90138>].

Main photo: <https://www.bloco.org/>

We can never forget Palestine

The latest post on [MedyaNew](#) by Sarah Glynn, Scottish Kurdish rights activist, talking on the relevance of Gaza to the Kurdish struggle and video on Twitter/X.

Sarah Glynn, herself an anti-Zionist Jew, discusses the relevance of Gaza to the Kurdish struggle. She states that the Palestinians of Gaza are undergoing a genocide. Israel’s attack on Gaza will have a major international impact, as well as a direct effect on the power balance in the Middle East, Glynn says. Both Palestinians and Kurds suffer

oppression under occupation, and the oppressors attempt to undermine a historic solidarity between the oppressed, the columnist warns, while celebrating the success of the Kurdish Freedom Movement as a model of peaceful coexistence in the fractured multi-ethnic region.

Sarah Glynn

□ [@sarahrglynn](#) | Social scientist Sarah Glynn links the Palestinian cause and the Kurdish movement, in terms of occupation, oppression and resistance. [#Palestine](#) | [#Occupation](#) | [#Genocide](#)

□ <https://t.co/0eHRGxSApz> pic.twitter.com/jTc3WnMbeN

– MedyaNews (@1MedyaNews) [March 11, 2024](#)

There is little that can be said about Palestine that has not already been said. There are no words left to describe the horror of the images daily streamed from Gaza, the brutality of the Israeli government that is inflicting this horror, and the depraved callousness of the international politicians who are enabling it. We are living through an epoch-changing moment, but I want to talk here about its specific relevance to the Kurds and the Kurdish struggle, and why no Kurd can ever forget Palestine. Some of these reasons are universal ones, others are specifically Kurdish.

The first reason is a simple one. The Palestinians of Gaza are undergoing a genocide, and nothing can ever justify that – not morally, and [not legally either](#). This genocide is being committed brazenly in the full view of the whole world and

with the complicity of international governments; only the biggest of mass mobilisations can stop it.

Second, the impact of what is happening in Palestine will be of huge global importance. It raises vital questions about the nature and feasibility of international law, and feeds into the changing balance of world power. The repeated exposure of Western, and especially American, hypocrisy will have international implications.

Third, more specifically, Israel's attack on Gaza is having a direct effect on the balance of forces in the Middle East. What is happening in Palestine impacts every part of Kurdistan. In North and East Syria, Kurds fighting ISIS have a [tactical alliance with the United States](#) (an uncomfortable position to be in) and both have come under fire from pro-Iranian militias under the banner of the Axis of Resistance. In Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is trying to present himself as the leading defender of the Palestinians (even while still trading with Israel and enabling the passage of [over 40% of Israel's oil](#) supplies that come from Azerbaijan). In Iraq, America's support for Israel is putting US forces under increasing pressure to leave the country. And in Iran, the regime is using Gaza to strengthen their position on the international stage, and to present themselves as on the right side of history. All this is in addition to the [serious danger](#) of the fighting spreading to other parts of the Middle East.

Fourth, both Palestinians and Kurds suffer oppression from occupying powers, and they have historically show solidarity with each other's struggles. Turkey and Israel share a similar colonial and ruthless approach to the main 'other' ethnic group over which they attempt to maintain control. Both deny basic rights and freedoms, including the right of self-determination. Both are quick to brand any-and-all resistance as 'terrorism', and to use this to justify brutal suppression. Both have no qualms about extending their classification of

terrorists to include a whole population, and subjecting that population to collective punishment, including the destruction of homes and displacement of long-established communities. Both carry out aggressive invasions under the pretence of defence. Statements put out by Presidents Erdoğan and Netanyahu are [almost interchangeable](#), if you just swap “Kurds” with “Palestinians”.

Historically, there was strong mutual support between the PKK and leftist groups in the PLO. The Palestinians helped train the PKK guerrillas, and thirteen PKK guerrillas died fighting against the Israeli occupation of Lebanon. Connections have been kept up by the Kurdish Freedom Movement more generally. Leyla Khaled of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) is a supporter of the pro-Kurdish leftist People’s Democratic Party (HDP, now the DEM Party), and draws parallels between the Palestinian and Kurdish struggles and between the oppressions that both peoples face. At the HDP’s 2018 congress, she [condemned](#) Turkey’s invasion of Afrîn, and the following year she [visited](#) hunger-striking MP, Leyla Güven, and supported the hunger strikers’ call for an end to the isolation of Abdullah Öcalan.

At the same time, and this is my fifth point, there is pressure to destroy Kurdish-Palestinian solidarity – a destruction that would only benefit the oppressors. While Erdoğan pretends to be a friend of the Palestinians, Zionists pretend to be friends of the Kurds.

Zionists also portray everything that is happening now as being a response to the 7 October attack by Hamas, rather than the reality which is that it is part of a 75-year history of Zionist settler colonialism, 56 years of Israeli occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, and sixteen years of Israel’s blockade that turned Gaza into a vast concentration camp. Then – led by Netanyahu – they are insisting that Hamas is equivalent to ISIS – which they are not.

Hamas came to control Gaza because Israel refused to work honestly with the older secular Palestinian organisations, reneging on every agreement that the Palestinians conceded to. They undermined the PLO and destroyed their credibility, and at the same time, they encouraged the growth of Hamas as a way to implement their own policy of “divide and rule”. (Abdullah Öcalan [warned](#) that Turkey was attempting to create similar destructive divisions among the Kurds through promotion of the far-right Kurdish Islamist group, HÜDA-PAR.)

Hamas is an Islamist organisation: they don't support the idea of the separation of religion and politics, but believe that all of life, including politics, should be informed by religion and in conformity with religious law. In addition, and this is a separate issue, they condone attacks on Israeli civilians as a method of struggle. However, no one can genuinely compare life in Gaza with life under ISIS. By contrast, legitimate comparisons can be and are made between life in Israel/Palestine and life under South African apartheid, or even life in 1930s Germany. And Netanyahu's Zionism builds its support through [a brutal distortion of Judaism](#) that is being used to justify the murder of Palestinian children.

As cannot be repeated too often, opposing genocide is a fundamental human duty, and does not imply support for Hamas. We should be seriously worried about the growth of politics dictated by religion – any religion – though the extent of Palestinian support for this is unknown and currently unknowable. And, irrespective of the contested details of what happened on 7 October, we must also condemn all attacks that target civilians, which cross a fundamental ethical red line. But we won't draw people away from Hamas by keeping silent on the cause of Palestinian freedom – and even Palestinian survival – because we don't like Hamas' ideology and methods.

And lastly, and this time positively, with its emphasis on peaceful coexistence through bottom-up democracy, the Kurdish

Freedom Movement can provide a model for a different way of understanding and organising society in this fractured multi-ethnic region. Outsiders cannot specify how others choose to organise their lives, but, as people look for a way out of this nightmare, they can be encouraged and emboldened by an example that has come out of Middle East society and has taken root where it might not have been thought possible.

Informed by Öcalan's philosophy, the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (of the region known as Rojava) promotes a bottom-up democracy where decisions are made as close to where people live as possible, where women's rights are actively supported and patriarchal relations discouraged, and where care is taken to involve all ethnic groups in organisation at all levels.

The administration recognises differences in culture and the importance of different cultures, and it enables people from those different cultures to work together. This week, in majority-Arab Raqqa – the city that ISIS made their capital – women are loudly and publicly celebrating international women's day. The focus on coexistence contrasts with the ethnic nationalism promoted by nation states, which Öcalan argues are an [intrinsically oppressive](#) form of organisation.

I am not a Kurd and cannot presume to speak for the Kurdish community. I speak only as a social scientist, and as a Jew who has long recognised Zionism as a colonial and racist project, and protested against it – as many Jews have done since Zionism was invented at the end of the nineteenth century. [Rather than ending the scourge](#) of antisemitism, Zionism has fuelled new oppressions, and now this unimaginable horror.

Experience and reading have taught me that struggles against oppression in different places are strengthened by mutual support, while absence of support strengthens the oppressors. And that every time one oppressive nation gets away with

impunity it encourages other oppressors.

I have also noted that the Kurdistan Communities Union – the umbrella body that includes the PKK and all the groups that follow Öcalan’s philosophy – has [expressed solidarity](#) with the Palestinian struggle while condemning the methods of Hamas, and that there have been [clear statements](#) from the DEM Party (formerly the HDP) calling for real support for the Palestinian people in place of Erdoğan’s hypocrisy.

As they both point out, the Kurdish movement, inspired by Öcalan, has a unique contribution to make to any future resolution of Middle East Politics, through a model of different communities working together. The movement has attempted to put Öcalan’s ideas into practice in North and East Syria, and sees this as an example for the whole of Syria, for the Middle East, and beyond. But it is an example that risks being lost and forgotten in the ongoing power struggles.

*Sarah Glynn is a writer and activist – check her [website](#) and follow her on [Twitter](#).

Republished from MedyaNews and Twitter/X
<https://medyanews.net/we-can-never-forget-palestine/>

**For the right to self-
determination of**

Palestinians, for the withdrawal of imperialist forces from the Middle East

The war in Gaza continues, with its procession of horrors, but also with significant solidarity mobilizations and significant resistance in Palestine. In an interview published by [International Viewpoint](#), Gilbert Achcar addresses this situation and the avenues for building resistance against Israel and its accomplices, the far right and imperialism.

Interview with Gilbert Achcar by Antoine Larrache, Inprecor.

What phase of the Israeli intervention are we in now?

Things are relatively clear in light of the military reports of the occupying forces. The most intensive bombing phase has been completed for the north and is being completed for the southern part. In the northern half and centre, the occupying forces have moved to the next phase, that of a so-called low-intensity war. In reality they are organizing a complete grid of the areas they have occupied in order to destroy the network of tunnels and search for fighters from Hamas and other organizations who are always in ambush and can emerge at any time, as long as the tunnels exist.

Israeli forces are increasingly under international pressure, particularly American, to move to this so-called low-intensity phase of combat. But this name is misleading because in reality low intensity is limited to bombing. The number of missiles and bombings by planes and drones will decrease since there is not much left to destroy in Gaza. They will move on to one-off interventions against groups of fighters who emerge here and there.

What followed on from 7 October was an absolutely devastating

bombing campaign that took on genocidal proportions: the wholesale destruction of a vast urban area inevitably resulted in the extermination of an incredible number of civilians. More than one per cent of Gaza's population was killed. For France, this would correspond to the frightening figure of 680,000 deaths!

Added to this is the expulsion of 90 per cent of the population from their places of residence. A good part of the Israeli right – which is an extreme right in a country where the Zionist left has been crushed – would like to expel them from the territory of Gaza to Egypt or elsewhere. Israel wants to ensure total military control of the territory, but that is an illusion: they will never succeed unless they kick everyone out. As long as there is a population in Gaza, there will be resistance to the occupation.

The drop in intensity of bombings on Gaza also allows Israel to raise its tone against Lebanon and Hezbollah. Zionist leaders are banking on the fact that part of Lebanon can be detached from Hezbollah for sectarian and political reasons. The threats are increasing day by day, with strong pressure for Hezbollah to withdraw to the north, to a distance from the border that Israel would deem acceptable. Otherwise, Israel threatens to inflict the fate of Gaza on part of Lebanon, in other words to raze the regions where Hezbollah is in a position of strength in the southern suburbs of the capital, in the south of the country, and also in the east, in the Bekaa.

What is the state of military resistance in Palestine?

In Gaza, resistance can continue in devastated areas as long as there are tunnels. A sort of underground city was built for the fighters. It's like a metro network, but the Gazan population cannot take refuge there, unlike what we saw in Europe during the Second World War or as we see today in Kiev, Ukraine. The tunnels dug by Hamas are for the exclusive use of

fighters.

Rockets continue to be launched from Gaza into Israeli towns, with Hamas and other groups trying to show that they are still active. Eradicating Hamas and all forms of resistance in Gaza is an impossible goal.

This is what leads the Israeli far right to say that we must empty the territory of its population, annex it, create Greater Israel from the Jordan to the sea and empty all this territory of Palestinians. The Israeli far right, including Likud, aspires to this. Netanyahu displays a more ambiguous official position due to his position as prime minister, but he keeps winking at this extremist perspective.

In the West Bank, the difference with Gaza is that the Palestinian Authority – which is in charge of the Palestinian populated areas in the West Bank – is exactly in the position of Vichy in relation to the German occupation. Mahmoud Abbas is the Petain of the Palestinians. There are organizations in the West Bank advocating armed struggle, such as Hamas and others, but what has attracted the most attention over the past year is the emergence of new groups of young people who are not affiliated – neither with Fatah, nor with Hamas, nor with any of the traditional organizations. In some refugee camps or towns, such as Jenin and Nablus, they have formed armed groups and carried out occasional operations against the occupying troops, which has led to massive reprisals.

