

International VIEWPOINT

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV371 October 2005

BRAZIL

The collapse of the PT and rebuilding the Brazilian left

PALESTINE

After Gaza

DOSSIER

Venezuela

Germany

Pakistan

Palestine

Debate

Brazil

Iraq

Brazilian Left

Review

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International Viewpoint, the monthly English-language magazine of the Fourth International, is a window to radical alternatives world-wide, carrying reports, analysis and debates from all corners of the globe. Correspondents in over 50 countries report on popular struggles, and the debates that are shaping the left of tomorrow.

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GERMANY

Towards a new, liberating party of the Left

MANUEL KELLNER ·

The big parties were the big losers in the federal elections of September 18th, 2005. Compared to 2002, the Christian-conservative CDU/CSU, with 35.2 per cent, lost 3.3 per cent. The SPD dropped by 4.3 per cent and finished with 34.3 per cent - more than had been anticipated, because the ferociously neo-liberal line of Angela Merkel, the CDU/CSU candidate for Chancellor, led to a loss of votes to the advantage not only of the SPD, but also of the original advocates of unbridled neo-liberalism, the liberals of the FDP, who finished spectacularly with 9.8 per cent. The Greens marked time with 8.1 per cent of the vote. The right-wing extremists made progress, but didn't manage a breakthrough. The big winner, in reality, was the Left Party, supported by the WASG, with 8.7 per cent of the vote, which represents more than double the vote obtained by the PDS, which got 4 per cent in 2002, thus failing to pass the 5 per cent barrier, thereby reducing its presence in the Bundestag to two MPs from Berlin who had been directly elected in their constituencies.

Gregor Gysi, Ulla Lötzer, Oskar Lafontaine

In the old regions of the West, the Left Party - the Left, for short - nearly got over the 5 per cent barrier, obtaining 4.9 per cent (the small Saar region can be declared "eastern", since the Left Party won more than 18 per cent of the vote there!). That is very important and it is linked to the new factor, to the WASG and to the unitary dynamic that generated a lot of hope among the mass of workers and of those who are relegated to the fringes of society. Because previously, in the West, the forces of the

Left didn't manage much more than one per cent of the vote. It was in May 2005, in the North Rhine-Westphalia region, that the WASG demonstrated the potential that was there by winning 2.2 per cent of the vote, "a second" after it had been formed, whereas the PDS stood alone at the same election and finished with 0.9 per cent of the vote.

In absolute figures, nearly 4 million people voted for the Left Party, 960,000 of whom had still voted for the SPD in 2002. The Left Party furthermore won over 390,000 voters who had abstained in 2002, 280,000 who had voted CDU/CSU, 220,000 from the Greens and 90,000 from the liberals of the FDP. All of that is as significant as the sociological aspect, because the Left Party's electors are especially workers, those in work and those without. To complete the picture we have to add that the SPD lost 640,000 to the Christian conservatives, while the latter lost 1,250,000 to the FDP! Moreover, non-participation in elections also increased: the CDU lost 740,000 votes to the "party" of the non-electors, and the SPD a bit more than half a million.

It goes without saying that the class struggle wing of trade unionists acclaimed the victory of the Left Party. But it also has to be said that the official leaderships of the DGB also welcomed it, while pointing out that there was a "left majority" of 51 per cent in the Bundestag against the CDU/CSU and the FDP, therefore against the preferred political forces of the employers' associations. There is the beginning of an important change in the unions: social-democratic hegemony over them is now seriously breached. But if there is a "left majority" in the Bundestag - which is rather doubtful - there will not in any case be a left policy, but very probably a "black-red" (CDU/CSU-SPD) Grand Coalition, with the SPD as junior partner, which

will continue more than ever the neo-liberal policies of the Schröder government. This will accentuate political differentiation within the unions and very probably lead to new waves of social mobilisations and political dissidence.

It is clear that the result of the federal elections of September 18th, 2005 in Germany marks a significant turning point in the political situation in Germany. Fifty-one per cent of the electorate voted to the left of the Christian conservatives and the liberals, which is not the expression of a clear rejection of neo-liberalism, but is nonetheless a rejection of anti-social austerity policies that were even more brutal than those of the defunct coalition of the SPD and the Greens. The representatives of capital who had campaigned for a "black-yellow" (CDU/CSU-FDP) government were clearly very disappointed after these elections.

Without the good results of the Left Party, it would not have been possible to defeat the black-yellow threat. For the first time in decades, there is now a chance to build a political force in the West and the East of the country which could break social-democratic hegemony in the trade union movement and re-conquer the political independence of the working class. That is giving considerable encouragement to the resistance to neo-liberal policies, to the mobilisations against the increasingly severe attacks on social gains and against militarist and imperialist adventures. One of the consequences will very probably be to make it possible to re-launch, among the broad masses, the debate on the socialist alternative to the destructive and inhuman capitalist mode of production. That is why the ISL has decided to be part and parcel of this process.

But from the beginning, there is a danger of missing the chance by organising a rapid fusion between the WASG and the Left Party, orchestrated from on high. The substantial apparatus of the ex-PDS, by co-opting elements chosen from the leading layer of the WASG, while relying on the support of the parliamentary group, which is on the one hand clearly dominated by members of the Left Party and on the other largely dominated by MPs without clear anti-

capitalist convictions, would like to limit the personnel which is going to elaborate the programme, the statutes and the profile of the new party to a narrow leading layer. That can only lead to a simple addition of the members of the Left Party (70,000) and of the WASG (15,000) under the tutelage of a leadership which will more or less rapidly take the road of adaptation.

The ISL, on the contrary, is proposing, together with a certain number of structures and members of the WASG, and also of the Left Party, to launch a broad movement for the formation of a new left party, calling on everyone to take part in open forums to discuss the programmatic and organisational bases, without excluding anyone, and especially without excluding the anti-capitalist and Marxist currents and all those who fear a fresh disappointment, which would be the result of a triumph of substitutionism and of adaptation to the mechanisms and the consensus of established politics.

The first problem to be discussed is the necessity of freeing ourselves from any co-responsibility for the neo-liberal policies of social democracy. At a federal level, the problem does not seem to be posed at present, because the SPD leadership rejects any idea of cooperation with the Left Party in the Bundestag. But already four Left Party MPs have proposed voting, if necessary, for Schröder against Merkel. They were quickly disciplined: this is no time to do such a thing! Our electoral and party base could only interpret it as supporting neo-liberal policies! Nevertheless, Gysi, Lafontaine and the others constantly repeat that in a few years from now, with a changed SPD, everything could look different...

But there is a very present problem: the participation of the Left Party in regional governments in Berlin and Mecklenburg-West Pomerania. And there is a big movement in the Berlin WASG that is opposed to the idea of fusing with a party that is implementing neo-liberal austerity policies at the regional level, as junior partner to the SPD. An animated discussion is taking place around the pro-

posal for an autonomous candidacy of the WASG in the 2006 Berlin regional elections, if the Left Party does not withdraw from the governmental coalition. And there, the question of the rhythm and the method of forming the new party and the question of the content of its policies are closely linked to each other: the leadership of the Left Party wants to rule out the possibility of a rival candidacy in Berlin by a rapid fusion with a WASG whose relatively few members in Berlin will not weigh too heavily in the balance and will not manage to impose the end of participation in the Berlin government.

An important fundamental problem is the absence of an alternative to capitalism as a social system. The "democratic socialism" in the programme of the Left Party does not signify the struggle for another society, but is a vague ethical reference, quite compatible with a pragmatic politics which does not in any way come up against the limits of the established social order. The programme of the WASG formulates criticisms of capitalism, without having a clear anti-capitalist reference point.

We who are fighting for a socialist democracy, for a classless society on the global scale, know very well that the crisis of credibility of the socialist alternative remains is still very serious. We do not want to impose our vision, but we argue for a thorough debate on the question of the alternative to capitalism, starting from what should be the general consensus: we all want an economic system which is not governed by the race for maximum profit and by competition, but by social needs and ecological responsibility. Such a system can only be based on social ownership of the large-scale means of production, democratically self-managed.

It is not a question of discussing this alternative in the abstract. In fact, this question is linked to the problem of concrete demands. Without a horizon that goes beyond really existing capitalism, it will not be possible to be consistent in the struggle for immediate demands that are in the interest of the workers and the marginalized layers in society. Without wanting to go beyond the capitalist system it is not possible to resist the argument of our ad-

versaries: everything which is socially just but not compatible with the race for maximum profit and for the strongest position of one's own nation against all other nations, will be sacrificed to "realism". How can you want to impose a significant reduction of working hours without loss of wages, how can you defend social gains and impose an improvement in the living condition of the workers and the marginalized layers of society, without being ready to challenge the sacrosanct private ownership of the means of production, the banks and the insurance companies? How can you organize resistance against the orgies of privatisation, how can you fight for a re-civilization of social relations without having in mind the need to reorganize society on new bases, different from those of today, which are dominated by the market, monopoly and the power of the big multinational trusts?

Internationalism must be part and parcel of the new party that is to be built. This begins with the pan-European struggle for a minimum social income and the reduction of working hours without loss of wages, continues with the refusal of military interventions and must be completed by establishing contact with all the forces in Europe that are to the left of social democracy and are anti-capitalist - we do not agree with confining ourselves to participating in the European Left Party.

The orientation and the profile of the party that is to be built are linked to the type of party that we want to build. In our opinion, we have to start by posing the question of why the SPD and so many other parties have become what they are today. One of the big problems is the substitutionism of leaderships, party apparatuses and especially parliamentary groups (not to speak of Millerandist ministers...) which tend on every occasion to depart from the initial emancipatory objectives and adapt to the mechanisms and the pro-capitalist consensus of established bourgeois politics.

In the last analysis, this mechanism is a product of the social division of labour and can only be surmounted by a qualitative leap in the self-activity and self-organization of the masses. That is why it

is not enough to ask the members of the parliament of a left party to play the role of a loudspeaker for social movements. We must ask more: that all their activity be directed to encouraging mobilizations, and encouraging self-organization within mobilizations, in other words to the extra-parliamentary struggle. Besides, our demands have no chance of being realized without a big social mobilization and a confrontation with capital which is the only thing that could really change the relationship of forces in society.

But while we are waiting for these big changes in the social and political climate, we need a party which ceaselessly encourages the activity of its members, therefore a democratically organized party that enables its members to control the leaderships, the apparatus, the parliamentary groups, and to determine the political orientation and activity. It must be a pluralist, open party which does not exclude currents on the pretext that they are too "radical". The debate on the strategic orientation must be conducted over a long period and without exclusives, with the right for everyone - not only for the Keynesians, but also for the anti-capitalist forces - to express themselves and to address the entire party.

Already, the weight of the apparatus and the leadership of the Left Party has proved to be a serious problem and an obstacle to the objective of building a broad new party with a mass base. Before the federal elections, time was short and we had to act quickly. Now the leadership of the Left Party wants a rapid fusion, organized and orchestrated from on high. In the WASG there is resistance to this, and so the leadership of the WASG is expressing the need for an open process which will go beyond just the fusion of the two existing forces, a process with open forums.

In the meantime, the new parliamentary group is preparing its work. It is the members of the central apparatus of the ex-PDS in Berlin who have been taken on as collaborators, while their posts in the Karl-Liebknecht-Haus are going by cooptation to chosen leading members of the WASG. So already

the weight of this apparatus, which is difficult to control, is great. And it goes without saying that politically, it is the weight of the partisans of coalition politics at the regional level which is being reinforced.

For the moment, that remains on the regional level. For the moment, the top leadership of the Left Party, the WASG and the parliamentary group rule out any cooperation with the SPD and reject the idea, for example, of voting for Schröder against Merkel, or for another SPD candidate for chancellor. But in the longer term - and both Gysi and La Fontaine continually repeat it - there is an orientation towards governmental collaboration with the SPD on the federal level too. To this we have to counterpose an orientation towards social mobilizations - without unity of action in the streets and in the workplaces, unity on an institutional level can only accelerate all the tendencies towards adaptation. And the SPD, up to now in any case, is definitely no longer a party of mobilization.

Our approach to the new party that is to be built is not "entryist" in the traditional sense that the term had in our movement. We want to build this party loyally, in an open process and by encouraging a broad and plural dialogue on the orientation to adopt and on how to function. At the same time, within this broad process, we want to push forward the formation of the anti-capitalist and internationalist current, because it seems to us that it is essential for it to be articulated in a way that is comprehensible, credible and strong. Our organisation has no intention of behaving as a "faction" in the process and does not impose discipline on its members within the WASG, the Left Party and the new party that is to be built. In any case, if it did, that could only poison relations with the other members of the new party. But our members share deeply-held programmatic convictions and regularly discuss and decide on the basic orientation around which they work in this broad framework, ready to take on responsibilities and without repudiating their political identity.

We have already learned from practical experience that this approach can pose problems. In the broad framework of the WASG, of the Left Party and of the new party that is to be built, our members can have different responsibilities at different levels of leadership, play different roles, find different allies - people with reformist socialist convictions who have a strong penchant for "Realpolitik" or people who do not always have socialist convictions, but have sentiments that are emancipatory, democratic

and anti-apparatus, for example. That can create conflicts and it has created conflicts. The only non-administrative way of countering these effects seems to us to be the reinforcing of our organisation as a framework for discussion, taking a decision when there are differences and formulating our position - without imposing it mechanically on the activists, but stating publicly what is the opinion of our small political current.

PAKISTAN

Not even 5 percent of aid received!

FAROOQ TARIQ ·

A two-member team from one private TV channel GEO accompanying a military relief helicopter in the Neelum Valley showed a glimpse of the plight of the villagers last night on 25th October 2005. The villagers were begging, arguing, fighting, accusing and saying what ever they could say to the military officers to get some immediate relief to save the lives of their children who are not yet dead. One villager said, "17 days gone, we have no team reaching to our village. We have buried 80 from our village, many more are injured, but no help yet has reached the village".

Money collected at the Labour Relief Camp in Lahore, Pakistan....

The so-called LOC is closed by the Indian and Pakistani governments and no one from any country can cross the Line. If the LOC had been open, it would have taken few hours for the Indian held Kashmir people to bring relief. The Pakistani government finally suggested last week to open the Line from 5 different areas. But technical side had to be discussed by the Indian government to agree to the proposal. It has not yet been opened.

Earlier, the Pakistani military government rejected an offer from the Indian government of Indian helicopters for relief purposes. "It was not in our national interest to accept this offer, it raises the question of the security of the country" said one Pakistani spokesperson while rejecting the offer. Later the Pakistani military regime offered to accept the Indian helicopters without Indian pilots. What more security is in the mind of the Pakistani government while, according to the latest official figures, over 53,000 are confirmed death after the 8th October earthquake. Unofficial figures for the

death toll are over 100,000 and more seriously injured.

Pathetic response

There has been a pathetic aid response by the governments of the advanced countries so far. Not even five percent of the total needed for the relief and rehabilitation work has been pledged or sent to Pakistan. The "friends" of general Musharaf have not been pushed properly by the military government to donate and come forward to help in this grave situation. The reason is very simple.

The military government's earlier response was to hide the facts. They tried in the initial period to show minimum losses of lives and property. I heard the core commander of the North West Frontier Province, the real boss of the province, on 9th October, a day after the earthquake "it is the politicians who are making noise about deaths and losses, I have been touring around the whole day, the maximum deaths are less than one thousand" This is a province where there are more than 20,000 confirmed deaths according to the official figures.

OXFAM UK issued a serious warning on 26th October that Pakistan has been abandoned by the industrial states. It noted that America, Japan, Germany and Italy have donated aid that does not match their financial position. While France, Belgium, Austria and Finland have announced no donations at all.

The United Nation asked for 300 million dollars in emergency relief but only one third of that has materialized. The UN economic coordinator for immediate relief in Pakistan, Mr. Rashid Kalkof, told news reporters in Islamabad on 23rd October that "we did not expect the disaster on that high level. It went beyond our imaginations. That is why there

was a delay in the initial relief activities". He said, "according to our initial estimation, over three million people have suffered from this catastrophe".

