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About Us

“No capital will be invested for the good of our great-grandchildren.” –Amadeo Bordiga

“They know the value of words but they don’t know how much of the future is contained in the workday of a laborer.” –Lucía Sánchez Saornil

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Drop Cap, [...]
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ow are you?” I say, tossing a spongy green ball to the eight-year-old in front of me. I’ve found that eight-year-olds are far more likely to pay attention if I throw them a ball at the same time as I ask them a question. And this is the spongiest ball I could find, because if not, they would find a way to hurt each other with it. The semi-private Catholic school I’m teaching in is not a great environment for learning. There are too many students per class. The walls echo. It’s loud. The kids don’t really want to learn English. They’re used to being yelled at by teachers and administrators and forced to sit in a seat and do exercises in a book. By the time they get to our extracurricular English classes, they’d rather be running around in the courtyard or playing soccer or basketball. Still, the teachers are doing our best. Coaxing, praising, occasionally threatening to talk to their parents. Telling them to stop bullying the poor kid recently arrived from an active war zone who sits in the corner covering his ears when it gets too loud. Telling them not to hug the crying kid, because he clearly doesn’t want to be hugged by them right now after they were just being mean to him. Trying to teach a bit about empathy and respect and consent. With luck, they even learn some English. “How are you?” I repeat. The last few kids have said, “I am happy.” “I am bored.” And “I am very very very very very happy.” I make a mental note to teach them “fantastic” and “great” so they stop overusing “very.” This eight-year-old thinks for a moment and says, “I am sad.” “Why?” I ask. And she reaches the limits of her English and switches into Spanish. “Because of what happened.” “Oh. I’m sorry,” I say, giving her a hug. “Did you have family in the affected zones?” “No. But it’s sad.” “Yes.” I say, and think of how to transition into a lesson on sea animal vocabulary in English. I can’t think of a segue and ask, “Does anyone know how to say ‘medusa’ in English?” Half a dozen children scream “JELLYFISH! JELLYFISH!” The refugee kid and I both cover our ears from the noise. This was our first class back after the school was closed for several weeks because of what happened. WHAT HAPPENED What happened was that the Autonomous Community of Valencia experienced the worst “natural” disaster in Spain in decades. There was a “cut-off low”—a meteorological phenomenon known by the acronym DANA in Spanish—basically a storm that drops massive amounts of rain in a short amount of time. From what I’ve read, they happen from time to time in the Mediterranean, but with rising sea temperatures, they’re expected to be more frequent and more intense. On October 29th, 2024 one hit Valencia. Over a year’s worth of rain fell in eight hours. A town in the mountains broke the all-time rain record for Spain. This caused massive flash flooding. Towns in the mountains, and especially the suburbs south of the city of Valencia were inundated. Bridges were destroyed. Over 220 people were killed. Over 15,000 homes were damaged or destroyed. And over 100,000 cars were totaled. This part of the world is no stranger to flooding. Valencia, which is the third largest city

in Spain, is on the Mediterranean coast where the river Turia flows into the sea. It has the second busiest port in the Mediterranean (after the Spanish port of Algeciras near the strait of Gibraltar) and has high speed rail that runs straight to Madrid. Throughout its history as a Roman city, an Islamic city, and a medieval Christian city, Valencians have had to deal with water management—flood prevention, and the use of water for irrigation. A storm in 1957, during the dictatorship of Francisco Franco, caused the river Turia to overflow its banks and flood the city. 6000 houses were destroyed and 81 people were killed according to official statistics, although people suspect that the real number was over 300 dead. After that, the government instituted a massive public works project changing the course of the river. The old riverbed is now a long park that runs through the city. It's a nice place for a bike ride on a sunny afternoon. The river was diverted to an artificial channel south of the city. In the October storm, the city of Valencia proper was not badly flooded, but the suburbs and towns south of the city were devastated. Several days before the recent floods, the Spanish meteorological service had warned about severe weather on the 29th. The University of Valencia suspended its classes the day before. The port of Valencia closed at 7:00 in the morning on the 29th. By 10:30 people were already being rescued from flooding in the mountains nearby. At 13:00 the president of Valencia, Carlos Mazón, gave a press conference saying that the storm was expected to dissipate by 18:00 that evening. At 19:00, trains between Madrid and Valencia stopped running. As the water rushed down out of the mountains, more and more areas flooded. More and more people died. Finally at 20:12 Mazón sent out a general red alert. I remember I was sitting in my kitchen with a few house guests, and we were startled as all our cell phones buzzed and went off at the same time, making a horrible emergency alert sound. My first thought was that it was a terrorist attack by the Israeli government, like the pager bombs in Lebanon. Ridiculous, but a year of genocide, of watching the steadily unfolding apocalypse in Gaza caused by the Israeli state will put those thoughts in your head. THE PEOPLE, THE STATE AND THE APOCALYPSE The Prime Minister of Spain is the crafty and good-looking Pedro Sánchez. His Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) is in government at the national level, with a coalition of left, and Catalan and Basque nationalist parties. But Spain has a fairly decentralized state system, where a lot of government functions are devolved to the level of the Autonomous Community. The right-wing Popular Party (PP) is in government in Valencia, and the president is Carlos Mazón. He won in the most recent election in 2023 and formed a coalition government with the support of the far-right party Vox. Vox is a party that broke away from the PP (with sketchy funding from Iranian exiles) and are now the third biggest party in Spain. PP are the first and PSOE are the second. Vox position themselves as the anti-establishment voice of the people (hence the name), and their idea of "the people" is a very specific one. They are strongly anti-immigrant, worry about birth rates of Spanish women, play down the brutality of Franco's dictatorship, want to recentralize the Spanish state, deny climate change exists, want to get rid of bike lanes, scapegoat feminists, communists, Muslims, queer people, and especially Catalan and Basque separatists. And they have the support of an important part of Spain's elites. I remember walking around in Salamanca, the poshest neighborhood in Madrid, before the last Spanish election, and there were Vox posters on every light post. After coming to power, the PP–Vox government in Valencia targeted organizations that promote the Valencian language. Valencian and Catalan are mutually intelligible dialects of the same language, but since Catalan separatism is seen as such a threat to Spanish national unity, Spanish nationalists sometimes insist that they are completely different languages. The law eliminated government subsidies to organizations that "make us ashamed to be Valencian."

