

SOCIALIST RESURGENCE 2019 FOUNDING CONVENTION INTERNATIONAL POLITICS RESOLUTION

The following resolution was approved by the founding convention of Socialist Resurgence on Dec. 14, 2019.

As 2019 draws to a close, capitalist politicians are celebrating the date 30 years ago when the Berlin Wall was breached. On Nov. 9, German Chancellor Angela Merkel paid tribute to those killed by the Stalinist regime in the East, and vowed that the “fight for freedom” has not ended. President Trump, who is now building his own Wall, sent a congratulatory message crowing that the one in Berlin had stood as a symbol of “failed socialism for more than a quarter century.”

Certainly, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 marked a momentary political triumph for the capitalist ideologues. And it coincided with the height of the period of “neo-liberal” or “globalist” capitalism. Neo-liberalist “free-trade” doctrine had become rife in ruling-class circles—including the IMF and the World Bank—after being tested in the 1970s, when Augusto Pinochet’s military dictatorship in Chile adopted harsh economic policies under the management of the so-called “Chicago Boys.” The advocates of neo-liberalism advised the semi-colonial countries that they could achieve stability through short-term loans (at high interest rates) and opening their economies to the unfettered influx of foreign capital. But that would require cutbacks in government spending, privatizations, cuts in social benefits, and gutting environmental and protectionist safeguards. Pro-imperialist autocratic regimes were often put into place to enforce the neo-liberal wave.

Later, the anti-labor agenda of neo-liberalism was brought home with Reagan’s 1981-82 war against the PATCO air-controllers’ union in the United States. Thatcher followed a couple of years later by crushing the unionized miners in Britain.

In 1989, as statues of Marx and Lenin were toppled from their pedestals, it was alleged that capitalism and the dog-eat-dog profit motive had been proven supreme. Within little more than a year, the Soviet Union (with its army shattered in Afghanistan) dissolved, as Stalinist bureaucrats and Western speculators moved in to steal its formerly nationalized industries. The imperialists licked their lips at the prospect of gaining new semi-colonies in the East, with a vast trough of low-paid labor—though much of their expected rewards proved to be illusionary.

In the West, tariffs and regulations between industrialized nations were drastically lowered under the call for “free trade.” And the international flow of capital (in trade, investment, and production) responded. By 2007, international trade flows were 30 times greater than in 1950, while output was only eight times greater.

That era also saw the beginning of a vast transfer of wealth from working people to the wealthy, trumpeted in the U.S. media under Reagan’s false mantra of “trickle-down economics.” Although capitalism has for now discarded its “free-trade” policies, moving to erect staunch trade barriers instead, the austerity measures that the working class was saddled with in that period continue into our own time—privatizations, the dismantling of social services, and the shredding of union contracts.

These cruel measures were a response to the onset of capitalist decline rather than robust growth. Even the so-called “boom” periods have failed to overcome the squeeze on the livelihoods and living conditions of working people. In the advanced countries, millions of working-class families can only survive by falling further behind in debt, while millions more—especially in the peripheral and semi-colonial countries—are propelled into extreme poverty and deprivation. Thus, despite the cheering by capitalist politicians about their victory over

“failed socialism” in 1989, it is capitalism that has failed to rescue the world’s people from misery.

Structural contradictions of capitalism

Following the carnage of World War II, the United States emerged as the major victor of the war, with the world’s preeminent economy and military establishment. In order to thwart the rise of working-class revolution, as well as to counter the resurgence of the Soviet Union, the U.S. bolstered military production (some 13 percent of U.S. manufacturing output in the 1950s), while at the same time helping to rebuild the war-damaged industries of Japan, Germany, and other Western European nations with the latest American technology. As a result, Western Europe and Japan underwent a period of rapid economic growth and deep social change.

The need for labor in Western Europe was gratified when millions of farm workers, uprooted by the newly mechanized and chemical-enriched agriculture, migrated to the cities. Additional workers poured in from Southern Europe, and later from the colonies and semi-colonies abroad, to take the lowest paid jobs and endure the worst social conditions.

The employers’ continual need for a pliable labor force, and the willingness of the mass social democratic parties and the unions (often led by Stalinists) to tamp down labor unrest in exchange for an array of social benefits, led to the institution of the “welfare state.” Due to the accumulated effects of their own struggles, but also to the grudging ability of the employers in the advanced capitalist economies to concede reforms in a period of general economic growth, working people were granted socialized health care (unlike in the United States), retirement pensions, legislated minimum wages, and other benefits.

In those years, the imperialist countries, often with the aid of the United States, fought a series of long and dirty wars to stop the revolt of their colonies—as in Algeria and Vietnam. But despite the eventual loss of their direct colonial empires, the imperialists were still able to pursue the exploitation of the so-called “underdeveloped” (semi-colonial) world. In a process that greatly accelerated in the 1970s and ’80s, Europe and Japan were once again able to compete with the United States in their investments abroad. They not only exported finished goods in return for raw materials but also exported *capital* (including machinery but usually in the form of loans and financial investments) to the semi-colonial countries, eventually opening textile and manufacturing shops that made use of the cheap cost of labor power that those countries had to offer. Of course, in general, these investments met the needs of the ruling class in the imperialist countries, not the people of the semi-colonial ones.

The process was explained by Lenin in his book, “Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism,” half a century earlier: “... an enormous ‘surplus of capital’ has arisen in the advanced countries. ... As long as capitalism remains what it is, surplus capital will be utilized not for the purpose of raising the standard of living of the masses in a given country, for this would mean a decline in profits for the capitalists, but for the purpose of increasing profits by exporting capital abroad to the backward countries. In these backward countries profits are unusually high, because capital is scarce, the price of land is relatively low, wages are low, and raw materials are cheap.”

As capital investments poured into the less developed world, some countries in those regions (South Africa, Brazil, India, South Korea, etc.) gained considerably in industrial strength. But the process was uneven. Commercial agriculture, mining, ports, and assembly plants benefited the imperialist corporations and a small layer of capitalists or land-owning oligarchs in the countries themselves, while the masses often became poorer. Farms that fed the people were supplanted by one-crop plantations producing for the world market—cocoa in Ghana, sugar in Cuba, palm oil in Indonesia, coffee in El Salvador, cotton in Egypt, etc.—leading to outright

famines and great environmental degradation. Forests were cleared throughout Africa, Indonesia, etc., causing monstrous floods in some areas and desertification of others—a prelude to the effects of the worldwide climate crisis that now has come upon us.

In the meantime, after the boost by investments and aid from the United States in the immediate post-World War II days, Japan and the Western European imperialist countries continued to invest at a relatively higher degree than the U.S. in new technology. For example, capital growth in West Germany for the period of 1950-62 was 9.5 percent, and even higher in Japan, while in the U.S. for 1948-69 it was only 3.5 percent. While the U.S. concentrated on manufacturing military hardware, the European and Japanese economies turned toward satisfying the rising consumer demand worldwide. In that, they often outcompeted the United States, with the use of technology that was increasingly less labor intensive. In other words, they had gained the ability to produce more products while paying less for labor power, and as a result, frequently offered better merchandise at lower prices than the U.S. was able to provide.

Even in the 1980s, for example, Japan's annual investment in manufacturing equipment was twice that of the United States. Due largely to increasingly advanced technology, output per worker in Japan (i.e., labor productivity)—which is one index of the degree to which workers' labor power is being exploited—went up over fourfold for three decades, while it rose by less than 50 percent in the U.S. At the same time, real wages in Japan were no more than 60 percent of those in the United States, which restricted Japan's domestic market and forced the country to rely on exports.

A crucial concern for U.S. and world capitalists is the general tendency for the rate of profit to fall. (Karl Marx defined the rate of profit as the ratio of profit to the total amount of capital that is invested.) In "Capital," Marx discussed the decline in the profit rate as a consequence of the average increase of constant capital (plants, raw materials, equipment, technology, etc.) compared to the lesser increase in variable capital (living human labor power). Because profits are only derived from human labor, as more and more capitalists invest in new machinery, the average labor time required to produce a commodity tends to fall, reducing the rate of profit.

Marxist economist Michael Roberts shows on his blog, for example, that in the United States, the average rate of profit declined 30 percent from 1946 to 2018. It rose slightly at the height of the neo-liberal period in the 1980s, but has been declining again in recent years.

A similar overall decline has taken place in Japan and Western Europe, and in other advanced industrial countries. Although their capital investments enabled Japan and Western Europe to effectively compete in the same league with the U.S. in exports, and increased the overall quantity of profits for a time for each country's capitalist class, the rise in constant capital contributed to the overall worldwide tendency of the profit rate to fall. This decline became rampant in the 1970s, and it greatly escalated starting in the 1990s. In Japan, for example, the rate of profit in manufacturing fell from 36.2% in 1960-69 to 24.5% in 1970-79, to 24.9% in 1980-90, and to 14.5% in 1991-2000.

Naturally, when the rate of profit slows, capitalists often react by becoming less eager to invest in machinery, which can produce a slowing of the pace of technological change and can contribute in turn to a decline in the growth of labor productivity. In recent decades, the growth of labor productivity has stagnated in a number of industrialized countries, including the U.S., Japan, and Britain—while it has fallen in Italy.

In addition, the rate of growth of economic output has generally been reduced among the top industrialized nations. In Europe, it declined outright from 2009 to 2017, even though the world economy had not yet entered a period of recession. The EU sees GDP growth of 1.1 percent for 2020, and "a protracted period of subdued growth" after that, made worse by trade wars and the looming Brexit. Germany, the powerhouse of Europe, has been particularly hard

hit. Germany's GDP contracted by .1 percent in the second quarter of 2019; exports fell by 8 percent, and industrial production fell by 5.2 percent in June 2019.

The rate of the growth in output in the U.S. has also slowed quite a bit in the last decades, from about 5 percent yearly in the late 1960s to around 3 percent for the next 30 years, to a little over one percent today. The U.S. has slid to second place next to China in manufacturing output, although China's rise has come mainly as the expense of countries other than the United States. China, the U.S., and Japan together still comprise 48 percent of the manufacturing output of the world.

All these problems of the advanced capitalist economies, and more, derived from the structural contradictions of the capitalist system itself, have tightened the international competition between them—including in the race among imperialist countries to exploit the cheaper labor of the semi-colonial world. By the 1990s, major rifts began to appear in the economic and political bloc that had been constructed under the protection of U.S. military and economic might following the Second World War.

When the U.S. defeated Iraq in the so-called Gulf War, George H.W. Bush loudly proclaimed a "New World Order" under U.S. hegemony, but was unable to fully carry through with that objective. The imperialist countries of the EU remained willing to accept U.S. help in their neo-colonial adventures in Africa and elsewhere, but were not as ready to accept every dictate of U.S. policy, unless they felt fairly certain that such actions aligned with their own interests.

It soon became embarrassingly apparent, after all, that the various U.S. war offensives in the Middle East, rather than ensuring stability in the region, had only enflamed radical rebellion. Moreover, the Islamist militias that the U.S. (with the connivance of Pakistan) had first trained to fight the reformist secular regime in Afghanistan—beginning six months before the Soviet invasion—had come back as a terrorist threat not only in the Middle East but in Europe and America as well.

This is not to say that revolutionaries should look upon the Western European nations, Japan, Canada, or the newer imperialist states such as China and Russia, as somehow being more benign than U.S. imperialism. The war atrocities of countries such as France in Northern Africa show that imperialism from any quarter can be just as cutthroat as that of the U.S.

The new imperialisms — Russia and China

Today, across the world, the leading imperialist powers are clashing more and more frequently on every front, from trade negotiations to military interventions. This atmosphere of belligerence is a product of the growing mismatch between the global division of spoils and the power and capacities of the key players. There have been two main factors driving this increasing instability—the growing structural tensions and disunity within the U.S.-led alliance, as mentioned above, and the rise of new imperial powers in China and Russia.

International summits of NATO and the G7 are increasingly a game of presenting the appearance of unity while rancor over substantive points of disagreement seeps through. Tactical disagreements over policy toward Iran and elsewhere have flared into acrimonious accusations. For now, the tensions have been kept largely contained, but the trend clearly points toward a weakening of these networks and toward an increase in inter-imperial conflict between Western powers in addition to the growing conflicts with Russia and China.