...food and equipment on its way.

On 22nd October, the prime minister of Azad Kashmir, (Pakistani-occupied Kashmir) said, "do not wait for the death of the Kashmiris, send the helicopters now. The world community should not talk but act. The whole world has not been able to send the immediate required 200,000 tents yet, what is the use of helicopters when Kashmiris are dead". The desperation of the hand-picked prime minister of Azad Kashmir shows the real danger that is erupting to the lives of the refugees who are desperate to get the tents before the arrival of the winter in three weeks times. Already in some areas, snow is pouring down and other areas, the temperature is around zero.

At present, there a total of 46 helicopters helping in the relief efforts, some 30 of them are from the US army. According to a BBC report on 23rd October, half of the helicopters are involved in VIP activities. That mean transportation of the very important personalities or security of these VIPs.

Even General Musharaf had to admit on 21st October that only 620 million dollars has been pledged which is very little. According to the government surveys, the total damage may exceed five billion dollars. The independent surveys bring the total damage to 10 billion dollars.

The World Food Programme appeal for 56 million dollars has met with only 10 per cent success so far. It has been issuing serious warning of more deaths if the international response to this disaster is not in accordance with the needs of the time.

Militarization of the relief efforts

All the action of the Musharaf regime shows the growing militarization of the relief efforts. The military want to control all the incoming aid and want to distribute it without the involvement of the civilians. A major general Farooq Ahmed has been appointed as the relief commissioner. Another gener-

al has been appointed for the rehabilitation work. Civilians seem totally outside the network of the official channels of relief and rehabilitation work.

The total incapacity of the military regime to provide any effective help in the first three days of the earthquake has now been compensated by the mainstream media's publicity for the army as the only saviour. Even the main private TV channels are promoting the army relief efforts as the only way forward. During the six years of military rule, most civilian institutions have been headed by retired or serving army officers. Now the relief and rehabilitation work has joined the same route.

The earthquake has raised the issues like occupation of Kashmir by Pakistan and India and its effect on the people. It has raised the issue of the priorities of the Pakistani state, which has been too busy iarming itself while totally neglecting the defence of civilians in any disaster like this one.

The natural disaster has not been met with the preparations that were needed. The total loss would have been reduced to a large extent if the state had been prepared for such incidents. But the social priorities of the people are the last words in the dictionary of the ruling classes of Pakistan.

Cancellation of the debts campaign

The national assembly of Pakistan has passed a resolution that the debts of the people in the affected area should be cancelled. So was the demand of the members of the NWFP assembly. This is related to the demand of Labour Party Pakistan to cancel the unjust debts of Pakistan. Pakistan owes 34 billion dollars in foreign loans. It pays nearly 5 billion US dollars annually in debt repayments. This is the largest part of the national budget. If the repayment of only year's debt were not paid, it could compensate for the total damage according to the official figures. The irony of the matter is that IMF has announced, not an aid, but a loan on soft terms basis even on this tragic occasion for Pakistan.

The people's response

There has been unprecedented people's response not only in Pakistan but internationally, particularly in those countries which have a large Pakistani immigrant population. According to one survey, over 10 billion rupees (200 million US dollars) donations have been sent to the affected areas by the people of Pakistan. The Labour Relief Campaign in its first four days of campaigning in Lahore raised over 250000 Rupees in cash and over 2 million Rupees worth of goods from ordinary passers-by. This has been the case of many more relief camps which emerged in every part of Pakistan. There have been the cases all over Kashmir and NWFP affect areas where the first aid came from the people and not from the state.

What is to be done?

The social movement internationally should take the question of earthquake on an urgent basis. It should urge the governments in the advanced countries to do more than they have done so far. It has to take the question to the labour movement and to help the Kashmiri and Pakistani workers and peasants who have lost every thing. The response has to come on urgent basis. More effective measures have to be taken to collect funds for the refugees not only for immediate relief but also for rehabilitation work.

Please visit Labour Education Foundation website for more details of Labour Relief Campaign www.lef.org.pk

Donations can be sent to the Labour Education Foundation appeal in two ways:

To Pakistan, but which might be very costly:

LABOUR EDUCATION FOUNDATION

A/C No. 01801876

BANK ALFALAH LTD., LDA PLAZA, KASHMIR ROAD, LAHORE, PAKISTAN

Route:

Please advise and pay to Citi Bank, New York, USA
Swift CITI US 33

for onward transfer to BANK ALFALAH LTD.,
KARACHI, PAKISTAN A/C No. 36087144

and for final transfer to BANK ALFALAH LTD.,
LDA PLAZA, KASHMIR ROAD, LAHORE,
PAKISTAN

Swift: ALFHPKKALDA for A/C No. 01801876 OF
LABOUR EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Or through a Paris-based NGO, the ESSF,
which is centralising the transfer of funds:

THROUGH ESSF:

Bank Account:

Crédit lyonnais

Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux (00525)

10 boulevard de Chanzy

93100 Montreuil

France

International bank account details :

IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 0044 5757 C12

BIC / SWIFT : CRLYFRPP

Account holder : ESSF

PALESTINE

After Gaza

CINZIA NACHIRA ·

The chorus of approbation for the Israeli government has reached unprecedented levels, much as in 1993 with Rabin. The only voices outside this chorus have come from within Palestinian civil society and politics, whether in the diaspora or in Palestine, and, predominantly in this instance, from within Israeli civil society itself (rather than from within Israeli politics).

The sigh of relief audible across the world on the eve of the evacuation seems to coincide with a sort of burial of this complicated matter.

But if everything is going so well in the Middle East, in terms of defusing the explosiveness of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, if we are progressing towards a chapter of peace, how can some people be sceptical of the process?

Well, anyone not totally taken in by the propaganda can look at the process that has been initiated by the implementation of Sharon's plan and see it for what it is: the consolidation of the extension of the Zionist colonial project, which has as its aim the cantonisation of the West Bank, dividing it into Palestinian enclaves within Israeli territory, and the annexation of the rest of Palestinian territory to the state of Israel. In this scheme of things, Gaza has absolutely no importance, it is only being used as the justification which the Israeli establishment has used to carry out an old project first thought of many years ago.

Retreat or rationalisation of the occupation?

The removal from Gaza is anything but a novelty. Ariel Sharon, then minister for settlements under Prime Minister Begin, had already drawn up the plan in 1979. In other words what is taking place

now is an integral part of his strategy, the rest of which consists of building settlements stretching from the Mediterranean to the Jordan.

Moreover, as should be obvious, the removal of the settlements does not mean the end of the occupation of Palestine, only that of the Gaza Strip. Nothing has been said about a real withdrawal of the army, nothing about what is essential for the survival of the Palestinians in Gaza, which will be run by the Palestinian National Authority; and nothing about Israel's frontier with Egypt, the customs posts, the transfer of individuals, whether into Israel or Egypt, or the control of water resources.

This silence on Israel's role in Gaza since the disengagement means, in other words, that unless there is an agreement with the Palestinians over the Israeli conditions, all the lines along which this area develops will continue to be determined by Israeli legislation, with predictable consequences.

Carrying out the project of unilateral withdrawal which as such is not negotiable, and which cannot be controlled jointly with any other parties - whether the Palestinians or other international forces - is the final phase as far as Israel is concerned, stamped on every other possible process of dialogue and compromise with the Palestinians. Is saying this an expression of extreme pessimism? No, just of the brutal reality.

There will be no reconsideration, even in theory, or any calling into question as a result of this project, of the plans to consolidate the settlement of the rest of Palestine, starting from East Jerusalem and its suburbs. Already on the day after the removal of the settlements from Gaza the extension of the settlement of Maale Adumin was recommenced, in fact joining East Jerusalem into one with the already existing settlements.

But this is not all. The project being carried out today in Israel fits perfectly into a strategy which is basically that of not giving up on the plan for Transfer of the Palestinians to Jordan, where since they would be the majority, they would be free to destroy the Hashemite monarchy in order to create a Palestinian state for themselves. This is a very old strategy, but it has one fault, or, expressed in the discourse prevalent amongst the Israeli political class, will meet a certain obstacle: how to make the Palestinians accept mass transfers? Decades of resistance have shown that they have no intention of abandoning their land. To carry out this project, which goes back in an unbroken line from Ben Gurion to Sharon, the international context has to be such that there can be agreement to ethnic cleansing on a vast scale, even worse than that which led, between 1947 and 1949, to the expulsion of 800,000 Palestinians.

As events have unfolded since September 11, 2001, the international context has already allowed Israel to achieve many objectives, above all the delegitimisation of all forms of armed struggle and resistance to military occupation, which has subsumed the official designation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into the more general term of "worldwide pre-emptive war against terror". This is not a minor point in the analysis, but the basis on which an important fact rests: from September-October 2001 until today, including the withdrawal from Gaza, the agendas of western imperialism, especially that of US imperialism, and that of Israeli imperialism, have increasingly coincided with one another. But those agendas are not identical, and even if there is not the slightest friction within this imperfect identity of interests, and even if it is not in contradiction with the one-sided support offered the Israeli state, still it does not guarantee the total impunity of Israel if the latter were forced to choose generalised violent expulsions, which would inevitably be accompanied by large massacres.

One of Sharon's characteristics, as of many Israeli leaders, is always to have two plans, linked as far as possible, but slightly different, in order to be able to

make the maximum gains even if the whole project cannot be carried out. The Separation Wall, and the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza and from the four colonies in the north of the West Bank, are all the focus of the backup plan which for the moment will be satisfied by settling and annexing more than thirty percent of the West Bank, keeping them out of the most densely populated Palestinian zone.

According to Israeli intentions, this will make it possible to write the epitaph on Palestinian aspirations for an independent state on the 22 percent of historic Palestine represented by the territories occupied in the 1967 war.

Frontline Palestinians in retreat

The Palestinians living in Gaza will certainly breathe a sigh of relief when the settlers and the army finally leave, but they will still remain shut in an immense prison, surrounded on every side and at the mercy of arbitrary Israeli power. The Palestinians of Gaza will not be free, from today onwards, to move freely anywhere outside the Gaza Strip. This means that as before, all forms of economic activity will be dependent on Israeli permission. For example, the torment endured by the workers who commute (most of the Palestinian labour force of Gaza) is not over, and in fact will probably get worse. Actually for many years, since the outbreak of the first Intifada in 1987, Israel has implemented a policy of substitution for the Palestinian workforce, using migrants from other countries. So in reality Israel has an ever decreasing interest in workers from Gaza being able to enter the country.

Without a shadow of doubt the period ahead is a very difficult and complex one both for the Palestinian National Authority and for the Palestinian population.

The difficulties come from various directions, above all from the fact that in Gaza in particular Israeli repression has struck fiercely, practically decapitating all political leadership, whether of the Palestinian National Authority or of the Islamic or-

ganisations, or above all, of the secular and progressive political opposition. This more than anything that today in reality the political class in Gaza is out of control. Is there the risk in Gaza of a Somalia-type situation? As we do not have a crystal ball we cannot give a definite answer, and we certainly are not predicting it.

What we can say, as it is vouched for by the history of the resistance of the Palestinian people both in and outside Gaza and in the West Bank, is that they have shown a surprising collective political ability to reflect and to mobilise around their own national objectives, even in the worst periods - of which the present is clearly one. The assassination of Musa Arafat (cousin of Yasser Arafat and former head of internal security for Gaza), and the brief but bizarre abduction of Lorenzo Cremonesi (correspondent for the Italian newspaper "Corriere della Sera") are episodes that have

Amongst the things that have emerged in these years of the Al-Aqsa Intifada, which broke out in 2000, is that the contest is not one between the PNA and Hamas. In this sense the real test of the Palestinians is not how far they are able to shake the Israelis' complex plans (which could even provide for the dismantling of other West Bank settlements if that turned out to be useful), but what capacity the PNA and the other political, social and cultural forces will have to head a movement that will not just accede to a tactical rearrangement of the occupation but will once and for all throw into crisis the instruments that the Israeli state possesses besides the Wall. As Bashir Abu Manneh, a Palestinian intellectual who lives in New York, observed:

"In this way Sharon has obtained a fourfold result from the Plan for Dispossession: to deny the rights of the Palestinians as well as refuse any real dialogue with the Palestinian Authority that was born out of the Oslo process; to control dissent and the process of internal fragmentation; to push aside international diplomacy; and to relaunch the image of Israel as a strong, cohesive and proactive state,

and to weaken the pressure on the state and on Israeli society from the messianic wing of Zionism.

This is another problem for the Palestinians, as their internal debate shows clearly: it seems that Sharon's results could be turned to their favour and that this would happen above all via a reconstruction of the forms of struggle and social and political reorganisation in order to face the new situation. But the risk is that the withdrawal from Gaza would turn itself into a worse trap than the illusions occasioned by Oslo.

Another challenge for the Palestinians, definitely posed more sharply now than in the preceding years, is to engage in a dialogue with Israeli society, essentially in order to profit from its contradictions.

Israeli society and the settlers

The contradictions within Israeli society are numerous and some of the most disenchanted Israeli Jews have for some time been sounding the alarm about their sharpening. Some, without putting a date to it, are talking of an urge towards suicide, and denounce what they call the "Masada syndrome", of a society which is searching for normality, and wishes to be normal, but is not, and cannot become so until it finds a balance in its relations with the Palestinians, whose population it holds under military occupation and which it represses socially, politically and culturally, exploits economically, and whose land it expropriates.

It should be said clearly that these contradictions cannot be seen as the result of the removal of the Gaza settlements. They had already been weighing heavily upon Israeli society, not because the majority of Israelis had started to discuss the concept of the settlements on which their existence as a state depends, but because of the resistance of the Palestinians of Gaza, their remaining after the air raids and not fleeing, after the demolition of thousands of houses, the uprooting of thousands of fruit trees, olive trees, and the destruction of hectare af-

ter hectare of cultivated land had forced home the message that military tactics do not pay.

None of this gainsays the fact that the army needed many thousands of soldiers to defend the 7,500 settlers of Gaza, and that these soldiers had started to ask themselves "Why are we doing this?", understanding at a very basic level that the equation "occupation equals security" does not work. In some cases, not many, but significant ones, soldiers from units deployed in Gaza have denounced their own brutality and the fact that they had been obliged to follow orders that were completely ridiculous and cruel. They used to find that the best way to stop children from going to school across a piece of land that had been shut by military order was to fire their own machine guns using remote control targeting.... many dozens of Palestinian children have been killed because a commander bored with hours of guard duty would point a gun at them and invoke "the need for security in the face of kamikaze attackers".

They were often exercised by attempts to foresee violent actions on the part of the settlers who would be "obliged to abandon their own homes that they had built", on other people's land, razing to the ground the houses of another people....

When the moment for evacuation came, the army was sent against unarmed settlers, and were ordered not to use violence: "Remember that they are your brothers...", completely hypocritical words from a leadership that without ever striking a blow itself has for decades ordered massacres, expulsions, and mass round ups of defenceless and unarmed people. Only fools would believe in a change of spots on the part of the army that embraced those same fierce settlers who, assembled in the synagogue of Neve Dekalim, had greeted them (literally) with vitriol.

These embraces between brothers were the nth blow for those of the Israeli soldiers who are familiar - when things are going OK - only with the butt ends of rifles, and with incomprehensible shouting in the strange jargon of the occupiers, which is not

intended to be understood by Israelis, let alone by Palestinians.

Even this was an integral part of the grand theatrics, aimed less at a domestic than at an external audience. The aim was to show that in the last analysis, while Israel "the only democracy in the Middle East" can succeed in managing such a vital transition by means of song, collective prayer, and only a few insults, albeit strong ones, on the other side are the barbarians, whom they shoot at. How much contempt and racism is hidden in the words: "A Jew does not expel another Jew" [settlers' slogan]. This means believing in genetic superiority, the sovereignty of a people of bosses in the name of God. But it was a Jew that assassinated a Jewish prime minister, was it not?