During the dictatorship it was illegal to publish, write official documents, or educate children in languages other than Spanish. The PP—Vox government in Valencia also eliminated the Valencian Emergency Unit—a coordinating body between different emergency services created under a previous PSOE-lead government of Valencia in response to flooding that killed 6 people in 2019. A fight between Vox and PP at the national level in the summer of 2024 meant that Vox ministers in the Valencian government were removed from power, and the PP continued in power as a minority (still depending on Vox votes though). The split happened because Vox leaders accused the PP of being insufficiently hard on immigration for not opposing a PSOE law supporting refugee children. The Spanish border is a slaughterhouse. In 2024 alone, under the "socialist" government, over 10,000 people died trying to get into Spain—the majority drowned at sea. Vox have spent a lot of time blaming immigrants for everything, especially refugee children. They have turned "MENA" (the Spanish government acronym for "unaccompanied foreign minor") into a slur. Such was the state of the state when disaster hit Valencia. I've always been a fan of zombie shows and I'd recently been watching the zombie-adjacent series The Last of Us. In almost every zombie apocalypse, when disaster hits, and the state is not in control anymore, social ties completely fall apart. Everyone's first instinct is to protect their immediate family and be hostile to anyone else. The result is a war between roaming bands of survivors. This tells us less about human nature and more about the imagination of the big businessmen who fund these series. They rightly worry that hoards of poor people would take their property if they were not constantly protected by the government. Still, I admit to being worried about the social effects of a "natural" disaster like this, especially in a context where racism and the far-right have been growing. With the complete mismanagement of the warnings and evacuation, the state had more or less failed. Some emergency services worked furiously, but an effective response by the government (Valencian or Spanish) had not been organized. On the other hand, regular people did react. As soon as the flood waters had receded, people kicked into action. It was very heartening to see that people's first reaction was to talk to their neighbors, see what they needed, gather together as many supplies as they could, and help out. Literally tens of thousands of people walked south out of the city of Valencia to help with the flood clean-up. I helped shoveling mud and cleaning for several days in the affected area, and later organizing supplies in a community center. As I headed toward the flood zone, there were people coming up towards the city covered in mud and looking exhausted. I joined people walking south. They were carrying shovels and brooms, hauling shopping carts full of food, bottled water, sandwiches, diapers, toilet paper, and cleaning supplies, giving them to anyone who needed them. I crossed a long foot and bike bridge over the new channel of the Turia with thousands of other people. Just on that bridge I remember hearing people speaking Spanish, Valencian, English, Arabic, Portuguese, Italian and what I think was Bengali. Everyone was engaged in a massive project of mutual aid. For weeks after the disaster, you would see people covered in mud all around town, and there was a real feeling of collective solidarity. Almost everyone I know in Valencia helped out in some way, either going to the affected areas, watching someone's children so they could go to the affected areas, or donating supplies or labor to the relief effort. I even heard interviews with farmers who drove their tractors down to the affected areas and moved the destroyed cars out of the way. For the first couple days, it was clear that regular people were being far more effective than the state. You started to see a slogan on banners hung from bridges, on social media, and spray-painted everywhere: "Only the people save the people!"—in Spanish or Valencian depending on your particular view of "the people."