Rising from the ashes of the Soviet Union and subsequent economic crisis, Russian monopoly capitalism has asserted itself on the back of oil and gas production as a major factor in its traditional sphere of influence across the Caucasus and central Asia, and increasingly in the Middle East and Africa. Its economy still lags behind other powers in many important respects,

but it compensates with an outsized advantage in military forces relative to its economic capacity.

China, for its part, emerged as an imperial power following the culmination of a carefully managed capitalist restoration—accomplished in large part by enforcing low wages and cuts in social benefits for the workers and peasants—but avoiding the catastrophic results of state collapse in the USSR and elsewhere. In combination with a period of extremely rapid economic growth, China has quickly emerged as a world power contending for shares of trade and investment in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, and elsewhere.

In recent years, for example, China has been the biggest foreign investor into Latin America and the Caribbean, its assets jumping in growth every year. Most of its investments have been in the energy extraction sector, mainly in Brazil. China is involved in building hydroelectric power plants in Argentina, Venezuela, and Ecuador. Chinese companies are now diversifying into sectors other than resource extraction in South America—including building electronics and automobile plants. In 2016, China was also the largest foreign investor in Africa; between 2005 and 2017, 40.3 percent of its investments were in metals and 33.4 percent in energy.

Both China and Russia gained significantly in relative terms from the Great Recession, when their economies slowed less and recovered more quickly than those of established powers. This, in conjunction with narratives presenting themselves as progressive alternatives to beleaguered semi-colonies, helped significantly in allowing both emerging powers to establish serious regional and global presences. Furthermore, the development of international infrastructure projects such as China's Belt and Road Initiative and Russia's North-South Transport Corridor have functioned both to expand the influence of these powers and to seek to reshape global economic and trade flows to the areas that they already hold a significant presence.

The reaction to these new powers has been uneven and contradictory. On one hand, many of the established imperialist countries view the rise of Russia and particularly China with growing alarm and have begun to take serious military and economic countermeasures. This has been exemplified by such events as Germany's freezing China out of corporate acquisitions in robotics, Japan's forming a rump TPP without the United States to maintain economic pressure against China within Asia, European sanctions on Russia in regards to its role in Ukraine, and the United States' developing the "pivot to Asia."

On the other hand, the appeal of Russia, and again, particularly China, as potential engines of growth for world capitalism in a period of global slowdown have prompted many powers to hedge their bets. Germany has sought Chinese investment into the development of a 5G network, to the consternation of others within the EU, while Japan and China have formed the center of a new Asia-Pacific trade pact excluding the United States.

Any party in the revolutionary movement must follow China's developments closely. Chinese capital is wreaking havoc on workers across the globe. This includes deeper military incursions in Mali, Iran, Balochistan, and elsewhere. Everywhere that Chinese companies own mines or build infrastructure there are strikes and push-backs by the workers. Just this past May [2019], a sit-down strike took place in the Orkney gold mine in South Africa over work conditions and pay; the mine is operated by Chinese capitalists.

Currently, China is deploying 5000 security personnel to Iran and has invested \$600 billion in petrochemicals and infrastructure building, including the Chabahar port. The end result of this investment will likely have the same outcome as Sri Lanka's experience with its Hambantota port; Chinese capital financed the port construction, and Sri Lanka defaulted on its payments. Today, the port is under Chinese ownership.

Similarly, Russian imperialism has made a stunning impression on the world stage with its intervention into Syria. Following the Russian bombing of neighborhoods and hospitals in

support of the murderous Assad regime, Russian companies were granted billions of dollars in contracts to rebuild Damascus, Aleppo, and other devastated cities. The reconstruction efforts were part of Assad's larger gentrification plan to clear the cities of the working poor and open up areas to international financial institutions. The Russian intervention was not a progressive alternative to U.S. imperialist intervention. Both had the *same* end goals, to exploit the Syrian working class and extract their resources. Today, Russian soldiers are murdering Syrian workers who are protesting working conditions and pay.

The sad record of reformism

The ability of the capitalists to try to stabilize their system has been aided immeasurably by the failure of the traditional mass workers' parties—both Stalinist and social-democratic—to mount a strong challenge to their rule. And the corrupt and self-seeking union bureaucracies deserve a large share of the blame as well in paring down the demands of the workers and short-circuiting any attempts at militant industrial action.

The conversion of social democratic parties into outright bourgeois parties, at least programmatically, could be glimpsed in France in 1983, when the government of François Mitterrand, whose Socialist Party had been swept into office two years earlier in an alliance with the Communist Party, collapsed before the demands of big business and made a sudden "turn toward austerity." A sweeping process of privatizations and fiscal cutbacks was undertaken; unemployment soon skyrocketed while wages fell.

In Britain, Tony Blair's "New" Labor Party openly embraced a neoliberal model that was not radically different from that of the Tories, while enthusiastically tail-ending Washington in its wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Meanwhile, Blair's counterpart in the German SPD, Gerhard Schröder, put forward the nefarious "Agenda 2010," which reduced many benefits and social protections that had been available to working people.

As a result of their capitulation to the most austere policies of capitalism, the once mighty social democratic parties in Europe have lost much of their former working-class electorate, and in turn much of their organic connection to the workers and their struggles, shrinking in some countries nearly to the point of oblivion.

The French Socialist Party, and its presidential candidate François Hollande, returned to power in 2012 with promises to turn around the country's lagging economy (with unemployment at nearly 10 percent) and to tax the wealthy. But when the government proposed a retrogressive new Labor Code in 2016, a million workers and youth waged a one-day strike in protest. Hollande's approval rating fell to merely 4 percent by the end of 2016.

In 2017, a new centrist populist party, En Marche, and its candidate, Emmanuel Macron, a former Socialist, were elected in France. But they too have been greeted by strikes and protests—most notably the "yellow vest" movement and the December 2019 general strikes against Macron's "reforms" of the state pension plan (see below). Macron has increasingly been reviled as the "president of the rich." In the meantime, the ultra-right National Front, and its candidate Marine Le Pen, came in second in the 2017 voting, winning a large chunk of France's decayed "rust belt" in the northeast as well as most of the Mediterranean departments. Two years later, the National Front was first in the 2019 European Union elections, with 23.6 percent of the vote, while the SP garnered only 14 percent.

The German SPD, considered the matriarch of social democratic parties, has lost over half of its electorate since 1998, receiving only 20 percent of the national parliamentary votes in 2017 and 15.8 percent of the votes in the 2019 European election. The SPD has emerged from many elections as merely the junior partner in coalitions with Merkel's Christian Democrats. As a

consequence of the party's shared responsibility for anti-immigration laws and the rollback of workers' benefits, it has reduced its standing among working people even further.

Spain's Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) has managed to hang on in control of the government, but its vote totals have fallen, and following the elections of November 2019, it was compelled to build a governmental coalition with the anti-establishment party PODEMOS (which emerged from the indignados movement). At the same time, the far-right VOX party surged in the voting in the Spanish state, more than doubling its number of seats in parliament. VOX, like the French National Front, has gained a hearing through its hard stand against immigrants, as well as its staunch opposition to the independence drive in Catalonia.

The British Labour Party appeared for a while to have gained new strength and dynamism under leader Jeremy Corbyn—an achievement that was virtually unique among the generally decrepit mass social-democratic parties. Its manifesto for the December 2019 elections promised major reforms, with the re-nationalization of key utilities, such as water, energy supply, telecom, transport, and the postal service, with a state bank to invest in infrastructure projects. It also promised a Green New Deal to create jobs in renewable energy projects (although the party softened its earlier pledge that Britain would become carbon neutral by 2030). However, as Marxist economist Michael Roberts pointed out in his blog (Nov. 23, 2019), nothing was said about nationalizing the country's major banks, insurance companies, and pension funds—which provide the bulk of Britain's potential investment funding. Thus it was questionable whether Labour's program would be enough to re-direct Britain's rentier economy into more productive areas of investment, or to make a dent in the increasing levels of inequality.

As it happened, neither the thousands of eager new recruits to the Labour Party nor its leftist-tinged reformist platform were enough to turn out the votes on Dec. 12; Labour received its worst electoral drubbing since the early 1930s. Huge areas of England's de-industrialized North, which have voted Labour for generations, now issued strong majorities for the Tories and their leader, Boris Johnson. It appears likely that many working people were disenchanted with the idea of returning Labour to power due to its inability in past years to effectively deal with joblessness, the housing crunch, and the deterioration of social services. Instead, a large number of these voters were beguiled by Johnson's right-populist "hard" orientation toward Brexit ("Get it done!") and his Trump-like enmity toward immigrants and foreign economic competition.

The weakness of the old mass workers' parties in some European countries has spawned new parliamentary formations, cobbled from various left spin-offs from social democracy and from the old Stalinist parties. However, these new Left parties—including Die Linke in Germany and the Parti de Gauche of Jean-Luc Mélenchon in France—have had not had much impact. The Left Front in France—a "moderate left" electoral bloc including the Parti de Gauche, the Communist Party, and a splinter from the New Anti-Capitalist Party—remains peripheral in national parliamentary elections.

Syriza, a new party similarly stitched together from various forces in Greece, including the "Euro-Communists" and social democrats, won acclaim from much of the international broad left when it was voted into power in January 2015 in a coalition with the right-wing ANEL party. But within months it embraced the IMF's austerity plans—only deepening the misery of the Greek working class. In the elections of July 2019, Syriza lost power to the center-right New Democracy party.

Growth of right populism; the yellow vests

As with Boris Johnson's Conservative Party in Britain, populist forces even further to the right—like VOX in Spain, the National Front in France, and the League in Italy—have managed to make inroads into the discontent felt by the working-class and lower middle-class electorate, who have been disillusioned by the inability of Europe's social democratic and Stalinist parties to deal with unemployment, stagnating wages, and other social ills.

An illustration of this phenomenon can be seen in an article in the Dec. 8, 2019, issue of *The New York Times*, which examined the situation of Prato, Italy, a textile and shoemaking center. Prato is in an area that used to vote heavily for the Communist Party, but recently has voted in the majority for the League. Roberta Travaglini was one of the working-class residents interviewed for *The Times* article. She stated: "We are in the hands of the world elites that want to keep us poorer and poorer. ... When I was young, it was the Communist Party that was protecting the workers, that was protecting our social class. Now, it's the League that is protecting the people."

Although the National Front and the League have recently muted their racist diatribes in order to gain more traction in the ruling-class milieu, their basic message remains—to deflect the blame for the crisis away from the capitalist system, and to divert the struggle against it into hysteria against immigrants, Muslims, and other scapegoats.

The ultra-nationalist and xenophobic rhetoric spewed by the far right meshes with the need of capitalists worldwide to tighten economic protectionist policies against their competitors, along with belt-tightening at home. It provides an ideological rationale for what the bourgeoisie see as an economic necessity in this period of heightened rivalry among competing national blocs of capital. At the same time, allowing the far right to achieve "acceptability" in the daily political life of a country prepares the ground for outright fascist tendencies to develop, which can be utilized when the time appears ripe to employ violence against working-class forces. Thus, in recent years, we have seen state authorities give encouragement to ultra-right and sectarian mobs in places as diverse as Ukraine, India, and most recently, against working-class forces in Bolivia.

The inability of the traditional mass working-class parties and trade-union federations to effectively combat the ruling-class offensive has also spurred the growth of an alternative, often anarchistic, protest movement within the broad left. The phenomenon blossomed in Spain in 2011, especially among young people, with the growth of the indignado anti-austerity protests and occupations—which were themselves highly influenced by the Arab Spring revolts of that year. On the same model, Occupy sprang up in the United States and elsewhere.

More recently, the yellow vest (*gilets jaunes*) movement in France has mobilized hundreds of thousands of people in the streets and on rural highways, and has engendered similar movements in other countries. As with the indignados and Occupy, the yellow vest protesters display suspicions of the old political parties and the bureaucratized trade unions, but their movement is more massive and has a different origin and class base. The yellow vests have included working people—particularly from small towns and rural and suburban areas—but also people from the middle-class and small shopkeepers. A poll by the Elabe Institute showed that 36 percent of yellow vest participants had voted for the far-right Marine LePen in 2017, while 28 percent had voted for Left Front candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon—much higher than the national percentages for both candidates.