Since 7 October, the occupying troops have been engaged in a mop-up campaign in the West Bank, a remake of the “Battle of Algiers”, with the added use of aviation for the first time since 2001. Added to this is the action of Zionist settlers who harass and kill. As we speak, there have been around 300 deaths in the West Bank. This is not comparable to the absolutely terrible massacre perpetrated in Gaza, but the Israeli far right wants to repeat it in the West Bank at the first opportunity. That said, contrary to what Hamas hoped, there was no widespread conflagration with an uprising of the

Palestinian population in the West Bank and inside the State of Israel in response to the Islamic movement's call. The reason is that the population of the West Bank is very aware of the disproportionate balance of military power. Unlike the Hamas soldiers in Gaza, where there has been no direct occupation force since 2005, the population of the West Bank comes into contact with the occupation forces on a daily basis and is directly confronted with the far right and the settlers. It knows that they are just waiting for an opportunity to repeat what was done in 1948, that is to say, to terrorize people and force them to flee from the territory. This explains why the West Bank has only moderately demonstrated its solidarity with Gaza.

What is the state of mobilizations in Israel?

The 7 October attack was a very strong shock, as was 11 September 2001 in the United States. Then there was its repeated use in the media. This shock continues to be exploited, with an endless series of testimonies in order to maintain a vengeful mobilization of the population. It was this type of campaign in the United States that allowed the Bush team to launch into the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. For now in Israel, this is also working, and the vast majority of Jewish-Israeli opinion supports the war.

A small anti-war minority denounces the genocide. We must salute its courage, because it faces complete rejection by its social environment. But what is striking is the virtual absence of mobilization by the Palestinian citizens of Israel, unlike in 2021, when there was a strong mobilization in solidarity with the start of the Intifada in the West Bank. This led to violent reactions from the Zionist far right in the country. In view of the hatred which has seized the Jewish-Israeli population after 7 October, if Palestinian citizens had tried to reproduce such a mobilization, the consequences would have been terrible.

This population suffers a very intimidating climate, with bullying, repression and censorship, which falls on them, worsening their status as second-class citizens. They are now pariahs in the eyes of much of Israeli society.

Why do you think there is not more action in Arab countries?

I belong to a generation that experienced the defeat of 1967 and its aftermath, then the 1970s which experienced very strong mobilizations. This time there were some big demonstrations in Arab countries, but no more than in Indonesia or Pakistan for example. In Jordan and Morocco, there were big demonstrations, but these countries did not even end their diplomatic relations with the State of Israel.

The relative weakness of the mobilizations can only be explained by the weight of the accumulated defeats. The Palestinian cause was weakened, in particular due to the divisions and the action of the Vichy-style Palestinian Authority, which allowed a certain number of Arab states to establish diplomatic relations with Israel.

But there are also the defeats of the two revolutionary shock waves that the region has experienced so far, in 2011 and 2019. When we observe the region today, the conclusion is sad: there is almost nothing left of the conquests of these two waves.

The last two countries where there were still gains from the popular movement are Tunisia and Sudan. Tunisia went from the dictatorship of Ben Ali to that of Kaïs Saïed, with perhaps an aspect of "farce" coming after the tragedy. In Sudan, the resistance committees had some success until last year, when the two factions of the old regime began a ruthless civil war in April. The international media does not talk much about it, especially in the West, despite the tens of thousands of deaths and the millions of displaced people, the sexual violence and everything else: the darker people's skin colour,

the less they talk about it. It is an immense tragedy, for which the resistance committees were not prepared. They do not have armed wings that would allow them to play a role in a situation of this type.

We can concretely see the impact of the defeats since the "Arab Spring": Syria, Yemen, Libya, and now Sudan, are in situations of civil war; in Egypt, Sissi established a dictatorship more brutal than that of Mubarak which the population had got rid of in 2011, and in Algeria the military restored order by seizing the opportunity offered by Covid, then it was Tunisia's turn...

All of this does not create a climate conducive to broad mobilizations which, in Cairo or other capitals, would attack Israel's diplomatic representations and force governments to break their ties with the Zionist state.

Is it relevant to conclude that if the Zionist extreme right's project is realized, Israel's influence will increase in the region?

The Israeli far right knows that the governments of the region pay very little attention to the Palestinian question, that a large part of them have already established official relations with Israel, and that they get along well between reactionary governments. Israel therefore does not feel the need to make concessions on this front. They know that the Saudi government is hypocritical, that it is on the path to establishing relations with them as the Emirates did. There is security and military cooperation between them against their common enemy, Iran.

The Israeli far right attracted into its fold, with the effect of October 7, a part of what was considered as centre-right. Today it is banking on the fact that the American administration, which made the mistake of providing unconditional support to Israel for its enterprise against

Gaza, has put itself in a position from which it can no longer retreat. Indeed, the United States has entered an electoral period, the Democrats are therefore in competition with the Republicans, and Trump will not fail to seize on the slightest disagreement that could arise between Israel and Washington to attack the Biden administration. The latter is in a weak position, it has put itself in a position from which it is no longer able to exert strong pressure on Israel's genocidal enterprise. There is a lot of hypocrisy in Blinken's speeches urging Israel to show greater "humanitarian" concern: he is taking people for idiots, in the full knowledge that the genocidal destruction and massacres in Gaza were only possible thanks to American support.

This war is the first joint Israeli-American war, the first war where the United States has been fully, from the beginning, a party to the operation, its stated goals, its weaponry and its financing.

In addition, the Israeli far right and Netanyahu are banking on a return of Trump to the American presidency, which would greatly facilitate their realization of a greater Israel.

This is why they constantly announce that the war will continue throughout the year 2024. This is inseparable from the fact that this year 2024 is an election year in the United States. They will exploit this opportunity to continue their military momentum. The threat is therefore very serious for Lebanon and the West Bank, the two potential targets of a future large-scale Zionist military campaign. The ongoing "low-intensity" "counter-insurgency" war in the West Bank may intensify and, in Lebanon, the limited exchange of bombings on both sides of the border risks turning into a large-scale operation .

In light of the experience of historical mobilizations on war, whether Vietnam, Iraq or the first Intifada, what are the most effective slogans to counter the Israeli offensive? Many people are wondering how to act, since we seem to be facing an

indestructible enemy.

The 7 October effect was exploited to the fullest by relying on what I called, after 11 September, “narcissistic compassion”, this compassion which is only exercised towards those who resemble you. In France, the parallel was immediately drawn between the rave party of October 7 and the Bataclan, so that people would identify with Israelis and put Hamas in the same category as the Islamic State.

Despite this, we have seen in Western countries a rise in the mobilization in solidarity with Gaza, which is however largely that of communities of immigrant origin from the Arab region or regions in sympathy with the Palestinian cause. Despite the absolute disproportion in the presentation of events in the media – for which a Palestinian death is much less important than an Israeli death – people realize the scale of the genocide underway. But, with the October 7 effect, the indignation is of a lesser magnitude than it should be in the face of a genocidal war of this type, which is taking place before the eyes of the whole world.

However, indignation is gaining ground and has begun to reverse the wave of October 7 in which voices of solidarity with Palestine were stifled by a campaign labeling the slightest expression of this solidarity as anti-Semitism, Nazism, etc.. We must now build for the long term, building on indignation at the genocide. What is happening in Gaza shows the reality of the State of Israel, governed by the far right for many years, an increasingly radical far right which took action by seizing the opportunity, using 7 October as the administration of George W. Bush had seized the opportunity of using 11 September to carry out actions that its members had been planning for a long time.

In terms of type of action, the BDS campaign is proven and effective. It must be continued and amplified. On the political level, we must emphasize the complicity of Western

governments – to varying degrees. We can understand the historical reasons for the attitude of the German ruling class, but the lessons they learned from the catastrophe of Nazism are very bad if they lead them to support a state which, although claiming to be Jewish, behaves more and more like the Nazis.

In France, Macron must have felt he had gone too far when he offered to participate in Israel's war on Gaza, and France has now distinguished itself from other European governments by supporting the call for a ceasefire. The procedure initiated by South Africa before the International Court of Justice on the question of genocide is also a point of support for pressure on governments.

We must also oppose arms deliveries to Israel, particularly in the United States, and highlight the hypocrisy and "double standards" of Western governments on the issue of Ukraine and that of Palestine. Their humanitarian and legal discourse on Ukraine collapsed like a pack of cards, especially when viewed from the Global South. Certainly, few people had any illusions, but now the double talk is quite blatant. This includes the qualification of genocide: it was quickly used for Ukraine even though what Russia has done there so far is of much less destructive and murderous intensity than what Israel has done in Gaza in three months.

A range of political themes makes it possible today to rebuild a truly consistent internationalist and anti-imperialist consciousness. The twinning of Ukraine and Gaza allows us to show that we are against any invasion, whether Russian, Israeli or American, and that as internationalists we are consistent in defending universal values such as peace, the rights of peoples, self-determination, etc.

Today there is room for numerous political education battles, confronted with the media, the reigning hypocrisy, and all the supporters of Israel or Moscow. This war of narratives is facilitated by the evidence of far-right sympathy for

Netanyahu and Putin. This also helps to show how anti-Semitism and Zionism complement each other. We must reverse the accusation equating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism by showing that, although it is true that certain anti-Semitic speeches disguise themselves as anti-Zionism, this is far from establishing permanent equality between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. However, it is necessary to emphasize the convergence between anti-Semitism and Zionism: the anti-Semitic extreme right of Europe and the United States, which wishes to get rid of the Jews, supports Zionism because it also advocates the fact that Jews must go to Israel rather than live in Europe or North America.

Regarding the slogans for solidarity with Gaza, today we must articulate the various questions that we have raised and which are first of all of a defensive nature: that is to say the need to stop the massacre, which is the top priority, therefore the call for an immediate ceasefire. But this is not enough, because stopping the fighting in the face of armed occupation of the entire territory obviously poses a problem. We must therefore also demand the immediate, and above all unconditional, withdrawal of the occupying troops. We must also demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Israel from all territories occupied since 1967.

It is a slogan which conforms to an optic that the vast majority of people can understand since international law considers these territories as occupied and therefore requires the end of their occupation and of any colonization put in place by the occupier. Likewise, international law recognizes to Palestinian refugees a right of return or compensation.

From there on, it is up to the Palestinians to decide what they want: the debate within the solidarity movement on one state or two states is often inappropriate in my opinion, because it is not in Paris, in London or New York that must be decided what is needed for the Palestinians. The solidarity movement must fight for the right to self-determination of the

Palestinian people in all its components. It is up to the Palestinians to decide what they want. For the moment, there is a Palestinian consensus on the demands for Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967, for the dismantling of settlements in the West Bank, for the destruction of the separation wall, for the right of return of refugees and for real equality for the Palestinian citizens of Israel. These are all democratic demands, which are understandable to everyone, and must be at the centre of the solidarity campaign with the Palestinian people.

Beyond that, in the realm of utopia, there is food for thought and debate, of course, but that is not what mass campaigns are built on, particularly in the emergency of a genocide. in progress.

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Gilbert Achcar will be the keynote speaker at: **Building Internationalism from Below in a Multi-Polar World**. A day conference organised by the [Republican Socialist Platform](#) on 11am to 4pm, Saturday 23rd March 2024, Renfield Centre, 260 Bath Street, Glasgow G2 4JP



*Gilbert Achcar grew up in Lebanon. He is currently Professor of Development Studies and International Relations at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London. A regular and historical contributor to the press of the [Fourth International](#), his books include *The Clash of Barbarisms. The Making of the New World Disorder (2006)*, *The Arabs and the Shoah. The Arab-Israeli War of Narrations (2012)*, *The People Wants. A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising (2022)*. His most recent book – *The New Cold War. United States, Russia and China, from Kosovo to Ukraine* was published in 2023. He is a member of [Anti*Capitalist Resistance in England & Cymru-Wales](#).*

Main Photo: Protesters for a ceasefire in Gaza fill Glasgow's Buchanan Street while the statue of former Scottish Labour leader Donald Dewar looks on (Mike Picken for ecosocialist.scot)

Ukrainians Haven't Been Forgotten

Connor Beaton writes for [Heckle.scot](#), publication of the [Republican Socialist Platform](#), on the recent day school in February 2024 organised by Ukraine Solidarity Campaign Scotland.