These are not the words of a Palestinian but of an Israeli called Avraham Burg, a religious Jew, former Labour president of the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) and of the worldwide Jewish Agency. They were published in "Haaretz", the most important Israeli paper, on 18 August.

Referring to the much heralded meeting between secular Israelis and religious nationalists, Burg continues:

"When the settlers threaten me with a "fratricidal war" I say "Stop!" Are these people my brothers? No! My only biological siblings are my two sisters. I have brothers and sisters who share values and the same spirit with me. But a wicked man, a whining oppressor or an occupier armed to the teeth are not my brother, even if they keep Shabbat and all the other religious rules. And if a woman wears a scarf to show that she is pious, but with the head underneath the scarf regards "Jewish soil" as more sacred than human life, she is not my sister but my enemy".

Avraham Burg's words clarify several things.

One of the most widespread and durable stereotypes is the one that sees Israeli society and Israeli Jews in their vast majority as cohesive, socially, politically and culturally homogeneous, straining to

build an ethnically homogeneous state in the name of Zionism, religion and the myth of security.

What has emerged in the last twenty years on the contrary shows that Israeli society is quite a varied and complex phenomenon. It is not possible to go into this aspect of the subject in as much detail as it deserves in this article.

But it can be said without any doubt that for some time Israeli society has been on the verge of an internal collision. It is no great novelty when a Jew kills another Jew - the history of the construction of the state of Israel is littered with episodes of this sort.

The crisis is a deep one, and also bears on the discovery that it is not the Palestinians, who are ready for compromise, as shown by the signing of the Oslo accords in 1993 and after, who initiated a civil and cultural (rather than a social and political) war.

After the failure of all the agreements, the Israeli political leadership is trying to resurrect the old myths. When Ehud Barak said in 2000-2001 that "We shall be a villa in the heart of the jungle", he was attempting to totally absorb the blows of the preceding period.

The villa is modernity, comfort, civilisation, culture. The jungle is barbarism. The jungle is by definition a rogue state. "We live in the heart of the jungle" means to be able to survive inside the Arab world, and also inside the Muslim world, it means that what surrounds us is an immense sea of barbarism while we are the only place that is civilised in the jungle, that we are threatened by barbarism. So, as we are a villa in the jungle we are allowed to do anything. When you are confronting the jungle, it is not possible to engage in negotiations or dialogue. Coexistence does not exist because the jungle will invade us, it is permanently in action with the aim of choking the villa. For those who are permanently at war, a general preventive war is needed against this jungle so that the villa is not choked.

These words below too are not the words of a Palestinian, but of an Israeli Jew, in every way a

son of the diaspora and of post 1967 Israeli society, Michel Warshawski, who says bitterly of his own society:

"The violence that has been put in train in the last four and a half years in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank is literally unprecedented in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is not just a quantitative difference but also a qualitative one. It is a violence that dehumanises the enemy. In the eyes of the Israeli soldiers, young men of 18 or 19, they are no longer men, women, children, old people, but a terrorist threat that must be rooted out (...) What has become the code for how to behave or how not to behave towards the Palestinians is little by little becoming the code for how to behave inside [Israeli society]. It is becoming a brutal, vulgar society, a society in which every idea of civilised living is disappearing.

It may be asked: "What does this have to do with the unilateral withdrawal?" It is, together with the international situation described above, the element which has allowed this process to be carried out.

In this brief analysis which began with the removal of the settlers from the Gaza Strip, we have tried to go beyond the common positions which make the present more acceptable but make it impossible to face the future. In this sense it is clear that neither crisis, that of Israeli society or that of the Palestinians, can be resolved by the unilateral removal of the settlements. Many scenarios can be envisaged for the future, some of them completely negative ones, but all of them more or less possible.

Ariel Sharon's declarations, on the day after his speech at the UN meeting, in which he threatened to block the Palestinian elections, planned to take place in January 2006, if Hamas puts forward candidates, shows even more clearly if possible, that it is in Israel's interest for there to be a total implosion of Palestinian society. The Palestinian sociologist Jawad, from Bir Zeit University, speaks of sociocide. An ugly neologism, but one which does however make the terms of the matter clear: the

question is whether Israel's interest lies principally in the destruction of every possibility, present or future, of political, social, economic and cultural organisation by the Palestinian people.

In this sense, the Palestinians are facing a great challenge, to face their own internal crisis without following the path to which Israel wants to confine them: either civil war or collaboration; but to ex-

periment in the very near future with a strong movement to democratise their own structures, both in Gaza and in the West Bank. This is the only antidote to chaos and corruption.

To develop the social and political dialectic is not a luxury but an unavoidable necessity for the Palestinians at this moment.

DEBATE

Islam and the left

SALMA YAQOOB ·

Salma Yaqoob

"It is really odd time for me to be at this meeting. I thought we would be celebrating all the fantastic achievements of the anti-war movement and Respect we have had over the last year. But, of course, the recent bombings in London have changed that.

As I watched the events unfold on my TV I recalled how I had felt on September 11 2001 watching similar events unfold. And in comparing my reaction to both situations I realized how much I have changed - a change in me that cannot be separated from your impact on me.

After September 11 2001 I did not know where to put my fear. I felt a deep pessimism about the future. Among my friends we started discussing whether as Muslims it would still be safe for us to stay in Britain. And if we were to go, what other country could we go to? Even though I considered myself a relatively integrated person, being a psychologist, having gone to university and having various non-Muslim friends, I started to question how many non-Muslims really understand us, trust us, would defend us? While everybody grieved for the victims of 9/11 somehow my grief, as a Muslim, did not count as much as the grief of a non-Muslim. I knew I would be forced to condemn the bombings again and again in a way that my fellow citizens would not.

After the 7/7 bombings, there were many similarities in the manner in which the Muslim community was demonized as after 9/11 but there was one important difference. This time I did not feel alone. This time I did not feel the same crushing pessimism. This time I knew that there would be tens of thousands of people who would understand that

if our government is explodes bombs in other people's countries, we increase the likelihood that somebody explode bombs on our streets in retaliation. The fact that the Guardian opinion poll showed that two-thirds of Londoners saw a direct connection between the London bombings and the invasion of Iraq, despite Blair's desperate denials otherwise, is testimony to the work of anti-war activists in shaping and informing the political culture in this country. The fact that the tide of racism in the aftermath of the bombing has not been as bad as it could have been is testimony to the work of the anti-war movement in helping to strengthen anti-racist barriers in this country. All that, and more besides, is testimony to the work of ordinary anti-war campaigners up and down the country. Because of the work between the left and the Muslim community in the anti-war movement you have given me hope again and I thank you for it.

I have spoken many times about the relief I felt when I came across socialists campaigning against the war. It marked the beginning of a new journey for me. But that journey has not been without its ups and downs.

Very early on, when the Stop the war coalition was established, I was confronted by socialists who factionalised in opposition to Muslim participation in the anti-war movement. They would say "we can't have Salma Yaqoob as chair because she has a head scarf,"; that the very presence of identifiable Muslims in prominent positions in the Stop the war Coalition somehow undermined its inclusive and secular nature; that the experience of Iranian revolution proved that Muslims and the left could nor should ever work together. I could not understand their reaction. I thought what has Iran got to do with me? Why are they so hung up about a piece of

cloth on my head? Why can they only see Muslims as one reactionary monolithic bloc?

These attitudes were overcome but they did cause damage. Many of the Muslims who came to the first anti-war meetings left when they saw people standing up and saying that they did not want to work with Muslims. They said if you do not want to work with Muslims we do not want to work with you. That was a serious setback, and there are still those perceptions of what it means to work with the left around in the Muslim communities.

I was reminded of that experience just last week I happened bump into Tariq Ramadan. He started telling me about what is happening with Muslims and the left in France - and I really could not believe it. The ideological arguments that are being put forward by people who are not marginal but - very much at the centre of our global movement. People like Bernard Cassen, who is one of the directors of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, and honorary president of ATTAC. He has actually conducted an attack on the SWP and on *Respect* saying that the left is compromising its most fundamental principles by working with Muslims in the way that we have in Britain. Basically saying that we do not want to infect the European side of our movement with the British experience.

I want to address this because I think it is really important that we are alive to the debates across Europe. This one-dimensional presentation of Muslims as a reactionary, monolithic bloc has to be challenged. Like every community the Muslim community is a mosaic of different communities, experiences, political viewpoints. For example when I stood as a *Respect* candidate in Birmingham the recent general election the bulk of my political opponents were Muslims. There was a Liberal Democrat Muslim candidate, an independent Muslim candidate, and a Conservative Muslim candidate all standing against me. I was also the one who was most attacked by the Muslim extremists who were going around with leaflets at the Mosque and in vans with loudspeakers saying I was no longer a Muslim because I work with atheists

and this is haram. On the other hand I was subject to attack from another group of very anxious Muslims who, because they were feeling scared and vulnerable - and understandably so because that is the reality we are living in are desperate to be accepted by the mainstream. They want to take cover under a big umbrella like the Labour Party and they say people like me are increasing the threat against the Muslim community by speaking out in the way that I do.

For example, on the same Saturday that I met Tariq I was speaking as a panellist at a meeting in Oxford University. It was with mainly Muslim panellists, and I was vilified in that room by the other panellists - not the audience who turned out to be very sympathetic - but prominent Labour and Liberal Democrat panellists, all Muslims, saying that I am leading Muslims down a cul-de-sac. That working with these extremists - i.e. leftists - is not what Muslims should be doing right now. We are in enough trouble as it is. So we should not ally ourselves to these other marginal people. I said yes I know we are marginal and they are marginal in terms of conventional politics but our values are not marginal. Our values of peace and social justice are held by the vast majority of people and it is on these values that we can unite. And anyway, all principled political positions invariably start off as being marginal, on the outside, before gaining wider acceptance. The opposition to Bush's war on terror started with his plans to attack Afghanistan and we were very marginal in our opposition. It was not a very popular position to adopt! But from that politically principled opposition we laid the foundation for a huge global anti-war movement.

The challenge in building stronger social movements and political alternatives is that we never lose sight of what unites us and I believe people like Cassen and others on the French left have become blinded to this elementary point. Our movement across Europe will be strengthened not weakened the more the left ditches some preconceived notions about Muslims and develops the political clarity and courage to engage with Muslims. I think we

have made some important steps in this regard in Britain which others could learn from. Tragically, I believe it was the failure of the French left to do likewise that was one the most important reasons why their anti-war movement did not reach the scale of Britain, Italy, Spain or Greece. I don't buy the argument that the fact the French did not send troops was an adverse factor in building a large anti-war movement because that could also be said of Greece yet their movement was among the most impressive in Europe. One of the key issues was a lack of political clarity on how to build principled alliances with Muslims.

When I talk to Muslims I am very conscious that I have to take people with me. To do that effectively you obviously have to relate to people where they are at. And that means being able to talk from a paradigm that they can relate to and I relate to. It means digging deep into Quranic sources, about the Prophet's life, about solidarity, about justice, because they are all there. Just like in any ideology or religion you have various schisms and interpretations - and as I understand it, it is the same with the left!

Seeing the centrality of the fight for justice to my faith was central to me becoming involved in broader political struggle. The more I read the Quran the more convinced I became that not only was this something I wanted to do politically but something as a Muslim I have to do. That it is not a compromise of my principles but an expression of my principles to work with non-Muslims in this manner. That the most important dividing line is those who stand up against oppression and those who endorse oppression, whether within our family, our community or society as a whole. You are either on one side of this line or the other.

The irony is this that those people who consider themselves as such pure Muslims that we cannot work with atheists have actually have far more in common with those people on the left who consider themselves such pure secularists that they do not want us believers polluting them. So I think that

being dogmatic is not just the privilege of religious people.

What is dangerous is that if we put these barriers in our minds, if we become these puritanical ideologues, we will miss the point. Because right now, at the heart of the neo-liberal agenda, one of the things that allows it to advance is the attack on Muslims and Islamaphobia that justifies it.

We cannot ignore that reality. So if the left falls into this trap and gets caught up in this argument about whether we can work with non-secular people - when in reality those are the people being oppressed right now - it will fail. If we want our movement to be strong, if we want to create the biggest force possible against the real enemy right now - then we have to have a united basis for it. This means religious people non-believing people acting together on a clear political platform - I am not talking about a mushy "lets hold hands together" kind of approach.

So now I find myself in the curious position of having more in common with atheist, socialist activists than with some of some of my own Muslim brothers and sisters. But for me it is not a compromise, for me it is very much an expression of what I understand to be Islamic notions of justice. If you want to call it socialist internationalism and I call it Islamic notions of brotherhood and sisterhood I don't care - as long as it means that we work in solidarity with those who are oppressed around the world.

And you know when I stand here and say I believe that another world is possible I am not just talking about heaven, I am talking about the one right here and now.

I am proud to say that I am one of the founders of Respect - and it is an interesting experiment. I did not know myself where it would go - I just felt that we had to do something like this. I knew I had more in common with trade unionists, with those people fighting for the environment, with those people standing up for working peoples rights, with those people who campaigns incessantly against the war,

than those who claimed to speak in my name in the Tory Party, or the Labour Government, or those wishy-washy Liberal Democrat people. This is what Respect has been about. It's for an alternative to the politics of imperialism and neo-liberalism. It has been clear that this is our commonality and what we put aside we put aside in a very conscious way.

This experiment I feel has born fruit. Sometimes it means going into the unknown and what we are creating is a bit unknown. I cannot tell you exactly how it is all going to pan out. But what we should not do is say that the socialist ideal state is that and the Islamic ideal state is this therefore these two can never start working together, therefore Muslims and socialists here do not work. I don't think that is the right approach. And I think by going into the unknown with the clear and principled basis, by stressing our common ground, we start to build real relationships and go forward to forge a real political alternative to the politics of war and

privatisation. That is the basis in which we operate in Respect and I believe we have established an important model of political engagement.

I am going to end with a quote from the Quran: it says "Stand up for justice even if it means going against yourself and your family, be they rich or poor".

What I read into that verse is that it is easy to be just with those people who are like you. The real test is standing up for people who are different from you and may not necessarily believe what you believe. And I hear an echo of that sentiment when I read what Lenin wrote in 1902 when he said that when people stand up for an increase in wages they are good trade unionists, but when they stand up to prevent Jews from being attacked then they are true socialists.

Our solidarity is our strength.

Thank you very much."

VENEZUELA

Political Declaration of the Party of Revolution and Socialism

NATIONAL CONSTITUENT COMMITTEE OF THE PRS ·

We, the workers, peasants, students and inhabitants of the neighbourhoods and rural communities of Venezuela, are conscious of the great advances and successes won through tenacious struggle over the past six years of the revolutionary process.

We are conscious of the meaning of the Missions [1] the broadening of democratic liberties, as well as the content of social and economic inclusion of the "leyes habilitantes" [2].

On the other hand, it is also clear that there is still much lacking in providing a structural response to the serious problems existing in the poorest sectors of our country.

The highest level of available oil resources in our history, in the hands of a government that counts on the sympathy of the great majority of our people, has not been enough to resolve the problems of poverty and exclusion, nor has it freed us from imperialist subjection and the power of the big monopolies.

There is no socialism without expropriation of the big private means of production.

The oil money alone cannot resolve the problem of capitalist exploitation, the origin of all our evils. To overcome it, the economy should cease to be in the hands of a handful of rich bosses, the conspiratorial oligarchy [3] and the multinational monopolies, and pass into the control of the workers and the people in power; it is necessary to take the step of expropriating the big companies which are in the hands of the bourgeoisie and imperialism. There is no socialism without expropriation of the big private means of production.

None of the parties which currently have ministers in the government or members of parliament have shown themselves ready to guarantee until the end the struggle for the Second Independence [4] in the face of imperialism, through the liquidation of the social relations of capitalist production and through socialism as a regime of ownership and collective government of the workers and the people.