The protests began in November 2018 when over 250,000 people, following a call on social media, took to the streets to protest a proposed rise in the tax on fuel that the government had announced as part of its campaign to combat climate change. Police attacked the demonstrators mercilessly (some 2400 protesters were injured). The government eventually bowed to the pressure and rescinded the tax, but protesters then added more demands. While the movement

faded for a while, tens of thousands again took to the streets in November 2019, raising demands against “elitism” in French society and for economic justice.

Positive developments have recently taken place with the yellow vests. The November 2019 national “Assembly of Assemblies” of the yellow vest movement voted unanimously for appeals for international solidarity with the many uprisings around the world—including those in Algeria, Chile, Iraq, Catalonia, Lebanon, Hong Kong, Sudan, Haiti, the Syrian Kurds, and others—while criticizing France’s role as an imperialist power and arms producer. A majority of the participants at the Assembly also voted to overcome their general aloofness from the trade unions and to join with the hundreds of thousands of workers who were planning the strikes against government pension reforms, beginning on Dec. 5, 2019.

The French government proposed alterations to the pension law that, among other measures, would delay the full retirement age from the current 62 years to 64 years. It also would utilize a point system that would result in lower pension benefits. In response to the protests, on Dec. 12, the government conceded that the reforms would only apply to workers born after 1975, while older workers could continue under the old system.

Many sections of the French working class participated in the strikes against the pension reforms, with the strongest outpouring on Dec. 5, and with further strong mobilizations on Dec. 10 and 17. Some 70 percent of teachers walked out on Dec. 5, plus numerous employees in the public sector, many trades in the private sector, and a strong contingent of students. The strike on Dec. 17 saw airline workers, hospital workers, and workers at the Paris Opera taking part, and electric power was cut in some cities. Most transport workers stayed out for weeks without a break. In general, support for the strikes occurred throughout the working class, as reflected in the development of grassroots strike support committees in many places.

Climate change stirs rebellion

Increasingly, the environmental devastation caused by world capitalism—and especially, the gathering menace of climate change—is taking a determinative role in the global economy, and consequently, in politics. This is only mildly reflected, however, in the periodic world climate forums, in which representatives of island nations that are sinking into the ocean and Indigenous peoples who are being driven from their homes come to beg aid from the same uncaring leaders of world imperialism who are killing them. But the environmental crimes of capitalism have produced a far more graphic response in the wars and revolts that are increasingly characterizing our epoch.

To cite one example, drought and water shortages had a hand in sparking revolt in Syria. Large areas of Syria, opened up to large-scale estate farming and wasteful irrigation schemes by Bashar Assad, fell into a lingering drought between 2006 and 2010. By the end, almost 60 percent of the country had become desert. About 80 percent of the cattle herd died. Hundreds of thousands of small farmers and agricultural laborers flooded into the cities, but many felt that the government turned a blind eye to their plight. This discontent was a key factor in the protests that began in 2011 and that soon morphed into civil war.

Long years of drought conditions also played a major role in the mass protests in Iran in the recent period. The small towns and villages used to be the backbone of the Islamic regime. However, *The New York Times* of Jan. 2, 2018, reported: “In less than a decade, all that has changed. A 14-year drought has emptied villages, with residents moving to nearby cities where they often struggle to find jobs.”

The drought was worsened by the recklessly unsustainable policies of the Islamic Republic, which expanded agriculture for export with the use of dams and by pumping the groundwater for irrigation. As a result, agriculture uses 92 percent of the country’s water resources. But the

farming practices have been inefficient, and with increasing water scarcity, the agricultural yield has declined.

A *Financial Times* article (Aug. 21, 2014) pointed out: “Thousands of villages rely on water tankers for supplies, according to local media, while businessmen complain shortages are a daily hazard in factories around Tehran. At least a dozen of the country’s 31 provinces will have to be evacuated over the next 20 years unless the problem is addressed, according to a water official who declined to be named.” Another official warned that Iran would “not be livable in 20 years’ time if the rapid and exponential destruction of groundwater resources continues.”

Rivers in Iran that have supported millions of people in agriculture are now bone dry. Lake Hamoun, once Iran’s largest body of fresh water, has turned into a desert—not just through drought but also because the Taliban in Afghanistan dammed a river that flowed into it. When the Americans took control from the Taliban, they had little interest in restoring the water flow to Iran. In addition, protests broke out in 2011 in Iran about the impending loss of Lake Urmia, which will kill the agriculture of the region; the lake was drying up largely due to the 36 dams that the Iranian government had placed on rivers flowing into it.

The Sahel region, on the southern edge of the Sahara, is also facing more frequent bouts of drought and unresponsive government policy. “Instead of 10 years apart, they [the drought] became five years apart, and now only a couple years apart,” Robert Piper, the UN regional humanitarian coordinator for the Sahel said in 2016. “And that in turn is putting enormous stresses on what is already an incredibly fragile environment and a highly vulnerable population.”

The region is home to the Tuareg (also called Tamacheq) people, traditionally nomadic herders in what was once considered one of the most prosperous livestock regions of West Africa. But the increasing drought cycles, made worse by misguided water policies and overgrazing, cast the people into unemployment and poverty, displacing many of them into the cities. These conditions helped to spur the revolt of Tuareg militias against the authoritarian governments of Mali and Niger in 1990 and 2007, and again in northern Mali in 2012. The government of Mali, with the help of West African and French imperialist forces, beat back the rebels in 2012, though French troops are still engaged in combat there seven years later.

On the other side of the world, the mountain glaciers that supply drinking water and irrigation water for people in Bolivia (30 percent of the potable water during the dry season) are melting, due to rising temperatures and drought. The glaciers shrank by 43 percent between 1986 and 2014; in 2009, the Chacaltaya glacier, 30 km from La Paz, finally disappeared entirely. This development contributed to the rage behind the demonstrations against attempts to privatize portions of the water supply in the city of Cochabamba in 2000. The protests fed into a major anti-governmental rebellion, which provided the background for the victory of Evo Morales in 2005.

Unfortunately, Bolivia under Morales continued to contribute to climate change and to the immediate problem of the shrinking glaciers. For example, deforestation in the Bolivian lowlands, to clear more acreage for commercial farming, carries smoke particles into the Andes, which helps accelerate the melting. At the same time, it heightens drought conditions in portions of the Amazon forest and adjacent land, increasing the occurrence of large wildfires. Nevertheless, in July 2019, Morales signed legislation that weakened restrictions on slash and burning techniques to create land for cattle ranching—just a month before 4.2 million acres were torched in the lowlands region. In response, thousands protested in the streets, but Morales refused to rescind the decree. The Morales government also granted large concessions to the oil and gas multi-national corporations, instead of diversifying the economy away from extractive industries, as had been promised.

Another “Pink Tide” reformist government, that of Rafael Correa in neighboring Ecuador, pursued similar policies. According to Ecuadoran environmentalist Esperanza Martínez, cited by Naomi Kline in her 2014 book “This Changes Everything,” “Since 2007, Correa’s has been the most extractivist government in the history of the country, in terms of oil and now also mining.”

Of course, the economic options for poverty-stricken semi-colonial countries are often very narrow when viewed within the bounds of the capitalist system. The real solutions will only come with an international socialist revolution, in which the wealthier areas of the world can provide durable economic aid to the traditionally poorer areas. But the nature of that aid must change from in the past, when Western governments and financiers brought big development projects, such as irrigation projects, to the “backward” countries, and neglected to take into account the ecological characteristics and needs of those regions. Ways of working the land and growing food that have become “accepted” in recent decades will have to be overhauled. In the future, development must strive to make use of the knowledge of local people, often accumulated over centuries, about how to work in ways that are compatible with the environment.

In some cases, however, climate change might force significant changes in lifestyles. For example, people who customarily eat grains like rice that require a lot of water to grow might wish to change to a less water-dependent grain, like millet.

Time is quickly running out to take significant action to head off the most catastrophic effects of climate change. The UN’s annual “emissions gap” report, which was issued on Nov. 26, 2019, pointed out that global temperatures are on pace to rise as much as 3.9 degrees Celsius (7 degrees Fahrenheit) by the end of the century. By that time, vast sections of the earth would be uninhabitable by people and other life. Coral reefs, already dying in many areas, would probably dissolve in highly acidic oceans. Major cities would be inundated by rising water.

The UN report indicated that the inability of governments to meet earlier goals to reduce greenhouse gases (emissions have risen about 1.5 percent each year of the past decade) means that deep, unprecedented cuts must now be made on the basis of an ongoing extreme emergency. The report stressed that global greenhouse gas emissions must begin falling by 7.6 percent a year, starting in 2020, merely to meet the most ambitious goals of the Paris climate accord—which were themselves inadequate.

But does anyone expect the capitalist system, based on constantly expanding production, with little regard for the wasteful use of materials and energy as long as money is to be made, to reduce its use of fossil fuels at anywhere near that pace? Or to make any significant cuts at all? That’s why we must demand “system change, not climate change.” In order to avoid utter catastrophe, the entire world must learn to reject the outmoded productivist model of capitalism (i.e., unlimited production of commodities simply for the sake of profits) and to substitute by revolutionary means a new system—socialism. In a socialist society, instead of looking to profits, production would be directed toward goods that are necessary for human life and happiness, and for all life in the world to survive and prosper.

Popular front or permanent revolution?

We appear to be in the midst of an explosive new phase of the uncompleted colonial revolution. Pent-up rage against the inability or unwillingness of the neo-colonial regimes to free themselves from the ravages that imperialism has imposed upon their countries, and the frequent imposition of corrupt and authoritarian regimes on those countries, has erupted into struggles in both world hemispheres.

Around the world—from Iraq to Colombia—democratic demands (not only for government accountability but also for land reform, women’s rights, the rights of oppressed nationalities, etc.) have often been at the forefront of the protests. Typically, young people,

including students, are the first to leap into the struggles; sections of the trade-union movement only join in later after the demands have been broadened to specifically address basic economic issues. Yet all of the revolts have come about against the background of an increasingly dire economic situation in the semi-colonial world due to imperialism's tightening stranglehold and the accompanying environmental crisis that the imperialists have largely caused.

In 2011, the "Arab Spring" burst out with a mass revolt in Tunisia, which followed the self-immolation of a street vender in December of the previous year. On Jan. 14, 2011, the Tunisian government of Ben Ali was overthrown, while massive protests erupted in Egypt the same month. Mass protests soon threatened the regimes of other countries in the region. But most of those rebellions were defeated. In Egypt, the revolutionary upsurge was dampened by the election of a conservative Muslim Brotherhood leader to power, and then completely reversed by the imposition of a new pro-imperialist regime backed by the military.

In the summer of that year, peaceful pro-democracy protests in Syria were attacked by Bashar Assad's troops and goon squads, and soon many protesters decided to arm themselves in order to protect their communities. Hundreds of popular local committees were set up to govern the towns and villages that the Assad authorities had withdrawn from. Within a year, however, the pro-democracy demonstrators found themselves increasingly fighting two enemies—Assadists and ultra-conservative Islamists. The entry of Lebanese Hezbollah (September 2011), Iran (2012) and Russia (2015) into the war—with massive firepower, fresh troops, and aircraft—allowed Assad to gather strength against the rebellion. The Assad forces then waged a scorched earth campaign over much of the country, bombing and starving the survivors into surrender or flight. In the meantime, the U.S. entered the war, mainly in the eastern part of the country, where it supported the Kurds and dissident Arab groups in a fight against ISIS. U.S. airpower virtually destroyed Raqqa and other cities, with massive civilian casualties.

In 2019, the Damascus government, aided by Russian bombing from the air, embarked on a campaign to retake Idlib, the last major holdout of anti-Assad resistance; again, civilian casualties have been high. According to the UN, over 500,000 people have been forced to migrate from the towns and refugee camps that have been attacked in Idlib.

The horrors of the war in Syria, coupled with the defeats in Egypt and elsewhere, muted the Middle East struggle for some years, although anti-government protests flared up in Iraq, Iran, and other countries. But we have seen an extraordinary renewal of rebellions in 2019, and their extension into Africa and Latin America—and even to Hong Kong. Protests appear to be having a cumulative effect, with the tactics used in street demonstrations, general strikes, and battles with police in one country quickly spreading to neighboring countries, across whole regions, and around the world. Thus, the upsurge that began in Algeria and Sudan—where demonstrators chanted, "Revolution is the people's choice!"—soon spread to Libya and the Middle East, with mass protests and strikes arising in Jordan, Syria (Idlib province), Iraq, Iran, and Lebanon. The entire west coast of South America also saw a social explosion, with protests in Ecuador spreading to Chile, Bolivia (a defensive struggle against right-wing forces), and Colombia.

