



INTERNATIONAL VIEWPOINT

News and analysis from the Fourth International

IV391 - July/August 2007



Why Eco-Socialism today?

Feminism of the
anti-capitalist left



Strategies of the Left
in Latin America



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Environment

Why Eco-Socialism today?

Joel Kovel

Homo sapiens has been contending with its effects on nature since Paleolithic days and the first great extinctions wrought by hunting bands. But it was not until the 1970s that these became experienced as a great ecological crisis threatening the future of the species. The modern environmental movement was born in that moment, with its Earth Days, green parties and innumerable NGOs signalling that a new, ecologically aware age had arisen to contend with the planetary threat.

The optimism of those early years has now quite faded. Despite certain useful interventions like greater recycling of garbage or the development of green zones, it is increasingly apparent that the whole mass of governmental regulations, environmental NGO's and academic programs has failed to check the overall pace of ecological decay. Indeed, since the first Earth Day was proclaimed, the breakdown in crucial areas such as carbon emissions, the loss of barrier reefs and deforestation of the Amazon basin has actually accelerated and even begun to assume an exponential character.

The whole mass of governmental regulations, environmental NGO's and academic programs has failed to check the overall pace of ecological decay

How do we explain this grim fact, the awareness of which should inspire the most vigorous efforts to go beyond the limits of present-day environmentalism? Perhaps Margaret Thatcher should be heeded here. In the later years of the 1970s, the very decade that was to usher in the environmental era, the "Iron Lady" Prime Minister of the UK announced the rise of "TINA," the acronym for her slogan "There Is No Alternative" to the given society, and certainly no alternative of the sort envisioned by the first wave of environmentalists.

What had happened was that environmentalism had missed the point, and was dealing with external symptoms rather than the basic disease. Thatcher did not spell

it out in detail but there is no mistaking what she had in mind and stood for: There was to be no alternative to capitalism - to be exact, the born-again, harder-edged kind of capitalism which was being installed during the 70s in place of the welfare-state capitalism that had prevailed for much of the century. This was a deliberate response to a serious accumulation crisis that had convinced the leaders of the global economy to install what we know as neoliberalism. Thatcher was emblematic, along with Ronald Reagan in the US, of its political face.

Neoliberalism is a return to the pure logic of capital; it is no passing storm but the true condition of the capitalist world we inhabit. It has effectively swept away measures which had inhibited capital's aggressivity, replacing them with naked exploitation of humanity and nature. The tearing down of boundaries and limits to accumulation is known as "globalization," and is celebrated by ideologues like Thomas Friedman as a new epoch of universal progress borne on the wings of free trade and unfettered commodification. This blitzkrieg or bombardment simply overwhelmed the feeble liberal reforms which the environmental movements of the 1970s had helped put in place in order to check ecological decay. And as these movements have had little or no critique of capital, they drift helplessly in a time of accelerated breakdown.

Thus it is time to recognize the utter inadequacy of first-wave environmentalism's basic premises and forms of organization. There is a certain urgency to this recognition, for nothing less than profound and indeed unprecedented changes in human existence are forewarned by the ecological crisis. And that this path has now opened before us can be attributed to capital itself, which places us on a track to ecological chaos. While there



are many complexities corresponding to capital's responsibility for the ecological crisis, there is but one overriding tendency: capitalism requires continual growth of the economic product and since this growth is for the sake of capital and not real human need, the result is the continual destabilization of an integral relationship to nature. The essential reason for this lies in capitalism's distinctive difference from all other modes of production, that is, that it is organized around the production of capital itself - a purely abstract, numerical entity with no internal limit. Hence it drags the material natural world, which very definitely has limits, along with it on its mad quest for value and surplus value, and can do nothing else.

We have no choice about the fact that the ecological crisis portends radical change. But we can choose the kind of change, whether it is to be for life or death. As Ian Angus puts it in his listserve, *Climate and Capitalism*, the choice is simple enough: "EcoSocialism or Barbarism: There is no third way" (To learn about and/or join this list, contact Angus at ecosocialism@gmail.com).

The ecological crisis portends radical change - the choice is simple enough: "EcoSocialism or Barbarism: There is no third way"

This is a paraphrase of the great Rosa Luxemburg's saying of the early twentieth century, that the real choice before humanity was between "Socialism or Barbarism." This is quite true. The failure of the socialist revolutions (both immediately as in the case of Luxemburg and the Spartacist uprising in Germany, and later with the failure of the

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other socialisms of the twentieth century, especially those organized around the USSR and China), has been a condition for the present triumph of barbaric capitalism, with its endless wars, nightmarish consumerism, ever-widening gap between rich and poor - and most significantly, ecological crisis. So the choice remains the same, except that capitalist barbarism now means eco-catastrophe. This is because the capacity of the earth to buffer the effects of human production has become overwhelmed by the chaos of its productive system.

Any movement for social transformation in our time will have to foreground this issue, for the very notion of a future depends on whether we can resolve it or not. For this reason, a socialism worthy of the name will have to be ecologically - or to be more exact, "ecocentrically" - oriented, that is, it will have to be an "ecosocialism" devoted to restoring the integrity of our relationship to nature. The distinction between ecosocialism and the "first-epoch" socialisms of the last century is not merely terminological, as though for ecosocialism we simply need worker control over the industrial apparatus and some good environmental regulation.

We do need worker control in ecosocialism as we did in the socialism of the "first epoch," for unless the producers are free there is no overcoming of capitalism. But the ecological aspect also poses a new and more radical issue that calls into question the very character of production itself.

Capitalist production, in its endless search for profit, seeks to turn everything into a commodity. Only in this way can accumulation continuously expand. By releasing us from the tyranny of private ownership of the means of production, socialism, whether of the first-epoch variety or as ecosocialism, makes it possible to interrupt the deadly tendency of cancerous growth, which is effectively driven by the competition between capitals for ever greater market share. But this leaves open the question of just what will be produced, and how, within an ecosocialist society.

It is plain that production will have to shift from being dominated by exchange - the path of the commodity - to that which is for use, that is for the direct meeting of human needs. But this in turn requires definition, and in the context of ecological crisis, "use" can only mean those set of needs essential for the overcoming of the ecological crisis—for this is the greatest need for civilization as a whole, and therefore for each woman and man within it.

It follows that human beings can only flourish in circumstances in which the damage to nature that capital has wrought is overcome, as for example, by ceasing to transfer carbon to the atmosphere. Since "nature" is the interrelated set of all ecosystems, production within ecosocialism should be oriented toward the mending of ecosystemic damage and indeed, the making of flourishing ecosystems. This could entail ecologically rational farms, for example, or - since we ourselves are natural creatures who live ecosystemically, in communities - ecologically directed human relationships, including the raising of children, the relations between genders and indeed, the whole spiritual and aesthetic side of life.

Ecosocialism is no more a purely economic matter than was socialism or communism in the eyes of Marx. It needs to be precisely the radical transformation of society - and human existence - that Marx envisioned as the next stage in human evolution.

This article is far too brief to allow the development of these themes. But from what has been said so far it should be apparent that

in talking of ecosocialism we are saying much more than that our economy or technology must change. Ecosocialism is no more a purely economic matter than was socialism or communism in the eyes of Marx. It needs to be precisely the radical transformation of society - and human existence - that Marx envisioned as the next stage in human evolution. Indeed, it must be that if we are going to survive the ecological crisis. Ecosocialism is the ushering in, then, of a whole mode of production, one in which freely associated labour produces flourishing ecosystems rather than commodities.

Most definitely, this raises far more questions than it answers, which is itself a measure of how profound the ecological crisis is. What, after all, would life look like if we stopped pouring carbon into the atmosphere and allowed the climate ecosystem to re-equilibrate, that is, be healed? How, really, are we to live fully human lives in harmony with nature given the tremendous horrors built into our system of society? There is no certainty of outcome. But there is one certainty we have to build: there must be an alternative.

There will be a meeting to found an International Ecosocialist organization this coming October 7th, in Paris. Please contact Joel at jskovel@earthlink.net, or Ian Angus at ecosocialism@gmail.com for further information.

From: New Socialist (Summer 2007).

Joel Kovel became involved in political activism during the Vietnam War. He has been an active member of antinuclear and peace campaigns, Central American and Caribbean solidarity movements, the movements for democratic media and environmental campaigns. As part of his campaigning work, he lived briefly in Nicaragua. His two most recent books are two most recent books are *Overcoming Zionism (Between the Lines)* and *The Enemy of Nature* (2nd edition forthcoming 2007, Zed)

Women

Feminism of the Anti-Capitalist Left

Lidia Cirillo

At the beginning of this year the Sinistra Critica (Critical Left) association in Italy had a discussion on drafting a feminist manifesto. While there are elements specific to Italy, the following notes on the discussions by Lydia Cirillo pose many important questions for the updating of a Marxist Feminist analysis.

1. Feminism and democratic, progressive and revolutionary currents

Feminism must be declined in its plural, feminisms, as women belong to various classes and cultures and have different political reference points. For example, there is a form of feminism in Italy among right-wing parliamentarians and career women, who lay claim to their share of power with the aid of traditional feminist arguments, decry the dynamics of exclusion and marginalization and demand anti-discriminatory measures.

And yet feminism is always born and reborn on the left, alongside revolutionary, democratic or progressive tendencies: on the margins of the 1789 revolution, in the national revolutions of the first half of the 19th Century, within the movement for the abolition of slavery in the United States, alongside the workers' movement, in the radicalisation of the 1960s and 1970s, in the global justice movement...

Right-wing feminism has always and only been the effect of picking up ideas born on the left, a sort of cultural fallout that earlier or later has had an impact throughout society as a whole. This phenomenon can be explained by the obvious reason that it has been easier (or less difficult) for women to exert pressure on men on the left in the name of liberation, by exposing their contradictions and using their lexicon and patterns of thought. The concepts of equality, self-determination, liberation, difference, revolution etc. have been nothing else than a feminised version of ideas elaborated by the political currents alongside which various forms of feminism were born or re-born.



This observation does not allow us to have any idyllic vision of the relationships between feminism and male revolutionary, democratic and progressive tendencies. Men's resistance to feminism has been tenacious, at times explicit and vulgar, at others subtle or even unconscious.

The early socialist movement included feminist men such as Saint-Simon and Fourier and indescribable misogynists such as Proudhon and Lasalle. Engels laid the conceptual bases for an anticapitalist feminism, comparing women to the proletariat and men to the bourgeoisie and locating in production and reproduction the bases of the social organisation of the human species, but afterwards these intuitions were lost in theory and practices. A full-fledged history of misogyny and anti-feminism in the workers' movement could be written, but in this text we can only touch upon the two most widespread attitudes within today's anticapitalist left.

In general, few men are so uncouth as to fail to render the expected homage to feminism and to envisage a proletarian, feminist and environmentalist future. However, these recognitions are almost always accompanied by a lack of interest. The ins and outs, differences and complex theoretical elaborations of feminism remain little-known the extent to which gender can represent an irreplaceable framework for the understanding of the logic of human relations remains overlooked.

The other attitude, much rarer to tell the truth, is the paternalism of men who claim to teach feminism to women, to take the lead and set the agenda for their work and discussions. Naturally, we can't rule out the fact that any given male may know and understand more about women's politics and

feminism than a given female. However, feminism is born, consolidates and renews itself only in the course of women accessing intellectual and psychological autonomy. It may be a slow and tortuous process, but there is no substitute.

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Without autonomy, even the feminism of anticapitalist left women is reduced to falling back on what was theorised and practised in separatist milieus. This feminism has proven itself capable of independent elaboration and a more relevant reading of gender-based power relations. At the same time, it has often represented needs and outlooks of academic circles or in any event female milieus with little interest in class conflicts and always exposed to the temptation to depict their own specific interests as the interests of women in general.

2. Patriarchal structures

Understanding feminism means before all understanding the nature of power relations between women and men. Today, there is a post-feminism that denies that oppression still exists, at least in the parts of the world where formal equality has been achieved. The formula "specific oppression" provides some foothold to that current; moreover, this is not

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the only reason a new one should be found. It is preferable to say that every human society, excluding none, bears the mark of manifest or latent patriarchal structures, which in different ways discriminate, exclude, oppress and commit violence against women.

Patriarchy in the literal meaning of the word is a system of relations in which property and social position are passed down from the father to the male child, almost always to the first-born son. It is obvious in Northwestern societies (but also in some others) that this type of reproduction of social positions no longer exists and reality is less blatant and more complex.

However, the logic of the male genealogy of power, which remains obvious beyond its legal and formal aspects, has an anthropological dimension and two centuries of struggle for emancipation have still not succeeded in doing away with it. The four UN conferences on women have provided data that at the time surprised even the most pessimistic theorists on oppression, revealing (for example) that the percentage of women owning land and real estate in the world does not exceed 3 – 4 %. Moreover, Amnesty International's data on violence against women have been a bitter surprise and confirmation. But the simplest way to understand patriarchal structures is to follow the thread of a European woman's existence from birth to death.

In other societies we find selective abortion and more little girls than little boys dying from malnutrition; in our societies patriarchal structures begin to act later. In their first years of life, little girls, in their difficult path towards femininity, encounter a phenomenon which Freud called "castration", i.e. the discovery that they did not have a penis, leading to a painful feeling of inferiority and conditioning their intellectual abilities and how they viewing themselves and others view them. At first, feminism responded to the castration thesis by arguing that Freud superimposed the male outlook over the female one, but later the issue has proven far more complex.

If Freud, as some had suspected, only confused little girls' and a little boys' lines of sight, he would have created a banal misunderstanding. Then we could not explain the reasons for his great influence on Western thought, and not only Western. The castration thesis is linked to clinical experiments, to tested outcomes that women also see themselves as castrated, lacking and deprived of something. Therefore, castration plays the role of an ideology: it is the

viewpoint of those who are "above" in a power relation, interiorised and incorporated by those who are "under". The inferiority theory does not flow from a male prejudice; it is a reality in the female unconscious. This reality acts every time real and not presumed difference comes into play, the different positions in relation to power. In fact, women do not envy the penis but the phallus, which is power in its diversified and multiple forms, of which the penis is merely the phallic fetish.

Another example. Violence against women has a scope and spread that Amnesty International data has finally made obvious. However, a particular woman may encounter no instance of violence in her life, other than the violence nature inflicts on us through diseases and death. And yet, her life will be deeply conditioned by violence, because the risk of violence entails precautions, lifestyles and psychological attitudes. The extent to which the world has been made to man's measure is proven by the paradox that the victim is the one who winds up in jail. Patriarchal structures that run through society make the risk of violence one of the main reasons for the segregation of women, especially young women.

Many more examples could be given, for example women's double working day, that is taking on tasks that were once men's domain and the absence of any reciprocity; or the overrepresentation of the masculine in the public sphere, which imposes rhythms and ways, counter to those of women's own existence or again the normative images of femininity constructed and crystallised through millennia of male monopoly over symbolic tradition. It seems that something is changing among the new generations in Italy, but these changes are slow and uncertain

Other effects of these latent structures are more complex, more difficult to pinpoint and define. It is true that we also think with our sex, perhaps less than is assumed by psychoanalysis, but we certainly do also think with our sex. If it is true that men have had a monopoly over culture for millennia, then a disturbing hypothesis is possible. The hypothesis is that every time a woman penetrates particularly structured and formalised fields of knowledge, she must cross a petrified forest of male signs and symbols, in which she will have greater difficulty finding her way.

The very ways women's presence makes itself felt in politics are the consequences of the existence of patriarchal structures. With their silences, their limited presence and their insecurity, women exercise a criticism of every

political arena. The greater the male presence and dominance in a given political body, the more that body has to do with the logics of power.

One might set forth a theorem, formulate a proposition or an equation. Political institutions, the army, the clergy etc. are the most male milieus because they are also those deeply involved in power. For various reasons these institutions can co-opt women: to get out of criticisms and glaring absence of women, to recover credibility or because they need a relationship with the social body.

The most significant example of male and female distribution is precisely the Catholic Church. An institution that builds ties to vast popular sectors, even sometimes feeding the hungry and quenching the thirst of the thirsty, it could not do without women's energy and their tendency to view themselves as caregivers. Above a Church open to the feminine side, where it extends deeply into society, rises the dome of a power hierarchy rigidly closed to women, the expression of that capacity to conserve the archaic human relations typical of religions.

3. Three key issues for anticapitalist feminism in Italy

Patriarchal structures condition women's lives and construct gender in rather different ways in different times and locations. The great number of demands – for example those compiled in the platform of the 2000 World March of Women – show the scope of the unresolved problems on a global scale. It is obvious that women in Afghanistan have different problems from those experienced by French or German women and that the central issues in contemporary Italy are not those in the forefront in the decades spanning the 19th and 20th century, which saw the first great wave of feminist movements. It is obvious that in different social milieus, different generations and different women's aspirations, the obstacles that women must overcome are not the same.

However, we must renounce the chronological illusion and not believe that we have almost secured emancipation. If it is true that, where formal equality has been achieved, more complex tasks await feminism, it is also true that battles already won, problems apparently already resolved and archaic relations can re-emerge to face us. Violence against women is the clearest example and its greater visibility has different and complementary explanations. Nowadays, women more frequently speak out against

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situations which they put up with in earlier years, public opinion becomes increasingly scandalised by matters that used to be laughed off; men react, as often occurs in power relations, with a combination of backward outlooks and punitive violence.

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Anticapitalist left feminism must not only refer to the needs and aspirations of proletarian women; it must take on the demands of the entire female sex. Naturally, since our intervention targets certain milieus, it is obvious that the demands of women workers, immigrants, unemployed women, female students, women in left parties, movements and trade unions will be in the forefront.

Here are some examples of issues on which we have worked in recent years and which must remain a priority in the near future.

a. Criticism of war, militarism and violence.

Women's politics has the instruments for a specific criticism of the military-virile drift produced by permanent war, without falling back on ideas about women's peaceful nature and female non-violence. Non-violence is the other face of violence: both take the unchanging nature of power relations for granted. Violence is a permanent dissuasive force against those who are challenging them; while non-violence can disarm only one of the two sides, the side that is "beneath", subject to oppression, exploitation and neocolonial plunder. The most obvious proof of this in Italy has been the spokespersons for non-violence, who are intransigent against the violence of the oppressed and then vote in Parliament for new credits for the Italian military mission in Afghanistan.

More astute feminism has already explained that the supposed peaceful nature of women is to a great extent linked to the need to interiorise an aggressivity that power relations with men have not allowed them to

display. Criticism of militarism and violence (above all violence against women) is based on many things other than the idealisation of subaltern status and oppression. Women can exercise it first of all because they do not have to conform to the stereotypes on which the construction of masculinity is based. They are not called upon to exhibit hardness and strength, which are phantasms linked to male sexuality. More than men, they are subjected to the devastating impact of human relations dominated by violence.

Against the violence on which power relations are based (between the sexes, between classes, between nations etc.) our feminism counterpoises above all a society in which this type of relations has been abolished. Therefore, it supports resistance, struggles and radical transformation projects.

It is against wars, militarism, armies and their hierarchical organisation. It does not think that violence is necessarily the proper response to violence; it considers the life of any person a precious thing and thus is not only against the death penalty but also against the cruelty and excesses of legitimate self-defence. However, it does not make non-violence a principle, because it recognises the right of subjects of liberation struggles to defend their own paths.

Our feminism also responds to violence against women above all with a logic of self-defence. Naturally, we don't mean women's armed self-defence against men because the relations between the sexes are regulated in a very different way. It does not believe the problem can be resolved via the control of the penis, even if it does consider State protection necessary and for the time being not replaceable by any other form. By self-defence, it means women's initiatives for the establishment and funding of antiviolence centres, so speaking out does not turn against victims and for metropolitan life to be organised starting out from women's needs, so women do not have to bear the cost of its irrationality and manifest or latent violence.

Finally, it remembers that women's politics is only apparently disarmed, as liberation dynamics have often been supported by people in arms in democratic, progressive or revolutionary movements. Resistance to Nazism/Fascism (for example) had an important impact on feminism and women.

b. for secularism and self-determination, against Catholic fundamentalism.

We live in a country which the Catholic Church still views as a state entity in which it

is exercising its temporal power: it has never resigned itself to the secular state and continues to fight it by all means at its disposal. In recent years, the rise of right-wing forces and political systems stacked in favour of Catholic political forces' ability to exert blackmail have actually increased the intrusiveness of the clergy with its patriarchal and homophobic implications.

Access to legal and free abortion has been challenged in various ways; it has prevented experimental use of pharmaceutical abortion; it has approved a horrible law, which constitutes the embryo as a legal subject from the very moment of conception. Moreover, we have witnessed a very harsh and often aggressive and racist opposition to any form of recognition of gay and lesbian couples. A short time ago, the ordeal of Piergiorgio Welby, a patient in the terminal phase of muscular dystrophy, concluded with a doctor's act of civil disobedience. For months, Welby had pleaded to be unhooked from the machine that forced him to survive in pain and would have imposed an even more painful death on him in the short term. His request became a clamorous political cause, in which the Vatican bureaucracy exerted all its powers of pressure and intimidation on judges and doctors.

Catholic fundamentalism (like all other forms of fundamentalism) does not represent a threat only to women and homosexual persons, but to all liberation processes, beyond the appearances and humanitarian and pacifist implications of the Church hierarchies' political action. They took a stand against war, but afterwards backed the idea of the Italian army's "peace mission". They advocate a welcoming stance towards migrants, but then support the right-wing governments that enact discriminatory anti-immigration laws. Moreover, we must never forget that the Catholic Church was one of the institutions that favoured the rise of fascism, and shored the regime up for more than twenty years.

Evidently peace, hospitality and democracy are minor concerns for the Catholic clergy in comparison to those that lead it to privilege relations with the right wing, i.e. control over the daily lives not only of the faithful but of the entire country, over which it aims to exert its temporal power. In recent years, the feminist and queer movements have been the only forces resisting Catholic fundamentalism.

As for feminism, a certain disorientation has meant that for a long time this resistance has been weak. At the most delicate moment, when the law on reproduction techniques

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was put in the pipeline and then approved by the right-wing government, feminist organisations and groups remained entangled in a discussion in which it was obvious that the more sophisticated arguments of the Catholic forces were getting more attention, as were worries about the alarming implications of scientific research.

The spectre of the scientist who created Frankenstein, archaic fears over the loss of female reproductive powers, well-founded concern about the limits of scientific research and the role of multinationals in the embryo traffic all combined to put a brakes on the initiative. As a result, feminists did not succeed in going much beyond discussions on this issue. This is another reason the referendum on the abrogation of this law was lost. In fact, it was lost for two reasons. The first is the very low turnout at the polls, not sufficient to reach the quorum. The question under discussion was complex, and contrary to abortion, direct experiences involved a very limited number of people. The second is that, while the referendum on the law decriminalising abortion in the first three months of pregnancy followed years of disobedience in practice and arguments rooted in women's right to self-determination, the referendum on reproductive techniques played out in the few months prior to the ballot, and in this context, the media played the determining role.

Later, direct attacks on access to legal abortions, in which the misogynistic and regressive stance was clearer, set the women's movement back in motion and in January 2006, a demonstration by hundreds of thousands of women in Milan provided a hard-hitting response. The very same day, the main organisations of the GLBTQ movement, including lesbians, gay men and transgendered people, demonstrated for PACS (recognition of civil unions). And the entire year 2006 was marked by demonstrations, initiatives and struggles on the issues of secularism and self-determination.

c. Defence of women workers' rights

Paradoxically, the defeats of wage labour and globalisation have opened up new job opportunities for women. This is not a new paradox, but something that has already been seen in some ways in the history of class relations.

Women have been preferred in economies when they first appear on the world market, because these economies relied on

productions with a high labour-power factor and thus on low wages, restrictions on trade-union organisation and severe limits on rights. In Europe too, when the workers' movement remained weak, it had to contend with the problem of female competition to the male work force, which is at least a partial explanation of the misogynist aspects of the workers' movement during its origins. Defence of women workers' rights thus also had the motive of reducing employers' interest in preferring to hire women.

Women have been preferred in the economies of the most developed countries, in which the service sector has grown and where there have been drastic attacks on the rights of wage labour, above all through the broad, molecular casualisation process.

The other side of the coin is that casualised work, impacting all wage labour, has a preference for women, for whom a steady job seems to have become nearly impossible. Laws protecting maternity act in this context as a strong disincentive to hiring for permanent jobs. Not only that, but in a more and more competitive career dynamic, women remain destined to remain behind or choose between a career and childbearing. To tell the truth, in the majority of cases it is impossible to opt for a profession, whatever a woman's personal life-plans, because being a woman in childbearing years puts limits on the possibilities for partnership in a firm or stable work.

Moreover, there is a crisis in occupational fields such as teaching, which guaranteed modest salaries but working times and rights compatible with the life choices of the majority of women.