A landmark seminar organised by the [Ukraine Solidarity Campaign Scotland](#) (USCS) began on Saturday [3rd February 2024] before last with the uplifting news that public service union UNISON's Scottish council had just [voted unanimously to affiliate](#) to the relatively young organisation. With the war featuring less and less prominently in the media, this was welcomed as an encouraging signal that Scottish trade unionists have not forgotten about their Ukrainian counterparts as the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine looms.

Taking place under the title 'Ukraine's fight is our fight', the four-hour-long event in Edinburgh's Augustine United Church – which was [live-streamed in its entirety](#) – boasted an impressive range of speakers, many of whom were Ukrainian

socialists, trade unionists and environmentalists. This made the event a refreshing departure from many other left-wing forums in Scotland and the rest of these islands in which the war has tended to be discussed with very little, if any, input from or reference to the views of Ukrainians.

USCS was established in the immediate aftermath of the all-out invasion in February 2022, initially as an outgrowth of the longer-running London-based [Ukraine Solidarity Campaign](#) (USC) but increasingly functioning as an independent organisation in its own right.

It rejects the argument advanced by some sections of the left, particularly those in and around the Stop the War Campaign, that the war in Ukraine should be understood principally as a conflict between Russia and NATO in which socialists should be neutral; instead, taking its cue from [left-wing Ukrainians](#), it recognises that Ukraine is fighting a defensive war against Russian imperialism in which it deserves support from those who uphold the right of nations to self-determination.

This event, by far the most substantial and successful event organised by USCS in its short existence, served two purposes: firstly, to aid socialists in Scotland in better understanding the current situation in Ukraine and the impact of the war on Ukrainian workers, the economy and the environment; and secondly, to focus minds on how we can organise the most effective and practical solidarity from Scotland to Ukraine.

Pictured: Dr Taras Fedirko speaking at the USCS seminar in Edinburgh.



Radical perspectives

The day suitably began with a harrowing report from Olesia Briazgunova, international secretary of the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine (KPVU), who joined the event remotely from Kyiv. She set out a now-familiar description of the dual role of Ukrainian trade unions in supporting their members on the frontlines while also defending their interests against employers and the state, all against the backdrop of martial law which has made strikes and union rallies illegal. The KPVU has called on western governments to continue to provide economic, humanitarian and military aid to Ukraine (not an uncontroversial demand in trade unions here), to impose stronger sanctions on Russia and to use frozen Russian assets towards a “just reconstruction”.

Solidarity greetings were subsequently heard from Labour MSP Katy Clark, SNP MP Tommy Sheppard, Green MSP Ross Greer and PCS assistant general secretary John Moloney – a reflection of the broad nature of USCS, whose members consciously decided not to have a narrow focus on the trade union movement but to instead build support for Ukraine across Scotland’s trade unions, political parties and social movements.

An exceptionally good, if sobering, presentation was given by

Dr Taras Fedirko, a political and economic anthropologist at the University of Glasgow. He explained in clear terms the extent to which the Ukrainian economy is now overwhelmingly dependent on western aid. Ukraine's defence spending alone was greater in 2022 than the entire state budget in 2021; the country's annual tax revenue just about covers military salaries.

Even the International Monetary Fund (IMF), alarmed by this unsustainable reliance on other countries, has encouraged the previously libertarian Zelenskyy government to pursue progressive taxation (an irony observed by LSE's Luke Cooper in a [recent article](#) which Fedirko mentioned and endorsed).

Fedirko's presentation left an impression of two distinct paths open to Ukraine: one in which the massive labour shortages created by the war, combined with the expansion of the state and a turn towards progressive taxation, provides enough leverage to organised labour to push for a social-democratic reconstruction; or one in which Ukraine becomes an "Eastern European Israel" with a powerful military-industrial complex orienting the entire economy and society around confrontation with Russia. With well-paid British consultants among western experts deployed to Ukraine to shape economic strategy, there is an acute danger of the British and European left leaving the question of Ukraine's economic future uncontested and allowing the right to exclusively shape it.



Pictured: Iryna Zamuruieva speaking at the USCS seminar in Edinburgh.

Environmental crisis

A similarly thorough presentation by Iryna Zamururieva, an ecological activist based in Edinburgh, highlighted the scale of the environmental damage caused by the war, much of which will have a cross-generational impact. For example, up to 40% of Ukrainian land is now mined.

While the full extent of the damage can understandably not be determined until areas which are either occupied or the site of active conflict become safe for researchers to access, it has already been established that hundreds of species of animals and plants are [at risk of extinction](#) (alarming not least because biodiversity is [recognised as a bulwark against climate change](#)) while fresh water, already in short supply in Ukraine as a result of climate change, has been widely contaminated by destructive actions such as the [flooding of coal mines](#).

The destruction of the Kakhovka dam last June, leading to devastating flooding in the Kherson region, is perhaps the best known environmental disaster arising from the war in Ukraine. Zamuruieva pointed out, however, that the construction of the dam in the 1950s was also an environmental disaster, motivated in large part by the need for fresh water in Crimea during the deportation of the Tatars – a Russian colonial crime. She also highlighted other environmental disasters; in one case which received remarkably little publicity, [more than four million chickens died](#) at Europe's largest poultry farm after the occupation made it impossible to feed them.

With fossil fuels playing a significant role both in driving and funding the war, the Scottish climate movement forms a critical part of global anti-imperialist struggle, Zamuruieva

put across. She encouraged USCS supporters to attend [Climate Camp Scotland](#) this summer, as well as to pressure the Scottish Parliament to take more action; opportunities include Labour MSP Monica Lennon's [proposed bill on ecocide](#), and the Scottish Government's [ongoing consultation](#) on a national adaptation plan that also encompasses international action.

A more technical presentation on Ukraine's major environmental challenges was separately given by [Ecoaction](#), a Ukrainian NGO which is to receive a £400 donation from USCS – the group's first international donation.

A divided left

Very little of the day was dedicated to discussing the way in which the war has divided the left internationally, but where these came to the fore most clearly was in a session on self-determination led by Irish writer Conor Kostick, who has [previously written and delivered talks](#) about Ukraine and the politics of James Connolly.

Though at times veering too close to a speculative exercise along the lines of 'what would Connolly say if he were here today?', Kostick correctly pointed out that Connolly was prepared to accept arms from a rival imperialist power, i.e. the German Empire, in order to wage a struggle for national liberation against the British Empire. Condemning Ukrainians for soliciting and accepting arms from NATO countries may be a legitimate political position, he said, but those advocating for it can't claim they've derived their analysis from Connolly.

Neither can they claim to stand in the tradition of Lenin, added Mike Picken of [Ecosocialist.scot](#), highlighting the Bolshevik revolutionary's [writing on self-determination](#) and in particular his opposition to annexations ("because annexation violates the self-determination of nations, or, in other words, is a form of national oppression"). This did not appear

to convince Graham Campbell, now an SNP councillor, who said he had been a Leninist for almost all of his life but had since come to believe that the Soviet project was imperialist from the very beginning, owing to its suppression of Ukrainian self-determination and the subsequent Holodomor.

Leslie Cunningham, national organiser for Scotland in [rs21](#), put across [their position](#) that Ukraine has a right to obtain weapons from whoever is willing to supply them, but also that the UK should not provide them. Everyone in the room, including the rs21 comrades, seemed to accept this was a bit of a fudge.

Most socialist opponents of western arms supplies to Ukraine rely on the specious argument that these supplies are prolonging the war, and that ending these supplies would quickly result in peace. USCS's persuasive counter-argument, which could have been more clearly articulated from the platform on the day, is that it is up to Ukrainians to decide the extent to which they resist the Russian invasion and occupation, and when to pursue peace and on what terms. This argument was recently and very coherently made by Colin Turbett in the [Scottish Left Review](#).

Allan Armstrong, a member of the [Republican Socialist Platform](#) who has incidentally [written extensively](#) about Connolly and his politics, said a withdrawal of western support for Ukraine would inevitably lead to something resembling the Munich Agreement. Ukrainian independence is vastly preferable to the alternative seen in Donetsk, Luhansk or Chechnya, he said – fascism of a far more aggressive kind [than is seen](#) in the core of Russia.



Pictured: Ukrainian students and refugees carry a flag through Dundee city centre to mark the first anniversary of the Russian invasion in February 2023.

Building the movement

The biggest takeaway from this event is that USCS is capable of organising discussions of a remarkably high calibre, a great achievement particularly in the context of wider post-pandemic organisational challenges being faced by virtually all of the left in Scotland. There was a welcome sense of comfort with USCS's political breadth and good-natured debate flowed easily from this. It was great that printed materials from Ukrainian writers, including English editions of the Ukrainian left journal [Commons/Spilne](#), were on offer.

The second anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, landing on Saturday 24th February, will overlap with Palestine solidarity demonstrations in towns and cities across Scotland. There is a valuable opportunity here to connect the Ukrainian and Palestinian peoples' struggles through a self-determination framework, which USCS is uniquely positioned to do. USCS has already rightly supported Palestine solidarity

demonstrations in Scotland and distributed copies of the [Ukrainian letter of solidarity with Palestinian people](#). Efforts to place Ukrainian and Palestinian solidarity in competition with each other should be fiercely resisted. Demonstrations organised by Ukrainian communities in Scotland should be given whole-hearted support.

Looking further ahead, the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) and various trade union conferences will provide more opportunities for USCS to win affiliations from trade unions, which – while representing only one aspect of its work – will boost its capacity to organise political and practical support for Ukrainians.

There is a positive sense of momentum building in USCS. It is virtually alone on the Scottish left in answering the call for internationalist solidarity with Ukraine. Its success or failure will reverberate for a long time to come.

CONTRIBUTOR

Connor Beaton is a republican socialist based in Dundee, where he works as a journalist. He was one of tens of thousands of young people drawn into politics by the 2014 independence referendum campaign. He is now the secretary of the Republican Socialist Platform and a local organiser for the Radical Independence Campaign.

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Main photo: USCS activists supporting Ukrainians in Glasgow's George Square on the 2nd anniversary of the Russian invasion 24 Feb 2024 (Mike Picken for ecosocialist.scot)

Other photos: Connor Beaton for Heckle.scot

Launching a Major International Front Against the Extreme Right

[Eric Toussaint](#) of the the Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debts (CADTM) is interviewed at February's World Social Forum in Nepal on future plans for an international movement against the extreme right.

Éric Toussaint interviewed by Sergio Ferrari on he World Social Forum in Kathmandu, Nepal, 15-19 February 2024.

At the end of another edition of the World Social Forum (WSF) held in Kathmandu, Nepal, from February 15 to 19, it's time to take stock. "It was a very positive event for the region. But we need to move forward and promote concrete initiatives in a complex international context marked by the far-right offensive," says Belgian historian and economist Eric Toussaint. Founder and spokesman for the Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debts (CADTM), Toussaint took part in the WSF, where his organisation promoted seven events that were well attended.

Sergio Ferrari: *What is your assessment of this latest edition of the World Social Forum?*

Positive, but...

Éric Toussaint (ÉT): It was very positive, mainly due to the participation of very diverse popular sectors and some of those most oppressed. I'm referring in particular to the Dalits, the untouchable caste, the native and indigenous peoples, historically marginalised but highly organised, the trade union forces and many feminists from the working classes. The majority came from Nepal and India. The organisers counted more than 18,000 registrations (from over

90 countries), and at the opening march on Thursday, February 15, between 12 and 15,000 people took part. No fewer than 10,000 people attended the conferences, workshops and cultural activities each day. It was an excellent decision to come to Nepal. This is an incomparably better result than the WSF in Mexico in May 2022.

However, the WSF as such has not achieved the same level of participation as in the first decade of its existence since it was first held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2001. There were very few participants from Europe, Latin America, Africa or North America. In short, there was a good level of regional participation but a weak presence from other continents. This shows how difficult it is for the WSF to take global initiatives that have a real impact.

There is no mobilizing international dynamic

Sergio Ferrari: *Do you think the last major pre-pandemic gathering for the 2019 WSF in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil, was a success?*

ET: Not exactly. If we think about this edition in Salvador de Bahia, although it was well attended, it was essentially reduced to the north-east region with participation from a few other regions of Brazil. Unfortunately, the presence of other continents was weak in Salvador de Bahia.

Today we see a contradictory reality. On the one hand, the World Social Forum is no longer a real force of attraction and impetus. On the other hand, it is the only global space that still exists. That's why it's still important for international networks like the CADTM to take part.

I am convinced that if the WSF had real strength, such as we had in February 2003 when we called for major mobilisations for peace and against the war in Iraq, its power today would be significant, both in confronting the genocide in Palestine and in helping to build a broad check on the growth of the far

right that can be seen in many parts of the world.