Their practice is reduced to introducing timid reforms inside capitalism, or conjunctural policies, which have not resolved and will not resolve the problem of exploitation and oppression. They maintain intact the real centres of power and economic control of the oligarchy and imperialism in our country, and at the same time they show a clear tendency to engender new and corrupt bureaucratic castes in the state apparatus that they lead, opening the way to the reinstallation of the old elites, bogging down the revolutionary process.

It is clearer every day that under the leadership of these parties the revolution will be frozen and we will not advance towards socialism.

Facing this crossroads, we the revolutionaries must assume the unshakable commitment to envisage and propose to the workers and the people, a political alternative which gives free course to the most dynamic, progressive and combative forces of the organized people, in the perspective of fighting for socialism with democracy, without exploiter bosses, nor bureaucrats embedded in the state.

It becomes urgent to offer the popular sectors, workers, women, peasants, students, indigenous communities and middle layers of the population who sympathize with social change, a project of socialism, without ambiguities, which breaks with

capitalism, the exploitation of man by man, and which fights for the definitive liberation of the human species from any form of oppression and exploitation, under the government of the workers.

While presenting this political alternative, it is also necessary to envisage the construction of tools that can win these basic changes that Venezuelan society and the world as a whole require.

The workers have advanced in building the UNT; the popular sectors, neighbourhoods, peasants and students organizing themselves in fronts and associations, and diverse forms of popular organization continue to proliferate.

They lack only the construction of the political tool of all these sectors, which organizes and strengthens, on the basis of a revolutionary programme and a political discipline, revolutionary militant activity towards socialism. It is necessary to build a party of the workers, the popular and revolutionary sectors, which on the basis of national and international experience and in agreement with the short, medium and long-term demands of the people, elaborates a Transitional Programme to advance towards socialism.

This political party must necessarily be new and different from those that exist. Through the revolutionary experience of recent years, the people have broken definitively with AD, COPEI, MAS, Causa R, Bandera Roja, Primero Justicia, Proyecto Venezuela, and so on [5], which it has recognized as oligarchic, putschist and pro-imperialist political structures.

But it has also come to the conclusion that the parties of the Fifth Republic are electoral apparatuses, that reproduce the old vices of the politicking of the Fourth Republic [6] and which do not have as their perspective the struggle for socialism without bureaucrats or bosses.

It should be genuinely democratic and organize inside it the best fighters and activists of the revolutionary process. It should have as final end popular and workers' mobilization and the struggle for the

conquest of power for the workers and the people. A revolutionary party which:

- fights for socialism, shows solidarity with the struggles of the people, defends national sovereignty, confronts imperialism, demands non-payment of the foreign debt and fights for a general increase in wages.

- confronts day after day the bosses and the exploiting and oppressive landowners. Which has the internationalist vocation that the liberator Simón Bolívar bequeathed to us. A party that is in the front line of support for the expropriation of the companies so that they are controlled and administered directly by the workers. A party that fights for a new society, free from exploitation and humiliation, that fights for socialism and democracy.

We should help the people become conscious of the fact that the problems that face us are insurmountable if we do not put an end to capitalism and private ownership of the means of production and fight for social revolution on a world scale.

Socialism is incompatible with the idea that there are national or international bosses involved in the development of the nation. We cannot conciliate the interests of the exploited and the exploiters; by this road we will only arrive at a caricature of revolution. This strategic difference with the reformist discourse of class conciliation justifies the construction of the revolutionary party.

But it is also necessary to signal that beyond this difference, we are committed to defend to the end the government of president Chávez from any coup attempt or destabilization by imperialism and the Venezuelan bourgeois opposition. We will defend, at the sides of the Bolivarian people, as we have done on April 13 [2002] and during the oil sabotage [7] the government of president Chávez against the putschist conspiracy of the oligarchic right and US imperialism, as well as all the democratic conquests won through the process of the Bolivarian revolution.

We will accompany the workers and the people in the experience with this government but in seeking the perspective of the development of workers' and peasants' power, popular, participatory and active, until government is directly exercised in a democratic manner by the workers to adopt, without vacillation or bureaucratic obstacles, the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist measures capable of leading us towards liberatory socialism.

This is the right time to launch the challenge of building that organization. The public meeting that we have organized on July 9 in the Teatro Imperial in the city of Caracas, in which delegations from all over the country and of diverse origins and political and organizational experiences participated, confirmed to us that hundreds and thousands of activists were seeking a revolutionary and socialist political structure that responds to their expectations and demands.

As a consequence of this reality, we have come together in the city of Valencia to set up the National Constituting Committee of the PARTIDO REVOLUCIÓN Y SOCIALISMO (PRS), and to discuss the characteristics of the political conjuncture and stage that the country is going through, and have reached the following accords:

POLITICAL ACCORDS

– We support those who struggle

We demand an immediate solution to the various conflicts which Venezuelan workers are currently experiencing. In particular those of Chrysler in Carabobo; those of the Social Security in Barquisimeto; the workers in the hydrologic sector, the mining industry and at Sidor in Bolívar state; the shipyard workers in the state of Sucre; those of the agri-foodstuffs company Guaica in Guárico; those of the multinational Coca-Cola in the state of Táchira and so on.

We support the thousands of peasants who mobilize before the Palace of Miraflores to demand that president Chávez applies the agrarian reform that finishes with the latifundio, and the investigation

and punishment of the backers of the bands of thugs who wish to eliminate the most prominent peasant activists.

We are at the sides of the indigenous communities that oppose the development of coal in the sierra of Perijá, which degrades its territories and violates the ancestral traditions of the communities.

Together with the revolutionary youth we repudiate the vile murders of students by police bodies that maintain an authoritarian and repressive presence, typical of the Fourth Republic. We demand investigation and punishment, while favouring the democratization of the police bodies, in a way that ends their vertical character and allows the election of commissioners by the communities and the police to organize unions to defend their economic, social and democratic rights.

– We propose an emergency economic plan

For a better use of the resources coming from the bonanza in oil prices, we propose that a National Plan of Public Works and Housing is developed that generates employment worthy of the name for millions of Venezuelan workers.

We demand that president Chávez extends in the same proportion to all the workers and employees of the public and private companies the wage increase granted to the components of the armed forces. We oppose the payment of the fraudulent foreign debt and pronounce ourselves in favour of the realization of a National Referendum through which the people can pronounce themselves democratically on the foreign debt and the international reserve surpluses.

We urge president Chávez to institutionalize the Missions and to urgently resolve the grave crisis in the systems of health, social security and national education. We oppose the use of the Missions for clientelist ends by the mayors, governors or parliamentary deputies and to the attempts to use the Missions as a means of introducing greater flexibility among the work force.

We support the projects of indigenous development as self-managed experiences of the community with the active and decision-making participation of the people, to supply the basic and urgent needs of thousands of families who are excluded by capitalism. We demand the granting of cheap credit and technical assistance to communities and peasant organizations to develop agricultural projects.

We fight for the elimination of the supposed "autonomy" of the Central Bank of Venezuela. We demand the nationalization of the private banking sector and the creation of a big national bank that concentrates all the resources originating from exports, renationalization of the banks currently in the hands of the transnational groups, with workers' control and investigation and punishment of the financial groups and entrepreneurs that promote currency flight.

We fight for the calling of an Oil Constituent Assembly that allows discussion on cargo oil policy, the portfolio of businesses of the PDVSA and the cancellation of all the concessions granted to the multinationals.

We fight for revolutionary co-management, workers' control and socialism. We understand co-management as a transitional stage towards socialism, during which the workers, in a free, democratic and revolutionary fashion, gain experience in administering public and private companies; advancing towards workers' control of production, the accountability of enterprises and the elimination of the social relations of capitalist production, to replace them by those of the socialist model.

We pronounce ourselves in solidarity with the workers of the electric sector, Alcasa and other companies, where the experience of co-management has gone furthest, so that this experience is genuinely democratic, reverses the techno-bureaucracy and aims at workers' control and socialism.

We fight for the re-opening of any company closed in an arbitrary fashion by the bosses and we demand from the government its expropriation and

restitution to the workers so that they can administer it and recommence production.

We are with the UNT and we support the Corriente Sindical Clasista, Revolucionaria y Democrática. We recognize the UNT as the trade union structure that is the most representative and most in accord with the interests of the Venezuelan workers. We place ourselves at the side of the class-conscious and revolutionary sectors that fight against the parasites and the new bureaucracy that seeks to crystallize inside it.

We fight for the autonomy and full political independence of the UNT, with respect to the bosses, the state and the government. We demand that the workers and the communities are consulted for discussion and the adoption of laws. We pronounce ourselves against the restriction of the right to strike contemplated in the partial reform of the Penal Code.

We fight for unity of action, through the Fronts of Struggle of the workers, peasants, students, housewives, the rural and indigenous communities, to defend the rights of the people or the conquest of new demands.

We defend the free right of trade union organization and support the indefinite extension of the Decree of Labour Irremovability and its application to all workers and employees who earn less than a million Bolívares as salary.

We condemn the employers' repression and demand exemplary sanctions against the heads of companies who violate the rights of workers and do not respect the standards of the Ministry of Labour.

We support the proposal of the UNT in the state of Sucre, where it demands that the state issue a certificate which attests that the private companies respect the rights of workers.

We support the self-organization and self-determination of the population. The communities and the workers have understood that to deepen the revolutionary process they must set up their own organizational tools, democratic, autonomous and sov-

ereign. As revolutionaries we commit ourselves to push forward and develop all the forms of self-organization adopted by the people to deepen the revolution.

We are in solidarity with all the fighters and activists, who declare themselves in rebellion against the orders imposed by the "political directors" including against the "benevolent finger" of the President, which has been used to justify corrupt and bureaucratic practices, in opposition to the right of the people to determine its political and electoral choices, as in the current electoral debate.

We give our support to those who, having won popular support in the internal elections of the parties, have presented their candidacies on an individual basis to respect the self-determination of the people.

Destitution and prison for the corrupt. No to impunity

We repudiate corruption and all the negligent practices that waste the national patrimony. We demand the immediate dismissal and imprisonment of any public or private functionary involved in fraudulent practices.

We cannot turn the page if the human, political, economic and social wrongs that the putschist company bosses and imperialism have inflicted on the people by constant conspiratorial and counter-revolutionary actions go unpunished.

Investigation and punishment of the owners of the private media who promoted the putschist actions of April 2002 and the oil sabotage. Updating of the details on the terrorist action that led to the death of Danilo Anderson [8]. Public judgment, with the participation of the trade union leaders and revolutionaries against the putschist Carlos Ortega. [9]

– We are internationalists

In insisting on our internationalist conviction we pronounce ourselves in solidarity with the peoples of the world under attack from imperialist military brutality, in particular with Iraq, Afghanistan and

Haití; in the same way that we are in solidarity with the just struggle of the Bolivian people.

We reject the pragmatic diplomacy of the government concerning the revolutionary processes in Latin America. We are for the support to all the processes of struggle and mobilization of the peoples, respecting the rhythms, dynamics and perspectives that their protagonists trace

Our methods of action: democracy and mobilization

All these demands can only be satisfied if we, workers and people, mobilize ourselves in a unitary and massive fashion to demand basic solutions to the problems that Venezuelan working people face today.

We distance ourselves totally from terrorist methods and call on the mobilization of the masses at national and international level to confront the enemies of the workers and peoples of the world who fight for their liberation.

We fight to democratize the professional, trade union, community and political structures that the workers and people adopt. Our commitment in relation to the rank and file is to struggle so that they decide.

Organizational accords

1. To set up the National Constituting Committee of the new political organization, to which we give the name PARTIDO REVOLUCIÓN Y SOCIALISMO and the acronym PRS.
2. To publish from August onwards a national bi-monthly newspaper, which we call OPCIÓN SOCIALISTA.
3. To hold regional meetings in August and September, leading to the setting up of state committees for building the Partido Revolución y Socialismo.
4. To form activist nuclei of the PRS in all the towns, neighbourhoods and workplaces.

5. To distribute the draft Political Programme and Statutes of the new organization among the activists and adherents of the new organization.

6. To hold a National Ideological Seminar on October 20, 21 and 22 so that the activists have an initial discussion to precise, complete or amend the draft Programme and Statutes and define the parameters for the drawing up of the Political Theses and Platform of Struggle of the new organization.

7. To ensure full autonomy and political independence, the new organization will not depend on any institutional or enterprise financing, so we are launching a National Financial Campaign, through which affiliates, sympathizers, friends and people in general, can give us their support and solidarity.

8. To hold a National Constituent Congress in early 2006 to adopt political and organizational theses

and the programme and statutes of the new party.

– The National Constituting Committee of the PRS is made up of four national coordinators - Orlando Chirino, Gonzalo Gomez, Miguel Angel Hernandez A. and Stalin Perez Borges - and some state coordinators: in the state of Anzoategui - Jose Boda, Luis Diaz; in that of Aragua - Emilio Bastidas, Richard Gallardo, Humberto Lopez; in that of Bolívar - Edgar Caldera, Jose Melendez, Orlando Perez; in that of Carabobo - Jose Barreto, Ismael Hernandez, William Porras, Americo Tabata, Jesus Vargas; in that of Caracas - Roger Bonilla, Marco Tulio Diaz, Tony Leon, Jose Mendoza, Franklin Zambrano ; in that of Falcon - Victor Garcia, Horacio Medina ; in that of Miranda - Armando Guerra, Yan Marciano ; in Tachira - Vilma Vivas, Javier Arellano; in Vargas - Antonio Jaspe; in Yaracuy - Hernan Brito, Oswaldo Villegas.

BRAZIL

Crisis and rebirth of the Left

FRANÇOIS SABADO ·

Although this crisis has been accelerated by the scandal of the buying of parliamentary votes by its leaders, which broke out last June, the roots of the crisis are to be found in the rapid change in the identity of the PT. [1]

Built in the course of the wave of struggles which finally put an end to the ferocious military dictatorship at the end of the 1970s, the Workers' Party brought together within its ranks militant trade unionists who were looking for a political instrument, militants from the Christian Base Communities and militants of the revolutionary Left.

So for the first time in Brazilian history, the workers established their own class political party, independent of the bourgeoisie, capable of expressing their aspirations and their demands on the political and electoral stage. This party naturally placed itself in the framework of democratic socialism, even though the socialist project that it elaborated remained vague. In the same way, it naturally took on board the mechanisms that came from the best democratic traditions of the workers' struggles from which many of its leaders had come.

Even though the PT's electoral successes fairly quickly gave it many elected representatives - a very privileged social position in Brazil - the democratic and pluralist tradition of the PT enabled it to slow down for years the process of alienation between its leadership and its members - in short, the bureaucratisation of the party.

It was only in the course of the 1990s, in particular after the neo-liberal turn of governmental policies of and the successive failures of struggles of working-class resistance, that the bureaucratisation of

the party progressed, while the level of activity of rank and file militants was in regression.

From the moment it came to power, in January 2003, the Lula government confirmed an orientation that was "in continuity" with the policies of FHC. It respected all the engagements undertaken by the Brazilian state towards the financial markets and international capitalist institutions.

The immediate consequence of the arrival in government of the PT was a new flow of members into the party. Even though for some of them that represented a political step forward and a development of their consciousness, many of these new members were seeking to take advantage of this route towards para-administrative jobs, which the PT's elected representatives and its ministers controlled. Simultaneously, the independent activity of the party generally regressed, to the benefit of the involvement in state institutions of its members, or of a wait-and-see attitude.

The social movements, in large part led by PT militants, also adopted a wait-and-see attitude towards the government. It didn't take long for it to become clear that the budget choices and the "reforms" undertaken by the government were in continuity with the neo-liberal policies of the preceding decade, worsening the attacks against the gains of the workers. The pension reform in 2003 in particular corresponded to the international orientation of capital, seeking to reduce the social wage.