Iraqi protesters have poured into the streets with particular fury, as police and military troops fire on them with live ammunition. As we write, after three months of protests, over 500 demonstrators have been killed, according to the UN. A number of articles are advancing an anti-Iranian narrative to characterize these protests. While this has a kernel of truth, there is a more complex process unfolding, including a deep disdain for the corrupt and repressive government headed by Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi, who agreed to resign but in late December 2019 is still in power.

To understand the current demonstrations, it helps to put them in the context of the utter destruction and occupation of Iraq by U.S. military forces. For decades, through war and sanctions, the U.S. has systematically destroyed the infrastructure of Iraq, which at one time was considered one of the more industrially advanced countries in the Middle East. The U.S.-led war and occupation from 2003-2011 alone killed more than 500,000 civilians and displaced one out every 25 Iraqis, sending more than a quarter of a million abroad.

In such times of struggle, questions of strategy rocket to the forefront: What does it take to win the *fundamental* demands of the movement—do the people have to make compromises? How can they effectively challenge the police and the army? Is violence the way? Can they trust the armed forces to keep order? And after the president is forced to flee (as has happened in some incidences), what then? How can the will of the people be put into action—should they call for a constituent assembly? Will the movement be strengthened if the workers parties form some sort of “front” with the “progressive” bourgeois parties in order to fight the ultra-right?

The Trotskyist movement points out that the task of winning fundamental change must be accomplished by working people taking the leadership of the struggle and fighting for power. That is true of struggles in semi-colonial countries as much as it is in the imperialist centers. No other force can do it—not the military, not the “progressive” capitalist class, and not the middle classes or peasantry alone.

Two hundred years ago, perhaps, the bourgeoisie was a revolutionary class. Bourgeois democrats and military figures led the Latin American national revolutions against the “mother countries” of Spain and France, while still leaving many tasks like land reform incomplete. In this epoch of modern imperialism, however, a semi-colonial country’s capitalist class operates merely as a junior partner to the imperialists; it is unable to complete the revolutions and to fulfill the basic democratic and economic demands of workers and poor peasants. These demands can only be won by means of a deep struggle for political power led by the working class and a revolutionary party, which goes on to overthrow capitalism, tear down and overhaul the state apparatus, and make the socialist revolution. These observations were outlined by Leon Trotsky in his Theory of Permanent Revolution.

An admirable expression of the principles of permanent revolution was made at the time of a workers’ upsurge in Bolivia in 1946, when the trade-union movement, led by the Trotskyist Partido Obrero Revolucionario, submitted its Thesis of Pulacayo. The Thesis stated in part: “The Bolivian particularity is that in the political scenario there has not emerged a bourgeoisie capable of liquidating the latifundia and other pre-capitalist economic formations; nor one able to achieve national unification and liberation from the yoke of imperialism. These incomplete bourgeois tasks are the democratic-bourgeois objectives, which we should realize without delay. The central problems of semi-colonial countries are: the agrarian revolution and national independence—which is to say, the removal of the imperialist yoke—tasks which are closely linked one to the other...”

The Thesis of Pulacayo went on to describe a corollary of Trotsky’s theory called “uneven and combined development.” It said: “The backward countries move under pressure from the imperialists; their development has a combined character: it brings together at the same time the most primitive economic forms with the latest technology and techniques of capitalist civilization. The proletariat of the backward countries is obligated to combine the struggle for democratic-bourgeois demands with the struggle for socialist demands. Both stages—the democratic and the socialist—‘Are not separated in the struggle by historic stages but surge immediately the one from the other.’”

It is tragic that the leadership of the workers’ struggles in a great number of semi-colonial countries—many times influenced by Stalinists or other reformist forces—have rejected the views expressed in the Thesis of Pulacayo. Instead, the reformists often insist on the idea of two

distinct “stages” in the struggle. During the first “democratic” stage, they advocate concocting a coalition with the capitalists and striving for the achievement of limited reforms, while they put off the struggle for socialism (the “second stage”) until the far distant future.

This was the case, for example, in South Africa in the early 1990s, when the African National Congress, closely allied with the South African Communist Party, elected to accept the offer of the government for “power sharing,” an arrangement that would abolish apartheid while leaving the capitalist economic system and state intact. Of course, the more farsighted elements in the capitalist class were overjoyed that the Black struggle could be demobilized and roped into such a bargain. These capitalists considered that apartheid, which had segregated the majority Black population into poverty-stricken “homelands” and operated largely with a strictly controlled migrant labor force, was no longer adequate for a modern diversified economy. If South Africa were to compete on world markets, they understood that they would require instead a stable, settled, skilled, and passive workforce.

The South African Communist Party stood behind the “power sharing” collaboration of the ANC with the DeKlerk regime. The process was explained in a pamphlet by Michael Schreiber and published by Socialist Action, “South Africa—The Black Unions Go Forward,” in 1987. Schreiber stated: “As South African Communist Party leader Jack Simons wrote in the June 1985 issue of *SECHABA* magazine, the organ of the African National Congress, ‘There is a Congress realization that most peasant-workers, who form the bulk of the working class under apartheid, are not yet class-conscious enough or ready for the adoption of a socialist solution.’

“Instead, the SACP calls for building what is variously called a ‘broad patriotic alliance,’ ‘anti-fascist front,’ or ‘popular front.’ The front would be constructed around a political platform that could unite ‘all classes and strata whose interests are served by the immediate aims of the national-democratic revolution’ (1962 constitution of the SACP).

“The Stalinists first advanced the popular front in the 1930s, portraying it as an alliance based on a long-term strategy on which both working-class and pro-capitalist forces could supposedly agree. In practice, working people were asked to give up their independent program and goals and to defend the program of the pro-capitalist forces participating in the front.

“The popular front has always had the effect of stifling the mobilization of working people and disarming them before their enemies. Many examples exist—most tragically, perhaps, in Spain in 1939, Indonesia in 1965, and Chile in 1973—when the strategy of the popular front resulted in a mass slaughter of the working-class movement....

“The popular front and the two-stage theory go hand in hand. Both concepts downplay the mobilization of working people toward their own long-term goals. To impose a two-stage schema onto the struggle in South Africa plays into the hands of liberal capitalists there who offer their scheme of limited ‘power-sharing’ to the Black majority in order to head off a revolutionary drive by the masses.”

After accepting the power-sharing role, it took only a short time for the ANC itself to become the predominant party in the South African government, and within a few more years, former liberation and trade-union leaders had become millionaires and capitalists in their own right. The ANC is now the guardian of South African capitalism; and while the worst aspects of apartheid segregation are gone, the Black masses continue to languish in poverty, slum-like housing, backbreaking working conditions, and limited access to the land.

In 2019, due to tensions with the Tripartite Alliance of the ANC, SACP, and COSATU union federation, the NUMSA metalworkers union, together with other forces in the labor movement, initiated a new party, the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party. This bears watching, although the NUMSA leadership appeared rather lackadaisical in promoting the new party in the recent parliamentary elections and the provincial elections, and it received a miniscule vote—failing to win any seats.

Women play a key role in the struggles

Women have been on the front lines of a number of mass rebellions, from Sudan to Lebanon to Ecuador—often mobilized through their own women’s organizations. Women and their allies have likewise been successful in getting issues of gender discrimination included among the demands raised by the broader struggles.

In Lebanon, for example, women have taken leadership roles in the movement that was ignited on Oct. 17. The movement zeroed in on government corruption and its inability to deal with deteriorating economic conditions. People were also incensed by displays of government incompetence such as its failure to quickly extinguish major fires that burst out in October. As in Iraq, demonstrators demanded an overthrow of the power-sharing system that is based on ethnic and religious divisions. The movement grew to the point of forcing the resignation of Prime Minister Saad Hariri, while demanding that the rest of the political establishment go with him.

At several events, women formed a human shield to protect protesters from riot police. "Women have naturally claimed their space in the public sphere, not only in traditional roles restricted to feminist issues," Carmen Geha, activist and assistant professor at the American University of Beirut, told a reporter from the *DW* web news journal. "We are real partners in this revolution."

The women protesters have come from a variety of backgrounds and beliefs; some wear headscarves, and some do not. But they all feel intensely that women’s oppression should be addressed in the broader struggle. In 2018, women’s organizations joined together to start the nationwide "Shame on Who?" campaign to raise public support for people who had reported sexual assault, with the caution to "condemn the rapist—not the victim." A law that had kept rapists from facing jail time if they promised to marry their victims had remained on the books until 2017.

DW pointed out: "Women in Lebanon have long borne the brunt of discrimination embedded in a sectarian political system that leaves them vulnerable and unequal to men. Laws governing marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance fall under the mandate of the various sectarian courts. There are 15 separate personal status laws for the country's different religious communities that are administered by religious courts, all of which discriminate against women, according to Human Rights Watch. Activist groups have long called for adopting a unified personal status law that treats women and men as equals. ... Lebanese women are significantly underrepresented in Parliament, holding only six seats out of 128. ...

"One of the protesters' top demands is establishing a non-sectarian civil state, which would, by default, result in progress toward women's equality, as overhauling the system could lead to civil laws that treat women and men equally. Another demand is reforming the nationality law. Lebanese women, unlike men, are banned from passing their nationality to their children and spouses."

In the meantime, in Europe, many hundreds of thousands of women and many male supporters demonstrated in 2019 against gender violence. On Nov. 17, tens of thousands (the feminist collective #NousToutes reported 100,000) filled the streets of Paris, the largest of about 30 protests of gender violence across France. The marchers highlighted the fact that at least 116 women (one group estimates 137) have been killed by current or former partners this past year in France.

Earlier in the year, similar protests took place throughout Italy. On March 8, 2019, *Non una di meno* ("Not one woman less") put hundreds of thousands of women in motion amidst collaborative national 24-hour shutdowns of bus, metro, tram, and train networks, airport

ground operations, and municipal offices and schools in Rome. In Milan, the transport unions issued demands that included a stop to male violence against women, gender discrimination and precarious employment; privatization in the welfare sector, the right to free and accessible public services, universal and unconditional earnings at home and at work, with equal pay, and a policy of shared support for maternity and paternity leave.

They began organizing three years ago after witnessing the 2016 strike of Polish women in defense of abortion rights and watching the Ni una menos movement in Argentina use the organizing tool of national and local assemblies to call a “women’s strike” in October 2016, in response to the murder of 16-year-old Lucía Pérez, who was raped and impaled in the coastal city of Mar del Plata. Ni una menos spread quickly to other cities in Argentina and soon to Brazil, Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay, El Salvador, Mexico, Turkey, and Spain.

In 2017, the International Women’s Strike, or *Paro Internacional de Mujeres* network, began to link these struggles in a more formal way and set March 8, International Women’s Day, as a global day of action for women fighting not only against sexual violence, for reproductive justice, and an end to discrimination, but against all the anti-working-class attacks on the social wage and the neoliberal restructuring of employment that hit women and gender non-conforming people the hardest.

The development of the IWS, from the global South to the south of Europe, before its expansion to more than 50 countries, is no accident. It reflects resistance in the places facing the most brutal of the impacts of the global capitalist crisis—the austerity demands placed on indebted nations, and the cutbacks and extreme pro-business measures implemented by local elites responding to the bidding of the IMF and other lenders.

In 2019, the outpouring globally on March 8 exceeded that of previous years. In the Spanish state alone, at least 6 million respected the national call for a general strike, and demonstrations numbered 350,000 in Madrid, 250,000 in Barcelona, and 200,000 in Zaragoza. Julia Cámara, who toured the U.S. in February 2019, described the organizing as involving linking networks of immigrant women; North African, Middle Eastern, and Central American refugees; caucuses of women in the unions; unorganized women fighting the stresses of precarious work; and young women struggling around sexual violence. All were together to restore desperately needed social provisioning such as housing, health care, education, and dignity for women, cis and trans, under attack due to the economic crisis and lack of a sufficient response from more traditional working-class organizations and parties.

Some insight into the process by which feminist activists and young working women are radicalizing, developing a systemic critique of the political order, and discovering themselves as agents of change for the whole working class can be gleaned from the many calls and documents put out by various assemblies for the International Women’s Day marches.