When I say this, I am referring, among others, to Narendra Modi in India, a violent nationalist, anti-Islam and anti-Muslim; to Ferdinand Marcos Junior in the Philippines, heir not only to the family dictatorship but also to the repressive Rodrigo Duterte; and to the reactionary regression of the regime in Tunisia, increasingly similar to the former dictatorship of Ben Ali before the Arab Spring. In Europe, there are extremist, warmongering governments like Vladimir Putin's in Russia, Giorgia Meloni's in Italy, Viktor Orban's in Hungary and Ukraine's neo-liberal, pro-NATO right-wing government. I'm also thinking of the real threats posed by Chega, a new far-right party in Portugal that is aiming to win 20% of the vote, whereas it was absent from the electorate between 1975 and just three years ago; the possibility of a victory for Marine Le Pen in France in the next presidential elections; VOX in Spain; the electoral victory of the far-right party in the Netherlands; the advance of the AFD in Germany...

In Latin America, presidents such as Nayib Bukele in El Salvador or Javier Milei in Argentina have a more radical economic and social program than Pinochet himself in the Chilean dictatorship. All this in the global context of a possible electoral victory for Donald Trump in the forthcoming US presidential elections. Not to mention the fascist government of Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel, promoting a racist, genocidal and colonialist project.

In search of better proposals

Sergio Ferrari: *If the World Social Forum doesn't have the strength to be a force for impetus and union in a global reality that you describe as dramatic, the question is obvious: what do you think progressive sectors should do?*

ET: I think that the formula of a WSF with only social

movements and NGOs but without progressive political parties (as defined in the 2001 Charter of Principles) does not allow for an adequate fight against the extreme right. Faced with the rise of far-right and fascist projects, we need to look for a different kind of international convergence. With this in view, the CADTM, along with other social actors, has contacted the PSOL (Socialism and Freedom Party) and the PT (Workers' Party) in Porto Alegre, the birthplace of the World Social Forum since 2001, to propose the creation of an organising committee that would convene an international meeting in May to discuss the way forward, with a view to a major gathering in a year's time. With a broad vision to integrate social movements of all kinds—feminists, climate justice activists, progressive believers—with a view to reflecting on the best way to resist the far right. Major forces such as Brazil's Landless Workers Movement (MST) could play an active part in this. If they have achieved success in Brazil by breaking free from Jair Bolsonaro with a broad policy of political and social alliances, it is essential to draw concrete political lessons from this. The World Social Forum could continue, but we are convinced that a new framework of forces capable of remobilizing is needed.

Sergio Ferrari: *There are initiatives like the International Peoples' Alliance that are already thinking along these lines...*

ET: Of course, it should be involved and play a role. But we need a new, broader United Front initiative. We think that this first meeting could be convened in May 2024 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and it would be conceivable, for example, to have a strong presence from Argentina, radical left forces with the left of Peronism, trade union organisations such as the Central de Trabajadores de Argentina and even the CGT (Confederación General de Trabajadores) and very diverse social and feminist movements. This would be a first step towards a major conference in 2025 in Sao Paulo, for example, if the left-wing alliance (PT, PSOL, etc.) wins the municipal

against Erdoğan invitation

Kurds in Scotland and their supporters have protested at the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh against any invitation to Turkish state President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to visit Scotland, reports Mike Picken for ecosocialist.scot.

The apparent invitation arose after Scottish First Minister, and leader of the governing Scottish National Party (SNP), Humza Yousaf met briefly with the Turkish state President while they were both in Dubai in December 2023 for the COP28 summit. Kurds are angry that Erdoğan is using the Gaza crisis to launch military attacks on Kurdish populations inside both the Syrian and Iraqi state and continue his persecution and murderous policies towards the 10 million Kurds inside the Turkish state. In the Kurdish-led liberated region of Rojava in neighbouring Syria, Erdoğan has [committed exactly the same sort of brutal bombing and attacks on civilian infrastructure](#) that he accuses Israel of in Gaza.



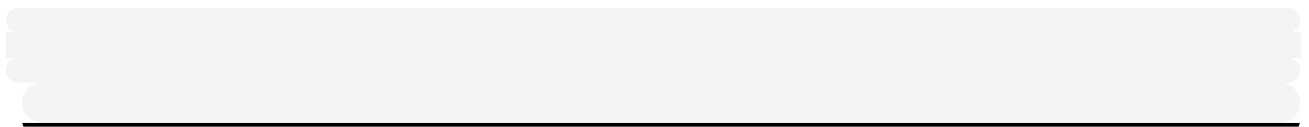
Damage caused by Turkish air attacks on civilian electricity infrastructure in Suwaydiyah North & East Syria. Photo: Rojava Information Center

So when news that Yousaf had invited Erdoğan to Scotland came out in the media in January 2024, Kurdish and solidarity organisations such as [Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan](#),

alongside trade unionists Mike Arnott of the Scottish TUC and Stephen Smellie of UNISON Scotland, moved swiftly to condemn the invitation by issuing a public letter of protest. The Kurdish community in Scotland organised a demonstration at the Scottish Parliament on 25 January to demand the SNP refuse to invite Erdoğan and instead condemn his regime's murderous policy against the Kurds. The protestor's views were recorded by progressive media outlet The Skotia on Instagram (video below) and the open letter of protest received [wide media coverage](#).



[View this post on Instagram](#)



A post shared by Media for a better Scotland. (@theskotia)

Prominent Glasgow SNP councillor Roza Salih, herself a refugee from Iraqi Kurdistan, had previously drawn attention to the matter in a post in December on Twitter/X in December, covered by The National daily newspaper:

“Humza being friendly and laughing with Erdogan is an offence to the Kurdish people”

Roza Salih, Scotland’s first refugee councillor, has criticised Humza Yousaf for shaking hands with the Turkish president <https://t.co/XHu2iH28P0>

– *The National (@ScotNational) [December 2, 2023](#)*

International Movement demands release of Öcalan on 25th Anniversary of his incarceration

Meanwhile the Kurdish movement internationally is organising a global mobilisation to demand the release of Kurdish political leader, **Abdullah Öcalan**, with demonstrations across Europe up to the **25th Anniversary** of his unjust imprisonment and solitary confinement by the Turkish state. An Internationalist Long March is poised to spotlight this anniversary, beginning in Basel-Switzerland on 10



February, and will include key events such as a conference in Strasbourg on 15 February and a pan-European demonstration in Cologne and Düsseldorf, Germany, on 17 February. SNP Westminster Member of Parliament, Tommy Sheppard, recently met with Öcalan's lawyers at the Council of Europe meeting and has written to UK government foreign secretary to call on him to take up Öcalan's incarceration by the Turkish government and demand his release (text below).

Text of Open Letter by Kurdish solidarity organisations and individuals on the invitation of Turkish president Erdoğan to Scotland

STATEMENT:

We, the undersigned, condemn the invitation that the First Minister of Scotland, Humza Yousaf, has made to Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The Turkish state's record on human rights abuses is well documented, both internally and externally. Women, ethnic minorities and migrants bear the brunt of its oppressive policies. In particular, the Turkish state continues a policy against the Kurdish people that seeks to suppress basic human rights and political autonomy through military force, legal repression, and assimilationist policies.

Erdogan's party destroys civilian infrastructure beyond Turkey's own borders for political leverage and to disempower an already economically disadvantaged population in Syria and Iraq. Yousaf's response to journalists was dismissive when challenged on this. We condemn the cooperation between

Erdogan and any segment of the British state. The First Minister's response to press questioning whether the invitation was "a good idea considering his treatment of the Kurds" was that "as a NATO ally", it was a legitimate invitation "if he was visiting the UK". This is hypocritical: The SNP positions itself as distinct from Westminster and with a more discerning eye towards human rights abuses and regional autonomy.

While Erdogan has been vocally supportive of Palestinians, 40% of oil imports to Israel come via Turkey, and the two governments have a long term and high value arms industry relationship that has been ongoing throughout the periods of intensification in Israeli attacks over the last decade. Erdogan does to the Kurds everything that he accuses Netanyahu of doing to the Palestinian people. Both Israel and Turkey have been crafting a Middle East where business and trade with western countries are more valuable than justice or freedom. The power to define terrorism and the legitimate use of violence are now highly developed tools to repress even the most basic self-determination of peoples.

From January 13th – 16th 2024, Turkish military forces carried out 224 ground and air strikes in north-eastern Syria, targeting agricultural and energy infrastructure such as oil fields. In nine locations, electric power stations were struck, which led to power outages and water supply issues that are currently affecting millions of people. This type of attack is a frequent but under reported reality and Erdogan is exploiting this moment when the world media is rightfully watching Gaza. The targeting of vital infrastructure is itself a war crime and these attacks are also an unprovoked act of aggression.

BAE Systems, Thales, Leonardo and other weapons manufacturing companies that have factories in Scotland supply both Israel and Turkey. In 2019, white phosphorous – banned for use as an incendiary chemical weapon – was reported to have been used

by the Turkish military in north-eastern Syria. An investigation at the time showed 70 British export licenses for phosphorous.

Domestically in Turkey, the political repression of the left-wing parliamentary party HDP has led to more than five thousand of its members being arrested, the stripping of MPs' parliamentary immunity and their imprisonment, and widespread implementation of the "trustee" system by Erdogan's party that forcibly removed all elected HDP mayors from office and replaced them with government-appointed officials. This has disproportionately affected the Kurdish people in Turkey, where attempts at democratic expression are crushed, and more than eight thousand Kurdish political prisoners are languishing in Turkish prisons. Kurdish language musicians, teachers and campaigners are often met with criminalisation – the Kurdish language is unrecognised by the Turkish parliament despite being the second most spoken language in the country, and language rights are linked to terrorism as a method of delegitimisation.

The UK government and the European Union countries have shrewdly wedded themselves to facilitating Erdogan's AKP government in exchange for the policing of Europe's land and sea borders and its imprisonment of displaced peoples subject to these "push-backs".

As residents of Scotland and members of human rights organisations, we request that the First Minister and the SNP condemn Erdogan and the AK Party for their actions. The targeting of civilian infrastructure and use of chemical weapons are war crimes, regardless of whether the state that does so is a NATO member.

We request Mr Yousaf's support in condemning these attacks on north-east Syria. We also ask him to assess the human rights abuses that the Kurdish peoples are subject to within the state borders of Turkey and that he supports the struggle for

the freedom of political prisoners in Turkey.

We are in a moment that requires brave leadership on myriad human rights abuses, the repression of the self-determination of peoples and the destruction of the earth, happening across the globe. We implore the First Minister and Scottish government, particularly in this moment, to resist shallow alliances that fail to look at the geo-political situation holistically. The moment demands an uncompromising acknowledgement of the colonial legacies of the current genocidal treatment of the Palestinian and Kurdish peoples.

We ask Mr Yousaf to meet with the Kurdish communities in Scotland and campaigners to discuss this issue. We believe that Scotland can do better and we would like to talk about how.

LIST OF SIGNATURES

Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan

Kurdish Community Scotland

Zagros Community Scotland

Women's Rights Delegation from Scotland to North and East Syria, May 2023

International Human Rights Delegation on political prisoners in Turkey, December 2023

Edinburgh University Justice for Palestine Society

Mike Arnott, President of Scottish Trades Union Congress

Stephen Smellie, Depute Convenor UNISON Scotland

International Solidarity Movement (ISM) – Scotland

**Text of Letter from SNP Westminster
MP Tommy Sheppard to UK government**

foreign secretary David Cameron

TOMMY SHEPPARD MP



*The Rt Hon Lord David Cameron
Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development
Affairs
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
King Charles Street
London
SW1A 2AH
26th January 2024*

Dear David

I am writing on behalf of several constituents to ask you to make representations to the Turkish Government in the case of Abdullah Ocalan.

You will know that Ocalan is regarded by millions of Kurds throughout the world as their leader and he is key to achieving a permanent and peaceful solution which respects the rights of the Kurds in Turkey and neighbouring countries.

He has been held in solitary confinement on the island prison of Imrali for almost 25 years. This is contrary to several judgements of European Court of Human Rights which have found the manner of his detention to be in violation of the statutes to prohibit torture.

As a UK member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, I met with Mr Ocalan's lawyers earlier this week. They tell me that he has been denied any communication with the outside world and any visits from his legal team for

almost three years now.

This case does great damage to Turkey's reputation and is an egregious breach of international human rights law. It is also a running sore and an insult to the many thousands of Kurdish people who have made this country their home.

I would ask you to take up this case with the Turkish authorities, demanding that Mr Ocalan be allowed access to his lawyers, that his isolation end, and that after a quarter of a century in solitary confinement, his case is reviewed, and plans made to end his incarceration.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

Tommy Sheppard

Member of Parliament for Edinburgh East

From Ukraine to Palestine – Occupation is a Crime

Ukraine socialist organisation, [Sotsialny Rukh](#) ('[Social Movement](#)') has published the following statement on the war against the Palestinian people in Gaza. The translation is by the [Ukraine Solidarity Campaign](#).