Faced with such problems, feminism found itself also in the past dealing with the alternative of demanding specific rights for women, with the risk of increasing difficulties in their getting jobs, or renouncing such rights, putting them sooner or later in unsolvable contradictions.

The issue cannot be solved only from a gender outlook. Protection makes it harder for women to find jobs, when social relations are unfavourable to subordinate classes: it is no accident that fascism was a strong protector of maternity. For that reason, laws that allow women to reconcile work with an existence different from men's are not enough. It is also necessary to impose forms of hiring that make discrimination impossible. In Italy, in the 1970s, a reform of short-term placement forced employers to bring far more women into the factories than

they would have wanted to. But many other measures are possible.

In terms of rights, outlooks and philosophies must also be changed. This means demanding the fewest possible specific rights for women and demanding instead that the measure of equality starts from women's point of view not men. From this viewpoint, we refused the European standards repealing the ban on night work for women, demanding that they be also extended to men, except in the exceptional cases in which night work is absolutely indispensable. Or in the case of early pensions for women, we preferred sabbatical years for caregiving tasks, which could be taken by women and men, just as we preferred parental leave for mothers and fathers.

Such criteria obviously no longer apply when it is a matter of the irreducible difference in human bodies. This means there are specific women's rights such as leaves for pregnancy and childbirth with full income compensation, access to legal abortion without charge, access to assisted reproductive techniques for older women. In this case difference must prevail, as there is no grounds for men having an equal right to decide because it is women's bodies and lives that are involved and disrupted.

Translated by Marie Lagatta

Lidia Cirillo has been a member of the Italian section of the Fourth International since 1966. Feminist activist and leading figures in the World March of Women in Italy, she also founded the Quaderni Viola (Purple notebooks, a feminist review). She is the author of several feminist works: Meglio Orfane (Better to be Orphans), Lettera alle Romane (Letter to Roman Women), and recently La Lune Severa Maestra (The Moon, a Strict Mistress) on the relationship between feminism and social movements.

Latin America

Strategies of the Left in Latin America

Claudio Katz

The call to build socialism of the twenty-first century has reopened the strategic discussion on the Latin American left. Once again characterizations of socialism and courses of action are being analyzed to advance the socialist objective.

This reflection includes six large themes: material conditions, relations of social forces, social subjects, popular consciousness, institutional frameworks and the organization of the oppressed. [1]

Maturity of the Productive Forces

The first debate takes up once again a classic controversy. Have the forces of production in Latin America matured sufficiently to begin an anticapitalist transformation? Are the existing resources, technologies and qualifications sufficient to open a socialist process?

The countries of the region are less prepared but more urgently in need of facing up to this change than are the developed nations. They endure nutritional, educational and sanitary disasters more intense than those in the advanced economies, but have weaker material premises with which to solve these problems. This contradiction is a consequence of the peripheral character of Latin America [within the global economy – ed.] and its resulting agrarian backwardness, fragmented industrialization and financial dependence.

On the Left there are two traditional responses in the face of this situation: to promote a stage of progressive capitalism or to initiate a socialist transition adapted to the regional insufficiencies. In a recent text we have expressed various

arguments in favour of the second option. [2]

But another equally relevant debate centres on the opportunities of each course. After a traumatic period of productive depression and banking collapses, Latin America is going through a phase of growth, increasing exports, and recomposition of business profits. One could object that in these conditions, no collapse justifying anticapitalist transformation is foreseeable.

However, the socialist option is not a conjunctural program to overcome recessionary cycles and in this respect strictly differentiates itself from Keynesianism. [3] It aims to overcome the exploitation and inequality that characterize capitalism. It seeks to do away with poverty and unemployment, to eradicate environmental disasters, to put an end to nightmarish wars, and to stop financial cataclysms.

This polarization is taking place in the current Latin American conjuncture. The increase in profits and consumption of the comfortable sectors contrasts with terrifying indices of misery. These calamities – that become more visible in the peaks of economic disaster – justify the battle for socialism. The situations of collapse do not constitute the only apt moment to eradicate the system. The anticapitalist turn is an open option for an entire period and can begin in whichever



conjuncture of the cycle. The experience of the twentieth century confirms this fact.

No socialist revolution coincided with the zenith of an economic crisis. The majority of cases erupted as a consequence of war, colonial occupation or dictatorial oppression. In contexts of this kind the Bolsheviks took power (in Russia), Mao imposed himself on China, Tito won Yugoslavia, the Vietnamese threw out the United States and the Cuban revolution triumphed. Most of these victories were completed during the full postwar boom; that is to say during a stage of record capitalist growth. No automatism links, therefore, the debut of socialism with economic collapse. The penuries that capitalism generates are sufficient to support its reversal, in whatever phase of the periodic fluctuations of this system.

One objection to starting socialist processes highlights the impediments created by globalization. It is argued that the current internationalization of capital makes an anticapitalist challenge in Latin America impractical.

But where exactly is the obstacle? Globalization does not constitute a barrier for a project of universal scope, such as

socialism. The overflowing of borders extends the imbalances of capitalism and creates better objective bases for a socialist transformation.

The presentation of globalization as a stage that makes alternative models impossible is a tributary of the neoliberal vision which proclaimed the inexistence of alternatives to the rightist model. But if one discards socialism for this reason it is also necessary to reject whatever Keynesian or regulated capitalist alternative. It is inconsistent to argue that the totalitarianism of globalization has buried the anticapitalist project, but tolerates interventionist forms of accumulation. If it has shut out all options for socialism there are also no openings for neo-developmentalism.

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However, in reality globalization does not constitute the end of history and all alternatives remain open. It is merely that a new period of accumulation

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began, sustained by the recomposition of profits at the expense of the oppressed and by transfers of major international imbalances to the weakest economies. These regressive media give new life to the necessity of socialism as the only popular response to the new stage. It is the only exit which can remedy the instabilities created by the expansion of global capital in a framework of nation states, and in the face of tensions generated by the overflowing of financial speculation, imperialist polarization and the divorce between markets and technological advance.

What is the Correlation of Forces?

The pre-eminence of relations of forces favourable to the oppressed is a condition for socialist change. The popular majority cannot prevail over its antagonists of the dominant classes if it faces a very negative balance of power. But how do we assess these parameters?

The correlation of forces is determined in Latin America by the positions gained, threatened or lost by three sectors: the local capitalist classes, the oppressed masses and American imperialism. During the 1990s a massive global offensive of capital over labour was consummated on a global scale. The initial Thatcherite forcefulness of this broadside has decreased, but it left behind an adverse general climate for workers on an international scale. What happened in Latin America?

The capitalists of the region actively participated in this attack, but ended up suffering various collateral consequences from the process. With commercial opening they lost their competitive positions and with the de-nationalization of the productive apparatus they gave up their defences against their external competitors. Later, the financial crisis thrashed the

establishment and took away their direct political presence. As a consequence the right has been left in a minority and centre-left governments replaced many conservatives in the management of the state (especially in the Southern Cone). [4] The capitalist elite are no longer able to fix the agenda of the entire region with impunity. They have been affected by a crisis of neoliberalism that could result in the structural decline of this project.

The regional relation of forces has also been modified by massive popular uprisings, which in South America precipitated the fall of various heads of state. The rebellions in Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina and Venezuela have had direct repercussions on the dominant classes as a whole. They challenged business aggression and in many countries imposed a certain accommodation with the masses.

The combative impulse is very unequal. In certain nations popular protagonism is visible (Bolivia, Venezuela, Argentina, Ecuador), while in others an ebb in the tide prevails as a consequence of deception (Brazil, Uruguay). A new development is the awakening of worker and student struggles in countries that lead in neoliberal ranking (Chile), and in nations overwhelmed by social abuses and haemorrhages of migration (Mexico). The correlation of forces is extremely varied in Latin America, but a general trend of popular initiatives is reaffirming itself throughout the entire region.

At the beginning of the 1990s American imperialism launched a politics of recolonization in its backyard through free trade and the installation of military bases. This panorama has also changed. The original version of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) failed because of conflicts between globalized and dependent corporations in

internal markets, clashes between exporters and industrialists and extensive popular rejection of the project. The counteroffensive of bilateral trade agreements that the US Department of State has launched does not compensate this setback.

The international isolation of Bush (electoral collapse of the Republicans, failure in Iraq, loss of allies in Europe) has closed the space for unilateralism and spurred the resurgence of geopolitical blocs adverse to the United States (such as the Non-Aligned countries). This American retreat is sharply reflected by the absence of military responses to the challenge of Venezuela.

The correlation of forces has registered, therefore, various significant changes in Latin America. The dominant classes no longer count on the neoliberal strategic compass, the popular movement has recuperated its street presence, and American imperialism has lost capacity of intervention.

Diversity of Subjects

The actors of a socialist transformation are the victims of capitalist domination, but the specific subjects of this process in Latin America are very diverse. In some regions indigenous communities have occupied a leading role in the resistance (Ecuador, Bolivia, Mexico) and in other areas peasants have led the resistance (Brazil, Peru, Paraguay). In certain countries the protagonists have been formal urban workers (Argentina, Uruguay) or precarious informal urban workers (Venezuela, the Caribbean, Central America). The new role of indigenous communities and the weaker role of factory unions stand out. The multiplicity of sectors reflects the differentiated social structure and political particularities of each country.

However, this diversity also confirms the variety of participants of a socialist transformation. As the development of capitalism expands the exploitation of salaried work and collateral forms of oppression, the potential actors of a socialist process are all the exploited and oppressed. This role does not fall exclusively on the salaried workers who directly create business profits, but to all the victims of capitalist inequality. What is essential is the convergence of these sectors in a common battle, which unfolds around ever-changing focal points of rebellion. Victory depends on this action against an enemy who dominates by dividing the popular camp.

In this struggle certain segments of salaried workers tend to play a more central role because of the place they occupy in the vital branches of the economy (mining, factories, banks). Capitalists profit from the privations of all the dispossessed, but their profits depend on the direct labour force of the exploited and from profit which is made specifically from certain activities.

This centrality is verified in the current conjuncture of economic revival, which tends to recreate the significance of salaried workers. In Argentina unions are reclaiming their pre-eminence in the streets, in comparison with the role played by the unemployed and the middle class during the crisis of 2001. In Chile the strikes of the miners are playing a leading part, in Mexico certain unions are establishing a role, and in Venezuela the centrality of the petroleum workers since their battle against the coup attempt (in 2002) persists.

Problems of Popular Consciousness

The eradication of capitalism is a project entirely dependent upon the level of consciousness of the oppressed. Only these

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convictions can direct a process of popular struggle toward socialism.

The primitive vision of this development as an inevitable transformation of history has lost intellectual consensus and political attractiveness. No pattern of historical evolution of this type exists. Socialism will constitute a voluntary creation of the vast majorities or it will never arise. What occurred under "real socialism" illustrates how terrible it is to substitute popular determination with the paternalism of functionaries.

But the consciousness of the oppressed is a sphere subject to sudden changes and is conditioned by the experience of struggle. Two opposing forces influence its development: the learning that the oppressed assimilate in their resistance against capital and the dejection which is generated by stifling work, anxiety for survival and daily alienation.

The inclination of salaried workers to question or accept the existing order stems from the variable results of this conflict. In certain circumstances critical vision predominates and in other moments resignation prevails. These attitudes depend on many factors and operate on very distinct generational perceptions of capitalism. For example, contrary to the 1970s the bulk of contemporary youth grew up without expectations of better jobs or education, observing exclusion, unemployment and inequality as normal facets of the functioning of the system. With this new outlook of the existing order, the new Latin American generation has taken up again the bellicosity of its predecessors.

But specifically socialist consciousness does not depend only on the predominant image of capitalism. On this level conclusions drawn from the class struggle and the impact provoked by key international events are more important. These milestones determine the

extent of certain "average degrees of socialist consciousness," that translate into levels of enthusiasm toward or disillusion with the anticapitalist project. The victories achieved in Russia, China, Yugoslavia, Vietnam or Cuba brought about a positive socialist perception that was not shattered by the numerous defeats that also occurred in those periods.

The current Latin American generation did not come of age as did their parents in a context marked by great triumphs. This absence of a successful anticapitalist reference – close to their immediate experiences – explains their greater spontaneous coldness toward the socialist project.

The biggest differences between the current period and the era of 1960-1980 are situated more on the level of political consciousness, than on the terrain of the relationships of social forces or change in popular subjects. It is not the intensity of social conflicts, the disposition of struggle of the oppressed or capacity of control of the oppressors which has changed substantively, but rather the visibility of and popular confidence in a socialist model.

The collapse of the Soviet Union caused a crisis of international credibility of the socialist project which has conditioned the action of the left. Latin America was not an exception, but the effective scope of this impact has been more limited in the region. The Latin American left had already traveled a great distance from the Soviet model before the collapse of the "socialist camp" and its dejection was due more to the inheritance left behind by the dictatorships, the failure of Sandinismo or the blockade suffered by the Central American insurgency. [5] Also on this level, the survival of the Cuban revolution functioned as a counterweight.

In any case the climate of disappointment was gradually replaced by an impulse to rebuild the emancipatory program. The advance of antineoliberal consciousness is illustrated in the forceful rejection of privatizations and deregulations (much greater than that observed in other regions, such as Eastern Europe). A rebirth of anti-imperialist consciousness is also taking place without the regressive components of ethnicity or religion that prevail in the Arab world.

However, the anticapitalist connection is the great missing link in this antineoliberal and anti-imperialist drive. This deficiency has curbed until now the radicalization of popular consciousness and therefore it is important to debate the socialism of the twenty-first century, a discussion initiated by the Bolivarian process (in Venezuela). This ideological reconstruction is possible because of the presence of many features of continuity on the left, which has suffered fewer fractures than in other regions. Neither the collapse of the historic political identity of the workers or the distancing from the left that occurred in various Eastern European countries is notable.

The Constitutional Framework

The Latin American left faces a relatively new strategic problem: the stabilization of constitutional regimes. For the first time in the history of the region the dominant classes manage their governments through non-dictatorial institutions, in almost all the countries and after a significant period. Neither economic collapses or political crises or popular insurrections altered this form of government.

The return of the military is for the most part a discarded hand for the hemisphere's elites. In the most critical situations

presidents are replaced by other leaders with some type of civic-military interregnum. What is discarded for now is the reinstallation of dictatorships to fight fragmentation from above or rebellion from below.

The current regimes are not real democracies but rather plutocracies in the service of capitalists. The institutions of this system have served to perpetuate social abuses which many dictatorships would not even have dared to suggest. These aggressions diminished the legitimacy of the system, but did not lead to a popular rejection of the constitutional regime equivalent to that suffered by the old tyrannies.

This change in the rule of capitalist domination has contradictory effects on the action of the Latin American left. On the one hand it amplified the possibilities of political action in a context of public freedoms. On the other hand the stabilization of parliaments, parties and functionaries offered capitalists more political security and growing confidence in their business affairs.

A system which reduces and at the same time consolidates the power of the oppressors represents a great challenge for the left, especially when this regime is for the most part perceived as the natural mechanism for the functioning of any modern society.

This last belief is encouraged by the right – which has grasped the usefulness of conducting their political activity within the constitutional context – and by the centre-left – which preserves the status quo under progressive masks. Both stoke false electoral polarizations in order to present the simple alternation of figures in power as meaningful change.

The current example of this complementarity is the "modern and civilized left" that arrived in government with Lula (Brazil), Tabaré (Uruguay) or Bachelet (Chile), in order to

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perpetuate the supremacy of the capitalists. However, other situations are more problematic because institutional continuity was broken with fraud (Calderón in Mexico) or presidential resignations (Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina).

In certain denouements these convulsions concluded with the reconstruction of the bourgeois order (Kirchner in Argentina), but in other countries the crisis resulted in the unexpected entrance to government of nationalist or reformist presidents, who are rejected by the establishment. This is the case of Chávez (Venezuela), Morales (Bolivia) and probably Correa (Ecuador). These results have been the consequence of the non-institutional character the crises and insurrections in these nations initially assumed.

In these processes the electoral terrain has shaped up to be an area of struggle against reaction and a point of support for coming to terms with radical transformations. This conclusion is vital for the left. For example, since 1998 all of the elections deepened the legitimacy of the Bolivarian process in Venezuela and transferred to the ballot box the defeat dealt to the right in the streets. The electoral sphere and the victories of mobilization complemented one another.

The constitutional setting significantly altered the framework of action of the left, which for decades had been accustomed to confronting a dictatorial enemy. The battle within these systems is not easy because institutionalism functions with permanent pretences of reproducing the existing order. Therefore it is necessary to combine direct action with electoral participation. For this path, times of arising popular power – which every revolutionary process requires – and the maturation of socialist consciousness – which to a certain degree is processed

through the constitutional arena – complement one another.

Movements and Parties

Popular consciousness translates into organization. The grouping together of the oppressed is indispensable to creating instruments of an anticapitalist transformation, since without their own organisms the exploited cannot initiate an alternative project for society.

Movements and parties constitute two modalities of contemporary popular organization. Both options perform an essential role for the development of socialist convictions. They reinforce confidence in self-organization and develop bases of collective functioning of popular power for the future.

Movements sustain immediate social struggle and parties fuel more developed political activity. Both instances are necessary to facilitate direct action and electoral participation. However, this complementariness is frequently questioned. There are exclusive advocates of movements and of parties.

But these objections only invalidate the actions of certain parties and not the general function of these structures, which are irreplaceable for acting on the political level. No emancipatory project can progress exclusively on social terrain, or dispense with the specific platforms, the links between demands and strategies of power, which party organizations provide. These groupings contribute to overcoming the limitations of a spontaneous rebellion. The party facilitates the maturation of an anticapitalist consciousness, which does not emerge abruptly from protest action and which requires differentiating struggle for improvements under capitalism and the battle for socialist objectives.

The disqualification of parties is as inadequate as the vice of

superiority that some organizations on the left still exhibit. They maintain the old vanguardist conception, act with iron verticalism and reward themselves with permanent self-proclamation. This cult of the organization leads to sectarian practices and a quest for hegemony in all social movements.

This form of political action feeds itself from the small-group caudillista tradition, or the tradition of strong-man, top-down leadership. In some countries this behaviour also expresses persistent bad habits from an organizational culture built during decades of clandestine action and antidictatorial resistance. In the current framework of public freedoms and party competition the confused character of this conduct is patently obvious. Those who maintain these practices can thrive, but they will never lead a socialist transformation.

Reform and Revolution

Material conditions, correlation of forces, social subjects, popular consciousness and popular organization shape the hexagon of themes that surround the strategy of the left. The postulated programs connecting action, conviction and proposals in a socialist sense depend on these six foundations.

However, rarely are these components coincidental. Sometimes the maturity of material conditions does not converge with the correlation of forces, with the protagonism of social subjects or with the aptitude of the political context. Less common still is the connection of these elements with the level of organization, consciousness and popular leadership required for an anticapitalist project. The strategy of the left is a search for paths to overcome these discordances and the analytical

distinction of six great questions aiming to facilitate this analysis.

The biggest problem is situated in the links that connect these pillars. The routes to follow are extremely varied because the universalism of the socialist program is not synonymous with uniformity. The experience of the twentieth century has illustrated how the bases of this process combine together in differentiated forms in each country. It has also been confirmed that the temporary nature of a socialist debut differs significantly between accelerated insurrectional conclusions (Russia) and prolonged confrontations of dual power (China, Vietnam). [6]

There are two grand responses – traditionally counterposed – to the dilemmas created by this disconnect between components of socialist change: reform and revolution. The first path promotes combining the disarticulated elements through a progression of social improvements that reinforce the positions of the workers and consolidate their political weight, institutional presence and organizational force.

But these reforms – which are feasible under capitalism – do not accumulate and are not irreversible. Sooner or later their consolidation (or deepening) clashes with the rule of profit and suffers employers' abuse which provokes major conflicts. In these circumstances the consequent popular response demands advancing toward socialist change.

Reforms are only valid as a link in the struggle for socialism. The absence of this perspective leads to the abandonment not only of an anticapitalist future, but of the improvements themselves. It's incorrect to attempt first the "resolution" in order to "discuss socialism later." If capitalism could structurally solve those problems socialism would be unnecessary.

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The second idea of socialist change promotes revolution and rejection of reforms. It calls for overcoming the disconnection between objective and subjective conditions through action which articulates the peaks of the crisis of capitalism with the disposition of struggle of the masses and socialist convictions. However, this connection is not so easy, even when there occur conjunctures close to the Leninist model of a revolutionary situation ("those from above can no longer continue dominating and those from below play a leading role in a historical eruption").

In South America we have observed in the last several years various circumstances of this type without any socialist result. Crisis of hegemony or authority of the dominant classes (loss of consensus and leadership capacity in Gramscian terms) converging with the revolt of the subaltern classes is not enough. [7]

Socialist maturity requires a prior process of learning which is not improvised in the expeditious path toward power. That preparation includes social achievements and democratic conquests that are obtained through reforms. This last term is not a bad word, nor is it situated in the antipodes of revolution. It is a useful instrument to gradually develop the revolutionary leap forward, building bridges which move the oppressed closer to the socialist goal.

A combination of reform and revolution can enable the link between immediate conquests and radical ruptures with capitalism. The first type of achievement is indispensable for creating popular power and the second for defeating an enemy that will not renounce its privileges.

To connect reform with revolution is the way to adapt the correlation of forces and popular action with the possibilities of anticapitalist

transformation in each country. But it is necessary to replace the old counterposing of both roads with their confluence.

Optimism and Reason

To discuss strategies presupposes searching for a guide for inspired action in past experiences, but always remaining open to new circumstances and experiences. This inquiry includes unprecedented hypotheses and no simple calculus of models to repeat.

The strategy of the left includes a liberated dimension that cannot be found in other political formations. It raises humanist objectives associated with a communist horizon which no bourgeois current can offer. But the credibility of these goals depends on the behaviour of its organizers and this conduct presupposes an attitude of spontaneous resistance to inequality and intuitive rejection of injustice.

The function of strategy is to transform indignation in the face of misery and solidarity with the oppressed into rational projects. And this development demands intellectual bravery to face up to the thorniest and most unpleasant problems. If there is no disposition to tackle the difficulties, the roads to socialism will invariably remain blocked.

The current Latin American conjuncture invites renewing strategic controversies on the left with frank, open and respectful debates. It is the moment to adopt the achievements and weigh the limitations with an enthusiastic and critical attitude. Both positions contribute to forging reasoned optimism which the battle for socialism demands.

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NOTES

[1] This is a challenging theoretical text available for the first time in English. Claudio Katz' interventions in the thriving debates on the future of socialism in Latin America have been much discussed in the magazines, journals and websites of the left throughout Latin America and Spain. In providing a translation of Katz' most recent contribution *New Socialist* is attempting to introduce to North American readers a taste of the character of discussions around building a socialism for the twenty-first century currently taking place on the ground in Latin America. The editors added the explanatory footnotes to the original text. Claudio Katz is an economist at the University of Buenos Aires, a researcher with Conicet, and a member of *Economistas de Izquierda*, *Economists of the Left*, in Argentina. This article was translated by *New Socialist* editor Jeffery R. Webber and appears in issue 61 (Summer 2007) of *New Socialist* (www.newsocialist.org)

[2] Claudio Katz, "Socialismo o Neodesarrollismo," (*Socialism or Neo-Developmentalism*), available in Spanish

at: www.lahaine.org, 1-12-06, or www.rebellion.org, 1-12-06.

[3] Keynesianism refers to the reformist economic theory of John Maynard Keynes. It was most influential between the end of the Second World War and the 1970s.

[4] The Southern Cone refers to Argentina, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay.

[5] Sandinismo refers to the ideology and practice of the Sandinista revolutionary government of Nicaragua, in power between 1979 and 1990. The Central American insurgencies referred to here were the unsuccessful revolutionary guerrilla wars waged in Guatemala and El Salvador in the 1980s.

[6] Dual power refers to an unstable and unsustainable period of a revolutionary situation in which popular institutions of the exploited and oppressed emerge alongside and in opposition to the existing institutions of the state.

[7] Antonio Gramsci was an Italian Marxist who developed the most influential Marxist theory of hegemony.

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Transition on Hold

Jeffery R Webber

“The transnational corporations always provoke conflicts to accumulate capital, and the accumulation of capital in a few hands is no solution for humanity... And so I have arrived at the conclusion that capitalism is the worst enemy of humanity.” — President Evo Morales, Cochabamba Bolivia, May 22, 2007, Associated Press.

“We are going to correct the discourse, suspending that unnecessary rhetoric, because on top of everything it does not correspond with our actual practice... in this year [the first year of the MAS government] there was not a single measure that has affected the middle classes, or even the upper classes of Bolivia... We repeat a thousand times: the government of President Morales respects private property, respects religion, respects healthy business activity, guarantees private participation in education and health.” — Vice-President Álvaro García Linera, March 1, 2007, Clarín (Argentine Newspaper).