In Argentina, the movement, while founded in response to a sexual murder, rejects carceral feminism (calling on the police), arguing that sexual violence is inextricably bound to the economic violence of the state, and refuses to ally with a criminal justice system that defends profits through racialized policing and jailing. In opposition to all the attacks on Argentine labor law and payment of the debt to those banks by President Mauricio Macri, they proclaimed: “In this strike we collect the history of all the historic strikes of the feminist movement and make it our own, because we are in the front row against the reactionary right, the neoliberal plans, and the interference of the imperialist governments.”

In Buenos Aires, the March 8 action began with a militant but disciplined face-off between the police and the organized women workers of Coca Cola, Hospital Posadas, the occupied MadyGraf print shop, and other work sites. The assembly also had to debate the place of bourgeois electoralism in the struggle, with supporters of former president Christina Kirchner trying to assert leadership and finally withdrawing financial support for

the strike sound system and stage. A vigorous intervention by trans-critical feminists hoping to exclude trans women was defeated, and the document supported a fully inclusive movement.

On the eve of March 8, 2019, an international group of signatories from the IWS movements in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Spain, Italy, and the U.S. published “Beyond March 8: Toward a New Feminist International” on the site of Verso Books. “The new feminist wave,” they wrote, “is the first line of defense to the rise of the far-right. Today, women are leading the resistance to reactionary governments in a number of countries.” The term “Feminist International,” coined by the Argentine movement, they say, is meant to evoke the new sense of urgency attached to international solidarity and transnational meetings to coordinate, share practical experiences, and deepen analysis.

The perspective of the International Women’s Strike movement, however, is the perspective of revolutionary socialists, who can bring the experience of the global movement to radicalizing working women and students in many ways, rooting the expansion of their political imaginations in internationalism, and laying the base for a future of class-struggle feminism.

Upsurge in Chile

In Latin America, as in the Middle East, we have seen a general pattern in which mass protests burst into flame around relatively limited or local issues, like a rise in Metro fares (Chile) or gasoline prices (Ecuador and Iran). And when the governmental authorities fail to respond adequately or employ repression, the protesters are not easily dispersed. They fight harder and coordinate their struggles; the protests erupt into massive nationwide rebellions. The demonstrators now raise a plethora of demands aimed directly against the national governments, which represent their long simmering discontent over poverty, unemployment, indifference to environmental degradation, and other issues. More and more, the streets become a battleground, with young people fighting back against the police attackers. More often than not, the traditional workers’ organizations, the trade unions, are pulled into the struggle at a later stage. In some cases, we see new struggle committees arise in the working-class neighborhoods.

The rebellions in Chile and Bolivia appear to have gone furthest so far in using class-struggle methods in their protests, utilizing one-day general strikes, elemental working-class assemblies to coordinate the struggle, and workers’ militias in Bolivia. In Ecuador too, Indigenous protesters that were impelled into action by the proposed 100 percent rise in fuel prices occupied the parliament building and caused President Lenín Moreno to flee the city. The Ecuadoran movement then organized a Parliament of the Peoples. These developments, if extended, can go a long way toward utilizing the full power of the working class to win their demands and even toward winning a revolutionary workers’ government.

Despite being rich in resources and the world’s largest copper producer, Chile has much poverty and one of the highest levels of inequality in Latin America. Over half of all Chilean workers earn less than \$550 a month, and over half of those living off pensions get less than \$190 a month. This is in one of the most expensive countries regionally and where the U.S.-backed dictatorship of the 1970s-90s privatized all public services. The so-called “democratic” governments since Pinochet’s fall only deepened the trend. Chileans have some of the highest consumer debt in the world for the same reason that we do in the United States: Health care, education, retirement, and all other aspects of social life are in the hands of private capital.

The current set-up in Chile is a boon for imperialism. U.S. companies own three of the AFP pension corporations, and in general there is over \$26 billion of annual U.S. investment in the

country. President Piñera has also made moves for Chile to become China's "[business hub in Latin America](#)." Chinese annual FDI into Chile is already double that of the U.S.

Since protests began over proposed Metro fare increases on Oct. 18, workers have made demands that include a huge increase in the minimum wage, nationalization of important resources, and a constituent assembly to remove the institutional holdovers of Augusto Pinochet's long and bloody dictatorship.

On Nov. 26, 2019, Chilean workers undertook a two-day general strike, which began with a dockers' strike that paralyzed 24 ports. In response, Piñera threatened to mobilize army troops to "protect critical infrastructure." Earlier, workers and their allies staged two one-day general strikes in October and November. The Nov. 12 action, which reports state involved some 2 million people, was taken to bolster demands for the president to step down and for a solution to the socioeconomic crisis. School classes were canceled and many government offices closed their doors. Many thousands of striking workers joined marches in the cities, while some protesters, including truck drivers, erected barricades to block the highways and streets.

The [announcement](#) by the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT, Workers' United Center) in favor of the second general strike came after a Nov. 6 decision by the government that the monthly minimum wage would only be raised to CLP\$350 thousand, about USD\$70 more than the current minimum wage. The demand from the movement is for a minimum wage of CLP\$500 thousand (USD\$640).

Across the country, workers began to self-organize in assemblies, which serve as stunning examples for the entire world movement. Especially in areas where the Social Unity Board, a collection of reformist groupings and trade unions, is absent, these assemblies have given the Chilean working people spaces to plan, organize, and coordinate their fight against the government. Instead of creating a phony "dialogue" with Piñera and Chilean capital, assemblies like the [Comité de Emergencia y Resguardo](#) in Antofagasta allow real discussions for the only social force that can sweep away the remnants of Pinochet's dictatorship and implement the necessary economic and political changes to ensure a green economy, livable wages, and cheap quality public services.

The CUT union federation [reported](#) on Nov. 3 that over 300 councils had been organized by various worker and community groups, with over 10,000 Chileans participating. These councils came together despite the government-imposed "state of emergency," which made public assemblies illegal. The demands, as articulated by the minute taker from one council, were put thusly:

"New Political Constitution; constituent assembly; New Pension and Solidarity Pension System, the NO + AFP was repeated many times as one of the important slogans; Environmental protection, no more areas of sacrifice; Nationalization of Common Goods such as water, energy and natural resources such as lithium and copper as well as basic services; Substantial increase in the Minimum Wage and improvements in the Labor System; Quality and free Public Education; creation of a Single Public Health System with the necessary resources for timely and quality care and without undercover privatizations such as waiting lists; effective access and improvement of housing; Tax Reform, modification of the tax system where the richest should contribute more; real and timely justice for violation of human rights; gender equality and feminist approach in public policies. In short, Chileans and Chileans demand a real and participatory democracy that effectively includes all the people who inhabit this territory: women, native peoples, children, and migrants."

A major concession from Piñera called for a process to change the Chilean constitution through a type of "constituent assembly," a demand that has been raised continuously from the streets. However, the proposal was obviously put forward as a way to keep Piñera in power and deflate the popular movement in the country, and it was rejected by most workers'

organizations. Under the terms of Piñera's plan, a referendum will take place on April 26, 2020, to ask Chileans whether they want a constitutional convention, and if so, whether they want it composed just of elected citizens or whether they prefer a mixed body composed half of citizens and half of legislators in the current reactionary congress. In a preliminary consultative vote, held in 225 of the country's 345 municipal districts, 92.4 percent said that they supported a new constitution, and 73.1 percent favored a constituent assembly made up only of citizens.

Among left-wing organizations, a debate is taking place concerning the type and necessity of a constituent assembly. The Frente Amplio (Broad Front, a coalition including the Greens, anarchists, and others) and Communist Party seem to be willing to accept the Piñera-endorsed constituent assembly that would start with the April 2020 plebiscite and generally leave untouched the social relations within the country.

On the other end of the spectrum sits the Left Workers Movement (MIT), affiliated with the International Workers League-Fourth International, who [argue](#) that a constituent assembly would be a trap to defang the workers' movement. In the MIT's view, instead of focusing on the demand for a constituent assembly, revolutionaries should be fighting to organize the class around economic and political demands. These include:

- Forgiveness of the debts of workers, youth and people
- End the AFPs [private pension system]. Minimum pension of 500 thousand pesos
- Free public and state health, education, and transportation, controlled by workers and the people
- End of subcontracting and informal work that reduces our rights
- Reduction of working hours to guarantee employment for all. Minimum salary increase to CLP\$ 600,000
- The right to self-determination of the Mapuche people and immediate demilitarization of the Wallmapu.

Then there is the Revolutionary Workers Party (PTR), affiliated with the Trotskyist Fraction, who argue for a "[free and sovereign](#)" constituent assembly. In this view, a constituent assembly would need to be convened purely out of the workers' mobilizations through the already-existing industrial and community assemblies discussed above. Instead of simply drafting a new constitution, the constituent assembly would be faced with the tasks of reshaping Chilean society to the utmost limit of what is possible in bourgeois democracy—and beyond. These demands include:

- Expropriation of the ports without compensation
- Nationalization under workers' control of the electricity, water, gas, and all public service companies
- Nationalization of copper and strategic natural resources, with no compensation to the owners, under the management and control of the workers and the communities.

They note, "If an emergency program like the one we are proposing is implemented, it will likely come up against the violent opposition of the big capitalists, who will defend all their privileges tooth and nail alongside their repressive state." Therefore, "it is more urgent than ever to form assemblies and coordinating committees at workplaces, schools and universities, and in neighborhoods."

Finally, the MST, the section of the IWU-FI (International Workers Unity) in Chile, believes that the demand for a constituent assembly, while acceptable, should not be primary. Instead, they put forward the demand for "a workers' and people's government" to replace the Piñera regime. Like the PTR, they see a "free and sovereign constituent assembly," built on the neighborhood, student, and union assemblies, as a means toward achieving a workers' government.

What will happen next in Chile is an open question. Prospects for a military crackdown cannot be ruled out. At the same time, the fact that there is such uncertainty in the country is emblematic of the new phase that the global class struggle seems to be entering. If Chilean workers continue on their path of self-organization and mass movement militancy, the possibility remains that *cordones industriales* (rank-and-file workers' councils that coordinated political struggles in several factories and companies), such as the ones that were built in the early 1970s, can reemerge in the country.

Right-wing coup in Bolivia

On Nov. 10, Evo Morales resigned as president of Bolivia at the "suggestion" of the head of the armed forces; he and Vice President Alvaro García Linera soon found refuge in Mexico. Jeanine Añez Chavez, a right-wing member of the Senate whose party received only 4 percent of the vote in the October election, declared herself "interim president." She immediately received the support of a number of imperialist countries, including Russia.

For three weeks, right-wing mobs had rampaged in the streets, attacking Morales supporters and burning and pillaging the houses of leaders of his Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS). Working people in El Alto, a working-class and largely Indigenous city of one million residents, and other towns and cities have engaged in continual protests to demand that Morales be allowed to return and that Añez step down as president. Police have attacked them with firearms—killing at least 23 by Nov. 16.

Just before asking Morales to resign, the head of the armed forces, Williams Kaliman, publically declared that the army would "never go against the people." But Bolivia has been prey to many military coups in the past; another one might well be on the horizon if it appears it would be necessary to put down continuing protest actions. In the meantime, MAS supporters face continuing repression; Añez has said that MAS might not be allowed to run in future elections.

Morales, the country's first Indigenous leader, had won four elections in a row, including substantial majorities in the first three. In the last election, on Oct. 20, Morales took over 47 percent of the vote. After the MAS asked the Organization of American States (a grouping that is dominated by Washington) to review the election process, the OAS responded that it had found serious problems. The OAS determination served to bolster allegations of "fraud" by Carlos Mesa, who had received the second largest amount of votes, and a call by him to bar Morales from any new election.

Donald Trump, who is glad to shake the hands of dictators throughout the world, applauded the coup, labeling it "a significant moment for democracy in the Western Hemisphere." The U.S. has always been eager to see Morales evicted; his professed anti-imperialism and friendship with the Cuban and Venezuelan leaderships ran counter to Washington's goals of extending its neo-colonial domination over more of the Latin American region. Moreover, despite Morales' assurances that the country was "open for business," his government was not thought to be sufficiently able to withstand anti-capitalist pressures from the mass movement.