It was because they refused to vote for this reform that Senator Héloisa Helena, militant of the Socialist Democracy current(DS), and the members of parliament Luciano Genro of the Movement of the Socialist Left (MES) and João Batista Oliveira de Araujo, known as Baba, of the Socialist Workers' Current (CST), were expelled from the PT in

December 2003. Their expulsion demonstrated the readiness of the PT bureaucracy to also break from its pluralist and democratic tradition.

The expelled members, joined by others - among them one of the founders of the PT and of DS, João Machado - then began building a new party of the left, the Party of Socialism and Freedom (PSOL), trying to preserve what could be preserved of the gains of class political independence, which the PT had incarnated and which it abandoned.

The Brazilian Left, up to then essentially grouped within the PT [2], was thus divided between those who were building the PSOL and those who were partisans of redressing the PT.

For a big majority of the PT Left undertook, within the party, a battle for an illusory reorientation, demarcating themselves from the most ultra neo-liberal wing, which heads the government and is identified with the Minister of Finance, Antonio Palocci, while at the same time adopting an orientation of support to the government.

The "governmentist" Left claimed that it could change the course of the government's policy. But confronted by the denunciations of one of its clients who had been caught with his fingers in the till, the PT majority and President Lula himself in no way showed a healthy reaction.

On the contrary, after having tried to snuff out the scandal by opposing a parliamentary inquiry, they tried to make the leaders of the party who are the most implicated carry the can, by once again suppressing the debate on the reasons for such degeneration.

The elections for the leadership and for president of the party (PED) did not bring the crisis under control. Certainly the Lulaist team remains in a majority, especially in the national leadership where it won almost 60 percent of the places. It also won the presidency of the party, but narrowly. Ricardo Berzoini - candidate of the majority camp - was not able to win the presidency in the first round of the PED.

Though more than 300,000 members of the PT took part in the first round, in the second round they were no more than 230,000. And as was to be expected in a party that had been taken back in hand by its bureaucratic apparatus, it was Ricardo Berzoini who won. [3]

In the second round more than 48 percent of those who took part supported the candidacy of Raul Pont, founder of the PT and of DS, former mayor of Porto Alegre, thus demonstrating the desire of tens of thousands of members to oppose the present course of the PT leadership. Raul Pont won the support of all the other minorities of the party, conducting a campaign in favour of the renewal of the PT and for a reorientation of the government's policy, while at the same time affirming his support for Lula and his government. [4] Over and above the political positions of Raul Pont, tens of thousands of PT members used his candidacy to oppose the course of the Lula leadership.

Raul Pont's political history, his position on the left of the party, his courage, his integrity, enabled these thousands of PT members to demonstrate their discontent by voting for him. But the support of the DS leadership and of Raul Pont to the Lula government also contributed to make his candidacy appear as one of moderate opposition, thus giving guarantees to an important part of the PT apparatus.

The sectors of the Left who remain within the PT nevertheless consider that the PED has shown that the party has a certain vitality, by mobilizing for the internal vote more than 30 percent of its members. "This level of participation reaffirms that the PT is the principal left party in the country and convinces us that a way out of the crisis can be obtained through the strength of the militants", declared Raul Pont on October 11th.

These sectors are trying to mobilize their bases for the next congress of the party in December and intend to take an active part in the electoral campaign of the PT in 2006. But the price to be paid for remaining inside the PT under these conditions is a

heavy one: to support the government, to belong to the same party as the leaders who are accused of corruption, to be in solidarity with one of the most consistently neo-liberal policies in Latin America. And that price will have to be paid during the coming political and social tests.

If the "governmentist" opposition follows its present logic, it will call for a vote in the next election for Lula or one of his supporters. How then can they defend anti-capitalist positions and support Lula when there will be a candidate, Héloisa Helena, who will defend a series of radical positions against liberal capitalism? How can hundreds of DS members support Lula against Heloisa? There is a crucial choice to be made there for the months and years to come!

Parallel to the worsening of the crisis of the PT, those who made the choice of building the PSOL are scoring points. Since Brazilian law demands that a party, in order to be legally recognized and be able to present candidates in elections, must gather nearly 450,000 signatures, the PSOL conducted a mass campaign at the same time as taking part in all the debates and unceasingly criticizing the government's orientation, whose balance sheet from the workers' point of view is becoming increasingly heavy. The PSOL thus succeeded in depositing the signatures, having them validated at state level and finally, on September 16th, being recognized as a legal party by the Higher Electoral Tribunal.

The PSOL thus appears as being able to aim at regrouping a Left which is seeking a political instrument for social transformation. So at the end of September the recomposition of the Left speeded up.

On the 24th, in the course of a public meeting in Fortaleza, capital of the state of Ceara, João Alfredo, federal member of parliament and DS member, announced that he was joining the PSOL along with two-thirds of local DS members. The state of Ceara was the strongest bastion of DS after Rio Grande Do Sul. The mayor of Fortaleza,

Luisianne Lins, as well as several other local DS cadres, is however remaining within the PT, and the militants who have joined the PSOL have announced that they will support the local administration of Luisianne.

On 26th, 27th, and 28th September, the press announced the move to the PSOL of leaders and militants of the PT Left in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Campinas, etc. In São Paulo the DS federal member of parliament, Orlando Fantazzini, announced that he was joining the PSOL along with several hundred militants. In Rio it was also the case with federal member of parliament, Chico Alencar, a historic personality of the PT Left.

At the same time, Ivan Valente and Maninha, two other federal members of parliament, militants of APS (Action for Socialism, which was formerly known as Socialist Force, the third big current of the PT Left) announced that they were joining the PSOL. It appears that the entire APS current has decided to do the same. This current supported the candidacy of Plínio de Arruda Sampaio - a historic figure of the PT, identified with the important current of the Christian Left - for the post of president of the PT. Plínio, who was seen as the candidate the furthest to the left in this PED, and who had obtained 13.4 per cent of the vote on September 18th, also announced that he was joining the PSOL.

A number of other national, regional, and local leaders of the PT Left and other small left currents also announced that they were leaving the PT for the PSOL. Worth mentioning in particular are the Movement for Socialist Unity (MUS) - a current which split from the MES of Luciana Genro in 2004, considering that it was necessary to continue the fight within the PT - and well known leaders of the left of the United Workers Confederation (CUT) such as Jordinho.

So the PSOL has seen an important inflow of new members at the same time as it won its legal recognition, which will enable it to be present in the electoral campaign in 2006. Today it has a federal parliamentary group of seven members of parliament

and two senators [5], which guarantees it a presence in the media.

The opinion polls indicate a significant result for the candidacy to the presidency of the Republic in 2006 of its best-known leader, Heloisa Helena. So the PSOL appears as the political instrument capable of preserving the best gains of the PT and a not negligible part of its militant capital.

So the crisis of the first attempt of the Brazilian working class to rise to the level of political independence is going to be lasting. And the division of the Brazilian Left among those who, despite their subordinate position, continue to hope for a re-

founding of the PT from within and those who have undertaken too the degeneration of their party of origin, will still be prolonged.

If the coming opening of the electoral campaign will not make it easier to seek terrains of united action between the two components of the Brazilian Left, the militants of the PSOL, involved in social movements, have already taken initiatives aiming to preserve this framework of united action and to set up forums for debates which can facilitate coming together.

Paris October 12th, 2005

IRAQ

On the Sunni vote in the Constitutional Referendum

GILBERT ACHCAR ·

A summary of the official positions:

The Islamic Party: As is well-known, the only major Sunni political force to have called for casting a YES vote in the referendum is the Islamic Party. This is the Iraqi branch of the Muslim Brotherhood (though the Association of Muslim Scholars is also close to the international MB).

Among Iraqi Sunni groups, the IP is one of the most susceptible to pressure from the Saudi Kingdom and Jordan, and has for long collaborated with the US along with the bulk of Iraqi opposition in exile before the fall of Saddam Hussein.

They reversed their position on the constitution after an agreement with the Shiite and Kurdish coalitions, brokered by US Ambassador Khalilzad, according to which there will be a procedure to amend the constitution after the election of a new Parliament in December (by majority vote in the new Assembly, which, if secured, is to be followed by a popular referendum with the same rule as in the October 15 referendum: two-thirds voting NO in three provinces would defeat the amendments).

The reversal in the IP's attitude led to splits within its ranks, and even violent attacks on some of its offices and members, but the attacks were condemned by most other Sunni forces.

Boycotters: The first Sunni-based forces that have defined an attitude toward the constitutional referendum were, of course, for its boycott as a matter of "principle." They were two: 1) the Ba'ath Party (communiqué of the pan-Arab leadership dated September 9 and communiqué of the Iraqi leadership the same month) calling for a boycott of the referendum to deprive it from any legitimacy (political groups serving as legal facades for the Ba'ath, like the "Supreme Committee of Patriotic Forces-Wahj al-Iraq," followed suit); and 2) Zarqawi's al-

Qaida branch in Iraq, which did not only warn against any participation in the referendum—from both a "principled" ultra-fundamentalist attitude against any human-made constitution and an anti-occupation stance—but also accompanied its threats with violent actions against those calling for the participation.

"No" Voters: Four major armed groups called on their followers to cast a NO vote in the referendum in order to defeat the draft by gathering the required two-thirds majority in three provinces: these are The Islamic Army in Iraq, The Army of Mujahideen, The Movement of Islamic Resistance (Hamas-Brigades of the 1920 Revolution) and The Islamic Front of the Islamic Resistance.

These groups, which initially were calling for a boycott, explained the reversal in their position in a communiqué released on the day of the referendum with the following basic arguments: they do not want to be accused one more time of preventing fellow Sunnis from acting politically; the recently defined rule that made the rejection pending on two-thirds of actual voters in three provinces instead of registered voters; they got guarantees that the Sunnis would supervise their voting areas so that no falsification of the results would be possible; there is a big part of the Iraqi people, Sunnis and Shiites, opposed to the draft, and therefore there is a great hope to defeat it.

The groups added accusations to the US of trying to prevent the Sunni regions from taking part in the vote for fear of a defeat of the draft, referring to the recent onslaught by US forces that started in Tal Afar and extended to Samara, Ramadi, etc.

The only remaining major Sunni armed group is the Army of Ansar al-Sunna. They simply did not issue a position, probably torn between their incli-

nation to boycott and the desire not to stand against what has become the dominant trend among Sunnis.

Coalition of Sunni Political Groups

Several Sunni political groups called similarly for casting a NO vote in the referendum. However the official statement of the coalition gathered around the Association of Muslim Scholars, the Council of Iraqi National Dialogue, acting as a the political counterpart of the armed groups, both Fundamentalists and Ba'athists, left the matter open between boycott and NO vote, just calling for a rejection of the draft by all "legal" means, i.e. avoiding violence.

Explaining that they were not convinced of reversing their rejection of the draft after the last-minute agreement between the Islamic Party and the Shiite and Kurdish coalitions, their spokesperson, Saleh al-Mutlak (or Mutlaq: there are different spellings of his name in Arabic sources), used the following argument to reject the agreement, which is a striking and amazing illustration of the double standard applied by Iraqi factions in their political reasoning: he said that the rule of two-thirds in three provinces (that would be enough to defeat future amendments) is unfair because it would allow majorities in three provinces to defeat what 80% of the Iraqi people would have adopted!

Here are excerpts from an analysis of the referendum in the Sunni provinces by an insider Sunni source, published on the evening of Saturday October 15 after the end of the vote. It sheds an interesting light on the dissensions among Sunni forces and their motivations.

The Votes of Sunnis were lost between the Islamic Party's Conspiracy and Zarqawi's Fanatism

Mufakkirat al-Islam, Oct. 15

Although four of the major and most influent resistance groups on the Iraqi scene called Sunni Iraqis yesterday to go to the polling centers and cast a NO vote on the constitution, reality was contrary to

what was expected from all Sunni circles, as our correspondents have reported that the regions falling under the control of al-Qaida's organization in Iraq have seen almost nil or insignificant rates of votes in the referendum.

This has incited Sunni Iraqis against the position of al-Qaida's organization because it contradicted the rest of jihadist combatant groups in Iraq that requested from the Sunnis to vote in order to abort the constitution.

Mufakkirat al-Islam's correspondent in Ramadi reported that four Sunni citizens were killed this morning in the early hours of the referendum by elements of al-Qaida's organization, as they were coming out of one of the polling stations after voting NO, according to their relatives. This has created a state of fear among city residents and prevented them from taking part in the vote although the number of registered voters in Ramadi reached 347,000 ...

Sheikh Abdul-Sattar Muhammad, one of the imams and preachers of Fallujah, said that al-Qaida's organization made a huge error in preventing the people by threats and intimidations to take part in the vote, adding that al-Qaida contributed with other groups to the marginalization of the Sunnis and their impotence in the face of Shiites, Kurds and secular parties... He said also that if al-Qaida's elements had let the people vote, the constitution would have been rejected by 100% of Sunnis and would have been aborted, while it would have been proved that Sunnis are not a minority in Iraq...

Whereas the Islamic Party has deliberately contributed in splitting the votes of the Sunnis in calling for a "yes" vote, Zarqawi has also given a gift to the occupation and the Safawi [a pejorative formula used in Sunni circles to designate the Shiites deemed to be "Iranian agents"] followers of Sistani by contributing unknowingly, through their threats to the voters, to the neutralization of the Sunni votes opposed to this constitution, under which the Iraqis may have to live miserably for a long period. It would have been better if it had behaved like the

Army of Ansar al-Sunna, as said one of the mosque imams in Mosul...

The question now in Iraq is when will al-Qaida's organization stop allowing the assassination of Muslims under various pretexts, after the murder of some Sunnis in Ramadi today because they took part in the vote, and, before that, the authorization to kill members of the Islamic Party.

Before that also al-Qaida's followers turned their weapons against members of other armed groups during the second siege of Fallujah under the pre-

text that they ought to accept Zarqawi's leadership after Usama bin Laden's appeal to this end. This attitude weakened the ranks of the resistance and allowed US occupation forces to execute their well-known offensive in the southern part of Fallujah...

Through their political facades and their jihadist groups, the Sunnis wanted by voting to impede the Safawi dream, supported by the occupation and Iran, and this by harassing the occupation and its agents politically, while the resistance is carrying on its steadfast action in combating the occupier.

VENEZUELA

Revolution in the revolution?

FABRICE THOMAS ·

Above all, the workers and the inhabitants of the poor neighbourhoods have become conscious of their strength. They increasingly want to participate actively in the transformation of society. There lies the fundamental basis for the future deepening of the revolution in Venezuela.

This thirst for active participation manifests itself first and foremost in the popular neighbourhoods of the big cities, inside the activist networks that support and give life to the "missions", the social campaigns sponsored by the government outside of the state structures. Some tens of thousands of the inhabitants of the poorer neighbourhoods - the "barrios" - devote their time and enthusiasm to furthering the success of the education and health programmes.

It is from the massive and determined support of the people of these neighbourhoods that Chávez draws his main strength.

However, the weaknesses of the process are also apparent here in these neighbourhoods, which account for more than half the population of a town like Caracas. Problems like unemployment, poverty, insanitary housing and lack of resources remain far from being settled.

Everyday there are neighbourhood mobilizations to demand that the parliamentary deputies, for the most part "chavista", fulfill their electoral promises. Corruption and clientelism have not disappeared and the "missions" sometimes involve those associated with "chavismo" reviving some of the practices of the preceding régime.

What is new, however, is that the people of the neighbourhoods are rebelling against these practices. In the "barrios" it is no longer enough to don a red beret (a Chavista symbol) to be untouchable.

This rise in discontent and demands does not only affect the cities. In July peasants demonstrated in their thousands in Caracas to demand the extension of the agrarian reform and the punishment of the armed bands of the landowners. The Indian communities in the west of the country, threatened with expulsion because of mining development, brandished their banners throughout the world festival of youth in Caracas in August.

The most significant phenomenon of recent months has been the rise in power of the trade union federation, the UNT. [1] The leadership of the old federation, the CTV, has passed bag and baggage to the side of the employers and reaction, so the union movement is in full recomposition.