“We want capitalism with a bigger state presence.” — Vice-President Álvaro García Linera, May 20, 2007, Clarín.

THE 19TH NATIONAL Congress of Factory Workers of Bolivia was held in October 2006, and the proceedings produced a remarkable document that speaks to the unique depth of radical labor traditions in Bolivia. [1] The document situates the contemporary domestic situation within the wider parameters of global capitalism since the fall of “real socialism” in the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc, the increasing radius of capitalist social relations to a planetary level, the rapid pace of capitalist exploitation in contemporary China, the new reality of mass unemployment as a permanent phenomenon, and the blows suffered by the international working class in different regions of the world since the close of the “golden age of capitalism” and the onset of neoliberalism in the 1970s.

At first glance, the ideological position of this Congress might seem fairly irrelevant given that “the largest share of the workforce — around 66% — is engaged in the informal sector, including thousands of micro-businesses, small-scale and often contraband and the illicit coca trade.” (Economist Intelligence Unit, Bolivia: Country Profile

2006, 20) Nonetheless, the influence of factory workers’ unions, especially in Cochabamba, extends far beyond their formal membership.

Beginning in the late 1990s, the factory workers’ union in Cochabamba led them to open the doors of their centrally-located union offices to neighborhood associations, poor people’s networks, water rights activists, the unemployed and others. When the Water War erupted in 2000, the union office became the initial home of the Coordinadora, the overarching social movement organization that tied together the rural and urban allies who fought against the privatization of water.

A shoe factory worker, Oscar Olivera, leader of the Federation of Factory Workers in Bolivia, became the lead spokesperson of that movement and one of the most prominent figures on the Bolivian left in the opening years of this decade. (See Oscar Olivera with Tom Lewis, *Cochabamba! Water War in Bolivia*, South End Press 2004, 121)

The factory workers persuasively argue that the neoliberal model (privatization

of resources and services, market dominance and worship of “free trade”) has meant the deepening of the neocolonial character of the Bolivian economy as a producer of raw material (with natural gas taking over the role that tin played for much of the 20th century), the profound penetration of international capital into, and therefore control over, the most important productive sectors of the economy, and the creation of unprecedented levels of unemployment. They point out that over 110,000 factory workers and miners lost their jobs in the 1980s as a consequence of privatization and the closure of “uncompetitive” factories.

The other prominent characteristic of the current period identified by the factory workers is the campaign of permanent war orchestrated by U.S. imperialism and its allies in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, the Balkans and elsewhere since the end of the Cold War. Facing up to this situation, the document suggests there are two options for the working class at the international level: the deepening of barbarism and wars and the worsening of the social conditions of the masses,

or the definitive victory of socialist revolution.

The current government of the Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement Towards Socialism, MAS), which took office in January 2006 after Evo Morales was elected President with 53.7% of the vote on December 18, 2005, is not an instrument for such a definitive victory in the Bolivian context, according to these workers. Rather, the Morales government represents the ideological resurgence of populism.

The four strategic guidelines coming out of the congress stressed autonomous, independent, and militant action of the working class: for class unionism; for a revolutionary leadership; for a political instrument of the workers; and for social revolution.

Legacies of Traditions and Contradictions

The revolutionary consciousness which characterizes the document from the factory workers is representative of one of two main insurrectionary traditions which continue to inform contemporary Bolivian radicalism. It is but one example of how the memories of



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Bolivia's militant trade unionism in the 20th century still live within the novel workplace and community settings of the opening decade of the 21st century.

First forged between 1880 and the 1952 national-populist revolution, the Bolivian workers' movement has been defined by powerful ideologies of revolutionary Marxism, anarcho-syndicalism and anti-imperialism. [2] For much of the 20th century the Bolivian labor movement was unique in Latin America for its militant independence, radical consciousness, and its relative freedom from the shackles of state corporatism.

Led overwhelmingly by the miners, the workers attempted unsuccessfully to steer the 1952 revolution toward revolutionary socialism, fought against a string of military dictatorships between 1964 and the early 1980s, and played a leading role in the recovery of electoral democracy in 1982, even as they sought to transcend liberal democracy and provoke a transition to socialism.

Despite the fact that the Bolivian working class, and the miners in particular, suffered an incredible series of defeats between 1985 and 2000, their revolutionary Marxist traditions were carried with them into the very new organizing contexts of the major urban slums — especially El Alto, on the edge of the capital city of La Paz — and to the coca-growing region of the Chapare, in the department of Cochabamba.

In 2005 and 2006 I attended innumerable meetings in El Alto, a place many in Latin America refer to as the most revolutionary city in the Western hemisphere, an urban shantytown of 800,000 residents, 82% of whom self-identify as indigenous. I was endlessly impressed by the way in which ex-miners, forced to relocate to El Alto in the mid-1980s in search of survival and still dressed in their mining fatigues, would intervene in popular meetings with

penetrating and lucid Marxist analyses of the current conjuncture of global capitalism and the balance of social forces in the Bolivian national context.

The ex-miners would then present what they thought to be the best course of militant action for the popular movement in El Alto in order to push forward the struggle for indigenous liberation and socialist emancipation. The ex-miners, moreover, were never merely pundits on podiums. They were often the first to arrive and the last to leave the front-line clashes with police and military forces.

I am convinced that the radical cultural legacy of militant workers' struggle from below has endured, even if it was temporarily debilitated by the terrible, distorting onslaught of neoliberal economic adjustments. Working-class struggle has had to adapt and recompose itself in the face of the new realities and the tremendous obstacles in the way of forging working class solidarity.

The other major tradition which underlies current Bolivian radicalism runs even more deeply into the history of Bolivia, in fact to pre-republican patterns of anti-colonial resistance. This tradition is one of indigenous radicalism and insurrection against colonialism stretching back centuries, and against internally colonial race relations since the founding of the Bolivian republic in 1825. [3]

As historian Brooke Larson writes, "stories of [the Aymara indigenous hero] Tupac Catari's six-month 1781 siege of La Paz still haunt the nightmares of its upper-class inhabitants." [4] She might have added that, on the other side of the racialized class divide, these same stories have inspired contemporary indigenous radicals in their urban repertoires of insurrection and rural road blockading for much of the current decade. Before Catari was drawn and quartered for his role in the 1781

revolt he warned the colonialists that he would "return as millions," and the protagonists of recent rebellions see themselves as part of this return.

While there were certainly periods over the last two centuries when revolutionary Marxist and insurrectionary indigenous movements coalesced in their resistance to capitalism and racial oppression, the relationship between the two traditions was not infrequently fraught with tension and rivalry.

The complementary nature of the anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and indigenous-liberationist wave of left-indigenous struggle between 2000 and 2005, then, was a particularly compelling illustration of the force that such solidarity can engender. [5] Together, left-indigenous popular forces struggled against the privatization of natural resources, put their bodies on the line as the military callously repressed unarmed civilian demonstrators, and managed to overthrow two neoliberal presidents: Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada in October 2003 and Carlos Mesa in June 2005. All of this laid the basis for the contradictory and complex electoral victory of Evo Morales and the MAS.

While clearly there were differences within and between the myriad leftist groups and indigenous organizations in this period, a shared commitment to multifaceted liberation was widespread. The strength of their unified collective action was palpable during the peaks of rebellion — October 2003 and June 2005 — when hundreds of thousands of indigenous peasants, laborers in the informal economy, miners, pensioners, unemployed, teachers, students, health care workers and so many others literally took over the streets of La Paz and demanded fundamental change to the organization of the economy, state and society.

Unfortunately, a third tradition influencing Bolivian radicalism

has repeatedly circumvented the realization of these first two emancipatory projects. This is nationalist populism, which has manifested itself in various forms and in different contexts over the years, but is most closely associated with the 1952 National Revolution, and the party of that revolution, the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (Revolutionary Nationalist Movement, MNR).

The revolution achieved the nationalization of the mines, the breaking up of the haciendas (large land holdings) through wide-scale agrarian reform, and the abolition of the hated pongueaje, a system through which indigenous rural laborers had been obliged to provide personal service to the landowner, his family, and his overseers in exchange for the ability to sew small sections of land on the hacienda. The labor movement, led by the miners, demanded the full-scale socialization of property relations and the institutionalization of workers' control in the mines and elsewhere during the opening years of the revolutionary process.

However, after the initial period in which the MNR was forced to enact major reforms due to pressure from popular movements, the MNR quickly turned on the workers with the assistance of US imperialism. In alliance with co-opted peasant organizations — placated by the recent land reforms — the MNR began reversing the gains of the revolution and rebuilding the army as a means of repressing the miners.

In 1956, an IMF-backed economic stabilization program was introduced, and by the arrival of the 1964 right-wing military coup the state had developed an elaborate system of divide-and-rule tactics to deal with rural and urban popular sectors, repressing the most radical and integrating those who could be integrated through cooptation and the divvying out of selective benefits from the state's purse.

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While the main currents of the insurrectionary wave of left-indigenous struggles between 2000 and 2005 seemed to have freed themselves of much of this nationalist-populist baggage, they were nonetheless unable to form a collective revolutionary project capable of taking power and driving forward a program of socialist and indigenous liberation. The MAS filled this vacuum as the only political party with cross-regional and inter-ethnic networks of alliance and an early history of solidarity with extra-parliamentary activism in the rural road blockades and street protests.

Since 2002, however, the MAS had been steadily transformed into a moderately reformist party bent on winning elections through the courting of the urban middle class. This was evidenced most obviously by the minimal role played by the party in the October 2003 and May-June 2005 rebellions, and in the MAS's temporary alliance with the neoliberal government of Carlos Mesa between 2004 and 2005.

Today it is increasingly apparent that the MAS has recreated the legacy of nationalist-populism in a new melange fit for the 21st century. The government has incorporated some of the language of indigenous liberation developed by the earlier popular struggles but has separated its indigenous focus from the material reality facing indigenous people.

In spite of the fact that indigenous people in Bolivia — who also constitute the vast majority of the rural and urban working class — experience racial oppression and class exploitation in a profoundly interpenetrating fashion in their everyday lives, the MAS government has concluded that a transition to socialism is impossible in the country for between 50 to 100 years.

As a parallel component of this government thesis — known as “Andean-Amazonian Capitalism” — indigenous liberation has come to represent

an impoverished version of its former self. In the worldview of Vice-President García Linera, indigenous liberation has come to mean simply the creation of an indigenous national bourgeoisie, or an “Andean-Amazonian” capitalist class. Disturbing parallels with South Africa's post-apartheid trajectory under the African National Congress (ANC) spring easily to mind.

García Linera's conception rests on the assumption that Bolivia must go through a 50-100 year stage of development in which the productive forces of capitalism will be nurtured to maturity. This is “Andean-Amazonian” capitalism in the sense that petty-bourgeois sectors of the indigenous majority today will be the national bourgeoisie of tomorrow...a capitalism, in other words, that will be nice to indigenous people.

The Vice-President's theory is heavily indebted to the economic, evolutionist Marxism of the early 20th century Second International, filtered through the tired line of the old Bolivian Communist Party. On this view, the national productive forces are not yet conducive to socialism; the formation of an indigenous capitalist class will be this revolution's achievement.

Thus the new nationalist-populism incorporates a diluted ideology of indigenous liberation while foreclosing the possibility of a transition to socialism. The MAS has also borrowed from the MNR's strategy of the 1950s in terms of seeking to divide the popular movements, control the most important social movement organizations, contain rank-and-file activism that exceeds the strict parameters of moderate reform, and even repress workers and peasants who are unwilling to submit to the limits of populism and subordination to the state.

A brief overview of the main policy developments since January 2006, the dynamics of

right-wing autonomist forces in the departments of the media luna (half moon) — Pando, Beni, Santa Cruz and Tarija — and popular struggles on the ground still unfolding will provide a clearer picture into this new Bolivian reality under the Morales government.

Nationalizing Everything, Nationalizing Nothing

Undoubtedly the most anticipated policy measure of the MAS government was announced on May 1, 2006: the “nationalization” of natural gas and oil. Bolivia has the second largest reserves of natural gas in South America, trailing only Venezuela in proven and probable deposits. Within weeks of the May Day events it was tragically obvious that presidential decree 28701, through which the nationalization was declared, did not actually signify the nationalization of anything.

The Morales government led the public to believe that the decree established a new regime of royalties and taxes whereby 82% of profits would now go to the state, and only 18% to private companies. In fact the 82/18 measure was only a transitory strategy which forced transnational corporations to enter into new contracts with the government within a period of 180 days, or to abandon the vast riches under Bolivian soil. The new contracts would be negotiable such that it was always understood that the maintenance of the transitory 82/18 relationship would be an exceedingly unlikely outcome in the long term, and that the petroleum multinationals would more likely come out doing much better under the new contracts. [6]

After seemingly interminable delays, and charges from the right-wing opposition of MAS corruption, incompetence and inefficiency, the Morales government signed 44 new contracts with 12 foreign petroleum companies for a period of 30 years in October 2006. The government also

managed to solidify new deals for exporting gas to the most important markets of Brazil and Argentina at higher prices than those secured by preceding neoliberal administrations.

Between 1998 and 2002 natural gas exports generated roughly \$232 million annually for the Bolivian state. In 2006, as a result of the transitory high tax period and the new contracts, the Morales government took in \$1.65 billion, and expects that annual figure to rise to \$2 billion in 2007, and \$4 billion by 2010. [7]

Thus the period of purified looting and unmitigated robbery of Bolivia's natural resources by transnational corporations may be over, at least for the moment. The larger state cut of the natural gas pie — the medium- to long-term size of which is contingent on the unstable price of natural gas on the world market — has freed up revenue for the Bolivian state to reinvest in social programs, although it has not yet done so on any significant scale.

But the more acceptable tax arrangement does not mean nationalization, and in this respect even the reformist measures of the Morales government fall well short of those enacted in the years immediately following the 1952 revolution. The transnational petroleum companies remain in control of the industry; the state oil company, YPFB, continues to be underfinanced and therefore incapable of exploration or production; and Bolivia continues to be trapped in the export of a primary commodity with no value-added, the price of which is currently high but will inevitably drop at some indeterminate future time.

As Raúl Zibechi points out:

“The problem with not nationalizing hydrocarbons is that the reformulation of the state-owned YPFB ... is not real. The new contracts require that YPFB not make investments or assume risks or responsibilities, but rather, act as an overseer for hydrocarbon companies The

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agreement signed with Argentina, which raises the price of gas supplied to this country, as well as the supply to Brazil, which makes up 30% of the energy used by the powerful São Paulo industrial belt, will provide a considerable boost to state revenue, but consolidate gas exports without industrialization. In practice, it will render large profits in the short term but create problems in the long run.”

Whatever the serious limitations to the gas policies of the Morales administration, the new government’s policy is in the mining sector is far worse. In the leadup to the December 2005 elections, Morales promised to rehabilitate the Bolivian Mining Corporation (COMIBOL), which had been devastated during the privatization of the mining industry in the mid- to late-1980s. In practice, in the western mining zones of the Andes the Morales government has instead promoted new “shared risk” contracts between transnational companies and the privileged sectors of the petty-bourgeois mining cooperatives (cooperativistas).

Bolivia is also home to Mutún, the largest iron deposit in the world, located in the eastern lowland department of Santa Cruz. The Morales government reached a deal with the Indian giant Jindal Steel & Power to exploit the mine beginning in September 2007. Morales emphasizes the fact that the new project will bring in roughly \$200 million annually in tax revenue, but a number of economists say that the terms of the deal constitute a veritable robbery of Bolivian resources and a missed opportunity to rebuild COMIBOL. [8]

All this is occurring in the midst of a commodities boom driven to a significant degree by the extraordinary expansion of China’s economy. The prices of nickel and tin skyrocketed 18% in 2006, for example, while China forecasts 8% GDP growth for 2007, following on 10.7% growth in 2006. [9]

The strength of metal commodities prices has led to intensified struggle between state-employed miners in the western altiplano (high plateau) and the cooperativistas. The former group, drawing on the revolutionary traditions described above, want to renationalize the mining industry and place it under workers’ control. The latter want to align with transnational capital and further privatize the enclaves of the mining industry still controlled by COMIBOL.

In early October 2006, tensions spilled over in a tin mine in Posokoni, near the community of Huanuni, in the department of Oruro. Cooperativistas attacked state-employed miners and two days of bloody battle ensued between the two groups, both armed with dynamite and other weapons. Between October 5 and 6, at least 17 people were killed and many more were injured. The government was widely criticized for not sending in the army to keep the peace.

In the wake of these events it came to light just how closely aligned the MAS government was with the cooperativistas. This is expressed most clearly by the fact that the Minister of Mines and Metallurgy, Walter Villarroel, was a former leader of the peak federation of the cooperativistas, and continued to be a registered member of a cooperative even as he was Minister of Mines.

In the wake of the 17 deaths, the government was forced to replace Villarroel and upped the ante in its rhetoric regarding its intentions for the mining industry. Morales again suggested that the industry would be nationalized. However, apart from the isolated case of the Empresa Metalúrgica Vinto tin smelter, nothing else has been nationalized.

Unfortunately, The Economist is probably correct when it argues, “In October [Morales] said it was the turn of mining [to be nationalized]. Yet with Mr. Morales, whose rallying cry is ‘Bolivian resources for the

Bolivian people’, sometimes the symbolism and the rhetoric is more ambitious than the reality.” [10] Indeed, the Economist Intelligence Unit recently reported on a predominant atmosphere of investor calm:

“In the face of the expropriation and its complexities, investors in Bolivia’s mining sector are less perturbed than might have been expected. The sector is on the brink of a substantial privately led investment boom, thanks to firm prices for all of Bolivia’s mineral products. Increased mine capacity produced a marked jump in mineral export earnings and volume growth in the first nine months of 2006. Firmer prices and output increases for the main minerals — zinc, gold, silver and tin — acted to raise the overall value of total mineral production by 92.9% year on year to US\$816.5m.... The government has quietly given assurances that whatever it may say in public it will not act against companies operating legally and in good faith. Foreign mining investors believe that mining code revisions to be announced by the government will be neither draconian nor confiscatory in terms of a higher tax burden and are therefore pressing ahead with their projects.” [11]

The Morales government has also announced its intention of buying 51% of an Italian telecommunications multinational in order to reestablish ENTEL as a state company, but so far this is just that, an announcement. No definitive action has been taken.

While there is no space to comment on them here, there are similarly profound limitations to MAS economic policy in terms of its commitment to central bank autonomy, fiscal austerity, a guaranteed miniscule rate of inflation, tight caps on the minimum wage and public sector salary increases, the limited parameters of agrarian reform, and so on and so forth. What all of this signals is a deep imprint of the old neoliberal model on the new moderately

reformist, indigenous populist Morales government.

The Autonomist Right of the Media Luna

Apart from the nationalization of natural gas, there was no demand more clearly articulated by the popular left-indigenous movements between 2000 and 2005 than the need to establish a revolutionary Constituent Assembly to fundamentally rebuild the foundations of the Bolivian state, economy and society in such a way that racism and capitalist exploitation would be challenged profoundly.

The MAS instead began its Constituent Assembly with election rules that guaranteed the capacity of the right-wing autonomist forces of the natural gas-rich media luna departments to veto any revolutionary or even deep reform content that the new constitution draft might have contained.

In seeking to appease the capitalist class of the media luna departments, the MAS underestimated the strength of the popular forces in January 2006 and the comparative weakness of the right-wing autonomists. However, because the MAS has sought with some success to contain the rank-and-file mobilizations of the Bolivian popular sectors, and because it has not challenged the underlying economic power of the capitalist class, the right has been gradually reconstituting its political strength.

The new boldness of the right is most vividly apparent in the fiasco that the Constituent Assembly has become. The right simply abstained from participation for the first six months of a process that was supposed to take a year in its entirety (August 2006 to August 2007), bringing the whole assembly to a grinding halt. To legitimize its boycott of the assembly process, the right accused the MAS government of authoritarian pretensions and held mass rallies at various times in the city of Santa Cruz calling for the autonomy of the media

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luna departments — meaning of course bourgeois control over the natural resource and agricultural wealth based in those departments.

While the leading peak organizations of the Santa Cruz right speak of “democracy” and the “rule of law,” they have much in common with the far right in Venezuela which seeks in fact to destabilize democracy and the rule of law in favor of the interests of a tiny elite. In Bolivia, the autonomist right includes in its social base the Unión Juvenil Cruceñista (Cruceño Youth Union, UJC), a group of violent, white, fascist youth who mobilize the racist sentiments of the upper classes of the media luna and frequently attack indigenous peasant and labour mobilizations in those departments with impunity.

The crisis over the Constituent Assembly grew to such proportions that the Argentine embassy in La Paz, worried about a possible flow of refugees to Buenos Aires in the event of civil war, commissioned a study on the probability of the conflict turning violent. The study argued that there was a 58% probability of civil war in Bolivia.

The International Crisis Group also published a report in January 2007 on the danger of rising conflicts in the country, while the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations commissioned a report on Bolivia’s increasing instability. [12] The report of the Council on Foreign Relations was adorned with a title seemingly indebted to the alliterative flourish of Fox News reporting on the terrible toll of toxic terrorism: Bolivia on the Brink! [13]

In January 2007, the Constituent Assembly conflict intensified when the right-wing government Prefect (governor) of the department of Cochabamba, Manfred Reyes Villa, called for a new referendum on autonomy so that his department could join the media luna autonomist forces. However, a referendum on that precise issue had been

held just a few months earlier, and the population of Cochabamba had decisively squashed the idea of joining with the media luna bloc for departmental autonomies.

The MAS mobilized some of its rank and file in the cocalero movement and urban unions in Cochabamba to pressure Reyes Villa into renouncing his call for a new referendum. Roads in the department were blocked and mass vigils were held in the central plaza of the city of Cochabamba. The rank and file quickly grew out of control of the MAS administration, however, as they confronted the arrogance of the far right Prefect and a serious intensification of the everyday racism of urban life in Cochabamba.

Street fights erupted between new fascist youth organizations, modeled on the UJC of Santa Cruz, and the popular sectors. Racist youth groups and upper-class bands of men attacked cocaleros and the urban indigenous poor while screaming racist epithets. The popular movements fought back vigorously and their demands grew to include the immediate resignation of Reyes Villa, something which MAS officials denounced as anti-democratic, calling for their social bases to retreat, lift road blockades, and end all violence.

The city was eventually pacified through military occupation after one person on each side of the conflict was killed in street clashes. A brief move by far left groups to form a parallel revolutionary departmental government in Cochabamba, led by and large by Trotskyist university students, failed to read accurately the balance of social forces. The parallel government died almost as soon as it was declared. The MAS had successfully pulled the cocaleros and urban unions out of the conflict by the time the parallel government was declared, and while there may have been a basis for such a radical measure at the height of the conflict, the attempt was made at the tail end of the mobilizations and

confrontations when all such possibility had disappeared.

Traditional U.S. power in Bolivia has been eroded considerably by a combination of factors. For one, the U.S. state is currently suffering from imperial overreach in Iraq and Afghanistan. Even with domestic political-military elite and popular rejection of the war in Iraq, there is still no end to that war in sight, while Bush’s eyes are seemingly still set on Iran. A further decline of U.S. power stems from the declining leverage of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in Latin America and elsewhere.

U.S. Imperialism

The United States exercised massive influence in Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s through its decisive role in both financial institutions. [14] The possibilities of anti-imperialist cooperation between Latin American states have generally improved with Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia slowly pushing forward the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA).

ALBA is meant to act as a counter, and eventually an alternative, to the U.S. grand project of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), and smaller projects of bilateral trade agreements, the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Tremendous obstacles remain with regard to building effective anti-imperialist cooperation, but a significant decline in U.S. imperial strength in the region is discernible.

In Bolivia, all these general factors have influenced the country’s particular experience with U.S. imperialism. The fact that Venezuela has astronomical, if ultimately tenuous, revenue flow from oil has opened up an alternative line of credit for Bolivia. This has afforded the poorest country in South America unusual room for maneuver in terms of

autonomous economic policy making, although as we have seen there has been minimal actual movement on this front.

The current price of natural gas and the metals commodities boom is presently boosting the Bolivian economy, which also provides the current administration with more space for designing better social policy. The declining importance of the United States as a Bolivian trading partner is critical, as well, in terms of decreasing Bolivia’s vulnerability to the Empire’s inclinations.

Nonetheless, the U.S. imperial project continues through multifaceted “democracy promotion” activities in Bolivia and by exercising its diminished but nonetheless real leverage in the old domains of the drug war, military bases and informal and formal military training and influence, aid provisions, conditional access to the U.S. market, and dominance in the international and regional financial institutions.