The Social Movement stands for a just peace in the Middle East, which requires the elimination of structural oppression of Palestinians and systemic violence against the civilian population. We also condemn the Iron Swords Operation launched by the far-right Netanyahu government in response to

the condemnable October 7 attacks and the war crimes being committed in its process.

The war in the Gaza Strip has been going on for more than two months.

The Social Movement stands for a just peace in the Middle East, to achieve which it is necessary to eliminate the structural oppression of Palestinians and systematic violence against the civilian population. Our organization condemns the bloody attack carried out on October 7, 2023 against the civilian population as part of the attack on Israel by the militarized Islamist movement Hamas. The brutal massacres of kibbutzim women, foreign workers, Bedouins and other civilians, which claimed more than a thousand lives, as well as the kidnapping of civilians as hostages, cannot have any justification.

However, we condemn the Iron Swords Operation launched by the far-right Netanyahu government in response to the October 7 attack and the war crimes being committed in its process. The actions of the Israeli army in the Gaza Strip are punitive against its entire population, about half of which are children. Israel has imposed a total siege on the Gaza Strip, which has been under an illegal Israeli-Egyptian blockade since 2007, preventing the supply of water, electricity, food and medicine to Gaza's more than 2 million people, turning it into "the world's largest open-air prison".



According to various data provided by international organizations, within a few weeks of this operation, up to 18,000 civilians, including 7,800 children were killed and another 50,000 people were injured; 85% of the nearly 2 million population of the Gaza Strip – were forced to flee their homes. More than 200 medical workers and more than 100 UN employees were among the dead. UN confirms that at least half of the population of Gaza is reduced to starvation. It seems unacceptable to justify the imposition of a humanitarian catastrophe and the terror of a powerful military machine against the civilian population under the pretext of a “war on terror”, as the Russians did in Ichkeria/Chechnya or the Americans did in Iraq.

Israel’s next military operation in the Gaza Strip is the exact opposite of an effective resolution of the conflict. Such a policy has been going on for decades, since the state of Israel, after confrontation with neighboring Arab countries, reinforced by British colonial policies, displaced hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their land, after which millions of their descendants were doomed to flee (events known as the Nakba – “catastrophe” in Arabic). The Israeli authorities continue to ignore numerous UN resolutions, the latest of which was adopted on October 27 by

the votes of 120 of the 193 member states in the General Assembly and called for a ceasefire. Reports from the UN and human rights organizations have repeatedly compared the segregation of Palestinians practiced by Israel to the apartheid regime in South Africa.

Israeli settlers, many of them militant fanatics, continue their policy of colonization and violence against the Palestinian population in the West Bank with the connivance of the Israeli authorities, who carry out the daily humiliation, arbitrary detention and killing of Palestinian men and **women {and children}??**. Even before this year's events, according to the calculations of the Israeli human rights organization Bezelem, since 2000, Israelis have killed more than 10,000 Palestinian men and women. Moreover, the general rule is the disproportionality of violence on the part of Israel, with which it responds even to exclusively peaceful protests. For example, during the suppression of the Palestinian **[Great March of Return]** to the wall blocking Gaza Israeli security forces killed 195 Palestinians, including 41 minors **[in a year since March 2018]** (data from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs). And in terms of the number of Palestinians killed in the West Bank, 2023 became a record year for the entire time that the UN has been keeping statistics (and this is as of October, when Israeli security forces killed more than a hundred people in this part of Palestine, which does not have any Hamas bases). The indifferent reaction of the world community, no more than "deep concern", led to the further despair of local residents in peaceful ways of resolving the conflict, which is what the fundamentalist forces are using.

The current Netanyahu government, also filled with reactionaries and religious fanatics who openly dehumanize the Palestinians and call for their murder and genocide, has gone even further than its predecessors. Israel itself at one time played a not insignificant role in supplanting the mainly

secular and non-violent resistance to the occupation among the Palestinians of the time of the first Intifada with a more right-wing, violent and fundamentalist variety. Netanyahu and his officials admitted that they have encouraged the reactionaries and religious fanatics from Hamas, because that weakened the Palestinian Authority, introduced additional discord into the condition of Palestinians and sabotaged the prospects of building a sovereign state for them.

This reckless policy did not change even after Egyptian, but also Israeli intelligence, current and retired military ranks warned of possible escalation as a result of the blockade and colonial policy. Thus, the former head of the Israeli Navy and the Shabak secret service, Ami Ayalon, warned that “when Palestinians see us destroying their homes, fear, frustration and hatred grow. These are the reasons that push people to terrorist organizations.”

Netanyahu, like other conservatives, constantly used the rhetoric of “defence against threats” to justify their attacks on democratic freedoms and further build-up of the security apparatus, which, however, did not avert the attacks of Hamas from Gaza but instead was preoccupied with terrorizing the Palestinians in the West Bank. After all, the never-ending spiral of violence has not and will not increase security for anyone except extreme conservative-nationalist forces. Such an atmosphere has already led to the most right-wing Knesset and government in Israel’s history. And the current war has provided an indulgence for the Netanyahu cabinet against which mass protests continued for most of 2023 (characteristically, a poll conducted on the eve of the escalation showed that the majority of the population of Gaza did not trust the Hamas movement, which more than a decade and a half ago after a civil conflict with Fatah established an authoritarian one-party government here).

At the same time, the mainstream of both leading parties of the main patron of Israel – the United States – demonstrated

an immediate readiness to provide unconditional military and diplomatic support for almost all actions of the Israeli government. Here, both the contrast with the hesitation regarding arms supplies to Ukraine and the desire of the most reactionary circles of the American ruling class – the right wing of the Republican Party – to finance the ethnic cleansing and adventures of the Netanyahu government at the expense of depriving Ukrainians of aid are notable. In this, the Trumpists are similar to many other far-right forces in the West: having many anti-Semites in their ranks, such parties at the same time protect the ability of both Israeli and Russian security forces to kill residents of Palestine and Ukraine with impunity.

What's more, Washington itself contributed to the current rise in tensions, supporting Israel's encroachment on Jerusalem as its capital exclusively since the Trump administration. Now the US is vetoing initiatives in the UN Security Council, such as Brazil's proposed provision of humanitarian corridors or the latest ceasefire resolution of December 8, which was voted for by 13 out of 15 members of the UN Security Council. As in the case of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, this once again proves that the permanent members of the UN should be deprived of their veto powers which paralyze the ability of the international community to stop the carnage.

Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine has increased the atmosphere of international tension and impunity, enabling the escalation of a series of conflicts that put entire communities on the brink of survival as already happened with the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh as a result of the aggressive actions of the Aliyev regime in September of this year. The current round of confrontation in the Middle East is of the same ilk and resulted in disturbing trends in the rest of the world, in particular, a surge in anti-Semitism and Islamophobia (up to attempted Jewish pogroms, such as in the North Caucasus controlled by Putin's Russia, armed attacks on

Palestinians such as the students in Vermont, or the murder of people such as the Palestinian boy in Chicago or the police shooting of Jewish tourists and a local guide in Egypt).

Unfortunately, the reaction of the Ukrainian authorities also reveals an extremely biased and one-sided approach: rightly condemning the attacks on civilians in Israel and honouring the dead, it at the same time prefers to ignore the dead civilians in Palestine. Despite the fact that Ukrainian diplomacy at the UN has consistently condemned the illegal occupation of Palestinian lands and other violations by Israel in almost all cases, whose authorities take an ambivalent position on the Russian occupation and provide the latest precedents to follow. Instead, the shameful rhetoric of demonizing Palestinians, declaring all of them, from infants to the elderly, as “terrorists” prevails in the Ukrainian media.

Yes, one should be aware that for many of the self-proclaimed “friends” of Palestine, whether they are well-known Hamas partners and sponsors, such as the authoritarian authorities of Qatar, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, or Russia (which maintained emphatically friendly relations with both the Netanyahu government and with Hamas), the tragedy of the Palestinian people is only a bargaining chip. But reducing the Palestinians to “proxies of Tehran and the Kremlin” in the domestic information space is as illiterate and outrageous a caricature as the “proxy” justification of Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Instead, it is in Ukraine that the suffering of the Palestinian people should be understood: there, too, the occupation by a state that possesses nuclear weapons and superiority in the armed forces continues, simply disregards UN resolutions and international law, denies the rights to subjectivity and resistance. The tragedy we are now experiencing should sharpen our sensitivity to similar human experiences in all corners of the world. The Ukrainian letter

of solidarity with the Palestinian people, posted on the platform of the “Spilne” magazine website, demonstrated such alternative voices to the official one, which affirm the universal right to self-determination and resistance to the occupation.

“How lonely are you, our loneliness, when they win their wars,” asked the Arab writer Hiba Kamal Abu Nada in her poem, when “your land is sold at auction, and the world is a free market... This is the age of ignorance, when no one will intercede for us.” The 32-year-old poet became one of the thousands of civilian victims of Israeli airstrikes this year. The duty of the world is not to leave the oppressed alone, especially when faced with the threat of their physical extermination. Not to put up with bombs and rockets flying at their heads. Neither in Ukraine nor in Palestine.

Therefore, the “Social Movement” calls for an immediate ceasefire and the admission of humanitarian aid to the region, and also expresses its support for the Palestinian people in their legitimate desire for a just and lasting peace.

Originally published by Ukraine Solidarity Campaign:
<https://ukrainesolidaritycampaign.org/2024/01/26/from-ukraine-to-palestine-occupation-is-a-crime/>

More information from: <https://rev.org.ua/english/>



USA Election 2024: Deform & Dysfunction

The Editors of USA socialist journal 'Against the Current' write on the forthcoming US Presidential election.

IN A POLARIZED, angry, anxiety-and-crisis-ridden United States of America, wide swathes of a fragmented and divided electorate find common ground at least on what they don't want: a 2024 repeat of a presidential election between Joe Biden and Donald Trump. Yet eleven months in advance – subject to change, but not easily – that spectacle is just what we'll get.

Such a prospect, along with Trump's criminal trials and Biden's policy stumbles, may help explain a peculiar popular climate of simultaneous political agitation and apathy. Many millions of voters including working-class people (aside from Trump cult loyalists) will find themselves voting for presidential candidates and political parties they despise the least, not for choices they actually like.

This malaise, rather than any hopeful excitement, also accounts for why the anti-vax and racist certified crackpot candidate Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. is polling as high as 24% as an independent, or why the rightwing Democratic Senator Joe Manchin might undertake a "No Labels" third-party campaign to "mobilize the middle" that could throw the election any which way.

No one should underestimate what a revived Trump presidency might mean – with his operatives' overt, already promised concentration/deportation camps to be constructed for asylum seekers, forced removals of students for pro-Palestinian activism, targeted attacks on the press, mass firings of government employees to be replaced by regime loyalists,

wholesale pardons for the January 6 aspiring insurrectionists, and who-knows-what chaos in imperialist global management.

The campaign of Trump's emerging leading Republican rival Nikki Haley has been endorsed (purchased) by the Koch Brothers' "Americans for Prosperity" (Plutocracy) outlet. This represents an attempt to consolidate a grossly reactionary, but more establishment neoconservative alternative to the runaway criminality of Trump and his prospective second term. That option would surely have appeal to much of the U.S. capitalist ruling class. (One rightwing commentator, Nolan Finley in the *Detroit News*, urges that Haley become the "No Labels" candidate.)

Activism and Ironies

To avoid a one-sided overly bleak portrayal, we should cite positive cases of social action that have made a difference. First, as we've discussed frequently, is the labor activist revival, culminating in union contracts with big gains for auto workers, at UPS, and steps forward in organizing places like Tesla and Amazon.

Second, at the present critical moment, is the outpouring in the streets demanding a ceasefire in Israel's war against Gaza and Palestine, which we discussed in our previous issue (*ATC* 227, "Catastrophe in Palestine and Israel: Apartheid on the Road to Genocide") and continue our coverage in the present issue.

Third is the continuing popular revulsion against the cynical and deeply evil anti-abortion extremism of the right wing, which is prepared to sacrifice women's lives to the "pro-life" cause, along with book bans and state-level voter suppression measures.

Such examples show that class and social movements continue – as also shown by myriad state, local and community struggles,

including around abortion, trans and housing justice among other issues. The fact that these are not generating much positive energy at the level of national electoral politics is one indication of a deformed and dysfunctional political system.

In this space we will not attempt to prognosticate, or chew over polling data, or (for the moment) seriously approach the prospects of an independent progressive alternative. The latter, critically important possibility must be a topic for future in-depth discussion. Here we want to explore some of the multiple ironies at the beginning of the electoral season.