And finally, by removing Morales and the MAS from power, the U.S. and the international capitalist class hoped to cripple the traditionally militant working-class movement of Bolivia, which includes trade unions that have roots in revolutionary socialism.

Morales and the MAS came to power in December 2005 at a time when upsurges had rocked several Latin American countries. As an outcome of the mass mobilizations, "left" populist and reformist political leaders were elected to office throughout Latin America—a development that became known as the "Pink Tide."

Morales has been considered by some to be a “socialist,” as the name of his party implies. But despite receiving support at the polls by most sections of the working class and small peasants, he and his party presided over a country that remained capitalist. Major reforms, such as dividing the big plantations among the landless peasants, were neglected. Morales readily dangled tax breaks and other incentives to attract multi-national corporations.

In order to view the accomplishments of his government, it is worth looking back at the events that brought Morales to power. A wave of mass mobilizations shook Bolivia during the first five years of the new millennium. Several governments fell in succession, working-class activist councils were established—creating a situation that verged on dual power—and the country was brought to the brink of revolution.

The protests of 2005 were touched off by the lifting of gas and oil subsidies by the Carlos Mesa regime, with a corresponding rise in prices. The Confederation of Bolivian Workers (COB), the miners’ union, and the central regional council of El Alto (a large working-class city near La Paz) called for re-nationalizing the oil and gas industry—which had been returned to private hands in the neo-liberal schemes of the 1990s—and replacing the bourgeois parliament with a workers’ government based on people’s assemblies.

At the same time, a right-wing force gathered strength, based largely around the eastern lowland department of Santa Cruz (and the city of the same name), an area of large farms and close to the main oil fields. There was a racist component to the division, since Santa Cruz contained many people of European ancestry who considered themselves superior to the Indigenous people who predominate in the Andean highlands. (Santa Cruz is also the base of Carlos Fernando Camacho, a Christian fundamentalist, white supremacist, and ultra-rightist who was the most prominent leader of the recent mob actions against the Morales government and its supporters.)

Evo Morales, the head of the coca-growers’ union and the Indigenous leader of the Movimiento al Socialismo, did not play a leading role in the mass rebellion of those years but used the momentum to build an electoral movement. In effect, his candidacy for president succeeded in containing the protests within the bounds of the electoral process.

In June 2005, after a two-year stint in the presidency, Carlos Mesa was forced to resign due to the protests. His successor, Eduardo Rodríguez, filled in for six months more. In December 2005, Morales won a decisive victory in a four-person presidential race. He received a high number of votes in the highland districts in which Indigenous groups and the workers’ movement are strong. However, not all of the workers’ organizations that had taken a leading role in the 2003 and 2005 mobilizations gave support to Morales and the MAS, which some of them considered to be a pro-capitalist peasant party.

In the *Socialist Action* newspaper of February 2006, staff writer Gerry Foley was able to trace the measures and half-measures that Morales took during his first days in the presidency. For one thing, Morales put forward a general “anti-imperialist” program, which was received warmly by Fidel Castro in Cuba and by Chavez in Venezuela when Morales visited them after his victory. One of his key issues was against the U.S. “War on Drugs,” which had promised to stamp out coca growing in the region.

But Morales was already granting concessions to capitalism. Foley cited a report in the Bolivian radical website *Econoticias* (Dec. 28, 2005) that Morales had received approval from representatives of the land-owning oligarchy in Santa Cruz when he promised to respect private property. Indeed, one of his first decisions in office was to smooth the way for capitalist interests to exploit the large iron and magnesium deposits in the southeastern part of the country.

In regard to re-nationalizing the oil industry, Foley again quoted an *Econoticias* report (Jan. 6, 2006): “Morales’ promise is to carry out a symbolic nationalization, which amounts to

applying with minor adjustments the present hydrocarbon law [imposed by his predecessor Carlos Mesa], which retains the ownership of the hydrocarbons for the Bolivian state while they remain in the ground or as they come to the surface. Once they come one meter above the ground, into the so-called mouth of the well, all the hydrocarbons become the property of the transnationals that operate in Bolivia, which will continue to be in charge of exploration, production, sales, exports, and refining of the hydrocarbons.”

In an article dated Jan. 26, 2006, the British *Economist* magazine warned of the threat of radicalism in the Morales regime, while at the same time noting the new president’s reassurances to the capitalists: “He also called for private investment, for an ‘alliance’ against the drug trade with the United States, and hinted that he might support an Americas free-trade accord if it helped small business.”

In respect to land reform—a pressing demand of the poor peasants—Morales’ plan was meager. It called for the distribution of 2.2 million hectares of state-owned land to poor farmers, but did not touch the 25 million hectares owned by 100 wealthy families. Morales also promised the oligarchs that the government would repress any attempts by peasants to seize more land. That promise was fulfilled in June 2006, when police violently attacked several actions by landless peasants to occupy the land.

While the Morales government was able to significantly lower poverty rates over the years, it still remains high (63 percent below the poverty line in 2002 and 35 percent in 2018). In the meantime, foreign capitalist investment has come roaring in, lured by government concessions and the abundance of cheap labor. While foreign direct investment was at \$250 million in 2005, it reached \$1750 million in recent years, according to the Economic Commission for Latin America. A BBC article states that in the past decade over 300 international retail chains decided to enter Bolivia, many of them attracted by the growth of big shopping malls.

Although Evo Morales’ government undertook some nationalization of the hydrocarbon industry, as stated above, over 80 percent of the oil and gas fields remain in the hands of multinational corporations, according to the La Paz-based Center for Labor and Agrarian Development (CEDLA). Big Oil has been handed a number of incentives, including low taxes and opening of protected areas and national parks to drilling. Natural gas accounted for over 32 percent of the country’s exports in 2017.

Mining companies (zinc is the principle ore) have gained similar perks; the transnational San Cristóbal corporation, for example, pays less than 10 percent of the value of its exports for royalties and taxes, CEDLA reports. Bolivia’s vast but untapped lithium reserves, necessary for battery production, are being developed in one location by a state-owned company and in two other locations in a joint venture with Chinese and German investors. The German firm, ACI, was given a sweetheart 70-year contract and virtual control over management of the lithium mines in the pristine Uyuni salt flats, plus permission to export 80% of the ore to Germany. After mass protests, on Nov. 4, Morales moved to rescind the concessions he had granted—but it was too late; the coup took place a week later.

In his February 2006 article, Gerry Foley summed up: “It is clear that Morales is just another populist politician in a long Latin American tradition. His objective is to keep the mass revolt against imperialist and capitalist exploitation within the bounds of the existing economic and parliamentary system.”

Populist politicians are often lifted into power on the strength of their promises to enact major reforms to benefit working people and the poor peasants. Populists often claim that they, and only they, can “save” the nation. They often make use of nationalist rhetoric and blast the intervention of Yanqui imperialism into the homeland, while at the same time straddling the gap between the fundamental demands of the oppressed masses and the demands of international capitalism upon them.

But soon the bills become due; loans to the international banks must be paid, while dissatisfied peasants are taking over the land and workers are walking out in strikes. Since the populists have failed to significantly reduce the power of the capitalist class and their imperialist big brothers, they find their space to maneuver greatly restricted. In order to stay in power, they have to shelve their earlier promises to the workers, give additional concessions to the capitalists who really run the country, make deals with the imperialists, and rely more and more on the military and police to “keep order.”

On the other hand, as Gerry Foley pointed out in 2006, Bolivia’s history of militant rebellion by working people and poor peasants could not be denied. Morales was “facing a more dynamic and conscious mass movement than similar populist leaders in the past.”

“Thus,” Foley wrote, “Bolivia remains a powder keg, and the imperialists have good reason to be worried. Supporters of the right of self-determination and the rights of labor have to remain alert to oppose imperialist threats to Bolivia and attempts by the capitalist press to project an image of the developments in the country designed to justify imperialist pressures and even eventually intervention.”

As it turned out, the workers’ movement and unions—despite their history of militancy—failed to move to take power in their own name. Morales and his party, as pro-capitalist reformers, were able to keep the mass movement bottled up. A Constituent Assembly was called, but its proposals failed to transcend the bounds of the capitalist state. A true revolutionary socialist party, capable of coordinating and leading the struggle for a real workers’ government and state, was never built.

Morales won the recent vote, but the capitalists, the ultra-right, and Washington felt he had become both vulnerable and expendable. At the end, Morales felt he could rely on the military and police to keep order—but they betrayed him.

The organized Bolivian labor movement should take the initiative in building a broad united front against the coup, and a nationwide general strike. At the same time, it is important to restore the working-class committees of struggle that sprang up over a decade ago. A good start is the call by the Federation of Neighborhood Councils (Fejuve) in the city of El Alto to “form self-defense committees, blockades, permanent and forceful mobilization” against the coup.

International actions in solidarity with the Bolivian people are likewise crucial. While accepting that a coup by the Bolivian military is an ever-present danger, we also must not discount the possibility of direct imperialist intervention. It is necessary to demand: “U.S. Hands Off Bolivia!”

Venezuela

Building opposition to the U.S.-backed effort to execute a coup in Venezuela is a priority for revolutionary socialists and antiwar activists in the United States. We must unequivocally defend Venezuela’s right of self-determination and educate the broad public about the stakes in this effort for all working people.

The U.S. was emboldened by the 2013-2018 economic crisis in Venezuela and the growing opposition within the country to the United Socialist Party (PSUV), all in the context of the global capitalist economic crisis, the collapse of the reformist Pink Tide projects in Brazil, Argentina, and elsewhere, and the rise of the Latin American electoral right in the figures of Bolsonaro and Macri.

The U.S. ruling class must also take into consideration growing economic competition from China in the region, Russian bailouts of the Venezuelan state-owned oil and gas company PDVSA in return for equity, and foreign policy initiatives on the part of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega that align with Russia. A March 19,

2019, meeting in Rome between the U.S. and Russia, in which they aimed to find a common resolution for Venezuela, suggests that the threats to Venezuelan sovereignty come from more than one pole of world imperialism.

Blessed with new allies in both the OAS and ALBA and belligerent governments in Brazil and Columbia eager to mop up any remaining traces of the reformist wave that gave hope to the working classes, the U.S. seemed determined to push past the dramatic failures of Juan Guaidó's efforts at the border and inside the country to rally the masses and sweep his wing of the Venezuelan ruling class into power. While prominent think tanks like *Foreign Policy* have published opinion pieces explaining that any U.S. military intervention into Venezuela would be unlikely to succeed in any reasonable amount of time, Washington continues war by sanctions and semi-covert machinations. Moreover, a direct U.S. military intervention, or one carried out in conjunction with troops from other countries, cannot be ruled out.

In early April 2019, the U.S. raised the stakes for revolutionaries worldwide when it vowed to sanction oil and other petroleum products that Venezuela sells at low cost to revolutionary Cuba. Strangling the Cuban energy supply seems to now be on the agenda. A confrontation between the U.S. and sanctioned Venezuelan tankers at sea seems to be a real possibility.

The impact of U.S. sanctions on the Venezuelan people has been criminal and murderous. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, the country has suffered a two-thirds drop in GDP—the largest fall in Latin American history and over twice the decline in the U.S. caused by the Great Depression. The misery produced by U.S. sanctions comes on top of a series of economic attacks on the working class and poor by the government in Caracas that propelled thousands of workers and community activists into the streets in 2018. Inflation born of the unwillingness of the Maduro regime to float the currency and upset the windfall gains of the boli-bourgeoisie via currency manipulation and the black market has left much of the population with a minimum wage of \$6 a month, or 5% of the needed basic basket of goods.

Government programs to provide food subsidies to the poor are organized on a clientelist basis that rewards loyalty to the PSUV and punishes working-class political independence and dissent. The government has encouraged disinvestment in the basic infrastructure of the electrical and water systems and new non-extractive production in favor of expenditures to attract new imperialist investment in extraction in the Orinoco Arc and exacting payment on the debt. The use of the police and PSUV-affiliated paramilitaries against worksite and community protests for wages and basic services have weakened the ability of the working classes to prepare to fight an imperialist invasion.

As oil prices dropped and the ability of the regime to maintain social benefits originally dispensed under Chavez contracted, the Maduro regime has increasingly relied on the military as its base of support. The loyalty of the top officers (Venezuela has over 3000 generals and admirals) has been purchased by giving them ownership of companies and access to the millions of dollars sloshing through the channels of corruption. The ability of Maduro to retain the support of these officers diminishes with each new round of sanctions and economic dislocation wrought by U.S. imperialism.