The above mentioned report solicited by the Council on Foreign Relations provides some further clues into the U.S. state’s perception of the Morales administration. The general recommendation of the report is to adopt a policy similar to that taken by the United States with respect to the MNR revolutionary government in the 1950s. The MNR was seen as potentially dangerous, but ultimately controllable through engagement, and perhaps even an effective means through which to co-opt and control the real danger of radical social movements and workers’ challenges from below. Maintaining stability seems to be the reigning objective at the moment.

Eduardo Gamarra, the author of the report, writes, “As long as crisis persists, the United States will find it difficult to make progress on its traditional policy agenda. Indeed, should any of these tensions reach a boiling point, sparking widespread

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social unrest or violence, U.S. commercial, energy, security, and political interests in Bolivia and in the Andean rim subregion may be threatened.” [15]

Besides, if one looks beyond Morales’ rhetoric, Gamarra reassuringly contends there is less to worry about than one might think:

“These events suggest that Morales, despite the persona he has tried to cultivate, is in many ways a traditional Bolivian political actor who doles out patronage to major supporters while simultaneously condemning those who came before him for doing the same. [16] ... In fact, a World Bank official interviewed for this project claimed that his organization’s relations with the Morales government are far better than with any recent previous government, despite Morales’ repeated anti-World Bank rhetoric.” [17])

Perhaps most astonishing, given that Morales rose to political prominence through his leadership in the anti-imperialist coca-growers’ unions of the Chapare, Gamarra reports that the U.S. War on Drugs is relatively secure:

“Remarkably, the Morales administration has permitted U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) officials to continue exercising significant control over interdiction efforts in Bolivia under its new policies, and U.S. diplomats have forged a successful, if somewhat tenuous, working relationship with their Bolivian counterparts. In September 2006, the State Department’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement announced that the United States has established ‘benchmarks’ that Bolivia had to meet over the next six months in order to continue to receive U.S. counternarcotics assistance. By meeting its 2006 goal of eradicating 5,000 hectares of coca fields, one benchmark was met. Furthermore, U.S. authorities agreed that there has been a significant increase in

interdiction efforts since Morales came to power.” [18]

Gamarra ultimately recommends that Washington continue its “democracy promotion” tactics, revive military assistance, and court the regional powers of Argentina, Chile, and Brazil to pressure Bolivia to maintain stability in the mutual interests of imperialism and sub-imperialism. [19] Meanwhile, “... the Morales government must quickly find a formula to co-opt dissent, much of which now revolves around organized labour groups historically supportive of the MAS.” [20]

Popular Struggle

The first year and four months of the MAS administration has witnessed relatively little autonomous pressure from popular left-indigenous organizations seeking to push the MAS decisively to the left. The complicated coalition of groups that constitute the MAS have become increasingly concentrated around the Vice-President, García Linera, the most conservative of the leading personalities in the party. Actual policy initiatives and strategic economic planning documents issued by the government thus far closely conform to his vision of Andean Amazonian Capitalism.

Thus far, however, most popular organizations, especially rural indigenous ones, see the government of Evo Morales as their government. His indigenous origins in the largely Aymara altiplano, and then in the largely Quechua Chapare, provide him with impeccable cultural credentials in the eyes of large sections of the popular classes and oppressed indigenous nations.

It should be remembered that Morales is the first indigenous president in a republic where 62% of the population self-identified as indigenous in the last census of 2001. When the popular organizations have mobilized, therefore, it has generally been to defend the government against the right-

wing autonomist forces of the media luna.

The right has become bolder and is increasing its political capacities by the day. In Santa Cruz, right-wing forces are capable of mobilizing hundreds of thousands of people to demonstrations against the government and in favour of departmental autonomy.

The Morales government has taken an overwhelmingly conciliatory position in its negotiations with the bourgeois forces of the media luna departments, a strategic error in my view that has allowed for the slow rearticulation of right-wing political power to match their economic power. There is no telling what the outcome of elections will be if a new Constitution is eventually passed, and legislative and presidential elections are held in 2008, as the Morales administration apparently desires.

While many rural indigenous organizations seem to continue to back the government solidly, as do the armed forces, there are increasing expressions of organized discontent in the urban labor movement and social movement organizations, and in the mines. Such underlying tension led to the bloody results of the October 2006 mining conflict and the urban clashes in Cochabamba in January 2007.

In April 2007, the Bolivian Workers Central (COB) announced that it would be forming a new political party (or political instrument, instrumento político) of workers because the organization believes the MAS is not taking steps to defeat neoliberalism. The COB argues that the weaknesses of the government provides space for the growth of right-wing movements and parties such as PODEMOS, led by former President Jorge Quiroga. [21] It is far too early to tell what will become of this new instrumento político.

In May 2007, teachers and health care workers struck and protested in La Paz, and university students from the Public University of El Alto (UPEA) mobilized behind a series of demands. [22] The state-employed miners of the altiplano and their indigenous peasant allies in Oruro are likely to be an important catalyst to any independent class politics and struggle for socialism and indigenous emancipation outside of the MAS government. The events of October 2006 show that they are increasingly well-organized, even as the cooperativistas retain substantial influence on the government and an impressive capacity to mobilize their rank and file.

In El Alto, the center of popular insurrection in the massive protests of October 2003 and May-June 2005, the situation is mixed. The two principal popular organizations in 2003 and 2005 were the United Federation of Neighbourhood Councils of El Alto (FEJUVE-El Alto), and the Regional Workers Central of El Alto (COR-El Alto).

There has been insufficient investigation into rank-and-file sentiments within FEJUVE as of late, but it is clearer that the leadership at least has become closely integrated with the MAS government. FEJUVE is therefore incapable, at the moment, of representing an independent radical politics in El Alto, as it had done for much of the 2000 to 2005 period.

COR-El Alto’s leadership was, until very recently, in a similar situation in terms of its relationship with the Evo Morales government. But on May 22, 2007 an important turn occurred within COR-El Alto at the organization’s Sixth Congress. The workers approved as their political declaration a document called Octubre señala el camino, or October Shows the Road, referring to the October 2003 rebellion.

COR-El Alto is now calling for a socialist and communitarian society which will necessarily

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come about through a social revolution, substituting private capitalist property with social collective property. The declaration argues that the government's strategy of "democratic cultural revolution," or Andean Amazonian capitalism, will lead Bolivians to failure in the face of transnational corporations and the oligarchy.

Octubre señala el camino goes on to argue that El Alto will continue being the vanguard and general headquarters of the Bolivian Revolution of the 21st century, as it demonstrated in October 2003 and May-June 2005. The oppressed from El Alto, from this perspective, will lead the process of social liberation. The document argues that the so-called democratic cultural revolution of the MAS government will not allow for Bolivia's liberation from the tyranny of imperialism, nor the end of the exploitation of Bolivian workers. Instead it will ensure that the apparatus of the Bolivian state, its body of laws and democratic system, will continue to service capitalists and large landowners.

Reminiscent of the early 20th-century insights of revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg, one reporter summarizes the Octubre as saying, "To occupy the presidential office and to obtain a parliamentary majority does not serve the interests of the exploited in any way if the power of the bourgeoisie and the regime of big private property continue intact." [23] It calls for a struggle for political independence of the workers, peasants, and popular indigenous forces in the face of the state and the government.

Again, to what extent this rhetorical position will be played out in practice it is too soon to determine. Nonetheless, nascent stirrings to the left of the MAS government are visible, just as the autonomist right is accumulating power in the media luna departments.

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NOTES

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[4] Brooke Larson, 2004, *Trials of Nation Making: Liberalism, Race, and Ethnicity in the Andes, 1810-1910*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 204.

[5] I discuss this in more depth in Jeffery R. Webber, 2005, "Left-Indigenous Struggles in Bolivia: Searching for Revolutionary Democracy," *Monthly Review* Vol. 57, No. 4 (September): 34-48.

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Days of Evo Morales: Image and Reality in Bolivia," *Against the Current* 123 (July/August): 11-20.

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[8] CEDLA, 2006, "La entrega del Mutún: ¿quién festejará," *Alerta Laboral*, septiembre, Centro de estudios para el desarrollo laboral y agrario.

[9] Pham-Duy Nguyen and Feiwen Rong, 2007, "Commodities Defy Greenspan Recession Odds," *The Globe And Mail*, March 13, 2007; and "Pushing Tin: Indonesian Mining," *The Economist*, March 3, 2007, 80.

[10] "Bolivia: Tin Soldiers," *The Economist*, February 15, 2007.

[11] EIU, "Bolivia's Industry," *Economist Intelligence Unit Briefing*, February 19, 2007.

[12] International Crisis Group, 2007, *Bolivia's Reforms: The Danger of New Conflicts*, Latin America Briefing No. 13, January 8, 2007, available at: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4778&l=1>.

[13] International Crisis Group, 2007, *Bolivia's Reforms: The Danger of New Conflicts*, Latin America Briefing No. 13, January 8, 2007, available at: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4778&l=1>.

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[15] Gamarra, *Bolivia on the Brink*, 4-5.

[16] Gamarra, *Bolivia on the Brink*, 24.

[17] Gamarra, *Bolivia on the Brink*, 43.

[18] Gamarra, *Bolivia on the Brink*, 29.

[19] Gamarra obviously does not use these terms, referring instead to multilateralism. For an important investigative report on U.S. "democracy promotion" in Bolivia see Reed Lindsay, 2005, "Exporting Gas and Importing Democracy in Bolivia," *NACLA Report on the Americas*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (November-December), available at: http://www.nacla.org/art_display.php?art=2603#. For the seminal work on U.S. democracy promotion as US imperial strategy see William I. Robinson, 1996, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[20] Gamarra, *Bolivia on the Brink*, 23.

[21] Miguel Lamas, "La COB formará un instrumento político de los trabajadores," *Bolpress*, 4 de abril de 2007, available at: <http://www.bolpress.com/art.php?Cod=2007040425>.

[22] "Tres sectores se radicalizan: hay paros y marchas," *La Razón* 7 de mayo de 2007; "Evo desafía a salubristas y a maestros," *La Razón*, 5 de mayo de 2007; "El conflicto salarial sube, no hay clases ni atención médica," *La Razón*, 3 de mayo de 2007; and "Vuelven los paros y las marchas: Maestros, salubristas, ropavejeros, microempresarios y mineros en las calles," *Bolpress*, 2 de mayo de 2007.

[23] APA, "Trabajadores alteños apuestan por una sociedad socialista y comunitaria: Afirmar que la Agenda de Octubre no se cumplió," *Agencia de Prensa de El Alto*, 22 de mayo de 2007, available at: <http://www.bolpress.com/art.php?Cod=2007052306>.

World Social Forum

The WSF at the crossroads

Report by Hubert to the Fourth International's International Committee

Fourth International

Created in 2001, after two consecutive years of big mobilisations against the institutions symbolising neoliberal globalisation, the World Social Forum began modestly (15,000 participants) at the first WSF in late January 2001 in Porto Alegre. The process then consolidated itself very rapidly, first in Latin America and in Europe (1st ESF in November 2002 in Florence) and reached South Asia in 2003 (1st Asian Social Forum in 2003 in Hyderabad).

The WSF process has strongly developed on the planetary scale

The take off of the WSF took place amid a rapid rise in anti-globalisation mobilisations: Seattle in November 1999 against the WTO, April 2000 in Washington and September 2000 in Prague against the IMF and the World Bank, not forgetting the mobilisations in Nice and Gothenburg against the neoliberal Europe. This rise continued after the first World Social Forum: mobilisation in Quebec against the Summit of the Americas in April 2001, against the G8 in Genoa in July 2001.

The events of September 11, 2001 did not succeed in holding back the mobilisations and placed struggles against imperialist wars at the centre of the latter with an enormous success at Florence in November 2002 and above all in February 2003 when more than 12 million demonstrators protested against the preparations for the invasion in Iraq. The organisations of the Fourth International and other revolutionary organisations fully involved themselves in these anti-globalisation mobilisations and in the WSF process. The two strongest WSFs in numerical terms were those of January 2004 in Mumbai (140,000 participants) and January 2005 in Porto Alegre (150,000 participants) although one can note a subsiding of mobilisations against the war,

IMF and WTO. In some years, the WSF process has developed over a great part of the planet: Latin America, Europe (including Russia), Asia (mainly India, Pakistan, the Philippines, South Korea and Thailand), North America [1], Africa including the Maghreb. A big absence: China, but in view of the repression there it is hard to see how it will develop in the short term. Still, on the margins, there has been the significant mobilisation in Hong-Kong in December 2005 against the WTO.

The WSF groups forces going from social democratic administrators to revolutionary organisations

The spectrum of political forces involved in the WSF process is extremely broad: it goes from social democratic and Christian democratic administrators of the system to revolutionary forces via big trade union confederations (the ICFTU and the CMT-WCL regrouped today in the CIS, not forgetting the ETUC), NGOs which favour dialogue with the international financial institutions that the anti-globalisation movement fights against, and which form part, with the big union confederations already mentioned, of Global Compact (which groups, under the auspices of the United Nations, transnational enterprises, union leaderships and NGOs) [2], radical social movements (Via Campesina, the South Korean



KCTU trade union, organisations of fishers, COBAS, SINCOBAS, Sud-Solidaires) and radical movements and campaigns (anti-war movement, anti-debt movement – Jubilee South and CADTM – anti-WTO campaign, not to mention the World Women's March and significant indigenous movements like Ecuador's CONAIE).

Of course, the WSF does not claim to represent all the forces mobilising against capitalist and patriarchal globalisation. Among those notably absent, let us cite for example the Zapatistas.

The evolution inside the International Council and the International Secretariat leaves no room for doubt, it is a rightward evolution

Tension has been a constant feature at the WSF International Council which brings together around a hundred organisations. Between those who think that a humanisation of globalisation is possible and those who fight it for what it is: a new phase of capitalism that must be fought radically by refusing to participate in initiatives like Global Compact, to support centre-left governments pursuing neoliberal policies and to participate in imperialist wars (notably in Afghanistan).

In the first camp we find the leaders of the big union confederations, several NGOs notably those which play a motor role in the Brazilian committee (IBASE, CIVES, Justice and Peace Commission and so on) charged with the secretariat of the WSF; NGOs and education

movements in Europe (Tavola per la Pace, Caritas, CCFD, Ubuntu and more recently ARCI) as in Africa (ENDA, the South African union federation COSATU), and in South Asia. This sector does not hesitate to support Lula, Zapatero or more recently Prodi or again, the two Indian Communist Parties in power in three Indian states (Bengal, Kerala and Tripura) and which support from outside the Congress Party government in power in Delhi. They have regular meetings with the Socialist International, the European socialist parties and they advance a programme of reforms of international financial institutions and of world governance. [3]

The evolution of the Brazilian CUT which is aligned with the orientation of the Lula government (comparable to the conciliatory attitude of COSATU towards the neoliberal policy of the South African government), has strengthened this first camp.

The difficulties of the coordination of the social movements

The radical forces have sought to strengthen the popular roots of the WSF everywhere where they could do it. They have attempted - with success at certain times - to favour powerful mobilisations against globalisation (launch at the first WSF of the Appeal for the anti-war mobilisation of February 2003). These forces have also favoured the dynamic of the Assembly of Social Movements which, at each edition of the social forum, whether at world or continental level, has adopted final declarations and developed

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calendars of action. Despite some highs and lows, the Assembly of social movements has experienced a growing success in 2006 and 2007 (3,000 participants in the Assembly of Social Movements at the 4th ESF in Athens in May 2006 and more than 2,000 participants at the Assembly of Movements at the end of the 7th WSF in Nairobi in January 2007). But the coordination of the social movements is still weak and the social movements and campaigns which are involved still come across obstacles which are difficult to overcome. How to succeed in uniting struggles which are still too fragmented at the international scale? How to lead a discussion on strategy? Differences emerge between these movements on the attitude to adopt for example in relation to the Lula or Prodi governments.

The balance sheet of the 7th WSF in Nairobi

The balance sheet is mixed, several very negative aspects [4] have to be raised. If in the future other editions of the WSF should be marked by such features, the process will lose its *raison d'être*.

Before touching on the negative elements, let's mention that this was the biggest international meeting where African movements from different parts of Africa met to affirm their will to struggle against neoliberalism. Moreover, different movements and campaigns [5] have profited from it to build links of struggle which unite them.

The Forum in Nairobi attracted 15 to 20,000 participants. [6] Given the characteristics of Kenya, it was impossible to expect numbers comparable to Mumbai (140,000) or Porto Alegre (150,000). If it had been correctly conceived, the WSF in Nairobi would probably have

been able to attract as many as 30 to 40,000 (as in Karachi in March 2006) but this is not sure. The WSF in Nairobi was strongly marked by commodification, by militarisation, and was conceived in a manner which was excluding in relation to the population.

A brief description: This forum was marked by delusions of grandeur: the organisers believed it was possible to attract 100,000 persons (they had announced to the press between 100 and 150,000 participants) while fixing prohibitive entry rates: 500 Shillings (KSh), the sum demanded from Kenyans was equal to a week's minimum wage (the income of the overwhelming majority of Kenyans which allows them to feed 3 to 4 persons). Such a decision implies a complete loss of contact with the living conditions of the majority of the Kenyan population or a lack of real concern with the participation of that population.

Inside the Kenyan organizing committee, some people (leaders of 3 or 4 NGOs) concentrated power [7] and took the most important decisions without really seeking to organise a process open to all the social movements of Kenya. [8] The decision to impose such a high entry price had moreover been opposed in vain inside the committee. The narrow nucleus which monopolised decisions was supported by some persons from the secretariat of the African Social Forum (mainly the leadership of the NGO ENDA-Tiers Monde based in Dakar), two or three persons from the Brazilian secretariat (representing 2 or 3 NGOs) and some Europeans. It is this small number of people that has concentrated the real power.

To go back to the delusions of grandeur: the organisation

committee had hired at great cost the entire infrastructure of an enormous sporting complex capable of holding more than 100,000 people whereas it would have been possible to hold the WSF both in one of the big stadiums in the city centre (capacity of 15 to 20,000) and in one of the numerous parks near this stadium. The gigantic complex chosen by the organisers was situated at more than 10 km from the centre of the city in a residential neighbourhood. The price which had to be paid by bodies wishing to sell food in the complex was also prohibitive (between 30,000 and 60,000 shillings). The price of food served to the WSF participants was thus also prohibitive (except for the Europeans, North Americans, Japanese and the NGO and union full-timers). Cost of a single meal: between 300 and 400 shillings on average. No free drinking water on the site, a half-litre bottle of water selling for 50 shillings (or the equivalent of the price of a meal in a city restaurant). Also, inside the stadium several luxury restaurants were operating, some the property of the Minister of the Interior, well known for his repressive policy and his past as a collaborator with the British colonial power (he actively participated in the repression of the Mau Mau who fought for independence).

The organisation committee had moreover concluded a sponsorship contract with an African telecommunications transnational CELTEL (the registration of the participants and all communications went through this private enterprise present everywhere at the Forum with its advertising). The security in the stadium was provided by the police and army. Several Kenyan participants were subjected to long hours of detention in cells in the stadium

simply because they had not paid the entry fee.

The tone of the speeches at the opening session (like the closing session) was essentially focused on the humanisation of globalisation. The 8,000 to 10,000 participants present at the opening had to put up with an emollient 45 minute speech by the former Zambian head of state, Kenneth Kaunda, preceded by a speech by Guy Rider, secretary general of the CIS and Flavio Loti of Tavola per la Pace. In short a very social democratic dominance.

Contrary to the decisions of the International Council, the organisers have not favoured convergence between movements. To give only one example: while the 4th day of the WSF should be conceived to allow the adoption of platforms and common strategies, calendars of common action, the organisers had planned 21 thematically different assemblies.

Big NGOs from the Christian churches had a high profile and some affirmed positions against women's rights to abortion and against LGBTs.

Happily, this did not happen without a reaction. The action of several components [9] of the coordination of social movements means that the Nairobi WSF did not end on a negative balance sheet. Several meetings of social movements succeeded from the first day in determining a common attitude and preparing the Assembly of Social Movements. There was immediately agreement on non-acceptance of the prohibitive entry price demanded of Kenyans. Contact was made with the organisers so that they let Kenyans enter for free if they wanted. Faced with the refusal of the organisers, provisions were taken to open the doors of

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the stadium to Kenyans who wanted to enter without paying. We should also mention that the People's Parliament had organised for the three first days of the WSF an alternative forum in a park in the centre of Nairobi. A thousand people participated every day. Then the People's Parliament joined the Assembly of Social Movements on the 4th day [10]. Although the organisation committee of the WSF had planned that the Assembly of Social Movements would take place on the 4th day at 9.30 am without translation (clearly in an attempt to sabotage it), it actually took place at the end of the day with more than 2,000 participants who ended the WSF in a unitary and combative spirit. [11]

The WSF International Council which met for two days just after the WSF was worrying. The number of critical and self-critical voices concerning the balance sheet was very limited: 6 to 7 critical interventions out of about fifty in total. [12] The next IC in Berlin from May 29-31, 2007 will adopt a code of conduct for the organisation of the next WSFs.

Beyond the WSF in Nairobi: putting down roots, creating networks, strengthening synergies...

We should distinguish the rightward evolution of the International Council from the overall process which remains positive. The dynamic of the European Social Forum has allowed the strengthening of European networks capable of uniting the struggles against the privatisation of public services, for a charter of social rights and so on. The process of preparation of forums remains democratic due to regular meetings of the preparatory European assembly. In South Asia, the dynamic of the WSF have strengthened the links

between militant forces in India and Pakistan (and beyond). In Latin America, the Social Forum of the Americas has been strongly oriented to the struggles against the FTAA, against plan Colombia and so on. We will see what will emerge from the first United States Social Forum in late June of 2007. In 2008, there will not be any edition of the World Social Forum, it will be replaced by global days of action around the pivot date of January 26-27, 2008. The 8th WSF will take place in 2009 and the location will be defined by the International Council soon.

It is important to pursue active participation in the dynamic of the World Social Forum even if this latter does not constitute the alpha and omega of the anti-globalisation movement. Far from it.

The Fourth International - an international organisation struggling for the socialist revolution - is composed of sections, of militants who accept and apply its principles and programme. Organised in separate national sections, they are united in a single worldwide organisation acting together on the main political questions, and discussing freely while respecting the rules of democracy.

NOTES

[1] The first US forum took place in Atlanta, in Georgia from June 27 to July 1, 2007.

[2] Global Compact was launched by the UN secretary general in June 2000. It involves 100 transnationals, 1,000 other private enterprises, with NGOs, in such a way as to resemble a new world governance. Also involved are the new International Trade Union Confederation, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch alongside Total Elf Fina, Bayer, Unilever, BP, Shell, Nestlé, Nike... See the presentation on the site of Global Compact.

[3] During the 5th WSF in Porto Alegre the ICFTU, the CMT (today regrouped in the CIS which has 160 million members) were associated with the Global Progressive Forum, which is the NGO created by the European Socialist Party and the Socialist International so as to be able to participate in the WSF (www.globalprogressiveforum.org) to organise 11 conferences on the theme of the "Social dimension of Globalization". In 2006, the Global Progressive Forum was admitted as a member of the International Council of the WSF, not without debate.

[4] See the dossier at Europe-solidaire.

[5] See common resolution of the debt campaigns which are equipped with a permanent committee of facilitation at CADTM.

[6] The official balance sheet presented by the organiser committee affirms that there were 56,000 participants, which is false

[7] Onyango Oloo, the national coordinator of the Kenyan Social Forum which publicly took its distance in relation to this nucleus, published two months

after the holding of the WSF an edifying analytic description.

[8] See also the balance sheet written by the People's parliament

[9] The anti-debt campaigns (including the CADTM) and anti WTO campaigns, the social movement Indaba from South Africa, NGOs, several ATTAC movements, the World Women's March, the movement No Vox... without forgetting the People's Parliament of Kenya.

[10] This radical social movement had also organised demonstrations against the over high price of food in the stadium. On the 4th day, some members of this movement looted one of the 5 star restaurants and distributed the food free to some dozens of street children who had accompanied them.

[11] See the final declaration of the social movements.

[12] See the report of the International Council.

Kenya

The People's Parliament

Interview with Wangui Mbatia

Could you present yourself and your organisation: what is it doing, how did it start and what are its practices and objectives?

My name is Wangui Mbatia, I am a member of Bunge la Mwanachi, which is translated as People's Parliament in English. Our organisation is a people's movement, it is not quite an institution; it is a movement of the people. It started 15 years ago just by having a gathering of Kenyans sitting under a tree in a park discussing their issues. And it has met every single day for the last 15 years, and under that tree we've discussed a lot of our problems; we've come out with solutions; we've created awareness.