If there's one policy arena where Biden-Harris administration should get at least passing marks and maybe some plaudits, it would be the general health of the post-pandemic economy. Yet that is exactly where polls show "greater confidence in the Republicans" – whose policies have been the most blatantly to enrich-the-rich, impoverish-the-poor, and run-up-deficits while pretending to be fiscally responsible.

It's an astonishing public-relations triumph of plutocracy posing as populism. Democratic pundits and operatives are visibly distressed that "Bidenomics" fails to garner the approval it deserves. The reasons for this apparent anomaly go far beyond its mediocre "messaging."

It's true that this administration came in with a Build Back Better program that had some inspiring, even transformative potential (even if much of it came cloaked in nationalist rhetoric about countering the rise of China). As it emerged from the desk of Bernie Sanders and the ambitions of Green New Dealers, the program included some serious federal spending – on infrastructure and energy transition – amounting to something like half the annual military budget.

Thanks to Senator Manchin among others, the best part of the program was trimmed back to what became the Inflation

Reduction Act. For example, pandemic-relief subsidies that cut U.S. childhood poverty in half – a very significant accomplishment in this brutally unequal society! – ran out. Thus in Manchin’s own state – according to official Census Bureau’s estimates, West Virginia’s child poverty rate – the highest in the nation – increased from 20.7% to 25.0% between 2021 and 2022.

Most important, the measurable benefits of the recovery flow overwhelmingly to the high-income layers of the population, who need them the least. Folks at lower-middle income or less levels see very little if any difference in their daily lives.

Inflation levels are well down from their brief eight-percent high point, but that still leaves prices of basic necessities far higher than they were – while the Federal Reserve’s interest-rate hikes that were ostensibly needed to “curb inflation” have themselves exacerbated a housing crisis that especially afflicts young people (and many limited-income senior citizens too).

The cumulative result is that macroeconomic statistics for the moment look reasonably good, but for many tens of millions of people the real-life economy doesn’t feel that way. That hurts the electoral prospects for an incumbent administration, i.e. for Biden in 2024 as it did for Trump in 2020.

Further Irony: Demographics

If there’s one factor that should be pushing the Republican Party toward permanent marginality even as it hurtles toward extreme-right lunacy, it’s that the United States is demographically becoming no longer a “white” country, and that younger generations are each more diverse than the previous one.

It’s precisely young, African American and other nonwhite and immigrant communities, and the LGBT and non-binary population,

who are the front-line targets of white-supremacist, Christian-nationalist and religious-right ideologies that thoroughly dominate today's Republican Party – including of course the Trump cult but not only that sector.

Yet it's precisely those younger, less white and less affluent sectors where the Democrats' presumptively overwhelming majorities are narrowing. Polls are showing nearly a quarter of African Americans preferring Trump over Biden, an astonishing (even if it turns out to be short-lived) index of disillusionment.

What's happened? Mainly, we think it's that the Democrats have overpromised and under-delivered real change – in terms of racial justice, student debt relief, immigration reform, tackling climate change, and more. Partly too, it was only a matter of time until the feeling of relief from the (first) Trump nightmare wore off.

To some extent, also, Biden's age and immovability present a bad look. But on key issues that are really hurting the Democrats' prospects in 2024, it's not Biden that's senile, but *American policy*.

This is particularly illustrated in the present Israeli genocidal war on Gaza. The crucial young sector of the Democrats' voter base is increasingly sympathetic to Palestine, alienated from the party's traditional unquestioning support of Israel, and no longer duped by feeble bleats about a long-dead "two-state solution." The December 1 resumption of the full-scale Israeli offensive, along with escalating murderous military and settler violence, accelerates that deepening and absolutely necessary disgust with Washington's active complicity in the massacre.

As for the Arab American and Palestinian communities, the fury over "Genocide Joe" Biden is difficult to describe if you haven't witnessed it. Leaders in communities like Dearborn,

Michigan, a key to the Democratic success in 2020, are openly vowing “we will never vote for Biden again even if the alternative is worse.” It’s impossible to say right now how this feeling will translate into votes or non-votes next November – keeping in mind the maxim that “all politics are local” – but the Democrats are willfully blind if they underestimate its importance.

Another factor that will require close further attention is the flood of bipartisan money from AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) and rightwing sources to defeat progressive, pro-Palestinian congressional representatives like Rashida Tlaib (MI), Cori Bush (MO) and Ilhan Omar (MN) in their primaries. AIPAC has been promising to throw \$20 million toward any candidate who’ll challenge Tlaib. Any Democratic leadership connivance in these efforts could have fatal electoral consequences.

Immigration Crisis

Another issue bedeviling the Biden administration, clearly, is the immigration and asylum crisis. This is a powerful case of imperialism creating a problem it can’t solve. The numbers of desperate refugees and asylum applicants seeking entry at the southern border are overwhelming U.S. and northern Mexican cities, towns and support networks attempting to shelter and feed them.

The refugee crisis is a thoroughly bipartisan product of decades of destructive policies that we’ve discussed in these pages: decades of “free trade” that’s wiped out much of family farming in Mexico, genocidal counterrevolutionary wars in Central America, economic sanctions that greatly contribute to the unraveling of Venezuela as well as Cuba, serial catastrophic interventions in Haiti, and more.

Worst of all, 50 years of an insane U.S. “war on drugs” could not have been more brilliantly designed to turn the drug trade

over to violent criminal cartels while shattering lives and communities in North America. On top of all this, the escalating effects of climate change are wiping out means of subsistence such as, for example, coffee crops in Honduras. We've noted before that desperate immigration journeys and calamities are global in scope, as the miseries in the Mediterranean and cruelties of the Italian, British and other European governments illustrate.

This crisis eats away at domestic confidence in the Biden administration's grip on policy, even though it's not of their making – and even though the “alternative” is the outright sadism of the Republicans.

A freshly passed Texas law enables local police to arrest suspected “illegals” on any or no pretext, and local courts to initiate detentions and deportations. In usurping clear federal jurisdiction over immigration, this law is so blatantly unconstitutional in its application, and so fascistic in its implications, that only the prevailing White Supremacy Court of the United States (WSCOTUS) majority would seem likely to uphold it. (The ACLU is mounting court challenges before the law takes effect in February.)

There remains one area where the right wing and the Republican Party seem determined to self-destruct: their drive to complete the banning and criminalizing of abortion in the United States. In one state after another, where the right to abortion comes to a choice by voters, it wins – decisively. The horrific implications of a Republican sweep of the White House and Congress will keep not only women but a big slice of the entire electorate on side with the Democrats. The Republican determination to continue a losing anti-abortion crusade is rooted in the centrality of that issue to the overall “culture war” assault on gender, racial and social literacy – in libraries, schools, college campuses, and everywhere else.

That specter might, just barely, preserve the Democrats' grip on power after a looming 2024 election choice that hardly anyone outside the Trump cult actually wants. That's a pretty weak reed to grasp, and certainly nothing for a progressive left to bank on. The struggle for an alternative must look elsewhere, beginning with the rising activism we've seen for labor, for Palestine, for immigration and reproductive justice!

January-February 2024, Against The Current 228

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<https://againstthecurrent.org/atc228/election-2024-deform-dysfunction/>

Graphic from Against the Current, title: 'The sequel – not by popular demand'

Bangladesh and the BKF, an overview: history, political situation, peasant struggles...

*This interview by Pierre Rousset (of [Europe Solidarity without Borders ESSF](#)) with **Badrul Alam**, president of the Bangladesh Krishok Federation (BKF), was conducted shortly before the parliamentary elections on January 7, 2024. The ballot predictably ended in victory for the Awami League, which won a large majority in the face of a boycott by the main opposition parties. However, the League was unable to secure a high turnout, which stood at around 40% of voters. Nevertheless, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina won a fifth term of office, her fourth consecutive since 2008. The opposition denounced the*

election as a "sham", with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party going so far as to accuse the government of ballot-box stuffing.

Pierre Rousset – Could you present Bangladesh, the country, for readers who know little about it?

Badrul Alam – Bangladesh achieved its national independence in 1971 through an all-out people's war against the Pakistani army and its collaborators in Bangladesh. 3 million people sacrificed their lives and 200,000 (two hundred thousand) women (mostly mothers and sisters) lost their chastity.

Formerly, Bangladesh was part of India during the British rule. British occupied undivided Bengal in the mid-18th century and continued occupying the entire India gradually. Concretely, the then British East India Company (EIC) took over power in 1757, killing Siraj ud-Doulah who was the Nawab of Bangal (Governor of a particular region: Bangla-Bihar-Odisa). It pillaged Bengal, destroyed the economic resources of the rural population. Famine became widespread between 1769 and 1773, causing the deaths of maybe up to 10 million people. Soon, Britain became the virtual ruler of Bangla-Bihar-Odisa. In 1857, widespread unrest led to a mass uprising against the EIC's rule and the authority of the British Crown. In 1857-1858, one hundred years later, Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India. The struggles for independence in the subcontinent were crushed in bloodshed. Queen Victoria established its direct colony and ruled for 190 years (including the company's 100 years' rules). In 1947, at the end of the WWII, the British handed over the power to native political entity dividing India into two countries -- India and Pakistan.

East Bangla became part of Pakistan with the new name of East Pakistan – as a province of Pakistan, even if the two parts of the newly formed Pakistan State were separated by some 1700 kilometres, had a different history and did not speak the same

language. British empire divided India on the basis of religion. They handed Pakistan to Muslim leaders and India to Hindus leaders. In this way, the greater Bengal or Bangla was split, its eastern part being included in Pakistan. After partition, West Pakistan started off with imposing a colonial style of rule on the eastern part. In every step they began to neglect Bengali people living in East Pakistan or East Bengal.

In order to strengthen their power and rule, they hatched a conspiracy against Bengali offering Urdu as one and only state language in the whole of Pakistan in 1948, just 8 months after the partition. Bengali people did not welcome their proposal; rather they strongly resisted any step in this regard. As a result, there was a blood shedding incident taking place in Bangladesh that claims several people's lives because of the shooting of Pakistani law and order forces in 1952. It was called "language moment".

In the following course of events, Bengali people built the hope of independence in their heart, resulting in many movements and struggles. They were people's uprising in 1969, when the Iron Man Field Marshal Ayub Khan, then President of Pakistan, was forced to quit power. Moreover, in a national election in 1970, Bangladesh bagged majority seats with a landslide victory but, unfortunately, the power was not handed over to the elected representatives. In the course of time, in 1971 Bangladesh declared the independence of the country, rejecting Pakistan. Consequently, Pakistan invaded Bangladesh on 26 March 1971 in the name of Operation Search Light. Actually, they brutally committed genocide on Bengali people. The Bengali people did not sit idle, they started guerrilla fight against the well-equipped army of Pakistan. Through a nine-month tough struggle Pakistani army were defeated, and forced to surrender and leave the country on 16 December 1971. On 3 December 1971, the Indian army had joined their forces with the freedom fighter to accelerate the victory. Bangladesh gained a place as a new independent country in the world map.

Now Bangladesh has completed 53 years of its independence. It is still a low-income group country, with the identity of poor economic performance, although there is a propaganda campaign, from the ruling class, according to which Bangladesh is getting up and will be developed country by 2041.

Bangladesh has big potential agricultural sector, which claims great nursing/attention for its actual development, but this sector is always neglected and the people who are engaged within this sector (peasants) are also neglected. Poverty, pauperization, marginalization, malnutrition and exclusion are common phenomenon in the rural agricultural area. Basically, the development of the country is rested on how importance is laid on agriculture.

Whereas all ruling governments since the independence laid emphasis on the structural development of the country, which always brings sufferings to the lives and livelihood of the ordinary people.

Geography: Located in South Asia, to the north of the Gulf of Bengal, it is virtually landlocked within India, sharing a small border with Burma. Most of the country is taken up by the Ganges delta, a fertile plain, but very flat and prone to tropical cyclones, floods and monsoons, and threatened by rising sea levels due to global warming.

Demographics: With a surface area of 147,570 km² and a population of 170 million, it is one of the most densely populated countries in the world (1,286 inhabitants/km²).

Language: Bengali

Independence: 1971

Capital: Dhaka



Geography of Bangladesh – Wikipedia. en.wikipedia.org

Let's start with the evolution of the situation in Bangladesh...

The bourgeoisie election campaign is going on. This election is going to be controversial, as before, as the major opposition parties will not join the election. It will be a monolithic election, somehow. The opposition is still in the street, demanding that the elections be under the responsibility of a caretaker government. More than 5000 people have been put in jail by the government, calling them obstacles to the elections. The ruling party will hold the

election at any cost.