An ominous development in September 2019 was the agreement of 19 governments in the Americas, led by the U.S., of a 1947 pact known as the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, or the Rio Treaty. The treaty was set up as a mutual defense pact against a foreign invader and is now activated to counter the threat that is supposedly in place because Maduro is said to be hosting guerrillas set to begin bombing key sites in Bogotá, the capital of Colombia. The U.S. and Colombia also claim that Russia is likely upgrading the Venezuelan missile defense system it earlier provided. In addition, the Russians are said to have provided thousands of portable surface-to-air missiles to Maduro.

The Rio Treaty pact was invoked soon after Trump's firing of John Bolton, whom the president said was "holding me back on Venezuela." The Rio Treaty potentially sets in motion collaboration on joint actions ranging from economic sanctions to the use of military force and cutting transport and communications links. According to *The New York Times*, administration officials said their immediate goal in future meetings was to escalate sanctions—including the possible interdiction at sea of ships carrying Venezuelan oil or closing airspace—and to provide a legal framework for other countries in the hemisphere to join them.

There is no guarantee that Washington will get exactly what it wants from this body. Mexico is on an offensive against the escalation to military enforcement of interdiction on the continent, and *The Times* reported unease among the Rio Treaty partners about U.S. aims. Left commentators argued that while nothing could be ruled out in terms of U.S.-led military action, the political hesitancy and the failure of the U.S. so far to win significant sections of the military officer corps away from Maduro in the eight months since the failure of their coup effort demonstrated that the invocation of the Rio Treaty and increased sanctions are more likely aimed at pressuring Maduro in the framework of the Norway negotiations underway in Barbados.

While Maduro dramatically "froze" the negotiations in August 2019 when the U.S. announced the plan to blockade, they are not dead, and Maduro admitted that his regime was carrying on "secret" meetings with the U.S., some in Washington, D.C., itself. In these negotiations, there were open rifts within the Maduro team and within the Juan Guaidó opposition, and the whole process was reportedly wracked by suspicion and fear about breaks within each team. Moreover, in November, Guaidó became enmeshed in a corruption scandal, and appears to have lost a great deal of support.

The opposition has been divided on whether or not they would accept a deal in which Maduro remains in power for six months or so while national elections are being prepared. Meanwhile, the U.S., which opposes that scenario, keeps publicly guaranteeing Maduro's security and safety should he agree to step down immediately and leave the country.

Recently, Maduro moved a chess piece in this game by announcing that the PSUV was forming a national dialogue with minor opposition parties in Venezuela (they are not the major opposition parties of Guaidó and Capriles). The pact would include delegates returning to the National Assembly and taking their seats, the re-activation of the electoral authorities, the release of some prisoners who come from the minor opposition, and support of an oil-for-food program. Maduro is clearly moving to shape a situation in which the regime would be more prepared politically for national elections. This could be in conjunction with some settlement or secret negotiations, although without direct collaboration with the big right-opposition parties.

It is unclear whether China will financially aid Maduro in this effort since it had been making overtures to Guaidó. Russia has not been in a position to extend high levels of assistance, and its flexibility regarding the outcome in Venezuela is indicated by its willingness to meet with the U.S.

Maduro himself is a bourgeois politician operating in defense of the boli-bourgeoisie, whose existence as a class is firmly tied to new imperialist investment in oil, mining, and speculation. With Maduro as their tool, the boli-bourgeoisie has dramatically increased foreign investment in Venezuela, and protecting these investments will ultimately trump efforts to maintain the country's right of self-determination.

This is a fundamental truth about the behavior of national bourgeoisies in semi-colonial countries that is explained in Trotsky's thesis of permanent revolution. The surest guarantee that the Venezuelan working classes have to be able to defend themselves from the imperialists and the rightist forces that the presidents of Brazil and Colombia, Jair Bolsonaro and Ivan Duque, wish to unleash into Venezuela is the independent organization of Venezuela's workers

themselves. Through this struggle in defense of their own interests, which necessarily includes defeating the draconian austerity and anti-worker program of Guaidó, Venezuelan workers could advance in their preparation to become a force that can seize power in their own name.

With this understanding, we are guided by the experience of Chile in the early 1970s, when sections of the working class failed, despite heroic efforts, to overcome the obstacles that social democracy, the Stalinists, and the trade-union bureaucracy threw up against their self-organization. This enabled the military, with the connivance of the United States, to ally with the right wing in a coup, which led to the immediate imprisonment of 40,000 militants and the eventual beheading of the workers' movement by the arrest of 130,000.

The last year has seen a period of struggle and the testing of perspectives among the Venezuelan revolutionary left. A section of the leadership of Marea Socialista, a Trotskyist "critical Chavista" current that was pushed out of the PSUV and banned from running candidates for office by the Maduro regime, disgraced itself by meeting with Guaidó in the hope of averting civil war.

However, other groups struggled more honorably on many fronts to create an independent workers' fightback against the economic "reform" program of Maduro. The attempt by several Trotskyist tendencies to lead a broad independent workers' front, which included non-Chavista unions, against the attacks on wages and working conditions is worth our study. In the end, the left was defeated and the front was won over by union bureaucrats to the Guaidó cause. Nevertheless, consideration of the debates within the Left Front on how to maintain working-class independence while effectively confronting the coup can contribute to our understanding of the capacities of the revolutionary socialist left in Latin America and can be highly useful to revolutionaries in the Northern Hemisphere trying to grapple with the reality of the struggle and rebuild a revolutionary international.

By making use of study and analysis of the situation inside Venezuela, including coverage of the activity and debates within the workers' movement and other popular organizations in the country, Socialist Resurgence can play a pivotal role in the construction of broader united-front activities in the U.S. antiwar movement, enabling it to attract radicalizing Latin American youth eager to facilitate revolutionary change on the continent. The increased threat to Cuba should also open new opportunities for united-front activities.

U.S. moves against Iran

In November 2019, after a sudden 50% rise in gasoline prices, protests broke out in over 100 cities throughout Iran. The upsurge appeared greatest in the oil-rich and majority ethnic Arab Khuzestan province. Working-class suburbs of several large cities also saw large protests, roadblocks, and attacks on police vehicles. Several banks were burnt down and pictures of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei were thrown in the bonfire. The government reacted with extreme violence against the protesters, even using live ammunition. Amnesty International reported on Nov. 23 that at least 143 people (and perhaps many more) had been killed. Internet and phone lines were also cut.

With the repression, the anti-regime demands of the protesters quickly escalated. "Leave Syria alone," some shouted, "Do something for us!" Others chanted, "Death to the dictator!" and "Out with the clerics!" Some demonstrators reportedly praised the former Shah.

The 2019 demonstrations come on the heels of a round of protests beginning at the end of 2017, when the workers, farmers, and unemployed in Iran rose up against economic and political attacks from domestic and imperialist capitalists. The mobilization took the form of mass protests in the streets, a continuing strike wave, and in some places the armed takeover of rural towns. Leading the charge were workers in the Haft Tapeh sugar factory, Ahvaz steel

workers, and teachers—whose recurring national strikes continued into 2019. Demands from the struggle included increasing women's rights, having more representative democracy, payment of back wages, protecting social provisions, and ending corruption.

In regard to the most recent revolt, the government, as with the past protests, charged that was fomented by the United States—and other adversaries such as Israel. But evidence to corroborate these charges has not been produced. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo sent greetings to the protesters, saying: “The United States hears you. The United States supports you. The United States is with you.” This is pure sophistry, of course, since the economic sanctions that the U.S. has imposed on Iran have had disastrous effects on the people.

U.S. imperialism is becoming increasingly desperate to retain hegemony over Iran. Ever since the signing of the “Iran Deal” (JCPOA) created space for investment from different imperialist powers into the country, a section of the U.S. ruling class has called for ending the agreement and imposing sanctions and possible military action. The tendency came to a head when Trump unilaterally withdrew from the JCPOA in May 2018 and began to impose extremely tight sanctions on Iran.

Since that moment, the voice of U.S. capitalism has been growing increasingly bellicose in its discussions on “diplomacy” with the Islamic Republic. Over the summer of 2019, escalations in isolating Iran's economy and the possibility that strong words might turn into a hot war rose to a fever pitch. In retaliation for unsubstantiated attacks on U.S. “interests,” missiles were readied to hit Iranian soil while active cyber-warfare has been carried out against important Iranian military facilities.

In September 2019, the United States moved its sanction regime to greater heights in effectively declaring the Iranian central bank and National Development Fund subject to sanctions and attempting to freeze between \$80 billion and \$100 billion held by the two entities. U.S. troops and military hardware are being brought into Saudi Arabia as a “defensive” measure against possible Iranian attacks.

Chinese imperialists are seeing the situation in Iran as a possible opening to make a decisive blow against U.S. influence in the Middle East. In the midst of the U.S. “maximum pressure” campaign, China has updated its 2016 bilateral strategic partnership to include a \$400 billion cash injection into energy, transportation, manufacturing, and infrastructural projects, mostly over the next five years. This goes along with an agreement to sell Iranian oil to China at a minimum discount of 12%, though the discount may be as high as 35% in some cases. Significantly, the planned \$600 billion of trade over the next 10 years will be carried out largely in renminbi and other “soft” currencies, directly confronting the universality of the dollar as the currency of world trade. China will also be increasing its military presence in the country with the immediate stationing of at least 5000 Chinese security personnel to protect its investment in Iran.

European Union countries occupy something of a middle space between the two rivals. French President Emmanuel Macron has continuously struggled for diplomatic inclusion for Iran, including inviting top diplomat Mohammad Javad Zarif to the city where the G7 summit was taking place. The great example of European diplomatic impotence is the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX), which is their way “around” U.S. sanctions. INSTEX has only dealt with trade allowed by sanctions, i.e., “humanitarian” offerings like agricultural and medical products, and now that the U.S. has closed off all categories of goods, the EU countries have no choice but to stop even those minimal supplies.

The Iranian economy is almost totally dependent on oil profits, with minimal alternate investment in productive sectors and huge amounts of unemployed or partially employed workers. The central role of the state in ensuring the continued dominance of oil capital is realized on the one hand through repression and on the other by administering welfare benefits.

The struggles of Iranian workers in the last two years have played out to fight against the first and extend the second, but the impossibility of reforming away the reactionary basis of a capitalist economy centered around fossil-fuel production and anti-democratic parliamentarism is always at the surface of the fight.

A national layer of petty lenders, illicit currency exchangers, and various "charity" organizations work with and around the state. A key and completely unproductive pathway for oil profits is the mammoth Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, whose economic presence is equal to the rest of the state and whose ideological presence is a cornerstone of anti-worker and anti-feminist reaction.

While representatives of Iranian capital posture as anti-imperialists, they are incapable of effectively fighting imperialism. On the one hand, they are forced by necessity to look towards imperialist investment in order to maximize their profits from the country's natural oil resources. On the other, their ability to profit, either from state or privately owned enterprises, is directly threatened by workers' struggles. Given these two tendencies, the uprising of Iranian workers has been brutally repressed with arrests, tortures, and the continued illegality of non-state controlled workers' organizations.

The way out of the political and economic crises in Iran is already indicated by the mass movements that have developed in the last two years. The biggest hindrance to the revolutionary potential of the Iranian working class is the absence of a class-conscious party that is capable of taking the struggle to its logical conclusions—overthrowing the Islamic Republic and forming a revolutionary workers' government, with socialist revolution as the goal.

In the United States, we must recognize that U.S. intervention—military, economic, and diplomatic—can only hurt the workers' movement in Iran. Our central demands are U.S. Hands Off! No Sanctions on Iran! At the same time, we must recognize that the working class is the only social force that can overturn the old capitalist order while combating imperialism, and fight to the end for democratic rights and economic control for Iranian working people and all the oppressed. It is critical for U.S socialists to educate our co-workers, readers of our press, and the mass movements in this country on the struggles of Iranian workers, how we can help through integrating anti-imperialism into all of our movements, and learning from the inspiring examples of a country in revolt.

Palestine

November 2019 marked the 100th anniversary of the declaration by British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour that approved the establishment of a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine. From the point of view of Britain's ruling class at the time, the edict would aid in inserting a grateful and compliant settler population into the bloc of Middle East colonies that Britain had captured from Ottoman Turkey in World War I.