So essentially the objective of the People's Parliament is to provide the people with a voice when it lacks one, to create awareness about different things: it could be about health matters, like HIV AIDS; it could be about political matters, for instance we worked very actively during the Kenyan constitutional reform process. We create awareness among the public about things that affect them: laws, for instance - we always make sure that we discuss the laws that are being discussed in our parliament, so that the people will know what the law will actually mean to them.

On many occasions we do take a pro-active role in ensuring that the rights of the people are respected. That is why we think that the World Social Forum is very important for Kenyans to participate in when it is in this country. This is our first World Social Forum. Our members are largely ordinary citizens who would not be able to afford a ticket to Brazil or even to India because it is too expensive.

So whereas some of us have been aware of the World Social Forum process, most of us cannot afford to participate and could not afford to participate when the World Social Forum was being held out of the country. Many of us thought that if the World Social Forum was coming to Nairobi, it would have included us, but it appeared however that too many things in the way the forum was organised have made it difficult for Kenyans to participate.

The first one was the fees imposed on us to access the World Social Forum. You know that to attend the World Social Forum and to participate in you had to pay large sums of money. For Kenyans, for instance, if you want to have a restaurant in this forum you have to



pay approximately \$500. The average Kenyan lives on less than \$1 a day. So to be able to have a restaurant here would have taken the average Kenyan more than a year's worth of income, which means, literally, we were excluded. But even if we want to go and put up a restaurant here, just to attend the forum the organisers insisted on a fee of 500 shillings, the equivalent of just over \$6 which is about a week's worth of wages.

We did not think that that was fair, considering again that the ordinary Kenyan lives on less than \$1 a day, and to attend a forum just to be able to commiserate with others, to discuss issues, to exchange experiences with others, it was very unfair to ask us to pay so heavy a price that we were excluded. So the People's Parliament took that up as an issue. We organised our forum; we ran our forum in a public park for free for three days. That was on Sunday, Monday and yesterday, Tuesday.

But then we thought today was going to be action day in the World Social Forum, and we thought that maybe if we come to this Social Forum we will find our fellow activists and our fellow comrades in action. So at our park we came up with a few resolutions about what to do. And one of the things that we needed to do was to create awareness that one, food prices in Kenya are just too high; and secondly that the World Social Forum should be a place where even the institutions that are allowed to participate are carefully selected, so that we don't send the wrong message.

And our action today at the Windsor restaurant is just an indication of that. We selected this restaurant as our point of action because of many reasons. The Windsor restaurant has a long history with the people of Kenya. The owners, the people of Kenya feel, have not treated them well in the past. It is reputed to be owned by our cabinet minister in charge of internal security. And he is a man not many of us are fond of because he has done some incredibly hurtful things to us as a people. So we thought that because he has made immense profits out of the World Social Forum, we would have some actions around his restaurant so that we can remind him and those like him that we are here and we exist.

What do you think or say could be your common objective after the world social forum ends, and for you in Kenya how can it help you in building your organisations and struggles?

I think that is one of the best aspects of the World Social Forum. It brings people who are like-minded together in a way that is not done in any other forum because here we have been able, as just average members of the public who are not normally able to travel outside to the world, we've had the world brought to us. And we haven't just had the world brought to us, we've had the right world brought to us, so that we speak to people who speak our language, they believe in what we believe in, they think the way we think, they want to do what we want to do.

So one of the most rewarding things about having the World Social Forum in Nairobi has been that... We have been able to meet with other organisers of movements elsewhere. Now for us again, because of the restrictions on the gates and because we have not been able to participate and portray clearly what our organisation is about, of course our opportunities have been somewhat limited.

However we are creative people and with the little that we have, I think we've touched a reasonable enough number of people, so that we think that perhaps our future will be a little brighter than it was before the World Social Forum came here. We have had immense support. For instance we took our lunch money during the past week in order to print our pamphlet. And when we started giving out the pamphlet and then we ran out of money various delegates who were attending the World Social Forum were generous enough to print our materials for us.

We did not want to be given money because we think that as a people we will get better when we get away from the culture of being given handouts. So we would simply tell them where they could go and help us print the pamphlet and they would print according to their ability. And we thought that was truly the pinnacle of socialism: to give according to your ability to those that have a need. Now for instance, a young lady has printed 5000 pamphlets for us, those were printed yesterday.

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You can understand the incredible camaraderie that we have found... Do we think that we will have the opportunity to build lasting networks? We believe so. I think so far the visitors that have come to us have opened their doors to us, so we believe that it is up to us take that to the next level and I think that if somebody has seen the people of Kenya in their true elements, they will find that we are generous and hospitable people who are willing to carry out change and who have tried and endeavoured to do so in the most peaceful manner.

We have been trying to avoid conflicts when it is necessary but we are also a hopeful people, we do not give up easily; which is why we have resisted having those gates closed, every single day we have had to force those gates open, every single day, so that we can come in and be with you, be with the other people that are here. And I think in a small way the World Social Forum has presented us with an opportunity to fight for ourselves. Sometimes when the world gives you trouble it is not always right to look at it as pain. Sometimes it is a good, a hopeful learning experience. And I think for us the World Social Forum has been a good learning experience. If it should come again next week we will be better prepared for it.

Beyond the World Social Forum what will be the situation in Nairobi and Africa; what will be the challenges for radical networks in Kenya and in Africa in the next months and years? What are the main issues to build and help to build, in your opinion?

We think that in our own small way we are helping to set the pace for those movements that tend to be excluded from mainstream World Social Forum events; so that we hope the next World Social Forum will give a bigger space for people like us, wherever it will be held. We think that by carrying out the two actions that we did, we have perhaps given a reasonably good idea to other movements out there about what can be done with just a little bit of innovative thinking, a little bit of creativity, a little bit of voluntarism, and a little bit of giving, to reinstate and stamp back the authority of the poor person within the Social Forum, of the person who is a revolutionary within the Social Forum. We think that we would do much better if the radical voices were on occasion allowed to air

their opinion, so that we stop being a congregation of the agreeable. Sometimes it is healthy to disagree agreeably.

What about the broad political issues? In your opinion what are the social and political issues activists around the world have to be taking into account, especially African ones.

For us in Kenya this is an election year, so we will be going to election for the first time after having had a coalition government which has quickly fallen apart and left us hanging as the people that voted it in. So we have a tremendous task again of re-educating our people on the process, the democratic process of election. Summarily, for us as an organisation we will take an active role in that.

But our organisation also deals with matters that have both a local and an international angle to them. For instance we are very concerned about the trend of war and terrorism because that in itself has been an instrument for creating terror in the ordinary citizens' lives. For instance, in Kenya our organisation has been very instrumental in ensuring that the anti-terrorism law was not passed here, because that law was going to install in Kenya a police state, where we were going to lose all our civil rights in exchange for protection from terrorism that doesn't even really exist here. So we do take our place in global causes.

We are very keen on dealing with the imbalance in trade. You know we are Africans and we suffer the brunt of inequality in trade. That is something we would like to deal with on a daily basis, although again ours is a grassroots movement, so it is limited by a lack of resources, but the innovative way of handling our issues allows us to go much further. We hope that the message that people who met with us will carry with them is that there is a group in Kenya that can work with them and that if we are included in processes we can make an impact, local perhaps, but a great impact; and that is just one step forward for all of us who want to change this world.

25/02/07, Nairobi, Kenya.

Wangui Mbatia is a leading member of the Kenyan People's Parliament.

Two-disc DVD available

“Ernest Mandel – A life for the revolution”

A documentary by Chris Den Hond



“These gentlemen don’t fear ideas that float in the air, that are written on paper, or that appear in printed or spoken form. What they fear is organization – organized action, organized attempts to bring these ideas to fruition.”

Ernest Mandel was one of the most innovative Marxist thinkers of the second half of the twentieth century. He was a “professional revolutionary” who invested all his energy, knowledge and vast personal culture in the struggle for socialism and in the building of a revolutionary party and the Fourth International. At the same time, Mandel maintained a hectic pace of scholarly activity; he is the author of several books: *Marxist Economic Theory*; *Trotsky: A Study in the Dynamic of his Thought and Late Capitalism*, among others.

This 90-minute documentary looks back at Mandel’s life and 60 years of struggles: from the Civil War in Spain to the fall of the Berlin Wall, with segments on Algeria, Che Guevara, Vietnam, the 1960-1961 Belgian general strike, May 68, Portugal, Chile, feminism, ecology, workers control, the Sandinistas and more. This DVD includes “A man called Ernest Mandel”, a 40 minutes 1972 film by Frans Buyens.

Directed by Chris Den Hond. This documentary was produced with the support of La Formation Léon Lesoil and La Gauche magazine

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Dem Rep of Congo

DRC: a demonstration of plunder and submission

Damien Millet, Eric Toussaint

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a textbook case for those who wish to understand complex notions like the pillage of a country's wealth, the intolerable loss of a State's sovereignty, or the concept of odious debt.

The manner in which the budget of 2007 was prepared and the orientations of the government led by Antoine Gizenga provide clear confirmation of what the Committee for the Abolition of Third World Debt and many other social movements have been asserting for a number of years. (See the article "Budget 2007: FMI s'inquiète, le gouvernement pour une revision", in the Congolese newspaper L'Avenir of 23 June 2007)

The 2007 draft budget presented by the government to the National Assembly was marked by a strict neo-liberal orientation, and for an obvious reason: according to the Congolese Finance Minister Athanase Matenda Kyelu, it "was in line with what was agreed with IMF services". We should bear in mind that the IMF is the spearhead of financial globalization, and notorious among the poorest populations on all continents for the ravages caused by the antisocial measures it has imposed for a quarter of a century.

But the National Assembly was having none of it! On 14 June it adopted amendments to increase the budget, a development that the IMF lost no time in criticising. Again according to the Finance Minister, "the IMF Board of Directors having met on Monday, June 18 2007 to examine the progress of the macroeconomic stabilization program monitored by the IMF, expressed concerns on the evolution of the ongoing debate in Parliament on the 2007 Budgetary Bill [...] forecasted receipts and expenditure have been considerably increased, so that they no longer correspond to the macroeconomic framework underlying the preparation of this 2007 Budget". The message couldn't have been clearer. The government was then instructed to put out the fire by intervening



with the Senate in this matter. A clear example of how a government bows to the IMF and its creditors, exactly as a slave serves his master.

Thus on June 23, the Congolese Finance and Budget Ministers took the IMF message to the Senate. As reported by the Congolese newspaper Le Potentiel, "Matenda Kyelu said he expected the Senate to amend the 2007 draft budget, in order to meet, in particular, the requirements of external partners, one of which being the International Monetary Fund" (See the article "Budget 2007, cap sur le point d'achèvement", Le Potentiel, 23 June 2007). The manoeuvre was successful: on 29 June, the Senate "amended" the Congolese State budget. What can this budget contain to make the stakes so vital?

Congolese wealth benefits neither the State nor the population, but a small number of cronies and the transnational corporations represented by the IMF

First of all, the total amount of the budgetary package is very low: about 2.4 billion dollars, equivalent to the sum spent by the United States in less than two weeks for the occupation of Iraq. How, in such conditions, can a country devastated by two wars in which 3.5 million people died, rebuild itself? For comparison purposes, France, which, like the DRC, has a population of around 60

million, has a budget of 520 billion dollars, in other words more than 200 times the Congolese budget, whereas the subsoil of DRC is a "geological scandal" – a treasure of mineral resources – and the country's agricultural land is very fertile.

Another interesting point of comparison: the DRC's budget barely exceeds the annual operating expenditure of the IMF, which employs only 2700 people! The scandalous truth is that Congolese wealth benefits neither the State nor the population of the country, but rather a small number of cronies and the transnational corporations whose interests are represented by the IMF and the major powers.

In addition, a disproportionate share (50%!) of DRC fiscal resources goes to debt servicing, the cost of which constantly takes an increasing share of the country's budget. As the Congolese Prime Minister declared when the budget was presented: "This situation reduces the Government's capacity to devote its internal resources, from 2007, to the improvement of working conditions for State officers and civil servants, particularly the police force and the army, and to reinforce its financial capacity to make priority investments." Finally, between making these priority investments and refunding rich creditors who are grabbing the country's national resources, the government, strongly advised by the IMF, chose the second alternative. Obviously, expenditure for education and health are reduced to the meanest proportions.

It is obvious that the planned budget goes deliberately against meeting the fundamental human needs of the Congolese population. In doing so, it violates several fundamental charters, including the Universal Declaration

Morocco

Stop the repression! For the liberation of all political detainees in Morocco!

National Authority for Solidarity with Political Detainees

The INSAD (National Authority for Solidarity with Political Detainees) is a unitary framework of the social and political left against the wave of repression which has recently hit Morocco. It promotes, among other initiatives, an activist campaign to gather a million signatures demanding the liberation of arrested and sentenced activists.

It has appealed at a press conference for active and prolonged international solidarity in all its forms. An appeal to international solidarity which ESSF wishes to fully support.

On May 1 demonstrators, notably in Agadir and Ksar el Kebir, were arrested, tortured, charged and sentenced to long prison terms (two and three years) for having chanted slogans "damaging the sacred values of the Kingdom", which constitutes a patent violation to the right of free opinion and expression.

At Beni Mellal demonstrators were arrested following a peaceful demonstration of solidarity with those sentenced on May 1 and accused of the same crimes as them. If some were acquitted, others received suspended penalties, heavy fines or custodial sentences. Such was the case with Bougrine, a founding member of the AMDH, aged 72. He has already spent 18 years in the jails of Hassan II and his father Mohammed V, a symbol of the continuity of the repression exerted under the "reign of the three kings" since independence in 1956.

In Rabat, the national body for solidarity with the detainees of May 1st, 2007 (INSAD), bringing together several associations, trade unions and democratic organisations has appealed for a solidarity rally. The forces of order charged the demonstrators without warning and with great violence. Solidarity has become a crime. Nearly thirty people were hospitalised after being beaten, including the new president of the Moroccan Association of Human Rights (AMDH), Khadija Ryadi. This police intervention was led by general Laanigri, one of the main sponsors of the human rights violations, institutionalised torture and disappearances under the reign of Hassan II, who remains in post.

This escalation of repression gives the lie to the official discourse of the construction of a state of law or of democratic advances. Punishment for damaging sacred values recalls the judgements of the famous "years of lead". It seeks to discourage the combat of the democratic forces, social movements and citizens for full freedom of expression and



defences of their social and democratic rights. The AMDH "recalls that repression fell on the unemployed, the workers, the civil servants, the handicapped and the defenders of human rights at a time when the persons who pillage public property, who commit political and economic crimes enjoy impunity" It is the fight for a democratic Morocco based on social justice which is targeted. We will not accept it and we bring our full solidarity to the democratic and social resistance movements. Thus, we demand the unconditional release of all political prisoners, the overturning of their sentences, and an end to repression by the Moroccan government.

PETITION

For the liberation of political detainees in MOROCCO! For an end to the repression of social and democratic resistance!

We support the activists and members of the social, trade union and democratic movements arrested and charged with "damaging the sacred values of the Kingdom" following the demonstrations of May 1 or for having simply demonstrated their solidarity. We demand their immediate and unconditional liberation, the overturning of their sentences and prosecutions as well as the full respect of the right of expression, organisation and demonstration. Our solidarity goes to those who fight for a democratic Morocco and social justice and we demand an end to all repression.

Send your signatures to this appeal to: solidaritesociale@yahoo.fr

You can also send faxes to the Moroccan authorities:

Prime Minister: FAX: 00 212 37 768 656

Minister of the Interior: FAX : 00 212 37 762 056

Minister of Justice : FAX : 00 212 37 765 257 (email : Alaoui@justice.gov.ma)

Don't forget to send a copy of the fax to: solidaritesociale@yahoo.fr

The INSAD (National Authority for Solidarity with Political Detainees) is a unitary framework of the social and political left against the wave of repression in Morocco.

of Human rights and the Preamble to the Congolese Constitution.

Indifferent to such arguments, the IMF and its local accomplices have built a budget whose goal is "to provide all opportunities to the DRC to guarantee its victorious march towards achieving the HIPC (Heavily Indebted Poor Countries) initiative" [1]. An initiative whose purpose is nothing else than to impose very unpopular economic measures on the DRC, such as the reduction of social budgets, removal of subsidies on basic products, privatizations, the opening up of borders and tax policies which aggravate inequalities. Can a government feel any genuine satisfaction at being at the head of such a very poor and heavily indebted State?

The very meagre debt cancellation resulting from these measures will help conceal the fact that the HIPC initiative is a vast laundering operation for former odious debts contracted by the dictator Mobutu to boost his personal fortune, with the complicity of various creditors who were handsomely paid in return. This debt has never benefited the people and is in fact an odious debt which should not be repaid. The international financial institutions (primarily the IMF and the World Bank) and the Congolese policy makers responsible for this debt, such as the current president of the Senate and former Prime Minister of Mobutu, Leon Kengo wa Dondo, should be made accountable to the Congolese people. An audit of the Congolese debt made by DRC social movements with the aim of legally repudiating this debt is the only way forward.

Translated by Sushovan Dhar and Judith Harris

Damien Millet is president of CADTM France. With Eric Toussaint, he co-authored the book "Who Owes Who?" published by Zedbooks, London, 2004.

Eric Toussaint is President of the Committee for the Cancellation of the Third World Debt (CADTM).

NOTES

[1] See Le Potential of 23 June.

Pakistan

The liberation of Farooq Tariq and other detainees

A success for solidarity in Pakistan and the world

Pierre Rousset

Two weeks after having been jailed, Farooq Tariq, general secretary of the Labour Party Pakistan (LPP) was freed from prison on June 19, 2007. More than six hundred other people who were imprisoned for participating in demonstrations in recent months had already been freed. Last to be freed, Farooq was also the only national leader of a left party to have been thus placed in detention in June.

After the massacre of Karachi on May 12 and 13, 2007, and with the wave of repression unleashed on June 4, the military regime of Pervez Musharaf wished to bring a definitive halt to the democratic mobilisations provoked by the suspension of the president of the Supreme Court, judge Chaudry. See Pierre Rousset, "Vague de répression au Pakistan — Farooq Tariq placé en détention" It is evident from the brutality and illegality of the arrests, the three month detention orders issued a posteriori, the measures of intimidation, the unacceptable conditions of existence initially imposed on the prisoners... If the government finally freed them after a fortnight, it is because it was forced to do so.

In Pakistan

The death in detention, in Kot Lakhpat, of Sarmad Mansoor, a member of the Pakistan People Party (PPP), placed the government in difficulty. Its responsibility was indeed clear. This man, aged 52, had been arrested while being cared for in a district hospital in Gujarat. He was transferred to the prison clinic, which was not equipped to treat him. He died of a heart attack on June 14. In the prison, all the political prisoners began a hunger strike in protest while the scandal swept the country.

In Pakistan, the pressure for the liberation of the prisoners was very strong. Farooq Tariq, in

particular, received widespread support. First and foremost from progressive lawyers, including the Bar Association of the High Court of Lahore, and from representatives of the Pakistani Social Forum. Nearly all the country's trades unionists published press releases demanding his liberation. A coalition of seven progressive parties to which the LPP belongs, the AJT or Democratic Movement of the Peoples mobilised on his behalf. Most of the main opposition parties demanded that he be set free, including the Muslim League of Nawaz (PML-N), the PPP and the Tehreek nsaf, led by Imran Khan. The same goes for Qazi Hussain Ahmad, president of Jamati Islami, the most important religious fundamentalist party, although Farooq is well known for his Marxist and secular views.

Numerous activist demonstrations were organised throughout the fortnight of detention, in defence of Farooq Tariq and other detainees (the biggest in Lahore, Karachi and Faisalabad). There was plentiful press coverage, especially during the "vigil" of June 17 in Karachi.

In the world

At the international level, the solidarity appeal, once launched, allowed support to be gathered in numerous countries in a very short space of time (more than

450 signatures in a few days, on every continent). See the petition and signatures: "Pour la libération immédiate de Farooq Tariq et des autres détenus après la vague de répression du mouvement démocratique au Pakistan" The email lists once more proved their use! The appeal was circulated through lists associated with the global justice movement (French, European and world forums), political-academic lists (like that of "Historical Materialism") or party-based lists (network of radical parties, Fourth International), before being taken up in a cascade on other specific lists.

All of these email lists drew a veritable web which allowed us to reach simultaneously personalities, every kind of organisation, various networks and activists on the ground. Solidarity was then built from top to bottom as well as the other way round - it spread. The fact that Farooq had been personally very involved in international mobilisations obviously also counted for a lot in the success of the campaign. As the news of his detention spread, the signatures for the appeal arrived at a higher rate, with the first delegations appearing in front of Pakistani embassies (Greece), while a European day of action was being prepared.

It was in this national and international context that the regime began to free the



detainees. On June 20, one of the most renowned lawyers in Pakistan, Abid Hassan Minto, was to present a petition in favour of Farooq Tariq. The government preferred to release him the day before. Thus on June 19, hardly out of detention, Farooq was able to tell a press conference about the conditions under which he had been arrested — and the degrading treatment that the political prisoners were subjected to in the prison of Bahawalpur. Farooq Tariq, "The 15 Jail Days under Musharaf military dictatorship"

If Farooq Tariq was freed on June 19, whereas his incarceration was planned to be much longer, and if the other detainees were also freed earlier than that, it is probably above all because of the situation in Pakistan itself. But the campaign of international solidarity has also played a role. It constitutes moreover an encouragement for activists who are struggling in very difficult conditions — and a clear warning to the government: we will remobilise tomorrow, in still greater numbers, if it again proves necessary.

Pierre Rousset is a member of Europe Solidaire Sans Frontiers (ESSF). He has been involved for many years in Asian solidarity movements

Pakistan

The Red Mosque Saga

Farooq Tariq

At the time, when hundreds died of government negligence during the terrain rains and flood across Pakistan, the Musharaf regime has finally been able to clear the Red Mosque from the “Alqaida and Talaban” supporters after killing of 80, according to the official claims.

The claim of 80 killings is not accepted by all the critics of the regime. In the highly charged atmosphere, the siege went over 9 days with thousands of army personnel involved. The Musharaf regime was bent to show its muscles to the international donors that it is able to take on the religious fundamentalist at any cost.

The message to American imperialism was clear, “trust us, you do not have to come, we can do the job for you”. The killings of dozens of innocent students and handful of religious fanatics during the misnamed “operation silence” has earned the much need respect for general Musharaf by the American imperialism and other allied forces. What a silence during the operation, the gun fire were heard all over Islamabad for over nine days, terrifying children who were asking their parent why so much noise all the time.

It was a total failure of a military operation in professional terms. Ten soldiers were killed including two officers and paid the price for this failure. It was story of misjudgments and misinformation. It was a total collapse of the moral values during such an operation. It was a real manifestation of the psychology of a military general who is also a president of a country. “Kill them if they do not listen”.

The initial successes of the military operation to

successfully arrest the chief cleric Abdul Aziz Ghazi without resistance led the thinking that it will be all over within hours. Government official claimed a “drop scene” within hours after three days of the operation. Even Ghazi Abdul Rashid, the junior cleric who fought till the end was ready surrender at that crucial time. But it was sheer high headedness of the military rulers who lost the precious time.

Those who came out of the Mosque to save their lives were branded as terrorists and those who have “surrendered”. In total humiliations they were paraded in public without shirts with their hands up. It was like an army to army operation where some soldiers surrendering. The sheer humiliation of Mullah Abdul Aziz who was interviewed by Pakistan Television in Burqah after his arrest was the turning point of the pattern of change in thinking of those who were still inside mosque. The incident gave the impression that if they come out, it could be worst treatment for them as well.

Instead of using the initial victories in humble manner to get the others to come out, the military officials went crazy in euphoria. They were all convinced, “that is it, and it is all over, showing the mullah in total humiliations in public, it will teach them a lesson”. This cruel behavior of the architectures of



Operation Silence at the crucial times led just the opposite thinking by the remaining fanatics inside the mosque. “It is better to die than this humiliated behavior, at least we will all go to heaven, our sacrifices will help in bringing the Islamic revolution” were the outcry of the fanatics inside which was conveyed in these terms to many interviewers by Mullah Abdul Rashid.

Later the military official tried to lesson the harm that was done already. “no taking off the shirts, no hands up, a safe passage, a home detention with ailing mother for Mullah Abdul Rashid” all these offers were rejected by the fanatics inside. It was total break of trust by sheer humiliating behavior of the army officials. Most of the commercial media headlines of “drop scene” after the arrest of Mullah Abdul Aziz were proven absolute wrong as the fanatics inside opted to an all out resistance till the end.

The Red Mosque saga was televised all over the world as headlines for some days. The impression was given that Musharaf is a tough guy and is ready to have a head on fight with the religious fundamentalists. Some papers commented that Musharaf has enhanced its international standing as a close ally of American imperialism. It is a wrong impression. The Musharaf regime that must take

full responsibility of killing dozens of innocent students alongside with religious fanatics.