The election commission called off all political activities until election is over. We have 2 or 3 activities during this period. We are wondering how to perform those.

Last year, Bangladesh experienced a major political crisis. The situation of the ruling party was very precarious. The onslaught of monetary and price inflation made life miserable for the population. The price of basic necessities soared. People couldn't eat the food they needed and wanted. The poor, the lower-middle class and the middle class were forced to cut their family expenses drastically. Since the start of COVID 19 in 2020, ordinary people's incomes have fallen, and this is still the case today. The number of poor people has risen alarmingly. However, the government claims that a person's average income per year is US\$2,800, which is not true. It makes propaganda about its structural development projects, such as building bridges, subways and elevated expressways, but it doesn't think about people's concrete lives, their suffering, their problems of life and death.

Health crisis is still with us. The dengue and cold situation have become an issue of concern in the country. About 2000 people died in 2023 already. Every day people are dying of dengue.



Bangladesh Krishok Federation Kurigram District Unit General Secretary Mokaddes

Hossain gave away warm cloth to poor people

Last year, the social situation was not very good either. There were numerous cases of child abuse, repression of women, murder and enforced disappearance throughout the country.

Many emigrant workers returned home from Middle Eastern countries, and many emigrant women returned with empty pockets, as they were unable to tolerate the sexual torture inflicted on them by male family members there. Women work mainly as domestic servants in the Middle East.

How would you characterize the present political regime?

Last two terms, it came to power by electoral manoeuvring and engineering. They are also going to hold a same type of election this year, with no participation of major opposition groups. The regime is already branded as a fascist-like one by many. With this election it will not get rid of this brand. Rather it will be possible to call it fascists in a way people have not ever seen before.

Presently, the party in power is called the Bangladesh Awami League. It led the country's liberation war in 1971. Sheikh Hasina is the Prime Minister, with executive power. She is the daughter of the veteran leader Bango Bandhu (title given by the people before the independence of the country) Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was the key leader of the Awami League during and after the independence struggle.

In effect, after the independence, Sheikh Muzibur Rahaman wanted to concentrate all power in his hand, forming a new party which was to be the only party, banning all other political parties in the country. The regime also banned all dailies except for four newspapers.

This one-party system rule and the killing of freedom of expression were not accepted by the then standing forces, religious groups and some leftist groups as well. Consequently, conspiracy started at national and international level that resulted in the pathetic history of Muzib's family. He was killed with his family members, except for his daughters, Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana.

On top of that, twice, martial law was declared. One was declared in 1976 by General Ziaur Rahman, who as the husband of the opposition leader Begum Khaleda Zia, and another by General Ershad in 1982. Since 1991, a bourgeois democratic system became more functional, with all its weakness, after the collapse of Ershad regime. Till to date, bourgeoisie governance with a parliamentary system is in effect with general elections. Therefore, in short, it can be said that the characteristic of the government in Bangladesh is bourgeois till now.

What has been the social responses to the crisis?

The last couple of years, several movements were built to control the prices of basic necessities, but nothing changed. The main bourgeois opposition tried to overthrow the current

government, but failed. In order to oust the government, they resorted to various actions. All their efforts went in vain. Different people's organizations and social movements also raised their voice, especially against price increases.

The government is always suppressing people's movement. Most of the time, it takes stern measures against protesters. Arrest, torture, confinement, false case are the tools of the government to suppress the movements. Forced disappearance of opposition has also become part of its political culture.

Despite receiving a huge financial stimulation from the government, the biggest industrial sector, the garment one, has become vulnerable due to COVID 19 and different adverse measures taken by the importing countries. As a result, there is an unstable situation in the garment industries around the question of increase in salary of the workers, who are mostly women. The garment workers would get paid with 8300/- as a monthly salary. They claimed 23000/- in view of price inflation, increase in living standard, etc. In face of such a strong movement, the government was compelled to concede the demands, but it approved only a 12500/- monthly wage. The representatives of garments' organisation got frustrated by the government decision, but accepted it for the time being. However, many garments organisation rejected the decisions, telling it unrealistic. Whatever, the government decision came into effect.

The money laundering has become a big issue in the country. Quite a number of people who are rich and super rich siphoned off incredible amount of money to different countries using so called tax haven countries. They built luxurious houses and other establishments in Canada, Malaysia, UAE (United Arab Emirate), and so on. The last couple of years people have raised their voice very strongly, demanding to stop illicit capital flight, which is against the people's interest.

After every national election, there are attacks against the

minority groups in Bangladesh. The miscreants and criminals set fire to, and vandalize the houses and properties of the minority. They torture, injure and kill minority people. Sometimes, they create such a situation of panic that minority people are forced to leave their homestead and land property. It took place hundreds of times since independence in 1971. However, the minority people never got justice.

What is the state of the Left?

The left-wing Marxist-Leninist forces [which in Bangladesh means non-Maoist] have remained poorly organized. They have come together in different platforms with different strategies. Some Marxist-Leninist-Maoist parties are still part of the ruling party alliance. There are some groups of leftists who are trying to get organized with the commitment of people's uprising but they are very weak in happening that.

The Trotskyist party has organized various street actions against the corruption of bureaucrats and business leaders.

It is true that there is an ebb tide in the left movement in the country, but the positive side, a source of optimism, is that they still exist in a country where religious fundamentalism is always active to destabilize left forces. According to fundamentalists Left people are Kafer (anti-religion). They should not have a right to living in a Muslim country like Bangladesh. They might feel happy if they could kill the leftist people. They target not only the political left, but also the progressive intellectuals.

Leftist political parties and groups are financially very poor in Bangladesh. This is because of the fact that they cannot raise funding from the public owing to the Anti-extortionist Act, which is being used by the government randomly. Moreover, the poor people are the main force of the leftist people and they have lost their capacity to give dues to the party, although they have still real support to give.

Some leftist people left politics for their very survival and joined different NGOs. Some were engaged in business, though it is very challenging for them as a political activist. Some left politics for ever from the ground frustration. Now they have a very negative attitude to the left politics and socialism as well as communism.

By the way, in spite of all impediments it can be pointed out that the left politics are still alive and bit by bit it is trying to make space in the national politic to become mainstream.

Could you present your organisation, the Bangladesh Krishok Federation

The Bangladesh Krishok Federation (BKF, Bangladesh Peasant Federation), as a grassroots organisation, has a long history of working on behalf of the peasantry in Bangladesh. Although its main focus is on land-related issues, it also gives importance to many other issues such as the environment, ecology, agriculture/agroecology, food sovereignty, climate change, land reform, genetically modified organisms, the commons, tax justice, water, water bodies and gender, etc.

When it was founded in 1976, the Bangladesh Krishok Federation began its activities by raising just one very concrete issue: that of the land that should be distributed to landless peasants and smallholders who were suffering a subhuman lifestyle in our society. Right from the start, this issue gained momentum, supported by local chapters. The BKF then focused on land which is mainly Khaschar (small islands without owners surrounded by water which emerged from the river bed) and which is not subject to any particular property rights. In principle, the land belongs to the government. The BKF mobilized the landless, agricultural workers and peasants to raise their voices to assert their right to land, drawing the attention of all the other organizations working on the same issue, in order to strengthen the movement.

Although these Khaschars were left uncultivated, they were not left unattended. Local influential groups and henchmen wanted to keep these lands illegally. That's why the idea was to dislodge them through a movement, a mass mobilization. In early 1992, this movement met with real success, thanks to a vast occupation of land by the landless. Previously, in 1980, huge tracts of land had been occupied, but there had been a setback. The landless were unable to keep the land, as the then government declared the occupation illegal. The main leaders of the BKF were then arrested and imprisoned. Subsequently, the BKF carried out an assessment of the movement's setback. Two findings came up as a problem: 1. The lack of legal documents in the interest of the landless; 2. The low participation of women in the movement.

During the 1992 movement, these two conditions were fully met. That is why the occupation was maintained. Nothing could dislodge the landless peasants from their possession of the land. Of course, there were battles between the landless peasants and influential local interest groups. There have been many victims and bogus court cases against landless peasant leaders. However, all the cases were dealt with effectively and efficiently in the lower and higher courts by the organisation. Based on this success, further land occupations have taken place in many other parts of the country. To date, 76600 acres of Khasland have been distributed to over 100,000 landless people across the country. Among them are 22 small islands in the south of the country, 9 shrimp-growing centers in the southwest and 12.5 kilometres long abandoned Khasland on the railroad built by the British regime in northern Bangladesh.

In 2022, we faced a major challenge, namely the occupation and colonization of new Khasland lands. A small area of Khasland close to an existing occupied island was taken over by the landless and the land was distributed among 41 new landless families. These families have become dignified owners of a

plot of land that guarantees them food sovereignty. They were able to build their homes, cultivate the land and raise cows, buffalo and poultry. Around the issue of land and food sovereignty, we ran 13 mobilization, training and national consultation campaigns. Through these programs, we have raised awareness among peasants and landless people of the legal aspects of action and the right of landless peasants to the government's Khasland.

We have linked the issue of food sovereignty to that of the land movement, because they are complementary. No food sovereignty can be guaranteed without land. And the central concept of food sovereignty [superior to that of food security] is in fact the right of peasants to land. We first came into contact with the concept of food sovereignty in 1996, at the World Food Summit in Rome, Italy. Since then, we've been developing the idea from a Bangladeshi perspective. We were also the first to promote and disseminate the idea in Bangladesh. We have also repeatedly pushed the government to incorporate food sovereignty as a principle in national agricultural policy, even though it has opted for the traditional concept of food security.

As part of this campaign, we endeavoured to convince peasants to use local seeds on their arable land, to grow culturally accepted foods and food for human consumption, and not to cede their lands to land grabbers. The farmers were able to understand the importance of food sovereignty. The people who joined the program also remembered the great caravan campaigns of 2011 and 2014, in which food sovereignty was one of the main themes. So, our sustained campaign on food sovereignty has at least succeeded in popularizing the issue. People can understand what food sovereignty is. Previously, they only knew the concept of food security, which is a major international program. Under this campaign, the international communities have not been able to eradicate hunger and poverty in the world, which is the main objective of the food security

concept. Rather, it is the implementation of food sovereignty through mobilizations that could optimally eliminate hunger and poverty in rural areas.



Seminar on 'What is the relationship between land movement and food sovereignty?', October 15, 2022 organized by Bangladesh Krishok Federation

We have also set up various agitation programs on agroecology, the environment, ecology and climate change. Our country has a Ministry of the Environment, Forestry and Climate Change. So, the state is concerned about climate, the environment and forests. It is not concerned with agroecology and ecology. Agroecology is a very recent concept promoted by the FAO and the UN. Agroecology enables people to obtain food that is healthy, nutritious and free from toxicity. It is a simple and scientific agricultural method. It is not a one-way approach; rather a diversified one with a holistic approach. There are many agro-ecological practices in different parts of the world. These are practices that respect the environment and ecology, and help combat climate change.

Bangladesh is an agricultural country. Its agriculture began converting to chemical farming in the mid-sixties under the name of the "green revolution". This method initially led to a considerable increase in production, but we gradually lost the fertility of our soils, our plantations, our greenery, our

fish, our health, our environment, our ecology and the micro-organisms present in the soil. To save the whole agriculture, which is our culture and heritage, we need to adopt agroecology.

Bangladesh is a front-line victim of global climate change. Consequently, the rich industrialized countries of the North, which have been emitting carbon for 250 years since the Industrial Revolution, owe an ecological and historical debt to countries like Bangladesh, which are vulnerable to climate change. We shifted the focus of our ongoing campaign on climate change last year, concentrating on this issue of reparation. The issue of ecology and environment is also included. The campaign was conducted in 13 points of the country's 64 districts. During our campaign, we demanded reparations from the countries responsible for climate change resulting from greenhouse gas emissions. We also demanded compensation for the losses and damage suffered by the countries affected. We demanded legal protection within the framework of the United Nations for migrants forced to emigrate by the climate crisis.

Bangladesh is a country where the available land is small relative to its population. The current population is 170 million. To feed this large population, well-organized land management is essential. What is needed, therefore, is a comprehensive and genuine land and agrarian reform that would give landless peasants the right to cultivate the fields as first choice. This reform would be distributive and redistributive in nature. The State's initiative will be indispensable for this. We have been campaigning for real reform for a long time. The idea of agrarian reform is not new. It appeared officially after the independence of India and Pakistan from British rule in 1947, but never materialized. It has always remained on paper. Even at the time of the creation of Bangladesh [formerly East Pakistan], after the war of independence in 1971, there was no progress

on reform issues, although they were discussed on several occasions. There is also a controversial land ownership system. Last year, we prioritized this issue as part of our movement and campaign.