Britain's pro-settlement policy opened the door for the events three decades later, following the next World War, when Zionist terror forced about 700,000 Arab Palestinians, about 50 percent of Palestine's prewar population, to flee from their homes. Close to half of that number were expelled *before* the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. In the process, between 400 and 600 Palestinian villages were sacked or completely wiped off the map.

The United States rapidly displaced Britain in those years as the dominant imperialist power in the Middle East. U.S. strategy looked to Israel as its major regional police agent to counter any struggles of Arab nationalism that might disrupt imperialist profit taking in that oil-rich part of the world. Since then, Israel has become the largest cumulative recipient of U.S. foreign assistance in the world; to date, the U.S. has provided Israel \$142.3 billion in aid

(in non-inflation-adjusted dollars). For 2020, the Trump administration has requested \$3.3 billion in military aid to Israel, plus another \$500 million for missile defense. The administration has also asked for \$5 million in “humanitarian” assistance for migrants to Israel.

Right at the beginning, the state of Israel quickly expanded its territory beyond what the UN had mandated for the Jewish “homeland.” Additional territory was seized as a consequence of Israel’s victory in the 1967 war with neighboring Arab nations. The Golan Heights was taken from Syria in 1967, and officially annexed to Israel in 1980. The Gaza Strip was taken from Egyptian administration, and the West Bank from Jordan. For the most part, the latter two territories were left under the nominal governance of the Palestinian Authority, which provides some services and a police force for the areas. Ultimately, however, both Gaza and the West Bank are subject to Israeli state and military control.

Today, 3 million Palestinians live in the West Bank, an area of stagnating growth where two out of three young people are unemployed. Israel retains direct control of over 60 percent of the territory. At the same time, over 600,000 Israelis live in over 230 settlements in the West Bank, which are linked by Israeli-controlled highways and fenced corridors that leave Palestinians isolated within disconnected patches.

Israeli politicians have never made a secret of their desire to formally annex even more Palestinian land to Israel—especially the wide and fertile valley of the Jordan River, which borders Jordan on the east bank. Israel has already allocated some 86 percent of the Jordan Valley to Israeli settlements.

Recently, the annexation proposal was made a centerpiece of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s re-election platform. Netanyahu has promised his right-wing base that, if allowed to stay in office, he would take immediate steps to annex the valley and other settlements—amounting to close to a third of the West Bank.

Despite being indicted on Nov. 21 on criminal charges of bribery, fraud, and corruption, Netanyahu has remained as head of state until the election, in accordance with Israeli law. Due to the inability of his Likud Party to form a coalition government, Israel now faces its third election in less than a year—probably in early March 2020.

On Nov. 18, the Trump administration announced that it does not consider Israel’s West Bank settlements to be a violation of international law—repudiating the conclusions expressed in a 1978 State Department document on the matter. This followed the administration’s declaration in 2017 that it recognized Jerusalem as the Israeli capital, and Trump’s proclamation in March 2019 accepting Israeli annexation of the Golan Heights.

Those pronouncements were capped last summer by Trump’s trumpeted “deal of the century.” Ghada Karmi, writing in the *London Review of Books* (Dec. 5, 2019) called Trump’s “deal” the “end stage of that process of delegitimation of Palestinian rights and wishes started by Balfour a century ago.”

Karmi reported that the “political” part of Trump’s plan had not yet been disclosed. However, “according to unauthenticated leaks published in *Israel Hayom* ... it envisages a mini-state of ‘New Palestine’ on 12 per cent of the West Bank, comprising non-contiguous cantons, with a capital somewhere inside Jerusalem’s expanded municipal boundaries. ... The new state would be demilitarized, its security provided by Israel but paid for by the Palestinians. Finally, the Palestinian right of return—declared an inalienable right by the UN General Assembly in 1974—would be cancelled.”

It is questionable whether the “deal of the century” will ever be implemented; with little doubt, resistance by the Palestinian masses would have to be reckoned with. In the meantime, Netanyahu and right-wing Israeli legislators are taking active steps to make annexation of the Jordan Valley a reality.

The U.S. statement on West Bank settlements in November was widely seen as an attempt by Trump to bolster political support for his ally Netanyahu in the impending parliamentary elections—if not also a tacit endorsement of Netanyahu’s plan for annexations. The prime minister embraced Trump’s edict with delight. “The historic decision by the American administration from yesterday hands us a unique opportunity to set Israel’s eastern border and annex the Jordan Valley,” Netanyahu said in a Nov. 19 Hebrew-language video posted on Twitter.

Netanyahu framed the annexation proposal, which would extend the territory of the Israeli state further along the border with Jordan, as a defensive measure. He told his voters in a recent Facebook post that Arabs “want to annihilate us all—women, children, and men.” Many believe, however, that the imposition of Israeli sovereignty over the Jordan Valley would cause Jordan to respond to mass pressure by suspending its peace treaty with Israel.

Netanyahu’s major opponent in the election is Benny Gantz, Israel’s former military chief. Gantz’s Blue and White party has expressed agreement with the scheme to annex the Jordan Valley. But some Israeli political figures have opposed direct annexation, at least at the present time, expressing the fear that accepting the Palestinian population of the territory as citizens might help tip the balance toward creating a non-Jewish majority in Israel itself. And it is evident to many that if the Palestinians who remain in the annexed lands were denied the full rights of citizenship, Israel’s status as an apartheid state would become even more blatant than it is today.

Raja Shehadeh, a Palestinian lawyer and writer, pointed out in the British *Guardian* newspaper that formal annexation offers few real benefits to the Zionist regime. He wrote: “Israel already is reaping all the benefits of annexation in the West Bank, and without having to bear any responsibility for the welfare of the Palestinians living here...

“Mr. Netanyahu made this promise, on the eve of an election, only to please his right-wing supporters. Formal annexation won’t bring about any real change or extra benefits for the Israelis who live in the occupied areas. For all intents and purposes, the Israeli government already treats them as though they were living in Israel proper (extending Israeli law to them), and gives them perks (cheap mortgages and tax relief).”

Shedaheh continued: That’s one reason that many Palestinians I know have come to believe in a one-state solution: After all, with so many Israeli settlements in the West Bank by now, a two-state solution would be impossible to implement. That’s not to say, however, that many Palestinians welcome Mr. Netanyahu’s formal annexation plan as a step forward toward that goal. Israel has always wanted this land—without its people.”

The so-called “two-state” solution has been waved around by negotiators for decades. “Two states” never was a serious option, however, since the scenarios entertained by Israel, the UN, and the United States always envisioned a Palestinian mini-state that would be a mere appendage of Israel, beholden to the Zionist government for military defense, customs enforcement, foreign policy, and so on. Trump’s purported “deal of the century,” which would squeeze the new Palestinian mini-state into a mere 12 percent of its former territory, is at least fairly obvious in its predatory goals.

In 2017, following Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, Saeb Erekat, the secretary general of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, was quoted in *The New York Times* (Dec. 8, 2017) as saying that Trump and Netanyahu “have managed to destroy that hope,” which he had fought for, of an independent Palestinian state. *The Times* reported that, as a result, “he embraced a radical shift in the PLO’s goals—to a single state, with Palestinians enjoying the same civil rights as Israelis, including the vote.”

The goal of a single democratic and secular Palestine, in which all citizens would have equal rights, was put forward by Palestinian freedom fighters back in the 1960s. Today, as

the “two-state solution” appears more clearly as being impossible to achieve, the idea of a single Palestine has been increasingly looked on with favor by many Palestinians. Socialist Resurgence supports this point of view. In this country, we likewise endorse the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement against the Israeli state and Israeli products, and we reject the reactionary slanders that attempt to equate anti-Zionist views and activities, and BDS in particular, with anti-Semitism.

Conclusions and our tasks

Working-class people around the world, increasingly beleaguered by economic pressures and by the worsening effects of climate change and environmental pollution, are becoming more politically restive. Strikes and organized protests have often taken a political dimension. At the end of October, for example, unionized public workers staged a one-day general strike in Rome to demand the resignation of the mayor, a member of the Five Star movement, for what they said was her inept management of the city. Transport, trash services, schools, museums, and social service agencies were all shut down. A mass march in the streets was scheduled for the following day.

The phenomenon of mass political protests, sometimes accompanied by short-term political strikes, has exploded in a number of countries, raising fundamental economic and democratic demands, and refusing to be humbled by police repression. And in not just a few countries, the demonstrations have gained the proportions of revolts against the central governments; in Lebanon, Iraq, Sudan, Algeria, and elsewhere, the rebellions have succeeded in forcing the sitting governments to resign in disgrace.

Women, Indigenous people, and other people who are specially oppressed have found a place in these rebellions, raising their own demands within them.

The protests in the streets generally have been initiated and led by young people, both workers and students. In many countries, as in the United States, young people have less employment opportunities than in the past, and many are burdened with debt, inadequate housing, and deteriorating school opportunities. For those reasons, it appears that a sizable number of young adults have managed to shed some of the illusions that older generations might have had in the possibilities of gaining a secure and stable future for themselves and their families. And by the same token, they are frustrated with governments that are rife with corruption and old-line political parties that refuse to make necessary changes. Accordingly, the feeling has grown that it is necessary for the people themselves to go into the streets and “make change.” Political outbreaks in one country often embolden aspiring rebels in other countries adopt those tactics at home, and then build and elaborate on them.

Young people, and the working class generally, are more open to discussing ideas about how to fight the system—and what a new world ought to look like. Revolutionary Marxists have increased opportunities to hold discussions with today’s rebel youth, as we offer solidarity with their struggles and participate in them whenever possible. Our movement can help demonstrate how to carry the struggles forward with a winning strategy on a world scale. But forces of the reformist left often have more resources than we do, and will be in line to misdirect rebellious youth into the dead end road of bourgeois politics. And forces on the far right are also lying in wait to divert them into attacks on immigrants and minorities.

The tasks for Socialist Resurgence are several. For one thing, it is our duty to educate ourselves, our contacts, and the public about the issues being fought for in today’s international struggles, and to analyze and evaluate the contending political forces within them. We need to inquire into the debates on strategy and tactics that are taking place in those countries,

especially among revolutionary left forces. When possible, we should take steps to publicize the demands of the international struggles, and build solidarity with their protests.

At the same time, as socialists in the United States, we have a special responsibility to build a movement to counter any attempt by the U.S. to intervene into struggles abroad. A November 2019 report released by Brown University's Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs found that "the U.S. military is conducting counter-terror activities in 76 countries, or about 39 percent off the world's nations, vastly expanding across the globe."

We must insist that all semi-colonial countries and oppressed nations have the right to self-determination; in all cases, we defend those countries against imperialist intervention. In the event of U.S. intervention into an oppressed nation, we seek to build protests with other antiwar and solidarity forces around principled demands such as "U.S. hands off!" and "U.S. out now!"

In order to build an antiwar movement that is truly effective, however, it is necessary to argue against a wing of the movement (often called "campists") that insists that activists close their eyes to the transgressions of authoritarian governments in the semi-colonial world as long as those governments are deemed to be in struggle against U.S. imperialism. Equally damaging is the tendency of those same forces to lionize the Russian and Chinese imperialist regimes, praising them as somehow being more benevolent than the U.S. and Western imperialist powers in offering "aid" to the semi-colonial world. The blindness of the campists often goes so far as to make common cause with ultra-right and even semi-fascist forces inside Russia and elsewhere in building activities against U.S. imperialism. Once again, they raise the false credo of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." However, consistent anti-imperialism and the cause of building solidarity with its victims require not concealing the truth about imperialist aggression from all quarters, including Russia and China.

In the case of Syria, for example, we defend the Bashar Assad regime against every instance of U.S. aggression, and demand that U.S. troops leave Syrian soil immediately. The broad antiwar movement can unite around that perspective without going further to praise and prettify either the Assad regime or the Russian forces that have colluded in bombing operations against Syria's town and cities. To do so would cut us off from the people of Syria who are most beleaguered and oppressed, and who require our solidarity. In the last analysis it is the working people of Syria who will be most effective in repelling the imperialists, not Assad, who was happy to give concessions to the U.S. in earlier times, and now is allowing the Russian imperialists to exploit the country and its people.