The Red Mosque incident can be best termed as fight between the two monsters. The two mullahs, Abdul Aziz and Abdul Rashed, were helped, developed and assisted in all means by those who are in power today. The present fight was between the two close friends who had developed some conflicts of interest. When two friends fight each other, they know the weakness of each other. They are well equipped with the information of the opposite group. In this case, the red Mosque mullahs were the junior partners and were developed to use them at proper times.

The two mullahs were helped, developed and assisted in all means by those who are in power today

The junior partner, the Mullahs of Red Mosque, went out of control after 9/11 in a gradual process. The history is of full of example of such incidents, where gangsters go out of control of the boss. The Indian and Pakistani film industry glorify such stories in many feature films. The political history of the Indian

Pakistan

subcontinent has also several such related stories.

In June 1984, The “Operation Blue Star” by Indian army on Golden Temple in Amritsar resulted in killing of hundreds of rebellious Sikhs including their leader Bhinderwale. Bhinderwale was helped and developed by Indra Ghandi, the then Indian prime minister to counter the growing influence of Akali Dal, the main party of the Sikhs in Punjab. Bhinderwale was arrested in 1982 on the charges of killing many leaders of Arya Samaji, the fanatic Hindu organization. He was released in two days on the orders of anonymous forces. He went out of control of Indra Ghandi to go an all out war against Hindus and for an independent Sikh State. Bhinderwale had to be killed by Indra Ghandi force in two years after his release. Within six months of killing at Golden Temple, the holiest place of Sikh religion, Indra Ghandi herself was killed on 31st October 1984 by two of her Sikh guards. The killing of Indra Ghani resulted a civil war where over 1000 Sikhs were massacred within days of the assassination.

It was also the similar case of the two Mullahs, who were arrested as being close allies of Alqaida in 2004 by the Musharaf regime but were helped in their release by the present federal Minister of religious affairs Ijaz ul Haq. It is no coincidence that Ijaz ul Haq is the elder son of late military dictator General Zia ul Haq. General Zia was primarily responsible in helping the religious forces on the instruction of the American imperialism. But when general Zia went against the American

plan of conciliation with Soviet Union and opposed the Geneva accord in 1986, he did not live long. He died in plane crash in 1988, no one knows up till now who killed him.

The changing relationship between the religious fundamentalists in Pakistan and the state forces were felt in many incidents after the 9/11. The decades old close relationship between the two has resulted in growing influence of religious fundamentalism. The religious fundamentalist forces now control North West Frontier Province (NWFP) one of the four provinces. They share the coalition in the second province Baluchistan with the ruling Muslim League, a staunch support of General Musharaf. The official opposition leader in the so-called parliament is from MMA, the alliance of religious forces. Thanks to the support of the government that the majority party in the parliament the Pakistan Peoples party was deprived of being the official opposition. The total votes of the religious forces in the fraudulent general elections were around 15 per cent. Incidents like Red Mosque have definitely helped the religious forces to increase their share of votes and sympathies.

Religious fundamentalism cannot be defeated by use of force

The religious fundamentalism can not be defeated by use of force. The war and occupation policies of American

imperialism is quite evidence of this phenomenon. It has to be political fight to expose the real meaning of religious fundamentalism to the lives of ordinary people. “you can not kill ideas” is the lesson of the growing influence of the religious forces across Muslim world. By killing dozens at the Red Mosque, the General Musharaf regime has created more difficult situation for the genuine progressive forces in Pakistan. The incident has polarized the Pakistan forces.

The incident has led to regroupment of different political parties and alliances. It has shattered the seven year old Alliance of Restoration of Democracy ARD. Pakistan Peoples Party has not joined the recently announced All Parties Democratic Movement (APDM) in London. Pakistan Peoples Party chairperson Benazir Bhottu has landed full support to the military operation saying that General Musharaf had no other choice. This is in persistence to her policies during the last few months. The PPP hopes to form the next government with the support of general Musharaf. This mingling of PPP with the military junta will reinforce the religious fundamentalists who are the main force behind the newly formed APDM.

The progressive forces in Pakistan must have an independent position to condemn the both. We can not lend our support to one enemy in opposition to the other one. The Military Junta with the support of American imperialism and the religious fundamentalists are both enemies of the working class. They both are against

trade unions and radical social and political organizations. They both are believers of private property and free market. They both have same economic policies which are primarily responsible for the absolute poverty stricken conditions of the masses across globe. We can not sit a side to see the fight between the two bulls. We must oppose the both to build our own ranks by fighting for the rights of the working class.

France

For the foundation of a new anti-capitalist party

Motion adopted by a large majority of the National Leadership of the LCR

Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire

In order to launch the debate on the perspective of a new anti-capitalist party, first of all among the militants of the LCR, then among all those who might be interested in this project, the National Leadership has adopted the following motion. It obviously does not prejudge the outcome of a discussion which is only beginning and which will now continue over the coming months...

1. Injustice in the world has not decreased. Quite on the contrary, it continues to afflict billions of human beings. This multiform injustice is the inevitable consequence of a system of organization of society, capitalism, whose driving force remains the search for the satisfaction of the thirst for power and profits of a very small minority. The exorbitant profits of the CAC 40, the golden handshakes, the managers' huge salaries are accompanied by an increase in inequalities, and often by real distress. It is the insane race for profit, further accentuated by the liberal policies which dominate capitalist globalisation, which generates misery, bad housing and job insecurity, and which deepens social inequalities, destroys public services and social protection, causes wars and the plundering of the Third World, which endangers all humanity by its catastrophic way of managing resources and energy. The logic of the competition of all against all, of the privatization of the world, and the logic of solidarity, of the sharing of wealth, of the broadest democracy, are irreconcilable. To put an end to the dictatorship of the shareholders, of capitalist private property, we will need powerful and generalized mobilizations, strikes, demonstrations, occupations. The future of society is in the hands of the exploited classes, of the wage-earners who produce all wealth.

2. In the name of the rupture, the policies of Nicolas Sarkozy are in fact situated within the continuity and the deepening of capitalist, liberal and antisocial policies. The Sarkozy-Fillon government is at the service of the very rich and the big shareholders. This Right also has a programme that is profoundly dangerous for public freedoms, for the right of expression, for the rights of immigrants, women and young people who are victims of discrimination. We have to defeat Sarkozy and the MEDEF by forming broad united fronts.

3. We cannot count on the Socialist Party to lead an opposition worthy of the name. Converted to liberalism, undermined by personal ambitions, more and more obsessed by an alliance with the centrists, the SP cannot lead a change of policy which would concretely make it possible to improve the lot of millions of people. It has abdicated from any inclination to contest the established order, preferring to yield to the logic of financial and imperialist globalization. As for the leadership of the Communist Party, it does not offer any perspective independent of the SP and is locked in its own crisis. Any institutional alliance with the SP is vain and will be a source of fresh disillusion. It is necessary to break with the policies that have been followed by successive governments. A page has been turned. Those who intend to fight without making concessions against the policies of this government, which is a tool of the MEDEF, those who want to defend an emergency anti-capitalist programme like the one that Olivier Besancenot put forward in the presidential election, need a new party which defends the interests of the workers and of all those who are oppressed and exploited. That is why we propose that all anti-capitalists come together in a new party, with roots among young people, in the workplaces, in the public services, in the popular neighbourhoods, in order to build the mobilizations of today which, for us, must prepare a radical, revolutionary, change of society. We are not starting from scratch. Impressive struggles have taken place over recent years and you can feel that faced with the attacks of the new government, the resistance, reinforced by a new generation, is being organised.

4. Concretely, we want to have a debate together with all those, individuals, groups of militants, political currents:

❖ who want to defend an anti-capitalist programme in struggles and in elections;



❖ who situate themselves in the strictest independence from the SP and who refuse to co-manage state institutions with it, preferring to centre their activity on the class struggle, on social and political mobilization;

❖ who want to come together in a political framework that is organized, militant, national and democratic, a party establishing international links with the forces which defend such a perspective.

5. Initially, we propose that meetings should be organised, from the month of September onwards, in the largest possible number of towns and cities, neighbourhoods, workplaces, universities, colleges and schools. It will be a question of discussing both the forms and the means of organising the indispensable fightback against the measures that will be taken by the government; the programme and the democratic functioning of the party that we want to establish; and the presentation at the next municipal elections, in a maximum number of towns and cities, of anti-capitalist lists that will be completely independent of the SP and its allies. The constitution of these lists will be part of the preparation of the new party. In the framework of the national congress, whose preparation is launched as of now, we will draw a provisional balance sheet of the process and make new proposals to go further and to make possible the convergence of everyone in a new party. Next, we envisage holding departmental conferences, going towards a national founding congress of this new anti-capitalist, feminist, ecologist, internationalist, and socialist party. Resist, mobilize and organize, act, discuss and decide, is what we propose to do together, on equal terms.

LCR - Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (Revolutionary Communist League) - French Section of the Fourth International

France

After the election, what perspectives for socialists?

The new political situation puts two demands on the agenda: unity to resist the plans of Sarkozyism and a new workers party.

François Sabado

1) Unity first. It is a capital issue. A number of observers have compared Sarkozy to Thatcher. There are differences linked to the specific history of the right wing in each country, but one can see a strategic similitude between the dynamic of “Thatcherism” and of “Sarkozyism”. Both have come to power following a clear electoral victory. But their electoral victory, by itself, cannot resolve the problems posed by neoliberal counter-reform in each of the countries.

To apply an ultra-Thatcherite programme, it is necessary to transform the electoral victory into a victory on the terrain of the class struggle. It is necessary to seek social confrontation on one or two key questions and seek to inflict a major defeat on the world of labour and the trade union movement. As André Slama has indicated in one of his thunderings in “Le Figaro” on May 7, the day after the electoral victory, “it will be necessary to inject social conflict”.

unity to resist the plans of Sarkozyism and...

The choice of Sarkozy by the bourgeoisie is the choice of confrontation, the choice of sharpening of the class struggle. It is necessary now to meet the challenge, prepare for the coming struggles. In this perspective, the preparatory phase is decisive, the choice of terrains of confrontation, rallying, the accumulation of new energies through partial mass struggles; in short it is necessary to take the measure of the stakes to come.

That will be difficult; Sarkozy holds the cards in his hand, but he can also overestimate his strength. Electoral victories are not automatically social victories... The resistance to neoliberalism which exists in this country are still as live and the new government can also break its teeth faced with the social tenacity which is one of the trademarks of the country. For that mobilisation, size and unity of the whole of the forces of the social and political left of the country is necessary. Which will only be possible by resting on the forces of resistance



of the social left to weigh on the traditional political and trade union left.

2) The second demand is the construction of a new anti-capitalist party. The leadership of the Socialist Party no longer makes a mystery of it, Royal and Strauss Kahn in particular wish to “renew social democracy” by a more systematic adaptation to neoliberalism and by the search for a new alliance with the centre. There are still many unknowns in the construction of a new project of transformation of the PS. “New social democratic party”, “Democratic Party” in the US style. A whole series of formulas will now appear in the discussion.

Already voices are raised in this direction. Hollande has launched an appeal for a new progressive party. Julien Dray states that “the PS of the congress of Epinay is obsolete”. Others call directly for the construction of a new “democratic party” We used to evoke the Italian situation, the choice made by the Italian reformists, socialists, and centrists. Will the French situation allow a consummation of this project? The question is now posed.

But what is sure is that the leadership of this is proposing a huge rightward shift, of course under the cover of modernity!! In such a situation, intermediary formulas can appear which reflect a certain résistance to this movement to the right... but experience shows us that these “left reformists” cannot go to the end in the rupture with social liberalism. They remain prisoners of the dominant social liberal and institutional horizon.

Thus the leaders of the Links Partei in Germany have judged that Schroeder was going too far in terms of social liberal integration, and have constituted a new party with Oscar Lafontaine and Gregor Gysi of the east German PDS, but it is to continue to govern with the SPD in the Land as in Berlin!

On the radical left, the discussion has also developed on whether a consistent project of construction/reconstruction of the workers movement, an anti-neoliberal or anti-capitalist left is or is not compatible with alliances, parliamentary support or governmental participation in coalitions with social-liberalism and the centre left. This debate has already divided the left in Italy and Brazil. This question was at the basis of the divisions of the anti-neoliberal left during the French presidential election.

The dynamic of the campaign and the post-campaign period have confirmed these strategic divergences. The PCF has opened negotiations with the PS leadership for these parliamentary elections. The inconsistency of Bové is revealed in his appeals for a government with Hulot, and more seriously in his rallying to the politics of Royal, even accepting an assignment on food sovereignty!!

These overall evolutions - social-liberalisation of social-democracy, incapacity of the PCF, Greens, alternatives to represent a truly independent social force - now open up situation where the formulas of unity of the anti-neoliberal left including the leadership of the PCF and the Bové current are obsolete, bypassed by the situation of these recent weeks.

France

Also to be noted is an “acceleration” of the decline of the PCF. With less than 2% in the presidential election, the PCF will now experience tendencies to break up, on the one hand under the pressure of currents sensitive to the appeals of Hollande for a new party – this is the meaning of repeated interventions of Gayssot - and on the other of the current which wishes to reaffirm the identity “PCF”, an identity which no longer has great historic meaning.

All these evolutions put on the agenda the construction of a new force which renews with the best traditions of the socialist and communist movement, which defends an anti-capitalist programme, and affirms its strategic independence in relation to reformism ancient or modern: a new “workers’ party” which draws the lessons of the main experiences of recent years.

for a new workers party

Indeed, in the political conditions of France in 2007, on the basis of the social liberal evolution of the PS and the collapse of the post-Stalinist party, it cannot amount to building a hybrid party which tries to mix “radicalism” and subordination to social-democracy or the centre left, a party which tries to render compatible the struggle and the framework fixed by the dominant social liberal left.

Our objective is not to constitute a force of pressure on the PS, to push it “further to the left”. It is to win socialist or communist militants to an independent perspective. From this viewpoint, the success of the campaign of Olivier Besancenot is a decisive point of support to create the conditions of advance towards this new party. The axes of Olivier’s campaign already constitute the skeleton of the programme of this new force: at the centre of the social question – in its multiple dimensions: feminist, ecologist, youth rights, challenge to capitalist logic - and democracy – defence of all democratic rights, a break with the Fifth Republic, election of a constituent assembly, control by

the people, power to assemblies elected in the communes and enterprises.

Its method: the struggle against the capitalist system, the logic of profit, its substitution by the satisfaction of social needs, incursions in the right of ownership to generalise the public and social appropriation of the main sectors of the economy. Its perspective: the redistribution of wealth, social equality, socialism. Its strategy: unity, class independence, socialist democracy and workers power. Such a party will address all those who wish to build or rebuild a new genuinely left political force.

Such a party would not settle all the tactical and strategic questions. A series of debates would remain open, but this new political force will be strongly tied to the class struggle; it will have clarified on the basis of certain political experiences of key strategic questions, notably the central role of self-emancipation and of the self-management of the population in social transformation, the relationship to the institutions subordinated to the activity of the social movement, independence in relation to the state and its central institutions in expressing clearly the refusal of all “ministerialism” through support to or participation in governments of management of the state and the capitalist economy. To all these projects of management of the system, we counterpose a break with capitalism and the constitution of a workers government.

Finally, this party should function on the principles of a centralised democracy which combines effectiveness in action and right of expression for diverse viewpoints, with tendency rights, a party which ensures that the elected leaderships are under the control of the militants, through the rotation of leaders at all levels, a party which gives to each their place in the common fight.

The constitutive bases of this party flow from our entire political struggle: the defence of an anti-capitalist programme, strict independence in relation to the PS, and

democracy; an organised national and democratic political framework, drawing international links with the international anti-capitalist left.

The question which is now posed to us is to discuss how to build this new party. A party which is open, bringing together all the militants, currents, experiences who identify with such an approach. It is in this spirit that we should engage in the coming weeks and months in dialogue with the forces which are ready to act with the LCR in this direction, starting with the sectors of youth and the world of labour which are most advanced in anti-capitalist combat.

We will also propose this discussion to the currents which have emerged from the crises of the PS and the PCF, to anti-neoliberal activists, to all revolutionaries. This force will not be the product of a random construction, combining apparatuses – big or small – self-proclaimed personalities or regroupments according to the contours and rules of hazy functioning. It is the product of the best experiences of the class struggle in recent years: it is addressed to all those who wish to build this new anti-capitalist party with us.

The LCR is the main instrument in the construction of this new party. Some hundreds of young people and workers have just taken the step of joining it, and it also must transform itself to respond to the new situation. But we think that in this new political situation, where the French left will experience major political upheavals, we can and should do better, attempt to organise thousands of new militants, go beyond the LCR, advance towards a more implanted force, broader, more open which brings together and allows a new advance in the construction of a force in the service of the exploited and oppressed.

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Ireland

The New Stormont regime in the North of Ireland

"And this is hell, nor am I out of it"

John McAnulty

A local cartoonist, Ian Knox, summed up the May 8th re-opening of the Stormont executive in the North of Ireland as the coronation of the sectarian bigot Ian Paisley, representing Martin McGuinness of Sinn Féin as his consort. It was a deadly accurate satire.

Tony Blair and Taoiseach Bertie Ahern led a deputation of B-list politicians from Europe and the US to the coronation, each outdoing the other in the use of cliché. The media played their part too, adopting the reverential terms reserved for royal weddings to describe the marriage of the loyalist DUP and the former republican movement, and supplying about the same level of analysis. Only the bravest reporters had the nerve to remind us that the same experiment had been tried 9 years before, with a great deal more support and in much more auspicious circumstances.

However it is not the ballyhoo and razamatazz that will determine the future of the new Stormont. It is the political foundations on which the settlement rests. Even at this late stage most people are unaware of the details of this political programme – in fact many details remain unknown, the product of secret diplomacy.

The new Stormont rests on a tripod. The three legs are: the continuation of British rule in Ireland and the denial of democracy. The restructuring of sectarian privilege and the preservation in a modified form of the original basis of the Northern state – 'a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people'. Finally the new society is to be established by a reactionary social and economic offensive designed to smash the working class.

Any description of the new structures would be incomplete if we did not take into account one other crucial dimension –

the frantic and absolute support of the Irish bourgeoisie for the new order, tail-ended by the former republicans of Sinn Féin.

British rule

Sinn Féin has successfully presented 'local democracy' as the alternative to British rule. This is an absolute falsehood. The Stormont parliament, rather than direct rule by British ministers, is the preferred method of British rule, the goal of British policy over more than 3 decades. Britain has been able to, and remains able to, turn off the switch at any time. It has dissolved and re-established the local administration on a whole series of occasions, rejigging rules, procedures, the conditions under which the republicans can enter and the balance of power within the chamber. The budget has been worked out in detail for the next ten years. Any local wriggle room in this comic-opera assembly, with over 100 Members of the Legislative Assembly and a raft of ministers to rule a population no bigger than that of a small city, is negated by the fact that all decisions will be decided beforehand in behind the scenes deals between Sinn Féin and the Paisleyites.

Sectarian privilege

The programme of the old Stormont parliament, the programme that led to the explosion of the troubles, was for sectarian privilege for Protestants, with heavy discrimination against Catholics and a Protestant militia and a legal system that negated democratic rights. The British



solution, summed up in the Good Friday agreement, was to provide for a sectarian division of rights. There were no democratic rights, instead the groups had supposedly equal communal rights as Catholic and Protestant. It was a solution bound to fail. In a sectarian setup one group has to be clearly top dog. The agreement led to a shift to the right within unionism and a series of accommodations by Britain to meet the bigots demands, leading finally to the collapse of the Good Friday agreement and its replacement by the St. Andrews schema.

The new assembly rests on total and absolute surrender by the republican movement

The new assembly rests on total and absolute surrender by the republican movement. Their arms are gone, their movement largely disbanded and they have been forced to give absolute support to the sectarian state and to the judiciary and state forces. The new arrangement shifts dramatically towards Unionist supremacy, with no requirement on unionists to support the joint leadership, with each ministry countered with a scrutinizing committee and the unionist majority able to block all decisions. The republicans are left with a veto over the most extreme sectarian

decisions – a very thin one, given their desperation to be in power.

At the same time concessions to the Unionists have inserted sectarian privilege at every level of society. The loyalist armed groups, still armed and still involved in sectarian intimidation, are subsidised by the state and integrated into civic society, being represented on the policing boards and a whole series of unelected committees. The housing authorities offer houses to Protestants in North Belfast at knock-down prices to 'preserve the Protestant character of the area' (the site of the intimidation of the children of Holy Cross school). £30 million is reserved in the Health service for Protestant illness.

The Orange order, still openly celebrating sectarian murder at its demonstrations, is free to intimidate while Sinn Féin police the districts it intimidates. In the last area it has been restricted, the Garvaghy road, the chair of the residents committee Breandan MacCionnaith has just resigned from Sinn Féin – a clear indication that the last restriction is to go. The supposedly reformed police openly reject inquiry findings of their involvement in sectarian murder, boycott the Ombudswoman's office and call for an end to all investigations of their bloody past. A special victims commissioner has been appointed to establish that it was republican aggression that was responsible for the troubles and to shower funds on former members of the police and the local militias.

Ireland

For all this, the Paisleyites last demand, that they be given a red button to eventually expel the republicans and end what they consider to be a temporary arrangement, was not granted. They were however given more seats on the Privy Council, giving them automatic right to scrutinise continuing British intelligence reports on the republicans.

Social and economic offensive

The attempt to make the North work politically is to be accompanied by attempts to make it work economically. The current setup rests heavily on public investment and employment by the British state. The plan is to rationalise and privatise in the hope of attracting significant transnational investment. In part the new dispensation is the outcome of a detailed strategic plan designed by the British treasury, the 'Review of Public Administration' (RPA). In part it comes from the DUP and Sinn Féin, who have very similar economic policies and who are hammering out a reactionary 'Programme for government' behind the scenes in committee rooms.

This combined offensive has both a social and economic element. The RPA was originally designed as a programme of rationalisation, to reduce the number of councils and unify education and library services. It was then modified to support and legitimise further sectarian division. So there are to be seven councils, three, West of the Bann, will have built in sectarian majorities for Sinn Féin. Three, East of the Bann have built-in loyalist majorities. In the background the DUP are lobbying furiously for new gerrymandered ward changes to

give them control of the final council in Belfast.

Similarly the proposal to set up a single education authority has been modified, with controlling bodies from the Catholic church and the Grammar schools bolted on. A report on rationalisation of the schools estate – the building and land in the education sector – instead of proposing comprehensive and integrated schools – proposed that the sectarian and social divisions remain and that different schools cooperate within an area – it is even proposed that schools would share the same site without the sects uniting! In the process genuine integrated schools stand to loose out, with an increasing number of starts refused funding. As already mentioned, the Health service finds itself forced to hand out £30 million to Protestant patients only.

As part of the RPA, the number of workers employed in the ancillary staff associated with schools and libraries will be cut sharply. Those retained will face a sharp speedup in workrate and worse working conditions. Classroom assistants and facilities for special needs will be specially affected. The decision of the new executive to delay water charges simply highlights the fact that the privatisation of the water service is well under way with 500 highly skilled jobs within the service slashed as the executive formed.

A large swathe of the Northern civil service is to be transferred to the public service, meaning that after a few years protection wages and pensions will be cut. The overall plan is to slash at least 30% off the public sector workforce and produce a low wage, business friendly environment that will attract inward investment.

By far the most enthusiastic proponents of this view are Sinn Féin. They have led the way in proposing a 12% corporation tax. The North will prosper, they argue, if the workers pay the taxes and the bosses don't. One early casualty of the southern general election was their attempt to rebadge themselves as Social Democrats, with proposals for a 5% increase in corporation tax, a tax increase for 'middle income earners' earning over 100,000 Euro and increased levels of public service. They dropped these proposals at the start of the election and now stand as a party of the right on economic issues, completely in support of the Thatcherite programme of Fianna Fail in the South and urging the extension of this rapacity to workers in the North.

The British have one final strategy for making sure that the new system beds in – using the conflict resolution principle that 'no-one should be left out.' They have poured money into community organisations run by Sinn Féin and the Loyalists. Very little reaches the communities. A 'Civic Forum' of Trade unionists, Loyalists, NGOs and the religious has been set up to advise the government as partners in the process.

Reality

There is no doubt that the reality of the new society will come as a shock to workers. Catholic workers will find that they remain second-class citizens. Protestant workers will find that the authorities have handed over control of their areas to Loyalist 'community representatives' whom they have consistently rejected throughout the troubles. All will find themselves facing major economic cutbacks and the destruction of public services.