Like land, water and water bodies are our source of sustenance. Unfortunately, water and water bodies are being monopolized by national and international transnational corporations. This happens in the name of purchasing, housing, urbanization, export processing zones, industrialization, eco-parks and so on. Most of the time, this happens in areas populated predominantly by indigenous people [Adivasi], who are evicted from their homes. Our partner organisation, Bangladesh Adivasi Samity, remains very active against illegal encroachment on indigenous customary land ownership. It also fights against illegal logging and proliferation by the Forest Department. Together, we are fighting against land, water and lake grabbers. In 2022, we set up a program to protect our common property rights which were gradually being privatized. The government's privatization policy, prescribed by the World Bank and IMF, is at the root cause of this phenomenon.

Last year, we focused a lot on the issue of tax justice. We have raised this issue both nationally and internationally. Basically, we have a very regressive tax system from which our population suffers greatly. The universal VAT (value-added tax) hits the poor hardest. It's an indirect tax imposed on the population. In addition, the income and corporate tax system is also inequitable. Large corporations benefit from tax exemptions, tax cuts and so on. They also evade taxes and send money to other countries via tax havens. They also embezzle money through over- and under-invoicing. In addition, some of the super-rich have smuggled billions of BDT [the national currency] from Bangladesh to various countries to settle their families. The government should bring this money back home and use it for the cause of the poor. To rationalize the tax system, the administration must propose a progressive

taxation system. That's why, last year, we worked hard on tax justice. We organized human chains, rallies, demonstrations with flags, festoons, banners, placards, etc. at national level.

The Bangladesh Krishok Federation has a broad mass base nationwide, 30% of whom are women. We're trying to increase this number to 50%. The LGBTQI issue is very sensitive in our country, which is primarily Muslim. We organize seminars/workshops on this issue, but we don't try to identify them, as this is not accepted by society and could put them in danger. However, transgender people are automatically exposed and they are the poorest of the poor in society. They can join our organisation openly. Our main gender issue is to establish women's rights in society. We have a long history of women's movement in Bangladesh, based on the 14 points of demands raised by our sister organisation called Bangladesh Kishani Sabha (BKS), which is an organisation made up of 100% peasant women. In addition, our organisation is especially involved in the land occupation movement to establish women's right to land. The gender issue was seriously explained and highlighted in the 2022 campaign.

In 2022, we carried out numerous humanitarian actions. There were deaths and serious injuries on an island occupied by our organisation. The peasant leader Bakul Begum was killed and her sister Mukul Begum is still alive, but seriously injured. She had to stay in hospital for over three months. Being unable to move about, she required considerable medical support. Complaints have been lodged with the police station. These cases are still pending.

Leaders of Civil Society in the press conference protesting the killing of Bakul Begum on 6 December 2022



Bakul Begum

Another executive member had to undergo brain surgery. She also received partial support. A patient suffering from a serious kidney disease whose kidney was transplanted was also supported on several occasions by our organisation as a senior member.

In 2022 and 2023, we provided humanitarian aid to those affected by the climate disaster, and also helped those affected by Cyclone and Corona to recover.

In addition, we organized numerous regular programs, such as various celebrations of national and international days.

Source: [Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières \(ESSF\)](#)

Main Picture: October 30, 2023, at 12 noon in the organization of North Char Shahjalal landless families in Dashmina Upazila of Patuakhali district, with the cooperation of Bangladesh Krishok Federation and Bangladesh Kishani Sabha

Interview with Ukrainian and Russian socialists

At the recent [International Committee of the Fourth International](#), held at the [IIRE in Amsterdam](#), two delegates from Ukraine and Russia attended. The interview below is with Vasylyna, a member of [Sotsialnyi Rukh/Соціальний Рух](#), and Mia, an activist in the [Russian Socialist Movement/Российское социалистическое движение](#), about the war and their organisations' activities.

How did you get involved in politics?

Vasylyna: My interest in political activism emerged during my studies in urban studies, where we often used Marxist theory to analyse different processes that affect our living spaces. Surrounded by lots of young progressive people from all over Europe at the university and united by similar struggles of being international students, we initiated a union for the

students of our department, fighting for equal tuition fees for European and non-European students. I joined Sotsialnyi Rukh because theory alone is not enough, driven by an urge to be active on the ground. Facing devastating current challenges, Ukrainian society is extremely vulnerable but definitely more open to change. Obviously, things cannot go on in the same way as they did before. For instance, there is a lot more discussion on corruption, and journalists are uncovering examples at the highest levels of power, so it feels like things are starting to shift.

Mia: I became interested in politics during my school years. When I was 14 years old, the annexation of Crimea happened. This was a moment when I really started to dive into news reports and listen to political commentators. However, I was almost unaware of differences on the political spectrum. The opposition field in Russia is predominantly liberal, so for many, the words “liberalism” and “democracy” are often equated. Like many people my age, I was anti-Putin, anti-conservative, pro-free elections, civil rights, and anti-corruption. I suppose my time spent at the university was important in this sense. I started reading a lot more about history and politics, and I was able to engage in political debates from a much more critical perspective. Since 2021, I have engaged in politics outside of the Student Council and university settings. I served as an election observer for the parliamentary and municipal elections of 2021 and started to participate in the activities of RSM. Soon after this, I became a full member.

What is Sotsialnyi Rukh’s position on the Zelensky government?

Vasylyna: The government’s stance is clear about fighting for the sovereignty of Ukraine, and this gets a lot of support from people. But we as an organisation are extremely critical of the political direction of the government, accompanied by neoliberal reforms and massive cuts to public spending. In Sotsialnyi Rukh, we are finding ways to organise around these

issues. People stand united to defend the country, but this does not mean that Zelensky has unanimous support.

Unfortunately, oligarchy and foreign capital have a significant influence on our current president. The current government was not capable of transitioning from an economy based on profit to a war economy that would work for providing defence capacity and solving humanitarian problems. Seeking allies amongst international partners, mostly among the richest states that have their own imperialist interests (like the USA), could cause harm to the support of Ukraine and bring out confusion in the countries of the Global South. We do not believe that our government is capable of fixing mistakes. That's why there is a strong urge for mass grassroots pressure and political critique from a leftist perspective. The key priorities of the state should be based on the protection of people's interests, fostering social cohesion, and promoting global solidarity against oppression.

What campaigning work is the Revolutionary Socialist Movement doing?

Mia: Campaigning work is difficult for our comrades in Russia due to the repressive regime. We try to work within the law because we don't want to endanger activists. Our main goals now are to shift the oppositional political conversation to the left and provide practical support for people. For instance, we have been doing work with independent trade unions in Russia. There is a union for delivery workers, which we have been helping to organise and support. When the activists and independent trade union leaders are imprisoned, we organise help—financially and via media campaigns.

We are actively working within the "University Platform" that unites professors and students to defend their rights and freedoms. We try to build communities and provide a space to discuss politics to overcome the atomisation of Russian society. Even inside repressive regimes, there are still

struggles and problems that are fought on the ground. When possible, we align with grassroots initiatives to defend people's rights against construction companies' lobbying and resist the destruction of nature. We are also prioritising the feminist platform as well as anti- and decolonial work within our movement; this is particularly important to us given the invasion of Ukraine. What is often overlooked is that while our government wages a colonial war against Ukraine, indigenous people in Russia are dying out. Indigenous populations often live in poor outlying areas of Russia's periphery, where people are mired in poverty and debt. Mobilisation occurs disproportionately in poor regions of the country, where people are pressured to join the army to pay off debts, often lack the ability to resist, and have fewer sources of information than the rest of the population.

What about the war?

Vasylyna: We support the Ukrainians' right to resist the invasion and colonisation. Some Sotsialnyi Rukh members have joined the armed forces and are fighting the Russian army. There are not really other viable options in terms of separate fighting militias and units at the moment.

Some on the left say that the conflict is primarily a proxy conflict between imperialists; do you agree?

Vasylyna: We do not see this as a proxy war. It is, first and foremost, a people's war for national liberation. At the beginning of the full-scale invasion, people were self-organising, doing anything they could to resist the occupation, speaking to soldiers, and older women making homemade explosives. People from all walks of life—LGBT+ people and women, artists, workers, and academics—joined the army to fight for the Ukrainians' right to self-determination.

"We do not see this as a proxy war. It is, first and foremost, a people's war for national liberation."

Mia: Some on the left have this false pacifism, and they put an ideological lens on the war that obscures rather than clarifies, but actually obscures the situation for real people on the ground. Of course, the Ukrainians have the right to defend themselves; they are the main victims in this conflict. This label of 'proxy war' doesn't give any agency to the Ukrainians themselves. People calling for negotiations and a ceasefire need to be clear on what basis. The problem is, no one would dictate to Russia the price they would demand for peace. But some on the left want to dictate conditions to the Ukrainians and say they need to sacrifice their national sovereignty by accepting annexations. Why?

What is the strength of the far right in Ukraine?

Vasylyna: The far-right can still be a threat to some individuals and social movements, but in general, Ukrainian society stands against authoritarian and chauvinistic ideas, as those ideas are at the base of Russian imperialism. Moreover, the influence and visibility of far-right movements in Ukraine are less strong compared to Western societies, for instance, Germany. Currently, far-right activists are not represented in big politics, but we need to be prepared to resist far-right interests in the future. History shows that wars, unfortunately, shape the favourable base for spreading hateful ideologies. Nevertheless, Ukrainian society demonstrated that it's empowered by its diversity and not by cultivating ethnic nationalism and national isolation.

"Ukrainian society demonstrated that it's empowered by its diversity and not by cultivating ethnic nationalism and national isolation."

Will Ukraine win the war?

Vasylyna: Of course! It is the only way to liberate the country. We have to end the Russian invasion as a priority. We definitely need more arms because this is an actual fight, and

these things matter.

How can the international workers movement and left help?

Vasylyna: We have the European Network of Solidarity with Ukraine, which meets weekly. There have been international visits by delegates from different countries. There was a good campaign to cancel Ukraine's debt and, recently, to free the Ukrainian human rights activist Maksym Butkevych, who was captured by Russian forces and tortured before being sentenced to 13 years in prison. Anything that people can do to help spread information about people like Butkevych and put pressure on Russia to release him would help. We would very much like the international left to offer Ukraine progressive solutions that would allow us to implement a just reconstruction and ensure sustainable development. The people of Ukraine want to live in peace and decent social conditions, and for this, it is necessary to eliminate the influence of the oligarchy, transfer all economic resources to public ownership, and write off the foreign debt.

Mia: We urge comrades around the world, but especially in the Western world, where politics is more open and you can have more public discussions: We don't want the Russian regime to win; it will be a disaster in Ukraine and Russia. There has been a precedent for lifting sanctions from Russian oligarchs in Europe (for example, the head of "Alfa Bank," Mikhail Fridman). We claim that sanctions against Russian capitalists should be maintained, and the money should be directed towards the Ukrainian resistance, Russian civil society organisations, and helping reconstruct Ukraine after the war. We also call for international solidarity with political prisoners. Among them are leftists, anarchists, anti-fascists, and trade union organisers. We welcome direct actions to help us raise money to help those needing political asylum and those already imprisoned. Prosecuted activists often escape, but they end up fleeing to places like Kazakhstan and other countries under Russian influence, where they are detained and then face

deportation back to Russia. At the same time, the visa regime is very restrictive, and the procedures take a very long time. Land borders with EU countries are effectively closed, and the simplified procedure for obtaining visas has been canceled. There is a need to support those needing political asylum—those who refuse to be sent to war and escape. It is necessary to demand that the European Commission and the European Parliament adopt a unified approach to providing international protection for Russian citizens who are at risk of persecution.

What was your view of the International Committee meeting?

Vasylyna: It was very important to come and hear the arguments from different organisations. There are certainly some contributions that my organisation would disagree with. But also, I am interested in discussing within SR how to develop our policies and ideas based on some of what I heard.

Mia: There were some positives, but also some negatives. On the positive, everyone is open to hearing other positions and wants to know more about the positions of the RSM and what is going on in Russia. But my criticism is that we merely exchange political opinions; the left spends so much time arguing over concepts like whether something is imperialist or not. But where is the practical solidarity? We need to do more to share what we are doing on the ground. It cannot just be ideological positions.

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NOTE: The Fourth International is a worldwide organisation of revolutionary ecosocialists. Defending the self-organization of the exploited and oppressed, towards the abolition of capitalism and the building of ecosocialism, the Fourth International brings together organizations convinced that this is not possible without a root and branch, revolutionary, transformation of society. Read more here: <https://fourth.international/en/166>