MONKEYS WITH PISTOLS While most people have a healthy distrust of government and rightly see politicians as self-serving and bought-off, the state still usually has a kind of halo of the common good about it. It's the place where everyone should come together and bring their grievances and work out their common problems. As the response to the disaster unfolded, it became more and more difficult to believe that the state was there to help everyone. After several days of a massive self-organized mutual aid effort, the Valencian government tried to insert itself. They set a meeting point in the center of the city, and organized city buses to take people to the affected zones. While this did save some people a long walk, the government had different priorities. Volunteers were furious when one group of a dozen or so city buses, filled with hundreds of people, stopped in the parking lot of a big shopping mall that had been flooded. Clearly the government saw in all this solidarity some free labor that could be used to save businesses some money. The volunteers angrily refused to clean the mall and instead walked to the nearest town. Videos and audio expressing disbelief and anger were all over social media. "We didn't come here to clean a Zara. We came here to help people," said one person. Another said of the government relief effort, "This is being directed by monkeys with pistols"—a Spanish idiom that refers to irresponsible, dangerous people. Two days later, on November 3rd, a media event backfired on the politicians. The King and Queen of Spain, Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, and Valencian President Carlos Mazón organized a joint visit to the town of Paiporta, one of the worst affected areas with the highest death toll. There was a massive police presence and the bridges over the new channel of the Turia were closed. For a photo op, the government was cutting off the main route that the tens of thousands of volunteers had been using to get down to the southern suburbs. The photo op did not go well. The people cleaning up the town were outraged. Mazón and Sánchez quickly retreated. Sánchez's car windows were smashed. The aristocrats tried to talk to people and were shouted at and had mud thrown at them. Mazón imagined that this was anger against the national government and tried another visit weeks later where he was also shouted down and forced to leave. The far-right tried to capitalize on the disaster to push their particular agenda, and to try to place as much blame as possible on the "socialist" government. Initially they tried to work up a panic about looting in the flood zones, but it was so clear that the majority of the looting was just people taking necessities from flooded supermarkets, and this didn't really take off. The sheer diversity of the volunteers cleaning up the city made it difficult to blame immigrants. It looks likely that Sanchez's car windows were smashed by fascists on the ground in Paiporta. The far-right conspiracy theorist, and TV and podcast host Iker Jiménez spread rumors that the government was covering up deaths. In an interview with a member of the Spanish military, he suggested that the military high command needed to act independently of the government, they should just step in and take control of the situation. He also had to cut ties with one of his reporters after video surfaced of the reporter in the flood zone kneeling down to get mud on himself before going on camera—to make it seem like he had been in the thick of things. A far-right group with links to Vox called Revuelta organized a protest about the mismanaging of the disaster response. Their name means "revolt" and on stickers and t-shirts they use the slogan "Revolt against separatism." Their protest only got about 300 people. So far there have been three much larger protests organized by various Valencian community groups against the government of Mazón. They have had between 80,000 and 130,000 people each. In the first, protesters smeared the palace of the Valencian government with mud, and when riot police formed a line to protect it, people chanted "Where were you on the first day?" In the second, masses of people all set off the emergency alert sounds on their phones at exactly 20:12.