Support for the new order will come under strain quite quickly. The danger is that the collapse in support will be to the right and that those who loose faith in the Sinn Féin pipedream will turn to sectarian rivalry, competing with the other community, and increasingly with migrants also for increasing scarce resources.

Those who fight for a socialist alternative will have to begin now, keeping in mind a number of key principles:

- ❖ Target the British – the main purpose of Stormont is to make British rule invisible – we consistently aim demands at the real rulers and begin to reactivate a solidarity movement in Britain.

- ❖ Oppose sectarianism – The British are building sectarianism into every nook and cranny of the six counties, with the collaboration of the majority of forces in civic society. Our aim should never be so poor as to target the bigots alone – we must expose all, North and South, who are complicit.

- ❖ Build rank and file opposition to the economic offensive – the trade union leaderships are in partnership North and South of the border and collaborate both in the economic and political offensive.

- ❖ Build a 32 county movement. The Irish capitalists are the most enthusiastic supporters of partition and the neoliberal offensive. The only alternative to sectarian division is our common identity as members of the Irish working class.

John McNulty is a leading member of Socialist Democracy, the Fourth International sympathising organisation in Ireland.

Britain

Politics under Brown

Socialist Resistance

New Labour's long awaited "plan B" – the replacement of Blair by Brown when Blair became electorally damaged beyond repair - is working, at least as far as Labour's short term electoral prospects are concerned.

We have the predictable "Brown bounce", with new Labour leading the Tories for the first time in many months. Tory/Labour opinion polls were always meaningless whilst Blair was still there and until Brown took over.

The Brown bounce has brought the crisis of the Tories to a head. And this has been further compounded by the by-election results in Ealing Southall and Sedgefield – where the Tories came third behind Labour and the Lib Dems – which has been a disaster for the Tories.

This raises at least the possibility of a snap election in the autumn of this year, or more likely the spring of next year – depending on Brown's assessment of the durability of the "bounce" and when the problems are likely to set in. Although the most likely date would still be to coincide with the European elections in two years time, all options are now open. Organisations such as Respect would be well advised to take this into account.

Brown's task has always been to look different to Blair – but remain exactly the same on the key issues. This means most fundamentally the neo-liberal agenda of deregulation and privatisation, the war, the replacement of Trident and the military agenda, the new relationship with the employers, and the relationship with the USA.

It was never going to be difficult to look better than Blair of course. But Brown's record since he has been in office – and what he has already spelled out for the future is a worse situation than many on the left with illusions in him predicted.

What has strengthened Brown's hand was the failure of the Labour Left to get onto the ballot paper and make a contest. It meant that he escaped any pressure from the left and put all the cards in his hands. Instead of a political debate we had a Brown publicity campaign.

The first thing Brown made absolutely clear was that the relationship with the employers cultivated by Blair would continue and deepen. The appointment of Tory ex-CBI boss Digby Jones as minister for trade and investment (and his consequent elevation to a Peerage) in his so-called "government of all the talents" is an insult to both the trade



unions and Labour voters. Jones is a longstanding enemy of the unions who has amongst other things opposed any rise in the minimum wage, blocked corporate killing laws, opposed the EU working time directive because it might reduce working hours and curtailed maternity leave.

Just to rub it in a bit deeper (and make sure private equity capital is at the heart of his government) Brown has also appointed private equity boss Damon Buffini to the Business Council of Britain and the National Council for Educational Excellence – both bodies which deal with policy which involves the trade unions.

This means that the hostility cultivated by Blair to the unions will continue in full force under Brown. One of the first pledges Brown made at the special conference at which he was "elected" is to abolish the block vote at Labour Party conference and put even more emphasis on undemocratic policy forums and focus groups.

On the war he is indistinguishable from Blair, and on the basis of the crudest Blairite arguments: that the attempted suicide bombings in London and Glasgow airport have nothing to do with Iraq, but were carried out by people who want to destroy "our Western values".

He retained Des Browne as Defence Minister and he refuses to contemplate any suggestion of the withdrawal of the troops from Iraq, saying that Britain has to honour its international obligations: i.e. support George Bush through thick and thin. And with Bush there are no half measures – you are either with him or against him.

Brown finds himself well to the right of the US Democrats on this (and to the right of all the candidates for the Democratic nomination, even Hilary Clinton) and even to the right of some prominent Republicans. He had the option of separating himself from the Blair/Bush position on Iraq whilst remaining in line with mainstream US opinion (including the majority of the population in the USA) and refused to take it – remaining shoulder-to-shoulder with George Bush - who will be gone in 18 months. It is a remarkable stance. Any of his ministers who have been interpreted as suggesting (whatever their actual intention) that there might be any degree of change in the relationship with Bush have been slapped

down. Brown is at root at least as pro-US as Blair if not more so. It is at the core of his politics.

On civil rights Brown is not only proposing yet another terrorism bill - but is re-raising the issue of detention without trial and its extension from the current 28 day to the originally proposed 90. The police, in response to this are now saying that 90 days is now not enough and it should be for "as long as it takes". Brownite ministers have said that it is worth discussing! We now have the remarkable situation where the Tories are opposing any extension to the 28 days and New Labour are out to extend it.

And of course Brown's neoliberal credentials are impeccable. His treatment of public sector workers in the current wage round by imposing a below inflation pay freeze of between 1.9-2.5 per cent is the worst attack on public sector wages since new Labour came to office in 1997. He is fully behind the deregulation and privatisation of postal services, and the hope of the CWU leadership that he will step in and save the situation is excluded.

He talks about education and the NHS but the private finance initiative and the market are at the core of everything he says. He talks about the scandal of the housing crisis and building 3m new homes, but he is not committing himself to resuming the construction of council houses. He is talking about private provision, housing associations, and partnership deals, which will put council tax money straight into the pockets of private business.

And if climate change is not effectively tackled finding places to build houses which are safe against extreme weather events will get increasingly difficult. The one potentially progressive issue he is raising is that of constitutional reform. Of course he chooses this issue on which to make his name (or not as the case might be) precisely because it is something he can do which does not challenge the core issues of neo-liberal economics and US global politics. This, however, does not make it any less important. He is proposing a constitutional reform bill and a Scottish-style constitutional convention. He proposes the abolition of the House of Lords and its replacement by a wholly elected second chamber elected by a proportional system.

Britain

But a constitutional convention raises much more than the discrete measures Brown himself puts on the table. It raises the issue of the monarchy and of a democratic republic. It raises the issue of the disestablishment of the Church of England. It raises the issues of the powers of the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament, and probably of a referendum on independence in Scotland. Of course Brown will oppose most of these things. And it raises the issue of electoral reform for the House of Commons. It would be scandalous if a constitutional convention left first-past-the-post for the Commons in place.

It would not be easy to avoid the issues once a constitutional convention took place, however. Brown is saying he wants to reconnect politics to people. But that is impossible if a system of election is retained which means that for the majority of people their vote does not count and that governments gets "elected" by big majorities on minority votes. It would not only be a scandal it would be a massive lost opportunity once the constitutional issues are put on the agenda in this way.

It is important, therefore, that the left engages this process and launches the widest possible campaign on electoral reform for Westminster. Otherwise it will be left to the Lib Dems to make the running and they are not capable of doing so. They have raised the issue but have not given it great profile. Brown has said that he is not opposed to a move towards PR providing the constituency link is protected. The danger now that Brown is doing well in the polls he may well conclude that he can win the next election without making any concessions on a PR system.

The left should demand a fully proportional system under which the representation of a party should be directly equal to the votes it receives – with no arbitrary threshold designed to keep out small parties. Reconnecting people with politics involves making sure that people can vote for what they believe in without wasting their vote.

Unfortunately some of the trade union left and the bulk of the Labour left still defend first-past-the-post (FPTP) and need to be challenged where they do so. In particular the idea that FPTP is a defence against the potential growth of the fascists needs to be confronted head on. In reality fascism can only be defeated by challenging its pernicious ideas – and by mobilising the organisations of the working class against it.

Of course there will be huge opposition to any change to a PR system for the Commons – full PR or a Scottish type half-way house – since the whole edifice of bourgeois politics

in the British state is built around FPTP. The Tories would oppose any change tooth and nail and new Labour would be split. FPTP is designed to create a two party system to the exclusion of all others. And the two parties concerned will put up with its problems it creates in order to get the inevitable shot at power that it gives them. The whole system would all collapse and reshape if almost any form of PR was brought in for Commons.

Hazel Blears' proposal for a "Porto Alegre style" participatory budgeting for local government is also interesting. But again the devil will be in the detail. Participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre includes local mass meetings, genuine mass involvement and real debate plus elected and well informed neighbourhood assemblies, not the presenting of people with carefully chosen and very limited "choices" on expenditure. It means breaking the government stranglehold over local government finances, otherwise the only choices on offer would be which cuts to make. If people are to be re-engaged at local level the starting point is an electoral process that gives representation in proportion to votes cast.

The most damaging development in all this for the future of the workers movement is the way the leaders of the major unions have collapsed into the Brown project. It may have been predictable but it's a disaster for the unions. It traps them in the current disastrous situation as far as the balance of forces with the employers is concerned. Faced with an onslaught from the Brown government on jobs working conditions and pay they fall at his feet, praise his government, and do everything they can to keep it in power. Of course the same union leaders rage on about what Brown and new Labour are doing, but when it comes to a challenge they are absent.

The leaderships of all the affiliated unions send huge sums of money to bank-roll new Labour. Not even a reduced amount, the full whack – money which is even more important to new Labour since private donations started to dry up under the pressure of cash for favours scandals. When they are asked what they see as a political alternative they say "reclaim old Labour". But old Labour does not exist. All that exists is new Labour led by Gordon Brown.

Yet public sector workers have shown time and again they are ready to take action over pay as real living standards are beginning to fall. In many industries pay alone is not the only issue facing workers – speed ups, job losses, privatisations and attacks on pensions are all part of the mix for many. Local rallies that have brought together workers across different sectors have been well attended and angry. But the real potential for united action is being squandered.

PCS members have taken several days of action in defence of their conditions but now their action seems to be suspended. UNISON members in health and local government are waiting to receive their ballot papers. The situation in the NUT looks more hopeful with the last Executive Committee endorsing a move from the left to serious look at co-ordinated action in September.

And of course there is the CWU, where the postal executive has been pushed to extend industrial action following two extremely solid days of action by the membership. Postal workers need both a political and an industrial strategy – and on both counts their existing leadership gets it wrong. All out industrial action across the public sector is needed to bust open the pay freeze – and a political alternative to new Labour is needed more desperately than ever.

There are those like Bob Crow of the RMT who know the score. He is clear that he despises new Labour, sees reclaiming Labour as dead in the water and wants a socialist alternative. But what he put forward in his closing speech at the Shop Stewards conference was not that the RMT would talk to others in the trade union movement and the left more generally about how best to go about creating a new political force. Rather he spoke about putting up anti-privatisation candidates in next years London elections so that RMT members didn't have to vote for Livingstone who was supporting privatisation of the East London line. He hoped other unions would do something similar and then talk to each other in three or four years.

Given the scale and urgency of the problem, this parochialism isn't a serious response. Even more so given that what Crow is mooted was tried by the RMT in the first set of elections for the London Assembly.

The need for a broad and pluralist alternative is as strong now as it was with Blair in office. Respect is the best attempt yet with some important electoral gains no other left organisation can match but it remains narrow and dominated by the SWP. Socialist Resistance believes that the crisis of political representation has to be resolved by a break from New Labour and the construction of a new political affiliations. While we will work as vigorously as we can to build solidarity with workers going into struggle around pay and conditions in the autumn, we know that the working class needs a political as well as an industrial answer to new Labour's neoliberalism

Socialist Resistance is a socialist newspaper produced by British supporters of the Fourth International in conjunction with other marxists.

Scotland

Celtic Tigers? - the SNP in government

Nick McKerrell

As the dust began to settle on the shambles of the Scottish election of early May 2007 it became clear that the Scottish National Party had just edged ahead of New Labour as the largest party by one seat. They were 1% ahead in the constituency vote and 3% on the list – not as dramatic a lead as some of the opinion polls had predicted but still a big recovery for the SNP compared to 2003.

This was particularly clear in the list vote where the SNP increased their vote by 10%. Partially this was down to the massacre of the SSP vote [1] but to a greater extent to the polarisation of the election between the Nationalists and New Labour as the two big parties. The SNP were able to muscle into traditional New Labour territory (and generations before the Tories) because of the amount of financial backing they received for business backers.

Brian Souter the individual citizen who has probably profited most from transport privatisation and deregulation in the British State and homophobic campaigner donated £500,000 [2] Knight of the Realm and Kwik-fit tycoon Sir Tom Farmer gave £100,000. The SNP reached their campaign target of £1million. Billboards, posters and leaflets were produced in an unprecedented way even in the context of Scottish elections.

Far from having a majority with 47 seats out of 129 and with the Liberal Democrats speedily announcing that they had no intention of entering another coalition, [3] a minority SNP administration was the obvious outcome. Salmond gained the most votes for First Minister and the British State formally endorsed the outcome when the Queen met with Salmond in Holyrood Palace on the 24th May. An event, incidentally, which gave senior SNP officials the opportunity of raising the possibility of replacing SNP policy of having a referendum on the monarchy with that of retaining the Queen as head of state in an independent Scotland.

What then does the SNP government have in store for Scottish society and what does it mean for the struggle for socialism? Will it be progressive on social issues and the battle for



the break-up of the British state or will it simply be a mouthpiece of business and a Scottish capitalist class? This article will attempt to grapple with some of these issues.

Recent History 1987-99

To understand what is likely under an SNP government one needs to understand the political trajectory of the Nationalists in the last 20 years. In this period they have emerged as the main political opposition to the Scottish Labour establishment. This process was obviously hastened by the establishment of the devolved Scottish Parliament in 1999.

The political tensions within the SNP have been remarked on for many years. This used to be signified by the more right-wing rural seats particularly in the North-East and the urban left activists. Jim Sillars personified this in the eighties and along with other individuals like Alex Neill and Kenny MacAskill attempted to shift the party to the left and place it at the heart of the poll tax non-payment campaign. Spectacularly winning the Govan by-election in 1988 with an explicitly radical programme, Sillars was for a time a key figure within the SNP.

Salmond was elected leader of the SNP in 1990 after Sillars surprisingly did not stand. Although from a left background – expelled briefly along with MacAskill for membership of the 79 group [4] – he was much more of a traditional politician. This led to an uneasy truce between the left and the right of the party throughout the 90s.

The party labelled itself as a ‘left of centre’ party at this time. This was a deliberate shift from the idea that the SNP’s only purpose

was to win independence then dissolve into competing political parties

Salmond often called himself a “social democrat” in this period – allying himself with the capitalist politicians of the Nordic countries in particular and also contrasting himself with the rapid shift to open neo-liberal policies being advocated by Blair following his election as Labour leader in 1994. He tied the struggle for independence with social improvements in decaying capitalist Scotland.

Traditionally this would be classified as a “reformist” programme and Salmond went into the 1999 election for the Scottish Parliament calling for a raise of the rate of income tax by one penny. Salmond also took a fairly brave and quite unique stand in condemning the blanket bombing of Serbia by NATO forces. The SNP gained one of their largest votes in this election 28.7% yet were excluded from power by the New Labour/Liberal Democrat coalition.

Right shift

It was in this period from 1999 until the election of 2007 that there was a qualitative shift to the right in the SNP in policy and organisational terms. This was down to a number of factors.

Firstly the extent of the left wing nature of the SNP’s policies in the nineties was always exaggerated. Largely this was due to the speed with which Blair shifted the Labour Party to neo-liberal Thatcherite territory.

However looking to the model of Scandinavia was also bogus. These societies so often the model for the right-wing of the Labour Party in the sixties and seventies were

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going through their own neo-liberal reversals. Social Democratic governments in Sweden and Norway in this period had embarked on a campaign of cuts in social spending partially in preparation for membership of the European Union—albeit from a much higher scale than existed in Scotland. These cuts continue today.

The programmes of these Nordic social democratic parties in the nineties and the shift of the SNP to the right are reflective of the same process. Blair, in a sense, blazed the trail as Thatcher did in the fields of privatisation before him internationally in completely turning the Labour Party into a bourgeois capitalist party. This process is now almost completely finished in Labour or social democratic parties internationally. There were broader social reasons for this. With the collapse of Stalinism internationally between 1989-91 capitalism no longer had any significant global competition. It wanted complete freedom to traverse the globe without any restraints.

Blair and his New Labour acolytes understood this and wanted Britain to be at the centre of “globalisation” and the neo-liberal world. This entrenched a low tax economy for big business and the uber-wealthy. They did not want their profits attacked and threatened to move from the British economy if any such policies were threatened. As a knock on effect this means that public spending on the welfare state, education, health and public services has to be minimal.

New Labour have taken this to the limits with all aspects of the British economy open to being bought to global economic forces. This is evident in a cultural context where the major English football teams are up for grabs to any number of overseas consortia. Scotland even has an echo of this in Romanov’s takeover and fairly bizarre regime in Hearts FC.

But even more significantly key sectors of the economy can be purchased with limited or no restrictions. Even Bush’s America does not let this happen to the same extent. In Scotland Scottish Power has been bought by a Spanish company Iberdrola [5] - the SNP although claiming to oppose this could only tamely lobby the board rooms of these companies in the run-up to the election.

Low personal tax rates means the wealthy from across the globe flock to live within Britain in particular the South of England.

Tied to Globalisation

Although there are variations to a degree in Europe this fettering of global capitalism is the major policy of all the capitalist parties. To an extent the SNP leadership are catching up with them.

This is indicated by Salmond’s obsession with cutting corporation tax – i.e. the main tax on big business. Really repeating the mantra of Blair and Brown of needing to pander to capitalism Salmond believes cutting taxes will attract industry in the global economy.

Quizzed by Andrew Marr one of the BBC’s main political analysts on the nature and contradictions of this policy with a progressive social agenda Salmond responded “So for a small country, getting a competitive edge on corporation tax is a fantastic way not just to have a competitive edge, but to increase government revenue and to pay for the things that we’d like to see in health and education.” [6]

Thus Salmond believes by cutting tax the capitalist economy will grow and thus public services would benefit indirectly by capitalist growth. This could come straight from the mouth of Blair or Brown or indeed David Cameron. It is far removed from the radical message of the early nineties and is reflective of the pro-globalisation shift within the SNP leadership.

SSP factor

Another factor of the qualitative shift to the right within the SNP was the launch and success of the Scottish Socialist Party. This was particularly true in the period of 1999-2003 when the combination of a radical socialist programme with a commitment to the struggle for an independent Scotland was a magnet to thousands of ordinary people including SNP supporters and indeed activists.

This was in stark contrast to John Swinney who was elected leader of the SNP in 2000. Swinney, clearly on the right of the party was always awkward – unlike Salmond – in discussing and promoting the radical

dimension of the SNP. This was evident in the massive anti-war protests in Scotland in 2002-3, which Swinney tried to capitalise on but failed with the SSP and the Greens gaining significant ground in the 2003 election.

Although Swinney was challenged twice from the left by Alex Neill, a long-term ally of Sillars, in 2000 and Dr Bill Wilson in 2003 these were to some extent rear-guard actions. The lack of any significant class struggle battles in this period also consolidated the shift to the right within the SNP. When there were limited exceptions to this like the fire-fighters dispute of 2002-3 and the nursery nurses all out strike of 2004 Swinney was mostly silent.

So objectively the SNP has altered as a party in the last few years. This was not substantively altered by the removal of Swinney as leader in 2004 and the joint leadership of Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon. Certainly this was not in any sense a shift to the left but it did reveal another contradiction within the SNP.

The return of Salmond steadied the ship of the SNP as a party. His courting of business provided funds for the election. His manner and also to some extent his history stemmed from the disillusionment of the more radical activists of the SNP. Salmond was confident in addressing an anti-Trident demo and the STUC in the election campaign in a way that Swinney would not have been.

Faced with the prospect of power in the Scottish executive some elements of the left simply silenced themselves. In some ways this is a distant echo of Kinnock and Smith’s leadership of the Labour Party in the eighties and nineties where a section of the left immersed themselves in support for the leadership in order to get rid of the Tories.

These processes were exacerbated by the suicidal legal action of Tommy Sheridan and his subsequent wrecking campaign against the SSP in 2006-7. This meant in some SNP activist eyes there was no other viable political vehicle for those committed to building an independent socialist Scotland. This is yet another politically damaging legacy of Sheridan.

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The nationalist left's support for the Salmond leadership was fruitless and not matched by any left policy announcements by the SNP. This has further been emphasised by the first month of the SNP executive.

SNP in Government

An ounce of experience is worth a ton of theory as American philosopher John Dewey said and the elevation of this leadership of the SNP will in a sense expose the contradictions within their thought in a concrete way. This is not going to be completely the case because of the minority nature of their administration but already within four weeks certain signs of this have emerged.

In his first Parliamentary address as First Minister Salmond went through every establishment party and declared where his administration agreed with them [7]: The Tories – law and order, New Labour – curbing under age drinking, Greens – no nuclear power stations. To some extent this was bourgeois politics at work as the SNP needs support from others to get other issues through but it does show how Salmond thinks he can rise above all forces in Scotland as leader. In a sense this has an element of Bonapartism within it – ignoring divisions within society and pretending you operate outwith them. At one level this is very similar to Blair's style of leadership.

What was also significant about the speech was the emphasis he gave to capitalism – approximately a third of his talk and it was littered with phrases like “We see barriers to business as barriers to national progress” [8] and announcing the launch of a Council of Economic Advisers. This confirms the shift of emphasis within the party.

Two Directions

However along with this pro- business agenda there have been a number of radical announcements – reflecting again the inherent contradictions of the SNP. The saving of the Accident and Emergency units at Monklands and Ayr after strong grass roots campaigns in these areas [9]. The scrapping of the shabby compromise on tuition fees agreed by the Liberals and New Labour in the first Scottish Parliament, the graduate endowment fee [10]. The announcement of

the spreading of free school meals to primaries 1-3 across Scotland [11].

But even these positive moves were riddled with caveats. Nicola Sturgeon, a lifetime SNP leadership apparatchik, made it clear in her statement that there could be hospital closures under the SNP. A few days later she also announced the imposition of a pay deal on NHS staff – before negotiations with UNISON and other unions had been completed [12]. As the scrapping of the graduation fee was announced Fiona Hyslop also hinted that they were moving away from their radical policy of scrapping student debt and introducing grants. Unlike the SSP who introduced the concept of free school meals the SNP's scheme is a move against universality of benefits to a more targeted one.

Cuts and Flat Taxes?

The best example of this dualism is though seen in John Swinney who as Finance Minister is a key member of the Scottish Executive. In the run-up to the election Swinney labelled the public sector “bloated” [13] – again using the language of Brown. This was echoed by their business backers including Tom Farmer: “there's a feeling that bureaucracy and waste is not something that's very tightly controlled at the moment” [14].

Swinney has now returned to this theme in Government claiming the SNP will cut £1 billion in spending in the public sector. Although Swinney has promised no compulsory redundancies anyone who has worked in the public sector in recent years when New Labour have been promising similar cuts knows how hollow those words are.

Swinney is also in charge of the abolition of the council tax. A radical policy – on the face of it – which the SSP for nearly a decade made most of the running on; even costing an alternative which was clearly redistributive, the Scottish Service Tax. Both the SNP and the Liberals stand for an abolition of the unfair and hated (by large sections of society) tax but there is a worrying aspect to the SNP proposal.

On announcing their desire to press ahead with the scrapping of the tax – perhaps an

unlikely outcome in this Parliament-Swinney stated that local tax “should be based on the ability to pay” [15]. However he also stated that local taxes should be low and “that we want more money in more people's pockets at the end of every month” [16]. Now, hidden in this statement is a clear message against redistribution as a principle and indeed that is reflected in the SNP's model.

Their local income tax would be set at a universal rate – a “flat tax” to use the jargon of the right. So although people like Souter and Farmer would pay more money in absolute figures than working class people and pensioners the percentage of their income they spend on tax would be the same as the poorest!

It is an open question and indeed one that needs to be debated by the SSP whether the scrapping of the council tax and its replacement with this model would be positive. By introducing the concept of a flat tax on income into Scottish society the SNP would be pioneering – although there are already universal indirect taxes like VAT (another tax which has an unfair imbalance for the poor) not even Blair has removed some element of progressive tax rates from the super-wealthy. What is beyond debate though is the tax is explicitly not redistributive.

Government of the Right or Left?

Thus the SNP executive in their first month have exhibited both worrying elements of right wing economic arguments along with some limited positive announcements. Yet it is too early to say exactly what over all direction the SNP will go in. Paul Hutcheon the political editor of the Sunday Herald probably in an attempt to be provocative argued recently that the SNP has pandered to the rich in its first month [17]. It is a very confused article and attacks progressive elements like the scrapping of graduate tax and the expansion of spending on care for the elderly.