In many workplaces new union activist networks are organizing, overthrowing by referendum the old bureaucratized union leaderships and mostly affiliating to the UNT. The latter is now the most important union federation in the country with perhaps more than a million members.

Militants of the revolutionary left, in particular the comrades of the former OIR [2] are at the forefront of this movement. With other currents which support the process, they fight for the structuring of the UNT as a class struggle trade union federation, independent of the government, even if, faced with reaction and imperialism, it is situated clearly in the camp of "Chavismo".

For tens of thousands of workers in all branches, it is about recovering their unions and, with confidence regained, to struggle for improved rights, wages and working conditions. At the same time that the independent trade union movement is being reborn, conflicts are multiplying: against the bosses, often allied to the former trade union bu-

reaucrats, but sometimes also against local notables.

In these conflicts the workers and union activists call on the governors, "Chavista" ministers, indeed Chávez himself. However, this support is far from being automatic and often remains verbal, which gives the new union networks even more incentive to conquer their independence.

The multiplication and impact of the experiences of "co-management" is another sign of the workers' desire to play a greater role in the transformations underway. Behind the word "co-management" there are certainly very different projects and realities. But the companies where the workers have acquired a real power are increasing and the debate on the content and the objectives of co-management has been launched across the country.

It is incontestably in the nationalized aluminium company Alcasa that the experience has been at its broadest. The directorate has been renewed by the vote of the workers and the strategic orientations of the company are subject to the approval of workshop delegates.

Alcasa has become a symbol that disturbs many. The resistance of employers or governmental sectors concerned by any idea of "workers' control" has shown that this does not amount only to a theoretical debate but is about power inside the company. A law on the right to work is in preparation and is fiercely discussed.

These convergent phenomena have led revolutionary activists to throw themselves into the construction of a new political organization, the Revolution and Socialism Party (PRS). It is an initiative originating with Trotskyist militants, but not them alone.

It already has several hundred members, for the most part workers involved in the construction of

the new union federation, the UNT. It seeks to rally all those who are not content to support the government of Chávez, but advocate the "revolution in the revolution" and the perspective of a socialist transformation of society.

For these comrades the construction of such an organization is both necessary and opportune.

Necessary because the official parties that support Chávez do not respond to the need for political and class independence which grow among the workers and in the population. Necessary because the contradictions or conflicts inside the "Chavista" camp will provoke reaction if they do not find an expression, a programme, which goes in the direction of the deepening of the revolution.

Opportune, because the debate on socialism has been launched by Chávez himself and corresponds to the questions and expectations of thousands of militants involved in the process.

The first steps towards the construction of this organization (a meeting of 450 people in Caracas in July, the publication in August of the political declaration that can be read below) have raised hopes but also fears and criticisms. Which is not astonishing given what is at stake.

The existing political organizations that support the process in Venezuela do not offer guarantees as to their will to transform society and ensure that power genuinely passes into the hands of the workers. The "Chavista" parties - Fifth Republic Movement (MVR), "Podemos" or "Patria Para Todos" - are primarily electoral machines and suppliers of cadres, while others like the Venezuelan Communist Party show little autonomy in relation to the government.

The comrades of the PRS have begun the difficult task of construction of a new party, a tool for the workers. They have the right to all our solidarity and to all the support we can bring to them.

BRAZILIAN LEFT

Left candidate narrowly misses presidency of PT

Ricardo Berzoini, the candidate of the Majority Camp and close to President Lula, won 51.6%. The total number of PT members voting was 228,175 - just over 30% of the total.

The different left slates that supported Raul Pont in the second round are now negotiating with the Majority Camp the make up of the incoming party executive. Berzoini, who was the Lula government's Minister of Pensions when it pushed through a controversial pension reform in 2003, said he wanted to see an "executive of unity", in which all PT currents felt represented. He believed this would break with the domination of the party by a single dominant voice, and prepare the PT for the challenge of re-electing Lula in 2006.

Raul Pont also pointed to a new balance of forces in the PT. He indicated the small margin of Berzoini's victory, and the fact that although the Majority Camp has the largest representation on the new national leadership, all together the opposition slates elected 41 of the National Directorate's 81 members. "This gives us a new legitimacy on the leadership", he said. However, Pont added that he and his supporters had not yet discussed whether he should accept Berzoini's offer the post of General Secretary of the PT.

Exactly what course the PT should adopt now, following the devastating allegations of illegal party finances and political corruption in Congress, will be at the centre of the PT National Meeting scheduled for December.

As the party's new President, Ricardo Berzoini, himself a former leader of the bankworkers' union, insists he wants to develop "a new road fundamentally tied to workers' struggles, national sovereignty and democratizing access to basic rights".

But Valter Pomar, a leader of the Left Articulation current, who came in third place just behind Raul Pont in the first round of the internal elections, and supported Raul in the second round, says that "with policies like those of the last three years we cannot win the elections in 2006".

For his part, Raul Pont argues that if the party is going to hang on to its traditional supporters among the popular classes, there will have to be changes on a series of questions like the minimum wage, pensions and income tax. "There has to be a sign", he says. "It's not that we're going to solve all the problems before (the elections) next year. But it is essential that the government gives a clear sign of the side it is on, that it is seeking to advance its project."

In a communique released earlier, when it already looked certain that he had lost, Raul Pont elaborated further. "Whatever the result," he wrote, "we will continue to raise the same banners and ideals: the need for the PT to be autonomous from our government, to draw up a programme of economic and social development that recovers the PT's commitment to the majority of the population and makes possible the re-election of our project; the defence of the broadest possible internal democracy, of open debate and the elaboration of policies by party bodies and the active participation of the members; the necessary creation of a party Ethics Commission to analyse the accusations against party leaders, as the body that can both guarantee the accused their right of defence and defend the party itself. It is with this commitment to renewal of the party that I want to invite all of you to take an active part in the party Congress, which will have the character of a true PT constituent assembly."

While lamenting the fact that a number of MPs and other activists had left the PT to join the PSOL (see below) as "grave political error", and one that had

certainly damaged the chances of the left in these internal leadership elections, Raul Pont called for unity in action. "If our enemy is the right and the centre-right, if our greatest adversary is imperialism, he said, it would be a political mistake for the PT not to play its part as the biggest party on the left and act as a pole of attraction for the others. I have no problem calling on these parties. I know they have a very sectarian attitude towards the PT, but I don't think we should reciprocate."

NB. Much of the information and quotations above are from an article by Verena Glass published by the alternative news agency Carta Maior on 14 October. The interview below with Raul Pont was published earlier by Carta Maior, at the beginning of the second round campaign.

INTERVIEW WITH RAUL PONT

Raul Pont, former mayor of Porto Alegre and a founder member of the Workers' Party (PT) says the second round of the PT's internal elections will not be a confrontation between those for or against the Lula government, but a debate on the policies which have led the PT into crisis. A deputy in the state of Rio Grande do Sul and a supporter of the Socialist Democracy tendency, Pont will participate in the second round of the elections, scheduled for October 9, against the federal deputy Ricardo Berzoini [1], a supporter of the majority camp.

Pont came second in the first round of voting, narrowly beating Valter Pomar, candidate of the Left Articulation. Now Pont prepares for a new struggle, with the challenge of unifying the left sectors of the party while countering the dissidents who threaten to leave the party and winning the support of the more moderate sectors in order to defeat the majority camp in the second round.

This represents a new political challenge in the life of this gaúcho from Uruguaiana, who has been in the PT since the beginning. Pont began his political activity in the student movement in the late 1960s, when he was elected president of the Central Leadership of the students of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul.

A graduate in history with a doctorate in political science from the University of Campinas (Unicamp), he taught political sociology and economy at the University. A state and federal deputy during the lifetime of four legislatures, he was also mayor of Porto Alegre, where he participated in the installation of the participatory budget.

Raul Pont

A firm defender of popular participation as a policy of public management and the promotion of citizenship Pont is the author of books like "From the critique of populism to the construction of the PT", "Short history of the PT, from the origins to the first congress, 1979-1991", "Democracy, participation, citizenship - a left vision". In 2002 he was again elected deputy in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, coming first among PT candidates and in second position among all deputies elected, with 69,453 votes.

In this interview Pont analyses the meaning of the confrontation with Ricardo Berzoini at a time when the PT faces the most serious crisis in its history. He rejects the polarization put forward by the candidate of the majority camp, according to which the confrontation in the second round will be between those who defend the Lula government and those who don't. "Berzoini is trying to create a tainted and fallacious debate" says Pont, indicating the tone of his campaign that will attempt to convince the majority of PT members of the need for a new orientation in the party.

Carta Maior: In your view, what is the meaning of the second round contest at a time when the PT is experiencing the most severe crisis in its history?

Raul Pont: One of the main conclusions that we can draw from the first round is that it was a demonstration of the vitality and strength of the party's activism.

The activist base responded to the appeal to take not only the question of internal succession, but also to confront the campaign waged in recent months in the midst of the wave of denunciations

of corruption, which has been transformed into a direct attack against the party.

Many of our adversaries seek to use this campaign to destroy the PT as a political force. And our militancy has given a vigorous response to this. Now, in the second round, we need to strengthen this mobilization and work to give a new orientation to the party.

How do you see the chances for your candidacy?

If we add together the six currents which are opposed to the majority camp, it amounts to nearly 170,000 members *1 who have come out in favour of theses critical of the current leadership of the party and the manner in which the PT has carried out some of the Lula government's policies, in particular in the economic field.

These votes clearly express an aspiration to reorient the party and the government. We have criticisms, we want to correct these orientations, without leaving the party and without ceasing to defend the government. This has received massive support from the members and we believe this can be expressed in the second round. There is no guarantee that this will happen, but the conditions are favorable.

Will the decision by Plínio de Arruda Sampaio to leave the party, with a group of members of parliament and activists, undermine your campaign in the second round?

I believe this decision by Plínio, Ivan Valente and other comrades is a political error. It is a lamentable attitude because it takes the road of the breakup and atomization of the left and in no way helps to give a new orientation to the most significant experience that the Brazilian left has built.

That will do us some damage, but I believe that the majority of members who voted in favour of the candidacy of Plínio will remain in the party and will support us in the second round. For this reason I

do not believe that we have lost the majority of these votes.

Ricardo Berzoini

According to what has been announced up until now, the decision to leave the PT is limited to the APS (Socialist Popular Action). Broad sectors linked to the Catholic Church and the Socialist Forum and Socialist Brazil tendencies (who supported Plínio) will stay with us in the second round. But it is lamentable.

In several debates that we participated in for the first round, Plínio said that in the second round he would support the left candidate who polled the most votes. The other candidates in this camp made the same commitment. By leaving the party, he has weakened this unity.

How do you expect to overcome this obstacle and reorient the party?

We defend the unity of all the forces opposed to the manner in which the majority camp has led the party, with the objective of orienting the PT on a new road. In this goal we defend what we have advocated since the beginning: the calling of a party congress before the end of the year and we wish to carry through the process of evaluation of the irregularities which have been committed and the censure of those who have been responsible.

The congress is not only about updating our programme and preparing the party for the 2006 elections, but also defining a politics to turn around, in the short term the orientation of the government.

We want to change, for example, the policy that established a large primary budget surplus - a mechanism that ensures the transfer of a significant share of the economies made by the country to financial income.

We want to prepare the government and the party to face a second term. For this we say that we need a different policy of alliances to that practiced until now. We also defend the resumption of the strategic debate on the PT's socialism. We need to relo-

cate the magnetic north of a utopia for our strategy. Without that, we are going nowhere. .

What will be your strategy for the second round campaign, which will be very short?

It's true, we have only a few days to campaign. I believe that it will be important at least to ensure a wide debate on a national scale, as in the debate before the first round which was transmitted by CBN. We will not have time to get to all the states.

We had the intention of getting to the states we could not visit before the first round, but we need to concentrate our forces on the main electoral colleges. It is not a strain.

For example São Paulo is the biggest electoral college in the country Berzoini's main strength is located there. Outside São Paulo, there are other big electoral colleges like Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais and Paraná, where the majority of party members are concentrated. In Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina we can already count on the support of other left currents, like Left Articulation.

We need the support of São Paulo, Paraná, Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro, because these are the main electoral colleges. We have around a week and a half to do this and visit wherever possible.

Ricardo Berzoini has said the second round will be an election polarized between those

who defend the Lula government and those who don't. Do you agree?

This is a false polarization. Berzoini is trying to create a tainted and fallacious debate. The question is not one of being for or against the Lula government. The question debated by the whole of the party is the crisis we are going through today. It is about whether the policy of alliances which has been adopted has yielded good results, and the reply is negative. That's what we should debate and respond to .

At the end of the day, has this policy of alliances been positive for the party? Has the governance built with these forces helped our government to realize the reforms and policies it advocated? It seems obvious it hasn't.

Today we are once more put in difficulties in the election of the president of the Chamber of Deputies.. And it is starting from this evaluation that we formulate our criticisms and make our balance sheet, not on the basis of this fallacious polarization.

The entire PT has elected the government and defends it. What we need to do is discuss how to make it advance and how not to repeat the errors which have been committed and which have cost us all dear.

Interview by Marco Weissheimer

REVIEW

Condition critical - health care under neoliberalism

ALAN THORNETT ·

But the book is justified in starting with Britain, especially so at a time when such attacks on health care (or "reforms" as he points out the perpetrators prefer to call them) are being driven forward in new Labour's third term in the form of new levels of privatisation and marketisation of the service.

In fact these "reforms" represent one of the biggest attacks on the British National Health Service since its inception in 1948. The book points out that health policy "reform" has gone further and faster in Britain than anywhere else in the world and that new attacks are under way.

San Francisco health professionals say it all. Photo: Basetree

Also, given John Lister's two decades and more as a leading health campaigner, you expect a robust defence of the NHS against these attacks which threaten its very existence as a comprehensive, publicly owned, service, free at the point of delivery. The book does not disappoint in this regard. It is a detailed defence of publicly own health care and could hardly be more timely as a result.

None of these attributes, however, reflect the full scope of the book in my view. The book's rather down-played sub-title gets a lot closer to the mark. It describes it as "A Critical Guide to the Global 'Health Reform' Industry".

The book points out that, "Health care is one of the world's biggest industries, accounting for global spending just short of 3 trillion US dollars in 1997, or almost 8% of the world gross domestic product. It is also a major employer: the health care workforce, numbering up to 35 million world-wide is the biggest of any industry. Policy decisions affecting health care systems therefore not only service

users, but potentially the jobs, pay, and conditions of staff".

It continues, "Health related industries, notably those manufacturing pharmaceuticals and modern diagnostic equipment, along with US private health insurers and health maintenance organisations are amongst the world's biggest companies with turnovers in tens of millions of dollars".

In fact the book contains an impressive comparative analysis of health-care systems world-wide under the impact of neo-liberal globalisation - with Britain as the starting point of the "reform" process. It gives an important overview of the reforms, the reformers, the material and ideological forces driving them, the impact of their policies on the consumers and the health care workforce.

It analyses the "reform process" by means of case studies from 42 different countries, covering five continents, over the last 15-20 years - countries as diverse as France, Germany, Holland, Russia, Poland, Hungary, Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, China, India, Japan, Canada, USA, Australia, Argentina, Colombia, Nicaragua and Cuba.

It concludes that there is no evidence that the reforms imposed by successive British governments can deliver better, cheaper, more efficient or more accessible services for patients than a fully public sector service - quite the reverse.

An interesting example from this study is the diverging paths between the Canadian and US health care systems. These systems had been similar in structure and costs until the 1960s. Since then the Canadian system has developed as a universal, tax-funded system which is vastly cheaper than the chaotic \$1.4 trillion US system that leaves 61 million Americans without adequate health cover but costs \$400 billion a year to administer.

A major theme of the book is the staggering inequality of healthcare world-wide. It points out that the cost of the US system is "more than four times the total health spending of the lowest-spending 62 countries, including India and China". It points out that the USA with around 5% of the world's population spends over 40% of the world's total health budget.