When a Vox media personality (known as “Vox’s black guy” because he’s from Cameroon) went to one of the protests, he was confronted and kicked out, as people chanted, “Fascists off our streets!” Thankfully, it doesn’t seem that the far -right have been able to turn the disaster to their advantage. They haven’t been able to destroy people’s immediate reaction of empathy for other people in a bad situation… for the moment anyway. The more established political parties are less interested in shaking things up. The PP dismissed the massive protests, saying they were the work of “Catalanists.” In his first statement in the Valencian legislature after the disaster, Mazón thanked the king and queen for their empathy and bravery. For their part, PSOE seem threatened by the distrust in government, and have tried to blame everything on the far-right. They want to counter the idea that the state is made up of heavily armed apes and have been trying to paint “Only the people save the people!” as a far-right slogan. The leader of the PSOE in Valencia talked about “climate change deniers” and “state deniers” as the same thing. And Pedro Sanchez has been pushing the idea that “We are all the state.” BACK TO CLASS If the fiction that “We are all the state” seems pretty ridiculous in light of recent events, “the people” are an equally ridiculous starting point for understanding what’s happening. The people can be the totality of citizens subject to the rule of a particular government. Or, the people can be defined more narrowly by language, food, traditions, religion, race. Usually both definitions sit on top of each other. In either case, state institutions are the most important element that create the people: either the abstract fact of being subject to a specific government, or more concrete institutions like the school system, immigration enforcement, language laws, subsidies for certain kinds of cultural events. Being a people is, to a large extent, a question of having a state, and states justify their rule by being the state of a particular people. Both in everyday life and during a climate disaster, how you experience life is overwhelmingly defined by your relation to property and the means of production, and therefore to work—it is defined by class. Even after Mazón’s government finally sent out the warnings, plenty of people were still working. Bike delivery riders employed by app companies could be seen pedaling hard in the wind and the rain. A number of delivery drivers for Spain’s largest supermarket Mercadona were seen driving well after it was safe. After the destruction of so many houses, Valencian landlords have been taking the opportunity to raise rents. In the aftermath of the disaster, police have continued to evict families of squatters. Amancio Ortega, the billionaire owner of the clothing chain Zara, is as Spanish as the volunteers who refused to clean out the mall. It is not “the people” who organized a massive mutual aid effort, quicker and more effective than the state. It is a diverse and activated working class. We’ve been back to work at the semi-private Catholic school for over a month now, and something is brewing. Management have been talking about how the students have missed out on a lot of classes. One day after a long weekend we receive a message that all the English classes will be 25% longer for 5 weeks to make up for lost class time. Oh, and this time won’t be paid—since we continued to receive our salaries when the school was closed, they say they already paid for these classes. The Spanish government have passed a series of laws to cover salaries of employees who work for businesses affected by the flooding, so it’s obvious the school is just taking advantage. I quickly message a friend who is a labor militant in Madrid and another in Galicia to make sure I have a handle on our rights under Spanish labor law. The teachers are pissed off, worried and having an animated conversation in our private chat group. We’ve been getting guilt-tripped about how our students will be behind, and how difficult it is to run a small English school. In the end we agree on a strategy. We arrive at school and have a tense argument with our boss that is cut short when we all have to go into class. I do my regular

routine, throwing around my spongy ball, reviewing vocabulary and trying to teach a few new things. At the regular time, the teachers give each other a look through the windows of our classrooms, and we leave class, simply not doing the extra time. Our boss looks furious and shocked. After a day and a half of this direct action he agrees to pay us for the extra time. So far, since we were all in it together, he has not been able to retaliate against us. Solidarity and direct action get the goods.

HOPE \
We're now several months on from the floods. "Mazón resign!" "Mazón Murderer! and "20:12" are graffitied all over the city—alongside "Israel = murderers!" The spectacular tragedy of climate-related disasters is slowly giving way to the everyday tragedy of capitalist daily life. I'm re-reading an old text on natural disasters. It's by Amadeo Bordiga, the former leader of the Italian Communist Party—he was removed and replaced with the more orthodox, more pro-Stalin Antonio Gramsci. In 1951 the river Po had flooded, killing 84 people. Bordiga makes the point that while one could invest more to maintain the riverbanks or the levies, or reforest areas around the river, that's not how the economy works. Capital is constantly searching for short-term profits, and it profits off reconstruction after destruction. As we blow past climate target after climate target, it's hard to argue. Israel's genocidal war machine releases more carbon in a month than whole countries in a year. The leader of Vox has recently congratulated President Trump on his victory, writing, "Congratulations to the defenders of liberty and common sense around the world." More monkeys with pistols. Grim times. It's a sunny afternoon. On top of everything else, my girlfriend and I have recently broken up. I'm kinda down and I decide to do something to cheer myself up: visit a cemetery. It takes me 15 minutes to bike down to the big Valencian cemetery and 30 minutes of walking around to find the specific grave I'm looking for. I finally find it: the grave of Lucía Sánchez Saornil. She was an anarchist, a poet, a lesbian, and a founder of the Mujeres Libres, an important women's group during the Spanish Revolution and Civil War. She was a firm believer that a united working class, through its own action, could change the world and free itself. After the nationalist side won the war she spent some time in exile in France, and eventually returned to Spain, doing gig work and living clandestinely under the Franco dictatorship. Partially covered by flowers and pennants from the anarchist union CNT, a line of her poetry is carved into her gravestone. It reads, "But… is it true that hope has died?" I think for a second and mentally answer, "No." Strangely, despite all the stress and tragedy of the last few months, I've come out of all of this with more hope, not less. Each year is hotter than the last, and climate disasters, racism and authoritarianism are on the rise. But working class solidarity is still a powerful force. And I think there is still hope that a diverse international working class can take action and remake the world. It's really the only way there is any hope for the future. The author of this article wants to remain anonymous.

But you can check out more of his work on www.prole.info.