He states that “If a government minister found £20 on the street, rather than give it to charity or a rough sleeper he would, according to the logic of the Executive, push it through the letterbox of a house with a Mercedes in the drive.” This is partially New

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Labour propaganda against universal benefits but the fact that such an article can be written a month into the SNP administration shows the ambiguous nature of their regime.

Within the Parliament an SSP contingent could have acted as a genuine left group which would have attracted some radical SNP representatives – some of which were elected including Swinney's opponent Bill Wilson. This happened in the past when we were a radical unified party of the left. Yet the actions of Sheridan and our electoral wipe-out make this fantasy politics. This is a historic setback in the struggle for Scottish socialism.

This means there may be some opposition to Salmond from within the SNP but it will be erratic and fairly ad hoc. Enormous pressure will be put on them in the context of a minority government. Wilson, himself, wrote an essay in "Is there a Scottish Road to Socialism" arguing for expansion of public services, workers' cooperatives and an end to anti-trade union legislation. This was commented on by the Scotsman [18] who were obviously keen to put pressure on the Salmond-Swinney executive.

Radical Struggle for Independence

However there also remains a radical element which the SNP leadership cannot escape and this is the struggle for independence. Despite Salmond's attempt to limit the establishment's fears over this by showing his allegiance to the monarch, which gained him the support of Ian Paisley, and promoting business backers the British establishment realises the potential for a splintering of the British State.

This is seen by Blair's casual dismissal of Salmond - refusing to even speak directly to him since his election – and discussion of devolved issues with other leaders like Gaddafi in Libya; Kirsty Wark's hostile and aggressive interview with Salmond [19] on the BBC – broadcast throughout Britain.

Moreover although the SNP named 100 business people backing them these were mainly based in service industries and small businesses along with maverick entrepreneurs like Farmer and Souter. Key figures in British capitalism almost universally condemned independence –

including Mervyn King Governor of the Bank of England, leaders of the CBI and finance capital.

There is no doubt this would be reflected in any referendum. Thus despite the SNP's attempt to dampen expectations this is not reflected in either the British State's approach nor ordinary people's expectations. Whether a referendum will be held or not though is a debatable point. Certainly the Unionist parties will do their utmost to prevent this – although some Tories have raised the idea of backing it. If the SNP leadership seek to back down on this or water down a referendum this could spark a revolt within the party and the broader struggle for independence.

We are entering a contradictory and complex period within Scottish politics and society. Unfortunately we as the SSP are coming at this from one of the lowest points that the forces of Scottish socialism have been at for a generation. Despite this it will be vital for us to have full discussions how we can best intervene and work to ensure the message of socialism is not lost in the general noise of bourgeois politics.

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NOTES

[1] For analysis of reasons for the decline in the SSP vote see Alan McCombes "The Day the Rainbow Parliament Turned Grey" at http://www.scottishsocialistparty.org/pdfs/election_analysis.pdf

[2] "Stagecoach tycoon donates to SNP" 17th March 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/6462119.stm>

[3] "Lib Dems will not do Labour deal" 6th May 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/6629775.stm>.

[4] An issue not mentioned in his party biography, <http://www.snp.org/people/alex/>

[5] "Scottish Power backs Spanish bid" 28th November 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/6190520.stm>.

[6] Sunday AM 1st April 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/sunday_am/6515517.stm

[7] Alex Salmond MSP, 23rd May 2007 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/This-Week/Speeches/FM-Parliament>

[8] *ibid.*

[9] Announcement by Nicola Sturgeon MSP, 6th June 2007.

[10] Announcement by Fiona Hyslop MSP, 13th June 2007

[11] "Free School Meals 'for deprived'", 3rd June 2007 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/6715585.stm>

[12] "Sturgeon confirms NHS pay deal", 12th June 2007 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/6743211.stm>

[13] "Increase in public sector workers", 13th January 2007 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/4609110.stm>

[14] Tom Farmer, 5th April 2007

[15] John Swinney MSP, statement to Parliament 30th May 2007.

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] "Alex, stop throwing money at the undeserving rich", Paul Hutcheon, 17th June 2007. Sunday Herald

[18] The sharing out of wealth, workers' co-ops and a uniform wage for all - a controversial Nationalist vision for Scotland" Peter MacMahon, 5th June 2007 <http://scotlandonsunday.scotsman.com/topics.cfm?tid=324&id=876642007>

[19] This can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FnQPtuG8uM>

Italy

For a way out of the crisis of the PRC towards the left

Resolution of the Critical Left Association

Sinistra Critica (Critical Left)

1. The obvious political crisis of the Prodi government and the conflicts between its components mark the bankruptcy of the political project of the Union, which was victorious in the elections in 2006, but which is incapable of representing a real political and social alternative in opposition to the Right.

Conceived of to guarantee a solution of continuity of Italian governmental policy, the Prodi government proved - which was foreseeable, and had been foreseen - to be a government that is hostile to the workers, representative of the interests of Italian capitalism (which is the real beneficiary of its basically anti-social policies), practising a "compassionate liberalism" and integrated into the mechanisms of multilateral war. [1]

This total bankruptcy is fundamentally the result of the exhaustion of the room for manoeuvre of reformism. It is not an accident that it goes hand in hand with the progressive involution of the Italian Left, which is being demonstrated by the formation of the Democratic Party (PD) under the leadership of Veltroni. [2]

The governmental Left, for its part, is scarcely being successful in limiting the damage, without managing to reverse the basic tendency. On the contrary, while contributing to putting a brake on struggles and conflicts, it is becoming an accessory and an active participant in these liberal policies. The Critical Left reaffirms its will to build opposition to the policies of the Prodi government and its refusal to support or endorse its anti-social and warmongering measures. We will oppose the

umpententh pension reform, we are against the base in Vicenza, we are opposed to the choice of causing an environmental disaster, such as with the high-speed train (TAV). No to the TAV, Notto Dal Molin, we will not help in any way or allow ourselves to be used! [3]

The Critical Left reaffirms its will to build opposition to the policies of the Prodi government and its anti-social and warmongering measures

2. The bankruptcy of the Union makes it obvious that the political line approved by the PRC at its Congress in Venice is also bankrupt, from its assumptions to its forecasts. The "Great Reform" has failed, faced with the diktats of Brussels and the employers; the alliance with the "good bourgeoisie" has broken down in the face of the usual aggressiveness of the Confindustria [4]; the Right has never been as strong in Italy; the



imperviousness of the government towards the movements is leading both to desertion in the face of the real movement and to ineffectiveness within the government. It is a case of a bankruptcy for which the whole of the leading group of the party bears responsibility.

3. This bankruptcy is producing the irreversible crisis of the PRC. We are witnessing the fundamental exhaustion of its role. Its political function as mediator between the active forces of the Italian and European bourgeoisie and the social movements is clearly being emptied of its content and is impossible to continue, because the PRC is unable to remain within the movements. June 9th made it possible to photograph this situation. The future lies with a coherent anti-capitalist project, difficult though it may be, with class independence and with building an alternative to both the centre-right and the centre-left.

4. The exhaustion of the PRC is also shown by the attempt, more or less lucid, of the leading group that aims at finding a way out of its crisis towards the right, in the direction of a "socialist refounding" which is once again proposing the traditional moderation of the Italian Left. "To go beyond", indeed, means today going in the direction of

social and governmental compatibility with what exists, in the framework of an abstract left unity based primarily on political class collaboration, whatever form it might take: confederation, "network", model, single party, "work in progress", etc.

5. Confronted with this bankruptcy, faced with a history which is ending with the other "beyond" proposed by the leading group of the PRC, we propose a radical alternative: a way out of the crisis towards the left, a different "beyond", directed towards the social movements and towards struggle, rediscovering political autonomy and the revolutionary perspective, outside of the government and the mediations that are imposed by the PD, at the heart of the social opposition.

6. The Critical Left is committing itself as of now to this project by proposing, to all the forces who are ready and willing, to start a constituent process of an alternative Left - anti-capitalist, ecologist, feminist, internationalist. A process of political recomposition that is open and has a medium-term perspective, and which is capable of being enriched by the best experiences of communist refounding, of the mobilization of Genoa, of the

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movements and of independence from the centre-left.

It is in no way necessary to respond to the creation of the PD by seeking to form a united Left, without adjectives, which is impossible from an organic point of view. Because, as always in Italian history, there are two Lefts: one oriented towards social compromise and the other, combative, anti-capitalist, class-based and internationalist. Today, even to the left of the Democratic Party, there are two lefts.

7. So we want to build this other Left, which will guarantee the presence of revolutionary themes, which will take over the best traditions of communist refounding and which puts the emphasis, as always, on the project of the movement. With the bankruptcy of the institutional and governmental Left and the difficulties caused by the social defeat, we must answer by social opposition, by building mobilizations, unitary networks and structures of social struggle.

We reaffirm this unitary approach, which is capable of building the broadest possible mobilization on the basis of given objectives. But on the basis of recent experience, of June 9th and 16th [5], and including the multiple local struggles in defence of health and the environment, we believe that the construction of pacts for action at the national and local level, around specific objectives

and within the framework of a social opposition to the Prodi government, constitutes a priority today.

The “no” to the war, the dismantling of the base in Vicenza, the rejection of the TAV, the defence of essential needs, the continuation of Pride, are the terrains of our work. But it is on the social terrain, in particular, that the decisive battle is being fought out today. For that we undertake, in liaison with the forces that organised June 9th, to plan out social actions which will lay the basis for a massive mobilization in the autumn against the policies of the Prodi government.

8. The comrades of the PRC who are members of the Critical Left therefore ask the party's leading structures to convene an extraordinary congress before the autumn. Within such a framework, making possible a broad and transparent confrontation of ideas, we will put forward our proposal for an way out of the crisis towards the left, as an alternative project to that of “socialist refounding”. Because these are the only two possible alternatives, in the space between which there can only be confusion.

We will propose this working hypothesis to the congress and will put we it into practice immediately afterwards.

9. We launch a call for the broadest participation in the National Seminar of the Critical Left that will take place in

Bellaria (Rimini) from the September 20th to 23rd, which will be a decisive moment for discussing the future of the Association.

Finally, we convene for November 9th-10th the National Assembly of the Association, which will discuss on the basis of a document to be prepared after the Bellaria seminar by the National Coordinating Committee.

The Sinistra Critica (Critical Left) Association (ASC) was set up in January 2007 by the minority of the Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC) which refused the participation of the party in the Prodi government. The association regroups members both inside and outside the PRC. It includes the comrades of Bandiera Rossa, Italian section of the Fourth International.

NOTES

[1] We reproduce here the motion adopted unanimously by the National Coordinating Committee of the Critical Left Association (Associazione Sinistra Critica) on July 8th, 2007. The original can be consulted on the web site www.sinistracritica.org

[2] Walter Veltroni (born in 1955) began his political activity in the Italian Communist Youth in 1976, was member of the Central Committee of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and supported its transformation into the Party of Left Democrats (PDS) of which he was general secretary, then into the Left Democrats (DS). He is currently candidate for the

post of general secretary of the Democratic Party which is due to be founded next October in order to unify, under the aegis of Romano Prodi, the current Prime Minister, his governmental centre-left coalition in a single party.

[3] The movements against the high-speed train connecting Lyon to Milan through alpine valleys which are still largely unspoilt - No TAV - and against the extension of the US military base in Vicenza - No Dal Molin - are among the most important movements which are conducting the struggle against the centre-left government of Romano Prodi.

[4] Confindustria is the name of the Italian employers' federation, whose present leaders supported Romano Prodi's Union against Berlusconi, his right-wing predecessor.

[5] On June 16th there took place in Rome the march for homosexual dignity - Gay Pride - which was a great success, with hundreds of thousands of participant(e)s, in spite of the inclination of the Prodi government, under the pressure of the Pope, not to grant equal rights to gays and lesbians.

Germany

“Die Linke”, a new party between hope and adaptation

Left parties merge

Manuel Kellner

As of June 16, 2007 at 16.36h, the Linkspartei.PDS (Left Party of Democratic Socialism) and the WASG (Electoral Alternative For Jobs and Social Justice) no longer exist. After two years of preparations, they formally merged to create the new party Die Linke (The Left). The previous day the last separate congresses had taken place, agreeing by a large majority to the unification of the two parties.

The Linkspartei.PDS, based above all in the east of the country, has 60,000 members and the WASG nearly 11,500. Before the fusion congress, the members of the two parties had been asked to vote for or against the fusion. In the Linkspartei.PDS, a large majority was in favour. In the WASG, it was a lot less clear: only slightly less than 50% of its members participated in the ballot, and even with a large majority inside this half of party members, in fact only a minority of its members actively voted for the fusion.

This reflects the fact that the founding enthusiasm of 2004 in the ranks of the WASG has run out of steam, and it is fairly probable that a part of the membership of the WASG will not be members of the new part. Some WASG members, conscious of the specific identity and roots of their young party, see the fusion as a colonisation by a party which is stronger in numbers and disposed of a broadly dominant apparatus, together with the common fraction in the Bundestag and a rather administratively oriented personnel in the ex-GDR.

Regional electoral success in Bremen

However, since the regional elections in the small Land of Bremen and since the fusion is now seen as an accomplished fact, there has been a new rise in the influence and dynamic of Die Linke. Let's look first on the results of May 13, 2007 in Bremen.

The governing parties lost, respectively, 4.1% (CDU) and 5.5% (SPD), and the opposition parties gained: the liberals of the FDP a little, the Greens a lot (3.6% to reach 16.4%) and Die Linke (common candidacy of the Linkspartei.PDS and the WASG) spectacularly (6.7% to reach 8.4%). In the



Perspectives of growth

polls the day before these elections, Die Linke was predicted to get only 5%!

This result for Die Linke is significant in several respects. It should be recalled that, towards the end of the 1970s, an electoral success for the Greens precisely in Bremen announced their breakthrough at the federal level. And if Die Linke, for the two years of existence of its fraction in the Bundestag, always scored between 8% and 10% in the polls, everybody knew that the electoral implantation in the East counted for a lot, whereas in many western regions, Die Linke (that is the Linkspartei.PDS and the WASG together) remained largely below the 5% barrier. With results largely above this barrier in the west we can then effectively expect new electoral progress.

The result in Bremen is also significant as to the content of the electoral campaign which was clearly oppositional, whereas the Linkspartei.PDS which co-governs with the SPD in the Land of Berlin lost nearly half of its electorate in the regional elections (but has continued to co-govern!). The results in Bremen have then a tendency to encourage those who are fighting Millérandism [1] in the new party.

Recent polls following the foundation congress confirm the ascendant electoral tendency of Die Linke. According to the Forsa institute, the SPD has lost 2 points to fall to 25%, the CDU/CSU one point to fall to 37%, while Die Linke has gained one point to reach 12%, becoming the biggest opposition party, overtaking the FDP liberals (10%) and the Greens (10%). According to the Emnid institute of June 19, 2007, which gives 36% to the CDU/CSU and 28% to the SPD, Die Linke again has 13%, 3 points more than both the FDP and the Greens.

Another poll indicates in more spectacular fashion that 25% of the German electorate “could imagine” voting for Die Linke! However, there is not only the electoral aspect. According to yet another poll, 10% of the members of the SPD (now down to a little more than half a million) “could imagine” leaving their party to join Die Linke. And if the SPD is subject to an erosion of its influence in the trade union world, it is Die Linke which profits from it. A considerable number of union activists, but also a section of the officials and even the full-timers are beginning to turn towards Die Linke. Even a part of the union leaderships at the federal level are beginning to treat Die Linke as at least a second interlocutor at the political level. Everything is still to play for, but this is a real tendency confirmed by the experience of our union activists, above all in engineering (IG Metall) and the services union (Ver.di).

If then a part of the membership of the former WASG (2,000? 3,000?) will probably not join the new united party, we can at the same time expect a certain influx of new members, in their majority of social democratic origin. What does this mean for the evolution of the party and more precisely for the clearly anti-capitalist tendencies in the party? It is an open question, because there are contradictory elements to take into account. Certainly there will be people attracted by the perspective of careers, above all at the level of the communal and regional levels. The parliamentary routine at its level risks strengthening the tendencies to the adaptation of the party. On the other hand, this influx of members will reflect an advance of political consciousness towards the left, and thus “the battle for the heads” of these new members is

Germany

not lost in advance for consistent anti-capitalist tendencies. And so it is not lost in advance for those like us, who oppose a strategy of transitional demands to the neo-Keynesian perspective dominant in the party but unrealistic in the context of contemporary capitalism.

Remobilisations

A lot will depend, as always, on the social climate, mobilisations and the development of the class struggle. The mobilisation against the G8 summit was an undeniable success, and with that there is probably — all proportion guarded — a section of the new young generations which is attracted by radical anti-capitalist perspectives. But there is also a renewal of the defensive struggle of employees, as shown symbolically in several weeks of strike action at Telekom, in the face of threats of a drastic wage rate cuts and in increase in unpaid working hours. For the first time in a long time, strike days are rising in Germany. Add to that the fact that a majority of the German population (at least in the polls) are opposed to the deployment “outside the frontiers” of the Bundeswehr (German army) which, at least according to the Grundgesetz (the German Constitution), has no other mission than defence of the country against possible assailants.

The tough neoliberal policies, insolent employers offensives, ferocious anti-social austerity measures and orgies of unbridled privatisation could in part pan out in a positive fashion, building support for Die Linke and creating openings to radical political thought, including Marxism as well as socialist strategic ideas going from a radical reformism to a “revolutionary realism” in the style of Rosa Luxemburg.

At the same time, there is still a great risk of seeing the participants collapse into protest movements and defensive movements out of resignation. Because they cannot win. Either they lose, or they are subject to the shoddy compromises which contribute to weaken wage earners and their allies. Today, a real class struggle, a mobilisation of millions including mass strikes and an active and

democratic self-organisation inside such a mobilisation would be necessary to reverse the relationship of forces and impose both an end to the neoliberal and employers offensives and the realisation of new gains. At the same time, such a movement would put on the agenda perspectives of going beyond the capitalist system. Nobody can predict if there will be such a mobilisation in the coming years.

Radical discourse and its limits

At the party political level, in any case, for the moment, a radical attitude pays. And it is above all Oskar Lafontaine with his well-developed instinct as a politician who has understood and who better than all the leaders at the summit of the new party Die Linke, employs a highly rebellious and radical rhetoric, situating himself on the far left and perhaps even beyond what one could call the officially accepted framework of the established political world in Germany.

That is why Lafontaine, towards the end of his speech to the founding congress of Die Linke in Berlin, stressed the necessity of being — or becoming! — “credible”. It is a diplomatic way of saying that he is not in agreement with the policy of co-governance in the Land of Berlin, or the PDS — and today Die Linke — participating in a subaltern position in the neoliberal management of the SPD. He understands well that this policy could damage the electoral rise of Die Linke. But it should be said also that this does not stop the same Oskar Lafontaine from favouring a possible future coalition with the SPD (and perhaps the Greens) at the federal level, perhaps even from 2009! Of course, he always adds that for this, the SPD would have “to change”. This would be his personal triumph against the current generation of SPD leaders who have treated him as a pariah since his resignation as minister and party leader, and who are now very nervous and can find no way out of their uncomfortable role as junior partner of the Christian conservatives and the growing pressure to their left. But how would the SPD change? And who, were there an arithmetical

majority to the left of the Christian conservatives and liberals in 2009, would be able to make the diagnosis and proclaim its change “sufficient”? Probably Oskar Lafontaine, skilful politician and brilliant communicator.

The struggle of the isl

We as the isl (international socialist left — one of the two organisations of the Fourth International in Germany) are participating in the construction of Die Linke. One of our members, Thies Gleiss, was elected to the federal directorate at the founding congress. Another, Wolfgang Zimmermann, is spokesperson of the party in North Rhine-Westphalia. Others have official functions at the regional or local level, notably Hermann Dierkes who leads the fraction of Die Linke in the communal parliament of Duisburg. We decided to participate in the construction of this party without abandoning our revolutionary Marxist convictions.

That means that we fight for an anti-Millérandist majority, and participate in the “Antikapitalistische Linke” left tendency inside the party. We try at the same time to encourage a long term strategic debate to make understood the necessity of questioning the system, if only so as to defend consistently the interests of wage-earners and the weakest in society. To this end, we support SALZ e.V., an association for political education close to the WASG, and, at another level we participate in the “Marxist Dialogue” which, at the second Marxist Conference, from April 20-22, 2007, attracted 700 people to Berlin, and which has created a stable plural coordination to continue this dialogue and organise a new meeting after the congress in Berlin on October 13, 2007 on the 90th anniversary of the October revolution and of Lenin’s “State and Revolution”.

Certainly, the revolutionary and radical left circles have for the moment an air of crumbling and decomposition, linked to some extent to the success of Die Linke which could marginalize them still further. Some of these circles were always or are now

Russia

Socialist activist arrested in Saratov

Solidarity needed!

‘VPERED’



outside the party. In Berlin, the BASG – successor to the rebel WASG in Berlin, which presented itself in the regional election against the PDS and against the opinion of the majority of the national leadership — does not participate in Die Linke and continues to fight under new forms against the policy of co-governance. Like our comrade Angela Klein, in Berlin, we support this approach.

Together with others, we call for a meeting of currents and individuals of a consistent anti-capitalist consciousness “inside and outside” the new party on October 14, 2007 in Berlin. This will discuss a first balance sheet of the fusion as well as common activities at the level of extra-parliamentary actions, education work and the possible creation of a durable coordination of forces and individual in Germany who wish to replace the capitalist system with an economy based on solidarity, a socialist democracy.

Manuel Kellner is a member of the coordination of the isl (international socialist left), one of the two public fractions of the Fourth International in Germany and a member of the new party Die Linke in Cologne. He is education director of the educational association SALZ e.V. operating at the federal level, recognised as “close to the WASG” in North Rhineland- Westphalia, which is currently requesting official recognition from Die Linke.

NOTES

[1] 1. From the name of Alexandre Millerand (1859-1943), lawyer and journalist, elected as a socialist deputy for the Seine in 1885. His entry into the government of Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau in 1899 was met with disapproval by Rosa Luxemburg and Jules Guesde. He evolved further to the right and in 1914 created the Ligue républicaine nationale which supported the imperialist war. He replaced Georges Clemenceau as president of the Council in January 1920 and was elected president of the French Republic (September 1920)

In the evening of 5th July Sergei Vilkov, activist of the Russian socialist movement ‘VPERED’, was taken into custody. This action of the local police results quite logically from their recent unprecedented campaign of pressure against the members of the movement in Saratov.

Constant surveillance, illegal arrests, threats and promises to ‘close down’ the movement — all this has come to be a normal practice of the local police against the members of the movement. We consider Sergei’s arrest as a conscious provocation, which the local bureaucrats needed to fill in their reports on the ‘fight against extremism’.

Here is a brief account from our comrade about Sergei’s arrest:

On the 5th of July in Saratov a provocative act led to the arrest of an activist of the socialist movement ‘VPERED’ Sergei Vilkov. When he was going home, he was seized by policemen and, after a search, a gun with 8 bullets was ‘discovered’. When I came to the local police department, after a call from an investigator, with a change of clothes for Sergey I was told rudely that I wouldn’t get answers to my (quite reasonable) questions and, shortly afterwards, that I had ‘to get a move on home’ because they’re gonna ‘come there with a search’.

At the moment Sergei is out of prison, but restricted to Saratov.

Apparently local police officers may be working out right now what case they’re going to frame up against him. That’s why he needs your solidarity right now, for what has happened to him yesterday may happen to every political activist tomorrow. Therefore we must act together to make sure this disgraceful and false “case” falls apart before it even gets to court.



The actions of Saratov police have to receive the widest possible publicity. We’re calling on journalists and all who have any access to mass media to connect to our website and try to publish this information as widely as possible.

We’re calling on all leftists, working class activists, and human rights activists to call and fax protests to the following numbers:

Saratov Department of Internal Affairs:
Officer on duty: +7(8452) 51-1222; +7(8452) 26-1578
Head of the department: +7(8452) 26-2824; +7(8452) 26-4719; +7(8452) 26-4927

Saratov Public Prosecutions Department:
+7(8452) 78-3418; +7(8452) 78-3417
Deputy prosecutor: +7(8452) 78-3421

Saratov City Administration: Office:
+7(8452) 26-1877 (Tel./Fax)

We call all left and progressive forces outside Russia to organize actions of protest in front of the Russian embassy buildings in their countries.

We also ask everyone who can give financial support (to pay a lawyer) to get in touch with the editors of the site: kashamanka@yahoo.com.

No to repressions, yes to solidarity!

The socialist movement VPERED (Forward, Russian: is a radical left-wing political organisation in Russia.