It goes on: "Health care spending is almost completely inversely proportional to the global burden of disease. The World Health Organisation's World Health (WHO) Report pointed out that 84% of the world's population shared just 11% of global health spending, but suffered 93% of the world's burden of disease.

"By the 1990s the top 29 countries, grouped in the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), accounted for 90% of total world expenditure on health, leaving the vast majority of the world's population to share the remaining 10%".

The book explains that Japan, with a similar size population as Nigeria spends 270 times more than Nigeria on health care. Also that while in Europe the median age of death is 75, the median for Africa is just *five*- in other words *around half of all African deaths occur in children under five years old*.

Although the book is, in part, an academic study, it is written from an uncompromisingly class-based Marxist standpoint. John Lister puts it this way: "A Marxist analysis offers the possibility of a consistent and critical analysis of the context, the content the motivation, and the material (class) interests served by particular policies or 'reforms'."

It is certainly the only study of world health-care systems containing numerous quotations from Trotsky (*The Revolution Betrayed*), Marx (*The German Ideology*) and from Lenin (*Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*).

Essentially the book argues that while the liberalised market is a disaster for society in general it is

a particular disaster in health provision. In this it starts from an analysis of the market from a classical Marxists position: "capitalism is a system driven by the accumulation of capital, through the production and exchange of commodities" and reaches the conclusion that, however: "it is not necessary to embrace a Marxists analysis to conclude that unbridled market mechanisms are incompatible with the equitable provision of health care."

From this point of view the book has a substantial chapter on the global agencies of capitalism and their role in promoting health policy 'reform' world-wide entitled "In the driving seat: international agencies and the transmission of policy ideas". This deals with the role of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the OECD the European Central Bank

It analyses the role of these institutions - the World Bank in particular - in using their economic power to promote privatisation and the imposition of user fees, despite the abundant evidence that this deters the poorest and most needy in society from accessing the services desperately they need.

On the impact of these policies on developing countries it points out that: "Perhaps the most influential policy document shaping health policy for developing countries in the 1990s was the (World) Bank's 1993 World Development Report. This effectively proposed the consolidation of a two-tier global health care system, in which the wealthy countries would remain free to spend as much as they wish but publicly funded hospital care in the developing countries would be reduced to a rudimentary minimum, or privatised."

In the country by country summary the book takes the example of Kenya to show how the impact of global capital and agencies such as the World Bank have helped undermine health gains which were achieved immediately after independence, while the attempt to introduce a new social health insurance system to deliver free care for the whole population has faced opposition from trade unions be-

cause it lands the bulk of the cost on the minority of the population who are in formal employment.

Similarly the remarkable health gains of the Sandinista revolution have also been effectively wiped out by years of neoliberal policies and economic pressure from the World Bank and IMF to cut back health spending in one of Latin America's poorest countries.

By contrast, the book also notes that while the World Bank has been pressing for poor countries to minimise spending on hospital care, and for their governments to fund only the most minimal package of primary care, immunisation and health education, it has been the country that has most flouted these guidelines - Cuba - which has delivered the most spectacular success.

It points out that Cuba's publicly-owned health care system, tax-funded and delivering a combination of primary care high-tech hospital care and public health measures free of charge to all, was ignored in World Bank reports until the end of 2003. While the poorest countries that caved in to World Bank guidance are still counting the cost in ill-health and low life expectancy, Cuba has lower infant mortality than Washington DC.

If there is a weak spot in the wealth of material the book has to offer I felt it was its lack of detailed analysis of the role of the pharmaceutical companies in all this given the huge role they play. Their role is covered but they are not subjected to the depth of analysis afforded to the many other aspects of this vast subject. Maybe it was beyond the scope of this book and requires a separate work. Such a study would add a lot to the overall picture of, and problems of, health care world-wide.

Meanwhile John Lister's book is a valuable resource for the movement today and we should make full use of all it has to offer both in defending health care against the new attacks which are taking and in advancing the kind of alternative we have to offer as socialists.

John Lister is a campaigning journalist and an editor of Socialist Resistance who has worked for 21 years for the health watchdog London Health Emergency. He has carried out numerous research projects for the trade unions and activists fighting hospital closures, privatisation and deregulation.

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 BRAZIL

The collapse of the PT and rebuilding the Brazilian left

FELIX SANCHEZ ·

The Congress showed its congenital weakness, its venality, and the party system laid bare its entrails, showing the limits of the Brazilian version of democracy. These limits are set by the contradiction between the desire for change, expressed by the voters in 2002, and the continuation, even the accentuation, of an economic model that had been rejected at the ballot box.

They are also determined by the supremacy of the government's economic decision-makers, cutting and re-allocating budget resources already decided by Congress. Thus a democracy which does not discuss the most important questions becomes a fake democracy, a democracy which submits to the dictatorship of the markets serves for very little.

Whatever the outcome of this crisis, it will result in great losses, a great loss of credibility for political participation and the political awareness of the workers and the people, and a questioning of much that the left has achieved over three decades of struggle. A great responsibility now rests on all those in the popular and democratic camp, who must collectively seek solutions that minimize the losses we are suffering.

2. Nonetheless, this shared responsibility cannot conceal the central source of this crisis. This is the PT's inability to carry out a government of change. Led by the self-proclaimed "Majority Camp", the PT abandoned its programme of social transformation and signed up to neo-liberalism.

Distancing itself from its social base, the Lula government entered into a consortium with all that is most corrupt and degenerate in Brazilian politics (PL, PP, PTB), moving onto terrain where the se-

ductive and corrosive power of money exerts all its force.

In spite of Lula's attempts to shift all the blame onto the PT, the responsibility for the crisis - in all its legal and illegal ramifications - passes directly through the presidential palace.

3. The possibility that some members of parliament involved in the investigations may have their mandates revoked, both from the PT and other parties, does not alter one jot the character of the government and its promiscuous relations with sections of speculative and finance capital, in other words its present class commitments.

It is therefore not correct to confine the problem of corruption to the PT, as if the government played no part in this process of degeneration.

The project which has dominated the PT, conceived and implemented by a part of the leadership, that of seizing the state apparatus, as well as the methods used to do it, were developed as a means of winning control of central government - they crystallised around Lula's election to the presidency. Lula himself is the central figure in this project. He is responsible for its consequences alongside Jose Dirceu and figures like Palocci and Gushiken.

4. The crisis shows that internal corruption has existed for a long time in a party dominated by a political group that felt no constraints on its action. Therefore there was never any real "dispute" over the government's direction, from the popular camp's point of view, between different sections of the 'majority camp'.

The alignment with neo-liberal economic policies, the alliances with parties of the right, the change in the party's social base and the containment and co-opting of the social movements - all these initia-

tives were perfectly coherent with the development of this plan to win and hold power at the expense of enormous pro-grammatic and ethical transgressions.

It is a classic (and tragic) case of the degeneration and bureaucratisation of a political current that had its roots in the popular camp and the socialist movement. *But it is now clear that the PT left also made many mistakes.* Whether on purpose, through apathy, or by mistake, it turned a blind eye to various aspects of a process that had long been undermining the party's vitality. We have to recognise that we failed to make the right criticisms, at the right time, with the right force.

5. The ideas and methods of the "majority camp" did not spring up during the Lula government; they already existed, especially in the PT local governments in São Paulo state. It is revealing - of the control that this majority machine exerts over the party - that the accusations of corruption came first from the allies on the right.

And that any reduction in the influence exerted by what now looks like the "rotten bunch" within the Majority Camp, that linked to Jose Dirceu, can only happen by strengthening Lula's direct or indirect control over the party machinery, as witnessed by the appointment of former ministers into key posts in the party leadership, and by the various proposals for "refounding" the party.

Although these proposals have always run into opposition from the minority currents on the left of the PT, which kept alight a struggle over the course taken by the party, *this struggle is now pointless.* It has been reduced to a fight between two bureaucratized sectors for control of an electoral machine stripped of any potential as an instrument of change.

6. With this crisis the Lula government has lost its last progressive vestiges. The representatives of the left who remain in the government have a merely decorative role - lending a thin veneer of legitimacy to a government that is struggling to survive through until the end of its mandate. It is a weak

government, hostage to the PSDB and the PFL (the main right-wing parties), which is likely to deepen its neo-liberal policies as a strategy to avoid impeachment and/or regain some room for manoeuvre.

7. Unlike European social democracy, Lula's conversion to neo-liberalism followed the Brazilian tradition of conciliation between new and old elites. A large part of the popular leadership forged in the struggles of the 1970s and 80s was co-opted by the state apparatus, with no attempt to preserve the gains of its original social base.

In fact, the basis of support for the Lula government and even for the PT has been rapidly modified over the last three years, since the publication of the Letter to the Brazilians in 2002 (Known sarcastically as 'Letter to the Bankers' by the left, this was the campaign document that pledged a future Lula government to respect the agreements with the IMF made by the previous administration-Trans Note.) The relationship with the organized movements soon changed into one of co-option and bribery, and in the case of the more militant sectors, open antagonism.

8. The threat of impeachment, held like Damocles sword over the head of Lula and his team, became a real possibility after the declarations of (Lula's campaign) publicist, Duda Mendonça. But as was made absolutely clear in an editorial on the Lula government in the Estado de São Paulo, entitled 'Bad with him, worse without', this option is not supported by a majority of the Brazilian bourgeoisie.

(Former president) Fernando Henrique Cardoso has, since the beginning of the crisis, pointed out that the ruling classes are not interested in formally removing the Lula government - the presence of a weakened, pro-neoliberal PT in the federal government, actually strengthens the regime established after the fall of the military dictatorship.

What's more, the turbulence would necessarily hit business, which means it is not the ruling class's first choice. However, the dynamic of the investiga-

tions does involve Lula, making him even weaker than before, so even without political support, the possibility of impeachment could be posed.

9. For the progressive sectors, already badly weakened, impeachment would greatly increase existing divisions, leading those closest to the government into a desperate struggle to hold onto their positions. It could also reinforce the idea that the political participation of the popular sectors and the ideas of the left are not viable.

However, to use, in opposition to this, the argument of an attempted coup, is to support a lie that falls apart in the face of the facts; it is also to manipulate the social movements in defence of a government that is not theirs.

Equally, the proposal of a pact between the government and the opposition parties to over-come the crisis merely seeks to keep the current economic policies and company profits in-tact, whilst avoiding the punishment of a large number of corrupt politicians amongst both supporters of the government coalition and the liberal opposition.

This must be clearly op-posed by the left. Proposals like the calling of a recall referendum or a constituent assembly are, on the other hand, quite artificial. The only coherent position for the left is to demand the investigation of all accusations and the punishment of those responsible. [1]

10. The crisis makes clearer than ever the consequences of the path chosen by the government and the party since the election and it deepens the political differentiation in the popular camp. The left in the CUT had already created the Socialist Left Front in 2004 and the more critical PT members of parliament had formalized the Left Block - as an articulation against the government's neo-liberal course - in March this year, well before the crisis erupted.

Now the debate over the kind of public administration and the character of the pro-Lula leadership are clarifying, for broad layers of activists and their social base, the bankruptcy of the PT project sym-

bolised by Lula, allowing a wide-ranging discussion of alternatives.

11. The PT may survive as an amorphous party machine, limited to disputing elected office. But it would be incapable of acting as a channel for the expression of popular wishes for change, and unable to develop a national project with a socialist perspective.

Proposals for "refounding" the PT are condemned to failure, because of the degeneration of the government, because of the strong traces within the party of the methods of the previous leadership, because of the lack of internal democracy, and because of the gulf that has opened up between the party and the government, on one side, and the socialist left and the social movements on the other.

A real "refounding" would only be possible, for those who support such a proposal, if there were a complete break with all those involved in the accusations. And that is not possible because of the web of relations built up by Dirceu. The really existing "refounding" is therefore aimed only at making the party an effective parliamentary and electoral support for the government and for Lula's re-election.

For the socialist left, on the other hand, "refounding" would only make sense if it involved a break between the PT and the Lula leadership; but the PT is inseparable from Lula and his government is definitively compromised as an instrument of progressive change; it is, itself, the centre of the current crisis.

In any case, with or without such "refounding", the realignment between those sectors of the "majority camp" identified with Dirceu, on one side, and those identified with Lula, on the other, has progressed, and it has co-opted both Left Articulation and the 'governmentalist' sector of Democracia Socialista. None of this will change the course of the Lula government. All will find their place in a new PMDB, pragmatic and bereft of utopias.

12. The most urgent challenge for the left is to differentiate itself from the Lula government and the

PT leadership and form a socialist pole of convergence for popular sectors, social activists and parliamentarians, capable of regrouping a left that is perplexed, disorientated and suffering rapid dispersion.

This regroupment needs to be able to provide, both in the social struggles and on the institutional terrain, a pole of left opposition to the Lula government. It's a question of saving as much as possible of the political and organisational gains, of the libertarian legacy built by several generations of the left and represented in the experience of the PT.

Today the PT has lost its character as an organisation of the political left. This will be expressed in a significant decline at the next elections. There is no way of justifying the continued presence of socialists on the same ticket as those responsible for the party's conversion to neo-liberalism, for a complete disrespect for democratic methods and for such a disastrous public administration.

Whatever the outcome, it's a question of organising a retreat from the collapse and defeat of what has been the dominant project of the left, regrouping forces and retaking the initiative on new ground. It's a question of actively contributing to overcoming the failed experience of "Lula-ism", and preventing the premature asphyxiation of the creature that is struggling to be born.

13. The twin failure of the Lula government and the PT as instruments of progressive change opens a profound recomposition of the left as a whole. This will be uneven and prolonged. It entails the rebuilding of political and social organisations, the development of a new project for the country, a new political leadership and the recovery by the workers of their self-confidence and capacity for initiative.

It means taking up again the process of independent class organisation by the workers, to confront both the current crisis and the changes in social structure and political struggle that have resulted from 15 years of neo-liberal globalization. But it does not mean, as some have suggested in response

to the crisis, "starting all over again". Our starting point is qualitatively superior to that at the beginning of the PT's historical cycle: three decades of popular struggle have produced an important fabric of association and citizen awareness in part of the population.

What would be disastrous would be if, as a result of the failure of the PT as a party of change, we were to retreat, either to the pre-1964 political patterns, in which the workers only appeared on the political scene as auxiliaries, as pawns at the service of different sections of the bourgeoisie and the elites, or to an Argentinian kind of situation, where the left is marginalised from the big political questions. It would be similarly disastrous if the PT's survival should lead to a new, lightweight version of populism, without any of the merits of the original.

14. The PT's crisis marks the end of its usefulness as a political instrument for the Brazilian working class, and also the crisis of all its internal currents, which had already begun to collapse when the Lula government changed the nature of the party. But the crisis could also affect all the other organisations built by the workers: notably the CUT, where Trade Union Articulation (the current in the CUT union movement that is linked to the Lula leadership of the PT - *trans note*), supported by the leadership of the CSD (the trade union current led by Socialist Democracy), promote a policy of support for the government and subordination to it; also the Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST), which faces an impasse in its struggle for land reform.

However, this should not lead us to conclude that these organisations are of no use to the workers and should be abandoned, as the PSTU appears to do with Conlutas (a new trade union co-ordinating body launched by the PSTU to replace the CUT - *trans note*). The policies of Trade Union Articulation in the CUT, for example, confront strong resistance from an important group of class-struggle and socialist forces organised in the Socialist Left Front - this struggle should be reinforced.

One thing that becomes particularly urgent in this context is the struggle for the autonomy and unity in action of the social movements in relation to parties and government. The Lula government and its choice of class conciliation is opening the door to an offensive by the right. For most of the population, it is the left that is governing Brazil.

The right has fixed its sights on this: it wants to show that neither the left nor the popular classes are capable of governing the country. Thus the defeat of the Lula government and the PT - already quite far advanced - will affect the whole of the left.

15. The dispute over the direction taken by the left was expressed - for many sectors of the PT - in the party's Process of Direct Election (PED - or internal leadership elections) which are now happening. In these, Plinio Sampaio was the only serious 'non-governmentalist' candidate; his support grew as a pole of attraction for those who were unhappy both with the leadership given by the 'majority camp' to the government and the PT, and with the alternative on offer from the pro-governmental left.

Valter Pomar, in spite of his radical rhetoric, takes the pragmatic position in defence of the government that has long characterised his current, Left Articulation - indeed he is being supported by sectors linked to Jose Dirceu and Marta Suplicy. Raul Pont, put forward as a candidate in an attempt to preserve the unity of Socialist Democracy, found his campaign strained by the need to justify taking part in the government; he has ended up taking on the thesis of "refoundation", thereby reinforcing Lula's position that responsibility for the crisis lies with the PT.

With the conclusion of the PED - in a situation where everything continues as before in the PT - the need for socialists to leave the PT can no longer be postponed.

16. Breaking with the PT is central to opening up a space for the political re-composition of the left. There is a huge political vacuum that could not be filled because of the protecting wall set up by the PT. As that barrier collapses, various forces try to

fill the space: electoral machines with a vague left profile, the PSTU (Brazilian section of the LIT), the Consulta Popular (a non-party, left forum set up in the late 90s by intellectuals and activists initially close to the MST), the PSOL.

a) The vacuum cannot be filled, in the first place, by any purely electoral and class-collaborationist project. Organizations like the PSB, the PDT and the PV - who are now scrabbling to attract members of parliament from the PT left - are overshadowed by their own histories of incoherence, some of them going back further than the PT's (and which themselves led to defeat a long time ago - eg. the defeat of Brazilian populism, of which the PDT is the heir, by the 1964 military coup, trans note); they are also tainted by possible corruption in different states, and some of them by their own ties to Lula.

The PSB, for example, was the party of Anthony Garotinho (former Governor of Rio de Janeiro state) at the last elections, is now the party of Ciro Gomez, and is supporting Lula's coalition. What is more, none of these parties is an option for the militant forces breaking away from the PT - who can only regroup around the proposal for an open and militant, socialist party, capable of engaging with the positive aspects of the PT's legacy. What's more, none of these parties can guarantee they will not end up supporting the re-election of Lula or the continuation of his political project at the October 2006 elections.

b) The PSTU, the only other militant party of the Brazilian left, which for the last decade has sought to present itself as the alternative to the PT, has also failed. It has proved incapable of dialoguing with the broader layers of the Brazilian popular movement, both because of its sectarianism as well as its inability to take a pedagogical approach to social struggles. The PT's crisis triggered a latent crisis in its own organisation, and the most open sectors left the party.

c) The Consulta Popular (Popular Consultation), which has been in suspended animation for years,

seems to see the crisis as an opportunity to re-launch itself as a non-electoral, political movement. It feeds on the frustration that exists with the way the PT was co-opted by institutional politics. But a political movement that refuses to take part in elections cannot be a central instrument in the struggle of the workers for social change and for power. Electoral processes continue to be key moments of political debate and participation, the expression of a political hegemony that we will never overcome outside of the forms of political struggle that have been established in our society.

There is also a risk of manipulation. While opposing its dilution in electoral processes, it may reserve the option of supporting pragmatically candidates from different parties, ignoring their institutional commitments - for example, supporting in 2006 candidates from parties committed to the re-election of Lula, whilst ignoring the central political divide.

What this shows is that there is no ready-made left alternative to the PT. The task facing Brazilian socialists is one of rebuilding an alternative that does not yet exist, in adverse circumstances and as we go along, by intervening in the central political disputes of the coming period.

17. The PSOL, which is completing its legalization process, is for its part a party that is still being built. Like anything new, it bears the uncertainty of the unknown. It is the only left slate with any legitimacy in this crisis, precisely because it was born out of the expulsion from the PT of left members of parliament (like senator Heloisa Helena, an emblematic figure in the resistance to the Lula government's slide into neo-liberalism) and their decision to create a new legal party framework for those sectors to be able to present a left alternative at the 2006 elections.

The PSOL has a rather narrow public image - partly because of the weight of some sectarian currents in its initial composition, partly because of some political mistakes and omissions made in its legalization phase (like not calling for a vote for Raul Pont in

the second round of the local elections in Porto Alegre). But this image is also a result of the cordon sanitaire set up by the 'governmentalist' currents in the PT, who need to dismiss the PSOL in order to justify themselves remaining in the PT. More of a movement than an established party, the PSOL can offer a haven for socialists in this situation of crisis.

18. The PSOL has, in the first place, the merit of being, potentially, the only party in existence that can regroup important militant forces that have been orphaned by the collapse of the PT. The arrival of new layers will probably give it immediately a broader and more open political profile.

The failure of the PT should not obscure the fact that the existence of a class-based party, combining social and political action in a global project for change, and fighting in all different areas of activity, was a huge step forward for the political organisation of the workers.

The big challenge for the socialist left now, is to try to minimize the risks of dispersion and fragmentation, and to regroup the maximum number of militants, political leaders, left parliamentarians and their electoral base, in the same party, not only those coming out of the PT, but also those currently in other currents co-opted by the Lula government. This is the only way of not compromising the independence of Brazilian workers, which has been so undermined by the Lula government and the degeneration of the PT.

19. Secondly, the PSOL has a great asset in its main leader, senator Heloisa Helena, who has shown real electoral weight and will be able to play a significant role in the 2006 polls, as a left alternative to Lula.

Left-wing voters, betrayed by the PT's crimes, will punish the party next year. If this electorate splits its vote among various unreliable parties, like the PSB, the PDT, the PPS or the PV, this will greatly dilute the already fragile terrain of class independence that has been built up over the last three decades.

It is important that the break up of the PT can produce, in our country, something comparable to the emergence of the Communist Refoundation Party (PRC) out of the crisis of the Italian Communist Party - that is a party capable of combining militant intervention in the social movements with the continuation of a serious presence in elections.

For this to happen it is essential that a number of the members of congress making up the Left Bloc in the PT go over to the PSOL; this can have a multiplying effect in electoral terms, allowing the continuation of socialist, parliamentary mandates linked to a collective political project.

If the members of parliament from the PT left were to be scattered among different electoral slates, not only would this not be any guarantee of winning re-election, it would also result in an irreversible dispersion what strength the socialist left has been able to build up.

It is only in such a framework - in a militant party with social roots, capable of laying claim to the best of the PT experience - that socialists will be able to stand, in 2006, with a very different profile to that of today, one that is critical and self-critical in relation to the PT, and which has a much stronger, organic link to the social movements and to popular struggles.

20. The PSOL leadership has already decided that it should open its lists not only to those supporting the party as such, but also to other sectors of the left who are critical of the neo-liberal course adopted by the Lula government and who need a slate to stand on. In other words, joining the PSOL can happen through an electoral agreement that does not imply any strategic commitment to the party project as such (which, in any case, remains to be settled!).

But joining the PSOL can be much more than that: it can facilitate the rebuilding of a shared political project and a more stable organizational framework, a potential new pole of re-groupment for the socialist left in Brazil.

It is a challenge, but it is the only logical one for socialists to take up. For this the PSOL, reshaped by the presence of the PT left, must see itself as a mass socialist party, open to the participation of and dialogue with all sections of the left, capable of rescuing the best of the PT experience and avoiding its mistakes, but also able to update the strategic and programmatic agenda of Brazilian socialists, which is badly out of step with contemporary reality.

It must seek to incorporate all the diverse experience of the different sectors of the left that are critical of the experience of the PT and the Lula government. And with the social movements it must be capable of developing a relationship based on both acting and learning, rejecting any kind of self-proclaimed vanguardism or subordination of the popular organisations.

21. Whatever positive role the PSOL may play, there is today no way of avoiding a degree of dispersion in the building of a political party organisation capable of taking the place historically filled by the PT.

This is because the PT emerged in the wake of the most formidable mass movement in Brazilian history, which led to the end of the military regime and gave birth to not only the party but also to organisations like the UNE (student confederation), the CUT and the MST, and was able to inspire hope, excitement, creativity and joy in millions of people in Brazil and around the world.

Today we are not in a period of upturn and the fabric of Brazilian society has changed greatly, making such processes more difficult. Rebuilding a left political party capable of achieving hegemony will be complex and may take a long time.

22. The socialist left will have to face, in the coming period, the need for critical and self-critical reflection. Where did we go wrong to end up where we are now? How could our conception of the party co-exist for so long with such a deformed structure, making internal democracy and the participation of the membership little more than a formality? How could we allow, throughout the 1990s, the po-

litical centre of gravity to shift from the social movements to the structures of the state apparatus? Lastly, which bits of this legacy do we still want to defend?

The self-organisation, the direct democracy and popular protagonism of the 80s and its relationship with a party-political movement that abandoned neither the electoral terrain nor its principles? A party that was able, in its early years, to integrate the diverse social and political experiences of the different sections of the people? The new life breathed into bits of the state structure by the proposals for participatory democracy and by the experiences of the participatory budget?

The proposal of the World Social Forum, which grew out of this con-text? The big campaigns of political education around issues like the debt and the FTAA? The crisis will only be overcome if we undertake a programmatic and strategic reflection that prepares the Brazilian socialist movement for the challenges of our time.

23. But programmatic and strategic reflection is fleshed out through tactical intervention in a concrete situation. The crisis of the PT coincides with the crisis of neo-liberal policies, yet the frustration felt at the Lula government disorganises the democratic and popular movement.

PSOL national meeting, January 2005

Now, as the crisis deepens, a serious regroupment of forces can probably be achieved around a combination of the struggle against corruption with the struggle against neo-liberalism, pushing the political debate beyond the ethical discussion.

However, this line, raised particularly by the Popular Assemblies, collides with line of the CUT leadership (and supported by the Co-ordination of Popular Movements) of combining the struggle against corruption with the "defence" of the Lula government - an orientation used by various sectors that are dependent on the government to try and subordinate the popular movement to their own agenda. In these unfavourable circumstances, the slogan demanding cancellation of all those re-

forms passed as a result of the buying of votes could, in an educational way, open up a dialogue with civil service workers and the other more aware sections of the movement.

24. In a situation where the socialist left is losing its reference point in the PT, and runs the risk of dispersion, it is urgent for socialists to begin a political movement that is broader and more flexible than the existing electoral platforms, one that can establish a framework of debate and co-ordination among all the currents, leaders and parliamentarians who are committed to rebuilding the socialist project in the Brazilian left.

The creation of a Movement for Socialism will be all the more solid the more firmly it is anchored in a party that can provide its centre of gravity; and only the PSOL can ensure this centre of gravity has a militant and activist base.

In these circumstances, this can help the socialist left, both inside the parties and outside them, to co-ordinate their efforts beyond the electoral horizon of 2006. It can help the recomposition of the left and the rebuilding of its organisations to be worked through with the least possible fragmentation.

25. Strategic considerations and the critique of the PT's electoralism should not obscure the fact that it is through the electoral process of 2006, on the terrain opened up by the failures of the PT and the Lula government, that the population will draw up its balance sheets of the government experience, and project its future political loyalties, hopes and identities.

Nothing solid can be built outside of the polarisation that will be expressed in those elections - a polarisation that everything indicates will be between Lula, the candidates of the right, and Heloisa Helena. No left-wing leadership will be able to avoid choosing sides in this confrontation.

It is important that in this election the largest possible number of candidates and socialist forces regroup in a left pole, on the slate of the PSOL or in alliance with it, allowing a presidential candidate

with sufficient electoral weight to have an impact on the debates and in popular perceptions, and	fighting for popular mandates that can take this fight further into the future.
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VENEZUELA

"Co-management" in the Alcasa aluminium factory

RAFAEL RODRIGUEZ ·

– Can you tell us what is specific about co-management at Alcasa?

– Alcasa is a company manufacturing aluminium, which is well adapted to respond to import substitution policy and where we have the possibility of developing an experience. Alcasa has made losses for the past 17 years. For some years corruption and embezzlement have practically rendered it bankrupt.

Carlos Lanz speaking at Alcasa workers meeting

For eight years (since Chávez became president) it has made losses which are very difficult to overcome without technological restructuring. Bankruptcy became a business for some; there have been many studies, projects and so on that have cost millions. There are gentlemen with attaché-cases who came, gave their opinion, left... and nothing changed.

We came here with the objective of salvaging Alcasa with the help of the workers. With Carlos Lanz we are convinced that the workers can build socialism in a practical manner, on the move. That is why we have proposed co-management here.

We have never had the intention of implementing a social-democratic and reformist co-management as in Germany, but tactically we have adopted this name. It amounts to indicating that we wished for co-management as transition towards self-management.

Here we have co-management with workers' control and a factory council with a view to giving the workers all the power over production, distribution and commercialization. The goal is to develop and diversify the production of aluminium, finding foreign clients outside the USA - like the Japanese for space construction, for example - but also to devel-

op national markets, like the construction of cheap quality housing.

For us co-management at Alcasa has its meaning in the peaceful and progressive construction of socialism. As Marxists and Gramscians we want to construct a counter-hegemony. For that we have set up a centre for socio-political training, so that the workers are involved in the process. We have been called every kind of name, Communist catechism and so on. But little by little the workers have become involved in this training and several hundred now attend. Now, according to the subject, it's increasingly the workers themselves who provide the training.

– What is the situation as regards the ownership of the company?

It remains state-owned. We are not for the kind of co-management that distributes capital to the workers, or associates the workers with capital, or divides the shares among them. And in Venezuela the problem is not really that of private ownership.

The state already possesses the essentials in this country: the majority of land, oil, the biggest companies... It is more a problem of the redistribution and restructuring of the state in a socialist sense. That's why do not conceive of co-management as being confined to the company, for us it should extend to the entire social environment and to all the problems including the military question. But on this level we should say that we have not advanced very much.

– What powers do the workers and the directors have at their disposal?

– When we came here, some have said to us "we have to fire all the leaders, all the directors". We replied "No, that is the last thing we will do". At

PDVSA (the national oil company) after the employers' sabotage, they dismissed more than 2,000 managers at one fell swoop and that has created big difficulties for them to this day. If we had done the same thing and installed committed but untrained Chavistas in all the leadership posts that would have been a catastrophe.

We wanted a process from below, elections in each workshop, in each work group of "spokesperson delegates". A system of direct election, control and accountability, revocability, rotation of tasks and so on.

At the first meeting that we organized 26 workers came (out of 2,700 at the company).

We worked by every means to convince, meetings, leaflets, newspapers, debates and so on. After a few months the workers saw it was in their interest to participate, to "take power" in the company. And then, we proceeded to elections at the management level.

The leadership team was considerably enlarged; for each former leader, we elected three new ones. Then there are 300 spokesperson delegates elected at the rank and file level by the workers. Today each department has its "administrative council" with spokesperson elected in each team where all the problems of production are planned and discussed.

When there is a problem to settle an assembly of workers in the department is called. We proceed in the same way at the level of the company as a

whole. At the central meeting the directorate submits its plans to the representatives of the workers and the latter raise their problems. It's no longer the director alone who decides, he must take account of the will of the workers.

– What future do you see for this type of co-management across the country as a whole?

– We have been dismissed as "mad", but we have the feeling that we are advancing. On the industrial level and on the political level. Production has grown, productivity also. We have ambitious industrial projects, the construction of a fifth production line, a redeployment and so on.

On the political level we have the feeling of being in tune with what president Chávez has said on the necessity of building socialism, of putting an end to capitalist relations.

In our state, in the industrial heart of the country in the basic industries, the process advances; co-management is advancing in several other companies. We have contacts with other enterprises which practice co-management in the country, there have been some meetings, there will be others. We are conscious of being observed with much attention.

But it's conflictual because there are several conceptions of co-management and we are not in agreement with the totally reductive vision that is formulated in some ministries or in the draft legislation that is being discussed at the moment.

Interview conducted by Fabrice Thomas